

INDIA-TURKEY RELATIONS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

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India-Turkey bilateral relations have been friendly and cordial since ancient times. The two countries have similar cultures and civilisations, art and architecture, customs and cuisine. There was a close and regular interaction between Indian rulers and the Ottoman Empire. The activism and the ideology of Mustafa Kamal Ataturk made a deep impression on the Indian freedom struggle. Ataturk changed a traditional and conservative society into a modern one. The two great civilizations with no history of mutual conflict and contradiction were well placed to rapidly expand mutually beneficial ties in the economic, science and technology, political and societal arenas. In the cold war period, bilateral relations did not progress far because of ideological differences. But after the demise of the USSR, the adoption of liberalization changed the uni-polar world into a multi-polar world, and the two countries agreed to improve their bilateral relations from a constructivist paradigm to a realistic paradigm. At the same time, India and Turkey have a few irritants in their bilateral relations.

India-Turkey relations stretch back to the ancient Vedic period. In the ninth and tenth centuries, many Turkic people arrived in India such as Mahmood Gazni, Mohammad Ghauri, Muhammad bin Kasim, etc. They changed India's historical, political and societal relations.¹ Iltutmish was the first Sultan of Delhi, followed by Balban and others. All of them acknowledged the supremacy of the Khalifa.² Iltutmish's coins and inscriptions, for example, bore the Khalifa's name. The philosophy of Maulana Jelalettin Rumi found natural resonance in the subcontinent where tolerance and a cosmopolitan approach were already embodied in the sublime traditions of Sufism and the Bhakti movement.

There was close and regular interaction between Indian rulers and the Ottoman empire in the mediaeval period. In Turkey's war of independence, India was the first foreign country to offer

¹ Chaurasia, Radhe Shyam, 2002. *History of Ancient India: Earliest Time to 1000 A.D.* Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Pvt. Ltd, Delhi, January 1, 2001, p. 102.

² Farooqi, N.R., "Mughal Ottoman Relations", Chapter 5, p. 186, for Iltutmish's coins and inscription which bore the Khalifa's name and the Sultan's and new titles, see also Edward Thomas, chronicles of the Pathan king of Delhi (1967) page no-55, 78, 80

aid, which made a great contribution in the establishment of ISBANK. The Khilafat movement in India also played a vital role in bilateral relations. In 1923, Ataturk established Turkey as a secular, democratic republic. Official relations between newly independent India and Turkey were established in 1948. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will attend the G-20 meeting in November 2015 in Turkey, which will offer an opportunity for the two countries to further their relations in a new global political era.

In the cold war period, Turkey was a member of different Western military blocs such as MEDO, Nato and Cento, while India followed a policy of non-alignment. Turkey also supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. Differing perceptions on the Cyprus issue were also a hindrance in India-Turkey relations.³ Nevertheless, the two countries signed several agreements such as the Treaty of Friendship 1950, Cultural Relations Agreement 1951, Agreement on Trade 1973, Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology, Agreement on Economic and Technological Cooperation 1978, etc.⁴

In the 1980s, Turkey began to open up its economy, replacing the earlier policy of statism and endeavoured to restructure its economy with the help of the IMF, World Bank and several Western countries, opening up new opportunities in the infrastructure sector, corporate affairs, capital investment, etc. In 1986, the visit of Turkey's Prime Minister Turgut Ozal to India boosted the relations between the two countries, particularly in the field of economy and trade. With India's opening up of its economy in the early 1990s, further impetus was added to the bilateral relations.⁵ During this period several agreements were signed between the two countries, such as agreements on avoidance of double taxation and tourism (1995), bilateral investment promotion and protection, prevention of trafficking in narcotics (1998), and an MoU between the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research and Turkish Scientific and Technological Research Institute.⁶

During the past decade the economic growth of both India and Turkey has been tremendous. India is currently the tenth-largest economy in the world, with GDP of \$1.75 trillion (2014).⁷ It is the third-largest economy in terms of PPP. India is also the largest exporter and 11th-largest importer in the world. Turkey is currently the 17th-largest economy, with GDP (nominal) of

³ Halle, Williams, " *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000*", London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp.109-44.

⁴ Mohapatra, Ashwini K., " *Bridge to Anatolia: An Overview of Indo-Turkish Relations*", The Turkish year book of International Relations, n0-39, 2008, pp. 164-70.

⁵ Dutt, V.P., " *India's Foreign Policy since Independence*", national book trust, Delhi, 2007, pp-16-17;

Khanna, V.N., " *Foreign Policy of India; the history of Non-alignment policy of India*", Vikas publishing house, Delhi, 2007, pp. 314-16.

