

Turkish- Indian Relations

Professor Mehmet Nur Altınörs



INTRODUCTION

Although it has a rich and ancient history, India is a fairly new state. This subcontinent is the second most crowded country in the world. In administrative terms, it consists of 28 states and seven union regions. While Hindi and English are the official languages, 22 regional languages are spoken in different states. India has been the birth place of four religions; Hinduism, approximately, (80 % of the population, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Nearly 14 % of the population) belongs to Islam, thus composing the world's largest Muslim minority population. Despite such diversity, serious domestic and international conflicts, high poverty and illiteracy rates, India has successfully maintained to be a democratic state until present time. India has the fourth largest army in the world. According to George Friedman, the Indian army has three major functions. The first is to balance Pakistan, the second is to protect the northern border from Chinese invasion. The last, but not the least, is to keep the nation's internal security (1).

The Indian economy is growing at an average rate of 7 % and is the second in world agricultural production. The service and automotive industry, software exporting, electronic trade, start-up business are the main sectors that contribute to economy. Birth control, air pollution, unemployment, regional and individual income imbalances are the major domestic problems to be overcome. Samuel P. Huntington argues that in the post-Cold War era, seven or eight major blocs were formed, such as the West, Islam, Orthodox Civilization, the Confucius Civilization, the Hindu Civilization, the Buddhist Civilization, Japan, and the Latin American Civilization. He also claims that most of the world's great civilizations have a leader or core state. Russia, India, China, Japan and the USA are the leading states of their civilizations (2). Such remarks highlight the importance of India.

Turkey is a country located in near East, at the intersection of three continents. It has a population of 83 million and is the world's 18th big economy. Turkish Republic was established nearly a century ago as a secular, nation state following the collapse of six-century old, religious-based Ottoman Empire. Turkey has been a NATO member for 69 years. A vast majority of the population is Muslim and of which, 74 % is Sunni. Turkey ranks as the 11th military power in the world. The political system is multi-party democratic parliamentary system, although there have been two military coups in the last six decades. Major political conflicts and civil wars in neighboring countries pose serious security, humanitarian, economic and social problems for Turkey.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The influence of Turks in India started with the establishment of the Ghaznavids State (963-1187) and reached its climax during the reign of Sultan Mahmut (990-1030). Relations between the Ottoman Empire and the Muslims of India date back to 14th century. Relations were revived with the conquest of Istanbul and the first official relations began in this period. The overtaking of Caliphate by Ottomans deeply affected the Indian Muslims. The Ottoman Empire opened its first consulates in Mumbai and Calcutta in 1849. In some cities of India, money was raised for the Ottomans in support of the 1853 Crimean War (3).

Following the end of World War I, in India, the religious-political initiative called the "Caliphate Movement", based on the Islamic ideology has gained a political-national character over time. Organizations such as, The Muslim League, Câmî'atü'l-Ulemâ, the All India- Khilafat Conference were established. At that time, the Muslim population in India was around 70 million. For these people, loyalty to the Caliph expressed a religious-cultural identity and strengthened the political-national consciousness (4).

Khilafat movement was initiated to protect the Turkish Khalifa and to save his Empire from the threats of Western powers. Khilafat Committee started collecting a fund to help the nationalist movement in Turkey and to organize the Khilafat movement in India (5). The Muslim League, Islamic organization working for autonomy, collaborated with Hindus acting for the same purpose (4).

Gandhi supported the Khilafat cause and became a member of the Central Khilafat Committee and joined Indian National Congress with the issue of self-government and Khilafat demands. Khilafat leaders had made Hindus and Muslims in a united front against British rule in India (5).

Turkish- Indian Relations

The young Turkish Republic abolished the Caliphate on 3 March, 1924. Until this date, Turkish-Indian relations were about supporting the independence of the Caliph. At the All India Conference, the Ankara government was criticized for abandoning Islamic interests (6).

Abolition of Caliphate sparked positive and negative reactions in the Indian press. Those who criticized this decision, claimed that the Caliphate was an institution that could not be abolished, that the Turks had the right to elect their own government, but that they did not have the right to abolish the Khalifah. Some suggested that Mustafa Kemal take over the Caliphate position. On the other hand, those who supported the decision, stated that the Caliphate did not help neither the African Muslims nor the Indian Muslims who were attacked by both the domestic and foreign enemies. It was also argued that the Turks would not have the chance to achieve a full national identity under Caliphate, and that without this they would not be able to exist free and independent in Europe (7).

According to Indian Muslim historian, Muhammed Sadık, the abolition of the Caliphate caused many changes in Indian politics. The unity of the Muslim intellectuals was broken, and it was one of the most important reasons, if not the only reason, for the Muslim-Hindu cooperation to end. The abolition of the Caliphate even led to the start of the process of deterioration of the Hindu-Muslim relations and eventually the disintegration of the country (4).

