

# Navigating National Interests: Exploring the Dynamics of Pakistan-South Africa Bilateral Relations

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## Abstract

South Africa occupies a strategic geographic position at the southern tip of the African continent, serving as a potential trade and investment gateway for countries in the Americas, Europe, and Asia. It is a key partner for Pakistan's Look Africa Policy. Pakistan and South Africa, bound by shared values and a focus on common interests since establishing diplomatic ties in 1994, have cultivated a long-standing partnership. However, a significant gap remains in the academic exploration of this relationship. This study delves into the politico-diplomatic, economic, and defence aspects of Pakistan-South Africa relations, employing the concept of national interest as outlined by Morgenthau and Neuchterlein. Employing a qualitative analysis, this study argues that high-level visits, the establishment of institutional mechanisms, and the formalisation of cooperation through Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have significantly shaped the direction, facilitation, and governance of Pakistan-South Africa relations. This research highlights three key findings: despite frequent leadership-level exchanges and interactions between parliamentarians and policymakers, the relationship lacks the necessary vigour; while trade between Pakistan and South Africa has grown



steadily, Pakistan experiences a trade deficit with its partner; and defence collaboration remains a significant aspect of their relationship. This article posits that the existing Pakistan-South Africa bilateral relationship holds the potential to blossom into a more formalised and enduring strategic partnership, contingent upon the implementation of well-defined and practical initiatives.

**Keywords:** African continent; Pakistan; South Africa; national interest; bilateral relations

## 1. Introduction

Pakistan's geostrategic location offers a win-win paradigm for enhanced connectivity with African countries. Being the second largest continent, home to 54 sovereign states with a total population of 1.4 billion people, Africa boasts a US \$3.1 trillion GDP and hosts almost 25% of the natural global biodiversity and 30% of world mineral resources. Africa's potential as a growing region of economic activity is self-evident by the African Development Bank projecting GDP growth for the Continent at 4% average in 2023 and 2024 (Afgun 2023). Since 2000, Africa has emerged as an appealing hub for foreign investment, propelled by its notable growth rate, the burgeoning middle class, and abundant resources, particularly within the energy sector (Arnaud and Guennoun 2019). The major and middle powers such as the United States, the European Union, China, Russia, India, and Turkey have been cementing their footprints in the continent due to Africa's rising politico-strategic significance and strong economic growth patterns.

While Africa has long been a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy, its engagement with the continent since the 1950s has been suboptimal, lacking dynamism and a well-defined long-term strategy. The Foreign Relations Committee of the Senate of Pakistan suggested that 'Pakistan should pursue an aggressive economic diplomacy so as to reap the abundant benefits as well as opportunities that exist in Africa' (Senate of Pakistan 2005: 9). Pakistan needs to revise its foreign policy approach and reignite its relations with Africa, both politically and economically (Hafeez and Sarwar 2014). Pakistani policymakers have shown their intent to improve connectivity and revitalise relations with Africa through the 'Look Africa Policy' launched in 2017. Primarily, this approach focuses on engaging with the ten leading economies in the African region, namely, Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, and Tanzania. Additionally, three trading blocs have also been singled

out for negotiations, aimed at establishing preferential trade agreements, including the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), the East African Community (EAC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Ministry of Commerce n.d). This policy aims to foster constructive engagement with African countries across diplomatic and strategic levels, promoting closer political, economic, social, and cultural cooperation. In doing so, it positions Pakistan as an active participant in Africa's development (Altaf 2022).

In furtherance of this strategic shift, Pakistan also launched the 'Engage Africa Initiative' in 2019, which has since facilitated a range of collaborative activities. These include the 'Two-day Envoys' Conference in Islamabad on 27–28 November 2019; the first Pakistan Africa Trade Development Conference (PATDC) in Nairobi, Kenya, on 30–31 January 2020; the second PATDC and Single Country Exhibition at Lagos, Nigeria, on 23–25 November 2021; the third PATDC and Single Country Exhibition in Johannesburg, from 29 November–1 December 2022 (Ghauri 2023); the opening of five new embassies in Djibouti, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, and Uganda, the establishment of six new commercial sections in Algeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Senegal, Sudan, and Tanzania, concluding framework agreements, the establishment of Joint Working Groups (JWGs) and Preferential Trade Agreement, organising 'Look Africa Trade Forums' in major cities of Pakistan; the participation of TDAP in the 38<sup>th</sup> International Fair Khartoum, Sudan, and holding of sector-specific webinars (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2020; Finance Division, Government of Pakistan 2021). In a briefing to the National Assembly's Foreign Affairs Committee on October 24, 2022, Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs outlined the state of Pakistan's relations with African countries. It was highlighted that:

Pakistan's Engage Africa initiative rejuvenated the trajectory of Pakistan's relations with the African countries. Prior to the Engage Africa policy, Pakistan had only 14 missions in 54 African countries. The COVID-19 crisis and the emergence of Africa as a vibrant emerging market laid the foundation for Pakistan's new pivot to Africa. Pakistan opened five new missions in Africa; relocated six commercial wings; appointed 26 Honorary Councils; established a Rs. 100 million Africa Fund; expanded bilateral consultations and made significant progress on visa abolition agreements and defence cooperation with a number of African countries. Pakistan's high-level engagements and delegation exchange with the African countries need to expand. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also underlined the need for expanding

Pakistan's presence in UN Formed Police Units in Africa (National Assembly of Pakistan 2022).

The Look Africa Policy and Engage Africa Initiative demonstrate a renewed prioritisation of Africa within Pakistan's foreign policy strategy. Consequently, strengthening relations with African countries is emerging as a key focus of Pakistan's foreign policy operations (Paraiso 2021). However, Pakistan's engagement with Africa differs from one country to another as it pursues its national interests. The case of the Pakistan-South Africa bilateral relations exemplifies this phenomenon. This arises from the shared similarities and alignment of national interests between the two countries. South Africa is a key partner for Pakistan's Look Africa Policy. Despite the geographical distance, Pakistan and South Africa share a warm and multifaceted relationship built on mutual respect and a history as former British colonies. Since establishing formal ties in 1994, they have collaborated in the political, economic, and defence spheres. Regular high-level visits and a Joint Commission framework solidify their partnership. However, infrequent political interactions and trade imbalances hinder their full potential. A robust defence cooperation marked by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and training programmes fosters security ties. Nonetheless, there is a dearth of scholarly inquiry into the bilateral ties between them.

