

BRIDGE TO ANATOLIA: AN OVERVIEW OF INDO-TURKISH RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

With the end of the bipolar international system, regional powers have not merely experienced an extension of their influence within their respective areas, but also scope for enhanced engagement between them. After years of mutual exclusion, India and Turkey, the two ambitious regional middle powers have, for instance, made remarkable headway in their efforts to forge close ties founded on shared values like democracy and secularism. Nowhere has it been more glaring than in the recent spurt in economic interaction, raising Indo-Turkish relationship to a qualitatively new level. In explaining variety of factors that account for the upswing in their bilateral relations in the past decade, this article argues that interests of the two countries in a common extended neighbourhood do not clash but overlap. In addition, the long-standing historical ties and the unprecedented growth in trade and investment underline the possibility of an enduring friendship notwithstanding Turkey's special relations with India's hostile neighbour, Pakistan.

KEYWORDS

Post-Cold War, Terrorism, Energy Security, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan and Central Asia

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Introduction

The cession of bipolar rivalry with the end of the Cold War has not just dissolved old strategic identities but also increased the scope for greater interaction among the regional middle powers like India and Turkey. Although geographically apart, India and Turkey have seen an upswing in their bilateral relations in the past decade spawned by a broad convergence of views on issues ranging from global terrorism and the situation in post-Saddam Iraq to the promotion of democracy and free trade regime. As the two countries after years of mutual exclusion come close to forge new ties founded on shared values like democracy and secularism, an overview of their historical ties assumes significance. For the memories of the past constitute the screen or prism through which elite perceptions of the external environment is filtered. The decision-makers generally act in accordance with their perception of reality, not in response to reality itself. Thus, the weight of history – real or imagined - tends to shape attitudes of hostility or friendship, trust or distrust, and fear or confidence towards other nations.¹

From Ancient to Modern Period

Historically, cultural exchange between the Turkish world and the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to the medieval times, though some historians assert that direct contact was established in the first century BC, long before the advent of Islam. In support of this contention, they cite the well-known Sanskrit work *Rajtrangani* in which its author Varahmihir describes the Emperor Kaniska and his successors as ethnic Turks.² The history of Indo-Turkish

¹See, Kenneth E. Boulding, “National Images and International Systems”, in James N. Rosenau (ed.), *International Politics and Foreign Policy*, New York, The Free Press, 1966, pp. 391-398; Steve Chan and Donald A. Sylvan, “Foreign Policy Decision Making: An Overview”, in D.A. Sylvan and S. Chan (eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making: Perception, Cognition and Artificial Intelligence*, New York, Praeger, 1984, pp. 5-6.

²According to Romila Thapar, a renowned Indian historian, there is no doubt that Kanishka, the founder of the *Kushana* dynasty which flourished in northern India (A.D. 78-144) was of Central Asian origin. Romila Thapar, *A History of India, Vol. 1*, Middlesex, Penguin Books, 1984, pp. 97-98. Also

interaction, however, begins in a more verifiable way with the conquest of parts of the Indian subcontinent in the early eleventh century AD by Mahmud of Ghazna. During the entire early medieval period, there emerged numerous Turkish rulers and Turkish kingdoms in the subcontinent whose subsequent absorption contributed to the evolution of a brilliant synthesis of Indian and Islamic culture. For example, a new indigenous language that developed in the army camps where Indian, Turkish and Persian soldiers mingled with one another later came to be known as Urdu, which in Turkish refers to army (*Ordu*). Also, during this period the great Sufi tradition of India was deeply influenced by the philosophy of Mevlana Jelalettin Rumi, the 13th century mystic from Konya.³

The next phase of Indo-Turkish interaction began with the establishment of the powerful Moghul Empire in the 16th Century. In fact, the founder of the empire, Babur was a descendant of Timur, a Turkic *Kagan*. The successors of Babur barring Akbar (1556-1605) and Aurangzeb (1658-1707) were proud to accept the Khilafat of the Ottoman Sultan, the most powerful Muslim state of the time. Saah Jehan (1627-1658) was the first Mughal ruler of India to establish regular contacts with the Ottomans.⁴ However, the first recorded diplomatic mission between the Muslim rulers of India and the Ottomans took place in the years 1481-82, between the Bahmani Kings of Muhammad Shah III (1453-1481) and Mahmud Shah (1482-1512) through the exchange of embassies, letters and gifts.⁵ The diplomatic correspondence between them points to the desire on the

see, Mehmet Tezcan, "Kuşanlar, Akhunlar ve Eftalitler", in *Tarihte Türk-Hint İlişkileri Sempozyum Bildirileri*, Ankara, Atatürk Kültür, Dil ve Tarih Yüksek Kurumu, 2006, pp. 9-47.

³Türkkaya Ataöv, "Historical and Cultural Ties between India and Turkey: Turkish View", in Türkkaya Ataöv (ed.), *Indo-Turkish Symposium on the 50th Anniversary of India's Independence and Turkish-Indian Diplomatic Relations*, Ankara, Centre for Strategic Research, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1997, pp. 70-71.

⁴For details see, Rahman Farooqi, *Mughal-Ottoman Relations: A Study of Political & Diplomatic Relations between Mughal India and the Ottoman Empire, 1556-1748*, Delhi, Jayyad Press, 1989.

