

COMMENTARY

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New Diplomatic Horizons between Turkey and India in the 21st Century

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The significantly improved bilateral relation between Turkey and India is of recent phenomenon. Both are the members of G-20 group and they are actively promoting economic development, as G-20 specifically meant for economic development of member states. In recent years, the bilateral relations between them have become multidimensional. They have increased their focus on military relationship to strengthen the defence sector. The economies of Turkey-India are two of the fastest growing economies at international level, and in the forthcoming years they are expected to be two of the top ten economic powers in the World.

Turkey is the only country which has vibrant secular and democratic politics in the Middle East region. It is also an emerging regional player among competitors like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Similarly, India is one of the leading democratic states in the world since its independence. It aspires to move from regional power to the status of global power, and enjoy the standing on par with United States, Russia and China. Turkey and India had witnessed a considerable economic development in all sectors in the last decade. This multidimensional aspect gives an opportunity to understand economic growth and current political conditions of the world and the Asian regions in particular. The bilateral trade between Turkey and India rose from US\$ 637 million to US\$ 6.05 billion in the last decade, and it is anticipated that, by 2020 this volume of trade will double.

Turkey and India established their modern diplomatic relations in 1948. But, during the Cold war, both states had leaned towards their comfort in the international political stage. Turkey took side with the USA and Western European States, as Kemal Pasha Ataturk the founding father of

Turkey followed the policy of Westernization. On the other hand, India was the ardent supporter of non-alignment movement and later inclined towards USSR. Hence, during the bi-polar era both countries had very minor interaction between them. By the end of the century, the situation has changed considerably, and Turkey got closer to India. After the 9/11 incident world politics shifted to war on terror. Both states converged on mutual interest, war against terrorism and bilateral trade relations started its new phase.

Current Political Relations

The Vice-President of India Hamid Ansari visited Turkey recently in October 2011. In his tour, the Vice-President briefed the present condition of India-Turkey bilateral relations and India's commitment to development of Afghanistan. But unexpectedly Turkey raised the question of non-proliferation at nuclear supplier group meeting in February 2013 that struck the discordant in the bilateral development, and also try to make informal way for Pakistan to get exemption from the nuclear liability. Later, National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon inexplicably cancelled his tour to Turkey at the last minute. So this can be considered as fallout of Turkey's stance in NSG. During the same month Turkish foreign ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu came to India to explain Turkey's position, and said that turkey merely sought for clarification in the exception provided to India with regard to NPT. Further he said that Turkey-India need to upgrade its potential in the bilateral relationship, so that we may move to strategic partnership, and assured relationship with India is considered on it is own merits.

Last month, India's Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid visited Turkey. During his visit, Khurshid met with his Turkish counterpart Ahmed Davutoglu: both made a joint statement on bilateral relations that kicked-off for a systematic framework and an action plan for 2014-2015. Such meetings and visits by the head of states are necessary for understanding each other and for going to next level of strategic partnership.

Turkey should come out from the prism of Pakistan while looking at India, and look forward for a realistic approach particularly with India. Turkey's policy of "zero problems with neighbours" influenced India much, to start the dialogue with Pakistan, but it didn't prove much fruitful. Turkey always envisages an Afghanistan with political stability and economic prosperity, and India also appeals the same. Hence, India attended all the Istanbul processes for Afghanistan participated by Afghanistan, and Pakistan, organized by Turkey in 2012. In the same year the Indian Ambassador signed a treaty of extradition with Turkish minister of Justice.

India believes that Turkey's support for India's candidacy at UN Security Council as a permanent member is crucial. Turkey should favour India in the OIC (Organization of Islamic council) which may increase credibility in the mutual understanding of Middle Eastern politics. The two countries' mutual external policy areas and their cooperation through global organizations may create compulsory ground for accessible and responsive affairs.

Military Relations:

Defence co-operation between Turkey and India has not been of significant interest during Cold-War era. Turkey and Pakistan have undergone many military coups since 1950s that gave an opportunity for mutual understanding of each other on military relationship. So, in these circumstances Pakistan successfully prevented Turkey and India to get closer. Pakistan supported the Ankara's intervention in Cyprus. Besides during the political upheaval in Turkey in the 70s and 80s Pakistan gave critical support to Turkey and Turkey supported Pakistan on Kashmir issue. Turkey acted as a space for covert operation against USSR in Caucasus region, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Such was the bond that Turkey had with Pakistan causing fifty years of military relations with India static.