Given this context, this article examines the dynamics of Pakistan-South Africa relations within the framework of their respective national interests. It will seek answers to the origin of their bilateral relations, the main focuses, achievements of these bilateral relations, as well as the challenges characterising them and how they can be effectively redressed. For this purpose, the article has been divided into four sections. Following this introduction, section two delves into the concept of national interest and explores how political, economic, and security factors intersect to influence a state's foreign policy goals and preferences. The third section discusses political, economic, and defence relations between Pakistan and South Africa, along with the role of the Pakistani diaspora in South Africa. The fourth section concludes the discussion by summarising the essence of the main findings. This study has utilised a qualitative approach, employing document analysis for data collection. Data for this study was drawn from a variety of sources, including public and private documents, academic publications (research articles and books), reports by think tanks and governmental bodies, news media (newspapers and internet sources), and statements made by officials from both countries.

## 2. Conceptual framework: National interest

National interest functions as both the cornerstone and the guiding principle in shaping a state's foreign policy. Regardless of geographical or military stature on the global stage, constructing foreign policy based on national interest is imperative for every state. The origin of the concept of 'national interest' as a tool in diplomacy can be traced back to the era coinciding with the development of the modern state system. This term originates from Latin, with the implication of 'it concerns, it makes a difference to, it is important with reference to some person or thing' (Beard 1934:20). As put by Morgenthau (1951: 241), 'it is not only a political necessity, but also a moral duty for a nation to always follow in its dealings with other nations but one guiding star, one standard for thought, one rule for action: The National Interest.' The role of national interest holds considerable importance in the analysis of foreign policy (Morgenthau 1952; Marleku 2013). It has been and continues to be a crucial component in explicating the fundamental reasoning behind the actions of statesmen and states within a threatening international milieu. Statesmen and scholars have employed it to delineate the aspirations and objectives of sovereign entities within the global sphere (Neuchterlein 1976).

How states define their national interest is crucial because states act in their national interest. The fundamental aspects of national interest are territory and commerce (Beard 1934). Morgenthau's (1952:972) widely recognised realist perspective on national interest is founded on the premise that every nation endeavours to 'protect their physical, political, and cultural identity against encroachments by other nations'. He argues that national interest is characterised by power – namely political, military, and economic considerations. The primary force compelling states to pursue power is the international system's anarchic character. Osgood (1953) states, 'National interest is understood to mean a state of affairs valued solely for its benefit to the nation.' In Dyke's (1957) perspective, it entails 'the values, desires, and interests that states seek to protect or achieve in relation to each other'. Similarly, this concept encompasses the aggregate of all the values held at the national level (Frankel 1969: 103). Another scholar, Nuechterlein (1976: 247), describes it as 'the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment'. According to Cantor (1986: 51), 'the concept of national interest implies that there can be a coherent foreign policy representing interconnected national concerns'. On the other hand, Roskin (1994) contends, 'it seems crisp, clear, objective:

what's good for the nation as a whole in international affairs'. Said and Lerche (1995:27) hold national interest as 'the general, long-term, and continuing purpose that the state, the nation, and the regime would all see themselves as serving at any given time'. There, the notion of 'national interest' is often understood as the fundamental objectives, the collective aspirations and guiding principles that shape a state's actions, policies, and decision-making processes over time.

Morgenthau (1962) categorises national interest into two tiers: *the vital or primary*, and the *secondary*. The vital component is the survival or identity of a state which is divided into cultural, political, and physical aspects. Delineating vital national interests is quite straightforward: they entail the security of a nation's sovereignty, safeguarding its institutions, populace, and core values. The foreign policy decisions of a country remain focused on enhancing its security. Even when it comes to going to war, they do not compromise or hesitate. On the other hand, secondary interests refer to the desires of individual states that they would undoubtedly prefer to fulfil, yet they are not willing to go to war over them. Defining these interests seems to be more challenging. 'Potentially, however, they can grow in the minds of statesmen until they seem to be vital' (Roskin 1994). They are influenced by decision-makers, party politics, public sentiment, sectional or group interests, and political and moral customs. While vital interests can be regarded as the overarching goals, secondary interests can be labelled as the objectives of foreign policy.

Nuechterlein (1976) has subdivided national interest into four categories, including defence, economic, world order, and ideological interests. Defence interests encompass safeguarding state security, governmental structure, and the populace against physical aggression stemming from external threats. Economic interests involve advancing economic prosperity through interactions with other countries. Interests regarding world order comprise maintaining global economic and political stability, ensuring national security, and supporting peaceful international commerce and citizen interactions across borders. Finally, ideological interests refer to safeguarding and advancing the collective values held by a state's citizens and perceived as globally beneficial

There is an ongoing debate whether the national interests are permanent or adjustable. Some interests, like sovereignty and survival, are non-negotiable and cannot be compromised, while others require regular review and reappraisal. According to the famous maxim of Lord Palmerston, 'We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and those interests it is our duty to follow' (Ward and Gooch 2012). Evans and Newnham (1998) believe in the changing nature

of national interest during different times, under different circumstances and with different policymakers leading a nation-state. Morgenthau also believes in the adjustable nature of interests. He deems that interest cannot have ‘meaning that is fixed once and for all’ (Morgenthau 1967: 8).

The notion of national interest is closely intertwined with a realist perspective on the study of international relations, prioritising security as the foremost objective (Humphreys 2015). Realists contend that a state’s national interest and foreign policy are determined by its position within the anarchic international system. All forms of realism accentuate the importance of national interests and the pursuit of power (Khan 2022). Contemporary realists start from the premise that the national interest serves as a dependable compass for crafting well-informed policy decisions and conducting scholarly analyses of foreign policies (Naaz 2012). It is imperative for every state to identify its national interests and formulate its foreign policy to conduct relations with other states and to pursue those national interests. Therefore, within a realist framework, this paper examines Pakistan’s relations with South Africa by delving into the political and economic aspects of national interests as put forth by Morgenthau and Neuchterlein.