⁵Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, p. 1.

part of the Muslim rulers of India to expand cooperation against the penetration of the Christian-European powers, notably the Portuguese and the Spanish overseas ventures. Tipu Sultan, the most ambitious ruler of Mysore in southern India sought Ottoman assistance to resist British domination. He was the first Indian ruler who sought a Caliphal investiture from the Ottoman Sultan and put forward a proposal for a military and commercial alliance against the expanding British influence in the sub-continent.⁶

Most significant period of Indo-Turkish interaction is late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the progressive shrinkage of the Ottoman Empire and the diminution of the Khalifa-Sultan institution coincided with the stirrings of national consciousness in India. Inspired by the drastic changes brought about by the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the Sunni ulema of *Deoband madrassa* sought material assistance from Turkey in their resistance against the colonial state ruled by non-Muslims.⁷ Developments in Turkey until the early years of World War I influenced mainly the conservative sections of the Indian Muslims who hailed the Turkish ideas of constitutionalism and reforms as signs of recovery of the “sick man” and the awakening of the East. But, as the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire appeared imminent towards the end of the War, Indians cutting across their religious divide showed unquestionable pro-Turkish leanings.⁸ Although the British failure to protect the Turkish Khilafat was an emotional issue among the Muslims, Mahatma Gandhi turned it into a popular movement by rallying all

⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

⁷A branch of Sunni Hanafi Islam, Deobandis arose in India during the last quarter of the 19th century as a reform movement with twin objectives of training religious scholars to safeguard the traditional Islamic values and to resist the colonial state ruled by non-Muslims. What was, however, taught to the Afghan refugees in hundreds of *madrassas* set up along Pakistan’s Pushtun belt in the wake of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan was an extreme form of Deobandism, which was much closer to the *Wahhabi* creed than the reformist agenda of the original Deoband seminary. On Deobandis see, Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966, pp. 204-205.

⁸See, Özcan, *Pan-Islamism...*, chapters 4-5; Salim Cöhce, “Turk İstiklal Mücadelesi ve Hindistan”, in *Tarihte Türk-Hint İlişkileri*, pp. 139-151.

Indians to fight for the cause of national liberation. It is pertinent to recall what Vallabhbhai Patel, a leading light of the Indian freedom movement and first Home Minister of free India had to say in August 1920 in the context of Mahatma Gandhi's Khilafat campaign:

The Turkish Empire was divided in spite of Britain's promise. The Sultan was made a prisoner in Constantinople. Syria was absorbed by France. Smyrna and Thrace were swallowed by Greece. It has been a heart-breaking episode for the Indian Muslims, and how can Hindus stand unaffected when they see their fellow countrymen thus in distress?⁹

Different phases of the Turkish War of Independence, first against the occupation and then, emancipation from the Ottoman yoke left stimulating and abiding impression on many Indian freedom fighters. Two chapters in the famous book of Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, "A New Turkey Rises from the Ashes" and "Mustafa Kemal's Break with the Past" provide interesting insights into modern Turkish history and show great sympathy and understanding for what the Turks suffered as a result of external provocations that led to Armenian uprisings and eventually, the Greek invasion of Turkey. In the praise of Atatürk, the great poet, Rabindra Nath Tagore, the first Indian Nobel Laureate observed, "Turkey was once called the sick-man of Europe until Kemal came and set before us an example of a new Asia, whose living present recalled glories of a dead past."¹⁰ Similarly, pledging India's support to Turkish struggle, the Ahmedabad meeting of the Congress party in 1921 passed the following resolution:

This Congress congratulates Ghazi Mustafa Kemal Pasha and the Turks upon their successes and assures the Turkish nation of India's sympathy and support in its struggle to retain its status and independence.¹¹

⁹Quoted in Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1990, p. 86.

¹⁰Quoted in Akhtar-ul Wasi, "Historical and Cultural Ties between India and Turkey: Indian View", in Ataöv, *Indo-Turkish Symposium*, p. 81.

¹¹*All-India Congress Committee Resolution VIII, Ahmedabad, 1921*, cited in Verinder Grover (ed.), *International Relations and Foreign Policy of India, Vol. I*, New Delhi, Deep & Deep Publications, 1992, p. 80.

In those early years, the Indian National Congress not only hailed the victories of Atatürk as victory against colonialism but also raised donations to help found the *İş Bank*, one of Turkey's largest banks today. Mention must be made about the anti-imperialist refrain of the Turkish War of National Liberation, which contributed in no small way towards forging Hindu-Muslim unity manifested in the non-cooperation movement of the period. "One of the main planks of this movement", Nehru has noted, "was the question of the Caliphate or *Khilafat* and the treatment given to Turkey."¹² While the Muslims of India seemed more concerned with the preservation of the Caliphate, to India as a whole Turks were seen as victim of imperialism. Underlining the political saliency of the movement, India's leading Turcologist writes:

If viewed in the light of the subsequent political developments in Turkey which culminated in the abolition of the Caliphate in March 1924 and the initiation of the process of secularisation, the *Khilafat* movement might appear to have been a reactionary upsurge. However, in the context of the Indian situation, it constituted a progressive trend and signified the birth of a new consciousness even if this new consciousness was directly derived from religion.¹³

Cold War Decades

Indo-Turkish relations failed to achieve their potential notwithstanding past cultural affinities and interactions. Instead, the early ties that existed between the emerging modern India and the young Turkish Republic were broken by the creation of Pakistan and the gradual estrangement that followed. Indeed, it is instructive that the state with which Turkey arguably has best relations is Pakistan. Until recently, several Turkish public opinion polls indicated Pakistanis as the *Kardeş* (brother), while others including the US as

¹²Jawaharlal Nehru, *Glimpses of World History*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 702.

