

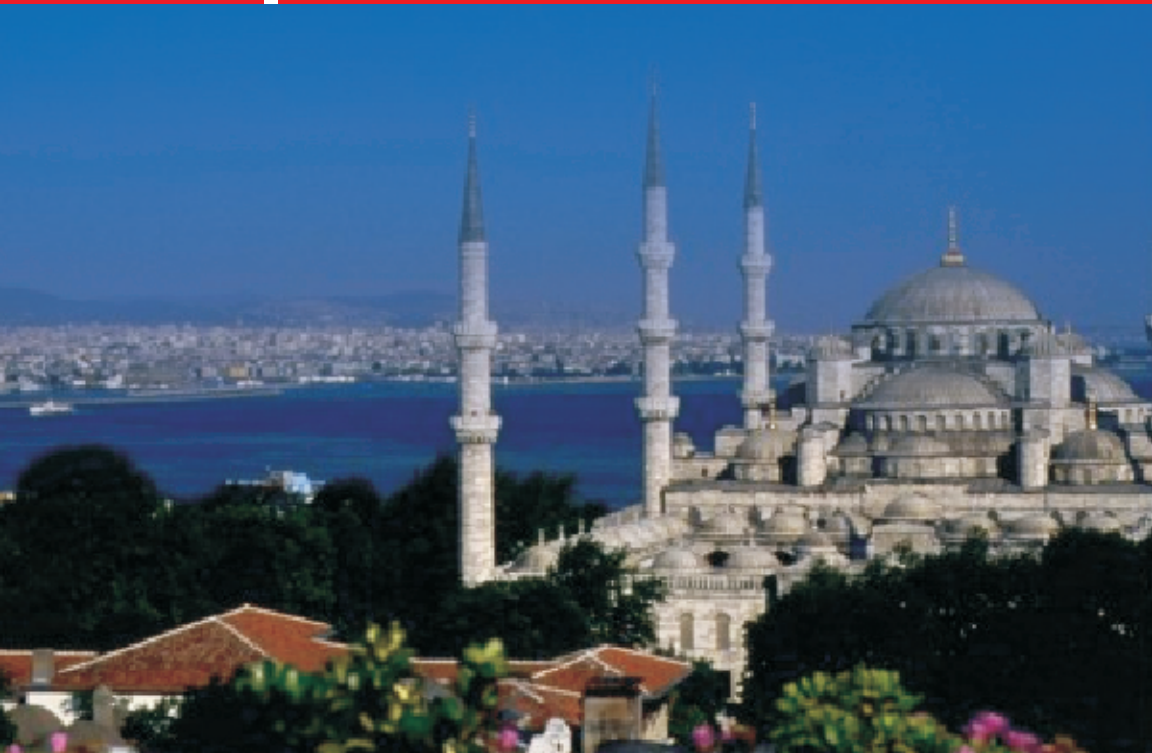
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No. 32 January 2014

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# TURKEY AND ITS QUEST FOR LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE WEST ASIAN REGION



RAJEEV AGARWAL



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**IDSA Monograph Series**

**No. 32 January 2014**

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**Turkey and its Quest for  
Leadership Role  
In the West Asian Region**

**Col Rajeev Agarwal**



**INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE  
STUDIES & ANALYSES**

**रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान**

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Col Rajeev Agarwal

January 15, 2014



# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Turkey has always been an important country in the region. Blessed by geography, it acts as a bridge between Asia and Europe, is surrounded by the sea on three sides and sits astride one of the most important waterways in the world, the Bosphorus, connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Its borders traverse through the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), the Muslim and Arab world (Iran, Syria, Iraq) as well as Europe (Bulgaria, Greece) bestowing upon it a unique geographic position as well as advantage. The fact that great majority of the potential areas of crisis in post cold war era are located around Turkey (the Caucasus, Balkans and the Middle East) gives the country the added strategic importance.

Turkey is also the heir to the great Ottoman Empire, which at various points dominated the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus and deep into Russia, was born after its collapse after World War I as a nation much smaller and more vulnerable than the great empire. As a result, its initial years were tentative, uncertain and often very cautious. Even in World War II, it was very cautious. Later, it aligned with the United States during the Cold War. Several decades on, with the World Wars long over and the Cold War era a thing of the past, Turkey is emerging as a revitalised country faced with a host of opportunities for expansion. The collapse of Soviet Union and reduced external threats, internal political stability, consistent economic growth and strong and modern armed forces has helped Turkey emerge as a power of reckoning. The country is now seeking

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<sup>1</sup> This monograph includes some portions of my web comment "Is Turkey's Foreign Policy of 'Zero Problems with Neighbours' Coming Apart?-A Critical Appraisal, published at IDSA on October 31, 2012, available at [http://idsa.in/idsacomments/IsTurkeysForeignPolicyof%20ZeroProblemswithNeighbours\\_RajeevAgarwal\\_311012](http://idsa.in/idsacomments/IsTurkeysForeignPolicyof%20ZeroProblemswithNeighbours_RajeevAgarwal_311012)



to establish itself as a credible regional power, economic powerhouse and a possible interlocutor in regional disputes.

Only by geography, it is very difficult to identify Turkey with any particular region. It is Caucasian as well as Balkan. Mediterranean Sea bestows on it the Mediterranean culture whereas Black Sea connects it to the energy rich Central Asian region. Finally, the huge land border with Muslim West Asian countries gives it a distinct West Asian identity. However, the region where Turkey aspires to realise the potential of its leadership role is in the West Asian region. Common Muslim identity, large contiguous land borders, energy dependence, trade and investment opportunities and perhaps above all, an opportunity to contribute and stand counted in an unstable region is what perhaps drives Turkey to seek a leadership role in West Asia.

Political discourses and economic surveys too in recent times have been heavily overwhelmed by frequent citations of influence and rise of this emerging power in the West Asian region; Turkey. Realising that its time has come, Turkey is perhaps attempting to emerge out of the dark shadows of contempt and neglect which accompanied its birth. Phrases like 'Turkey as a mediator in regional disputes', 'Turkey as the energy transit hub for Europe and Asia', 'Turkey as a leader of Islamic countries' etc have become common discourse in political and academic debates and clearly point to Turkey's continuing upward trajectory towards leadership role in the region.

The confidence within Turkey could be largely attributed to the rise of the mildly Islamic government of Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi or AKP led by its enterprising Prime Minister Erdogan in 2002. Its policies in the region have contributed to Turkey carving out a prominent space for itself in the region.

As things were progressing well, the uprisings in the Arab world in 2011-12 took the region and world by storm. Suddenly the internal political dynamics in countries changed, dictators were overthrown, Monarchies were put under serious threat, rise of Islamists to power threatened the regional power balance and Turkey found itself in the middle of a revolution which it had nothing to do with, but it could not remain unaffected. In the aftermath of 'Arab Spring', Turkey finds itself at crossroads in the region. Its slow and progressive rise to the

leadership position in the region is being challenged by the changing regional dynamics, resurgence of Egypt as a regional power, conflicting situation in Israel and an assertive Iran trying to align itself positively with changes in the region. In this backdrop, it has become imperative for Turkey to reassess its position and role in the region as also modify its course accordingly towards regional leadership.

### **Scope of Study**

This study thus seeks to explore various factors which would influence and affect Turkey in realising its aspirations for leadership role in the West Asian region and seek answers to some of the important issues as follows:-

- How has Turkey's foreign policy evolved over the years towards making it a significant player in the region?
- What are the major elements/factors contributing to Turkey's rising profile in the region?
- What has been the response in the region to Turkey's increasing role in the region?
- What are the challenges faced by Turkey in realisation of its aspiration to become the regional power?
- Has the uprisings in the Arab world, 'Arab Spring' hindered or facilitated its rise as a regional power?
- With India too emerging as a regional power in South Asia, what are the evolving options and opportunities for the two nations in the region?

It is argued that despite positive developments in the past decade, especially with regards to its foreign policy coupled with consistent economic growth, Turkey still faces numerous challenges before it can lay claim to leadership role in the region. The recent Arab uprisings in the region, 'Arab Spring' have brought to fore some of the critical fault lines which may adversely affect the rise of Turkey. Besides, Turkey will have to overcome major domestic challenges including the most critical issue of Kurdish reconciliation. Turkey's acceptance within the region and the Islamic world as an important partner and the rapidly changing balance of power in the region will also dictate how Turkey

is able to balance its position on domestic and regional issues and emerge as a leader in the region.

**Chapter One** lays out the context of Turkey's remarkable evolution from a demure nation born out of conflict to a nation exerting itself in a turbulent region. It examines the evolution of Turkey since its birth over time. The chapter divides the period of evolution into five distinct phases and highlights how each phase either facilitated or hindered Turkey's evolution as a powerful modern state. Of particular interest are the phases when Turgat Ozal came to power after the military coup in 1980 and the present times when Turkey under the present government for past 11 years has set path towards regaining its past glory and leadership role in the region.

**Chapter Two** focuses entirely on the evolution of Turkish foreign policy, one of the most crucial factors which has enabled rise of Turkey in the region as well as its regional and global recognition. It has not only helped Turkey to reach out within its neighbourhood but was also instrumental in making new allies and enhancing the status of Turkey as an emerging power in the region. This chapter, while highlighting the role of foreign policy in being a major lever in Turkey's quest for leadership role in the region, also highlights the factors that led to this foreign policy, Turkey's relations with major foreign powers, response to Turkey's initiatives by regional powers and finally how the recent uprisings in the Arab world have impacted Turkey's foreign policy framework.

**Chapter Three** critically examines major factors that have contributed to the rise of Turkey in the region. While acknowledging that foreign policy has been one of the primary contributing instruments, it highlights how Turkey's growth as a nation in past decade has been anchored on two other important pillars; political stability and economic growth. It also examines how Turkey has made full use of its favourable geographical location and framed a dynamic energy strategy which has helped it become the "energy hub" of the region. Also, the role of Armed forces in modern times and how they could contribute to Turkey's rise in post coup era is an important factor to be examined.

**Chapter Four** highlights and examines how, despite steady economic growth in past decade, deft diplomacy and political stability, there are

critical and fundamental domestic issues which challenge Turkey. The chapter examines the Kurdish issue, the internal political challenges and the future of Turkish state identity being presently debated under the 'New Constitution'. The ongoing debate on 'Islam versus Secularism' as a basis of Turkish society and identity, how the 'Arab Spring' surprised Turkey and is now posing major challenge to Turkey's regional strategies and the issue of Turkey's acceptability as a leader in the Muslim neighbourhood are some of the other critical issues examined in the chapter.

**Chapter Five** examines the evolution of Indo-Turkish ties, especially in present times, when both the countries have emerged as major regional players in their respective regions owing to economic growth and geo-political alignments. Despite rather luke warm ties during the cold war era, both nation realise the huge potential of mutual cooperation in present times. Convergence of views on issues ranging from global terrorism, war in Iraq and Afghanistan, shared values like democracy and secularism could contribute towards an upswing in their bilateral relations. Also, interest of both the countries in garnering a major role in West Asian region could also be seen as a contributing factor for ensuring mutual growth and benefit of both nations.



# **TURKEY'S EVOLUTION THROUGH THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

## **Introduction**

Born out of the ashes of Ottoman Empire which ruled over the region for over three centuries, Turkey inherited the regional hostility towards the Ottoman Empire which had left bitter feelings in the region and the neighbourhood. The fact that Turkey soon joined North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as an ally in 1952 was also not to the liking of the Arab world who resented Turkey, a Muslim country for joining a Western military alliance. Turkey, however felt comfortable in NATO and successive governments including the military junta ruling Turkey for decades made no efforts towards changing any of these regional perceptions. Despite occasional efforts to reach out to the Muslim neighbourhood, Turkey remained largely focussed on its Western discourse and ignored regional developments and concerns. But that was all to change when the 2002 elections heralded a new era in Turkey and its regional outlook with the AKP coming to power for the first time.

Among the first things the AKP government set out to do was to craft a policy that would help Turkey regain its position as a prominent power in the region and make it acceptable within its immediate neighbourhood. With four Muslim countries as its immediate neighbours, there was a realisation that Turkey could no longer remain isolated in its neighbourhood; and that time was ripe for Turkey to seek better relations in the region. In a turbulent region, Turkey already stood out significantly as a stable, democratic and moderate, and more importantly a "secular" state, despite having a predominantly Muslim population. Turkey as a powerful Muslim nation also presented an alternative to the Islamic fundamentalist phenomena sweeping West Asian region. In addition, Turkey's significance got further enhanced in being the most powerful and (arguably) the leader of Turkic-speaking ethnic world numbering 200 million in Central Asia and Caucasus.

The evolution of Turkey from a demure nation born out of a World War to a modern nation now exerting itself in a turbulent region is remarkable. It would however be difficult to understand and study Turkey without a glance into its brief history of over 90 years including a brief insight into the great Ottoman Empire. It is in this context that it is important to study the evolution of Turkey since its birth and to examine how this country has evolved over time. The evolution can be classified into five distinct phases.

### **Birth of Turkey from the Ashes of Ottoman Empire (period up to World War II)**

Modern day Turkey owes its legacy to the great Ottoman Empire which ruled over most of West Asia and Europe for more than three centuries. It was one of the most powerful empires to have ruled the region over the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, was the longest and last surviving Islamic empire and was spread across the Balkans, Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, North Africa, Western Europe and inner Asia. Established by Osman I in the thirteenth century, it initially spread across the Asia Minor before marching westwards into Europe. The Ottomans' rapid conquest of the Byzantine Empire in Europe as well as the other Balkan states in the years from 1290 to 1453 helped the spread of its power and influence. Its rule continued till well into the nineteenth century when the rise of European powers owing to the industrial revolution and setting up of colonies in Asia and Africa started challenging the power of the Ottomans. Britain, after helping defeat Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798, became a significant commercial and military power in the Mediterranean. Russia too wanted to expand influence across the Balkans and reach the Mediterranean, much against the British interests. Russia annexed Crimea located on the northern coast of the Black Sea, (currently under Ukraine) in 1783, established itself on the Black Sea and threatened the Northern boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman Empire, caught in the great power rivalry between the British and the Russians, started losing its imperial territories which virtually commenced the process of its eventual downfall.

However, it was the World War I which finally concluded the process of dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire. Ottomans entered the war on the side of central powers of Germany and Austria in December 1914 but was left defeated by the Allied powers of France, Italy, Brittan

and Russia. It led to the famous Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916<sup>2</sup> which led to division of the Ottoman Empire into protectorates. Under this secret agreement, France was to obtain authority over Lebanon, Northern Syria, Northern Iraq, and South-western Turkey. Britain was to acquire western Arabian territories of Persian Gulf, Transjordan, and rest of Iraq. Russia was to obtain Istanbul and some other major cities of Eastern Turkey like Kars. Italy was promised South-western part of Anatolia including city of Antalya. Palestine would be subject to an international regime. The Armistice of Mondros of October 31, 1918<sup>3</sup> further completed the dismemberment of Ottoman Empire and added to its humiliation. Under this treaty<sup>4</sup>, the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles were opened to the ships of the Allied Powers; Turkish military fortifications were to be occupied; the Ottoman Army surrendered and was demobilised; Turkish warships to surrender to the Allied Powers and means of communications like ports, roads, railways, telephone and telegraph as well as the ammunition dumps were made available to the Allied powers for use. Allied Powers were also given the right to occupy any area of security and strategic importance in the country " In the event of a situation threatening their security" as per Article 7 of the Treaty. The Allied powers occupied Mosul, Iskenderun, the Straits of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, as well as parts of Anatolia and Thrace. Parts of six eastern provinces with Armenian population went to Armenia. With this and subsequent expansion, the Ottoman State collapsed threatening a much smaller and vulnerable nation instead, Turkey. The sense of defeat and betrayal gave rise to the battle for independence which finally culminated in the birth of modern day Turkey in 1923.

