

# Confrontation with Iran not in Pakistan's defense doctrine: **Former envoy**

## Joint defense pact 'should not be characterized as anti-Iranian'



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### INTERVIEW

Mehdi Honardoost, the former Iranian envoy to Islamabad and the head of the Iran-Pakistan Friendship Association, told Iran Daily in the following exclusive interview that bilateral relations should be analyzed within the framework of "geopolitical coexistence" — a framework in which, despite certain disagreements and divergences, the political will exists to manage differences and preserve shared interests. Referring to Pakistan's mediating role in the recent tensions between Iran and the United States and the formation of the joint mutual defense pact among Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, he emphasizes that tactical measures should not be subject to hasty strategic interpretations.

Honardoost maintained that Islamabad faces multiple considerations — namely, its geopolitical position, economic and security considerations, and close relations with Riyadh and Washington — in maintaining equilibrium in its foreign relations. Nevertheless, escalating tensions with Iran neither serves Pakistan's national interests nor accords with the necessity of preserving good-neighborly relations. Regarding the joint mutual defense pact, he stated that the agreement should be examined within the context of security developments in South and West Asia. He added that the pact's actual nature and operational conduct in the future, particularly if it progresses toward establishing a joint operational structure and military command, will be decisive in assessing its implications for Iran. The full interview with the former envoy follows:

**IRAN DAILY:** Iran and Pakistan have maintained diplomatic relations since Pakistan's establishment in 1947 and share historical, cultural, and religious ties. Nevertheless, security disagreements and border tensions have emerged between the two countries at various junctures. In your view, what factors have thus far prevented these disagreements from developing into enduring hostility?

**HONARDOOST:** Iran-Pakistan relations should be defined within the framework of geopolitical coexistence. In this type of relationship, the two countries may converge on certain issues and diverge on others, but the understanding among their leaders and decision-makers of the importance of bilateral relations provides the basis for managing disagreements. From an operational perspective, the activities of armed and terrorist groups in border regions constitute a threat to both Iran and Pakistan. These groups operate in border areas and act against the national interests of one or the other country. In Pakistan, groups such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan are also engaged in conflict with the government and act against the country. Drug trafficking and other illegal activities are also shared challenges for both sides. The important point is that the leaders of Tehran and Islamabad do not necessarily interpret these activities as evidence of hostility on the part of the other government. Rather, they regard these terrorist activities as threats to the security, stability, and economic development of border regions. Both countries understand that continued insecurity along their borders prevents these areas from being transformed from security flashpoints into corridors for trade and economic cooperation. Nevertheless, the broader interests of both countries necessitate that terrorist activities in their border regions not lead to bilateral tensions and that an episodic crisis not be permitted to undermine the fundamental principle of friendly and good-neighborly relations.



Mehdi Honardoost

**In your view, given the reciprocal attacks by the two countries in January 2024, how can a recurrence of such a situation be prevented?**

I served as Iran's ambassador to Pakistan from 2015 to 2019. Furthermore, my professional and academic work has focused on Eastern affairs for many years, and I have undertaken diplomatic assignments in India and China. During my tenure in Pakistan, I also visited and examined Balochistan and various border areas of the country firsthand on numerous occasions, from north to south. In my view, an

assessment of armed groups' activities in Pakistan's border regions must take into account the geographical and security conditions of Pakistani Balochistan. The region's complex topography and extensive mountainous terrain make operations against armed groups difficult. I disagree with the assessment that the Pakistani government has no intention of confronting these groups, although its priorities, constraints, and operational capabilities may fall short of Iran's expectations.

One of the vital dimensions of Pakistan's economic activity is its cooperation with China. This cooperation is particularly evident at Gwadar Port, where numerous development projects are underway. These projects have repeatedly been attacked by the BLA because its members do not want the Chinese to maintain a presence in the region and believe that

People and security personnel gather at the site of a terrorist attack by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) near the airport in Karachi, Pakistan, which killed two Chinese nationals, on October 7, 2024.

● XINHUA



Pakistan's army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir (L), shakes hand with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian during the former's visit to Tehran as the head of a top-level delegation on October 20, 2026.

● IRNA

this cooperation does not benefit the Baloch population.

Overall, I believe that any terrorist activity in Pakistani Balochistan against our national interests, as well as any escalation of tensions between the two countries, does not benefit Pakistan because Pakistan is bordered by four countries. Its border with China presents access difficulties owing to the mountainous terrain. Pakistan faces problems with its neighbor over the issue of Pashtunistan and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, and the two countries have disagreements over border issues. India, meanwhile, is regarded as Pakistan's principal adversary, and Pakistan's military forces devote much of their attention to Indian activities.

In this context, despite all the activities of terrorist groups, the Iran-Pakistan border offers Pakistan more favorable conditions for trade, economic activity, and other exchanges. In my view, terrorist activities along the Iran-Pakistan border are also carried out through the instigation and support of third parties and foreign actors.

Ultimately, the solution must be sought in security cooperation, intelligence sharing, the management of border disputes, and sustained dialogue. Neither country should permit a tactical action or limited incident to be interpreted as a change in the other side's overall strategy. In analyzing Iran-Pakistan relations, a distinction must be maintained between temporary disagreements and the two countries' long-term interests.

Nevertheless, existing problems should not be overlooked. Border incidents, armed groups' activities, and divergent perspectives on certain regional developments can generate tensions. The reciprocal attacks of January 2024 also demonstrated that, if crisis-management mechanisms do not function properly, even relations between two neighboring and friendly countries can be affected. However, the two sides' return to the diplomatic track demonstrated the existence of a determination to prevent that crisis from developing into enduring hostility.

**Despite these historical commonalities and economic potential, why has Iran-Pakistan cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, and transit not yet reached the expected level? Do Pakistan's relations with the United States and Saudi Arabia influence this situation?**

To understand this issue, Pakistan's position and its foreign policy approaches must be taken into account. Since its establishment, Pakistan has relied, in various forms, on foreign assistance and economic support. Saudi Arabia is one of its important partners in financial, oil-related, security, and military affairs, and the



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