¹³Mohammad Sadiq, *The Turkish Revolution and the Indian Freedom Movement*, New Delhi, Macmillan, 1983, p. 67.

arkadaş or simply friend.¹⁴ The fund-raising campaign for the victims of an earthquake in Pakistan by the state-owned Turkish Post Office in September 2005 is an illustrative example of the brotherly ties between the two nations. The posters and leaflets distributed during the campaign described Pakistan as “our brother Muslim country.” No such claims to family ties have ever been extended to other countries barring Azerbaijan¹⁵

The ties which have bound them together are doubtlessly rooted in their common religious background as well as identical world-views. An equally crucial factor in developing Turco-Pakistani friendship in the past decades is the deliberate distortion of history. Only a few years back, the Turkish News Agency on behalf of the Directorate-General of Press and Information in the Prime Minister’s office prepared a compilation aimed at reinforcing the Turkish identity distinct from other Muslim states. Curiously, the chapter on history in this compilation claims that the modern state of Pakistan is Turkic in origin because the Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna who established a powerful Turkic State in medieval India had brought the seeds of Pakistan. By Islamising the areas Sultan Mahmud had brought under the Turkic rule in the Indian subcontinent he laid the foundation for today’s State of Pakistan.¹⁶

Yet another major blind-spot in Turkish history is the mistaken notion that during the Turkish War of Liberation at the end of the World War I only Indian Muslims had extended moral support to the cause of Khilafat. The support extended by the nationalist forces led by Gandhi has been ignored or underplayed. Pakistan has over the years artfully exploited the historical and cultural bonds to project itself as the rightful inheritor of the mantle of Muslims in the subcontinent.¹⁷ Although founded on dubious misrepresentation of history, the Turco-Pakistani relations were cemented during those

¹⁴See, İsmail Önder Aktaş, “Turkish-Pakistani Friendship”, *Turkish Review: Quarterly Digest*, Vol. 4 (20), Summer 1990, pp. 21-24.

¹⁵Gareth Jenkins, “AKP’s Islamism, One of Values and Identity Rather than Sharia”, *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5 (15), 25 January 2008.

¹⁶Kesava Menon, “Turkey Looks at Religion in Quest for Identity”, *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 02 March 2001.

¹⁷The simple fact that India has more Muslims (over 140 million) than Pakistan reveals the hollowness of the latter’s claim.

eventful Cold War years. While Turkey and India followed diverging paths (Turkey joining NATO in February 1952 and India leading the Non-Alignment Movement), Pakistan moved closer through a variety of military and economic linkages forged with the blessings of the Western powers, particularly the US. In return, Pakistan received military assistance from Turkey which tried to help her logistically during the Indo-Pak wars.

India, on her part, struck up closer relations with Greece, an archenemy of Turkey and the Greek-dominated southern part of Cyprus. New Delhi's proximity with these countries is illustrated by her diplomatic efforts in lobbying for the UN resolutions that called for the reunification of the island-state divided since 1974. India's position on Cyprus tangle has often been misrepresented to create intense ill-feeling at popular level inside Turkey. The offshoot of all this was negligible contact between New Delhi and Ankara even though the first cultural agreement was signed way back in 1951 by India's first education minister and great admirer of the Kemalist Republic, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad. Between Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Turkey in 1960 and Turkish Premier, Turgut Özal's trip to India in 1986, Indo-Turkish relations underwent a quiescent phase.

The chances for a new impetus to the moribund state of Indo-Turkish relations looked promising during Prime Minister Özal's visit to India in April 1986. It marked a modest beginning of what could develop into an enduring friendship. "Given the momentum of rapid and sustained growth in both our countries", Özal wrote in a special message to the *Economic Times*, "I believe, the time is ripe and opportunities are in front of us to develop joint economic interest with a view to realizing durable and concrete cooperation."¹⁸ Although Prime Minister Özal's trip to India yielded no tangible results, particularly in terms of achieving dramatic increase in bilateral trade, it certainly set off a process of identifying mutually beneficial areas for cooperation and joint investments, such as science and technology, infrastructural development and agricultural modernisation. During the return visit of the Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in July 1988, the Indo-Turkish friendship saw a dramatic turnaround, as the Özal government agreed to ban the re-

¹⁸"Turkey: An Economic Times Special Feature", *The Economic Times* (New Delhi), 29 April 1988.

routing of nuclear inverters to Pakistan, and granted permission to the screening of Sir Richard Attenborough's film 'Gandhi' in Turkey. They were a definite pointer to the bonhomie, but the leaders on both sides failed to translate it into durable partnership. In the succeeding years there was a sudden spurt in bilateral trade increasing over twenty folds, but had no lasting impact in so far as Turkish foreign policy approach towards the region was concerned.¹⁹

Post-Cold War Phase

Relations between the two countries remained as lukewarm as in the past despite the subsequent exchanges including the official visits to New Delhi by the Turkish Presidents Kenan Evren in February 1989 and Süleyman Demirel in February 1995. Indicative of low-level relations was Ankara's unequivocal support to Pakistan, especially its decision to become a member of the Contact Group on Kashmir set up by the OIC in 1994, which triggered considerable resentment in India. Even though both sides tacitly agreed to keep contentious issues, such as Kashmir and Cyprus, off the agenda and stress on commonality of interests and identity of perceptions in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, the dark shadows of Pakistan continued to loom large over any potential Indo-Turkish friendship.²⁰ It was during the Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's visit to India in March 2000 that the difference of perception between the leaders of Pakistan and Turkey over Kashmir became clearer. An Indophile, who had translated two Indian classics into Turkish, Mr. Ecevit shared India's concerns on the issue of cross-border terrorism by pointing out that Turkey had itself been faced with similar menace for a long time posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) aided by its southern neighbours.²¹

¹⁹Aswini K. Mohapatra, "Bridge to Anatolia", *The Pioneer* (New Delhi), 01 February 1995.

²⁰K. P. Nayar, "Demirel Visit: There is a Case for Reviving the Rajiv-Özal Understanding", *Indian Express*, 24 January 1995.

²¹Ishtiaq Ahmad, "Turkey and Pakistan: Bridging the Growing Divergence", *Perceptions*, Vol. 5 (3), September/November 2000.