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<sup>2</sup> The Papers of Sir Mark Sykes, 1879-1919 with special reference to the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Middle East, Microform Academic Publishers Main Street, East Ardsley, Wakefield WF3 2AP UK, 2006, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Stanford J Shaw and Ezelkural Shaw, History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Volume:II Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975, pp.327-328.

<sup>4</sup> Text of the Treaty Available at [http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/armistice\\_turk\\_eng.pdf](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/eng/armistice_turk_eng.pdf), (Accessed December 31, 2013).



Turkey took birth after a protracted battle of independence led by Mustafa Kemal<sup>5</sup> who rejected the idea of a restricted territory for Turkey and fought back the territories assigned to Allied powers after World War I and the Armistice of Mondros. The Treaty of Lausanne<sup>6</sup>, signed after three years of nationalist struggle on July 24, 1923, established the new Turkish nation-state with complete sovereignty in almost all the territory included in the present day Turkish Republic. Earlier, the Sevres Treaty<sup>7</sup> signed on August 10, 1920 was rejected by the Turkish nationalists as it was detrimental to Turkish independence and destructive of its homeland. As per the treaty, the Turks were only allowed to keep a small part of central Anatolia under various restrictions. The fact that the sovereign rights and independence of the Turkish people had been disregarded by the Allied powers, and that the Turks were forced to fight to regain their independence and the territory, was to have an important effect both on subsequent Turkish attitudes vis-a-vis foreign powers, their relations in neighbourhood<sup>8</sup> (Armenia, Kurds) and on their nation-building efforts.

This was thus a phase where Turkey was still coming to grips with the loss of the Ottoman Empire. Its priorities were thus to consolidate itself as a stable nation and not to recreate the lost Empire. Domestic consolidation, economic reconstruction and a well evolved foreign policies were the keys to this. During this period, Turkey formed its foreign policy on the guiding principles laid down by Mustafa Kemal

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<sup>5</sup> Stanford J Shaw and Ezelkural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 2, pp. 373-374.

<sup>6</sup> Text of the Treaty available at [http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lausanne\\_ENG.pdf](http://sam.baskent.edu.tr/belge/Lausanne_ENG.pdf), (Accessed January 03, 2014). Also refer Stanford J Shaw and Ezelkural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, 2, pp365-366

<sup>7</sup> For the text of the Treaty of Sevres see World War I documents Archive, [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Peace\\_Treaty\\_of\\_S%C3%A8vres](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Peace_Treaty_of_S%C3%A8vres) (Accessed January 23, 2014)

<sup>8</sup> Mustafa Aydin, *The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, and Turkey's European Vocation*, p. 311

Atatürk<sup>9</sup> which came to be known as KEMALISM<sup>10</sup>. He realised that Turkey required a trouble free period to achieve far reaching economic and domestic reforms in the country. His policy therefore focused on the establishment and preservation of a national state with complete independence, promotion of Turkey to the level of contemporary civilisation, and attachment to a pragmatic approach in foreign policy actions. It also aimed at a renunciation of three strains which had been important during Ottoman times: the imperial-Ottomanism, Pan-Islamism, and Pan-Turanism<sup>11</sup> which, incidentally, coincided with the three of his political principles: **Republicanism, Secularism and Nationalism** respectively. Republicanism was considered an essential element to subvert any remnant popular imperialistic notions of Turkey being able to expand and return to the days of the Empire. It drove home the point that the new state formed would be Turkish in character and that it would espouse principles of national sovereignty, freedom and equality before the law. As quoted by Mustafa Aydin, "from this point of view, republicanism constituted a doctrinal barrier against those who still hoped for a return to the Sultanate and the Caliphate"<sup>12</sup>. Secularism aimed to incorporate the minorities especially the Christians into the nation state as also a deliberate

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<sup>9</sup> The Surname, Atatürk (meaning "Father Turk"), was granted to him (and forbidden to any other person) in 1934 by the Turkish parliament.

<sup>10</sup> Mustafa Aydin, *The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, and Turkey's European Vocation*, p. 318

<sup>11</sup> Pan-Turanism, refers to a movement to unify all Turanian peoples. It goes beyond the mere unity of all Turkic peoples (as in Pan-Turkism), and seeks to incorporate a wider Turanid race ie all peoples speaking Turanian languages. It includes the Ottoman Turks, the Turcomans of Central Asia and Persia, the Tartars of South Russia and Transcaucasia, the Magyars of Hungary, the Finns of Finland and the Baltic provinces, the aboriginal tribes of Siberia and even the distant Mongols and Manchus (Stoddard, T. Lothrop. "Pan-Turanism". *The American Political Science Review*. 11(1). (1917): 16.). The Ottoman Empire was a proponent of expansion and unity of all these areas into the Empire. The concept of Pan Turanism has also been expounded by Max Müller in his lectures on *The Science of Language*. Delivered At The Royal Institution of Great Britain in April, May, and June, 1861.

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Aydin, *The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, and Turkey's European Vocation*, p. 319

attempt to dismiss the idea of Pan-Islamism. It clearly rejected the idea of Turkey being an Islamic state which had a clear imprint in the coming decades as far as its engagement with the Muslim neighbourhood was concerned. Banning any public display of religious symbols including the clothing was a part of this secularist strand of policy. Nationalism, the third strand of KEMALISM, was to establish the identity of Turkey as a state born out of the independence struggle. It also tried to bring to fore the concerns that the Allied powers had been able to dismember the Ottoman Empire due to lack of integrated nationalist movement in the country. The concept of every national in the country being a 'Turk' irrespective of religion or ethnic origins or class identities was thus propagated. It was serving as a bonding glue for people emerging out of the trauma of dismembered empire, establishing a new state. The ideological guidance was formalised at the 1931 Congress of the Republican People's Party and written into constitution in 1937. It was also symbolised by the emblem of the RPP: six arrows, each of which represented one of the key words of Kemalist ideology: Nationalism, Secularism, Republicanism, Populism, Etatism, and Revolutionism. This ideology drove Turkey more into a Western orientation and was seen as a clear rejection of the need or necessity to embrace the Muslim neighbourhood. For Atatürk, modernisation of Turkey meant westernisation, a clear departure from the Ottoman era. This remained the focus of Turkey in the first few decades of its birth.

## **Joining the NATO and the Onset of Cold War Era**

Faced with threats from Axis Powers; Germany and the Italy during the period of World War II, Turkey, despite its neutrality started inching towards the West. Increased hostility from the Soviet Union after the World War II in seeking enhanced area of influence and operations across the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits further influenced Turkey's decision to join the Western alliance. In fact, the seeds of insecurity were sowed when Soviet Union started contesting the Montreux Convention 1936<sup>13</sup>, which had been signed by Australia, Bulgaria,

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<sup>13</sup> Montreux Convention 1936, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/naval-arms-control-1936.htm> (Accessed October 25, 2013).

France, Greece, Japan, the Soviet Union, Turkey, the United Kingdom and Yugoslavia in July 1936, allowing Turkey to remilitarise the Turkish Straits linking the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, a provision which had been prohibited under the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne. The World War II pushed the issue into the background. However, on August 7, 1946, following Turkish elections, the Soviet Union renewed its demands for a revision of the Montreux Convention and increased Soviet naval activity in the region. It demanded that Turkey's control of the strategic Dardanelles Strait, guaranteed by the Montreux Convention in 1936, be modified in Soviet Union's favour. Among other things, the Soviets wanted joint rights with Turkey to use bases in the straits. Turkey objected to the Soviet demands, and even the United Kingdom and the United States protested. After continued deadlock, on October 18, Turkey rejected the Soviet demands. United States and United Kingdom increased naval presence in the area and on March 12, 1947, that President Harry S Truman proposed to US Congress a programme to provide both Turkey and Greece with military and economic assistance to help protect them from the Russians, a part of the Truman Doctrine<sup>14</sup>. It was the start of a growing American involvement in Turkish security and economic development, which was to become a basic element in the policies of both countries during the next three decades. The Marshall Plan, announced on June 5, 1947, and Turkey's subsequent admission into the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) further strengthened its economic ties with the US (April 16, 1948). Turkey's entry into the NATO on February 18, 1952<sup>15</sup> confirmed Turkey as a full member of the Western alliance to defend themselves from Russian expansion and. This ended the isolation that had begun during World War II. Economic and military cooperation with the West has remained the basis of Turkey's foreign policy and an essential pillar of Western defences ever since.

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<sup>14</sup> Text of the Speech given by President Truman available at [http://alvaradohistory.com/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/2TrumanDoctrine.362195324.pdf](http://alvaradohistory.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/2TrumanDoctrine.362195324.pdf), (Accessed Jan 11, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Mustafa Aydin, *The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, and Turkey's European Vocation*, p. 317

## Military Coups and the Ozal Era

Even before joining NATO in 1952, a major realignment took place in Turkish politics. Democratic Party (DP) won the Parliamentary elections in 1950 garnering 408 seats and over 53 per cent votes, thus ending the one party rule of the RPP's (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP*) over three decades. The 1954 elections were again overwhelmingly won by the DP. However, by 1955 widespread support for the DP began to deteriorate due to the nation's worsening economic situation. The policies pursued under the DP rule led to high inflation rates, shortages of critical goods, and poor economic development. The government, headed by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes also began to loosen some restrictions on practice of religion: it allowed thousands of mosques to reopen, legalised the call to prayer in Arabic (instead of Turkish), and opened new schools for religious personnel, among others. All this caused widespread unrest forcing government to impose martial law in early 1960. The army stepped in and staged the first coup on May 27, 1960, toppling the government. General Cemal Gursel assumed power - beginning a period of military-dominated politics that would last until 1965<sup>16</sup>.

Elections were held again in 1965 wherein The Justice Party (*Adalet Partisi, AP*) won 240 of the 450 seats and Suleyman Demirel became the Prime Minister. Despite winning the next elections again in 1969 taking 256 seats with around 46.5 per cent of the vote, the overall situation for AP and Turkey grew increasingly chaotic. The Turkish economy stagnated, annual inflation reached nearly 80 per cent and the recession caused widespread unrest. Workers' groups staged demonstrations, sometimes violent, and right-wing groups carried out attacks of their own. On March 12, 1971, the military intervened once again. Memduh Tagmac, the Chief of the General Staff (CGS), handed over a memorandum to the Prime Minister, Suleyman Demirel. Demirel resigned after a three-hour meeting with his cabinet<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Begüm Burak, The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: To Guard Whom and From What?, *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, 4(1), 2011, p.150

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p. 151

Instability continued even after the 1971 coup: Turkey changed prime ministers 11 times in the 1970s, the economy continued to stagnate while the left and right wing groups continued their violent clashes in the streets<sup>18</sup>. Political uncertainty was compounded by unprecedented political violence in the late 1970s adding to overall unrest in the country. Thousands were killed in political violence, most notable incidents being the 1978 Bahçelievler Massacre<sup>19</sup> when seven university students, members of the Turkish Workers' Party, were assassinated by extreme nationalists, including Grey Wolves' leader Abdullah Çatlı and Haluk Kırcı. On October 9, 1978 in Bahçelievler, Ankara, or the 1977 Taksim Square Massacre<sup>20</sup> with 35 victims. Finally, on September 12, the Armed Forces headed by General Kenan Evren declared coup d'état. He dissolved the government, suspended the constitution and assumed the post of the President.

These years of military rule did bring some stability to Turkey. A new constitution was drafted, put to public referendum and finally adopted in November 1982. It ensured strengthening the political autonomy of the military over the parliament, limited the scope of the civilian judiciary branch, besides increasing the authority of the President<sup>21</sup>. In 1983, under the shadow of the military, elections were held but only three parties were allowed to take part in the elections. Turgut Özal, the leader of the Motherland Party was the triumphant of the elections. Under Özal rule, a considerable degree of democratisation was experienced and is widely credited with stabilising the Turkish economy by privatising many state-owned industries.

<sup>18</sup> Timeline: A history of Turkish coups, Al Jazeera, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2012/04/20124472814687973.html>, (Accessed September 10, 2013)

<sup>19</sup> 'Bahçelievler Massacre' convicts may be released, *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 11, 2012, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/bahcelievler-massacre-convicts-may-be-released.aspx?pageID=238&nid=25220>, (Accessed January 03, 2014)

<sup>20</sup> Sinan İkinci, Turkey's bloody 1977 May Day still clouded in mystery, World Socialist Website, May 1, 2003, available at <http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2003/05/turk-m01.html>, (Accessed September 10, 2013)

<sup>21</sup> Begüm Burak, The Role of the Military in Turkish Politics: To Guard Whom and From What?, *European Journal of Economic and Political Studies*, 4(1), 2011, p. 152

Özal took over Turkey in a period where Turkey faced isolation. The Kemalist policies had restricted contact with the Muslim world whereas the 1974 coup in Cyprus resulted in sanctions and arms embargo from the US and the European Commission (EU). The military coup in 1980 did not help as the failure to restore democracy resulted in suspension of financial aid from European Parliament on January 22, 1982<sup>22</sup>. Also, Turkey's NATO ties prevented it from improving relations with the Communist Bloc. The economic crisis was exaggerated by rise in oil prices after the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the Iran-Iraq war since 1980. In such a scenario, Turkey needed a radical shift in domestic and foreign policy in order to escape this political and economical isolation. Özal set two priorities for himself; reviving the economy and eliminating Turkey's isolation.

For economic revival, Ozal started with privatisation of many state enterprises. He focused on greater domestic participation ensuring that the economic power that had been in the hands of the Kemalist bureaucracy and state-sponsored businessmen broke free which led to increased production and increase in exports<sup>23</sup>. The Turkish government adopted the EC's nomenclature for commodity classification and in 1988 initiated legislative adjustments for adopting EC legislation<sup>24</sup>. The main aim was integration of the Turkish economy with the world economy. Apart from the structural change and the rapid development of the Turkish economy, the share of exports in the economy was dramatically increased. In addition to EC, Turkish businessmen focused on the Middle East countries, notably Iran, Iraq, Libya and Saudi Arabia. Thus, for the first time in Republican history, the Turkish economy became dependent on economic conditions in the Muslim world. By abandoning its inward looking economic policies, Turkey succeeded not only in diversifying its exports but also in becoming an important

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<sup>22</sup> Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism, *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, available at <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/333/turgut-ozal-period-in-turkish-foreign-policy-ozalism.html>, (Accessed August 12, 2013)

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*

market for direct foreign investment. During the period of 1980s, the Turkish economy grew at an annual rate of over five per cent, the highest among the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries. The volume of Turkish exports rose from \$ 2,910 million in 1980 to over \$ 20 billion in the early 1990s, with an annual increase of 15,6 per cent; a staggering 350 per cent increase in 10 years<sup>25</sup>.

Özal is also credited with opening out to the Muslim world. For Özal, the Islamic awakening in Iran was also on advantage in integrating Turkey with the rest of Europe and the Western system because the Turkish version of Islam was different from the Iranian or the Arab Islam. He claimed that the Turkish Islamic outlook could provide peace between Muslims and the others, since religion and progress could go hand in hand<sup>26</sup>. While Mustafa Kemal saw the Ottoman heritage as the source of problems in the region, Özal claimed that Turkey could solve the regional problems due to the Ottoman past. He even argued that the Ottoman heritage granted Turkey great power to control the region, saying that 'Turkey cannot be prisoner of the Misak-i Milli (National Pact) borders'. He further implied that the only solution to the Kurdish problem and other matters in the Middle East was a federation between Turkey, Syria and Iraq, which was considered as the resurgence of the Ottoman Empire by the leftist groups in Turkey<sup>27</sup>.

Özal thus brought in a new era in evolution of Turkey. It laid the basic foundation in its quest towards leadership role in the region, which manifested later in the first decade of twenty first century.

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<sup>25</sup> R. Hine, 'Turkey and the European Community: Regional Integration and Economic Convergence', in S. Togan and V.N. Balasubramanyam, *The Economy of Turkey since Liberalisation*, Macmillan Press, Ltd., London, 1996, p. 146.

