



Indian Council
of World Affairs



BEYOND FEZ AND NAZAR

VIEWS FROM
INDIA ON TURKIYE

INDIAN COUNCIL OF WORLD AFFAIRS

SAPRU HOUSE, NEW DELHI

2023



BEYOND FEZ AND NAZAR

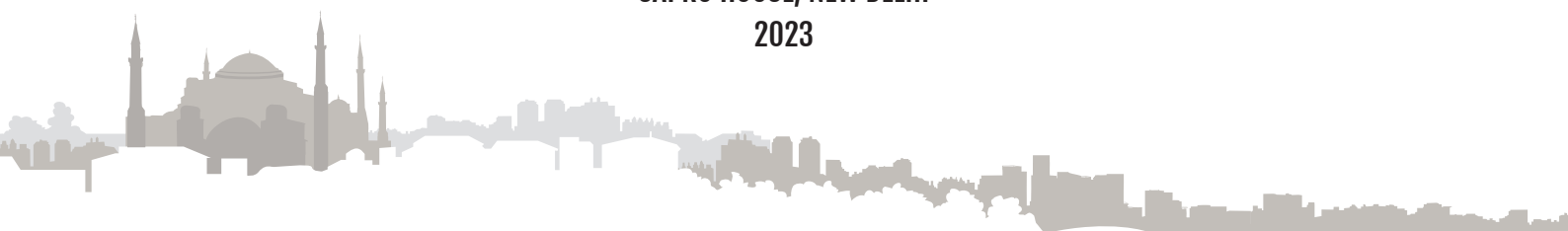
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CONTENTS

Foreword	5
India-Turkiye Relations: The Long Wait for a Reset	7
<i>Rahul Kulshreshth</i>	
Turkiye's Quest for Status: Politics of Alliances and Counter Alliances	19
<i>Rahul Kulshreshth</i>	
Turkiye under Two Decades of Erdogan's Rule	33
<i>Fazzur Rahman Siddiqui</i>	





FOREWORD

Over the past two decades, the Republic of Türkiye has witnessed tumultuous changes with a visible impact on its domestic politics as well as on its economy. On domestic front, there has been change of political system from Parliamentary to Presidential form of Government and similarly the role of army has undergone a major shift. In recent past, there has been a sea change in Türkiye's foreign policy pursuits resulting in significant regional and global ramifications. These changes were more explicit in the later years of Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rule in Türkiye which came to power in 2002. This changing trajectory of Turkish internal and external politics is likely to foster a new set of politics in the regional and global arena.

The present ICWA publication comprises of three papers by Ambassador Rahul Kulshreshth, Former Ambassador of India to Türkiye and Dr. Fazzur Rahman Siddiqui, Senior Research Fellow at the Council. In his first paper, Ambassador Rahul Kulshreshth offers a comprehensive account of Indian perspectives on its past and present ties with Türkiye. He explains how Türkiye rarely forged its ties with India independently or on their own merit but mostly the principles of its relationship with India remained hostage to its bond with Pakistan for several known and unknown reasons. In his second paper, Ambassador Rahul Kulshreshth gives us a broad outline of Türkiye's foreign policy focusing on its regional and global engagement. He delves deep into how Türkiye since its independence always shuttled between the West and the East in its foreign policy pursuits because of its geostrategic location. This paper is also a vivid account of Türkiye's recent shift from its policy of "Zero Problem with the Neighbours" and its dictum of "Strategic Depth". Dr. Fazzur Rahman Siddiqui's paper is a chronology of evolution of internal politics in Türkiye, particularly under the rule of AKP and President Erdogan since he came to power in 2002. His paper examines various turning points in the internal politics of the country which is engendering a multifaceted transformation inside Türkiye.

The main objective of this current study is not only to examine Turkey of the past but to unravel how the new name of Türkiye is not merely a nominal change but is reflective of a transformation that the country is currently witnessing. This volume is also a commentary on the changing trajectory of Turkish foreign policy in the region and beyond. ICWA hopes that this special publication on Türkiye will be useful for both scholars and practitioners who want to understand the internal and external contours of Turkish polity.

Vijay Thakur Singh

Director General

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February 2023



INDIA-TURKIYE RELATIONS

THE LONG WAIT FOR A RESET

RAHUL KULSHRESHTH




A meeting between Prime Minister Modi and President Erdogan on 16 September 2022 on the margins of the SCO Summit in Uzbekistan generated considerable interest and speculation whether it would lead to a modicum of understanding between India and Türkiye. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India in a press release stated that, “Both leaders reviewed India –Türkiye relations. While noting the increase in recent years in economic relations, particularly bilateral trade, they acknowledged the potential for further enhancement of economic and commercial linkages. The two leaders also exchanged views on regional and global developments. Both leaders agreed to maintain regular contacts not just on bilateral issues, but also for the benefit of the region.”


Four days later, in his address at the 77th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), the Turkish President again included a reference to Kashmir. Erdogan said: “We regret that a strong peace and cooperation between India and Pakistan has still not yet been established, despite 75 years following their independence. We hope that a just and lasting peace and tranquility will be reached in Kashmir.” While Indian commentators noted that the reference was milder and devoid of mention of UNSC Resolutions in contrast to several earlier statements on the subject by


President Erdogan, the MEA spokesperson in response to a question on the reference replied: “On Türkiye, as you know, Prime Minister had a productive meeting with the President of Türkiye, recently last week in Samarkand, and we had issued a press release on that... On the separate issue of, of course, UNGA and Jammu Kashmir, I think our position is pretty well known, but since you wanted us to reiterate that, I can say, this issue of course needs to be resolved, as per the Simla Agreement and bilaterally and we’ve always held that. And also discussions in a conducive atmosphere free of terrorism. I think all of us know that, and I don’t think reference to Jammu & Kashmir in the UNGA is useful or helpful.” The Foreign Ministers of India and Türkiye held talks in New York immediately after President Erdogan’s statement which, as the External Affairs Minister of India tweeted, was a “wide-ranging conversation that covered the Ukraine conflict, food security, G20 processes, global order, NAM (Non-aligned Movement) and Cyprus.” Almost 75 years after diplomatic relations were established between them, India and Türkiye are still in search of an elusive breakthrough that will take the bilateral relationship to the next level.

It is usual for any essay on India-Türkiye relations to allude to historical links. Turkish words that are part of ‘Hindustani’



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Stalin had made territorial claims in eastern Türkiye and demanded rights in the Turkish Straits, which led to Türkiye allying itself with the Western bloc. On the other hand, India under Nehru advocated a 'non-aligned' policy. This clash of perspectives and lack of convergence of strategic interests was evident as early as the Bandung Conference (1955).

point to a shared Central Asian heritage of sorts. In the not so distant past, the Indian nationalist leader, Dr. M.A. Ansari led a medical mission to Türkiye (1912) in the midst of the Balkan Wars. Although troops from the Indian subcontinent were actively deployed in large numbers against the Ottoman Empire during World War I, the Khilafat movement protested against the treatment meted out to the Ottoman Sultan by the victorious Allies. Indian nationalist opinion was supportive of Türkiye's war of independence spearheaded by Atatürk. Although lodged in Lucknow district jail in August 1922, Nehru in his autobiography recalled celebrating Atatürk's victory in a battle against the Greeks. Contributions from the subcontinent helped Türkiye in setting up the Türkiye İş Bankası. Atatürk came to be admired by Indian nationalist leaders not only for spearheading Türkiye's war of liberation but also, as Gurudev Tagore put it, for setting "us an example of a resurgent Asia..."

Türkiye recognized India immediately after India's independence on 15 August 1947 and established diplomatic relations. Ambassadors were exchanged in 1948. The historical bonds, shared cultural links and warmth and goodwill provided a sound foundation for the development

of bilateral ties. As it happened, however, Türkiye by then was preoccupied with Soviet expansionism. Stalin had made territorial claims in eastern Türkiye and demanded rights in the Turkish Straits, which led to Türkiye allying itself with the Western bloc. On the other hand, India under Nehru advocated a 'non-aligned' policy. This clash of perspectives and lack of convergence of strategic interests was evident as early as the Bandung Conference (1955). Türkiye's delegate at Bandung, Deputy Prime Minister Fatin Rustu Zorlu argued that communist expansionism was akin to colonialism. Türkiye, Pakistan, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Libya, Liberia, Sudan and the Philippines sponsored a resolution condemning "all types of colonialism, including international doctrines resorting to methods of force, infiltration and subversion." Pakistan's Prime Minister, Mohammed Ali advocated among other things the right to form alliances for self defence, which Zorlu endorsed saying that Türkiye would not have been represented at Bandung had it not been for NATO. Türkiye's assessment of Nehru (and other leading lights of NAM as well) came to be coloured by Cold War politics and Türkiye's position on issues of interest to India too seemed to be shaped accordingly.

The Turkish stance on the liberation of Goa (1961) was a case in point. There was otherwise little reason for Türkiye to have cosponsored a draft Resolution in the UNSC against India that was thwarted by a Soviet veto.

Meanwhile, after joining NATO in 1952, Türkiye and Pakistan signed a Pact of Mutual Cooperation in February 1954 and, in the following year, Türkiye, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and the United Kingdom formed the Baghdad Pact. The Türkiye-Pakistan nexus became another defining factor in Türkiye's India policy. Thus, when the India-China war occurred in 1962, Türkiye offered to send material assistance to India only to backtrack in deference to Pakistan's sensitivities. The Cyprus issue became another bone of contention. The document issued by the second NAM Summit in Cairo (1964) incorporated a reference to Cyprus that Türkiye suspected was authored by India. Pakistan, on the other hand, extended support to Türkiye; Türkiye, in turn, came to endorse Pakistan's position on Kashmir. Türkiye not only canvassed for Pakistan during the Indo-Pak war in 1965 but also helped the latter by sending military assistance. In 1969, Türkiye accommodated Pakistan by keeping India out of the Islamic Conference in Rabat. And, again in a display of solidarity with Pakistan, Türkiye withheld recognition of Bangladesh till 1974.

Nevertheless, attempts were made to improve relations with India during the 1970s and 1980s. As against two high level visits to Türkiye from the Indian side till 1987 - by Prime Minister Nehru (1960) and Vice President Dr. Zakir Hussein (1965) - apex level visits became a more regular feature in the interaction between India and Türkiye. Prime Minister Turgut Ozal's visit to India in 1986 and Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to Türkiye in 1988 raised expectations of a breakthrough in the bilateral relationship. Although Türkiye continued to extend support to Pakistan on Kashmir, that did not hinder high level engagement between India and Türkiye: President Shankar Dayal Sharma and President K.R. Narayanan paid visits to Türkiye in 1993 and 1998, respectively; President Evren and President Demirel visited India in 1989 and 1995, respectively. Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit's visit to India in 2000 was of particular significance. Ecevit, a known Indophile, took a bolder approach by not agreeing to combine his visit to India with even a stop in Pakistan. Ecevit (who had refused to meet Gen. Musharraf on his visit to Türkiye after the 1999 coup in Pakistan) referred to the shared values of democracy and secularism between India and Türkiye, emphasized the promotion of bilateral trade, and expressed understanding of India's terrorism-related concerns. More significantly, Ecevit referred to the 'necessity of bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan'. There was

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Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Türkiye in 2003 conveyed the Indian side's intent to deepen the bilateral relationship.




cautious optimism that Türkiye was viewing bilateral engagement with India on its own merits and not through a Pakistan-centric prism. Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Türkiye in 2003 conveyed the Indian side's intent to deepen the bilateral relationship. Interestingly, in a media briefing during the course of Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit, Ministry of External Affairs Secretary R. M. Abhyankar was cited as saying that, "Our relations with Pakistan or the Kashmir issue was not mentioned by the Turkish side which is in sharp contrast." Prime Minister Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul visited India in 2008 and 2010, respectively.