Syria, for instance, through its surreptitious backing for the PKK in the mid-1980s hoped to counterbalance Turkey's geopolitical pre-eminence and extract concessions on bilateral issues. Despite Ankara's diplomatic efforts to persuade Damascus to end its support for the Kurdish separatists in return for a variety of material benefits, the latter persisted with its pro-PKK policy by providing bases, training and hosting its leader Abdullah Öcalan until February 1999.²² Similarly, Pakistan, emboldened by the heroism of the Afghan *mujahideen* in ousting the Soviet occupation army, pursued a low-intensity proxy war against India for the liberation of Kashmir.²³ By the mid-1990s, most of the terrorist groups active in the Kashmir valley were not simply pro-Pakistan; they were purely Pakistani organisations, consisting of and led by Pakistani nationals. They constitute what an analyst has described them as "Pakistan's Army of Islam" created for the purpose of assisting the regular army of the state to wage covert war. This clandestine army comprises a host of terrorist outfits, namely the *Harkatul Mujahideen* (HuM), *Lashkar-e-Tayyaba* (LeT), and *Jaish – e-Mohammad* (JeM). The last two organisations have close links with al-Qaida and Taliban, but concentrate their activities against India.²⁴ By spiritualising violence and *satanising* the enemy, "Hindu India", they transformed an indigenous movement for independence into an increasingly "Islamist crusade" to bring all of Kashmir under Pakistani control.²⁵ Ironically, the growing Islamisation of the Kashmiri struggle not only cost it outside sympathy, but also alienated Pakistan internationally in the

²²Accompanied by a small number of his followers, the PKK leader fled Turkey in 1980 just ahead of a military coup. During his stay for the next twenty years, Öcalan had relatively free hand and recruited many Syrian Kurds for anti-Turkish operations. See, Michael M. Gunter, *The Kurds and the Future of Turkey*, New York, St. Martins Press, 1993, pp. 26-27.

²³Rahimullah Yusufzal, "Exporting Jihad?", *Newsline* (Karachi), Vol. 10 (3), September 1998, pp. 36-39; Maria Madalena L. Carvalho-Fischer and Matthias Fischer, *Pakistan Under Siege: Pakistan After September 11th, 2001*, Lahore, Vanguard Books, 2004, chapter 10.

²⁴B. Raman, "Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI)", *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 287, 01 August 2001, <<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/%5Cpapers3%5Cpaper287.html>>, 01 February 2009.

²⁵Jessica Stern, "Pakistan's Jehadi Culture", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 79 (6), November/December 2000.

wake of its Kargil misadventure in May 1999.²⁶ Internally, Pakistani promotion of the ideology of jihad and logistical support to the march of Taliban in Afghanistan fractured the social mosaic by setting off the cycle of sectarian violence,²⁷ which, together with proliferation of small arms and intervention of external powers turned Pakistan a “failed state” in popular perceptions.²⁸

What is thus common to the experience of both the countries in the past two decades is the state patronage of terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy by their regional rivals. Predictably, they in a joint statement at the end of Mr. Ecevit’s visit declared their “conviction” that the suppression of international terrorism “regardless of its origin and motivation” was an “essential element” for maintenance of international peace and security.²⁹ The fact that Mr. Ecevit refused to visit Pakistan during his South Asian sojourn even though General Musharraf had chosen Turkey as the first country for his travels abroad after the overthrow of the civilian government in 1999 was interpreted by the Indian media as his dislike

²⁶Under the guise of Kashmiri “freedom fighters”, the Pakistani army occupied the Kargil Heights in the far north of Indian side of Kashmir just across the LOC, thus posing a threat to Indian supply routes. The masterminds of the Kargil operation were driven by the belief that their nuclear capability demonstrated a year before would provide a protective shield to Pakistan. See, Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan’s Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America’s War on Terror*, Armonk, New York, M. E. Sharpe, 2005, pp. 169-174.

²⁷See, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, “Sectarianism in Pakistan: The Radicalisation of Shi’i and Sunni Identities”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 32 (3), 1998, pp. 689-716; see, W. Maley, “Talibanisation and Pakistan”, in D. Groves (ed), *Talibanisation: Extremism and Regional Instability in South and Central Asia*, Berlin, Conflict Prevention Network, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2001, pp 53-74.

²⁸Nuclear-armed Pakistan has been ranked among the top ten failed states in the world, ahead of Afghanistan, and other crisis-ridden African countries in a survey published by the *Foreign Policy* magazine. See, “The Failed States Index”, *Foreign Policy*, May/June 2006, pp. 50-58. An investigative report published in *Newsweek* in October 2007 says: “Pakistan is the most dangerous country in the world, and a safe haven for terrorists”, quoted in *Indian Express* (Mumbai), 23 October 2007.

²⁹C. Raja Mohan, “India Wins over Turkey”, *The Hindu*, 02 April 2000.

for Pakistan's jihadi politics.³⁰ Equally significant were his statements with reference to Kashmir indicative of the shift in Ankara's staunchly pro-Pakistan stance, which advocates for a solution to the conflict based on the UN supervision, to the importance of India-Pakistan bilateral talks in settling the issue

In all, the three-day state visit of the Turkish leader in 2000 marked a new beginning towards building meaningful cooperation unfettered by the Cold War burden. The absence of the overriding ideological and strategic threat freed the ambitious regional actors like Turkey and India to pursue foreign policy goals shaped by their immediate national interests. In the case of the former, the sweeping changes across the Eurasian landmass following the disintegration of the Soviet Union provided great opportunities in terms of redefining its role in the emerging global system. Although Turkey's bid to fill the power vacuum in the southern heartland of the former communist super-power encountered stiff resistance from Iran and Russia, it was reasonably successful in carving out a zone of influence in the area where it had previously no active involvement.³¹