<sup>26</sup> Nicole and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled, Atatürk and After*, John Murray Publishers Ltd., London, 1997, p. 163, as cited in Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism, *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, available at <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/333/turgut-ozal-period-in-turkish-foreign-policy-ozalism.html>, (Accessed August 12, 2013)

<sup>27</sup> Turgut Özal Period in Turkish Foreign Policy: Özalism, *The Journal of Turkish Weekly*, available at <http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/333/turgut-ozal-period-in-turkish-foreign-policy-ozalism.html>, (Accessed August 12, 2013)



## Turbulent period post the collapse of Soviet Union

With the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991-92, Turkey was relieved from its biggest military threat. The birth of Central Asian Republics (CARs) and nations in the South Caucasus meant that it no longer had the Soviet Army at its borders. Growth in economic power and domestic stability too added to Turkey's confidence which led to Turkey charting independent thought and led to re emergence of latent desire to reclaim its leadership role in the region. However, this was also the period of gross uncertainties in Turkey's political and military establishment. With the end of Cold war and the perceived loss of Turkey's strategic importance to the West, the fear of abandonment seemed to have been aggravated exactly at a time when the instability and threats in the neighbourhood were growing<sup>28</sup>. Debates about the future of NATO with the Soviet threat gone were a very strong source of worry. For Turkey, NATO membership symbolised stability and security assurances. The developments happening on the borders of Turkey (the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the break-up and wars in former Yugoslavia, the Gulf war) seemed to confirm Turkey's fears. The struggle with Parti Karkerani Kurdistan' (PKK) awakened the fear of loss of territory and the historical legacy of disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. The role of the military increased in foreign policy making, which was manifested mainly in its actions in the National Security Council<sup>29</sup> (NSC). A darker side of this activism in foreign policy was therefore observed in the 1990s, when Turkey's ready resort to the threat or the use of military force was particularly visible<sup>30</sup>. Regular military incursions in Northern Iraq to crush PKK forces, threats against Syria, with troops amassed at the border in 1998, hard rhetoric during the Russian S-300 missiles crisis planned to be deployed in Cyprus

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<sup>28</sup> Kirisci, Kemal (2000). "Turkey and the Muslim Middle East". In Makovsky, Alan and Sayari, Sabri (eds.). *Turkey's New World – Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>29</sup> Paula Sandrin, *Turkish Foreign Policy after the End of Cold War: from Securitising to Desecuritising Actor*, Doctoral Discussion Papers, London School of Economics, Europe, p.3

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, pp2

in the same year are a few examples. In 1995, the Turkish Parliament announced that if Greece expanded its territorial waters from six to 12 miles, Turkey would go to war and which almost happened over islets in the Aegean Sea. In 1996, a former Turkish diplomat, Sukru Elekdag, published an article arguing that Turkey should be ready to fight two and a half wars (against Greece, Syria and the PKK). This primacy of security and the use of confrontational tools to solve foreign disputes seemed to have contributed to Turkey's image as a "post-Cold War warrior"<sup>31</sup>, a "coercive regional power"<sup>32</sup> or a "regional bully" which insists on "one-dimensionality when it comes to means"<sup>33</sup> during that decade.

### **The Twenty First Century and the rise of AKP**

In the first decade of this century, Turkey's foreign policy underwent profound changes. The decision of the EU to accept Turkey as a candidate country at the Helsinki Summit in December 1999<sup>34</sup> was perhaps one of the fundamental turning points which reassured Turkey that it was not being left out. Overcoming the uncertain and perhaps belligerent post Cold War period and in search of a new role in the emerging world order, Turkey's foreign policy community has recently moved towards a proactive peaceful engagement with its diverse neighbourhood. The concept of Turkey's 'Strategic Depth',<sup>35</sup> laid down in 2001 by Ahmet Davutoglu, the current Minister of Foreign Affairs

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<sup>31</sup> Kirisci, Kemal (2000). "Turkey and the Muslim Middle East". In Makovsky, Alan and Sayari, Sabri (eds.). *Turkey's New World – Changing Dynamics in Turkish Foreign Policy*. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

<sup>32</sup> Onis, Ziya (2003). "Domestic politics, International Norms and Challenges to the State: Turkey-EU Relations in the post-Helsinki Era". In *Turkish Studies* 4 (1).

<sup>33</sup> Desai, Seiju (2005). 'Turkey and the European Union: a Security Perspective: Risk or Opportunity?'. *Defence Studies* 5 (3).

<sup>34</sup> Onis, Ziya (2003). "Domestic politics, International Norms and Challenges to the State: Turkey-EU Relations in the post-Helsinki Era". In *Turkish Studies* 4 (1).

<sup>35</sup> Loannis N. Grigoriadis, *The Davutoglu Doctrine and Turkish Foreign Policy*, Working Paper Nr 8/2010, Bilkent University / ELIAMEP

of Turkey provided the intellectual background to this new policy orientation. Earlier, the region did not see Turkey as an active regional player. However, buoyed by its newly formulated regional policies, soft power approach, economic growth and expanding cultural relations, Turkey's role in the past decade has expanded significantly.

Henri J Barkey has further divided this phase into three distinct and interesting parts; 'The Conciliator 2002-07', 'The Balancer 2007-11' and 'The Would be Regional Hegemon 2011'<sup>36</sup>. In the first part, he highlights the cautious approach of the AKP Government in the first phase, both, in domestic as well as foreign policy issues whereas in the second part he highlights how Turkey started emerging out of its shell to take a more proactive part in the region, especially on issues like Iraq, Syria, Israel and even the tricky Kurdish issue. The last part highlights the attempt of Turkey to repackage itself as an important leader and a role model in the wake of Arab Uprisings of 2011-12.

This period was also marked by the rise of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan who won elections in 2002 with 34.28 per cent of the vote and has since won three consecutive elections up to the last one in 2011. Erdogan and AKP have led Turkey to a position where it can work to regain its rightful position as a leader in the region.

The country is now seeking to establish itself as a credible regional power, economic powerhouse and a possible interlocutor in regional disputes. In the context of this new approach, Turkey started by changing its position towards the division of Cyprus through the Annan Plan<sup>37</sup> in 2004. In the referendum conducted, the Turkish Cyprus voted overwhelmingly in favour of the peace plan, however, the Greek

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<sup>36</sup> Barkey Henri J, *The Evolution of Turkish Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, TESEV Foreign Policy Programme, July 2012, available at <http://www.scpps.org/libs/spaw/uploads/files/Policy/07-18-2012%20The%20Evolution%20of%20Turkish%20Foreign%20Policy%20in%20the%20Middle%20East.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Text of Annan Plan available at [http://unannanplan.agrino.org/Annan\\_Plan\\_MARCH\\_30\\_2004.pdf](http://unannanplan.agrino.org/Annan_Plan_MARCH_30_2004.pdf) (Accessed April 02, 2013).

Cyprus rejected it citing unclear and unsatisfactory security guarantees. It may have failed to bring about unification of Cyprus, but Turkey demonstrated its willingness towards rapprochement. Turkey later even attempted resolution of other conflicts in the region including Syria and the rather dormant conflict in Armenia. Such initiatives provided Turkey the required space and context to chart out new rules for regional engagement.

## **Conclusion**

The evolution of Turkey through the twentieth century has highlighted the transformation of the nation which was born in the shadows of World War I and by the end of the century was ready to take on its rightful place in the region. The period of 1970s and 1990s also highlighted the streaks of belligerence in Turkish foreign policy and its latent desire perhaps to regain the leadership role. The dramatic transformation of its foreign policy towards the turn of this century, has laid the foundation for its possible emergence as a leader in the West Asian region. How much is the foreign policy, as an instrument of power, able to propel Turkey towards its eventual goal is to be seen over time. It is therefore very important to next examine the evolution of its foreign policy, especially over the past decade to predict the final outcome.

# TRANSFORMATION OF FOREIGN POLICY: NECESSITY, EXECUTION AND ITS IMPACT

## Introduction

Changing regional dimensions and global outlook over the decade of 1990s prompted Turkey to reconsider its foreign policy outlook. However, it was only after the advent of the twenty first century that Turkey emerged with a more assertive foreign policy. The framework of the policy was presented by the chief advisor on foreign policy (current Turkish Foreign Minister) Ahmet Davutoglu in 2001. The success of the policy banked upon successful implementation of some of its core principles: balance between security and freedom (which recognised the crucial inter-relation and importance of each in society), zero problems with neighbours, proactive peace diplomacy or 'soft power', compatible global relations and, finally, active participation in global and regional issues.

The first signs of the new foreign policy were visible in 2003 when Turkey refused to allow its territory to be used for launching operations against Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq (although it was more by default as MPs voted 264-250 in favour of the deployment, but the motion fell four votes short of the required majority of deputies present in the chamber<sup>38</sup>. Even in Afghanistan, despite being a part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), Turkey refused to be a part of the fighting force. All this not only helped signal a Turkey relatively less dependent on the United States but also won friends in

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<sup>38</sup> Turkey upsets US military plans, BBC News 01 March 2003, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2810133.stm>, (Accessed April 29, 2013). Also refer to Michael Rubin, A comedy of errors: American-Turkish Diplomacy and the Iraq War, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring 2005

the Muslim world. Keeping in with its notion of being an equal part of the European-Muslim civilisation, Turkey continued its pursuit for permanent membership in the European Union. It also took the lead in secret peace talks between Syria and Israel in 2007-08, which were reportedly in the final stages of breaking the deadlock when Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in December 2008. At the same time, Turkey engaged proactively in the Balkans to bring about normalisation among the Serbs, Bosnians and Croats in Bosnia. With Russia, Turkey improved ties to such an extent that Russia is today one of Turkey's leading trade partners as well as Russia's strategic gateway to the warm waters through the Bosphorus. With Iran, Turkey has found common ground on the Kurdish issue as well as on opposing Israel (especially post the May 2010 Flotilla incident), and also emerged as an interlocutor on the Iranian nuclear issue by volunteering to be the host for the swap of enriched uranium. With Israel too, initially, Turkey improved ties, especially in defence cooperation and annual participation in Exercise Anatolian Eagle. Syria and Georgia were quickly integrated into Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and dialogue commenced with Armenia in 2009 with a historic visit by Turkey's president. In 2007, Turkey even took the initiative in Iraq and Lebanon in an attempt to solve their internal issues. Prime Minister Erdogan's speech in the Arab League in 2007 made it clear that Turkey wanted to embrace its Muslim neighbours without getting into the Shia-Sunni discourse, thus winning over many more Arab friends.

The current foreign policy thus served Turkey well over the past decade. It not only helped it to reach out within its neighbourhood but was also instrumental in making new allies and enhancing the status of Turkey as an emerging power in the region. This chapter, while highlighting the role of foreign policy in being a major lever in Turkey's quest for leadership role in the region, also highlights the factors that led to this foreign policy, Turkey's relations with major foreign powers, response to Turkey's initiatives by regional powers and finally how the recent uprisings in the Arab world have impacted Turkey's foreign policy framework.

### **Factors Leading Up to the Present Foreign Policy**

A number of significant factors can be attributed to the present threads of Turkey's foreign policy. Amongst them foremost is how Turkey

has evolved over past decades and especially post the Cold War period in defining its core security interests as also its internal and external identity in the region. In addition, the events in its neighbourhood, internal political developments as also its inclination towards 'Europeanisation' have been other major contributing factors. EU's "conditionality" principle as a prerequisite for EU accession has also been an important transformative force.

In the 1990s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, transformation of Eastern Europe, the three Gulf wars, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo crises in the Balkans, and the conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh, Chechnya and Abkhazia in the Caucasus, all took place in the immediate neighbourhood of Turkey and highlighted the concerns of national security as well as dangers of inadvertent involvement in regional conflicts. These concerns were further aggravated by the possibility of setting up an independent Kurdish state in Northern Iraq after the 1990-91 Gulf War. In the discussions over the new European security architecture that might leave Turkey out as also discussion about the relevance of NATO in the 'new world order', Turkey suddenly found itself in a situation where it felt threatened both by the lingering uncertainties regarding its immediate neighbourhood and by the fact that its Western security connection, which hitherto provided her with relative safety and stability in the region may cease to exist<sup>39</sup>. There was a clear realisation that while Turkey could continue its Western orientation and alliance with NATO, there was a need to reach out towards its neighbours, especially the Muslim neighbourhood in the new emerging regional dynamics. 9/11 incident and the subsequent launch of Global war on Terror (GWOT), the second Gulf War in Iraq in 2003 and the growing menace of transnational terrorism also meant that Turkey could not remain insulated from the developments in the region, especially its neighbourhood. The fact that West Asia along with Af-Pak region was becoming the hub of global terrorism dictated a change

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<sup>39</sup> Mustafa Aydin, *The Determinants of Turkish Foreign Policy, and Turkey's European Vocation*, p. 323

in regional approach by Turkey. It was aptly clear that security of the country depended on common security of the region security and that dialogue could be one of the primary means of solving regional issues crises. This manifested itself in Turkey taking on the mantle of interlocutor in many regional issues in the first decade of twenty first century.

There was a huge impact of domestic political developments too. Three factors stand out as important forces reshaping Turkish foreign policy; the soft coup of 1997, the economic crisis of 2001 and the rise of the AKP led government. The soft coup in 1997 which resulted in the fall of Turkish Government after the issue of a memorandum government by the NSC Meeting on February 28 as well as the conditionality principles of joining EU (de-securitising of national politics) was a major factor which prompted Turkey at not only revising civil-military relationship within the country but also formulating a policy wherein the role of the armed forces was no longer considered vital. This could only be done by improving relations in the neighbourhood. Secondly, the 2001 economic crisis forced the government to reform fiscal policies to help the economy rebound towards a growth trajectory. February 19 2001, is still referred as "Black Wednesday" in Turkey, the day when Turkey's economy collapsed, banks closed down, exchange rates sky rocketed and overnight Turkey became almost 25 per cent poorer. Turkey realised that its national interests and national security could not be defined through the narrow prism of military based security only. It propelled Turkey to two very vital decisions; to commence a concentrated campaign to join the EU and secondly to focus in its immediate neighbourhood to enhance political and trade ties. Trade with neighbourhood perfectly complemented with the foreign policy direction of the government of "zero problems with the neighbours". The influence of Ahmet Davutoglu's thinking as the chief foreign policy advisor to the prime minister could be especially underlined. His ideas depicting Turkey as a 'central country' and developing a "zero problem policy" with neighbouring countries left an imprint on the transformation of Turkish foreign policy. Lastly, the rise of AKP to form government in 2002 and its drive towards reclaiming Turkey's regional space of engagement too is a vital factor in reformed foreign policy.



## Guiding Principles to the Foreign Policy

The basic principles that guided Turkey's foreign policy since the founding of the republic included caution and pragmatism—especially with regards the West Asian region. An imperial hangover from the Ottoman era drove home the lesson that Ankara had little to gain and much to lose from interjecting itself into the acrimonious politics of the region<sup>40</sup>. It was only after the advent of the twenty first century that Turkey emerged out of its own shadows to lay down an assertive foreign policy for itself. The framework of the present policy was presented by the current Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu in 2001. Although, he is credited with the current thought process, it was actually Prime Minister Ozal, who had envisioned and put into practice most of the threads of current foreign policy in 1980s when he not only liberalised the economy but also reached out towards Turkey's Muslim neighbours (details already highlighted in Chapter 2).

Ahmet Davutoglu bases the current foreign policy on three methodological principles<sup>41</sup> and five operative principals, terming the methodology as a visionary approach, not a crisis oriented approach. Among the methodological principals he highlighted 'Vision oriented foreign policy' as a critical principal wherein he talked of stable neighbourhood including the Balkans and the Middle East, taking into aspirations of multicultural, multilingual societies and nations living in an atmosphere of mutual respect, stability, peace and prosperity. The second principle; 'Consistent, systematic framework' highlighted that Turkey's vision of Middle East cannot be seen to contrast with its approach in Central Asia or the Balkans and vice versa. The third methodological principle; 'Soft Power' highlighted Turkey's new found confidence in dealing with regional and global issues.