Despite the high-level meetings and expectations that this would create better understanding and enable a more conducive climate for the bilateral relationship, the Pakistan factor had not entirely gone out of the equation. In January 2010, India was deliberately excluded from a Türkiye-sponsored meeting on Afghanistan. The following year, Prime Minister Erdogan brought up Kashmir in his address at the UN General Assembly stating: "All of us bear political and moral responsibility for resolving international problems before they lead to

stalemates. In that respect, more effective efforts must be made to peacefully resolve the Kashmir conflict and many other frozen disputes, which I will not enumerate here." It is difficult to fathom why Türkiye again raked up Kashmir just when bilateral ties were acquiring momentum. Was it that against the backdrop of the Arab Spring which Türkiye believed heralded the 'Ankara moment', Erdogan considered it also an opportune moment to burnish his credentials in the Islamic world by taking up issues like Kashmir that had an appeal with his party's conservative base? This unwarranted reference sullied the build up to visits to Türkiye by Vice President Hamid Ansari (2011) and President Mukherjee (2013). Coupled with Kashmir, Türkiye's position on issues of interest to India such as membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group strongly suggested that Türkiye was not viewing ties with India independently and on their own merit but linking it to its own relations with Pakistan. So, while bilateral dialogue with Türkiye was maintained and Prime Minister Modi and President Erdogan held talks on the margins of the G20 Summit in Antalya (November 2015) and preceding that Foreign Office Consultations were held,



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progress in the further development and expansion of bilateral relations was stalled.


Where Türkiye stood became amply clear during the latter half of 2016 when the Kashmir Valley saw violent protests that were instigated and abetted by Pakistan in the aftermath of the killing of Burhan Wani, local commander of the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on a visit to Pakistan in early August, 2016 remarked at a press conference in Islamabad that Türkiye fully supported Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir issue. Asking for the mobilization of the OIC Contact Group and for the visit of a fact-finding mission to Kashmir to monitor the situation, Cavusoglu added that the Kashmir issue should be resolved through dialogue and not through violence. A month or so later, the Turkish Foreign Ministry reacted to the terrorist attack in Uri saying that, "For this heinous attack, we share the sorrow of the Indian Government and people, extend our condolences to the families of soldiers who lost their lives and wish a speedy recovery to the injured." The press release did not condemn the terrorist attack and, in a balancing act, added that Türkiye was "deeply concerned about the increasing tension and casualties occurring recently in Jammu and Kashmir and hope that the problem will be settled through

dialogue and within the framework of the relevant UN resolutions." (The Turkish Foreign Office issued a similar press release after the Pulwama attack in February 2019.) President Erdogan on a visit to Pakistan in November 2016 said at the joint press conference with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif: "We especially discussed the latest developments about Kashmir. The troubles experienced by our brothers and sisters in Kashmir and the increasing tension along the Line of Control have reached an extent that cannot be ignored. We are watching with concern the tension and loss of life on the Line of Control. Kashmir problem should be resolved through dialogue between Pakistan and India within the framework of relevant UN resolutions and by taking into consideration the demands of the people in Kashmir. We, as Türkiye, will continue to provide support as the term president of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation." A similar reference occurred in the Turkish President's address to the joint session of the National Assembly and Senate of Pakistan. Türkiye's articulation of support for Pakistan in the context of Kashmir clearly reiterated the traditional Turkish position. It is possible that Türkiye - and Erdogan personally - felt obliged that Pakistan closed the Gulen-linked Pak-Turk schools in Pakistan at the request of


Turkiye (which was the main objective of Cavusoglu's visit to Islamabad in August 2016) and expelled the Turkish staff in these schools. President Erdogan's visit to India in 2017, for which the Turkish side was unusually eager, failed to assuage ruffled feelings on the Indian side. In an interview to WION TV on the eve of his visit, Erdogan opined that the Kashmir issue should be resolved through multilateral dialogue and hinted that Türkiye was open to a mediatory role in the process. The Turkish President was dismissive of any comparison between the Kurdish issue and J&K, asserting that Türkiye did not have a problem with the Kurdish people but with a terrorist organization whereas J&K was a territorial dispute. Erdogan also clarified that Türkiye was supportive of India's bid to become a NSG member in as much as it also supported consideration of Pakistan's case for joining the NSG on the basis of an objective mechanism and criteria that would allow non-signatories to the NPT to become members of NSG.

Although PM Modi and President Erdogan again met on the margins of the G 20 meeting in Osaka (June 2019), Türkiye persisted with a partisan approach that reflected Pakistan's stance and interests. The Turkish Foreign Ministry in a press release expressed concern that the revocation of Article 370 of the Constitution of India on 5 August 2019 'could further increase the existing tension' and called for 'the resolution of the problem through dialogue and within the framework of the relevant UN resolutions, by observing the legitimate interests of all people of Jammu-Kashmir as well as Pakistan and India'. Türkiye also offered its good offices

to ease tension in the region subject to the consent of the parties. Speaking at the UNGA session in September 2019, President Erdogan observed: "Despite the resolutions that the Security Council has adopted, Kashmir remains besieged and eight million people are still stuck in Kashmir; they cannot leave. In order for the Kashmiri people to look towards a safe future with their Pakistani and Indian neighbours, it is imperative to solve the problem with dialogue and on the basis of justice and equality, instead of with conflict." It was also evident that Türkiye had teamed up with Malaysia (and Pakistan) to rally support against the Indian Parliament's decision to revoke Article 370 and internationalize the issue. In a sharp rebuttal the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) urged the Turkish side to get "a proper understanding of the situation on the ground before they make any further statements on this issue. It is a matter which is completely internal to India." However, the Turkish President again flagged Kashmir in his address at the UNGA, both in 2020 and 2021. In his address at the joint sitting of the Senate and National Assembly of Pakistan in February 2020, President Erdogan referred to Kashmir multiple times and reiterated Türkiye's support for Pakistan in respect to Kashmir and drew a parallel between Canakkale (Gallipoli) in 1915 and Kashmir ("It was Canakkale yesterday and it is Kashmir today, there is no difference."). He also assured Türkiye's support in FATF, claiming that Pakistan was facing political pressure in its attempt to get off the grey list. Again MEA reacted sharply to Erdogan's comments, the spokesperson underlining that the 'remarks reflect




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neither an understanding of history nor of the conduct of diplomacy...distort events of the past to advance a narrow minded view of the present' and represent 'one more example of a pattern of Türkiye interfering in the internal affairs of other countries'. The spokesperson pointedly rejected 'the repeated attempts by Türkiye to justify the cross border terrorism practiced so blatantly by Pakistan'. A strong demarche was made to the Turkish Ambassador and it was stressed that these developments had strong implications for bilateral ties.

Besides the UN (including the UN Human Rights Council), bilateral Türkiye-Pakistan Türkiye platforms and the Türkiye-Pakistan-Azerbaijan trilateral mechanism, Türkiye has been vocal in raising the Kashmir issue and routinely criticizing India at the OIC. (Türkiye has been a member of the OIC Contact Group on Kashmir since 1994). Notwithstanding Türkiye's provocations, dialogue has been maintained between India and Türkiye, both at the political level and through

institutionalized bilateral mechanisms. Trade relations, another important plank of the bilateral relationship, too have seen fairly impressive growth. The trade turnover, which was USD 4.6 billion in 2011-12, crossed the USD 10 billion mark (the target was set during President Erdogan's visit to India in 2017) in 2021-22. Although a large number of Indian companies are registered in Türkiye, bilateral investments are admittedly modest (Indian investment in Türkiye is estimated to be about USD 125 million and Turkish investment in India USD 223 million, as per Turkish data), Turkish contractors have projects in India worth about USD 430 million and this is an area of interest to Turkish business interests. Türkiye has become a popular destination with Indian tourists (about 230,000 Indian tourists visited Türkiye in 2019) and this, coupled with westward bound traffic from India, is behind Türkiye's persistent request to allow Turkish Airlines to expand flight operations between India and Türkiye both in terms of destinations in India and the frequency of flights.




There are, however, unmistakable signs that patience has started to wear thin on the Indian side due to Türkiye's repeated references to Kashmir and interference in India's internal affairs and especially so after Türkiye questioned and criticized the revocation of Article 370.




There are, however, unmistakable signs that patience has started to wear thin on the Indian side due to Turkiye's repeated references to Kashmir and interference in India's internal affairs and especially so after Turkiye questioned and criticized the revocation of Article 370. India put on hold for some time a US\$ 2 billion five 45000 ton fleet support vessels between Hindustan Shipyard Ltd and a consortium of Turkish shipyards led by Anadolu Shipyard and signaled that other retaliatory options of an economic nature could follow too. Prime Minister Modi met the Cyprus President and Greek PM on the margins of the UNGA in 2019, the import of which could not have been lost on the Turkish side. India issued a press release against Operation Peace Spring in Syria in 2019. A press statement issued in June 2020 in the context of Libya that endorsed the Cairo Declaration (6 June 2020) and another in July 2022 that condemned the killings in the Zakho Governorate in Iraq's Kurdistan Region were indicative of India's position in conflict situations involving Turkiye. And, in the case of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, Indian support to Armenia has translated into defence exports.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee noted that, "Turkiye 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 locations give us shared concerns in the region, as well as some common opportunities." However, the potential for cooperation between India and Turkiye to come together to forge a new partnership remains unfulfilled largely because of Turkiye's unrelenting position on an issue that is of vital significance to India. Indeed, Indian public opinion at large has come to view Turkiye in negative terms, as a country with a blind spot for Pakistan and, stemming from this, prone to act against India's interests and in an unfriendly manner towards India. Barring a very brief period when Prime Minister Ecevit visited India in 2000, as C. Raja Mohan has observed, "the Turkish establishment's uncritical embrace of Pakistan has been unchanging, irrespective of who dominated Ankara - the secular army or the current Islamist leadership." If Turkiye's approach to the Indian subcontinent and its relations with India and Pakistan were conditioned primarily by Cold War politics during the 1950s and 1960s, the policy during the preceding decade or so bears the imprint of an Islamist agenda. The AK Party government under Prime Minister Erdogan, even though not de-hyphenating India and Pakistan, began with a relatively neutral position on Indo-Pak issues, but then veered towards not only support for Pakistan but also advocacy for Pakistan's



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cause(s) in multilateral fora. This coincided with the phase when Erdogan attempted to carve a place of his own - and for Turkiye - in the Islamic world by pro-actively championing Islamic causes and supporting forces that represented political Islam..The Turkish leadership waded into troubled waters in its immediate vicinity and also elsewhere. If it was Jammu & Kashmir in the case of India, in Bangladesh it was the War Crimes Tribunal.