Together with its cultural and economic penetration of Central Asia and the Caucasus, a greater activism in Middle East and renewed interest in the Balkans since Yugoslavia's dismemberment elevated Turkey's status as a "multi-regional power."³² What underpinned the country's regional standing was its comparable power potential in terms of per capita income, general standard of living, economic growth and its expertise in the fields of telecommunications, infrastructure construction and development. Even though Turkey experienced a severe economic contraction and virtual financial collapse in 2001, its swift recovery vindicated that liberalisation reforms initiated in the early 1980s had a stronger base. Indeed, its flourishing private business sector has in the post-Cold War years played a significant role in projecting the republic as a

³⁰Satish Jacob, "India Charmed by Turkey PM", *BBC News*, 30 March 2000.

³¹See, Aswini K. Mohapatra, "Turkey's Quest for Regional Role in Central Asia", *International Studies*, Vol. 38 (1), 2001, pp. 29-52.

³²Barry Rubin and Kemal Kirisci (eds.), *Turkey in World Politics: An Emerging Multiregional Power*, London, Lynne Rienner, Publishers, 2001.

pivot of financial and commercial activity in the region of Greater Middle East.³³

Like Turkey, India too underwent dramatic transformation at the turn of the century, emerging “as the swing state in the global balance of power.”³⁴ As the recent developments, notably the American offer of the civilian nuclear deal suggests, the Western powers have shown readiness to engage India on its own terms.³⁵ India’s rise to major power status could be attributed to a variety of factors ranging from its military might, diplomatic clout and points of influence in its extended neighbourhood to huge middle-class population, stable democratic political system and above all, its growing economy. In the past decade, India has emerged as the world’s second-fastest-growing major economy, expanding at a rate of 8 percent. Although foreign direct investment flows to India remain below those of its neighbours, particularly China, Indian companies have become global players by investing abroad, forging alliances and finding joint ventures.³⁶ Moreover, India’s scientific and technological education institutions produce thousands of top-class scientists, earning her recognition as a world-class player in at least three vitally important sectors of the global economy: information technology, biotechnology, and space.³⁷

To sum it up, if Indo-Turkish relations showed definite signs of improvement in the wake of Prime Minister Ecevit’s visit, it was not the function of the post-Cold War global systemic changes alone. The strength of this relationship derived from a greater understanding of

³³Ziya Öniş, “Turkey in the Post-Cold War Era: In Search of Identity”, *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 40 (1), Winter 1995, pp. 54-58.

³⁴C. Raja Mohan, “India and the Balance of Power”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 (4), July/August 2006, p. 17.

³⁵The deal is controversial in the sense that it lacks consensus among India’s political parties even though it acknowledges India as a legitimate nuclear power in return for a strategic realignment with the US. See, Ashton B. Carter, “America’s New Strategic Partner?”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85 (4), July/August 2006, pp. 33-44.

³⁶Yasheng Huang and Tarun Khanna, “Can India Overtake China?”, *Foreign Policy*, Vol. 83 (4), July/August 2003, pp. 74-81.

³⁷George Perkovich, “Is India A Major Power?”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27 (1), Winter 2003/2004, pp. 131-132.

their basic commonalities and mutual appreciation of each other's power potential. Acknowledging India's new international profile, a Turkish columnist wrote, "Turkey cannot ignore India within this new world order as was previously the case. Conditions have changed and Turkey has to adapt its policies accordingly."³⁸ So did the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who during his three-day official visit to Turkey in September 2003 highlighted the latter's unique geo-strategic position in the post-1991 order while sharing its concerns about the developments in the surrounding regions. In an interview to a Turkish daily *Yeni Şafak*, he said, "Turkey is situated at the junction of Central Europe, Central Asia and West Asia. We are located between West Asia, Central Asia and East Asia. Our geopolitical location gives us shared concerns in the region, as well as some common opportunities."³⁹ Mr. Vajpayee was the first Indian Premier in 15 years to visit Turkey. Prior to that, Mr. Yashwant Sinha's visit in August 2003 was the first a Foreign Minister of India had undertaken since 1976.

Against this backdrop, the Indian leader's voyage to Turkey was more than simply the customary return visit. It assumed significance in a larger global-regional context as reflected in the signing of an agreement to set up joint working group on terrorism, and convergence of views on issues pertaining to Iraq and post-Taliban Afghanistan. The developments in Iraq following the US-led invasion of the country were of prime concern to Turkey and India because the forces inimical to their national interests would grow in strength under conditions created by a forced regime change in Baghdad. If the former was worried about the separatist PKK gaining political space in the twilight zone of Northern Iraq, India's concerns stemmed from the possibility of the spread of the al-Qaeda -inspired Islamist terrorism in the area and beyond. Thus, Prime Minister Vajpayee and his Turkish counterpart, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in

³⁸Hüseyin Bağcı, "Turkey and India: New Horizons", *Turkish Daily News*, 29 March 2000.

³⁹"Interview of Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee by Yeni Şafak", *Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India* (New Delhi), 15 September 2003, <http://pib.nic.in/archieve/pmvisit/pmsvisit03/pm_visit_sep2003/pm_vst_sep2003.html>, 01 February 2009.

the official press conference stressed that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the war-ravaged Iraq must be maintained.