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<sup>40</sup> What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy? by Svante E. Cornell, *Middle East Quarterly* Winter 2012, pp. 13-24

<sup>41</sup> Principles of Turkish Foreign Policy, Address by H.E, Foreign Minister of Republic of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, at SETA Foundation, Washington D.C. , p.6.

Ahmet Davutoglu, then highlighted the five principles of current foreign policy. The first principle; 'Balance between security and freedom' wherein he said "If you ignore security for freedom you will have anger and chaos. If you ignore freedom for security, you will have an authoritarian, autocratic society". The second principle; 'Zero problems with our neighbours' was with a message to the neighbours "that we may disagree on many points but we have to reintegrate because our destiny is the same". The third operative principle; 'Proactive peace diplomacy', with neighbours as well as all the regions. The fourth principle; 'Compatible global relations' wherein he highlighted that we are not involved in a bipolar world anymore. Good relations with Russia can not be an alternative to the EU or that Turkish model partnership with the United States is not a new partnership against Russia. The fifth principle; 'Active involvement in all global and international issues, in all international organisations'. Again this was prompted by Turkey's eagerness to actively participate in regional and global issues to be counted as a regional leader.

Ahmet Davutoglu also gave Turkey the status of a 'Central Country' which is bestowed on it because of its unique geographical position as well as multi cultural identity. He said that in terms of geography, Turkey occupies a unique space. He added that Turkey is unlike many other countries claiming central country status in their respective region because Turkey holds an optimal place in the sense that it is both an Asian and European country and is also close to Africa through the Eastern Mediterranean. A central country with such an optimal geographic location can not define itself in a defensive manner. It should be seen neither as a bridge country which only connects two points, nor a frontier country, nor indeed as an ordinary country, which sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West. Turkey's geography harmonises these elements. Turkey should guarantee its own security and stability by taking on a more active, constructive role to provide order, stability and security in its environs<sup>42</sup>.

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<sup>42</sup> Davutoglu Ahmet, Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision: An Assessment of 2007, Insight Turkey, 10(1), 2008, p. 78

## Turkey's foreign Policy and the Western Powers

### *United States*

Turkey's influence as a regional power manifests not only in its relations with the major stakeholders in the region but extra regional powers as well. Among this group, most important relationship is that of Turkey-US relations. Turkey US relations go back almost to the time of birth of Turkey, adoption of Kemalist principles and the World War II period.

Despite the strong ties, there have been serious differences between the two. In the early 1970s, after Turkey's invasion of Cyprus in response to a Greek-led coup, the US placed an arms embargo on it. The efforts of the Armenian-American community to convince the US Congress to recognise the 1915 mass killing of Armenians as genocide have often resulted in bilateral tension<sup>43</sup>. In 2003, the US invasion of Iraq created heartburn as a result of the Turkish Grand National Assembly's inability to pass legislation allowing US forces to use Turkish territory. Post invasion, instability in Iraq that coincided with a resumption of PKK terrorist attacks on Turkey has also been a point of discord. Ankara's 2010 trilateral Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) agreement with Brazil and Iran, as well as its subsequent vote against applying United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions on the Iranian regime, raised questions in US policymaking circles about Turkey's commitment to the Western alliance<sup>44</sup>.

The current turmoil in West Asia has, however, reminded both US and Turkey of their shared interests and complementary strategic perspectives. Close coordination between them during the 'Arab Spring', Turkey's continuing contribution to the NATO mission in Afghanistan, Turkey's decision to join the US-led NATO missile shield program, and US security assistance to Turkish military efforts against the PKK

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<sup>43</sup> U.S.-Turkey Relations: A New Partnership with a New Turkey, Council on Foreign Relations, Independent Task Force Report No. 69, 2012, available at <http://www.cfr.org/turkey/us-turkey-relations/p28139>

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*

all highlight the extent to which the two countries can cooperate in Turkey's increasingly volatile and conflict-prone region<sup>45</sup>.

Looking ahead to the future of US-Turkish relations, the alliance is likely to be shaped by a number of factors. The first is how the US will reposition itself in the world as it further develops its "pivot to Asia." The future of the relationship will also be affected by the extent to which Turkey will opt for independent action over cooperation with the US when conducting its foreign policy.

## ***EU***

Relations with EU were to be a corner stone of Turkey's foreign policy success. Turkish Foreign Ministry official website states "Europe is our common home...relations with the EU are a fundamental aspect of the Turkish foreign policy... our goal to become an EU member is a strategic choice"<sup>46</sup>. Turkey-EU relations go back in time to the Ankara Agreement signed with the European Economic Community (EEC) on September 12, 1963 which took effect on December 1, 1964<sup>47</sup>. In recent times, a new period began in the relations between Turkey and the EU after Turkey assumed "candidate status" during the Helsinki Summit in December 1999 and EU decided to open accession negotiations with Turkey on October 3, 2005<sup>48</sup>. However, in 2007 France declared that it will not allow the opening of negotiations on five chapters and in December 2009, Greek Cypriot Administration unilaterally stated that it would block the opening of six chapters<sup>49</sup>.

Talks have remained primarily stalemated since then. Cyprus and Turkey's Muslim identity remain the two major road blocks. There

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<sup>45</sup> U.S.-Turkish Relations a review at the beginning of the third decade of the post-cold war era, CSIS, November 2012, available at [http://csis.org/files/publication/121107\\_Aliriza\\_USTurkishRelations\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/121107_Aliriza_USTurkishRelations_Web.pdf) (Accessed April 05, 2013)

<sup>46</sup> Turkey-EU Relations, Official website of Turkey's Foreign Ministry, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-and-the-european-union.en.mfa> (Accessed April 05, 2013)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

have been signs of Turkey losing interest in EU accession in recent times due to lack of movement as also realisation that Turkey stands to gain more by focusing in the neighbourhood than EU.

## Greece and Cyprus

Turkey's relations with Greece and Cyprus have been closely inter-linked over the past five decades ever since Cyprus gained independence in 1960. Though, the historical context of Turkey's relations with Greece goes right up to the Ottoman era, Cyprus issue is more recent, but is the one which has dictated the relations between Turkey and Greece. Greece gained independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1821, but it was mainly over the main land leaving some islands in Aegean Sea open to dispute till later on. Post the collapse of Ottoman Empire, the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres<sup>50</sup> gave Greece eastern Thrace and an area of about 17,000 km<sup>2</sup> in western Anatolia. The treaty was however rejected by Mustafa Kemal's who fought back Turkish areas from Greek occupation. The Treaty of Lausanne<sup>51</sup>, signed after three years of nationalist struggle on July 24, 1923, established the new Turkish nation-state with complete sovereignty in almost all the territory included in the present day Turkish Republic. The relations witnessed many ups and downs, but deteriorated after Cyprus gained independence in 1960. For over a decade, Turkey suspected that Cyprus would unite with Greece. Finally, in response to a coup in Cyprus on July 15, 1974 which resulted in installing Nikos Sampson as the President, a known member of *Ethnikí Orgánosis Kipriakou Agónos (EOKA)*, (Greek for National Organisation of Cypriot Struggle)<sup>52</sup>, seeking Enosis (Union) of the island of Cyprus with Greece, Turkey invaded Cyprus on July 20, 1974. Cyprus thereafter has been divided into two parts; Greek

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<sup>50</sup> For the text of the Treaty of Sèvres see Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East*, pp. 81–9

<sup>51</sup> Stanford J Shaw and Ezelkural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey, 2, Reform, Revolution, and Republic: The Rise of Modern Turkey, 1808-1975*, pp.365-366

<sup>52</sup> EOKA, *Britannica Encyclopedia*, available at <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/189352/EOKA>, (Accessed August 26, 2013).

and Turkish Cyprus. Following the partition of Cyprus, various other issues like the territorial air and sea rights as well as sovereign rights over the Aegean seabed and its subsoil has been the central bone of contention between Greece and Turkey. The recent discovery of natural gas field containing between five and eight trillion cubic feet of natural gas under the Mediterranean Sea by Cyprus has become the latest bone of dispute between Turkey and Cyprus<sup>53</sup>. The gas field is located 115 miles south of the island. Turkey however said that Cyprus has no legal right to search for oil and gas and sent its own survey ships to the field. Cyprus is also one of the major issues which has blocked and delayed Turkey's entry in to the EU.

## **Regional response to Turkey's Foreign Policy**

### ***Arab World***

On January 10, 2011, before an audience of eminent Islamic scholars in Kuwait City, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was awarded the "Outstanding Personality in the Muslim World" award. Drawing on his training as a Muslim cleric, Mr Erdogan elicited cries of "Allahu Akbar" as he launched into a passionate tirade against Israel and its treatment of the Palestinians in his acceptance speech. The moment perfectly captured Turkey's growing popularity in the Arab world under Mr Erdogan's AKP party government that shot to power in 2002<sup>54</sup>.

Whether it was the 2009 Davos World Economic Forum meet outburst<sup>55</sup> or the Gaza Flotilla incident<sup>56</sup> or the recent attack on 'Zionist'

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<sup>53</sup> Cyprus confirms gas find, sparking Turkey tensions, BBC News December 28, 2011, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-16346507>, (Accessed August 26, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Turkey's growing ties with Arab world, BBC News, January 27, 2011, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12290479> (Accessed April 07, 2013)

<sup>55</sup> Turkey: PM Erdogan's Criticism of Israel Could Damage Ankara's Aspirations as Mid-East Peace Broker, Eurasianet, 04 February 2009, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020509.shtml> (Accessed March 25, 2013)

<sup>56</sup> Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident, September 2011, available at [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle\\_east/Gaza\\_Flotilla\\_Panel\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle_east/Gaza_Flotilla_Panel_Report.pdf), (Accessed October 2, 2012)

Israel through his statement on February 27, 2013 while speaking in Vienna at a United Nations event<sup>57</sup>, Turkey and its Prime Minister have tried to endear themselves to the Arab world in recent times.

In September 2011, in middle of the 'Arab Spring', Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan received an enthusiastic welcome in Egypt at the start of a North African tour to assert Turkey's role as a friend and helper of the popular movements that have toppled long-standing Arab leaders<sup>58</sup>. He also addressed the 22-member Arab League and reaffirmed his support for the Arab people. He stood by the Palestinians during the Gaza Conflict in November 2012, denouncing Israeli aggression. Along with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others in the Arab world, Turkey is playing an active role in supporting the rebels in Syria against President Assad. Turkey is a member of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its current Secretary General, Ekmeleddin Ýhsanoglu is a Turkish academician.

## **GCC**

GCC countries have responded positively towards Turkey in recent times. Economic and cultural relations as well as diplomatic relations have gained a new momentum. The most significant development was on September 2, 2008 when the GCC declared Turkey a strategic partner and established Turkey – GCC High Level Strategic Dialogue Mechanism<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Erdogan calls Zionism a 'crime against humanity', *Times of Israel*, February 28, 2013, available at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-calls-zionism-a-crime-against-humanity/> (Accessed April 10, 2013)

<sup>58</sup> Turkish PM visits Egypt to boost regional influence, Reuters, September 12, 2011, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/13/us-egypt-turkey-idUSTRE78COK520110913> (Accessed April 10, 2013)

<sup>59</sup> Turkey- GCC High Level Strategic Dialogue Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to be held in Ýstanbul, Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-gcc-high-level-strategic-dialogue-meeting-of-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-to-be-held-in-istanbul.en.mfa> (Accessed April 05, 2013)

Turkey-GCC relations have a number of issues of mutual benefit. While Turkey is an important investment destination for cash rich GCC Countries due to its industrialisation and economic growth, Turkey sources its energy needs from the Gulf region. Recent anti Israel stance by Turkey has been to the liking of GCC and the events of 'Arab Spring' especially Syria has brought GCC and Turkey even closer.

### **Iran**

As regards relations with Iran, the past decade has witnessed a very close engagement. Turkey has even offered to mediate between the US and Iran on nuclear matters<sup>60</sup> and has defended Iran's rights to civilian nuclear energy more than once. In November 2008, Erdogan urged nuclear weapons powers to abolish their own arsenals before meddling with Iran<sup>61</sup>. Soon afterwards he termed Ahmadinejad a "friend"<sup>62</sup> and was among the first to congratulate the Iranian president upon his re-election in June 2009. Turkey even, abstained from a sanctions resolution at the *International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)* against Tehran in November 2009 that even Russia and China supported<sup>63</sup>. In May 2010, Erdogan and Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, on the eve of a UNSC vote on a new round of sanctions on Iran, announced their alternative diplomatic proposal to handle the Iranian nuclear issue<sup>64</sup>. The Gaza Flotilla incident of May 2010 resulting in breakdown of relations with Israel brought Turkey closer to Iran. However, the decision by Turkey to host the NATO radar station in

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<sup>60</sup> Kaya Karen, Turkey-Iran Relations After The Arab Spring, available at <http://fms.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Turkey-Iran.pdf> (Accessed April 10, 2013)

<sup>61</sup> Hürriyet, November 17, 2008; *The Economist* (London), November, 27, 2008. Quoted in What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy? by Svante E. Cornell, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2012

<sup>62</sup> The Guardian (London), October 26, 2009; Sofia (Bulgaria) Echo, Oct. 26, 2009. Quoted in What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy? by Svante E. Cornell, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2012

<sup>63</sup> Reuters, Nov. 27, 2009. Quoted in "What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?" by Svante E. Cornell, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2012

<sup>64</sup> The Economist, May 17, 2010. Quoted in "What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy?" by Svante E. Cornell, *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter 2012



September 2011<sup>65</sup> was taken as an adversarial action by Iran. Post onset of 'Arab Spring', there has been issues which have adversely impacted the bilateral ties. Syrian crisis has brought them on opposite sides. Deployment of Patriot Missile batteries on Turkey-Syria border too has not been welcomed by Iran.

### ***Israel***

Israel and Turkey relations have witnessed significant ups and down in past decade. Close defence cooperation, trade and diplomatic ties have seen a down ward spiral in recent times. Initially, the AKP led government in Turkey, as a part of its reformed foreign policy, sought to mediate between Syria and Israel in 2008<sup>66</sup>. However, following Israel's offensive against Hamas in December 2008-January 2009, relations deteriorated. In January 2009, Prime Minister Erdogan famously walked out of an event at the Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) after starting a shouting match with Israeli president Shimon Peres<sup>67</sup>. Relations worsened after the Gaza Flotilla incident of May 2010<sup>68</sup>, when eight Turkish activists were killed in fierce clashes with Israeli commandos. On February 27, 2013, speaking in Vienna at a United Nations event devoted to dialogue between the West and Islam, Erdogan said "just like Zionism or anti-Semitism or fascism — Islamophobia as a crime against humanity"<sup>69</sup> which was more of a rebuke to Israel than anything

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<sup>65</sup> "Turkey agrees to host missile early warning radar for NATO," *The Guardian*, September 2, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/02/turkey-missile-warning-radar-nato> (Accessed April 02, 2013)

<sup>66</sup> Israel and Syria negotiate as Turkey mediates, *New York Times*, May 21, 2008, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/world/africa/21iht-mideast.4.13101516.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/world/africa/21iht-mideast.4.13101516.html?_r=0) (Accessed April 02, 2013)

<sup>67</sup> Turkey: PM Erdogan's Criticism of Israel Could Damage Ankara's Aspirations as Mid-East Peace Broker, *Eurasianet*, 04 February 2009, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020509.shtml> (Accessed April 02, 2013)

<sup>68</sup> Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident, September 2011, available at [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle\\_east/Gaza\\_Flotilla\\_Panel\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle_east/Gaza_Flotilla_Panel_Report.pdf), (Accessed October 2, 2012)

<sup>69</sup> Erdogan calls Zionism a 'crime against humanity', *Times of Israel*, February 28, 2013, available at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-calls-zionism-a-crime-against-humanity/> (Accessed March 07, 2013)

else. Israel's apology on March 22, 2013<sup>70</sup>, on the Gaza Flotilla incident might restore ties to some level; however, it is unlikely that the strong bonds that the two countries shared earlier could be replicated in short or medium term, especially with the current thinking in the Turkish policy makers that Turkey stands to gain more with strengthening ties with Muslim neighborhood than Israel.