The 'Erdogan doctrine' translated into a more vocal, aggressive and intrusive foreign policy designed to demonstrate to the Islamic world at large - and to his domestic audience too - that Erdogan was a leader given to speaking his mind on issues relevant to the Islamic world. Daily Sabah (18 February 2020), the Turkish pro-government daily, in its coverage of President Erdogan's visit to Pakistan in February 2020 commented that, 'Erdogan is an exceptional leader...He does not refrain from weighing in on critical issues... he criticizes the unjust order that prevails in the world today...he speaks for the oppressed peoples and Muslims around the globe – whether they are in Myanmar, Kashmir, Syria, Palestine or Somalia'. Pakistan with its two hundred million plus Muslim population, predominantly

Sunni, came to acquire its own value in Erdogan's contestation for leadership of the Islamic bloc. This alone though does not entirely explain Turkiye's 'uncritical embrace' of Pakistan. Accompanying this is a flawed understanding of the history of the subcontinent as well as of developments that led to the partition of India and particularly of the accession of J&K to India. As Prof Ashwini K. Mohapatra noted in his article 'Bridge to Anatolia: An Overview of Indo-Turkish Relations (The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations [Vol. XXXIX]2008), in the Turkish narrative, Pakistan has at times even been depicted as a State that 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'. Erdogan invoked this theme in his address to Pakistan's Parliament in February 2020 to underscore a shared history between Turkiye and Pakistan. Further, as Mohapatra observes, 'is the mistaken notion that during the Turkish War of Liberation ... 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'. An unquestioning belief in the fallacious

It is also problematic from the Indian perspective that, despite professing to be on the same page as India on terrorism, Turkiye simply turns a blind eye to cross-border state-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan (in sharp contrast to its own sensitivities about alleged Kurdish terrorist activities from bases in Iraq and Syria).



It would indeed be a welcome development if Prime Minister Modi's talks with President Erdogan in Uzbekistan generate a serious rethink in Ankara on its approach on Kashmir and issues in India-Pakistan relations in general.




two-nation theory also seems to guide - or justify - Turkey's relations with Pakistan and by extension the perspective on Kashmir. Unequivocal support for Pakistan is periodically combined with offers of mediation, which are unacceptable given India's unambiguous position that outstanding issues with Pakistan will be resolved bilaterally. It is also problematic from the Indian perspective that, despite professing to be on the same page as India on terrorism, Turkey simply turns a blind eye to cross-border state-sponsored terrorism emanating from Pakistan (in sharp contrast to its own sensitivities about alleged Kurdish terrorist activities from bases in Iraq and Syria). It is noteworthy that this concern was highlighted by the MEA spokesperson in public comments. There is also an issue of approach. Broadly, present Turkish foreign policy tends to compartmentalize bilateral relations and maintain that differences in the political realm should not impede ties in the economic and commercial sphere. Unfortunately, the Turkish leadership does not grasp the salience of Kashmir for Indian leadership and Indian public opinion.

Additionally, there are other potential irritants. The Turkish defence industry has developed fairly rapidly and acquired a level of technological sophistication. Turkey is naturally keen to promote


defence exports and Pakistan, already an importer of Turkish arms (probably Turkey's largest defence customer), offers an attractive market. During his visit to Turkey on 25-26 November 2022 for the joint inauguration of the third of the four MILGEM corvette vessels built by Turkey for the Pakistan Navy, Prime Minister Sharif invited Turkey to join the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), adding that he would discuss it with China if Turkey evinces interest in it. Turkish participation in projects in POK may well cast a shadow on India-Turkey relations. There have also been reports in Indian media about activities of Kashmiri separatists out of Turkey and these, if substantiated, will be understandably unacceptable.

It would indeed be a welcome development if Prime Minister Modi's talks with President Erdogan in Uzbekistan generate a serious rethink in Ankara on its approach on Kashmir and issues in India-Pakistan relations in general. The relatively milder reference to Kashmir in Erdogan's statement at the UNGA session has come at a time when Turkey has reset ties with Israel, Saudi Arabia and UAE and attempted to mend fences with Egypt. This is attributable to external factors and domestic pressures. Presidential and parliamentary elections are due in Turkey in 2023 and entrenched positions on





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foreign policy issues may be influenced by electoral compulsions. The official Indian read out on the meeting between the leaders in Uzbekistan is indicative of the direction in which India would prefer the relationship to develop, and the promising prospects for deepening bilateral engagement in the economic and commercial domain, as also in other fields, are self-evident considering the size of the economies and the rich and varied expertise available in the two countries. Broadly, both India and Turkiye are also in agreement that the international order as it exists does not reflect current global realities. They exercise an important influence in their respective geographies. Regular exchange of views at different levels on regional and international developments and issues will help promote better understanding

of each other's perspectives and perhaps lay out the ground for common positions where interests coincide. Institutional mechanisms and structures that can help realize the potential for increased bilateral interaction in scope and depth are already largely in place. However, the course that bilateral ties take would be contingent in large measure upon Turkiye's approach. In this context, as the Indian External Affairs Ministry's spokesperson noted, references to Jammu and Kashmir is neither helpful nor useful. Given Turkiye's track record and President Erdogan's mercurial style of leadership as well, it may be premature to jump to conclusions. On balance, it would be prudent to wait and monitor whether Turkiye understands and addresses India's central concerns and to calibrate bilateral cooperation accordingly.

Mr. Rahul Kulshreshth, a retired career diplomat, served as India's Ambassador to Turkiye and Egypt. He also held various positions in the Indian Missions in Moscow, New York, Thimphu, Yangon and Islamabad as well as in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. Ambassador Kulshreshth also worked as Joint Secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy.

TURKIYE'S QUEST FOR STATUS

POLITICS OF ALLIANCES AND COUNTER ALLIANCES

RAHUL KULSHRESHTH



THE ATLANTICIST LEGACY


The Republic of Türkiye was established in 1923 as a ‘Türkiye for the Turks’ and as a sovereign entity that rejected its Ottoman past. Atatürk asserted that ‘the new Türkiye has absolutely no relation with the old Türkiye. The old Ottoman state has gone down in history. Now, a new Türkiye is born’. Atatürk, who shepherded the new Türkiye until his death in 1938, focused on recognition and consolidation of the new entity, an entity that was to be modern and western in its orientation. Ideology and pragmatism guided the approach, as the emphasis was naturally on building a modern state and avoiding entanglements and adventurism that could not have been sustained. Circumspect as it remained after Atatürk’s death, for various reasons Türkiye was neutral for most of World War II, throwing in its lot with the Allies only towards the end of the war in February 1945.

Although westward-looking, Atatürk was practical enough to seek Soviet support during the Turkish war of independence and later, in 1925, entered into a ten-year ‘treaty of friendship and neutrality’ with the USSR that was extended for another ten years in 1935. Tensions mounted between Türkiye and the Soviet Union when the latter withdrew from the treaty in 1945


and made territorial claims in eastern Türkiye besides demanding rights in the Turkish Straits. Under pressure from Stalin, Türkiye anchored itself to NATO in 1952 and then CENTO in 1955. Türkiye thus entered the Western camp and, by virtue of its geostrategic location, became an important part of the NATO security architecture. However, frustrated with the Western position on the Cyprus issue and its disputes with Greece, Türkiye attempted to maintain a degree of balance and even signed a Friendship Agreement with the Soviet Union in 1978.


TURGUT OZAL – SHIFT TO NEO-OTTOMANISM

The Turgut Ozal era (Prime Minister from 1983 to 1989 and President from 1989 to 1993) heralded changes in Türkiye’s vision and approach. Ozal challenged several ingrained Kemalist tenets. Atatürk believed that ‘Turks always went towards the West and would continue in that direction’. Ozal’s vision was of a Türkiye that should combine westernization with its cultural Turkish and Islamic roots. As Ozal put it, ‘we are an Islamic country. We have differences from the West...We are the bridge between the West and the East. We need to take the science, technology, thinking understanding and compromise




Atatürk, who shepherded the new Türkiye until his death in 1938, focused on recognition and consolidation of the new entity, an entity that was to be modern and western in its orientation.





Turkiye thus entered the Western camp and, by virtue of its geostrategic location, became an important part of the NATO security architecture. However, frustrated with the Western position on the Cyprus issue and its disputes with Greece, Türkiye attempted to maintain a degree of balance and even signed a Friendship Agreement with the Soviet Union in 1978.




of the West. But we have also our own values that the West does not have'. Ozal held that the Kemalist foreign policy approach was excessively cautious and was critical of the policy pursued during World War II. His view was that Türkiye's foreign policy needed to be an instrument to extend "the weight of Turkish trade and political power". So, while on the one hand Ozal applied for full membership of the European Union, he began a more active engagement with the Arab world and the neighbouring countries. Lying in its proximity, these represented natural markets for Turkish industry and the economic reforms introduced by Ozal drove Türkiye to become proactively engaged in its neighbourhood. Similar impulses guided initiatives such as the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. The disintegration of the USSR brought the

Balkans and Central Asia into focus. Türkiye even dreamt of extending its influence from the Adriatic to Central Asia! Ozal also joined the US-led coalition during the Gulf War, thus demonstrating that Türkiye was pursuing an active foreign policy to its east in political and military terms as well. This was also evident when Türkiye exerted military pressure on Syria to expel Abdullah Ocalan.


As an adviser of his observed, Ozal initiated a neo-Ottomanist policy. The policy was a product of Ozal's ideological belief as much as it was borne out of confidence that Türkiye had achieved a level of development that now allowed it to play a more forceful role in the region. From a nominal GDP of USD 58 billion in 1980,



Ozal's vision was of a Türkiye that should combine westernization with its cultural Turkish and Islamic roots.



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Turkiye's GDP stood at USD 187 billion in 1997 and, during the same period, exports rose from US\$ 2.9 billion to US\$ 26.8 billion. Military spending too increased and Türkiye sought to build its defence industry by deepening military ties with the United States. The end of the Cold War, the collapse of the USSR, and the Gulf War too were factors at play that enabled Türkiye to seek a larger role.

STRATEGIC DEPTH

The AK (Justice and Development) Party came to power in 2002 and Türkiye's foreign policy activism became even more pronounced. Ahmet Davutoglu (Erdogan's key foreign policy adviser who later became Foreign Minister and then Prime Minister) combined Türkiye's Ottoman heritage, its geostrategic location and AKP's conservative Islamic orientation to enunciate a clearer and coherent strategic vision of Türkiye's foreign policy direction. Davutoglu posited that based on its history and geography, Türkiye enjoyed "strategic depth". Türkiye belonged to several regions - Central Asia, the Gulf and the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Türkiye, Davutoglu argued, belonged to the category of countries that he described as "central

powers", countries that were placed to exercise influence across geographies and thus play a strategic role at the global plane. To this end, Türkiye needed to resolve contentious domestic issues, primarily the Kurdish problem and the domestic ideological divides. Externally, Türkiye needed to pursue a zero problem policy with neighbours. Davutoglu rejected criticism that he was articulating a neo-Ottomanist policy. For him, the context was that traditional geographical regions were 'reemerging in a cultural, political and economic sense'. Full membership of the EU remained on the table, but as one of the priorities. Türkiye also presented itself as a moderate Islamic country with an elected government that espoused democracy and free market, which had its own appeal in the aftermath of 9/11.

