



India-Turkey Relations in a 'Multidimensional Foreign Policy'

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INTRODUCTION

India-Turkey relations are defined by the historical, ideological and geo-strategic dilemmas ever since the two republics were born. Pakistan is the most important defining factor, often described in most of the discussions on India's relations with another important and militarily powerful Muslim nation, Turkey. Surprisingly, both countries have been able to improve their relations in the period when they were ruled by conservative politicians. The Turkey-India Friendship Treaty says that "there shall be perpetual peace and friendship between India and Turkey", but this peace and friendship has not yet been translated into bilateral relations defined by well-defined strategic and political objectives. This paper tries to locate India within Turkey's "multidimensional foreign policy" where Turkey seeks an active economic relation with India without changing much of its Pakistan policy.

CHANGING CONTEXT

Turkey is expanding its relations beyond its traditional West and EU focused foreign policy. In order to diversify its relations, Turkey has increased its' over all interaction with South Asia, West Asia, Central Asia and Africa. In Gulf countries, it is looking for close defence cooperation with joining Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAF) in which 34 Muslim countries are now members. Turkey's growing and deepening interaction with the Asian countries is likely to increase after Turkey-EU relations are gradually declining. India has deep historical, cultural linkages since centuries much before its independence in 1947. India-Turkey relations are based on centuries' long historical, cultural and political interactions and have mutual understanding.

In their Middle Eastern politics, both countries recognize the state of Israel and firmly support the two nation solution living side by side. Except the post-Mavi Marmara, Turkey has maintained better relations with Israel. Both countries have been successful so far in balancing their relations with Israel and other regional powers like Iran, Saudi Arabia. If India has an impressive maritime security chain spread over the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean, Turkey is an important member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) securing the longest physical border between NATO and the Middle East.

India's post-cold war leadership has been redefining its global engagement, by keeping India's development priorities as a major determinant of its global engagement, and to do that India needs a beneficial global economic and security environment where it works with all major powers. India's "Act East", "Look West", BIMSTECⁱ and its increasing interaction with the East Asia community show that India's global role is going through its greater regional cooperation and connectivity.

Turkey's disenchantment with NATO and the West and its dying EU accession hopes are playing an important role in redefining Turkey's relations with all Asian powers. India and Turkey, in Fareed Zakaria's conception of "rise of the rest", have strong economic and political aspirations and have increased resources to be part of the global leadership. Both countries have successfully diversified their bilateral and multilateral relations beyond Non-Aligned Movement or NATO. Turkish politicians are talking about the betrayal they have met with from their western allies in their fight against Kurdish militants in Syria and Iraq. The deepening differences between Turkey and its Western allies have also made Turkey's waiting time for the EU membership frustratingly longer. All this has not come all of sudden and the country's diversification of its strategic and international relations started alike. Turkey is no longer a West-centric; it is not completely a Middle Eastern country yet, though. Turkish ambitions, both official and political are for a 'multi-dimensional, constructive, proactive, realistic and responsible foreign policy' to minimize its dependence on its Western allies, to access diverse and larger markets and to achieve the goal of what it calls 'expansion of the sphere of peace and prosperity in its region. Where does Turkey stand in its relations with India? Pakistani media is often tempted to overwhelmingly report Turkey's "pro-Pakistan" and "pro-Kashmir" policy in which the Turkish media show only marginal interest and more precisely it does not subscribe the Pakistani description of "Turkey favouring Pakistan over India'.

In a regional perspective, Turkey had not evolved an active South Asian policy as long as it remained a West centric country until a centrist Prime Minister from the Motherland Party Turgut Ozal Turkey undertook an active foreign policy. As he professed his conviction that Turkey "should leave its former passive and hesitant policies and engage in an active foreign policy", he became the first Prime Minister to visit India in 1986. As Ozal himself was a centrist and had run as a candidate from an Islamic party, his policies were widely respected by a large constituency of the Turkish society including the seculars, Islamists, and nationalists. In exploring an active foreign policy and looking towards Asia, Turkey faced a major dilemma of choosing between India and Pakistan; both had fought two wars on their dispute over Kashmir. Turkey as a

Muslim NATO country, an ally of Pakistan since the cold war had maintained its support for Pakistan. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Prime Minister Turgut Ozal decided to maintain a pause on Cyprus and Kashmir in order to de-hyphenate their bilateral relations from these two issues. After Islamic parties came to power, first in 1997 and again in 2002 with a complete majority, Turkey's active foreign policy was branded as a new multi-dimensional foreign policy. From 2002 onwards, bilateral relations have seen quantitative and multi-sectoral progress. However, the change, a remarkable trade relation, is yet to see a major breakthrough in their political relations particularly on India's overdue membership at NSG and United Nations Security Council.