⁶ <http://www.ficci.com/international/countries/Turkey/Turkey-commercial-relation.htm>

⁷ Ibid.

\$789.25 billion (2014) and the 15th in terms of PPP. India's emerging potential in the IT sector and huge domestic market make it an attractive country for economic interaction. Turkey in its turn has growing clout in many regions like Central Asia, the Balkans, Mediterranean Sea, North Africa, West Asia and elsewhere and has strong economic links with the European Union (EU).

During the visit of the then Prime Minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee to Turkey in 2003, the two countries agreed to establish a joint working group for counterterrorism. They formally declared their opposition to "those who sponsor, abet and instigate terrorism and provide them safe heavens." India's target in this context was Pakistan's overt and covert support to insurgency and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and in other parts of the Indian territory; Turkey was in its turn pointing fingers at the outside support that the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) gets from outside players. During the visit of Turkey's President Abdulla Gull to India in February 2010, a joint declaration on terrorism was issued. The two countries also agreed to work on a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).⁸ In October 2013, India's President Pranab Mukherjee visited Turkey. He signed many agreements in different areas such as science and technology, education, economic cooperation and terrorism. In January 2015, India's Minister of External Affairs, Sushma Swaraj, visited Turkey.⁹ Her Turkish counterpart Mehmet Cavasoglu visited India two months later. Both agreed to work towards uprooting terrorism. India also thanked Turkey for freeing 158 Indian citizens from the clutches of ISIS (Islamic state and Iraq and Syria) in 2014.¹⁰

India and Turkey have their own respective interests in Afghanistan. Though there has been no direct clash of interests between the two countries so far as reconstruction and security issues are concerned, India was excluded from the Istanbul conference, held in January 2010, to discuss the fallout of the US-NATO deadline to withdraw from Afghanistan. India strongly expressed its displeasure to Turkey on its decision in this regard. In February 2010, the Turkish President visited India, and in November 2011, India was invited to the second leg of the conference that was held in Istanbul. Twenty-seven countries took part in the conference.¹¹

Turkey and India are important players in Central Asia. Both countries have geostrategic and geo-economic interests in the region, such as energy security, strategic interest of India in Ayni airbase, control of narco-terrorism, and transportation through international corridors. The two countries can also cooperate in various forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). India has recently been enrolled as a potential member of SCO while Turkey will obtain

⁸ Dikshit, Sandip, "Turkey agrees to work closely with India on global terrorism," *The Hindu*, 10 February 2010..

⁹ *Today's zaman*, 2013. "President of India to visit Turkey," 13TH October 2010.

¹⁰ *Times of India*. "Turkey helps to free Indians from ISIS," 15th March 2015.

¹¹ Roy, Shubajit, "Turkey regrets not inviting India for Afghan meet," *Indian Express*, 28th February 2010.

the status of a dialogue partner. In this regard, both countries have the support of major players such as Russia and China.¹²

As emerging economic powers, both India and Turkey can play an important complementary role in the developmental process of many developing countries of Asia and Africa. Both countries have hosted conferences to discuss this subject of least developed countries in Pail in 2011, and in May 2011 in Istanbul, in order to enhance their influence in these countries. India's presence in Africa and Turkey's growing relations with the countries of this region can be a point of convergence between the two countries.

Recently, Iran's nuclear programme has become a major issue in the international debate. In March-April 2015, P5+1 (USA, RUSSIA, BRITAIN, CHINA, FRANCE, E.U) and Iran agreed on a nuclear deal. Iran has agreed to limit uranium enrichment to only one centre at Natanz. Neither Turkey nor India wants a nuclear arms race in this region, in the context that Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries have expressed concern about the deal.¹³

Both India and Turkey attach great importance to science and technology as an important driver of their development process. Technology drives the knowledge economy, which is at the heart of the globalization process. It also accelerates transiting from one stage of development to the next. Both India and Turkey have global scientific traditions. It is natural that the two countries should enhance their linkages in this area. India's growing strengths in agriculture, information technology, biotechnology, space and civilian nuclear power are well recognized. Companies around the world are outsourcing their research to Indian laboratories and institutions. India is also emerging as a world-class centre for healthcare.¹⁴

India and Turkey have a mutual interest in free trade in goods and services. With its large rural population, India is particularly interested in removing distortions and inequities in the regime for export of agricultural commodities. The failure of the WTO meetings illustrates that those who lecture others on immediate sacrifices for long-term gains are not willing to follow their own prescription. If developing countries are to hold out for a more open and non-discriminatory global trade regime, India and Turkey should coordinate their positions with other likeminded countries. The two countries can also work together on global issues like global warming, nuclear disarmament and sustainable development.¹⁵

India and Turkey have artistic, cultural and linguistic connections. Usta, for example, is an art form practised by a depleting group of artists in the Bikaner region in India and Turkey. This art

¹² Dar, Firdaus H., 2014. "India's response to new great game in Central Asia," J.S.Asian studies,02(01),2014, p-14.