The country where the Turkish revolution has had the greatest impact was India. Both Muslims and Hindus were inspired by the events that took place in Turkey in the autonomy and independence movements against the British colonial administration. Muhammed Sadık considers the Turkish revolutionary movement and the new Republic as the beginning of national awareness in India. He also thinks that the Turkish revolution's attitude towards religious conservatism as well as the anti-colonialist movement inspired the Indian freedom movement and the nationalistic and secular ideas of Indian intellectuals (4).

TURKISH-INDIAN RELATIONS

There have been three major disputes between India and Turkey. The Kashmir problem is one of the most chronic, and unresolved conflicts in the world. With regard to this conflict, Turkey has always supported Pakistan.

The second important problem is the Cyprus issue and the third one is supporting of different approaches in the international political arena during the Cold War years. India pursued an independent and neutral policy in the international platform during the Cold War years, and was one of the leaders of the "Third World Movement". However, Turkey, as a NATO member and a loyal ally of United States (US) implemented pro-Western policies especially in the first decade of the Cold War.

KASHMIR CONFLICT

Muslim leader Muhammed Ali Jinnah quoted " There is only one practical and realistic way of resolving the Hindu-Muslim problems and differences between them. This is to divide the Indian subcontinent into two independent parts, Pakistan and India. Each of us must trust each other to treat the opposing minority within ourselves fairly".

It is up to historians and political scientists to debate whether or not the division of the Indian peninsula into two independent countries on a religious basis on August 15, 1947 was an inevitable event. It has been clear that, over time the division could not completely solve the problems. Located in the northwest of India and northeast of Pakistan, Kashmir has been one of the most fundamental problems between the two countries.

Kashmir was predominantly a Muslim emirate in 1947 ruled by a Hindu, Gulab Singh. Kashmir was divided into two, with the vast majority remaining in the Indian side. The 740- kilometer control line drawn between the two sides caused constant violations and clashes. Pakistan's leader Jinnah's proposal to determine the future of the region with a plebiscite was rejected. India claimed that Kashmir belonged to them. When a cease-fire was reached in January 1965 with the initiative of the United Nations, 65 % of Kashmir remained under the control of India. A law was passed in 1957, for the unification of ceasefire control areas with India, complicated the already complex problem and drag both sides into the 1965 war. The third war that started in 1971 brought a refugee problem involving millions.

The war between India and the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the development of Pakistan-PRC relations in this process has multiplied the problems between India and Pakistan. China supported Pakistan on the Kashmir conflict after 1959. While Pakistan was getting closer to China, India tried to establish close relations with Soviet Union (8).

Turkey's traditional affiliation with Pakistan has naturally led to support of Pakistani view on Kashmir issue. This view, in its simplest form, is a plebiscite under the supervision of United Nations.

Muddassir Quamar refers to Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit to India during April 30-May 1, 2017 when he declared Turkey's willingness to host a "multilateral dialogue" to resolve the Kashmir problem. He also recalls Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's statement during a visit to Islamabad that Turkey fully supports Pakistan on Jammu and Kashmir conflict. Mr. Çavuşoğlu, further proposed that India should allow the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) fact-finding team to visit Jammu and Kashmir (9).

Mehmet Özkan claims that Turkey has softened its Pro-Pakistan approach on the issue realizing that it is important to build up a coherent and comprehensive relationship with India. He also points out that Turkey's Asian policy is no longer based on Pakistan

Turkish- Indian Relations

as it was in the recent past. Therefore, Turkey has emphasized the importance of bilateral talks between India and Pakistan for finding a sustainable peace process concerning the Kashmir problem (10).

Onur Sinan Güzaltan approaches the Kashmir problem on a global scale and points out that it is an important opportunity for Turkey to evaluate the possibilities of cooperation with China through Pakistan, in connection with the Kashmir issue. Since the relations of Turkey with USA is gradually deteriorating, Turkey tries to augment its economic ties with China and seek Chinese support in Cyprus and East Mediterranean problems. China, on the other hand, is pursuing a policy of improving relations with Pakistan in order to reduce the influence of India in the region and to realize the Belt and Road project. China also assumes that it can soften the reaction of Islamic world on the Uyghur issue by supporting Pakistan and cooperating with Turkey. Güzaltan thinks that USA is supporting India against China on the Kashmir issue while Russia is seeming to keep quiet. Israel, which has close military cooperation with India, takes an anti-Pakistan position (11).

BANDUNG CONFERENCE

The Bandung Conference was held in Bandung city on April 18-24, 1955, on the initiative of India, Pakistan, Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), Burma (later Myanmar) and host Indonesia, with the participation of 29 countries. Closer economic and cultural cooperation was envisaged between these countries, many of which gained their independence after the Second World War.