In recent years, Pakistan seems to have influenced Turkey in bring back the Kashmir reference in Turkey's South Asia political discourse. Turkish leadership has made at least four public statements on Kashmir since 2002, mostly during President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's visit to Pakistan. Turkey is also an active participant of "One Belt One Road" project on which India has sought certain clarifications as the project involves part of Indian Territory under Pakistan occupation. The question should be asked what kind of South Asia vision Turkey is developing which should enable India and Turkey to achieve fullest potential of their bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

ISSUES

There are three issues which have been dominating the public discourse of India-Turkey relations: Turkey's growing vocal support to Pakistan on Kashmir issue, Turkey's position on India's membership at NSG as well as in the United Nations Security Council and third, Turkey's role in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood, which include Afghanistan and West Asia. On Kashmir, Turkey's first known reference can be traced back to 1960s when the United States and the UK had roped Turkey to facilitate a dialogue between India and Pakistan. The talks eventually happened in several rounds in Karachi, Rawalpindi, and Delhi. Since then, facilitating "bilateral mechanism", not the United Nations Security Council resolution has remained as the main policy reference for Turkey. In his address to the Pakistani senate on 17 November 2016, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said: "The issue of Kashmir needs a resolution based on dialogue between Pakistan and India in line with U.N resolutions, where the demands of the Kashmiri people should be considered. As a President and a term President of the Organization for Islamic Cooperation [OIC], we are determined to continue our support." Turkey may not have the ability to directly influence the issue but it helps Pakistan to internationalise the Kashmir issue and misuse it out of context.

On India's membership in the Nuclear Supplier Group, Turkey has conveyed its position that it will favour a consensus. "I believe India needs to work on this issue in order to convince the other countries. We are ready to join the consensus if it is reached," Turkey's Minister for Development Lutfi Elvan had stated during his visit to India in November 2016. Previously, Turkey had supported India's membership at the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).

After few interactions between the two sides and exchange of views on the matter, it appears that Turkey is trying to avoid a situation where it can be seen as favouring Pakistan over India.

From Turkish point of view, three issues can be identified as making important discussions when it comes to India-Turkey relations. As India-Turkey trade has increased, so too has the trade deficit widened in favour of India. To overcome it, Turkey wants a Free Trade Agreement, now part of Comprehensive Economic Partnership currently under consideration by both sides. The Turkish side has raised the issue of the Gulen affiliated institutions in India. Turkish side has become very sensitive to the Fethullah Gulen network that they are investigating and trying in several Turkish courts for plotting the failed coup on 15 July 2016. India was among the first countries to have rejected the coup attempt and had announced its support for the democratically elected government. Some of the institutions like Turkish Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (TICCI), having close relations with Gulen-affiliated umbrella groups, still active in India; Turkish side would like to see the business associated replaced with some other pro government business association. As for as Gulen-affiliated schools, charity or interfaith dialogue groups are concerned, their political activities have already gone down due to financial problems. As the investigations and court cases are progressing in Turkey and some western countries are investigating the Gulen network and its role in the coup attempt, Gulen-affiliated networks will remain a major detractor in Turkey's bilateral relations all over the world. After Pakistan government's decision to close down the Gulen-linked schools and expel Turk teacher was overturned by the Peshawar high court, these schools have received a temporary relief. In India no such action has been advanced so far but the Turkish side has not left any opportunity to raise the issue with higher authorities.

