

AN OVER VIEW OF POST-INDEPENDENCE TURKEY-INDIA RELATIONS

Dr. Seraj Ahsan



INSAMER

IHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

To cite this article: Ahsan, Seraj. "An over view of Post-Independence Turkey-India Relations", INSAMER, 11.08.2020.



Analysis

Despite Turkey-India's lengthy relations, contemporary Indo-Turkish ties can be divided into two phases, the first being since India's independence until the mid 1980s; the second from the mid 1980s. During these periods political and diplomatic differences have been kept at the corner due to changing priorities of both countries, while globalization helped them enhanced their trade ties. However, during most part of the first phase and in the early period of the second phase, Turkey-India relations dropped because of non-convergence in the goals and objectives in both countries' foreign policy.

Turkey's foreign policy went through different phases, especially after the end of WW II. The first phase was from 1945 to 1960. In this period, Western dependency dominated Turkey's foreign policy. It was also the period of Turkey's disappointment with the West that led to the

beginning of Turkey's reconciliation attempts with the Soviet Union in particular and the Third World countries in general. However, this shift did not mean that Turkey lost its significance in the Western security cultures.

During the 1970s, Turkey observed alienation from the West and tried to make reliable partners outside Western alliance. After the end of the Cold War was a new phase in Turkish foreign policy with other countries that exhibit multi-regional approach. The purpose of this approach was to give more attention towards the so-called Third World countries particularly Asian countries.

So far as India is concerned, it pursued a non-alignment policy after its independence from Britain. India tried its best not to be part of any camp in the Cold War era but it appeared that India's foreign policy inclined towards the



INSAMER
IHH İNSANİ VE SOSYAL ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ
IHH HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIAL RESEARCH CENTER
مركز البحوث الإنسانية و الاجتماعية

erstwhile USSR from the early period of the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War, a major shift took place in India's foreign policy because the beginning of 1990 saw a rapid transformation in world politics; India was forced to adopt the changes that were coming due to globalization and liberalization.¹

During the Cold War, the level of relations between Turkey and India remained very low. There can be several reasons for this, one being security. In the Cold War, for security reasons, Turkey had no alternative but to join the Western bloc. As mentioned, India's effort was to maintain non-alignment in its foreign policy outlook. Post-Independence, Turkey and India chose different paths; therefore their relations had been at minimum level.²

Due to the general security environment in the region, Turkey chose to be part of the Western military alliance system. In 1951, Turkey made an effort to establish the Middle East Defense Organization (MEDO) and subsequently, joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952, the Balkan Pact in 1954 and the Baghdad pact in 1955 that later paved the way for the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).

India was primarily against these military alliances. This reflected the divergence of interest between Turkey and India. India was also skeptical of Turkey because of Pakistan presence in most of these alliances. Moreover, Turkey's deep ties with Pakistan in defense sector also alienated India from Turkey.³

The policy differences overshadowed Indo-Turkish relations, despite major agreements between both countries for having close cooperation in the early 1950s. The agreements became less significant due to Turkey's inclination toward the Western bloc, while India had been skeptical toward the very bloc due to its history in the fight against Western colonialism.

To build solidarity among Asian and African nations, in 1955 a conference in Bandung,

Indonesia was held. In the conference, Turkey criticized the dubious character of non-alignment policy and defended the West and its alliance; while perceiving socialism and communism as threats to its stability. At the time, the majority of the Third World countries were under the influence of USSR. This also furthered the gap between Turkey and the Third World countries, including India.

Despite being an anti-colonial country, Turkey felt the negative implication of its support to the Western bloc in the United Nations. Turkey also faced isolation in several issues. Therefore Turkey realized the importance of shifting its stand as far foreign policy is concerned. Under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the AK party-led government tried its best to shift its axis from the predominantly Western to Eastern discourse.

Turkey and India: Between differences and agreements

Kashmir and Cyprus have been the core issues between the two countries at diplomatic front that prevented Turkey and India to have amiable relations for a long time.⁴ Traditionally, Turkey supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue and differed with India's claim that Kashmir is an integral part of India.⁵

Turkey has also been supporting Pakistan's stand on the Kashmir issue in different International forums such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). This also caused strains in Turkey -India relations. But for some years Turkey's stand regarding the Kashmir issue has softened. However, Turkey still maintains that the UNSC resolutions and plebiscite on Kashmir should be implemented.