Türkiye's foreign policy can be viewed in phases in the two decades that AKP has been in power. In the first phase stretching from about 2002 to 2011, Türkiye adopted a more cooperative posture. Ties with Syria improved to the extent that Bashar al-Assad visited Türkiye in 2009. The two countries agreed to establish a Turkish-Syrian High Level Strategic Cooperation Council to "expand and solidify their cooperation. Türkiye tried to bridge differences between Syria and Israel, between the Palestinian

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factions, and engaged with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG, Iraq and Iran. The Tehran Agreement between Türkiye, Iran and Brazil in May 2010 secured Iran's agreement to swap 1,200 kilograms of low-enriched uranium for fuel rods on Turkish soil. Türkiye also presented itself in the role of a bridge between the West and the East. In general, Türkiye was seen exercising a benign influence in the region and even though Turkish-Israeli relations became tense after Israel's offensive in Gaza in 2008 and then deteriorated with the 'Mavi Marmara' incident in 2010, within the region Türkiye was perceived to be championing the Palestinian cause. Between 2002 and 2010, the share of the Middle East in Türkiye's total exports increased to 16% from 6%, and the total trade volume with the Middle East increased to USD 23.6 billion from USD 3.9 billion. The policy in its economic dimension made ample sense against the backdrop of the rise of the Anatolian business interests and Türkiye's rapid economic growth in the same period. GDP increased three times and exports increased from about USD 36 billion to USD135 billion in 2011. Türkiye's growing economic muscle coupled with the focus on promoting greater trade and economic cooperation with the Middle East also meant that Türkiye was inclined to chart a course in the region more independent of the West.

The Turkish Grand National Assembly's 'no' vote to logistical support to the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and Türkiye's position on UN-mandated sanctions against the Iran in June 2010 were pointers in this direction.

ARAB SPRING

Given the AKP's conservative domestic power base and its ideological leanings, Türkiye was also inclined to take up Islamic causes more vigorously and carve its own place in the Islamic world. Türkiye embraced and allied itself with forces in the Middle East and Northern Africa that represented political Islam and Islamist militant groups. And, it perceived in the Arab Spring an opportunity to extend its political influence in territories that were once part of the Ottoman Empire as well as to burnish its credentials as a leader in the Islamic world. Türkiye supported the movement against Mubarak. President Abdullah Gul visited Egypt soon after Mubarak was ousted and met Muslim Brotherhood leaders. Davutoglu referred to the relationship with Egypt as an "Axis of Democracy". Erdogan's visit to Cairo in September 2011 was marked by an air of triumphalism. The delegation included six ministers and 200 businessmen. Several in Türkiye came to believe that the protests

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in the Arab world represented the advent of the 'Ankara moment'. Ibrahim Kalin, a close aide of Erdogan, told CNN that the objective of the visit was to show support 'to the Egyptian people in their struggle to establish a democratic socio-political order based on justice, freedom, transparency and rule of law...values which Turkiye has been implementing in its domestic and foreign policy'. Turkiye's economic turn-around under Erdogan added to his image of a popularly elected leader and, for the Muslim world in particular, this was buttressed by his unequivocal support for the Palestinian cause and strong reaction to Israel after the Mavi Marmara incident. Turkiye also became more vocal and sharper in its criticism of President Bashar al-Assad and over time committed to removing the Syrian President.



The 'Ankara moment' was all too brief. Established regimes in the Gulf became wary of Turkish designs. Turkiye began to be viewed as a disruptive force. The collapse of the Arab Spring - especially the ouster of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt - frustrated Turkiye's ambitions in the region. Erdogan described developments in Egypt as a coup and referred to Sisi in derogatory terms. The Turkiye-Qatar axis too was not viewed kindly and Turkiye found itself pitted against Egypt, Saudi Arabia and UAE. On the other hand, Russian and Iranian support for Assad became a sore point in Turkiye's relations with these countries. Turkiye also grew frustrated with the US policy in Syria. By mid-2014, the threat posed by Islamic State (IS) and highly radicalized groups such as al-Nusra was very real. Turkiye, however, obsessed with removing Assad, was seen to be extending

even greater support to radical anti-Assad groups. In October 2014 IS laid siege to the Kurdish town of Kobane in northern Syria, adjoining the Turkish border. The Kurdish YPG (People's Defence Units) put up stout resistance and gained Western sympathy and material support. Turkiye, on the other hand, maintained that both IS and YPG were terrorist organizations and that there was no difference between PKK and YPG. Turkiye closed the border and seemed to wait for Kobane to fall. Eventually, the United States airdropped supplies to the besieged Kurds and discovered in the YPG a force capable of taking on the IS. Turkiye was also seen to be turning a blind eye to the westward passage of illegal migrants and refugees through Turkish territory and worse still playing this card to extract concessions from European countries. The spillover of tensions flowing from Turkiye's domestic politics into several European countries added to the difficulties in ties with Europe. Meanwhile, on 24 November 2015 Turkiye shot down a Russian fighter aircraft near the Syria-Turkiye border. Russia retaliated by announcing a slew of measures against Turkiye besides targeting Turkish supported groups in Syria. Thus, by the close of 2015 not only were Turkiye's relations with the traditional Western allies strained, but Turkiye also had zero neighbours without problems.

THE ERDOGAN DOCTRINE

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Three developments that occurred in quick succession in 2016 brought about a change in Turkish foreign policy: Davutoglu resigned as Prime Minister in May 2016; Turkiye offered an apology of





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sorts to Russia in the following month; and, Türkiye was rocked by a coup attempt in mid-July. Davutoglu's resignation meant that Erdogan's views came to influence Turkish foreign policy to an even greater extent and this was particularly significant with respect to the Kurdish issue in both its internal and external dimensions. The second amounted to an admission that while the economic costs imposed by Russia were severe for Türkiye, there were also implications of Russian actions on Türkiye's Syria policy. The Western response to the failed coup attempt became an additional point in Erdogan's list of grievances against Türkiye's traditional allies and one that saw him move towards working more closely with Russia. Turkish scholars have opined that the 'Erdogan doctrine' replaced the Davutoglu doctrine. Essentially, the 'Erdogan doctrine' represented a more robust, aggressive foreign policy, with Türkiye exerting military power not only through proxies but also directly. Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean were glaring examples of the power projection.

SYRIA, LIBYA AND THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

Bashar al-Assad's successes in Syria and Kurdish militia campaigns against IS forced Türkiye to reexamine its stance. With Russian and Iran committed to al-Assad, Türkiye could not expect to dislodge al-Assad through proxies or even directly. Alongside, Türkiye was alarmed by American assistance to YPG and the prospect of a Kurdish dominated contiguous territorial space along the border with Syria. Following the rapprochement with Russia, Türkiye undertook military operations in Syria (Operation Euphrates Shield in August 2016, Operation Olive Branch in January 2018, Operation Peace Spring in October 2019 and Operation Spring Shield in February 2020). These were directed against Kurdish forces along the border with Syria, halting the Syrian Army's march to Idlib, and preventing the influx of refugees from Syria to Türkiye. Türkiye has been able to establish its hold over pockets




The 'Erdogan doctrine' represented a more robust, aggressive foreign policy, with Türkiye exerting military power not only through proxies but also directly. Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean were glaring examples of the power projection.

of territory in northern Syria and thereby a measure of influence on eventual outcomes in Syria. The interventions in Syria also came in handy to drum up support domestically among the conservative and nationalistic voters.


Unlike Syria where the Kurdish and the refugee problems had a direct bearing on Türkiye's security concerns, Turkish policy in Libya was guided more by concerns over the fate of Turkish nationals working in Libya and the sizeable Turkish investments in that country. Thus, to begin with, Türkiye was a reluctant partner in the NATO operation, favouring instead a political solution to the conflict. While Türkiye welcomed the transition process that was started after Gaddafi's ouster, like the other regional actors in fray in Libya, Türkiye also formed alliances with local partners. Given its patronage of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Justice and Construction Party was a natural choice for Türkiye. By 2015 there were two main power centers in Libya and, besides competing interests, the ideological and political battle lines between the external patrons of these two power centers were as pronounced as they were in the Middle East. In Tripoli, where the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist elements were dominant, the Government of National Accord (GNA) received support from Türkiye and Qatar. The other power center in Tobruk, headed by General Haftar, was supported by UAE and Egypt. Gen Haftar launched a military operation in April 2019 and threatened to take Tripoli. Türkiye reacted by extending more assistance to the GNA, providing arms, and transporting or enabling foreign fighters from the Syrian theater to help GNA

forces. Türkiye however extracted a price. In November 2019, Türkiye and the GNA signed a memorandum establishing an EEZ from southwest Türkiye to northeast Libya. While this move linked the conflict in Libya with competing claims in the Eastern Mediterranean and disregarded Greek claims in particular, as in Syria, Türkiye went a step forward when the Turkish Parliament approved the deployment of troops in Libya in January 2020 and stepped up Turkish military presence and deployment. Haftar's offensive on Tripoli was effectively halted and repulsed. Haftar's offensive and the consequent Turkish intervention (and that of other powers) froze the situation on the ground along the Sirte-Jufrah axis – the redline for competing interests - and revived efforts for a political settlement in Libya.

The Libyan conflict complicated the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye bears historical grievances vis à vis the EU in so far as Cyprus is concerned. Over time the Turkish position has hardened and, believing that the EU has not been fair to Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots, Türkiye has even suggested that the only other alternative to the Cyprus issue is a two state solution. The maritime disputes in the Aegean and Mediterranean are also of a long standing nature. Türkiye's positions on the sovereignty of islets, the delimitation of maritime waters and the EEZ and airspace are irreconcilable with those of Greece and Cyprus, with the latter two enjoying EU support. Discoveries of hydrocarbon resources in the waters have compounded the difficulties. Türkiye reacted by undertaking exploratory and drilling activities of its own from time



Turkish policies in Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean resulted in tensions in the relationship with the EU as an institution and with major European powers such as France.



to time besides strengthening military presence in the area. Meanwhile, several regional cooperation fora have emerged such as the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, the Philia Forum, and the trilateral talks involving Greece, Israel and Cyprus etc., which Türkiye perceives as alliances directed against its interests.


THE EU AND THE UNITED STATES

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Turkish policies in Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean resulted in tensions in the relationship with the EU as an institution and with major European powers such as France. European powers were unhappy with Turkish military operations targeting YPG as also with the use of the refugee issue as a political weapon by Türkiye to threaten the EU. The accession talks with EU were frozen and in July 2019 the EU also cancelled meetings of the EU-Türkiye Association Council and several high level sectoral dialogue mechanisms. Negotiations on an air transport agreement too were suspended. Tensions continued to mount in 2020 leading to Greece mobilizing its



naval forces and French warships visiting the region in support of Greece and Cyprus. The pivot towards Russia added to the existing frictions in relations with another traditional partner, the United States. Türkiye's procurement of the S-400 air defence system from Russia led to its suspension from the F-35 programme and eventually to sanctions against Türkiye's defence procurement agency.

Türkiye's relations with the EU and the United States demonstrate that Turkish decision makers do not believe that despite longstanding traditional partnerships and the NATO umbrella, Türkiye's interests will always or fully coincide with Western interests. Hence in situations where it felt that its key interests were ignored by Western partners it acted independently of them and worked with other partners. There is though also acknowledgement of the vital political, security and economic stakes in the traditional relationships and for these reasons Türkiye is unlikely to walk away from NATO or cause a complete rupture in ties with the EU. For the same reasons, the West too is averse to a situation where Türkiye goes into the Russian embrace.