Turkey's economic imperatives are the most important factors shaping Turkey's present foreign policy while the country is facing an impending risk of going through a long-term economic slowdown. As global economic slowdown has only mildly recovered, Turkey's economy is facing fresh turbulence following a series of terrorist attacks and the failed coup attempt. Prime Minister Binali Yildirim expects that the economy won't revert to its longstanding target of 5 percent expansion until 2018, according to media reports. The World Bank reports that Turkey's growth has slowed from 6.1 percent in 2015 to an estimated 2.1 percent in 2016, following the failed coup attempt and several terrorist attacks. The World Bank fears that a strong recovery is difficult.ⁱⁱThe Turkish government estimates a recovery of growth again through some corrective measures taken.ⁱⁱⁱ In recent months, Turkey has demonstrated flexibility to engage with Russia, Iran and to pursue more a conciliatory role in Syria, compared to its earlier active support to the opposition groups in Syria. As normalization of relations with Russia and Israel progress fast, and Turkish cooperation with Russian-Iranian side in Syria has created a new dialogue forum, the Astana Dialogue, security situation in Turkey is more is likely to improve.

The total trade volume between India and Turkey had steadily declined from 7 billion in 2014 to 6 billion in 2015 and 2016. The above-mentioned corrective measures, normalisation with Russia and Israel, peace process in Syria, taken by the Turkish government will likely to help India-Turkey trade. To bring back trade relations and to bridge the deficit gap, Turkey is actively

seeking Free Trade Agreement and now a Comprehensive Economic Partnership to achieve the target of 15 billion bilateral trade and bridge the trade deficit.

Turkey-India Bilateral Trade

Year	Export (Million)	Import (Billion)	Volume	Balance
2007	348.229	2.299.732	2.647.961	-1.951.50
2011	756.082	6.498.651	7.254.733	-5.742.57
2014	586.589	6.898.575	7.485.164	-6.311.98
2015	650,424	5,613,217	6,263,641	-4,962.79
2016 (September)	613.94	2287.29	2901.23	
Gold, metalliferous ores and metal scrap, crude fertilizers and crude minerals, non-ferrous metals, power-generating machinery and equipment		Petroleum, petroleum products and related materials, textile yarn and related products, plastics in primary forms), organic chemicals, road vehicles		

Source: Foreign Ministry, Republic of Turkey and [bilateral-trade-report/turkey](#)

Turkey's Customs Union with the EU since 1996 has allowed Indian companies to access European markets and many Indian companies have invested in Turkey toward expanding their business in Europe.

As of now, there are more than 150 companies having registered businesses in Turkey in the form of joint ventures, trade, and representative offices. M/s Polyplex, GMR Infrastructure, TATA Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, Reliance, Ispat, Aditya Birla Group, Tractors and Farm Equipment Ltd., Jain Irrigation, Wipro, and Dabur are few among them. The Joint Study Group on FTA had already held many meetings and reached to a conclusion that both sides should explore the possibility of Comprehensive Economic Partnership. Trade in Goods, Services, Investment and IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) were already discussed.

Common perspective

Both India and Turkey have global and regional aspirations towards achieving a combined objective of development and security. Both countries have been facing militancy inside their countries, but not sufficiently been acknowledged by the outside world. On counterterrorism efforts, apart from having an effective extradition treaty, both countries have enhanced intelligence sharing, particularly after the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Several Indians suspected of joining the Islamic State have been deported to India. Turkey's recent

military operations against the Islamic State in Syria have been effective in restricting the terror group's dramatic expansion.

As the Persian Gulf countries are preparing for "Post-Oil" economy, they are looking towards Asian countries to be their partners in restructuring their economy. Differences over the Syrian crisis aside, Iran and Turkey have maintained closer and pragmatic ties. Since the economic sanctions on Iran, Turkey stayed as the major route for Iran's international trade, occasionally defying the US imposed sanctions. With Iran, Pakistan and major Central Asian countries, Turkey looks towards energizing the Economic Cooperation Organization by increasing more road and rail connectivity from Pakistan to Turkey.

If this is the upcoming template of Turkey's South Asia vision, India and Turkey need to intensify their over-all interaction and maximize mutual interests. Indians are closely observing Turkey's deepening military ties with Pakistan and China with whom Turkey had once attempted to purchase a long-range missile defence system from China Precision Machinery Import and Export Corporation in 2013, then vetoed by Turkey's NATO allies.