### **3. Pakistan-South Africa relations**

Pakistan and South Africa share a foundation of diplomatic cooperation and mutual respect, rooted in common values and strategic interests. ‘Pakistan has voiced its opposition against apartheid and racial discrimination in South Africa. In view of Pakistan’s support for the liberation struggle, strong bonds of friendship have formed and solidified between the two countries since 1994’ (Department of International Relations and Cooperation n.d). These relations remained well below their potential and suffered from the lack of substantial political and commercial underpinnings (Khan 2019: 33). This necessitates a closer examination of their bilateral cooperation across politico-diplomatic, economic, and defence spheres, particularly in the wake of Pakistan’s ‘Look Africa Policy’ and ‘Engage Africa Initiative.’

#### ***3.1 Politico-diplomatic engagement***

South Africa, situated at the southernmost point of the African continent, boasts a diverse landscape with two ocean coastlines. As the ‘gateway to Africa’, it connects

America, Europe, and Asia (Amir 2015). Its population, estimated at around 59.3 million, ranks 25<sup>th</sup> globally, making it a vibrant and populous nation (Amir and Khan 2021). South Africa holds vital influence in the Southern African region and within key African economic alliances such as the African Union, AfCFTA, SACU, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Being part of the G-20, the IBSA Dialogue Forum, and the BRICS Forum, it embraces a noteworthy political and economic role both within the continent and globally (Khan 2023). South Africa has been elected three times to serve on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Hendricks and Majozi 2021). Moreover, South Africa's engagement in both the SADC and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) underscores its commitment to multilateralism.

The official bilateral relations between Pakistan and South Africa were not established until the end of apartheid in South Africa (Peter 2017). Pakistan set up a High Commission in Pretoria in December 1993. 'An exchange of notes on Establishing Diplomatic Relations in April 1994 led to the establishing of full diplomatic relations in April 1994 with High Commissioner Ismail Coovadia becoming South Africa's first High Commissioner to Pakistan taking up his position in July 1995' (Department of International Relations and Cooperation n.d). Relations were frozen following Pakistan's suspension from the Council of the Commonwealth in October 1999 (Rafique 2019). The suspension of Pakistan by the Commonwealth was lifted in May 2004, which facilitated the normalisation of relations with South Africa (Republic of South Africa 2006: 72). Subsequently, bilateral relations began to show improvement. Yet, 'both the nations needed to work closely to strengthen political, economic and social ties for benefit of the two countries' (Mavimbela 2009).

After 1994, high-level engagement between Pakistan and South Africa has taken the relationship to the next level. Both countries maintain regular diplomatic exchanges and engage in constructive dialogue aimed at enhancing collaboration across various sectors. Former President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, visited Pakistan in 1992 and was bestowed with the prestigious honour of Nishan-e-Pakistan (Rafique 2019). On 11 May 1994, the late Benazir Bhutto, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, accompanied by Asif Ali Zardari, embarked on a visit to South Africa to attend the inauguration ceremony of Nelson Mandela's Presidency. Mr Gohar Ayub Khan, former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, visited South Africa in January 1998. In 1999, Nelson Mandela undertook a subsequent visit to Pakistan, during which he was accorded the honour of addressing a joint session of the parliament. In September 2012, Syed



Naveed Qamar, the former defence minister of Pakistan also visited South Africa. Since 1994, South Africa's Deputy Foreign Minister, Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, made the first ever official ministerial-level visit to Pakistan in 2012. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan (2012), 'the visit was intended to provide an opportunity for close interaction and consultation on regional and global issues, especially on counter-terrorism and the conflict in Syria. It provided an opportunity to review the entire range of bilateral relations and ways and means to further consolidate these ties.' Former Pakistani President, Mamnoon Hussain, participated in the funeral proceedings of Mandela in 2013. Responding to Pakistan's diplomatic overtures, a delegation from South Africa embarked on a visit to Islamabad in September 2014 to engage in negotiations pertaining to the Extradition Treaty (Rafique 2019). Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, South African Defence Minister, visited Pakistan in March 2017. These bilateral high-level exchanges, while limited in scope, had contributed towards trust-building and setting the stage for mutually beneficial relationships.

Efforts were undertaken side by side to formalise the relationship through an institutional framework. The Pakistan-South Africa Joint Commission (JC) established in 1999 provided a formal platform for structured discussions at the Deputy Director-General level for bilateral cooperation. Its first session took place on 12–13 March 2007 in Islamabad, Pakistan, which set the direction of future relations between Pakistan and South Africa. According to a report of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs:

This event has triggered the normalisation of relations between the two countries after the long hiatus that had resulted from the temporary suspension of Pakistan from the Commonwealth. It can be expected that the outcomes of this first JC will contribute towards the improvement in trade and investment, and greater cooperation in a range of important areas ranging from science and technology to agriculture and security-related matters (Republic of South Africa 2007: 112).

According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (2012: 57), 'In July 2011, South Africa hosted the second Joint Commission with Pakistan to strengthen the bilateral relationship.' The Third Session of the Joint Commission was convened on 15–16 April 2013 in Islamabad. The delegations of Pakistan and South Africa were led by Seema Naqvi, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, and Anil Sooklal, Deputy Director-General, Department of International Relations

and Cooperation (DIRCO) of South Africa, respectively. This session is regarded as a significant event in the context of Pakistan-South Africa bilateral relations because:

The agenda of the meeting covered prospective cooperation in Trade, Industry, Engineering, Energy, Agriculture, Health and Education. The two sides noted with satisfaction that the Joint Business Council would hold its first meeting in September/October, 2013 in Pretoria. They also agreed, in principle, to enhance the bilateral trade volume to over US \$1 billion by 2015. In view of the fact that South Africa excels technologically in Mining, prospects of cooperation in Mining Sector were discussed. The Pakistani side also handed over to South African side a MoU on Cooperation in the field of Health Sector (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2013).