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Although it professes support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and has supplied drones to Ukraine, Türkiye has not gone along with the sanctions against Russia.



RUSSIA

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The show of bravado notwithstanding, Türkiye was affected by the consequences of the stand-off with Russia in 2015-16. Given that Russia was strongly committed to Bashar al-Assad (and the United States and other western powers were unwilling to establish a no-fly zone and seemingly more preoccupied with dealing with IS), the objective of regime change in Syria was abandoned in favour of the more limited objectives. Türkiye came to acknowledge that regime change in Syria was not a feasible option and that its key interests in Syria viz., eliminating the possibility of a Kurdish threat from its border with Syria as well as ensuring that Türkiye would have a say in any future agreement to end the Syrian conflict would be better served by working with Russia (and Iran) rather than the United States. It is significant that Turkish military operations against YPG in Syria occurred only after the rapprochement with Russia. For Russia, on the other hand, the deals with Türkiye came in handy to enable al-Assad to reassert control over a very large part of Syrian

territory, get the YPG to seek cover from the al-Assad regime, and acquire greater leverage over Türkiye so that now Russia alone seems to stand between an all-out assault on Idlib by the regime's forces. Elsewhere though, as in the case of the Libyan conflict, Russia and Türkiye have pursued divergent interests and supported rival alliances. Although it professes support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and has supplied drones to Ukraine, Türkiye has not gone along with the sanctions against Russia. It has used its relations with Russia and Ukraine to broker an agreement facilitating the export of Ukrainian grain shipments and so underscored its relevance in the region.

The Turkish leadership recognizes the eastward shift in the global balance of power and has accordingly invested in cultivating China. Besides its obvious value as a permanent member of the UNSC, development of ties with China helps Türkiye in its quest for strategic autonomy and, more importantly, in the immediate context for funding and investments for its ambitious infrastructure projects. Türkiye



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hopes that the BRI will dovetail with its own Middle Corridor project.

RESET TO ZERO PROBLEMS

The preceding two decades have undoubtedly seen a more assertive Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye had begun to move in this direction during the Ozal era. Perhaps this was inevitable given Türkiye's attributes of national power. The Davutoglu doctrine gave expression to this. Erdogan's ambition to be recognized as a world leader and transform Türkiye into an influential global actor in its own right translated into a more belligerent approach. Türkiye's rapid economic development and the growth of its defence industry (TB2 drones have acquired a legendary reputation and showcase the prowess of Türkiye's defence industry) coupled with instrumentalities of soft power gave it the confidence to act decisively in its neighbourhood as well as to expand its outreach to regions beyond. Thus, interventions in Syria, Iraq, Nagorno-Karabakh and Libya and Turkish military bases in Qatar and Somalia were accompanied by an impressive outreach to Africa. A more aggressive foreign policy flowed in part from a perception that Türkiye might be able to alter the ground situation and successfully project its leadership role by allying

with organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas and using Islamist militant groups. It was also the product of Türkiye's threat perception from PKK/YPG which, in turn, was linked to Türkiye's domestic politics. The offensive against PKK and YPG bolstered Erdogan's appeal to nationalistic voters and served him well in successive polls.



By the end of 2020 Türkiye had preempted the Syrian Kurds from establishing a zone of influence along the border with Syria, entrenched itself more strongly in Libya, and put itself in a position that its energy security requirements would not be entirely overlooked in any future energy corridor in the Eastern Mediterranean. At the same time, however, Türkiye found itself at odds with its Western partners. Relations with Russia were not devoid of disagreements and those with China not entirely smooth due to the Uyghur issue. As to the Gulf and the Middle East, there was perhaps the realization that continuation of the confrontation with heavyweights in the region such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt and Israel was counterproductive and that the kind of opening in the region that Türkiye saw for itself a decade ago had been shut with the rollback of the Arab Spring. The Middle East landscape too had changed with the Abraham Accords and the Biden Administration's passive

Beginning 2021, Erdogan took to nimble-footed diplomacy typical of the region and moved to reset ties with regional powers. Türkiye initiated diplomatic and intelligence contacts with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

policy in the Middle East added to the uncertainties. The “Muslim 5 Summit” fiasco convened by Malaysia in December 2019 highlighted the frictions within the Islamic world as also the limits of Türkiye’s ambitions to challenge Saudi leadership of the Islamic world.

Beginning 2021, Erdogan took to nimble-footed diplomacy typical of the region and moved to reset ties with regional powers. Türkiye initiated diplomatic and intelligence contacts with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. President Isaac Herzog’s visit to Türkiye in March 2022 was followed by the Turkish Foreign Minister’s visit to Israel in May. Yair Lapid visited Ankara in his capacity as Foreign Minister a month later. Turkish authorities revealed that they had foiled an Iranian plot to kidnap Israeli tourists in Türkiye. Türkiye and Israel also announced that after a four year hiatus, they would again exchange ambassadors. In April 2022 a Turkish court brought the Khashoggi chapter to a close by transferring the trial to Saudi Arabia, thus removing a major irritant in Saudi-Türkiye ties and setting the stage for President Erdogan’s visit to Saudi Arabia later that month. UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed paid a visit to Türkiye in November 2021 during which several agreements promising Emirati investment of USD 10 billion were concluded. President Erdogan’s visit to the UAE in February 2022 further suggested that UAE and Türkiye were turning a new page in their relations. Thirteen agreements covering diverse sectors such as trade, defence, agriculture and healthcare were signed. UAE and Türkiye also signed a USD 4.7 billion currency swap agreement.

Erdogan again visited the UAE in May 2022 to convey condolences over the death of Sheikh Khalifa. Clearly the expectation is that Saudi Arabia and UAE will help relieve Türkiye’s economic woes by providing loans and investments while promoting Turkish exports to these markets. A quiet process of reconciliation with Egypt was also initiated. A Turkish delegation led by Deputy Foreign Minister Sedat Onal held visited Cairo in May 2021 and Egypt reciprocated by sending a delegation to Ankara in September. Reportedly, the exploratory talks covered Libya, Eastern Mediterranean, Israel-Palestinian conflict and Egypt’s Muslim brotherhood-related concerns. Turkish criticism of the Sisi regime was toned down and a Muslim Brotherhood affiliated satellite channel shut shop in Türkiye in April this year. In a recent interview with the TRT News Channel, Erdogan remarked that talks at the lower level with Egypt were continuing and “it is not excluded that this will happen at higher levels as long as we understand each other”. A tentative thaw has also occurred in ties between Türkiye and Armenia. Special Envoys appointed by both countries in December 2021 are discussing the normalization of relations and a few steps such as opening their shared border for third country nationals and beginning direct cargo flight operations have been taken in this direction. The Armenian Foreign Minister, Ararat Mirzoyan, participated in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum in March 2022 in the margins of which he had talks on the restoration of ties with Foreign Minister Cavusoglu. In parallel, Türkiye stepped back from further confrontation



Powers in the Middle East are redrawing and realigning equations and interests among themselves taking into account ground realities, the perceived American retrenchment from the region, US-Russia relations and the Sino-US rivalry.

with the EU that carried the risk of EU sanctions, halted drilling activities in the Eastern Mediterranean, announced that it was seeking better relations with Europe and the United States, and resumed talks with Greece. Türkiye also relented on the issue of NATO membership for Sweden and Finland after its PKK-related concerns were met and Finland and Sweden undertook to support Türkiye's fight against terrorism and to address pending Turkish requests for deportation or extradition of terror suspects at the NATO Summit in Madrid in June 2022.

Powers in the Middle East are redrawing and realigning equations and interests among themselves taking into account ground realities, the perceived American retrenchment from the region, US-Russia relations and the Sino-US rivalry. The pessimistic world economic outlook is another factor. Global economic growth is expected to decelerate from 5.7% in 2021 to 2.9% this year. The Turkish economy has been in a downward spiral since 2018. The Turkish Lira has been under pressure, sliding from about 3.44 to a dollar in September 2017 to 18.22 currently. The annual inflation is at its highest since September 1998. The government has had to use foreign exchange reserves to stabilize markets. The results of the municipal elections in Türkiye in 2019

were an unpleasant surprise for Erdogan. Encouraged, the Turkish opposition is trying to mount a unified challenge to him. Six opposition parties - the Table of Six - issued a lengthy declaration in February this year, announcing their intent to reverse the executive presidential system introduced by Erdogan and strengthen parliamentary democracy in Türkiye. These are worrisome developments for Erdogan as he prepares for presidential and parliamentary elections in 2023. A combination of domestic pressures and external factors has driven the reset in Turkish foreign policy. It is unrealistic to expect that Türkiye will entirely give up entrenched positions and assets. Erdogan threatened another operation against YPG in May this year and reiterated in July that a fresh military offensive in Syria would remain on the agenda until Türkiye's security concerns were addressed. Likewise, irked by the "militarization" of some islands near the Turkish coast, tensions between Türkiye and Greece have again escalated and Erdogan has warned Greece not to "go too far". Possibly, in both instances the rhetoric was meant for domestic consumption. The larger question is whether the latest recalibration in Turkish foreign policy is just a tactical shift borne out of immediate electoral and economic compulsions or does it reflect

recognition of the limits of Turkey's power and will Türkiye, as it now calls itself, eschew confrontation and brinkmanship

and instead adopt a more conciliatory approach in the pursuit of its interests.

Mr. Rahul Kulshreshth, a retired career diplomat, served as India's Ambassador to Türkiye and Egypt. He also held various positions in the Indian Missions in Moscow, New York, Thimphu, Yangon and Islamabad as well as in the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi. Ambassador Kulshreshth also worked as Joint Secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy.



TURKIYE UNDER TWO DECADES OF ERDOGAN'S RULE

FAZZUR RAHMAN SIDDIQUI



“The army’s attitude cannot be defined within democracy. Those who trust the power of the weapons cannot build democracy.”¹

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan

INTRODUCTION

Almost two decades of Justice and Development Party’s (hence AKP’s) rule under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the Republic of Türkiye has been marked by an uneven trajectory, leading to an unprecedented level of transformation in the national polity of the country. If two decades of Turkish politics is examined, one would agree that second decade (2012-2022) of the AKP’s rule portrays an adverse image of the political milieu shaped by the AKP in the first decade (2002-11) of its rule. This paradoxical nature of politics has made Türkiye lose its track or resemblance with its own past, which Erdogan himself had nurtured earlier.

Following the advent of the AKP to power and the simultaneous rise of Erdogan as the Prime Minister in 2002, the country witnessed an extensive economic growth

in successive years. These years were also marked by a successful experiment with the Islamic democracy which was then hailed as a model for the Arab leaders.² Erdogan was able to strengthen the democracy despite his ideological origin in Political Islam which has been mostly criticised for not conforming with the Western ethos of democracy.



But the success of democratic experiment in the first decade of AKP’s rule was soon usurped by a new set of polity, marked by shrinking space for political dissensions. Soon there was a change in the Turkish parliamentary system into an ambiguous presidential system,³ with unlimited power to the President of the day. The first decade of AKP’s rule witnessed a high growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) along with the emergence of new economic middle class but the economic growth too suffered the fate of the democracy, and the later era

Following the advent of the AKP to power and the simultaneous rise of Erdogan as the Prime Minister in 2002, the country witnessed an extensive economic growth in successive years. These years were also marked by a successful experiment with the Islamic democracy which was then hailed as a model for the Arab leaders.