Turkey no longer wants to remain dependent on NATO for its security and is looking to diversify its security arrangements by engaging more with China, Russia, and Pakistan. Turkey's total military export has increased from 70 million USD in 1999 to one billion in 2014 aiming a defence export worth \$25 billion by 2023. Turkey's defence companies are going global to produce small weapons and military equipment.

India is already among the biggest economies of the world, having integrated into the global economy and its relations with Turkey are important for India's trade expansion globally reaching Central Asia, Europe, and West Asian countries. Both countries have started heavily investing in research and development, their cooperation in related areas of research and development will be beneficial for both sides and in some cases, India's emerging research workforce may help Turkey's research industry.

For broader regional cooperation which includes security and stability of the Persian Gulf, North Africa, Afghanistan where the two countries are ambitious to expand their trade ties, they need to explore the ways to cooperate regional security. In recent years, both sides have exchanged crucial intelligence on counterterrorism particularly about the ISIS. In 2008, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then Prime Minister, had agreed to enhance cooperation between the two defence forces. President Pranab Mukharjee and President Abdullah Gul also "agreed to enhance cooperation between two defence forces through military-to-military contacts and training exchanges" according to an interview President Mukharjee gave to the Turkish news agency Cihan during his visit in October 2013.

In most part of their diplomatic relations, India and Turkey have not allowed any difference to affect their regular bilateral relations. There is already similarities and common understanding on issues related to Persian Gulf security, counter-terrorism, peace and stability in

Afghanistan. There are opportunities and huge potentials, untapped so far, in bilateral trade, science and technology and counter-terrorism.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding the long-standing gap between the two countries' political and security perceptions, trade and cultural relations have seen a progressive growth in the last one decade. The recent trade volume has seen a decline mostly because of global slowdown, both sides have once again have talked to reach an agreement on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership in order to double their bilateral trade to \$15 billion, a target missed in 2015. Turks are looking for some corrections in their bilateral trade in order to bridge the deficit gap.

Turkish side is looking to access India's expanding market for automotive and auto parts, textile machinery, chemical industry (Petrochemicals, inorganic and organic chemicals, fertilizers, paints, pharmaceuticals, soaps and detergents, synthetic fibres, essential oils, cosmetics and personal care products) Plastic products, Jewellery (precious metals and stones), Glass and glassware products, Leather products, Electrical equipment and electronics, Construction materials.

There are several big projects Turkish businessmen, particularly from the construction sector, have completed in India. Turkish construction and engineering companies have established their business globally. But their experience in India is reportedly not much promising; firstly because India's domestic construction sector is very strong, secondly, India's real estate business is being reformed by multiple government regulations. As a result, for any foreign company to invest in construction sector involve more complexities than in any other sector. Both sides need to work out to ease all difficulties pertaining to investment from construction and engineering companies.

Completion of Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in near future will be one important tool to rationalise the trade relations between the two countries which will also translate into an advanced political and strategic relations in the coming years. This requires an enhanced level of political consultations and exchange of ideas between the two governments and leaders.

Security and counter-terrorism cooperation is another area where India and Turkey have to cooperate. Turkey is the only military power in the region whose logistical support against the Islamic state bases in Syria and Iraq are most required. No matter what are the political differences between the United States, Russia, and Iran, Turkey's long border, over 900 kilometres, give Turkey a strategic depth to act against the ISIS. As the ISIS has lost much of its territorial gains, weaponry and supply lines, terrorist attacks on Turkey have risen in a dramatic way. India's fight against terrorism and to ensure peace and stability in West Asia, India has maintained close consultation with Turkey and needs to enhance it further.

In today's West Asian security architecture, Turkey has emerged as a key player, perhaps outpacing Iran by entering in multiple bilateral and multilateral security arrangements, including the formation of Islamic Military Alliance. Turkey has also entered a defence pact with the state of Qatar and a high-level strategic cooperation with Saudi Arabia. Turkey's role in the Persian Gulf as well as in North Africa has increased politically and economically. Turkey and India both maintain close relations with Israel but they also have good relations with other West Asian countries. Both powers have the ability to help the peace process to resolve the longest conflict in the region. A lasting resolution of the Arab-Israel conflict will help change the security discourse.