Already public opinion in both the countries was overwhelmingly against the war. It was in fact under popular pressures that the Grand National Assembly of Turkey rejected on 1 March 2003 the US request for access to Turkish soil. Indian parliament too passed a unanimous resolution deploring the US action. Subsequently, India, like Turkey, also refused to accede to the US request over troops to Iraq as part of a "stabilisation force."⁴⁰ What is more, approach of Turkey and India with regard to democracy promotion in the Islamic world is strikingly similar. Although both sides consider their shared engagement to democracy and freedom as the basis of an enduring partnership, they refrain from projecting themselves as model in the Middle East or Central Asia. India's Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee, for example, spelt it out clearly in a speech in Washington, "India is not inclined to export ideologies, even ideologies it believes in and follows. India would rather promote democracy in the region by precept and example."⁴¹ Likewise, Prime Minister Erdoğan in his address at the American Enterprise Institute stated,

I do not claim, of course, that Turkey's experience is a model that can be implemented identically in all other Muslim societies. However, the Turkish experience does have a substance which can serve as a source of inspiration for other Muslim societies, other Muslim peoples. Muslim societies have to find their own solutions to their problems and each country should determine for itself what is to be done as well as its method and speed.⁴²

In brief, the approach of Turkey and India represents the normative strain of democratic discourse, which is antithetical to the

⁴⁰Sultan Şahin, "India: US Daisy Cutters or Olive Branch?", *Online Asia Times*, May 17, 2003, <<http://www.atimes.com>>, 01 February 2009.

⁴¹Quoted in Robert McMahon, "Central Asia: Defense Minister Touts India's Potential Moderating Influence in Region", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 28 June 2005.

⁴²*Conservative Democracy and the Globalization of Freedom*, 29 January 2004, <<http://www.aei.org>>, 01 February 2009.

so-called democratising campaign of the US through externally-induced regime change.

Central Asia and Afghanistan

Turkey and India may not have a contiguous border either with Central Asia or Afghanistan but their stakes are heavy in the area for more than one reason. First of all, Central Asia is closer to both countries in geopolitical sense. Whereas Turkey has a 10 km border with the Azerbaijani enclave of Nakhichevan, which is cut off by the Armenian corridor, Tajikistan is just 20 km from Greater Kashmir. Second, Central Asia has strong historical and cultural relations with the Indian subcontinent dating back to the Indus Valley civilization in the second millennium BC. During the Greek expeditions in Asia and the subsequent Kushan Empire in northwest India, relations between India and Central Asia reached its peak. It was during the Kushan period that the trans-Asiatic trade route, popularly known as the Silk Route connecting China with India and Europe came into existence, and played a significant role in the development of cultural and commercial contacts.⁴³ For Turks of Anatolia, however, Central Asia is more than simply the site of their origins; it is a special land officially described as “the cradle of all civilizations of the World.”⁴⁴ It is indeed the common ethnic linkage together with linguistic bonds and a shared religion that provided Turkey with a unique diplomatic leverage in its relations with the newly independent Central Asian republics following the breakup of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

Finally, endowed with vast energy reserves (an estimated 15 to 17 billion barrels oil and nearly 360 trillion cubic feet of gas),⁴⁵

⁴³See, Devendra Kaushik, “Overcoming the Colonial and Geographic Barrier: India’s Traditional Relationship with Central Asia” in N. N. Vohra (ed.), *Culture, Society and Politics in Central Asia and India*, New Delhi, Shipra Publications, 1999, pp. 143-152.

⁴⁴Didem Mersin Alici, “The Role of Culture, History and Language in Turkish national Identity-building: An Overemphasis on Central Asian Roots”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15 (2), 1996, pp. 228-230.

⁴⁵*Energy Information Administration: Caspian Sea Region*, Washington DC, May 2007. According to British Petroleum's *Statistical Review of World*

Central Asia is a potential source of secure and proximate energy resource for India as well as Turkey. With a population of over one billion and booming economy, India's dependence upon secure oil and gas supplies represents a vital national interest.⁴⁶ So is the case with Turkey, which imports about 70 percent of its total energy needs because its own oil and gas reserves account for a small fraction of its rapidly rising demand.⁴⁷ Even though largest part of its energy comes from Russia and Iran, Turkey, wary of the risk that these countries could use energy as a political instrument, seeks to diversify its sources of supply. This in part explains why Turkey pursued its efforts steadfastly to complete the construction of the \$4 billion, 1760 kilometre-long Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the slightly shorter Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline transporting Azeri oil and gas. More importantly, Turkish political elites have now come to realise the potential gains from the strategic expansion of the new pipelines. In addition to the recently completed 'interconnector' pipeline between Turkey and Greece, the planned 3,300 kilometre-long Nabucco pipeline, which aims at bringing Central Asian gas to Austria via Turkey, would strengthen the country's European integration.⁴⁸ In all, Turkey's ambition of becoming a Eurasian energy hub and the investment it has made in the region's energy

Energy, proven oil reserves in the Caspian Basin total 16.5 billion barrels. Soner Çağaptay, "Startup of the Baku-Tibilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline: Turkey's Energy Role", *Policy Watch*, No. 998, 27 May 2005.

⁴⁶India consumes 1.9 million barrels of oil a day with 70 percent of it imported, which, according to some experts, is likely to rise to 4 million barrels a day by 2010, most of it imported. See, Stephen Blank, "India's Energy Offensive in Central Asia", *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 09 March 2005.

⁴⁷Energy consumption in Turkey has increased by 5 percent, and its demand for natural gas has grown more than three-fold in the last decade because scant rainfall has forced power stations to rely more on gas rather than hydropower. See, British Petroleum (BP) report in *Turkish Daily News*, 21 June 2008; David Tonge, "Turkey's Energy Sector under Stress", *IBS Research & Consultancy*, March 2007.

⁴⁸Yigal Schleifer, "Questions Cloud Turkish-EU Energy Cooperation", *Eurasianet*, 12 June 2007, <<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav061207a.shtml>>, 01 February 2009; Katinka Barysch, "Turkey's Role in European Energy Security", *Centre for European Reform Essays*, December 2007, <www.cer.org.uk>, 01 February 2009.

transport underline its high stake in peace and stability in Central Asia.