1 Simon A. Waldman and Emre Kalsikan, *The New Türkiye and its Discontents* (London: Hurst and Company, 2016), p.n. 15

2 Bahr Baser and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk (ed.), *Authoritarian Politics in Türkiye: Elections, Resistance and the AKP* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), p.n. 20

3 Bahr and Ahmet, p. 01



The banishment of the army – once the principal actor in national politics – from the political arena has been one of the most significant developments in the politics of Türkiye under Erdogan.



was marred by large-scale corruption and growing interference of the ruling clique in economic affairs. The banishment of the army – once the principal actor in national politics – from the political arena has been one of the most significant developments in the politics of Türkiye under Erdogan. Over the years Türkiye has also shown an overarching engagement across the region and today its strategic, economic and diplomatic imprints are explicit in Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America. But these overarching trends in recent years have suffered a backlash, leaving Türkiye with few allies in the region and across. Likewise, the advent of the Arab uprising a decade ago and subsequent power vacuum and collapse of the nation-state in the region continue to pose Türkiye with novel security, strategic and diplomatic challenges.

In the light of the above, this paper will highlight the two decades of Türkiye's political transformation and will also underline the changing nature of relationship between the PKK and Turkish Government. The paper will also examine how the July 2016 attempted coup opened a new vista for Erdogan to tame his political opponents.

RISE OF ERDOGAN AND AKP

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As the remnant of Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Türkiye did not fall to the colonial powers like its own former outpost such as Algeria, Syria or Egypt. Türkiye under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk achieved independence in 1923 not long after the end of World War I. Atatürk's rule in subsequent years created a unique set of political and ideological relations between politics and military,⁴ which



The rise of the AKP can be traced to the remnants of the forces of Political Islam which had its earliest origin in late 1970s and 1980s amidst the ideological divide between right and left, and it had some success because of the monotonous Atatürk-styled secularist and urbanite politics existing for long.

⁴ Norman A. Gaham, Folk Lindahl and Timur Kocaoglu (ed.), Making Russia and Türkiye Great Again: Putin and Erdogan in Search of Lost Empires and Autocratic Power (UK: Powderman and Littlefield Publishing Group, 2021) p. 126



The rise of the AKP's supreme architect, Erdogan, may be understood as a reflection of the growing trend of populist politics across the world. His firebrand rhetoric and charismatic style sometimes surpassed his own party so much so that a vote for the AKP would soon become a vote for Erdogan alone.



gradually transformed the army into a principal guardian of the country.

The Republican People's Party (CHP) formed by Ataturk ruled the Republic till 1950, followed by the rule of Democratic Party (DP),⁵ which in later years subdued the Kamalist secularist ideology and paved the way for multiparty system. The rule of the DP was disrupted in first ever military coup in 1960 and the subsequent years witnessed a series of coups such as in 1970, 1980 and 1993. This era was also marred by political and ideological clashes among the Islamist, secularist, nationalist, socialist and the leftists.

The rise of the AKP can be traced to the remnants of the forces of Political Islam which had its earliest origin in late 1970s and 1980s amidst the ideological divide between right and left,⁶ and it had some success because of the monotonous Ataturk-styled secularist and urbanite politics existing for long.

The AKP claims to represent the conservative-democrats and, according

to the party manifesto, it acts like a bridge between the East and the West and intends to create a synthesis between Islam and the West too.⁷ In the words of Erdogan himself, "AKP values religion as a social value."⁸ Since its formation, the AKP relied on lower and middle class along with the urban poor who were disillusioned with the past political instability and economic backwardness. After the first electoral victory of the AKP, one of the paper headlines read, "Anatolian revolution,"⁹ a reference to the alienated conservative poor Muslims of Anatolian region known as Black Turks, long alienated by civil and military elites known as White Turks.

The rise of the AKP's supreme architect, Erdogan, may be understood as a reflection of the growing trend of populist politics across the world. His firebrand rhetoric and charismatic style sometime surpassed his own party so much so that a vote for the AKP would soon become a vote for Erdogan alone.¹⁰ His projection of himself as someone belonging to the common masses

5 Norman, Folk and Timur, p.n. 148

6 Ahmed El Amraoui and Faisal Edroos, Why Turkiye's Military is not what it used to be, Aljazeera English, June 5, 2018, Accessed <https://bit.ly/3li0vIE> December 23, 2022

7 Simon and Emre, The New Turkiye and its Discontents, p. 61

8 Simon and Emre, The New Turkiye and its Discontents, p. 61

9 Simon and Emre, The New Turkiye and its Discontents, p. 51

10 Simon and Emre, p. 27



appealed to the larger electoral groups. His own propagation of White Turks and Black Turks¹¹ to describe the secularists/rich and conservative/poor respectively¹² erected his image as a saviour of the poor. Once he said, “We have distinction between the White Turks and the Black Turks. I as your brother belong to the Black Turk.”¹³ His appeals to the political sensibilities and religious sentiments brought him all political dividends and he always held his Islamist card close to his heart to exhort the masses. The more his party progressed, the more he emerged as cult figure in the national politics, and today he is often addressed as Sultan, World Leader, the Conqueror of Davos, Great Master, Long Man, Man of Love and the Chief.¹⁴

In its first election in 2002, the AKP secured more than 34% of votes¹⁵ and gained absolute majority in the Parliament. After the first victory of AKP,

its political graph continued to rise as it received 46.6%, 49.8%, 40.9% and 49.5% in 2007, 2011, June 2015 and again in November 2015 elections respectively.¹⁶

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION OF TURKIYE IN LAST TWO DECADES

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The first decade of the AKP’s rule witnessed a liberal and democratic transformation of the country. A series of political, legal and educational reforms were introduced. These reforms were perhaps more to do with Turkiye’s growing ambition to attain full membership in the European Union (EU) and hence the AKP started adopting policies in concurrence with EU’s criteria of liberty, religious freedom, democratisation and free market economy. The first decade of Erdogan’s rule was

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11 Simon and Emre, p. 13



12 Norman, Folk and Timur, p. 158

13 Simon A and Emre, p. 60

14 Norman A. Gaham, Folk Lindahl and Timur Kocaoglu, p.n. 161

15 Eric Zurcher, Turkiye: A Modern History (New York: I.B Tauris, 1993) p. 338

16 Norman, Folk and Timur, p. 153



The real turnaround in Erdogan's politics would come following his third consecutive victory in 2011 with more than 50% of votes. Now the government would begin conveying a series of alarming messages hinting at altering the established secular model. Erdogan would soon jettison the past debates around democracy, freedom and human rights, and instead would begin questioning them.

marked by three prominent features which had brought the country close to the western model of governance: embracement for democracy, shift towards open market economy and significant improvement in the human rights records.

One of the most important achievements of the AKP in the first decade of its rule was economic growth which it accomplished through trading and establishing business linkage with outside world. There was a substantial rise in GDP growth. In 2011, the GDP achieved 11.1% rise and inflation declined by 6.3% in 2009 from 29.6% in 2002.¹⁷ During the first twelve years of Erdogan's rule, Türkiye's GDP tripled at the tune of US\$798.429 in 2014.¹⁸ A 2013 study projected that there was a strong correlation between AKP's popularity and the growth of the national economy.¹⁹ In 2005, its economy had become so stable that the

government decided to do away with its past multi-zeroed banknotes and got a new currency with a lot few zeroes on it.

But soon after completing its first term in office in 2007, the AKP was confronted with a neo-nationalist resistance movement that equated the AKP's rule with an apocalypse threatening the very survival of the nation.²⁰ In 2008, the Court Cassation (CC), highest court of appeal in the country would fail only by one vote to dissolve the AKP-led Parliament for being the centre of anti-secular activism.²¹

The real turnaround in Erdogan's politics would come following his third consecutive victory in 2011 with more than 50% of votes.²² Now the government would begin conveying a series of alarming messages hinting at altering the established secular model. Erdogan would soon jettison the past debates around democracy, freedom and human rights, and instead would begin

¹⁷ Simon A. Waldman and Emre Kalsikan, p.n. 68



¹⁸ Mecati Plot, p.n. 313

¹⁹ Simon A. Waldman and Emre Kalsikan, p.n. 68

²⁰ Necati Polat, *Regime Change in Contemporary Türkiye: Politics, Rights, Mimesis* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2016) p. 115

²¹ Necati Polat, p. 85

²² Necati Polat, p.141



The Giza protest came as a first major challenge to the rule of Erdogan and his party. The protest that had begun first as a sit-in by the locals and the environmentalists against the government's development plan in the cherished green spot in Istanbul's Giza Park area soon turned into a nationwide protest.

questioning them.²³ The AKP's cadres who were reared in local Islamo-nationalist politics would now start pressing for a shift from tag of conservatives to Islamism. Soon the tag of the AKP as a liberal and pro-European party started eroding.²⁴ The crippling blow to the old politics would come first in the form of banishment of the army from the national political spheres. Under Erdogan, there has been gradual erosion in the role of the army and the spectacular rise of AKP coincided with the vanishing role of military.

Through several coups in the past, the Turkish army had transcended the traditional role of National Security Council (NSC), and between 1980 and the advent of AKP in 2002, the Council had become the most powerful institution in the country. It had accumulated an unlimited power and, in the name of security, had vetoed several decisions taken by the civilian government.²⁵ In 2011, in the crackdown against the army, top ranking commanders and general were

tried on various charges of corruption and treason, and hundreds were forced to seek early retirement setting the tone for its future ostracization. Soon the government turned the NSC into a civil institution and the military expenditure was brought under the watch of the civilian government. New laws were made to free universities and media from the control of the army.²⁶ Referring to the role of army, Erdogan had once said, "Old disputes need to be resolved first before Turkiye can fulfil its unlimited potential."²⁷ In the past, the focal point of the national political identity in Turkiye was loyalty to the republicanism and a respect for the army but the AKP gradually distanced itself from this past narrow matrix of national identity.²⁸

What would further highlight the changing nature of government and shrinking space for dissension was the brutal response of the government to Giza protest in May-June 2013.²⁹ The Giza protest came as a first major challenge to the rule of Erdogan and his party. The protest that

23 Necati Polat, p. 178

24 Necati Polat, p. 147


25 Simon and Emre, p. 19

26 Ahmed El Amraoui and Faisal Edroos, Why Turkiye's Military is not what it used to be, Aljazeera English, June 5, 2018, Accessed <https://bit.ly/3li0vLE> December 23, 2022

27 Simon and Emre, p. 229


28 Necati Polat, p. 76

29 Necati Polat, p.188



Through a national referendum in April 2017, the AKP introduced the Presidential form of Government which was a major blow to an already weakening democracy.

This bizarre move by Erdogan was less to diminish the role of Parliament or eliminate the office of the Prime Minister and more to accumulate unlimited power and bring Turkiye under one-man rule.



had begun first as a sit-in by the locals and the environmentalists against the government's development plan in the cherished green spot in Istanbul's Giza Park area soon turned into a nationwide protest. One of the commentators described the Giza protest as revolt of the dignity.³⁰ It was protest against Erdogan's growing contempt for the secularist urbanites. The protest would send strong message to the Islamo-nationalist and challenge the self-claimed invincibility of AKP's power. Erdogan chose a path of confrontation by othering his own citizens. The government arrested thousands of youths from across the country which further deepened the divide between people and the government. Erdogan exhorted his voters in a series of nationwide rallies to stiffen his core supporters in the face of rising unrest in the country.³¹ By now Erdogan had become intolerant towards the critical voices. One-time close political allies of Erdogan, like liberals and left, were not spared for

expressing dissent and they were branded as foreign stooges.