Both India and Turkey have seen growth in their economy mostly in the service sector and both are committed to becoming self-dependent in critical areas of technology, defence, and science. Their expenses on research and development are a clear indicator that both countries have a goal not just becoming a consumer but also the one who have complete access to the technology they are using. In doing so, both countries have an opportunity in common research programs in science and technology.

After registering impressive growth rate for a decade, the Turkish economy is now faced with multiples risks emanating from continued terrorist attacks inside Turkey, a volatile global economy and increasing tension between Europe and Turkey. This is what makes important for Turkey to look beyond Europe and West and strengthen its ties with the Asian economies. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement about his country's willingness to join the Shanghai Five (SCO), has come in the context of Turkey's loosing hope in becoming part of the EU. As the risks emanating from continued terrorist attacks are slowing Turkish economy, added by the global crisis, lowering domestic demands in Europe, Turkey needs to expand its economic relations with Asian economies. While it is true that both sides historically belong to different poles in the international politics, and Turkey remains a close ally of the Western bloc as a NATO member, both countries have always had reasons to cooperate in all regional and international issues from trade to security.

The Prime Minister-headed Supreme Council of Science and Technology (BTYK) had decided to increase Turkey's R&D expenditure from 1% to 3% by 2023, which has led the government to incentivize investments in R&D. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also announced an ambitious "Make in India" program which aims to make India a manufacturing hub where "Made in India" marked products can go globally. Research and development, as well as higher education can be one more important area of cooperation between India and Turkey.

Turkey is very keen to attract Indian visitors to Turkey. In 2015, there were 130,000 Indian tourists to Turkey and Turkish tourism expects more arrivals. To this end, Turkish airlines and Air India have already signed a Free Sale Codeshare Agreement which allows both the airlines to market each other's flights by their own code and flight numbers on a free sale basis. As Turkish tourism industry grows, Turkish airlines would seek the expansion of their operations.

Turkey today is in need for an active and compulsive “Look East” policy and its partnership with India particularly in the fields of trade, research and development, higher education and tourism. The new Indian government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been actively working on what he called “Look West” policy, which has reenergized India’s overall West Asia engagement.

Here are some recommendations for India-Turkey relations to maximize their mutual interests:

- A Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, currently under consideration by both the governments, will be a qualitative step forward towards enhancing India-Turkey relations.
- It is important to diversify their trade relations and find a joint mechanism in many fields including construction and renewable energy.
- Persian Gulf remains as an important energy source for countries, its security and stability is a common. The two nations can play a constructive role in facilitating humanitarian assistance and rebuilding.
- On issues related to counter terrorism, security and even military and defence cooperation will help both sides. As Turkey will remain an important country from where anti-ISIS international coalition is operating, to upgrade the existing counter-terrorism cooperation and intelligence sharing will be an important step forward.
- Both Turkey and India have evolved from an agricultural economy to service economy and have successfully developed a credible manufacturing sector. However, they need to develop their own research and development in order to qualify for an advanced and innovative stage of manufacturing and design.
- In areas of expansion of health services to common people and rural areas, both countries can benefit from their experiences. Moreover both countries have become an important hub of medical tourism medical services are an important area for cooperation.
- As both India and Turkey have invested immensely in research and development activities, particularly in pharmaceuticals, IT, defence, telecom, automotives, renewable energy, water conservation, both sides have many opportunities in joint R&D projects in areas of mutual interest.
- Art, Film and Culture have played an important role in bringing the two people closer in recent years, it is important to intensify the cultural exchange. This should include an exchange of ideas between the institutions, individuals as well as government levels.

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Disclaimer: Views expressed are of author and do not reflect the views of the Council.

End Notes

ⁱ The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation

ⁱⁱThe World Bank, “Turkey Regular Economic Note - February 2017”,

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/publication/turkey-econ-note>,

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Development, Turkey, “Medium Term Programme (2017 - 2019)”, Ministry of Development, Turkey

[http://www.mod.gov.tr/Lists/MediumTermPrograms/Attachments/13/Medium%20Term%20Programme%20\(2017-2019\).pdf](http://www.mod.gov.tr/Lists/MediumTermPrograms/Attachments/13/Medium%20Term%20Programme%20(2017-2019).pdf)