The agenda of the conference included colonialism, racism and Non-Alignment policy against West and East Blocs. These countries wanted to remain neutral and independent, and because of this policy they were also named "3rd World". The Soviet Union was trying to draw these newly independent countries that had economic problems to her side.

Turkish Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Fatin Rüştü Zorlu spoke very strongly against the concept of neutrality and proposed that all states supporting the idea of Non-Alignment should join the West Bloc in order to stop communist expansion. He also commented that freedom, independence and peace are not blessings obtained without any effort, but ideals whose realization and protection imposes heavy responsibilities on each partner. Mr. Zorlu also said that states should follow a realistic path by not getting caught in some words and dreams. He further pointed out the important role played by NATO in maintaining peace and stated that all weapons should be reduced for coexistence.

Indian Prime Minister Nehru heavily criticized Turkey, NATO and Pakistan because of her close cooperation with Turkey. He said that Atlantic Pact is the patron of colonialism. The Turkish delegation demanded a joint proposal with Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan and the Philippines to condemn the destructive activities of international communism. The ideas and proposals of Turkey put forward during the conference, caused a negative impact on Turkey's relations with the 3rd World nations.

CYPRUS ISSUE

Cyprus is an island in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, only 70 kilometers away from Turkey's south coast. Since the mid-1950's, the Cyprus issue has been the most important agenda item of Turkish foreign policy due to conflict between the Greek majority and Turkish minority. The efforts aiming to find a peaceful and lasting solution to the problem yielded fruitful results following the agreements of Zürich, and London, February 19, 1959. The signing parties were United Kingdom, Turkey, Greece, the Turkish and Greek communities of the island. According to the treaties, a constitutional order was established while Turkey, Greece and Britain were designated as guarantor states. Eventually, the Republic of Cyprus was declared on August 16, 1960.

Greek Cypriots initiated a military coup d'état under the leadership of Nikos Sampson and backed up by the military junta in Greece in June, 1974. The aim was realization of ENOSIS, that is uniting the island with Greece.

Turkey has used its rights arising from international agreements and intervened in Cyprus on July 20, 1974 in order to prevent bloodshed, restore order and bring peace back. The establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus was declared on November 15, 1983, but no recognition was received except Turkey.

India supported Greeks during Turkish military operation in 1974 and afterwards recognized the Southern Greek administration as the sole representative of Cyprus. In return, Nicosia has consistently backed New Delhi on Jammu and Kashmir conflict.

Inter-communal negotiations that have started in 1968 aiming to find a solution for the conflict have been going on till present with many interruptions in between. These efforts have not yielded a successful result.

Nuclear Suppliers Group (Nsg)

In 1970, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was signed. The main objective was to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear technology. While 189 United Nations member states along with two observers were included in the treaty, India, Pakistan, North Korea, Israel, South Africa, Iran, Syria and Libya refrained from signing the treaty.

The NSG was founded in 1975 with the purpose of preventing nuclear exports that would be used in the production of nuclear weapons. The 48 signatory countries including Turkey aimed to coordinate their exports to non-nuclear states and prevent the nuclear proliferation. NSG has established two sets of guidelines to achieve its principles. These guidelines were published by IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). According to these rules, a non-NPT state can not become a member of NSG.

Turkish- Indian Relations

India and Pakistan, both possessing nuclear energy, have applied to NSG membership. China supports Pakistan while USA and Britain back up India. A final decision has not been yet reached and Turkey's approach to the issue will be important as far as the bilateral relations are concerned with India. Muddassir Quamar reflects Turkey's position on India's membership. Turkey believes that both India and Pakistan have right to claim for membership, but this view is in contradiction with India's understanding that nuclear proliferation records of the two Non-NPT signatories are vastly different (9).

ARMS CONFLICT

In 1962, the Indian government requested arms from the Turkish government to be used at the ongoing war with China. Supporting India against China, USA sent some of the military supplies from NATO bases to India for emergency aid. After Pakistan claimed that India would use these weapons against itself, the Turkish government changed its decision and refrained from shipping weapons to India.

DISCUSSION

There are three main factors affecting the relations between Turkey and India. The first one is the different positions of the two countries in the international arena during the Cold War years.

Secondly, the bilateral relations are affected by the relations of these countries with third parties. India's good relations with Armenia and Greek Cypriot administration are noteworthy in contrast to Turkey's traditional close relationship with Pakistan and its planning of joint projects with China. Turkey supported Pakistan's view on Kashmir issue.