The current hostility against its own past in Turkiye went beyond Giza. Through a national referendum in April 2017, the AKP introduced the Presidential form of Government³² which was a major blow to an already weakening democracy. This bizarre move by Erdogan was less to diminish the role of Parliament or eliminate the office of the Prime Minister and more to accumulate unlimited power and bring Turkiye under one-man rule. Erdogan was able to win the referendum by a narrow margin as merely 51% of the voters said Yes for the referendum and rest were opposed to it.³³ Later Erdogan said, "We won the referendum whether the result is 1.0 or 5.0 it does not make a difference."

As a result of the referendum, the office of the Prime Minister and cabinet was abolished, giving all power to the President to select his administration. He also reduced the age for membership in the Parliament to eighteen years and enhanced

30 Necati Polat, p. 195

31 Necati Polat, p. 177

32 Norman, Folk and Timur, p. 155

33 Norman, Folk and Timur p. 155


the seats in the Parliament,³⁴ perhaps to have more loyalists' beside him. On his part, there were already some indications about his misgivings towards democracy as he had once stated, "Democracy is like a streetcar. You ride it until you arrive at your destination, and then you step off."³⁵

In the second decade of his rule, Erdogan was not only intent upon altering the core principle of the political structure but he would start taking risk with his old loyalist and past political allies. The biggest victim in this regard was Fethullah Gulen and his movement. Over four decades of its religious-social activism, Gulenist movement had grown as a powerful entity and his network of supporters had penetrated wide and deep into Türkiye's state institutions. The Gulenists were very instrumental in the rise of Erdogan. Past political and judicial reform enunciated by the AKP enjoyed full support from the Gulenists. The Gulenist intellectuals would become increasingly fond of referring the AKP government and


the affiliated literati in the media as the true Islamist with a fetishism of the state.³⁶

But soon both Erdogan and Gulen began to harbour and display a separate ambition to dictate national politics which gradually turned into an open political confrontation. It all began in September 2014 when the Gulenists came with a whistle blower of corruption involving Erdogan, his family and cohorts.³⁷ Erdogan would term the corruption charges as an attempted coup by the Gulenists and would tell that the Gulenists are working as stooge of anti-Türkiye global forces.³⁸ This scandal would provide a window to the Gulenists to make some moral claim amidst rising apprehensions around the Islamist cult of Erdogan.³⁹

The growing ideological and political clashes eventually culminated in an open confrontation and, in 2016 attempted coup, Gulen-supported generals were accused of backing the coup plotters.⁴⁰ In the post-failed coup crackdown, many of the Gulenists were expunged from most



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34 Norman, Folk and Timur, p. 158

35 Zeyon Baren, Torn Country: Türkiye between Secularism and Islamism (Hoover Institution Press: Stanford University, 2010), p. 45

36 Necati Polat, p. 160

37 Necati Polat, p. 94

38 Necati Polat, p. 237

39 Necati Polat, p. 240

40 Soner Cagapte, New Sultan: Erdogan and Crisis of Modern Türkiye (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), p. XVIII

of the state institutions such as the police, media, academic institutions and judiciary.⁴¹ Erdogan not only pursued the suspected coup plotters but started crackdown against the Gulenists and used emergency law to subdue all his political opponents including the Gulenists who had by now turned into political adversaries for him.

During the first decade of the AKP rule, its program and policies were in correspondence with Ataturk secularist polity but a drastic change occurred in 2011 shortly after AKP's third major victory in the election with more than 50% of the votes. The first sign of the bold Islamist order would be an overnight revision of the national compulsory education system. The government introduced a new segment into the primary education, doing away with the binary system of education that had been in place for long. A section on Islamic education was added at primary level. Imam Hatip schools (earlier a centre for vocational course for mosque staff) were revived which were earlier open only for children above high school. A series of elective courses were introduced in both public and private schools which caused unrest, particularly among the Alevi minority who were already seeking exemption from the compulsory religious education.⁴²

As the years passed by after 2011, autocratic trends were more visible in the functioning of the government. There were various reports of wire-tapping the telephone of all key figures of the country like politicians, generals, judges, media tycoons and the businessmen.⁴³ Special courts were formed to try those generals and politicians who were suspected to be accomplices in the past coups.⁴⁴ Even the subsequent elections were tightly managed by the state institutions. The opposition candidates were targeted in the elections. Opposition parties were denied media coverage and, according to a report, Turkish Radio and TV (TRT), a stated-owned media house would allot thirty and twenty-nine hours for AKP and Erdogan respectively while five hours for an opposition party such as the CHP.⁴⁵

After the corruption revelation in 2014, the government brought new legislation to tighten control over the electronic communication. There were efforts to censor public dissent on social media. In 2014, a verdict by the CC against the government order was termed by Erdogan as an unpatriotic act.⁴⁶ Similar court order in 2015 against the illegal detention of journalists received the following remarks from Erdogan, "I neither obey nor respect the ruling."⁴⁷ In 2015, the Rule of Law Index of the World Justice Project would rank Turkiye globally behind China and Russia.⁴⁸

41 Simon and Emre, p. 44

42 Necati Polat, p.145

43 Necati Polat, p. 98



44 Necati Polat, p. 103

45 Necati Polat, p. 232

46 Necati Polat, p.165

47 Necati Polat, p.166

48 Necati Polat, p. 142



The US-led anti-ISIS war in Syria in 2014 further altered the dynamics of Kurd-Turkish government relationship.

The siege of Kobani – a Kurdish region in Syria – in 2014 by the ISIS and Turkiye’s inaction against the ISIS led to discontent among the Kurds in Turkiye.

PKK-TURKIYE RELATIONS UNDER ERDOGAN

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As mentioned earlier, Turkiye’s political landscape in 1970s and 1980s was deeply divided between left and right, and out of this political and ideological separatism there emerged a neo-Marxist Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) which was formed in 1978 by the student icon Abdullah Ocalan.⁴⁹ Its main objective was the establishment of a socialist Kurdish state in the southeast of Turkiye, a Kurd-dominated region. Not long after its formation, Turkiye witnessed its third coup in 1980 and Kurds had to bear the real brunt of it. They were accused of weakening the national sentiments, while Kurds accused the government of denying them all their cultural and political rights.

Again in pursuit of achieving EU membership, the AKP government in 2002 announced a comprehensive welfare package for Kurds, including cultural and educational freedom, which constitutes one of their principal demands.⁵⁰ The AKP launched a program, “Kurdish Opening,” in 2004 and again in 2009, granting them cultural and linguistic rights.⁵¹ One

of the major steps taken by the Erdogan government was the release of thirty-four PKK cadres in 2009 under “Kurdish Opening Plan,”⁵² but soon it ran into trouble straining the relations further. The growing Syria-Turkiye hostility amidst the Arab uprising has been a significant factor in the ongoing hostility between Kurds and Turkish government.

The US-led anti-ISIS war in Syria in 2014 further altered the dynamics of Kurd-Turkish government relationship. The siege of Kobani – a Kurdish region in Syria – in 2014 by the ISIS and Turkiye’s inaction against the ISIS led to discontent among the Kurds in Turkiye and soon a series of riots broke out first in Kurd-dominated south-eastern part of Turkiye and later spread in surrounding regions.

The government’s inactions against the ISIS were seen by the Kurds as an effort to help the defeat of the PKK by the ISIS which would rebalance the former’s power relation for any negotiation with the government in future. The post-Kobani phase was followed by a prolonged phase of sieges, arrests, airstrikes, curfew, terrorist

49 Eric Zurcher, p. 202

50 Simon and Emre, , p. 176

51 Bahar, p.n. 32

52 Simon and Emre, p. 185

attacks, roadside blast and assassinations in Türkiye, and the worst came in the form of Ankara bomb blast in September 2015 killing 102 civilians.⁵³ The 2015-2016 violence and subsequent Turkish military operation against Kurdish outfits in Syria derailed the nascent peace process between PKK and Turkish government, risking the longevity of the conflict.

2016 ATTEMPTED COUP D'ÉTAT AND ERDOGAN'S REINCARNATION

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What paved the way for Türkiye to move further towards politics of majoritarianism was the failed coup in July 2016 which not only eased but expedited the process of expanding and deepening Erdogan's control over national political discourse. All past efforts by Erdogan to establish himself as an unchallenged ruler were further intensified in the guise of confronting the offenders. The government of the day squarely blamed the Gulenist factions and the opposition forces for the attempted coup which gave free hand to Erdogan to reign the country. The post-coup politics of Erdogan created a binary in the political

spheres of the country by depicting a new slogan with a new mantra, "If you are not with the government, you are with the offenders and hence an anti-national."

A systematic campaign was launched to search the conspirators, and thousands of media persons, university and college teachers, politicians from the opposition and armed personnel conceived not to be loyal to the AKP were either fired or imprisoned.⁵⁴ On one occasion Erdogan called for widening the definition of terrorism and said, "There is no difference between a terrorist holding weapon or a bomb and one who uses a pen or a title or with those giving orders to terrorist to reach their aim."⁵⁵ The crackdown in the name of nabbing the conspirator defied all logic of democratic norms, judicious trail or political accountability. The harbingers of civil society such as journalists, academicians and civil liberty NGOs continue to be targeted till date.⁵⁶

RISE AND FALL OF TURKIYE'S ECONOMY

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53 Simon and Emre Kalsikan, p. 193

54 Norman, Folk l and Timur p. 157

55 Bahar and Ahmet , p. 225

56 Bahar and Ahmet, p. 214



Turkiye's economy has been in a better shape under the AKP's rule than at any other time in its recent history.


There was substantial rise in GDP growth in the first decade of Erdogan's rule and, in 2011, the GDP achieved 11.1% rise and inflation rate declined to 6.3% in 2009 from 29.6% in 2002. During the first twelve years of Erdogan's rule, Türkiye's GDP tripled at US\$798.429 in 2014.




democratic polity were the landmark achievements. The adoption of new economic policies and drive for an open economy were once again boosted by an urge to achieve the full membership of the European Union (EU). Accession to EU would require substantial reform to harmonise with various chapters of EU such as promotion of export-oriented economic model and increase in the foreign direct investments. The AKP adopted an economic policy which benefitted disadvantaged and rural poor more directly. A 2013 study projected that there was a strong correlation between the AKP's popularity and the growth of the national economy.⁵⁷

Turkiye's economy has been in a better shape under the AKP's rule than at any other time in its recent history. There was

substantial rise in GDP growth in the first decade of Erdogan's rule and, in 2011, the GDP achieved 11.1% rise and inflation rate declined to 6.3% in 2009 from 29.6% in 2002.⁵⁸ During the first twelve years of Erdogan's rule, Türkiye's GDP tripled at US\$798.429 in 2014.⁵⁹ National economy had become so stable only in 2005 that Türkiye removed the six zeros from its national currency when it established a new Lira. The most booming sectors of Türkiye in the heydays of Türkiye's economic growth were the real estate and construction, and these sectors hit the markets in Europe, Latin America and Africa. The rapid improvements in health sectors, transportation and public services were outcome of an overall economic prosperity. Again, a significant part of this economic achievement can be subscribed



In the recent past Türkiye has suffered severe economic downturn, and much of the liberalisation and entrepreneurial independence dissipated.