At the fourth session of the commission convened in November 2014 in Pretoria, consensus was reached to elevate the Joint Commission to the Deputy Ministerial level (Republic of South Africa, 2015: 49). As a follow-up, a review meeting also took place on 19 May 2016 in Pretoria to evaluate the progress of decisions made by Pakistan and South Africa during the fourth session of the Commission in 2014. Both parties deliberated and examined the full spectrum of mutual ties. A particular agenda point concentrated on easing visa restrictions, with a special emphasis on the community of over 100,000 Pakistanis residing in South Africa. According to a statement:

The two countries expressed satisfaction at the progress achieved so far and the strengthening of bilateral relations in all fields. Both sides also underlined the need of having frequent and regular interaction for further deepening of political, trade and economic relations. Satisfaction was also expressed at the high level contacts between the two countries in the defence and defence production fields. Both sides agreed to finalise MoUs and Agreements especially on Security related matters (High Commission for Pakistan, Pretoria 2016).

Pakistan and South Africa have reiterated to strengthen their institutional mechanism for cooperation by signing an agreement for the establishment of the Pakistan-South Africa Joint Commission in Pretoria on 25 November 2021 (Rao 2021). This document intended to 'provide an effective mechanism to review, monitor and expand cooperation in diverse areas' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2021). The South

African minister, G.N.M. Pandor termed 'the signing of the document a milestone in Pakistan-South Africa relations. She stressed the need to add further substance to bilateral cooperation especially in the fields of Renewable Energy, Agriculture, Health and Higher Education' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2021). Similarly, Mazhar Javed, Pakistan's High Commissioner to South Africa 'expressed the confidence that the Agreement will catalyze bilateral cooperative process, especially in terms of economic relations' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2021). Former Pakistani envoy to South Africa, Najam-us-Saqib, commenting on Pakistan-South Africa bilateral ties, remarked that:

Pakistan enjoys strong ties with it, especially defence cooperation as the COASs from both countries visit each other regularly...and no Pakistani head of the state has paid a visit there in the last 15 years, except former President Mamnoon Hussain, who went there to attend the last rites of late Nelson Mandela. People in South Africa still remember the leading role played by Pakistan against the apartheid. However, the benefits of such cordial relationships are yet to be reaped (Institute of Policy Studies 2021).

The leadership of South Africa has expressed concern regarding the issue of Kashmir Pakistan and India. Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa, held 'a clear stance on the [Kashmir] dispute' (Correspondent 2020). Mandela brought up the Kashmir issue during the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in September 1998 in Durban, by declaring that, 'the Kashmir dispute was a cause for concern for all of us and assured that NAM would extend all the strength that it has in settling the Kashmir issue' (Javed 2020). On 5 August 2019, the central government of India undertook the revocation of Indian Constitution Articles 370 and 35-A. These alterations have resulted in the deprivation of Kashmiris' legitimate identity (Correspondent 2020), the abolition of the autonomy of Kashmir, curtailment of its decision-making authority, and permission for the settlement of non-Kashmiri Indians in the region (Ellis-Petersen 2019). The DIRCO, while expressing its concern over these developments, stated that:

The issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be resolved bilaterally, and South Africa urges India and Pakistan to resolve their differences through peaceful means and exercise restraint and refrain from actions that could further exacerbate the situation and potentially destabilize the region. South Africa further appeals that the

freedom and rights of citizens be respected in line with international humanitarian and human rights laws (Monyela 2019).

Nkosi ZMD Mandela, Nelson Mandela's grandson, voiced his support by stating that, 'the struggle of the Kashmiri people is "our struggle" and the South African people send a message of peace and security to Kashmiris' (Web Desk 2021). Thumbumuzi Dlamini, step-grandson of Nelson Mandela also expressed that 'the Kashmir issue is a global one. India should step up and solve the Kashmir issue with Pakistan' (Web Desk 2021). Additionally, in his message on Kashmir Solidarity Day in 2022, Nkosi ZMD Mandela stated:

We express our unequivocal solidarity with the brave and courageous people of Kashmir and support their right to self-determination in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 47..... We will continue to support the Kashmiri people in their struggle until they win the struggle for self-determination and freedom. President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela reminded us that 'as long as there is a single human being suffering anywhere in the world our struggle is far from over' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2022)

Since the formal establishment of diplomatic ties, both states have engaged in exchanges at various levels, aiming for mutual benefit, identifying common objectives, and pursuing shared goals, which underscore the evolving nature of their political relationship. But active follow-up has been missing in the political spectrum for many years. Leadership-level exchanges and interactions between parliamentarians and policymakers have remained infrequent (Khan 2019). It necessitates tangible interventions. Both states should increase diplomatic exchanges and visits to fortify personal connections among political leaders. Regular high-level diplomatic dialogues are imperative to address political matters, regional interests, and global challenges. Convening Joint Commission sessions regularly is essential to enrich the bilateral relationship. Encouraging people-to-people exchanges, cultural interactions, educational initiatives, and scholarships can foster deeper mutual understanding between Pakistani and South African citizens. The formation of joint committees or task forces to address shared interests is crucial for promoting enhanced collaboration. Establishing a regular review mechanism is necessary to ensure the effective implementation of agreements and initiatives.

### ***3.2 Economic cooperation***

South Africa is one of the top ten countries prioritised under Pakistan's 'Look Africa Policy' for promoting its economic linkages in diverse sectors. It boasts a diverse economy and stands as the foremost economic power on the African continent. In 2021, South Africa's GDP was worth \$790.625 billion with a growth rate of 4.91 per cent (Central Intelligence Agency n.d). South Africa views Pakistan as a significant market for business-to-business collaboration, solidifying its position as one of Pakistan's key economic partners on the African continent. 'Pakistan and South Africa bilateral relations offer an enormous potential for enhancing mutual annual trade' (Mavimbela 2009). According to Ambassador Mthuthuzeli Madikiza, the High Commissioner of South Africa to Pakistan, 'South Africa and Pakistan enjoy excellent and cordial bilateral ties and one of the top priorities is to expand economic relations for the mutual benefit of both countries' (Rafique and Khan 2020).