### ***Egypt***

In addition to the Arab world, Iran and Israel there is also the case of Egypt. Post Mubarak, Egypt too is attempting to re-emerge in the region. Whether it was brokering the cease fire between Hamas and Israel in November 2012 or attempt to form a Quartet of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey to solve the Syrian crisis, Egypt seems keen to re-establish itself as a leader in the region. The ouster of President Morsi in July 2013 and crackdown on Muslim Brotherhood may have set the democratic process in Egypt back, but the potential of Egypt can't be ruled out. Good relations with Egypt will stand by Turkey in its quest for increased prominence in the region.

### **Current Trends**

Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) was re-elected to a third term in June 2011. Among other factors responsible for its re election, Turkey's growing international profile also played a role in the continued public support for the conservative, Islamist party. Indeed, in a highly unusual fashion, Prime Minister Erdogan began his victory speech by saluting "friendly and brotherly nations from Baghdad, Damascus, Beirut, Amman, Cairo, Sarajevo, Baku, and Nicosia." "The Middle East, the Caucasus, and the Balkans have won as much as Turkey," he claimed, pledging to take on an even greater role in regional

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<sup>70</sup> Obama Brokers Apology From Netanyahu to Erdogan, Al Monitor, March 22, 2013, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/netanyahu-apology-erdogan-gaza-flotilla-obama-trip.html> (Accessed March 25, 2013)

and international affairs. By 2023, the republic's centennial, the AKP has promised Turkey will be among the world's ten leading powers.<sup>71</sup>

Over the past three terms since 2002, the ruling AKP has based its policy on the official slogan, "zero problems with neighbours." In following it, Turkey has endeavoured to mend fences with Syria, the Kurdish Movement represented by the PKK and even to some extent with its past adversary Armenia. Along with it, Turkey has tried to emerge as the regional interlocutor by taking active part in Israel-Syria dialogue in 2007-08, Iran Nuclear issue etc. Its traditional leaning towards the West has been underpinned in its pursuit for the membership of EU. Coupled with its foreign policy initiatives, Turkey has made rapid strides in over hauling its economy and is today world's top 20 economies. In addition, it has emerged as an important player in the regional transit matrix of Gas and energy across West and Central Asia to Europe. Most importantly, Turkey has made endeavours to send signals to the Arab world and especially in the neighbourhood that it is ready to for a long term partnership and should be seen as a part of the Muslim world. The neo Islamism propagated by AKP led government and the political overtures have definitely signaled a shift in axis from the predominantly western discourse to an Oriental or Eastern discourse.

Turkey's recent profile has however has been a topic of hot debate in the region. Turkey's outreach towards neighbouring Muslim countries has been seen by the West as Turkey abandoning its traditional and trusted allies. Its ties with Iran and rapprochement with Syria over past few years drew specific ire of the West. With the EU membership not progressing well and effectively put on the back burner, Turkey's breaking off with Israel after the Gaza Flotilla incident of May 2010 also put seeds of doubt that Turkey was in effect ready for a rupture with the West. The popular protests in the Arab world, 'Arab Spring' however, caught all countries in the region as well as Turkey by surprise. Turkey attempted to champion the cause of peoples' rights and tried

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<sup>71</sup> What Drives Turkish Foreign Policy? by Svante E. Cornell, *Middle East Quarterly* Winter 2012, pp. 13-24

to project itself as an ideal model of democracy in the Muslim world. Events however, have shown that Turkey may have lost more ground than gained. The rise of Islamists in the region as well as the current crisis in Syria has clearly turned Turkey's policy of 'zero problems with the neighbours' on its head. The massive influx of refugees and the threat to national security from spill over effects forced Turkey to support the alliances against President Assad in Syria. It not only caused downturn in ties with Syria but also with Iran due to Iran's declared support to Assad regime in Syria. With Egypt too, after the initial efforts towards patronising the revolution in Egypt and offering democratic solutions and support to Muslim Brotherhood government, the ouster of President Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood government in Egypt in July 2013 has left Turkey deprived of yet another ally in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Most of the issues troubling Turkey's foreign policy in recent times have, however, been more of their own creation than faults in Turkey's dealing with them. Israel's attack on the Gaza aid flotilla and killing of Turkish citizens was an attack on Turkey's sovereignty and Israel's refusal to apologise left Turkey with no other option but to sever ties. Similarly, the 'Arab Spring' was a manifestation of internal turmoil in respective countries which threatened to engulf the region and Turkey was forced to make a choice and, in most cases, it chose to side with change.

Even in good times, Turkey had focused on increased engagement in the region and was open to talks with the existing regimes. In fact, it found it easier to forge relationships with authoritarian regimes as in the case of Libya and Syria. Turkey's emphasis was on soft power and taking a lead role in resolving regional issues. Internal or social problems in those countries ran contradictory to Turkey's foreign policy tenets and therefore became a blind spot. The overthrow of pseudo-secular powers and the rise of the Islamists post the Arab revolutions are threatening to bring about a new political order in the region, one which Turkey will have to find a way to accept and deal with. Thus, Turkey is realising that a soft power-based foreign policy was successful and gave returns with minimum risks only when the region was stable. With the region going through a political transformation, Turkey will have to invent new strategies to remain strong and relevant and continue its rise as a regional power.

Turkey will thus need to tread carefully in the region in its quest for leadership in the region. Ties with Iran will play a major role. Both will have to take a long term perspective of their relations and minor irritants will have to be overcome for larger long term gains. In addition, the Arab world led by Saudi Arabia will need to remain positively engaged. Emergence of Egypt in future may signal the birth of another pole in the region and Turkey will need to remain vigilant to such developments and forge relationships accordingly. But right now, it is Syrian crisis that has split regional loyalties down the middle which will be an acid test of Turkey's capabilities as a regional leader.

# MAJOR ELEMENTS/FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO TURKEY'S RISING PROFILE IN THE REGION

## Introduction

"The political stability in Turkey is without a doubt Turkey's greatest asset on the way to economic success," President Abdullah Gül said at an engineering conference in Istanbul on June 26, 2013<sup>72</sup>, highlighting along the way how political stability has contributed towards the economic growth of the country in past decade. In fact, Turkey's growth as a nation in past decade or so has been anchored on three important pillars; political stability, pro-active foreign policy and economic growth. While we have seen how foreign policy has contributed towards Turkey's rise as a major power in the region in previous chapter, this chapter would highlight how political stability and economic growth have been major contributing factors towards Turkey's rise as a major power in the region.

Turkey has also exploited the potential of its geographical location at the cross roads of Asia-Africa and Europe. Despite being energy deficient, owing to its location, it is endeavouring to become the 'Energy Hub' of the region. Thus, oil and gas pipelines across Central Asian region, Russia, Iran and Iraq traverse through Turkey before ending up at their respective destination in Europe or the Mediterranean. This too has resulted in generation of large revenue, cheap energy as well as regional clout for Turkey.

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<sup>72</sup> Turkish President Gül says stability is nation's greatest asset on way to success, *Hurriyet Daily News*, June 26, 2013, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-gul-says-stability-is-nations-greatest-asset-on-way-to-success.aspx?pageID=238&nid=49541>, (Accessed August 27, 2013)

Another factor which can be credited to Turkey's rise in the region is the evolving role of the armed forces. Surprisingly, it was the armed forces and the ultimate power which they exercised in Kemalist Turkey till late twentieth century which was seen with disdain and suspicion in the region. However, the dilution in participation of military in political affairs in the twenty first century, clearer demarcation of civilian and military authority and the boost given to defence industry have lately contributed positively to Turkey as a nation.

### **Political Stability**

One of the main reasons for the rise of Turkey as a nation has been the political stability witnessed during past 10 years. Ever since the AKP came to power in November 2002 with 34 per cent votes, it has increased its vote share with every other election. It got 47 per cent votes in 2007 and returned triumphant for the third time in 2011 with almost 50 per cent votes (49.8 per cent) and 327 seats out of 550. The three election victories has given an unprecedented period of political stability, a far cry from the turbulent period of military coups in 1960-80s or the frequent changes in government in 1970s and 1990s. But it has not only about winning elections which has lent to political stability and thus the growth of the nation. Along the way, AKP government carried out gradual domestic reforms, initiated market-oriented policies and revived the ideological roots of the Turkish Islamist movement leading to economic, social, and political transformation of the nation in the last decade.

When AKP first came to power, very few gave it a chance to challenge the Kemalist foundations for long. AKP's popularity was driven through a popular perception that it was a popular reformist party that promised to break the stranglehold of Kemalist over the country, to get rid of the corruption in state institutions and to promote economy, free trade and values of democracy while possibly limiting the military's power over civil affairs. The three measures in domestic politics which has given maximum dividends to AKP and the nation would be; reining in the military, attempted reconciliation with the Kurds and liberalising the practice of religion in Turkey. All three were seen as major challenges as they attempted to overthrow deeply engraved ideologies in Kemalist Turkey for past eight decades.

Perhaps aware of the challenges, AKP did not take many bold steps domestically in its first term. It was in 2007 when the military's attempted to intervene in national politics on April 04, 2007 through the an announcement to the press, which was then later posted on their website (dubbed the "E-Memo Warning"<sup>73</sup>) warning the AKP government against electing AKP's Abdullah Gul as President of the Republic and stressing on military's commitment to secular Kemalist values. Instead of getting bogged down it gave the perfect opportunity to the AKP to dissolve parliament and declare early elections. AKP won the elections with 47 per cent votes and Gul was elected president. "April 27 is a source of pride for Turkey. It was the first time a civilian government dared to reject a statement coming from the military. If one can talk about an initiative on the Kurdish question today and if there is a criminal case like Ergenekon and if [military] plans to make minority groups a target in order to send the entire world a message that there is a religious government in Turkey and Christians are being killed for this reason are exposed, this is thanks to the atmosphere created after the rejection of the military memorandum [by the government]," stated Bekir Berat Özipek, an associate professor of political science<sup>74</sup>.

This was followed by government crackdown on reports of two failed coup attempts known as the *Balyoz* and *Ergenekon* affairs<sup>75</sup>, which led to severe indictments of senior military officers which sent a clear signal to the armed forces that their past role in Turkish politics is no longer acceptable. The September 2010 referendum on proposed changes to the constitution was also seen as a major victory for AKP which resulted in placing limits on the power of the military in politics,

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<sup>73</sup> Ms. Karen Kaya Contractor, Changing Civil Military Relations in Turkey The Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, April 2011, available at [fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/.../Civil-Military-Relations-in-Turkey.pdf](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/.../Civil-Military-Relations-in-Turkey.pdf), (Accessed August 29, 2013).

<sup>74</sup> BETÜL AKKAYA DEMÝRBAP Reactions to April 27 e-memo a milestone for Turkish democracy, Today's Zaman, 27 April 2011, available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-242139-reactions-to-april-27-e-memo-a-milestone-for-turkish-democracy.html>, (Accessed August 29, 2013).

<sup>75</sup> Ehud Toledano, The AKP's New Turkey, Hudson Institute, (April 22, 2011), available at <http://www.currenttrends.org/research/detail/the-akps-new-turkey>, (Accessed September 10, 2013)



opening up judicial appointments and enacting other measures in line with EU accession policy.

As regards Kurdish issue (details in Chapter Four), despite several attempts in 1990s by Turgut Ozal, no breakthroughs took place. AKP, however attempted to resolve the issue and grant them more space and rights in the national mainstream. It initiated a “Democratic Opening” in 2005<sup>76</sup>. Prime Minister Erdogan also reportedly gave the green light to start negotiations with the PKK in Oslo in 2008<sup>77</sup>, organised by Norwegian civil society group. Under the “Democratic Opening”, AKP attempted to introduce changes to the secular nature of the Kemalist state and to allow for cultural autonomy and greater religious freedoms as also attempt recognition of their separate and exclusive identity within Turkey. Possible resolution of this issue could enhance the reach and potency of AKP and its grip on Turkey.

Third major step taken by AKP is the easing of restrictions on practice of religion in secular Turkey. Given to its Islamist roots, AKP has taken steps towards Islamisation of the education system, permit display of religious symbols, permitting and propagating codes on issues such as women’s dress, consumption of alcohol etc. People forced to suppress their religious practices under Kemalist era have welcomed it. It has brought Turkey closer to its Muslim neighbours but many fear that AKP seeks to turn Turkey into an Islamic state. There is also the issue of Prime Minister Erdogan’s increasing authoritarian style of leadership which could be a major challenge for Turkey in the coming years.

## **Economy**

Credit for turning the Turkish economy towards a growth trajectory goes to the Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, who in 1980s, in an effort to revive the economy decided to replace for import-

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<sup>76</sup> Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement, International Crisis Group Report, September 11, 2012

<sup>77</sup> Amending the Turkish Constitution to solve the Kurdish Question, Al Jazeera Center for Studies, March 03, 2013, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2013/03/2013336372537622.htm> (Accessed April 10, 2013)

substitution policies with policies designed to encourage exports. He privatised companies and ensured decrease in government expenditures which led to high GDP growth in the decade. However, the first Gulf War in 1991 leading to drying up of revenues from Iraqi oil and subsequent policies led to economic downturn by late 1990s which led to the most severe economic depression in Turkish history in 2001.

Post the 2001 economic crisis<sup>78</sup>, the changed government and the reformed fiscal policies have helped the economy rebound towards a growth trajectory in the past decade. In fact, February 19, 2001, is still referred as "**Black Wednesday**"<sup>79</sup> in Turkey, the day when Turkey's economy collapsed, banks closed down, exchange rates sky rocketed and overnight Turkey became almost 25 per cent poorer. Efforts by government ensured that the liquidity crunch was overcome and the economy was changed from a fixed rate regime to a floating rate one. In fact, apart from a well formulated and practiced foreign policy post 2002, one of the other big factors which have contributed immensely to the rise of Turkey as a major power in the region in the past decade is the economy.

Turkey also realised that its national interests and national security could not be defined through the narrow prism of military based security, which it practiced in 1990s. It was this realisation which propelled Turkey to two very vital decisions; to commence a concentrated campaign to join the EU and secondly and maybe more importantly, to focus in its immediate neighbourhood to enhance political and trade ties. Trade with neighbourhood perfectly complemented with the foreign policy direction of the government of "zero problems with the neighbours". The campaign for EU membership dragged on till 2007 after which it was put on the back burner. It was perhaps a blessing in disguise as

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<sup>78</sup> Ziya Onis and Fikret Senses, Turkey and the Global Economy, Neo Liberal Restructuring and integration in the post crisis era, Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Economies Levent Koch and MA Chaudhary, February 2001 Crisis in Turkey: causes and Consequences, The Pakistan Development Review 40:4 Part-II (Winter 2001) pp. 467-486

<sup>79</sup> Turkey's economy from 2001 to 2011: stronger, steadier and safer, *Turkish Review*, March 01, 2011, available at [http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail\\_getNewsByld.action?newsId=223078](http://www.turkishreview.org/tr/newsDetail_getNewsByld.action?newsId=223078) (Accessed March 25, 2013)

Turkey escaped the 2008-09 global and EU financial crisis with very little damage.

Kemal Kirisci in his paper 'The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy: The Rise of the Trading State'<sup>80</sup> has highlighted the role of economy in shaping the Turkish foreign policy and its rise as a regional power. He has articulated the role of economy which has helped Turkey progress from the concept of a 'security state to a 'trading state'.