¹³ <http://economis.com/blogs/economist-everything>, [www.the-diplomat.com/6th april 2015,how-an-iran- ????](http://www.the-diplomat.com/6th-april-2015-how-an-iran-????)

¹⁴ India and Turkey relations in the 21st century, <http://www.Turks.us>

¹⁵ Ibid.

needs a wider market. Novelists of both Indian and Turkish origin have used painting as a local form of historiography that can challenge the European historiography. Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk has also visited India many times to meet his partner Indian novelist Kiran desai.

During the visit of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to India in November 2008, Turkey initiated negotiations on a free trade agreement (FTA) with India. Turkey became interested in having an FTA with India just after India and the EU started discussions on having an FTA. This message was officially conveyed to India during the visit of Kursad Tuzmen, Turkish Minister of State, in March 2008. A joint study group was set up during the visit of Prime Minister Erdogan to study the relevance and benefits of an FTA. This group also examined the possibility of a comprehensive economic partnership agreement. During the Turkish President's visit to India in February 2010, it was decided to have a joint technical committee to search further the prospects of the proposed FTA. Bilateral talks on FTA are being held annually.¹⁶

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit in November 2008 and President Abdulla Gul's visit in February 2010 to India have strengthened Turkey's interest in India. The Indian response so far has been somewhat tepid due to Turkey's close relations with Pakistan. Now, however, Turkey is no more interested in formulating its Asian policy on the lines of Pakistan's approach to these issues. Turkish officials have identified Pakistan as a failed state. Turkey has already softened its approach on the Kashmir issue to build up a comprehensive relationship with India. Turkey's continuous good ties with Pakistan have also been undermined following the latter's soft approach to Taliban and its covert support to Islamist radicals who have destabilized Central Asia. Turkey has since revised its support to Pakistan's stand on Kashmir, clearly moving away from its earlier support for plebiscite under UN supervision, to giving more importance to India-Pakistan bilateral talks on the issue, which is closer to India's position.

Turkey imports a variety of goods from India such as cotton and synthetic yarn, organic chemicals, organic dyes, denim, steel, antibiotics, zinc, TV CRT, clothing and apparel, automotive components, machine tools, light machinery, small electrical items and mobile handsets. India in its turn imports from Turkey poppy seed, auto components, marble and textile machinery, denim, carpets, etc. Bilateral trade between the two countries was worth \$7.5 billion in 2014; the target to be achieved is \$15 billion in 2015. There are new areas where the two countries can increase bilateral trade, such as iron ore, textiles, tourism, agro-based industry, gems and jewellery, information technology, media and entertainment, research and development, etc.¹⁷

¹⁶ Mohapatra, Ashwini K., 2008. "Bridge to Anatolia: An overview of Indo-Turkish relations," *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*, no. 39, pp. 178-80.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The Changing Face of Turkey's Foreign Policy

In West Asia, Turkey has emerged as an influential player. Turkey follows a policy of reconciliation between the different West Asian countries, but has failed to promote its zero problem policy with Syria. India also supports peace and political stability in this region because this region meets various Indian interests, including supply of energy resources and the interests of migrants of Indian origin in this region.¹⁸

The AKP has been in power in Turkey since 2002 with an absolute majority. It is the only party in the last fifty years of Turkish history whose votes increased in successive elections from 34 per cent in 2002 to 47 per cent in 2007, but declined to 37 in the 2015 elections. Turkey was trying to revive its economy after the economic crises in 2000 and 2001, when the AKP came to power. During the AKP period, Turkey developed a strategy of export-oriented economy and tried to develop political relations with neighbouring countries. It opened its markets to Africa, East Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. Ministry-level visits to these areas have increased to these regions over the years along with the opening of embassies.