Pakistan seeks to tap into South Africa's vibrant market potential for expansion in its trade and investment (Khan 2018). The natural bounty of South Africa, from gold and diamonds to platinum and diverse minerals, fuels its economic potential and positions it as an important player in the global resource market. Its economy depends significantly on the mining, vibrant agricultural, and financial sectors. The stock exchange of South Africa ranks among the top twenty globally and serves as Africa's largest market (Khan 2023a). South Africa's primary exports include diamonds, gold, platinum, equipment, machinery, and a wealth of various metals and minerals. Major trading partners like India, the US, China, Germany, and Saudi Arabia contribute to its import market (Khan 2018). The top categories of South Africa's major import products include refined and crude petroleum, vehicles, machinery, equipment, electronic goods, chemicals, foodstuffs, textiles, and pharmaceuticals. On the other hand, Pakistan primarily exports textiles, apparel, paper, rice, leather garments, cement, electric fans, tractors, men's clothing, and woven cotton fabrics to South Africa. Pakistan's main import sectors from South Africa comprise coal, iron and steel, machinery and equipment, chemicals, paper and paperboard, vehicles, plastics, gems, and jewellery.

There has been a steady growth in Pakistan- South Africa economic cooperation, driven by mutual interests in trade and investment. Data indicates a positive trajectory in Pakistan-South Africa bilateral trade, with a significant increase from \$186 million in 2003 to \$1.052 billion by 2019 (Arif 2020: 3). Textile goods rank as one of Pakistan's leading exports to South Africa, despite facing significant tariffs imposed by SACU. Rice, instruments, and appliances, among other leading export items, are tariff-free,

while paper and paperboard exports face a relatively low tariff of two per cent. The most notable positive Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) between 2015 and 2019 is observed in exports of denim (203%) and men's or boys' cotton ensembles (73%). Tractors and electric fans diversify Pakistan's export portfolio. Until 2015, the export of cement to South Africa was a dominant product of Pakistan. However, it has experienced a steep decline of 51.7 per cent from 2018 to 2019 due to anti-dumping duties ranging between 14 per cent and 77 per cent imposed by the International Trade Administration Commission (ITAC). Pakistani products have the potential to generate exports worth \$3.57 billion to South Africa. Pakistan's imports from South Africa are dominated by coal and metals, constituting a substantial portion of the overall trade between the two states. These imports are subject to tariffs ranging from zero per cent to 20 per cent (Amir and Khan 2021). Table 1, compiled by the authors using data from the *Trading Economics* databases, compares Pakistan-South Africa bilateral trade statistics from 2009 to 2022.

**Table-1: Bilateral Trade Statistics**

Year	Pakistan's Exports to South Africa (US\$ Million)	Pakistan's Imports from South Africa (US\$ Million)	Total Bilateral Trade (US\$ Million)
2009	191.00	266.00	457.00
2010	255.00	390.00	645.00
2011	285.00	378.00	663.00
2012	271.00	314.00	585.00
2013	289.00	288.00	577.00
2014	290.00	440.00	730.00
2015	223.00	483.00	706.00
2016	163.00	505.00	668.00
2017	172.00	1000.04	1172.04
2018	178.00	1000.24	1178.24
2019	179.00	1000.17	1179.17
2020	183.00	922.00	1105.00
2021	222.00	1000.74	1222.74
2022	237.00	1000.22	1237.22

**Source:** Pakistan exports to South Africa 2024 data 2025 forecast 2009-2022 from <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/exports/south-africa> and Pakistan imports from South Africa 2024 data 2025 forecast 2009-2022 from <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/imports/south-africa>

These statistics indicate that the total value of Pakistan-South Africa bilateral trade in 2022 reached \$1 237.22 million, with exports of \$237 million and imports of \$1 000.22 million. It shows a trade deficit of \$763.22 million. Pakistan's highest export volume of \$290.00 million and import volume of \$1 000.74 million occurred in 2014 and 2021 respectively. It further reveals that the trade balance has consistently favoured South Africa since 2009, with 2013 being the only exception. According to the *Observatory of Economic Complexity* (2022), over the past 27 years (from 1995 to 2022), South African exports to Pakistan have increased at an average annual rate of 9.13%, while Pakistani exports to South Africa have shown an annual growth of 7.94 per cent.

The Pakistani government and business community are promoting Pakistan-South Africa trade through trade promotional activities, investment facilitation measures, and by establishing market access and distribution networks (Khan 2023a). In 2013, Eight MoUs were signed in a Joint Commission meeting to increase trade volume (Trade Development Authority of Pakistan 2022). Pakistan's 'Look Africa Policy' of 2017 and 'Engage Africa Initiative' of 2019 also aim at enhancing trade volume between African countries and Pakistan. Pakistan took part in the South Africa Investment Conference convened in South Africa on 18–19 November 2020 (Arif 2020). Pakistani industrialists and traders were urged to invest and bridge the existing trade gap with Africa during a virtual meeting of the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI) and the Pakistan-South Africa Trade Federation (PSATF) held on 18 November 2020 in Islamabad (Ahmed 2020). Furthermore, the Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has concluded a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with PSATF to enhance trade, boost exports, and nurture networking between South Africa and Pakistan (Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce 2020). The Pakistan government also announced the establishment of the Pak-Africa Trade Centre to provide a platform for chambers and the business community. At a meeting on 18 February 2021, South African High Commissioner Mthuthuzeli Madikiza and Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) President Mian Tariq Misbah agreed to jointly build a meaningful partnership between the private sectors of both countries to strengthen trade and economic ties (Correspondent 2021). The High Commissioner reiterated this commitment in his address to the business community at LCCI on 8 August 2023, and 'underscored the need for collaborative efforts to address challenges faced by the business community and enhance trade cooperation' (LCCI 2023). The LCCI President Kashif Anwar supported High Commissioner Madikiza's views, expressing optimism that enhanced bilateral economic relations despite the current trade imbalance favouring

South Africa. He cited State Bank of Pakistan data showing a drop in bilateral trade from \$1.7 billion in 2021–22 to \$626 million in 2022–23, and highlighted the potential for collaboration in agriculture, textiles, manufacturing, technology, and pharmaceuticals (LCCI 2023).