Turkish economy has continued its 'bull run' throughout the past decade but there are signs of the economy cooling down. Estimates suggest a sharp slowdown in real GDP growth seen since mid-2011. This coupled with the instability in the neighbourhood; especially Syria is severely affecting Turkish economy. The threat of increase in energy prices could lead to further instability in the economy as Turkey has virtually no domestic energy resources as relies on imports. Assuming that some amount of monetary loosening by the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) revives domestic credit growth and that global financial and economic conditions improve slightly, growth is forecast to pick up from 3.2 per cent in 2012 to 3.8 per cent in 2013 and just over five per cent a year during 2014-17<sup>81</sup>. Maintaining economic growth would therefore be essential for Turkey in its quest for leadership role in the region.

## **Turkey's as a Key Energy Transit Hub**

Energy transit has been one of the strong pillars of Turkey's policy and has been a major driver in its emergence as a regional leader. Turkey's official 'Energy Strategy'<sup>82</sup> highlights that "Turkey is geographically located in close proximity to more than 70 per cent of the world's proven oil and gas reserves. Turkey, forming a natural energy bridge between the source countries, West Asia and the Caspian basin, and

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<sup>80</sup> Kirisci Kemal ,The transformation of Turkish foreign policy: The rise of the trading state , New Perspectives on Turkey

<sup>81</sup> Country Report November 2012 ,Economist Intelligence Unit Limited 2012,p. 33

<sup>82</sup> Turkey's Energy Strategy, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa> (Accessed March 27, 2013)

consumer markets, stands as a key country in ensuring energy security through diversification of supply sources and routes, considerations that have gained increased significance in today's Europe. In this respect, major pipeline projects, realised and proposed, contribute to Europe's energy supply security, will as well enhance Turkey's role as a reliable transit country on the East-West as well as North-South energy axis"

Turkey's Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources in its Strategic Plan (2010-14)<sup>83</sup>, clearly identifies turning the country into a successful energy hub as a key 'Strategic Theme' wherein it states

"Turning our country into an energy hub and terminal by using our geo-strategic position effectively within the framework of the regional cooperation processes".

*International Energy Agency (IEA)* too has noted<sup>84</sup> how Turkey has been successful in finalising and executing agreements with Russia, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, the Caspian Region (Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (Turkmenistan). These agreements have strengthened Turkey's role as a transit country and an energy corridor which benefits both the country itself and the wider international community.

Turkey's energy strategy rests on three main pillars<sup>85</sup>. The first is to ensure diversified, reliable, and cost-effective supplies for domestic consumption; the second is to liberalise its energy market; and the third is to become a key transit country and energy hub. As a part of its third pillar, whether it is the key oil pipelines transiting across Turkey or critical gas pipelines, energy transit has definitely propelled Turkey into a leadership position in the region. A glance at its major oil and gas

<sup>83</sup> The Republic Of Turkey Ministry Of Energy And Natural Resources Strategic Plan(2010-b14),p. 29, available at [http://www.enerji.gov.tr/yayinlar\\_raporlar\\_EN/ETKB\\_2010\\_2014\\_Stratejik\\_Planı\\_EN.pdf](http://www.enerji.gov.tr/yayinlar_raporlar_EN/ETKB_2010_2014_Stratejik_Planı_EN.pdf) (Accessed March 27, 2013)

<sup>84</sup> Energy Policies of IEA Countries Turkey 2009 Review by IEA, available at <http://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/turkey2009.pdf> (Accessed March 27, 2013)

<sup>85</sup> Babaly Tuncay, Turkey at the Energy Crossroads, *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2009, pp. 25-33, <http://www.meforum.org/2108/turkey-at-the-energy-crossroads> (Accessed March 27, 2013)

## Oil and Gas Pipelines transiting Turkey



Source: <http://deepresource.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/botasmag.gif>

pipelines would give a deeper insight into this factor contributing to Turkey recognition as a major player in the region.

### ***Oil Pipelines***<sup>86</sup>

***Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline***, extends from the Azeri-Chirag- Guneshli (ACG) field through Azerbaijan and Georgia to a terminal at Ceyhan on the Mediterranean coast of Turkey. The pipeline, which has a capacity of 1 million barrels per day, and at 1760 kilometres is the second longest of its kind in the world. As of October 15, 2012, over 1.5 billion barrels of Azeri oil was loaded to tankers from Ceyhan and shipped to international markets.

The **Iraq - Turkey (Kirkuk – Yumurtalık) Crude Oil Pipeline System** transports the oil produced in Kirkuk and other areas of Iraq to the Ceyhan (Yumurtalık) Marine Terminal. The pipeline system with an annual transport capacity of 35 million tons was commissioned in 1976 which was increased to 46.5 million tons/year in 1984. With the completion of the second pipeline, parallel to the first one, the annual capacity reached 70.9 million tons as of 1987. Turkey has concluded the negotiations with the Iraqi side aiming at extending the duration of the transportation agreement via this pipeline on September 19, 2010.

In addition, the Turkish Straits transport 3.7 per cent of the world's daily oil consumption. Oil and oil products transported through the Strait of Istanbul has increased from 60 million tons in 1996 to around 150 million tons in 2008. This figure is expected to reach around 190-200 million tons in the coming years due to the expected throughput from the Caspian region reaching the Black Sea in addition to the large amounts of Russian oil. With many other bypass pipelines like the planned Samsun-Ceyhan by-pass oil pipeline, it is anticipated that six to seven per cent of global oil supply will transit Turkey and that Ceyhan will become a major energy hub and the largest oil outlet terminal in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>86</sup> Turkey's Energy Strategy, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa> (Accessed March 27, 2013)

### *Gas Pipelines*<sup>87</sup>

**Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) Natural Gas Pipeline** transports natural gas from the Shah Deniz field in the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian Sea, through Georgia to Turkey, has become operational as of July 3, 2007 and will export 6.6 billion cubic metres a year. Transportation of Caspian natural gas resources via multiple pipelines to Europe through the interconnection of the gas pipeline networks of Turkey, Greece and Italy within the **Southern Gas Corridor** also constitutes an essential component of Europe's energy diversification efforts. It is the key in the delivery of natural gas primarily from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Turkey and Azerbaijan reached an agreement concerning the sale and purchase of six bcm and the transit through Turkey to European markets of 10 bcm of natural gas. Within this framework, an Intergovernmental Agreement between Turkey and Azerbaijan as well as numerous contracts between BOTAS and the Consortium were signed on October 25, 2011.

Another key link in the incorporation of Turkey's energy network with that of the EU was realised through the Turkey-Greece Interconnector. The Turkey-Greece Interconnector became operational on November 18, 2007. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed among BOTAS, DEPA and Edison with regard to the IT Governance Institute (ITGI) Project on June 17, 2010 in Istanbul, which will link the EU countries Greece and Italy via Turkey to Caspian and Middle Eastern natural gas resources.

The Trans-Anatolian Pipeline Project (TANAP) proposes to transfer upto 16 bcm of natural gas from Azerbaijan to Europe via Turkey. A MoU was signed between Turkey and Azerbaijan concerning a standalone pipeline in Ankara on December 24, 2011. This too would greatly enhance Turkey's role as a critical energy hub.

While Turkey is enjoying its status as the energy hub of the region, it has to often walk a tight rope owing to geopolitical considerations. It has come under constant pressure from the US owing to its close ties

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<sup>87</sup> Turkey's Energy Strategy, available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkeys-energy-strategy.en.mfa> (Accessed March 27, 2013)

on energy import and transit with specially Russia and Iran. Currently, around 26 per cent of the total energy demand is met by domestic resources, while the rest is supplied from a diversified portfolio of imports<sup>88</sup>. Turkey imports around 91 per cent and 98 per cent respectively of the oil and natural gas it consumes. Turkey imported 51 per cent of its oil from Iran and 12 per cent from Russia in 2011 while its gas import was 55 per cent from Russia and 21 per cent from Iran in 2011<sup>89</sup>. With US led block putting considerable pressure on Turkey to support the Nabucco pipeline<sup>90</sup> (seen as rival and alternative to Russian Gas supplies to Europe), how well Turkey manages and balances its domestic energy needs, energy transit issues and relations with US, Russia, Iran and other stakeholders in the region would define how Turkey is able to maintain its status as the 'Energy Hub' of the region.

## Turkish Armed Forces

Turkish armed forces or *Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri* (TSK) have been one of the strongest pillars of Kemalist Turkey and the unquestioned guardian of the secular republic that protects and upholds Atatürk's principles. Throughout the early decades of Turkey's birth, TSK ensured strict execution of secular principles, kept governments in check and formed the backbone of Turkish identity. Starting in 1960, the military conducted coups d'état virtually every decade (1960, 1971, 1980 and a 'soft-coup' on 28 February 1997), removing governments deemed as a threat to secular Turkey. Throughout this period, the TSK maintained its close control over the state system.

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<sup>88</sup> Babali Tuncay, The Role Of Energy In Turkey's Relations With Russia And Iran, CSIS paper, pg2, Available at [http://csis.org/files/attachments/120529\\_Babali\\_Turkey\\_Energy.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/120529_Babali_Turkey_Energy.pdf), (Accessed March 27, 2013)

<sup>89</sup> Babali Tuncay, The Role Of Energy In Turkey's Relations With Russia And Iran, CSIS paper, pg3, Available at [http://csis.org/files/attachments/120529\\_Babali\\_Turkey\\_Energy.pdf](http://csis.org/files/attachments/120529_Babali_Turkey_Energy.pdf), Country Analysis, Turkey, US Energy Information Administration, updated up to February 2013, available at <http://www.eia.gov/countries/cab.cfm?fips=TU> (Accessed March 27, 2013)

<sup>90</sup> Overview available at <http://www.nabucco-pipeline.com/portal/page/portal/en/pipeline/overview> (Accessed March 27, 2013)



The twenty first century had profound changes in Turkey and especially the TSK. There was a clear realisation that Turkey could no longer continue as a 'security state'. The conditionality of accession to EU which called for civilian control over armed forces also contributed to change in thought process. Riding on clear electoral victory in 2002 and twice thereafter till 2011, AKP led government has brought about changes which have resulted in the TSK gradually coming under civilian control. The 2010 National Security Policy Document (NSPD) revised the terms of military influence and control as also re-assessed external threats keeping in line with its regional role. The State Security Courts were abolished and the emergency rule in the south-eastern region of Turkey was abolished. Moreover, defence expenditures in Turkey as a percentage of GDP decreased from 3.2 in the 1995-99 period to 1.8 in the year 2009<sup>91</sup>. TSK today is less involved in internal governance and is thus free to plan and exercise for its conventional roles against external threats. Reconciliation with Kurds could further free the TSK from internal duties.

These developments when seen in conjunction with the military might of TSK become a prime mover of Turkey's influence and deterrence in the region. Already, it is the second largest armed forces in NATO after the US and fifth largest in the world<sup>92</sup>. Equipped with an inventory of one of the most modern military equipment and training, it projects a formidable force. The Five Year Strategic Plan 2012-16 announced in March 2012, aims to make Turkey's defense industry one of the world's 10 largest by 2016 with an annual turnover of US\$ 8bn and exports US\$ 2bn<sup>93</sup>. Already, in 2012, Turkish Machinery and Chemical Industry Corporation

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<sup>91</sup> Defence and Security Policy of the Turkish Republic, CIDOB International Yearbook 2011, pp. 241-247, available at [www.cidob.org/.../file/241-248\\_ANEXO\\_POLITICA+DEFENSA+DE+T...y](http://www.cidob.org/.../file/241-248_ANEXO_POLITICA+DEFENSA+DE+T...y), (Accessed August 26, 2013)

<sup>92</sup> Ibid

<sup>93</sup> Military Balance 2013, IISS, p. 104

(MKEK) reported arms exports worth 55.4 million U.S. dollars<sup>94</sup>, half of which went to Saudi Arabia. Bahrain made the second highest purchases from MKEK worth of 5.4 million dollars followed by Pakistan, 4.1 million dollars. With a target of 75 million US Dollars of arms exports in 2013, it is an indication of things to follow. While present defence spending of US\$ 16,954mn in 2012 amounting to 2.17 per cent of its GDP<sup>95</sup>, it may not match up to the huge spending undertaken by Saudi Arabia or Iran by virtue of petro dollars, but in terms of quality of armed forces, it remains a major regional leader as shown in the table below.

Country	Defence Expenditure 2012 (in US\$ mn)	Defence Expenditure as % of GDP	Numbers in Armed Forces(in thousands)			Remarks
			Active	Para Mil	Reserve	
Turkey	16,954	2.17	511	102	379	
Saudi Arabia	52,570	7.95	234	16	0	Leading recipient of Arms in 2011US\$ 2800 mn
Iran	23,932	4.95	523	40	350	
Israel	19,366	7.85	177	8	465	
Egypt	5,510	2.16	439	397	479	
Iraq	14,727	11.28	271	531	0	

**Source: Military Balance 2013, published by International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)**

<sup>94</sup> Turkey's arms export hits 55 million USD in 2012, *Xinhua News*, May 07, 2013, available at [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-05/07/c\\_132365629.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-05/07/c_132365629.htm), (Accessed August 26, 2013)

<sup>95</sup> Military Balance 2013, IISS, p. 549

Thus, as Turkey moves ahead, it would require a modern and well equipped force which is under civilian control and restricts its employment to its conventional roles. With economy on positive trajectory and internal problems (Kurdish issue) moving towards resolution, TSK could become one of the major pillars of Turkey's assertion as a regional leader.

## **Conclusion**

Turkey has thus been assisted by numerous factors which have not only contributed to the nation growth in the region but also have contributed towards a clear recognition of Turkey as a power to reckon with in the region. While AKP led government has ensured over a decade of uninterrupted continuation of domestic and foreign policy objectives, economic growth has given the necessary shot in the arm to boost Turkey's image in the region. Coupled with the economic growth, a very well thought out and focused 'Energy Strategy' has ensured that Turkey remains relevant to the region as well develop better integration with the region, especially the immediate Muslim neighbourhood. Reining in of armed forces too has resulted in multiple benefits; primary among them being forcing and facilitating the armed forces to focus only on their primary tasks ie security issues without getting involved in politics of the nation. It has also helped in alleviating the fears within the neighborhood of any 'Neo Ottoman' designs of Turkish armed forces and the nation. Also, the fast developing defense industry could become another source of power, influence as well as crucial revenue for Turkey.

However, this is not to conclude that Turkey is now totally resurgent. There are still numerous challenges, some of them very critical, which Turkey will need to overcome if it is to be counted and recognised as a viable regional power and an aspirant for leadership role in the region. They are discussed in detail in the next chapter on "Challenges Faced by Turkey".

## **CHALLENGES FACED BY TURKEY IN ITS QUEST FOR LEADERSHIP ROLE**

Rapid strides in its economic growth in past decade as well deft diplomacy has placed Turkey on an ideal platform from where it could build up on to exert its leadership role in the region. However, Turkey will have to emerge stronger domestically and in the region to exploit its success in other spheres. While the AKP government, in continuously winning elections three times since 2002, has lent political stability, there are critical and fundamental domestic issues which challenge Turkey. They are the Kurdish issue, the internal political challenges and the future of Turkish state identity being presently debated under the 'New Constitution'.

The ongoing debate on 'Islam versus Secularism' as a basis of Turkish society and identity too is a critical factor moving forward. In addition the 'Arab Spring' has surprised Turkey as well as the region and is now posing major challenge to Turkey's regional strategies. Also, acceptability of Turkey in the region as an equal partner will be an important step towards its quest of leadership role.

Turkey will have to overcome these domestic and external challenges to continue on its path towards growth and leadership in the region. This would only be possible in case it identifies the parametres and depth of each of these challenges and takes pro-active and concerted steps to overcome them. This chapter deals with each of these challenges in brief and citing the pay-offs of overcoming these challenges in Turkey's march ahead.

### **The Kurdish Issue**

"The non-resolution of the Kurdish issue remains the single greatest obstacle to progress on human rights in Turkey". This quote from

Human Rights Watch (HRW) report 2012<sup>96</sup> perhaps sums up how important the Kurdish issue is for Turkey.