After a decade and half of independence, most of the Central Asian states seem stable, but this stability is illusory. The roots of instability in the region are largely systemic, which include the inchoate nature of the nation-state, precarious legitimacy, uneasy inter-ethnic relations, economic dependence and intense insecurity owing to the increased penetration by the hegemonic powers.⁴⁹ Over and above, permeability of the borders has not only facilitated the flows of weapons and terrorists, but also turned Central Asia into the main transit route for opium from Afghanistan to the European markets. The narcotics traffic is likely to fund extremist elements in places combining population growth, poverty, religious ferment and political repression like the Ferghana Valley.⁵⁰ If the recent events in the area, notably the May 2005 uprising in Uzbekistan's Andijion city are any indication, the risk of Islamist terrorism remains a real one even after the ouster of the Taliban regime in Kabul by the US-led anti-terror coalition in 2001.

It is the fear of resurgent Taliban and Pakistani covert support to the forces resistant to the international presence in Afghanistan that has prompted New Delhi to set up a military outpost along Tajik-Afghanistan border in 2007 as part of the trilateral agreement between Russia, Tajikistan and India.⁵¹ After all, the spread of religious extremism in India's extended neighbourhood increases the possibility of spill-over into Kashmir and other volatile Indian border areas. Furthermore, the great power rivalry in Central Asia has stirred New Delhi's anxieties of "encirclement" in view of its geographic proximity.⁵² With a permanent military presence in Afghanistan and

⁴⁹For details see, Roland Dannreuther, "Creating New States in Central Asia", *Adelphi Papers* (London), No. 288, March 1994, pp. 8-14.

⁵⁰See, Wayne Merry, "Governance in Central Asia: National in Form, Soviet in Content", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17 (2), July 2004, pp. 285-300.

⁵¹"Indian Forces Got Foothold in Central Asia", *Times of India* (New Delhi), 17 July 2007.

⁵²Scott Moore, "Peril and Promise: A Survey of India's Strategic Relationship with Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26 (2), June 2007, pp. 279-291.

bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan following the 9/11 attacks, the US has, for instance, become Central Asia's third neighbour. Likewise, China under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is steadily expanding its influence in Central Asia to include even military ties, perhaps with a long-term view of replacing Russia as the regional hegemon.⁵³ Interestingly, while some analysts in India view the US presence in Central Asia as constraining New Delhi's strategic options in the region, others argue that it has in some ways facilitated India's entry into the Great Game.⁵⁴

In any case, the end of the Taliban rule has offered India a new opportunity to regain its strategic foothold in Afghanistan. As one of the largest donors of the reconstruction projects, India's influence is now spread across the spectrum in Afghanistan. Of the \$650 million in assistance India pledged to Afghanistan, \$200 million has already been spent on various reconstruction projects throughout the country.⁵⁵ Besides, India has also offered to help train the new Afghan Army and contribute to the maintenance of its Russian-built military equipment. Similarly, Turkey being the closest neighbour of Afghanistan has given firm support to the US-led campaign to reinforce peace and stability in the area. Apart from contributing troops to the NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF),⁵⁶ Turkey has provided \$200 million multi-dimensional aid towards the rebuilding of Afghanistan's shattered infrastructure and

⁵³See, Niklas Swanstrom, "China and Central Asia: Game or Traditional Vassal Relations", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17 (2), July 2004, pp. 569-584.

⁵⁴See, Aswini K. Mohapatra, "India and Central Asia: Interests, Opportunities and Challenges", *Bi-Annual Journal of International Politics* (Teheran), Vol. 1 (2), Summer/Autumn 2008, pp. 55-76.

⁵⁵See, Amin Tarzi, "Islamabad Anxious as Kabul Gets Chummy with New Delhi", *Eurasianet*, 16 April 2006, <<http://www.eurasianet.org>>, 01 February 2009; Kenneth Katzman, "Afghanistan: Post-War Security, Governance, and US Policy", *Congressional Research Service (CRS Report)*, 28 January 2008, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁶Turkey has commanded the ISAF twice and increased its contingent to around 1,400 troops. See, Bülent Ecevit, "Turkey's Role: Reconstruction and Nation Building", *International Herald Tribune*, 31 July 2002.

Turkish construction firms have invested \$1.5 billion in projects since 2002.⁵⁷

The extent and nature of their involvement in post-Taliban Afghanistan suggest that Turkey and India complement each other in their efforts to ensure that the country no more serves as the hub of terrorism and religious extremism. The convergence of interests and objectives in a common extended neighbourhood, supplemented by a spurt in economic interactions has raised Indo-Turkish relationship to a qualitatively new level.

Economic Interactions

As noted, economic interactions between Turkey and India were negligible till the 1980s. Nowhere was this more glaring than in the absence of the ubiquitous Indian trader in the bustling city of Istanbul. In contrast, more than 60 Indian companies have today registered business in Turkey either in the form of joint ventures or trade or establishing trading offices. Thanks to the resumption of direct air-links in 2003, the number of Indian companies investing in Turkey has grown rapidly as is the bilateral trade, which has increased over 300 per cent in the past five years. In absolute numbers, the total trade volume was up from \$ 800 million in 2002 to \$ 2.6 billion in 2007.⁵⁸ With the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries in an advanced stage of negotiations, the trade is certainly set to boom. Indicative of this, Turkish Minister of State for Foreign Trade Mr. Kürşad Tüzmen while addressing the India-Turkey Business Forum in New Delhi announced, "We are targeting a figure of \$ 5 billion by 2012 and \$10 billion in the next 10 years."⁵⁹

Major projects undertaken by the Indian companies in Turkey include the railway construction by the Indian Railway Construction Company (IRCON), consultancy services by the National Building Construction Corporation (NBCC) for the Marmara Engineering

⁵⁷"Afghanistan", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Republic of Turkey, <<http://www.mfa.gov.tr>>, 01 February 2009.