Government officials, presidents of national chambers, and business leaders representing the member states of the SADC actively participated in the third Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference & Single Country Exhibition (PATDC & SCE) held in the year 2022. About 120 Pakistani companies took part in the conference, showcasing various key sectors of Pakistan's economy, with over 70% of participants hailing from the engineering and healthcare sectors. The event saw the participation of 59 delegates from 11 member states of SADC, alongside numerous other attendees from South Africa. It facilitated high-level Government-to-Government (G2G) interaction between Pakistan and the Southern African countries, laying the groundwork for strengthened trade and business connections (Ghauri 2023). Trade investments between Pakistan and South Africa are facilitated by business companies, which pinpoint investment prospects, offer market intelligence, and link potential investors with indigenous partners (Rashid and Ghauri 2020). They also assist exporters in establishing distribution networks to expand the reach of Pakistani products in South Africa (Trade Development Authority of Pakistan 2021).

On the other hand, various barriers, including intricate regulations, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers impede bilateral trade (Khan 2023a). Both the SACU and the SADC impose high external tariffs. The exporters to South Africa have to navigate its import regulations and protective regime, which impose substantial duties and taxes and non-tariff barriers (Trade Commission of Pakistan, Johannesburg 2022). Pakistan's primary export goods face tariffs varying from zero per cent to 40 per cent when entering South Africa. Noteworthy non-tariff barriers include anti-dumping duties imposed on Pakistani cement, sub-optimal banking channels, and intricate import licensing and product certification procedures. Pakistan has taken tariff-related measures to boost exports to South Africa, including implementing a further two per cent duty drawback on textiles in 2018 (Khan 2018), providing an 80 per cent subsidy for trade fair participation in Africa, and introducing a 4.4 per cent duty drawback on electric fans (Amir & Khan, 2021).

Pakistan and South Africa have a promising economic future together. Pakistan can expand its exports by focusing on new, high-demand products. Both countries should encourage business exchanges and regular trade meetings to strengthen ties. Pakistani



investors in South Africa can benefit from joint ventures. To improve trade efficiency, they should address logistical hurdles, simplify procedures, and reduce barriers like anti-dumping duties. Collaboration on technical expertise and economic knowledge can further boost economic growth, aligning with South Africa's focus on South-South cooperation (Correspondent 2020a).

### ***3.3 Defence collaboration***

Defence and security cooperation remains a significant aspect of Pakistan-South Africa bilateral relationship, notwithstanding its complex nature. Exchanges of high-level military delegations, defence cooperation, joint military exercises, arms trade, and training programmes for military personnel have been the major contours of this cooperation. These relations are primarily driven by Pakistan's strategic interests in the international system (Khan 2023b). This relationship has evolved since the 1990s, reaching its zenith during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Pakistan Air Force Chief 2019). In September 2016, the two states committed to enhancing their defence ties, with South Africa announcing intentions to establish a Defence Attaché office in Islamabad (Press Information Department 2016). Later, the initial reciprocal exchange of defence delegations and mutual interactions played a pivotal role in propelling the momentum to enhance these ties from 2014/2015. Consequently, discernible indications emerged, illustrating an augmentation in bilateral cooperation across a wide array of domains. A snapshot of the initial interactions is given in Table 2 below (*compiled by the authors*).

**Table-2: Reciprocal exchanges of defence delegations and mutual interactions**

Sr#	Nature of Interaction	Venue	Year
1	Pakistan participated in the Africa Aerospace and Defence-2012 (AAD) Exhibition	Waterkloof Air Force Base, Pretoria	2012
2	The meetings between Vice Admiral Johannes Mudimu, Chief of the South African Navy, and Pakistan's Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), General Raheel Sharif, as well as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJSC) General Rashad Mahmood.	Rawalpindi	2014
3	A visit of the Paramount Group from South Africa, led by Ivor Ichikowitz, to the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC).	Rawalpindi	2014

4	A meeting between the Chief of the South African Army, Lieutenant General Vusumuzi Ramakala Masondo, and Pakistan's COAS General Raheel Sharif, along with CJCSC General Rashad Mahmood.	Rawalpindi	2014
5	A Pakistani delegation, led by Rana Tanveer Hussain, former Minister for Defence Production of Pakistan, visited South Africa for five days.	Pretoria	2015
6	A three-day, first-ever visit by Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (CoAS), General Raheel Sharif, to South Africa since 1994.	Pretoria	2015
7	Visit of the Naval Chief of Pakistan, Admiral Muhammad Zakaullah, to South Africa.	Pretoria	2016
8	Pakistan participated in the Africa Aerospace and Defense (AAD) Exhibition 2016	Waterkloof Air Force Base (AFB), Pretoria,	2016
9	South African companies such as Denel SOC Ltd., Rheinmetall Denel Munition, and Turbomeca Africa participated in the International Defence Exhibition and Seminar (IDEAS).	Karachi	2016 2018
10	General Solly Zacharia Shoke, Chief of the SANDF, visited Pakistan.	Islamabad	2017
11	Vice Admiral Mosuwa Hlongwane, Chief of the South African Navy, called on Pakistan's Naval Chief, Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi.	Islamabad	2022
12	General Nadeem Raza, the former CJCSC of Pakistan, visited South Africa.	South Africa	2022
13	Pakistan participated in the Africa Aerospace and Defense Exhibition (AAD).	Air Force Base (AFB) Waterkloof, Pretoria	2022
14	General Rudzani Maphwanya, the Chief of the SANDF, visited Pakistan.	Rawalpindi	2022

Pakistan and South Africa have developed a formal framework to facilitate cooperation in the defence sector. On 27 March 2017 they finalised a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on '*Defence and Defence Industrial Cooperation*' at the government level, which involved forming a joint committee aimed at bolstering formal defence collaboration between the two states (Associated Press of Pakistan 2017). It is argued that 'this will pave the way for strengthening and diversifying through formal structures, collaborative programmes, exchange of information and training of the armed forces

officers and soldiers' (Peter 2017a). Khwaja Asif, Pakistan's former Minister for Defence, commenting on the scope of MoU stated as follows:

Acquisition of defence equipment as well as cooperation in Research and Development (R&D), transfer of technology, co-production or joint ventures in public as well as private sectors, also fall within the domain of the MoU. The cooperation between both the countries will help open new vistas in both defence and defence production sectors (Correspondents 2017).