The Kurdish problem has its roots in the birth of Turkey from the Ottoman Empire wherein the Kurdish nationalists realised that perhaps, they had missed an opportunity to carve out their own homeland. Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's vision for the Turkish Republic was based on a strong centralised state which required the suppression of ethnic groups and minority identities in favour of singular identity "Turkish". He regarded multiculturalism as divisive and minorities like the Kurds a threat to national cohesion. In 1978, a group of young Kurds, led by Abdullah Ocalan, established the Kurdistan Workers Party 'Parti Karkerani Kurdistan' (PKK)<sup>97</sup>. It launched its first attack on Turkish soil in 1984 in its plan to establish an independent Kurdistan. Turkey launched military operations including cross-border raids into northern Iraq.

Turkey has also made attempts towards peace talks with PKK right from the 1990s. The first of these attempts was between 1991 and 1993, pledged by President Turgut Ozal, who himself was of Kurdish origin<sup>98</sup>. It began with the abolition of the total ban on the use of the Kurdish language, altering it to a partial ban. However, talks broke down after his death. Some analysts believe that there was a direct link between Ozal's sudden death in 1993 and his efforts to resolve the Kurdish issue. In 1997, Islamist Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan again attempted to open channels of negotiation with the PKK, but Erbakan's authority over the military and security establishment was not at a level that allowed him to quickly advance a peaceful path. Also, his government did not last longer than a year. The capture of PKK

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<sup>96</sup> World Report 2012: Turkey, Events of 2011, Human Rights Watch, available at <http://www.hrw.org/world-report-2012/world-report-2012-turkey>, (Accessed March 28, 2013)

<sup>97</sup> Amending the Turkish Constitution to solve the Kurdish Question, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 03, 2013, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2013/03/2013336372537622.htm>, (Accessed March 28, 2013)

<sup>98</sup> *ibid*

leader Ocalan from Nairobi in February 1999 and his subsequent trial and solitary confinement on Imrali Island put the process of reconciliation back.

The emergence of AKP led government gave hope towards peace. It initiated a "Democratic Opening" in 2005<sup>99</sup>. Prime Minister Erdogan also reportedly gave the green light to start negotiations with the PKK in Oslo in 2008<sup>100</sup>, organised by Norwegian civil society group. The Norwegian negotiations continued until July 2011, when the PKK ended its truce with the state and launched an armed attack on a Turkish military. As per International Crisis Group (ICG)<sup>101</sup>, since large-scale hostilities with the PKK resumed in summer 2011, Turkey has experienced the worst fighting since it captured and jailed Abdullah Ocalan, in 1999. Since the June 12, 2011 parliamentary elections, 711 people had been killed by mid-August 2012, including 222 soldiers, police and village guard militia, 405 PKK fighters and 84 civilians. This is four times more deaths than in 2009 and far more than the annual figures during 2000-2004.

Despite the spurt in PKK initiated violence. PM Erdogan has garnered widespread support to solve the Kurdish question peacefully. On February 22, 2013, Erdogan's government presented the fourth judicial amendments<sup>102</sup> which, upon approval, are believed to pave the way for a fundamental change in the procedures relating to charges and litigation and would allow for the release of thousands of prisoners

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<sup>99</sup> Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement, International Crisis Group Report, September 11, 2012

<sup>100</sup> Amending the Turkish Constitution to solve the Kurdish Question, Al Jazeera Center for Studies, March 03, 2013, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2013/03/2013336372537622.htm>, (Accessed March 28, 2013)

<sup>101</sup> Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement, International Crisis Group Report, September 11, 2012

<sup>102</sup> Amending the Turkish Constitution to solve the Kurdish Question, Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, March 03, 2013, available at <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2013/03/2013336372537622.htm>, (Accessed March 28, 2013)

of the illegal Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which is affiliated to the PKK and had long been targeted by the Turkish security services and the judiciary. Erdogan's government has also presented to parliament a penal code reform, which could lead to the release of many Kurdish activists jailed over alleged PKK ties. Among other reforms, Kurdish politicians seek Kurdish language education and a constitution boosting equality. At the same time, Erdogan has adopted a strategic policy of rapprochement with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, whose cooperation is necessary for any solution or for a military confrontation with the PKK<sup>103</sup>.

On February 23, 2013, three parliamentarians from the Peace and Democracy Party (Turkish: Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, (BDP) — Pelvin Buldan, Sirri Sureyya Onder and Altan Tan visited Ocalan at the prison island of Imrali<sup>104</sup>. The visit was a part of the ongoing peace process between Turkey and the militant Kurds. Ocalan presented a series of ideas that would set the course for a solution to Turkey's Kurdish problem. He proposed the withdrawal of the PKK militants from their hideouts inside Turkey to begin with the Nowruz celebrations on March 21<sup>105</sup> and end by August. As if to demonstrate his intent on peace talks, eight captives abducted in 2011 and 2012 and held in the mountains of northern Iraq by the PKK were released at a border crossing on March 13, 2013 in a sign that peace talks between Turkey and Kurdish rebels were gaining momentum<sup>106</sup>.

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<sup>103</sup> ibid

<sup>104</sup> Ocalan Peace Plan Irks PKK Militant Leaders, Al Monitor News, March 03, 2013, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/03/ocalan-pkk-akp-peace-process-turkey-kurds.html>, (Accessed April 28, 2013)

<sup>105</sup> PKK leader Ocalan declares ceasefire with Turkey, Telegraph News, March 21, 2013, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/turkey/9945897/PKK-leader-Ocalan-declares-ceasefire-with-Turkey.html>, (Accessed April 28, 2013)

<sup>106</sup> Kurdish Rebels Free 8 Turks, Fueling Peace Talks, *New York Times*, March 13, 2013, available at [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/14/world/europe/kurdish-rebels-release-turkish-captives-fueling-peace-talks.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/14/world/europe/kurdish-rebels-release-turkish-captives-fueling-peace-talks.html?_r=0), (Accessed April 28, 2013)

Ocalan summed up the criticality of the issue when he said<sup>107</sup> “We must establish a new democratic republic in line with the new world and the new Middle East. The Kurdish problem can only be solved with Turkey’s democratisation.” He added, “If it is not solved, these problems in Turkey will deepen... God forbid, we will end up like Iraq or Syria.”

As a proof of its commitments, reports indicate that PKK has indeed commenced the process of withdrawal from its hideouts. There are also indications of cooperation between Turkey and Iraq on the Kurdish issue. Syrian Kurds, however, remain a sticking point and could jeopardise the process if not handled properly. There are no signs presently of Syrian Kurds being a part of the reconciliation process. The Kurds issue, though primarily an internal domestic issue has regional ramifications not only for Turkey but also the region. This could therefore be one critical test in Turkey quest for leadership role in the region.

### **Internal Discontent**

When AKP won its third successive term by winning election in 2011, Erdogan, the prime minister, triumphantly declared that the next five years would mark an era of unprecedented growth in Turkey and era of mastery for his party. Having won almost 50 per cent votes, there seemed no credible political opposition to the AKP. AKP’s rise in votes and Erdogan’s desire (undeclared yet) to run for Presidency in 2014 by amending the constitution perhaps gives rise to hope that AKP would run Turkey at-least till 2023, the centenary of Ataturk’s republic.

AKP led government has undoubtedly given one of the most stable periods in political history of the country. Since taking office in 2002, it has led Turkey to economic recovery and growth, freeing the country from the military oversight, carried out judicial reforms, eased restrictions

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<sup>107</sup> Kurdish Rebel Leader Issues Dire Warning for Turkey, *VOA News*, February 26, 2013, available at [http://www.voanews.com/content/kurdish\\_rebel\\_leader\\_issues\\_dire\\_warning\\_for\\_turkey\\_reuters/1611388.html](http://www.voanews.com/content/kurdish_rebel_leader_issues_dire_warning_for_turkey_reuters/1611388.html), (Accessed April 23, 2013)



on practice of religion and has opened up with its Muslim neighbours. Through all this, Turkey is being hailed as a model of democracy and regional stability. However, lately, in past two years, there have been issues and occasions which point towards increasing discontent within the population and domestic polity, which could set AKP and Turkey back, if no corrective actions are taken. The Gezi Park protests in June 2013<sup>108</sup> were not merely about opposition to its redevelopment plan, but reflected a deeper sense of discontent within the population in recent times. Major concerns and source of discontent within Turkey in recent times have been the forceful enforcement of Islamic agenda on the society and the perception that Erdogan is turning dictatorial in conduct.

Mr Erdogan's greatest boon is the lack of a credible alternative. The main opposition RPP (CHP) led by its chairman, Kemal Kilicdaroglu continues to be bogged down by internal squabbles and unable to take advantage of peoples growing discontent with AKP. Even during the Gezi Park protests, the protestors felt that their demands are neither being adequately represented nor addressed in the political sphere. The parties that they voted for, especially the main opposition RPP (CHP), have failed to give voice to their demands. According to a survey conducted by KONDA, an independent polling firm, 41 per cent of people attending the Gezi Park Protest voted for the CHP in the 2011 election, unenthusiastically. This is a very high percentage given that 17 per cent of protestors indicated that they were under the voting age at the time, while 13 per cent stated they did not vote and 7 per cent admitted to have cast empty ballots<sup>109</sup>. "The protests gave the CHP a big opportunity to net undecided voters but it was missed," says a disgruntled CHP lawmaker<sup>110</sup>. As the protests in Gezi Park displayed,

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<sup>108</sup> Turkey protests: Istanbul erupts as Gezi Park cleared, BBC News June 16, 2013, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22924886>, (Accessed August 29, 2013).

<sup>109</sup> Why Turkey needs a better opposition, Aljazeera, July 15, 2013, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/07/201371015443837214.html>, (Accessed August 28, 2013).

<sup>110</sup> Turkish politics Lonely command The prime minister rules the roost, despite setbacks at home and abroad. Lack of serious opposition helps, *the Economist*, August 28, 2013, available at <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21583989-prime-minister-rules-roost-despite-setbacks-home-and-abroad-lack-serious>, (Accessed August 28, 2013).

the voter's loyalty with AKP could dwindle if Erdogan and AKP do not pay heed to their concerns.

As Erdogan has gained increasing electoral power, accusations of his authoritarian style are being repeatedly witnessed. Liberal and secular opponents warn that he and his party are looking to impose a religious agenda<sup>111</sup>. These fears have been fuelled by two controversial measures passed this year: educational reforms that push curricula more toward Islam and restrictions on alcohol advertisements and sales. Erdogan's argument that that all women should have three children, or that anyone who drinks is an alcoholic—has made many Turks worry about more stringent restrictions to come.

Also, Erdogan appears increasingly unwilling to be challenged. That proved to be the case during the anti-government in Gezi Park. The government's heavy-handed response to the protests only fuelled concerns on Erdogan's authoritative and inflexible outlook.

Press freedom, too remains a serious concern in Turkey. The country has long history of jailed journalists which is increasing in numbers with journalists being jailed for anti AKP writings. Already Turkey has slipped to 154<sup>th</sup> rank in Press Freedom ranking in the world<sup>112</sup>. Even mainstream journalists, analysts say, are increasingly facing government's ire. "The imprisonment of journalists is having a chilling effect on Turkey's media, which exercised self-censorship during this month's anti-government protests"<sup>113</sup>, said Dunja Mijatovic, representative for media freedom at the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in

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<sup>111</sup> Mike Giglio, Turkish opposition Grows Up, *The Daily Beast*, June 19, 2013, available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2013/06/19/will-turkey-s-protest-end-democracy.html>, (Accessed September 10, 2013)

<sup>112</sup> Turkey now 154th in world press freedom index, *Hurriyet Daily News*, July 24, 2013, available at <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/Default.aspx?pageID=238&nid=51328>, (Accessed August 29, 2013).

<sup>113</sup> Jailing of reporters has "chilling effect" on Turkish media-OSCE, *Reuters News*, June 13, 2013, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/06/13/turkey-media-osce-idUSL5N0EO24S20130613>, (Accessed August 29, 2013).

Europe (OSCE), adding that 67 journalists were behind bars in Turkey - the largest number among the body's 57 member states.

AKP has little time on its hands. It has local and presidential elections in 2014 followed by general elections in 2015. Elections in 2014 could give an insight into 2015 Parliamentary elections and future of AKP. The only thing going for AKP is that none of the rival political parties Republican People's Party (CHP) nor the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) has enough mandate or confidence to challenge it presently. Also, unlike other countries in the region, Turkey was able to overcome the protests in Gezi Park and control the situation thereafter. Erdogan will however, have to be more vigilant and responsive in future because any 'Gezi Park Part-2' may prove fatal for him.

## **Question of National Political Identity and the New Constitution**

The current constitution was written in 1982 subsequent to the September 12, 1980 coup and reflects the style of government in those times in being too authoritarian. It seems that "the primary objective of the 1982 Constitution was to protect the state from the actions of its citizens, rather than protecting the individual liberties from the encroachments of the state<sup>114</sup>." Even the preamble to the 1982 constitution stresses that "no protection shall be afforded to thoughts or opinions contrary to Turkish national interests, the principle of the existence of Turkey as an indivisible entity with its state and territory, Turkish historical and moral values, or the nationalism, principles, reforms, and modernism of Ataturk<sup>115</sup>."

Kurdish interests do not find a place in the constitution. Articles 26 and 28 of the 1982 constitution banned "language prohibited by law" for

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<sup>114</sup> Gunter Michael M, Turkey: The Politics of a New Democratic Constitution, Middle East Policy Council, available at <http://www.mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/turkey-politics-new-democratic-constitution/> (Accessed August 21, 2013)

<sup>115</sup> Citations from the 1982 Turkish constitution are taken from the version contained in Prime Ministry Directorate General of Press and Information, *Turkey Yearbook 1983*, Donmez Ofset Basimevi, Ankara, 1983, pp.594-656.

speech and press while Articles 68 and 69 block Kurdish interests by provisions regarding “the indivisible integrity of the State” and “the domination of a class or group<sup>116</sup>.”

With the coming of AKP to power as also the subsequent developments, there was a need felt to have a more liberalised and democratic constitution which reflects modern day Turkey's political stature and evolving domestic dynamics. It could also help towards the cause of accession to the EU as well solve the Kurdish issue. AKP was successful in pushing through a referendum on some key Constitutional Amendments in September 2010<sup>117</sup> which include amendments to the judicial system, curbs on the power of military courts and an article abolishing the immunity currently enjoyed by the leaders of the 1980 coup. The core of the package was a major overhaul of the judiciary. This gives the president and parliament greater say over the appointments of senior judges and prosecutors, and expands the size of the constitutional court and that of the judicial body in charge of appointments.

Subsequently, after its third electoral success, the AKP constituted a new Reconciliation Committee (CRC) to draft the new constitution. The CRC began drafting the new constitution in May 2012 and consists of three deputies from each elected party — AKP, BDP, CHP and MHP. Despite numerous meetings, CRC members have thus far failed to reach consensus over the issues key to defining the nation's soul. That is, they lack unity in defining who is a citizen, and the fiercely disagree over adopting Kurdish as the second official language and

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<sup>116</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Turkey, available at [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed\\_protect/—protrav/—ilo\\_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms\\_127495.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/—ed_protect/—protrav/—ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_127495.pdf), (Accessed September 10, 2013)

<sup>117</sup> Turkey's constitutional referendum, Erdogan pulls it off, *The Economist*, September 13, 2010, available at [http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/turkeys\\_constitutional\\_referendum](http://www.economist.com/blogs/newsbook/2010/09/turkeys_constitutional_referendum) (Accessed August 21, 2013)

Turkey's Erdogan hails constitutional referendum win, CNN news, September 12, 2010, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/09/12/turkey.referendum/index.html> (Accessed August 21, 2013)

allowing the teaching of Kurdish in schools and classes to be taught in it<sup>118</sup>. There is fear in the opposition parties that the AKP is leaning toward Kurds granting most of what they have asked for from the state. In return, they fear that the Prime Minister is looking for additional support that would allow him to call a constitutional referendum which would be possible if AKP musters up 330 votes, as per the Turkish law<sup>119</sup>. AKP presently has 326 seats and could look towards BDP for support. In case of a referendum, it is feared that the new constitution is likely to give a Presidential form of government and Erdogan could then use it in becoming President in 2014.