⁵⁷ Simon and Emre, p. 68

⁵⁸ Simon and Emre, p. 68

⁵⁹ Mecati Plot, p. 313

to ratification of EU's guidelines such as large-scale structural reforms to hasten the process of EU membership. In 2005, EU-25 had 38% share in foreign direct investments in Türkiye's overall foreign investments.⁶⁰

Like political and democratic graph, country's economic graph also started declining particularly after 2015. In the recent past Türkiye has suffered severe economic downturn, and much of the liberalisation and entrepreneurial independence dissipated. The unemployment rate between 2015 and 2020 has risen from 10.3% to 13.7% and inflation rate from 7.7% to 12.6%.⁶¹ In 2018, Türkiye's Lira had lost 30% of its value against the US dollar. In 2019, Türkiye fell below the 2007 level when the per capita national income had risen to US\$12,480 in 2013 but again declined to US\$9,117 in 2019, not much dissimilar to 2007 level.⁶²

Over the years, support base of the AKP within the public sectors employees and the entrepreneurs eroded, and, after the attempted coup, national economy has suffered significantly and corruption has further deepened. In 2019, Türkiye was ranked 91 among 180 countries by Transparency International.⁶³ In search of freedom and opportunity, a new phase of brain drain was seen affecting the progress

of industrial growth. Many industrial units are reportedly opting for outsourcing their manufacturing and R&D to evade the political tension, uncertainty and growing red-tapism. Many foreign countries reportedly stopped their operations in the countries because of the above reasons.⁶⁴

What further vexed the Turkish economy was the Syrian civil war and the influx of 2.7 million refugees leading to sudden rise in the unemployment.⁶⁵ In 2019 local elections, the AKP lost all major cities⁶⁶ which are likely to impact Erdogan's future political prospects too.

TURKIYE AND THE WORLD

Like many of the AKP's prophecies and promises at home, Türkiye's foreign policy in successive years too started faltering. The first victim in the two decades of Türkiye's foreign policy conduct was its acclaimed philosophy of "Zero Problem with Neighbours" which soon turned into "Only Problem."⁶⁷ Further its dictum of 'Strategic Depth,'⁶⁸ failed to make any significant imprint on Türkiye's foreign policy model.

During the first decade of the AKP's rule (2002-2011), Arab world was the focal point of its foreign policy, and the country was able to embrace its Arab world neighbours

60 Simon and Emre p.199

61 Norman Folk and Timur, p. 170

62 Norman, Folk and Timur, p. 174

63 Norman A. Gaham, Folk Lindahl and Timur Kocaoglu, p.n. 173


64 Peter S. Goodman, Türkiye's Long, Painful Economic Crisis Grinds On, The New York Times, July 8, 2019, Accessed <https://nyti.ms/3W21cnk> on December 10, 2022

65 Simon A. Waldman and Emre Kalsikan, p.n. 70


66 Golun Tol, Türkiye's Endgame in Syria, Foreign Affairs, October 19, 2019

67 Norman, p.n. 175

68 It is strategic philosophy propounded by former Prime Minister of Türkiye, Prof. Davutoglu which refers Türkiye as a bridge between Western and Islamic civilisations



During the first decade of the AKP's rule (2002-2011), Arab world was the focal point of its foreign policy, and the country was able to embrace its Arab world neighbours with some success. But with the outbreak of the Arab uprising in 2011 and subsequent Türkiye's overarching policy, the growing warmth in this relationship came to an end.



with some success. But with the outbreak of the Arab uprising in 2011 and subsequent Türkiye's overarching policy, the growing warmth in this relationship came to an end. Soon its strategic behavior marked by misconception and diplomatic errors would lead to its near-isolation.⁶⁹

Amidst the Arab uprising, Türkiye was the first country in the region to applaud the revolution in pursuit of projecting itself as a role model for the post-Arab uprising Arab polity. Türkiye's support to the revolution was vividly informed by its Islamist orientation.⁷⁰ Türkiye first asked President Mubarak and President Assad to leave their offices and later supported the anti-government forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood (MBH) and rebel forces in Egypt and Syria respectively. Its support to

the MBH led to an ideological confrontation between the coalition consisting of the anti-MBH UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt on the one side and Türkiye on the other.⁷¹

Further Türkiye's support to Qatar during its June 2017 blockade by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt was major departure from its past policies of mediation and negotiation. Soon the murder of a dissident Saudi columnist, Jamal Khashoggi, in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in November 2018 led to another confrontation between Türkiye and Saudi Arabia. The strategic and military involvement of Türkiye in Libya in 2019 and late maritime agreements⁷² between Türkiye and the UN-recognized government of national unity not only ruined the relations with the Arab world but



Türkiye's support to Qatar during its June 2017 blockade by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt was major departure from its past policies of mediation and negotiation.



69 Simon, p.n. 197

70 Katerina Dalacoura, Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Power Projection and Post-Ideological Politics, *International Affairs*, Vol. 97, Issue 4, July 2021, pp. 1125-1142

71 Katerina Dalacoura, Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Power Projection and Post-Ideological Politics

72 Türkiye Signs Maritime Deal with Libya, Reuters, November 28, 2019, Accessed <https://reut.rs/34ekfVv> December 23, 2021

transformed the rift into a major ideological conflict which positioned Türkiye as the biggest strategic and ideological enemy of Egypt along with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The Türkiye-Arab relations dipped to a level when in a rare statement President El-Sisi of Egypt said, “Türkiye being a non-Arab country has no right to intervene in the Arab affairs.”⁷³ Many even today view its strategic overture as a sign of the old “Ottoman Empire.”⁷⁴

Under Erdogan, Israeli-Türkiye relations also ran into trouble as Türkiye often accused Israel of supporting the Kurdish resurgence in the region while Israel criticized Türkiye for its overture to Hamas. Israel once said that Türkiye’s current overture was nothing but a reflection of its new ideology-driven policy.⁷⁵

Over the years, Türkiye’s relationship worsened with Greece, Armenia, and other major countries in the European Union like France, Germany. Türkiye has pursued an uncertain and faltering foreign policy direction between the US and Western Europe on the one hand and Russia on the other. In the past, Türkiye had deep differences with Russia during the South Ossetia crisis in 2008 and both were almost at the brink of war during the height of Syrian conflict in 2014 after Türkiye downed one of the Russian fighter planes for entering into Türkiye’s air space.⁷⁶ In 2020, Türkiye dramatically escalated the

tension with Greece by claiming its “Blue Home Doctrine” with respect to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea. Erdogan in his pursuit of Blue Water policy failed to receive the support of any major country in the EU, and Türkiye’s 2019 Libya deal was also condemned by majority of the EU countries.

Likewise, Türkiye and Republic of Cyprus relations have deteriorated under Erdogan’s rule after Türkiye started drilling Cyprus’s Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) for natural gas. Another evidence of complete disregard to its “Zero Problem with Neighbours” policy was Türkiye’s military and diplomatic support to Azerbaijan in its war against Armenia in September 2020. What further created the rift between the government of Türkiye and the European powers was the decision of President Erdogan to annul the status of Hagia Sophia – for long a symbol of Türkiye’s cosmopolitanism – from the museum to the mosque in July 2020. This was done after the highest administrative court nullified a 1934 cabinet decision to turn the Hagia Sophia into a museum.⁷⁷ There was global hue and cry against the decision as Greece said that it was an insult to its ecumenical character. The European Union’s High Representative also condemned the decision.

Türkiye’s accession to the EU has been a major issue in the political circles of the country since Türkiye was announced to be candidate for its membership

73 Necati Polat, p. 98

74 Gargash: Erdogan Spreading MBH Ideology in Europe, Must Be Confronted, ASHARQ AL AWASAT, November 2, 2020, Accessed <https://bit.ly/3ARbWeE> January 24, 2022

75 Simon, p. 211

76 Simon, p.209

77 Türkiye’s President Formally Re-Converts Hagia Sophia into a Mosque, Time Magazine, July 20, 2020, Accessed <https://bit.ly/3i18wKx> on December 22, 2022

following the Helsinki European Council Meeting in December 1999.⁷⁸ As mentioned earlier, most of the political, economic or legal reforms enunciated in early years of Erdogan's rule were largely aimed at complying with the EU charter to access the EU. Between February 2002 and July 2004, the Turkish Parliament would adopt eight legislative packages to adjust to normative framework of the EU on issues like human rights, democracy and rule of law as required by the Copenhagen political criteria.⁷⁹

For the first time in 2005, Türkiye's then Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul gracefully broke the news to the Turkish public that, "We have reached an agreement and Türkiye will be the only Muslim country in the EU."⁸⁰ But soon both the EU and Türkiye would go apart and the talks would remain suspended after Türkiye in 2006 refused to open its ports and airspaces⁸¹ for the Republic of Cyprus, already an EU member. In later years, the EU put on hold eight chapters out of thirty-five EU chapters and later Republic of Cyprus added other six chapters to be put on hold which in the words of Philip Gordon, "It left Ankara with a sense of betrayal."⁸²

CONCLUSION

The observations in the preceding paragraphs have shown how the Republic of Türkiye has transformed itself in the

course of two decades of the AKP's rule. No doubt the first decade of the AKP's rule had ushered in a new democratic beginning for the country and unprecedented economic growth. Because of the democratic attitude of the AKP, new space could be carved out for the political dissention, and the institutions like judiciary and media – harbinger of a civil society – were able to express themselves freely. The improvement in Türkiye's human rights record and tolerance towards the criticism were appreciated even by the Western powers and they were appreciative of Türkiye's embrace of new politics in pursuit of reaching close to the Western model of governance. What came as a major surprise was the emergence of the new polity under the AKP which was significantly informed by the normative of the Islamist politics which in other Arab countries had failed to succeed.

But the new democratic political space evolved out of the AKP's liberal politics was usurped by new set of polity which seemed embarked upon erecting new political structure painted by shrinking space for political dissentions. Turkish politics became majoritarianism in all sense where people were left with very narrow political choices. Further the creation of constitutionally enshrined Presidential form of Government has reduced the political space for democratic politics in the country and this system is likely to evolve into a one-man rule. Further Türkiye is set

78 Simon, p. 198

79 Necati Polat, p. 88

80 Nicholas Watt, Europe Embraces Türkiye as Diplomatic Deadlock Is Broken, The Guardian, October 4, 2022, Accessed <https://bit.ly/3WIXoHH> December 22, 2022

81 Simon, p.199

82 Philip Gordon and Omer Taspinar, Türkiye on the Brink, The Washington Quarterly, Vol. 29, Issue 3 (Summer 2006), p.63



to hold nationwide elections in June this year when voters will chose the President as well as six hundred Members of Parliament. This election would be a litmus test not only for President Erdogan alone but for the whole national polity because a lot has changed in Turkiye in past two decades under the rule of AKP. Further the change

of Parliamentary system into Presidential system, a series of new legislations granting more power to the President and, last but not the least the attempted coup of July 2016 has created a new kind of binary politics in Turkiye where space for the opposition forces seem to be shrinking.

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of World Affairs**

Sapru House, New Delhi