In 2002 the new AKP government came to power and gave importance to political decision over stagnant military strategy. This new democratic government compelled defence establishment to get closer with India by encouraging visits at various levels. Turkey-India military dialogue is at the beginning stage. Turkish part realization on the importance of joint-military exercise with India shall enhance war combat capability against terrorists and other unlawful groups. But, even at this stage, both sides had failed to draw a time-frame for the visits of the heads of defence forces. However, in May 2012, Indian Defence College officers visited Turkey and interacted with Turkish military personnel. The Commander of the Turkish Navy, Admiral Emin Murat BilGel visited India in November 2012. During the same time the Turkish defence minister sent an invitation for India's defence minister to visit Turkey for promoting defence cooperation between the two countries.

A Turkish Navy ship proposed port call at Mumbai September 2012, as the naval ship participated in "Admiral Cup Sailing Regatta" in December 2012 at Ezhimala Kerala. In the future Turkey's navy may do joint-navy exercise with India to promote safety of the long coastal lines of both states, and it may prevent each other from incursion of illegal people from neighbouring countries to plot terrorist acts, human trafficking, drug trafficking etc. From the strategic point of view, India is importing most of its oil from Gulf States and North African states and India's telecommunication cables also passing through Mediterranean and at Red sea.

Therefore, India and Turkey can sign a Memorandum of Understanding to defend Indian ships from pirates and respond to emergency call in the deep sea. Turkey and India have long coastline which need to be protected from sea intrusion. A joint Task Force or Joint naval exercises will be more effective in the security affairs of states. The upcoming naval force meeting between Turkey-India should concentrate on maritime security of both states, and that should definitely be the 'corner stone' of the bilateral relations. It is necessary to have periodical discussion on intelligence sharing and control, to stop unprecedented terrorist strikes on civilian targets. Turkey-India joint projects in the defence field will increase common strategies to deal with war on terror, and insurgency. Both the states should work on the prerequisites to have a Joint

Working Group, and a permanent strategic dialogue committee, which would be helpful for carrying the relations further.

Cultural Relations:

Turkey-India academic exchange programs should be promoted, which will give new understanding of bilateral relation. Turkish language and cultural studies programs should be started at more universities in other parts of India too, apart from the metro cities. Student exchange programs must be diversified rather than sticking to a particular subject. The total number of scholarships awarded to university students should also be increased. Both governments should consider creating joint fund for providing scholarship to higher level research students. TOMER language institute can start in metro cities of India to fulfil Turkish companies requiring translation services.

Promotion of tourism by both states started only after 2010, now an annual event for creating Turkish taste among the metro population. Turkey can take its cuisine to reach the Indian mass through Kebab chains like Italian pizzas. Turkey is the best destination for movie-making with proper facilities and stress-free permission from authorities with reasonable expenditure. Recently, Indian Movies *Dukkudu* (Telugu) *Ek Tha Tiger* and *Race* (Hindi) were shot in Istanbul, Izmir, and its sceneries impressed Indian audiences. An Indian cultural troupe went to Turkey in January 2013 under the title *The Ticket to Bollywood*. The troupe was led by Sharmistha Mukherjee who performed at Ankara, Istanbul and Izmir. Newspapers appreciated.

Conclusion:

1. Turkey and India must develop a strong bond more than bilateral and strategic relations, based on common interests of both for the future.
2. Economic partnership need to be tightened periodically and an economic task force should be constituted for promoting exports. As a member of G-20 export oriented issues need to be addressed at bilateral level.
3. Turkish language and cultural studies should start at different universities, and exchange of cultural troupes among different states will increase people to people contacts, these promotions are an attempt to break the nonexistence of Turkey in India.

Turkey is also scheduled to open four more consulates in India (Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Kolkata). This shows its political and economic interest in India. Recently, Turkey opened a new Embassy in Sri Lanka, by now it opened embassies in all major countries in South Asia. Turkey wants strong friendly relations with South Asian countries and India could help.

Turkey-India comprehensive understanding in the international politics and economic strategies will help both the nations in achieving their goals. It is essential to cooperate in defence sector for strategic level which will improve the hard power along with soft power relations. The

cooperation between these two states never stopped at any political situation, whether it is domestic or international except for a short-term inaction. There is a lot of scope for improvement in India-Turkey Diplomatic relations.

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