The MoU also involved exploring potential partnerships between Heavy Industries Taxila and Pakistan Aeronautical Complex with South African defence vendors such as Denel Aviation or Paramount Group (Khan 2017). This arrangement can create new opportunities and reduce Pakistan's reliance on Western states (Siddiqui 2017). Emphasising the significance of this initiative, Nosiviwe Mapisa Nqakula, South African Minister for Defence and Defence Industry, also remarked that:

The importance of continuous cementing of relations in an effort to share knowledge and ideas can never be over-emphasised. As the South Africa National Defence Force (SANDF) we believe in empowering ourselves and others through collaborative partnerships and agreements (SA and Pakistan sign, 2017).

Following the signing of the MoU, the military leadership of Pakistan and South Africa frequently interacted. Lynne Brown, South African Minister of Public Enterprises, Mogokare Seleke, the Department of Public Enterprises' Director-General, and Zwelakhe Ntshepe, the CEO of the Denel Group visited Pakistan in 2017. It was a significant stride to find out the prospect of collaboration between Denel, the state-owned arms and defence manufacturer of South Africa, and Pakistani enterprises alongside its defence forces (Cruywagen 2017). Lynne Brown, reiterating the importance of Pakistan-South Africa defence relations, stated that:

The South African Government views the relations with Pakistan as of great significance and relevance in the current global dynamics. I believe that the defence sector remains one area in which our countries have more opportunities to explore cooperation. The partnerships will enable both countries to share experiences and transfer technology, as well as the know-how. These investment opportunities

are within the Memorandum of Understanding on Defence and Industrial Cooperation (Cruywagen 2017a).

In January 2019, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, former COAS, and South African High Commissioner Mr Mpendulo Jelemet met in Rawalpindi to discuss mutual interests, regional security, and Pakistan-South Africa relations (Inter Services Public Relations 2019). During the same year, a meeting took place between General Qamar Javed Bajwa and Lieutenant General Lindile Yam, the Chief of the South African Army. According to an official statement issued by the South African military, ‘the goodwill visit is aimed at enhancing bilateral relations between the two armies, sharing ideas pertaining to cutting-edge defence technology and best practices employed by their respective defence industries’ (Martin 2019). Similarly, General Qamar Bajwa accentuated that:

South Africa has a good technological base that we want to benefit from. Despite the geographical distance between Pakistan and South Africa, our thinking and understanding of world affairs are quite similar. Both South Africa and Pakistan have similar foreign policy outlooks. The opportunities for military-to-military cooperation are immense. Pakistan could be a potential arms supplier for South Africa, and businessmen in South Africa can also benefit from what is produced in Pakistan (Martin 2019).

On 24 October 2019, Air Chief Marshal Mujahid Anwar Khan, the former Chief of the Pakistan Air Force, and his South African counterpart, Lieutenant General Fabian Msimang, discussed defence cooperation and agreed to strengthen bilateral cooperation, engage in the exploration of shared areas of interest, and cooperate on training facilities (Zahid 2019). On the other hand, Msimang lauded the professionalism of the Pakistan Air Force and its domestically manufactured equipment including JF-17, K-8, and the Super Mushshak (‘Pakistan Air Force Chief’ 2019). On 22 December 2019, the Pakistan Navy vessels MOAWIN and ASLAT embarked on an overseas deployment and arrived at Simon’s Town, South Africa (Recorder Report 2019). It was followed by an encouraging interaction with the South African Navy’s Flag Officer and Chief Magistrate with regard to the expansion of maritime security (Inter Services Public Relations 2019a).

General Rudzani Maphwanya, Chief of SANDF, paid an official visit to Pakistan on 27–28 July 2021. During his visit, he had meetings with the President of Pakistan

Arif Alvi, General Nadeem Raza, the then Chairman of the JCSC, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Pakistan's COAS, and Admiral Muhammad Amjad Khan Niazi, Chief of the Naval Staff. According to Inter-Services Public Relations (2021):

During the meetings both sides deliberated upon bilateral cooperation, security and prevailing regional environment. The dignitaries dilated upon measures to enhance the level and scope of military to military engagements between both countries and reaffirmed to continue to forge deeper ties. The visiting dignitary lauded the professionalism of Pakistan Armed Forces and acknowledged their sacrifices in fight against terrorism.

Furthermore, the President of Pakistan also underscored the significance of Pakistan-South Africa defence cooperation by stating that:

Pakistan and South Africa enjoy excellent cooperation in the field of defence which needs to be further expanded for the mutual benefit of the two countries. Pakistan wants to further enhance trade, investment and defence relations with South Africa. Pakistan attaches great importance to its ties with South Africa under its "Look Africa" policy and wants to increase the frequency of exchanges at military and political levels to further cement bilateral ties (Radio Pakistan 2021).

Pakistan has shown interest in the procurement of military hardware from South Africa ('Chief of the SANDF' 2021). This acquisition underscores Pakistan's commitment to modernising its armed forces and enhancing its strategic capabilities. As per reports from the South African National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) spanning the years 2000 to 2021, Pakistan has been the recipient of South African defence equipment over the years (<https://www.sipri.org/databases/national-reports/South%20Africa>). Accordingly, the main categories of this procurement have been Sensitive Major Significant Equipment (SMSE), Non-sensitive Equipment (NSE), General Services (GS), and Sensitive Significant Equipment (SSE). Table 3 below provides the Rand value of these transactions (*compiled by the authors*).

**Table-3: Rand Values of Pakistan's defence imports from South Africa 2000-2021**

Year	Type and Description			
	SMSE	NSE	GS	SSE
2000	2294000	39481000	23488000	
2001	1825000	43779000	2035000	
2002	19300000	10198000		
2003	8134000	49195000		
2004	5468698	95886133		
2005	8569087	21040850		
2006	18495.234	7023769		
2007	4278015	27195356	3267450	2121281
2008	6862636	13806497	8953.151	
2009	550739	30409508	8551142	
2010		6608253	28005912	
2011		21363982	28093576	
2012		118118284	21749566	
2013		2427220		45173250
2014	2612795	1926108		
2017				45173250
2018		926168		10267865
2019				65297006
2020		15446238		66662643
2021		7356616		

The exchange of military training programs is another aspect of Pakistan-South Africa defence cooperation aimed at enhancing their defence capabilities. A considerable number of members from the SANDF have received training from Pakistan. Similarly, the South African Army College reciprocated by providing training to the Pakistani military personnel. Pakistan's military officers attended Executive National Security Programme-2002 and 2003 and Joint Senior Command and Staff Course-2002 at training institutions of the SANDF (Lekota 2003: 55). On the other hand, officials from the South African Department of Foreign Affairs participated in the '13th Advanced Diplomatic Course' for African diplomats, which was conducted under the auspices of the Ministry of External Relations of Pakistan (South African Government 2003: 153).