⁵⁸"Turkey Discovers India", *Turkish Daily News*, 06 February 2008.

⁵⁹"Turkey Offers to Sign FTA with India", *Financial Express* (New Delhi), 24 March 2008.

Emergency Reconstruction Project for the earthquake affected areas, construction of a segment of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline by the Punj Lloyd in association with the Turkish construction company LİMAK, and power transmission line by Kalpataru, Gujarat along with the Turkish company BARMEK. In July 2007, the Bangalore-based GMR Infrastructure, a part of the three-member consortium, won the tender for construction of a new international passenger terminal at the Sabiha Gökçen Airport in Istanbul.⁶⁰ Other Indian companies currently active in Turkey are the TATA Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra in the automobile sector, Indo-Rama Group in the production of polyester fiber and Polyplex in film manufacturing in Çorlu.⁶¹ Besides, a modest beginning has also been made in the information technology (IT) sector by Dewsoft Solutions, a Mumbai based Indian company, which is engaged by BTC/BOTAŞ for IT related work in the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. Another Indian IT company, Dhanus Technologies has recently acquired Borusan Telekom of Turkey, whereas APTECH and NIIT are gradually entering Turkey's IT education sector.⁶²

In the energy sector, cooperation between the Indian companies and their Turkish counterparts has been rather impressive. While the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) is partly constructing the Samsun-Ceyhan pipeline, the ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL), a subsidiary of India's leading Public Sector Petroleum Company is working with the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) in a Libyan exploration block. The IOC is reportedly trying to rope in foreign firms for building a refinery in Ceyhan as part of a joint venture with Turkish Çalık Enerji at an estimated cost of \$4.9 billion.⁶³ Likewise, Gas Authority of India Limited (GAIL), India's largest gas transmission and marketing company and BOTAŞ, Turkish public sector company

⁶⁰"GMR Bags Turkey Airport Deal", *Times of India*, 11 July 2007.

⁶¹"India-Turkey Economic and Commercial Relations: Scope for Indian exporters and entrepreneurs", *Federation of Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)*, February 2004, <www.ficci.com/international/countries/Turkey/turkeycommercialrelation.htm>, 01 February 2009.

⁶²*Confederation of Indian Industry (CII): Country Profile – Turkey*, <http://cii.in/menu_content.php?menu_id=1135>, 01 February 2009.

⁶³"IOC to Rope in Foreign Firms for Turkey Unit", *Times of India*, 24 August 2007.

dealing with gas and oil pipelines, have signed an MOU for cooperation in CNG conversion of vehicles in Turkey.

Topping them all is Turkey's recent offer to facilitate India's access to Central Asian oil via Israel through a combination of overland pipelines and supertankers. This is part of the multipurpose Mediterranean pipeline project Medstream and India was formally invited to join by Mr. Ali Babacan, Foreign Minister of Turkey during his five-day official visit to India in February.⁶⁴ Under the plan, oil transported through Turkey's extensive pipeline infrastructure from Central Asia to Ceyhan port on its Mediterranean coast would be sent across by tankers to the Israeli port of Ashkelon. There it would be fed into Israel's Ashkelon-Eilat overland pipeline, and from Eilat port in the Gulf of Aqaba supertankers would carry oil to India over the high seas.⁶⁵ Given the uncertainty surrounding the proposed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) project, Turkish offer is seen as a potentially viable alternative. What makes the offer even more attractive for energy-hungry India is that the pipelines involved do not run through Pakistan and hence, free from the risk of disruption.

Conclusion

The recent growth in trade ties and economic cooperation together with the direct air-links has facilitated a level of interconnectedness between the two nations never experienced before. A steady movement of entrepreneurs and capital, goods and information, scholars, artists and tourists in addition to intergovernmental visits would help dispel mutual misgivings and misperceptions based on gross historical distortions. Many in India, for instance, continue to wonder how come secular Turkey has remained a close and steadfast ally of the Islamic Pakistan and that too a state with the notoriety of being the breeding ground of Islamist

⁶⁴Indrani Bagchi, "India Keen to be Part of Turk Pipeline Plan", *Times of India*, 29 July 2008.

⁶⁵Sudha Ramachandran, "Turkey Offers Oil Pipeline to India", *Asia Times Online*, 27 February 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/south_asia/jb27df03.html>, 01 February 2009.

terrorism. How is it that a country so sensitive to the issue of Kurdish ethno-nationalism supports Kashmiri separatism disregarding its dangerous region-wide implications? Notwithstanding such uncomfortable questions, the two countries need to focus their diplomatic efforts on augmenting as well as diversifying contacts without a fundamental appraisal of their bilateral relations with other countries. This process would inevitably pave the way for an enduring friendship, which the former Indian Prime Minister Mr. Vajpayee alluded to in his keynote speech to Turkish lawmakers, academics and opinion-makers at Ankara's prestigious Center for Strategic Research:

As Turkey and India step forward together, it would be a cooperation of two civilizations, gaining from their ancient wisdom, building on their current strengths, and driven by their common objectives. Enhanced engagement between India and Turkey is in the interests of regional and global peace and cooperation.⁶⁶

⁶⁶“Atalji Emphasises Indo-Turkish Ties in Post-Cold War Era: PM's Keynote Address to the Centre for Strategic Research”, *BJP Today* (New Delhi), Vol. 12 (20), October 16-31, 2003.