Lastly, the two countries do not know each other sufficiently and are not fully aware of the characteristics and potential of the other party in spite of the efforts spent to that cause. Mehmet Özkan agrees with this last factor and he adds the lack of global dynamics in Turkish-India relations as a major obstacle (10).

Mr. Turgut Özal won the elections of 1983 in Turkey and he was appointed as the Prime Minister. The general approach of Mr.Özal's to foreign affairs was to give priority to problems that would be rather easily solved and to increase commerce. He believed that chronic and more complex issues could be postponed and finding solutions to such conflicts may be eased by the atmosphere of trust created by previous improved relations and achievements. Omair Anas touched on the same issue and stated that Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and Prime Minister Turgut Özal decided to deal with the bilateral relations independently from the Cyprus and Kashmir problems (12).

India understands the strong bond between Turkey and Pakistan. However, they have difficulty in understanding why this closeness hinders developing closer relations with India.

Henry Kissinger predicts that there will be at least six power centers in the new world order. These are the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia and possibly India (13).

According to projections, it is estimated that India's population will exceed China in the near future. This increase is expected to create population pressure on the countries of the region and also on developed countries and consequently lead to serious political, economic and social problems.

Areas of cooperation between Turkey and India include railway construction, housing, pharmaceuticals, health, counter-terrorism, cinema industry, entertainment, renewable energy, energy efficiency, environmental technology, bio-technology, information technology, tele-communication computerization, space and scientific research.

The future relations of the two countries will be shaped by the willingness of the decision-makers on both sides to promote cooperation in various areas, to increase trade volume, their capacity to provide flexibility in their views on chronic problems, and international developments other than themselves.

REFERENCES

- 1) George Friedman. Gelecek on yıl (Turkish). The next decade. Pegasus Yayınları (Pegasus Publishing Co.), İstanbul,2011, pp. 244
- 2) Samuel P. Huntington. Medeniyetler Çatışması (Turkish). The Clash of Civilizations.Vadi Yayınları (Vadi Publishing Co.), Ankara,1995, pp.170-171
- 3) H. Hilal Şahin. Osmanlı Devleti ile Hindistan Müslümanlarının Tarihi Bağ ve "Hindistan Hilafet Hareketi" (Turkish). The Ottoman Empire and India Muslims. History and "Indian Caliphate Movement". Kafkas Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi.Kafkas University, Journal of the Institute of Social Sciences. Sayı/Number 24, Sonbahar/Autumn 2019, pp.731-754.
- 4) Muhammed Sadık. The Turkish Revolution and the Indian Liberation Movement, South Asian Books, New Delhi,1983
- 5) Nazmul Islam. Turkish Soft Power Policy Towards India, Pakistan and Bangladesh: A Comparative Assessment from Humanitarian Perspective. www.icwa.in, www.academia.edu/37939678. www.icwa.in
- 6) Halil İnalçık. Osmanlı ve Modern Türkiye(Turkish). Ottoman and the Modern Turkey. Neşe Matbaacılık A.Ş. (Neşe Printing Co.), İstanbul,2013, pp.176

Turkish- Indian Relations

- 7) Fida Hussain. Hindistan Matbu'atında Türk Kurtuluş Savaşı ve Inkılabı (Turkish). Turkish War of Independence and Revolution in the Indian Press. Ankara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, İslam Tarihi ve Sanatları Anabilim Dalı. Doktora Tezi,Ankara,2012. Doctorate Thesis. Ankara University, Institute of Islamic History and Arts, Department of Social Sciences, Ankara, 2012.
- 8) Cengiz Topel Mermer. Keşmir Sorunu ve Pakistan-Hindistan İlişkileri Üzerine Etkisi (Turkish). Kashmir Question as a Matter on India-Pakistan Relations. Doktora Tezi. İstanbul Üniversitesi, Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, Siyaset Bilimi ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı,İstanbul,2018. Doctorate Thesis. İstanbul University, Social Sciences Institute, Department of Political Science and International Relations, İstanbul, 2018
- 9) Md. Muddassir Quamar.India-Turkey Relations: Frozen in Time? IDSA(Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses) Issue Brief, May 12, 2017.
- 10) Mehmet Özkan. Can the Rise of "New" Turkey Lead to "New" Era in India-Turkey Relations. IDSA ISSUE brief. www.academia.edu/335234
- 11) Onur Sinan Güzaltan. Keşmir sorunu: Türkiye ve Çin arasında işbirliği imkanı (Turkish). Kashmir issue: The possibility of cooperation between Turkey and China. <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/kesmir-sorunu-turkiye->
- 12) Omair Anas.India-Turkey Relations in a "Multidimensional Foreign Policy". Indian Council of World Affairs.Policy Brief, 5 April 2017
- 13) Henry Kissinger. Diplomacy. Simon and Schuster,NewYork,1994, pp. 23