Approximately 40 commanders from South Africa received training in counterterrorism tactics and special operations from Pakistani Special Forces in 2019 (Martin 2022). Moreover, Captain Caven Khoshi Matsho, a South African junior infantry officer, was the first to attend and complete an advanced commando course in Pakistan in 2020 ('Junior infantry officer' 2020).

Pakistan and South Africa's shared history and strategic interests have fostered strong defence cooperation. This is evidenced by their government agreements, military exchanges, and joint training programs. Both countries seek to collaborate in defence research and technology transfer. Opportunities exist for deeper cooperation in areas like technological advancement, peacekeeping missions, and counter-terrorism expertise sharing. However, the extent and nature of this partnership can be influenced by internal political and economic factors within each country.

### ***3.4 Pakistani Diaspora***

The significant presence of the Pakistani diaspora in South Africa constitutes a crucial dimension of Pakistan-South Africa bilateral relations. Pakistanis constitute less than one per cent of South Africa's population. The Pakistani South African community traces its origins to labourers and migrants who arrived from British India in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Over the past decade, the influx of Pakistani nationals into South Africa has increased substantially. In 2010, the Pakistani diaspora in South Africa was estimated to be between 70 000 and 100 000 (Park and Rugunan 2010). By 2019, this number had grown to approximately 100 000, out of a total of six million foreign nationals in the country (Malope 2019). By 2021, the Pakistani population in South Africa had reached 170 000 (Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development 2021). As of 2024, around 200 000 Pakistanis are residing in South Africa (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan 2024). The number of workers who proceeded to South Africa for employment, as registered by the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BE&OE) during the Financial Year 2020-21 and 2021-22, was 22 and 46 respectively (Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development 2022). Most of the Pakistani diaspora reside in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and Grahamstown. Pakistanis formed their first community group, the South African Pakistani Association (SAPA), on 9 September 2009 with the aim 'to assist the Pakistani community living in South Africa and promote bilateral cooperation between South Africa and Pakistan in social, political, economic and in art

& culture fields' (Park and Rugunanan, 2010). The Pakistan South Africa Association, with its central executive office based in Pretoria, operates 16 units across all provinces and maintains an active presence on social media, effectively representing Pakistanis throughout South Africa.

Singh (2015) investigated the arrival and settlement of Pakistanis in Verulam, a town on the North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, focusing on the prominence of Pakistani-controlled businesses in the area. Pillay (2010) argued that there is a growing trend of Pakistani immigrants acquiring citizenship in South Africa, focusing his Durban-based research on investigating the personal, social, and political factors shaping their pathways to citizenship. This study concluded as follows:

Pakistanis are satisfied with their personal decision to gain citizenship. They consider themselves privileged as they are able to live their lives as fully fledged South Africans without having to abandon their contact with Pakistan. The locals have treated them respectfully and have embraced their differences which have helped their assimilation to progress naturally with time. Furthermore, they stay abreast of current affairs and advocate the importance of political participation and all the social and political benefits in South Africa served as further motivations for them to gain citizenship. Pakistani citizens are educated and professional additions to South Africa and their greatest ambition is to make an impact in the country which they call their new home (Pillay 2010).

Most Pakistanis work in small-scale businesses, although there are a few highly successful Pakistani businessmen and a handful of large Pakistani overseas enterprises. Research indicates that Pakistani retailers concentrate on selling cell phone accessories and repairs, computer services, medical supplies, linens, leather goods, fabrics, and household items. In border and rural areas, Pakistanis also manage substantial grocery stores like 'Cash n Carry' outlets. In Johannesburg's Oriental Plaza, approximately one-third of the retail shops, predominantly rented from Indian South African owners, are now operated by foreigners, mostly from Pakistan (Park and Rugunanan 2010). According to the then commercial secretary at Pakistan's embassy in South Africa, 'The Pakistani community in South Africa, by and large, is associated with small-scale businesses, thus contributing positively towards the South African economy, in addition to providing employment to South Africans' (Malope 2019). The Pakistan South Africa Association, with its central executive office based in Pretoria, operates 16 units across



all provinces and maintains an active presence on social media, effectively representing Pakistanis throughout South Africa. Despite the presence of Pakistani expatriates in South Africa, cultural relations remain limited, indicating a need for enhancement. This can be achieved through initiatives such as promoting Pakistani films, dramas, and organising cultural events (Institute of Policy Studies 2021).

## 4. Conclusion

This study reveals a complex picture of Pakistan-South Africa bilateral relations. Though formal ties began in 1994, their connection stretches back for decades. The shared interests bridge the geographic distance between the two nations. Cooperation has fostered a multifaceted relationship across political, economic, and defence spheres. Regular high-level visits and formal mechanisms like the 1999 Joint Commission and the 2021 Pakistan-South Africa Joint Commission facilitate and regulate bilateral collaboration. However, infrequent political engagement and limited functionality of the institutional mechanisms hinder the full potential of the relationship.

Pakistan and South Africa have witnessed steady growth in economic cooperation, driven by shared interests in trade and investment. However, Pakistan faces a trade imbalance in this relationship. Regulatory hurdles, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers pose significant challenges. Despite the strong bilateral relations, there remains significant scope to increase trade volume. Since the 1990s, Pakistan and South Africa's defence cooperation has evolved and grown, characterised by a robust connection between their respective defence establishments. This cooperation was further strengthened by a government-to-government Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on '*Defence and Defence Industrial Cooperation*' signed in 2017.

Despite a strong foundation of shared values and historical solidarity, Pakistan and South Africa's relationship holds significant untapped potential. Pakistan's recent 'Engage Africa' initiatives offer a chance to bridge the gap between political ties and substantial economic and defence cooperation. By working together on shared interests and overcoming current challenges, they can build long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships across various sectors. This collaboration could strengthen Pakistan's global position, economic growth, and national security.

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