AKP has also changed its views on longstanding foreign policy issues like Cyprus, even in the face of opposition by some traditional domestic constituencies. Turkey took the initiative to solve the Cyprus issue by accepting the Kofi Annan plan of reunification of that island in 2004. The Greek Cypriots disapproved the UN reunification plan but Turkish Cypriots approved it with 65 per cent majority. Turkey also developed relationship with Greece and even signed a Protocol with Armenia to improve relations. This clearly exhibits a soft-power approach to foreign policy.

The referendum in Serbia and Bosnia in 2009 can also be seen as examples of Turkey's pragmatic soft-power policy in its immediate neighbourhood. Recent official requests for Turkish mediation from different parts of the world like Somalia and Philippines indicate the positive future involvement of Turkey in other regions too.¹⁹

The foreign policy of post-cold war era Turkey has undergone a significant change from a passive and isolationist stance to active engagement especially in matters concerning the Middle East. AKP's foreign policymakers (especially Ahmet Davutoglu) have tried to envision Turkey as having multiple roles to play in the political world. Turkey has developed politico-economic relations with its neighbours and has signed high-level consultation agreements especially with Syria and Iraq. Turkey has also signed a protocol with Armenia and improved its relations with Russia, Greece and Georgia. Turkey has employed "proactive peace diplomacy" in regional

¹⁸ Davutoglu, Ahmet, 2010. "Turkey's zero problem foreign policy," 20 May, <http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/5/20>

¹⁹ Hasan, Kosebalaban, 2007. "The rise of Anatolian cities and the failure of the modernization paradigm," critique: *Middle Eastern Studies*, 16(3): 229-40.

affairs. It got involved in the Iraqi-Syrian dispute in 2010, and has paved the ground for Syria-Israel peace efforts for Sunni-Shiite reconciliation in Iraq since 2005. Turkey has also tried to have good relations with every region, including the EU. At the same time, Turkey was found failing in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria in the last decade, such as stability of political institutions, guaranteeing democracy, rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, and economic stability. However, now Turkey is a politically stable country in West Asia, protecting the minorities' rights, implementing the rule of law by amending the constitution (2013-2014). The economy is also stable. In 2013, Cyprus was admitted to EU membership.²⁰ Meanwhile, Turkey is facing a few challenges in the last few years, such as women's rights movements, students' movement, control the corruption scandals.

Towards a New Momentum in India-Turkey Relations

India and Turkey have developed in very different environments but the approach of both as regards the role of religion in politics is very different from the totalitarian way of French secularism. Traditionally, both countries have a similar experience of secularism. But now, Turkey's Justice and Development Party is gradually following the Islamic values rather than secular values. In India also, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is following communal politics. It is in the common interest of both countries to project a secular image of their governments' secular orientation.²¹

Both India and Turkey are vying for great-power status. Since both are members of G-20, the emphasis of which is economic development, their search for cooperation in the economic domain is understandable. However, within the G-20 fold, Turkey along with some others is trying to form an informal grouping –MIKTA (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Turkey and Australia) of which India is not a part. There is also another perspective as an alternative forum to BRICS, to be called TIMBI (Turkey, India, Mexico, Brazil, Indonesia). Several of the more developed of the countries have also proposed IBSAT (India, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey).

Both Turkey and India are rising powers but their cooperation at the global level is limited. Both countries need to cooperate on a much more extensive scale on global issues like terrorism, climate change, justice for the developing world's aspirations, human rights, sustainable development, total nuclear disarmament, and South-South cooperation. Another important platform is the UN Security Council permanent membership. Turkey was a non-permanent

²⁰ Sozen, Ahmet, 2010. "A paradigm shift in Turkish foreign policy: transition and challenges," *Turkish Studies*, ii(1): 103-23.

²¹ An-Nain, Abdullahi Ahmed, 2008. *Islam and the Secular State: Negotiating the Future of Sharia*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

UNSC member in 2009-2010, whereas India has several times been a non-permanent member of the UNSC. Therefore, Turkey may be supportive of India for permanent membership.

The main obstacle in India-Turkey bilateral relations is lack of genuine information about each other. This problem is deep-rooted and requires time for a resolution. A few strategies could be implemented to overcome this obstacle, as follows.

1. Exchange of Parliamentarians.
2. Exchange of academics and researchers between universities and their optimum interaction.
3. Ensuring cooperation between the diplomats of both countries and organizing joint conferences and seminars on Indo-Turkish socio-political issues, thereby creating awareness on both sides.
4. Continue efforts to finalize the negotiations for an ambitious FTA in order to address trade and investment irritants as well as maximize business and economic opportunities. Economic relations will spill over to political, societal, science and technological relations.