Cyprus has been another contentious issue between Turkey and India. Since Cyprus' independence from Britain in 1960, Turkey has been concerned about the ethnic Turkish communities living in the northern part of the Island, and historically they have been kept marginalized by the majority Greek Cypriots.

In 1974 Turkey sent its military to north Cyprus to protect Turkish Cypriots from Greek aggression. India criticized Turkey for making the de-facto division of the Island. Occasionally, the Cyprus issue also creates tension in Turkey-India relations. Ankara has often considered India's support for Cyprus as a reciprocation of Turkey's support for the Kashmir issue.⁶

Economic Relation between India and Turkey

As mentioned earlier about the shift in Turkey's foreign policy orientation from the late 1960s, Indo-Turkish relations started to move towards some sort of positive directions. In the 1970s, India and Turkey came close to sign several agreements. Two of them in economy and commerce sectors, (a) agreement related to trade (1973), and (b) agreement regarding economic and technical cooperation (1978), and another agreement related to cooperation in science and technology (1976).⁷

In the beginning of 1980s Turkey started to open up its economy replacing its earlier etatism/statism policy. Turkey made the effort to restructure its economy by negotiating with the IMF, the World Bank and several Western countries. New opportunities emerged in infrastructure sectors, export-import and capital investment to name a few. Turkey's new business opportunities soon attracted several countries. Some multinational companies and organizations showed their interest to do business in Turkey; they liked to tap the emerging prospects in the Turkish market that continues dynamically.

Subsequently, India and Turkey signed an agreement in 1983 for the setting up of a joint Economic Commission (JEC), with an

understanding and provision of JEC meetings to be held in both countries alternately. Due to this endeavor, the economic factors took further prominence in Indo-Turkish relations that led to build the economic ties between two countries.⁸

Until the late 1980s, bilateral trade between India and Turkey was very low, and India's export to the country was minimum. In the early 1990s India also started to liberalize its economy. The total trade volume between India and Turkey, particularly India's exports, grew rapidly. India started to export products such as cotton yarn, synthetic yarn, organic dyes, organic chemicals, denim, steel, granite, antibiotics, carpets, unwrought zinc, sesame seed, TVCRTs, mobile handsets, clothing and apparel. Turkey's exports to India were poppy seeds, minerals and fittings and steel products.⁹

Furthering the trade, several Turkish and Indian companies, most of which in the construction and energy sectors, either took major projects in their respective countries, or opted to avail the cooperation of the host country's company. Indian Railway Construction Company, Tata Motors and Oil Cooperation are such companies in this respect, with current volume of trade Surpassed \$8 billion, \$7 billion of which in imports and \$1.2 billion in exports.¹⁰

Turkey has rapidly developed its economy and today it is seen as one of the world's most vibrant economies. In addition, it also became an important player in the regional transit matrix of Gas and energy; it links the West and Central Asia to Europe. From this, it is understandable that India is in no position to ignore Turkey despite their political differences; they maintain different stands as far International issues are concerned.

Endnotes

- ¹ M.S. Rajan India's foreign policy and Relations: A documentary Services, 1972-1992, New Delhi, 1999 pp. 3-4
- ² A. K. Pasha, India and Turkey: Past and emerging relations, Delhi, Academic Excellence, 2006, pp. 132-35
- ³ V. P. Dutt, India's foreign policy since independence, New Delhi, National Book Trust, 2007, pp. 16-17
- ⁴ Mustafa Aydın, Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy: Changing Patterns and Conjectures during the Coldwar" Middle Eastern Studies, vol. 36 (1), January 2000, pp. 124-25
- ⁵ ibid
- ⁶ www.sam.gov.tr
- ⁷ <http://meaindia.nic.in/foreignrelation/turkey.htm>
- ⁸ V. N Khanna, foreign policy of India, new Delhi, Vikas publishing house, 2001, pp. 314-16
- ⁹ Aswani Kumar Mohapatra, "Bridge to Anatolia: an overview of IndoTurkish Relations," The Turkish yearbook of International relations, No. 39, 2008, pp. 178-180
- ¹⁰ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkey-india-trade-grows-steadily/1878776>