Constitution has also become the manifestation of the differences between the secularists and the Islamists. Whatever be the outcome, the Constitution is a key factor to Turkey's domestic stability and growth as well as regional leadership. If Turkey is able to provide space for the Kurdish issue in its constitution, it will be a major step forward for the country in the region.

## **Islam versus Secularism**

Turkey is a country and society of paradox: it is constitutionally secular and yet Islamic in numbers as well as historical roots, it has attempted to be modern (especially in Kemalist era) and yet retains traditional Islamic identity, it wants to look westwards and embrace EU membership and yet it seeks greater partnership, understanding and better relations with Eastern and Southern Muslim neighbours.

Notwithstanding its secular constitution and ban on overt projection of religious symbols in public by earlier governments, Islam has deep roots and a long history in Turkey. Adopted early by the various tribes, it was the Ottoman Empire which ruled over the Islamic caliphate in Turkey until it was abolished in 1924 by Kemal Ataturk, the founder

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<sup>118</sup> Erdogan's Constitutional Crisis, Al Monitor, February 04, 2013, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/erdogan-akp-constitution-turkey-crisis-referendum.html> (Accessed April 05, 2013)

<sup>119</sup> Turkish Parliament Faces Deadline On Draft Constitution, Al Monitor, May 3, 2013, available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/turkey-parliament-constitution-draft-deadline.html> (Accessed August 05, 2013)

of modern Turkey. Ataturk propagated only one identity; "Turkish" and prohibited any public display of religious symbols. Ever since, Turkey has been in a state of self contradiction. A predominantly Muslim state, it sought a secular identity. It shelved traditional orthodox Muslim values for a more modern, Western outlook. It gave no place to religion in its constitution and ensured removal of religion from all facets of public life. Yet, in past one decade, it has started opening out eastwards into its Muslim neighbourhood for support, co-existence and even leadership. Prime Minister Erdogan has often been quoted as saying that "only states can be secular, not individuals"<sup>120</sup> and that he is a Muslim Prime Minister of a secular state.

There is intense debate in the country on the subject. The AKP government has over time started reducing curbs on religion. AKP with its Islamic roots is slowly facilitating religious symbols into the society and fighting to overcome and subdue secular Kemalist ideas of previous century. Head scarves no longer a taboo and mosques are freer to run their programmes. However, Islamic values have led to restriction on freedom of speech, jailing of journalists and lack of tolerance on criticism of Government policies. Turkey has been propelling itself as a model of Muslim democracy in the region after the onset of 'Arab Spring'. How it pans eventually is a big challenge and could define how Turkey stands counted in the region.

### **The 'Arab Spring' and its Impact**

The popular protests in the Arab world, 'Arab Spring' caught all countries in the region as well as Turkey by surprise. Turkey attempted to champion the cause of 'rebelling peoples' rights and tried to take 'Arab Spring' as an ideal opportunity to project itself as a regional leader, an able interlocutor and a model of Islamic democracy for the Arab world to emulate. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Egypt, Libya and Tunisia in September 2011 as a show of solidarity to the new emerging order.

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<sup>120</sup> Is Turkey's secular system in danger?, BBC News, October 24, 2012, available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20028295> (Accessed August 21, 2013)

However, things have not gone totally as per Turkey's designs during these uprisings. While Egypt was a success, Libya proved more complicated. While it initially opposed UN sanctions on the Qaddafi regime and rejected calls for a NATO operation in Libya, it eventually relented and later approved the NATO operation, calling for Qaddafi's ouster in April 2011<sup>121</sup>.

Syria is proving even more difficult than Libya. Syria which was labelled as one of the success stories of Turkey's foreign policy of "Zero Problems with Neighbours" due to their rapprochements in 2007-08, is today an acid test of Turkey's neighbourhood policy. Initially Turkey exercised restraint, but when violence and refugees crossed over in to Turkish borders, Turkey had to change its stance. On June 10, 2011, Erdogan said "Sadly, their actions are inhumane," and that "we can't support Syria amidst all this"<sup>122</sup>. Turkey there after took the step of supporting the rebels against the Assad regime and even permitted the NATO to deploy Patriot Batteries on border with Syria<sup>123</sup>.

Syria has also led to strain in Turkey-Iran ties. Positioning of Patriot missiles on Turkish soil too is not to the liking of Iran. 'Arab Spring' has therefore exposed the limitations of Turkey's neighbourhood policies than promoting itself as a model Muslim democracy. How Turkey handles the evolving situation in its neighbourhood will determine how successful Turkey would be in the longer run to emerge as a regional power.

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<sup>121</sup> ICC may issue arrest warrants against Qaddafi, as Turkey asks him to exit Libya, Al-Arabiya (Dubai), May 3, 2011, available at <http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/05/03/147738.html>, (Accessed November 28, 2012).

<sup>122</sup> Turkey deplores 'inhumane' Syrian crackdown, reprimands Assad family, Today's Zaman, June 10, 2011, available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-246828-turkey-deplores-inhumane-syrian-crackdown-reprimands-assad-family.html> (Accessed February 23, 2013)

<sup>123</sup> NATO missile defense battery on Syrian border operational, Fox News, January 27, 2013, available at <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/01/27/nato-says-1st-missile-defence-battery-deployed-to-turkey-is-operational/#ixzz2OGDJC4L1> (Accessed February 23, 2013)

## Acceptability in the Region

Acceptability in the Muslim world as an equal partner is another big challenge for Turkey. Seen through the lens of Western alliance for long, Turkey is still viewed with skepticism despite its efforts to reconnect with the region in the past decade. As discussed in earlier chapters, Turkey has got a long way to go before it is fully embraced by all regional actors. 'Arab Spring' and anti Israel rhetoric has helped Turkey find common ground in the Arab world, whereas trade and energy have brought it closer to the region. Slow moves towards embracing Islam over secularism may help Turkey but it is unlikely in short term that either Saudi Arabia or Iran would let Turkey take over the leadership roles in their respective domains.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Turkey has made numerous attempts to befriend the Muslim world. The 2009 Davos World Economic Forum (WEF) meet outburst<sup>124</sup> or the Gaza Flotilla incident<sup>125</sup> or the recent attack on 'Zionist' Israel through his statement on February 27, 2013 while speaking in Vienna at a United Nations event<sup>126</sup> are some of the examples of how Turkey has sought acceptance in the Arab world. Turkey, along with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and others in the Arab world, is playing an active role in supporting the rebels in Syria against President Assad. It has also publicly defended the Palestinians issue especially during the Gaza Conflict in November 2012, denouncing Israeli aggression. GCC countries have responded positively towards Turkey in recent times, particularly in economic and cultural relations marked by declaration of Turkey as a strategic partner of GCC on September

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<sup>124</sup> Turkey: PM Erdogan's Criticism of Israel Could Damage Ankara's Aspirations as Mid-East Peace Broker, Eurasianet, February 04, 2009, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav020509.shtml> (Accessed October 02, 2012)

<sup>125</sup> Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident, September 2011, available at [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle\\_east/Gaza\\_Flotilla\\_Panel\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle_east/Gaza_Flotilla_Panel_Report.pdf), (Accessed October 02, 2012)

<sup>126</sup> Erdogan calls Zionism a 'crime against humanity', *Times of Israel*, February 28, 2013, available at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/erdogan-calls-zionism-a-crime-against-humanity/> (Accessed March 02, 2013)



2, 2008 and establishment of Turkey – GCC High Level Strategic Dialogue Mechanism<sup>127</sup> .

As regards relations with Iran, Turkey has sought closer relations in past few years. As discussed earlier, Turkey has even offered to mediate between the US and Iran on nuclear matters<sup>128</sup> and has defended Iran's rights to civilian nuclear energy more than once. However, post onset of 'Arab Spring', there has been issues which have adversely impacted the bilateral ties. Syrian crisis has brought them on opposite sides. Deployment of Patriot Missile batteries on Turkey-Syria border too has not been welcomed by Iran.

## Conclusion

Turkey realises that the road ahead is all but easy. The numerous challenges that it faces internally as well as some from external influences could derail the entire process started a decade ago. More than the external factors, it is the internal environment that Turkey has to grapple with and control. The Gezi Park protests in June 2013 have demonstrated how quickly the AKP government which has looked in total control (including getting the Armed Forces under civilian government's control) for past few years can suddenly be made to look so vulnerable. Timely action to first brutally subdue the protests and later measures to pacify the protestors may have saved the day for Erdogan, but the lesson is quite clear. Success of any kind and especially political success in such a volatile region can't be taken for granted.

The Kurdish issue will remain a major destabilising factor. How successful is Turkey in the reconciliation of this issue will dictate to a great measure both; internal security as well as political leverage for Erdogan as he seeks his political future in the country beyond 2015,

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<sup>127</sup> Turkey- GCC High Level Strategic Dialogue Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs to be held in İstanbul, Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-gcc-high-level-strategic-dialogue-meeting-of-ministers-of-foreign-affairs-to-be-held-in-istanbul.en.mfa> (Accessed April 06, 2013)

<sup>128</sup> Kaya Karen, Turkey-Iran Relations After The Arab Spring, available at <http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/documents/Turkey-Iran.pdf> (Accessed April 06, 2013)

when he would become ineligible for another term as the Prime Minister. Related to this is how the constitution shapes up which is being reworked presently under a chosen committee. The constitution is also relevant and very important from another point i.e the identity of Turkey as a nation. For over eight decades Turkey has constitutionally remained a secular nation. With rumours of AKP attempting to insert an Islamic agenda into it, it could completely transform Turkish identity and resultantly its relations in the neighbourhood. It could also polarise the society into liberals and seculars versus the Islamist which may not be conducive to Turkey growth as a regional leader. It could also result in final closure on its attempts to gain entry into the EU.

Finally, Turkey may attempt any number of measures but there is a limit to the extent which it can control the external environment. As the 'Arab Spring' protests demonstrated, Turkey's famed "Zero Problems with Neighbours" lies shattered and exposed. Events in Syria, Libya and Egypt have exposed the limitations of its policies and the extent of its influence. Also, as discussed, the Arab world is yet to be convinced that Turkey is on their side and whether Turkey can be given the status of a regional power. While the immediate issues like the Syrian crisis may have brought Turkey and GCC together, it is still far away from the leadership goals of Turkey. Also, the current strain with Iran and the downward spiral in relations with Egypt post ouster of President Morsi could run counter to Turkey's goal of seeking leadership role in the region.

# RISING TURKEY AND EMERGENT INDIA: AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD LONG TERM PARTNERSHIP

## Introduction

*" Turkey is situated at the junction of Central Europe, Central Asia and West Asia. We are located between West Asia, Central Asia and East Asia. Our geopolitical location gives us shared concerns in the region, as well as some common opportunities."* This statement from the Indian Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee<sup>129</sup>, during his three-day official visit to Turkey in September 2003, first by an Indian Prime Minister since 1988 was perhaps an apt recognition of the vast potential for the two emerging regional powers to come together in forging a new partnership, based on mutual respect, shared concerns and values between two powerful democracies and rising economic powers.

Geographically apart, India and Turkey experienced luke-warm relations through the cold war era and even thereafter. There were attempts to put in a purpose to the mutual relations from time to time especially through the 1980s and thereafter, but real momentum has been witnessed only in past one decade or so. Interestingly, this is the same period when both the countries have emerged as major regional players in their respective regions owing to economic growth and geo-political alignments. Convergence of views on issues ranging from global terrorism, war in Iraq and Afghanistan, shared values like democracy

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<sup>129</sup> Interview of Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee by Yeni Safak, Press Information Bureau (PIB), Government of India, September 15, 2003, available at [http://pib.nic.in/archieve/pmvisit/pmsvisit03/pm\\_visit\\_sep2003/pm\\_vst\\_sep2003.html](http://pib.nic.in/archieve/pmvisit/pmsvisit03/pm_visit_sep2003/pm_vst_sep2003.html), (Accessed August 14, 2013)

and secularism too have contributed towards an upswing in their bilateral relations<sup>130</sup>. Also, interest of both the countries in ensuring a major role in West Asian region could also be seen as a contributing factor. India needs West Asia not only for its energy requirements but also due to related security and trade issues and is thus attempting to forge a “West Asia Policy”<sup>131</sup>. Similarly, Turkey too is endeavouring to emerge as a major power in West Asia to see successful fructification of its foreign policy and trade ties and sees West Asia as a crucial element of its foreign policy in the neighborhood.

Owing to this, there has been an increased interest shown by both countries in enhancing the bilateral relationship in recent years, a fact proven by increased number of high level bilateral visits, signing of agreements and exponential increase in trade figures. However, it is still a long road ahead. As we look towards a resurgent Turkey in West Asia, there is a need to examine various facets of challenges and opportunities for Indo Turkish relations and options for enhancing engagements in the future.

## Historical Connects

Claims of cultural ties and trade between Turkey and India go back to the times of Emperor Kanishka wherein Varahmihir, author of a well-known Sanskrit work *Rajtrangani* describes the Emperor Kaniska and his successors as ethnic Turks<sup>132</sup>. However, the conquests of parts of the Indian subcontinent by Turkic ruler Mahmud of Ghazna in the early eleventh century AD are well documented. The arrival of Mughals cemented the connections with Turkey. In fact, the founder of the empire, Babur was a descendant of Timur, a Turk. The establishment of Mughal Empire in India was preceded by the establishment of the

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<sup>130</sup> Aswini K Mohapatra, “Bridge to Anatolia: An Overview of Indo Turkish Relations”, *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* (Ankara), 39, 2008

<sup>131</sup> Ginu Zacharia Oommen and Khurshid Imam, India’s ‘Look West’ Policy and Its Impact on India GCC Relations, *International Politics*, 3(6), Summer & Autumn, 2010

<sup>132</sup> Romila Thapar, *A History of India*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1,1984, pp. 97-98.

Ottoman Empire across Turkey and vast areas of West Asia and Europe. The rulers in India established contacts with the Ottoman Empire from time to time. In fact, the first formal exchange is reported to have been held much before the Mughals arrived in India, in the years 1481-82, between the Bahmani Kings of Muhammad Shah III (1453-81) and Mahmud Shah (1482-1512)<sup>133</sup>. The contacts continued right through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Towards the end of nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire experienced the commencement of its downfall. Near simultaneously the Indian freedom movement was gaining momentum and Indian leaders were positively influenced by the Young Turk movement in 1908 in Turkey. Indians were sympathetic towards Turkey's freedom struggle which is reflected in statement made by Vallabh Bhai Patel (first Home Minister of Independent India) in August 1920 in the context of Mahatma Gandhi's Khilafat campaign, "The Turkish Empire was divided in spite of Britain's promise. The Sultan was made a prisoner in Constantinople. Syria was absorbed by France. Smyrna and Thrace were swallowed by Greece. It has been a heart-breaking episode for the Indian Muslims, and how can Hindus stand unaffected when they see their fellow countrymen thus in distress?<sup>134</sup>". Even Jawaharlal Nehru in his famous book, *Glimpses of World History* has two chapters, "A New Turkey Rises from the Ashes" and "Mustafa Kemal's Break with the Past" providing insights into modern Turkish history and display sympathy and understanding towards Turkey's sufferings.

## Relations in Modern Times

Post independence of India, the relations witnessed a dip due to the onset of cold war and Turkey joining NATO. India despite being one of the leading lights of Non Aligned Movement (NAM) was known to have leanings towards the USSR which did not help the cause of India's relations with Turkey in any manner. Also, creation of Pakistan

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<sup>133</sup> Azmi Özcan, *Pan-Islamism: Indian Muslims, the Ottomans and Britain, 1877-1924*, Leiden, Brill, 1997, p. 1.

<sup>134</sup> Rajmohan Gandhi, *Patel: A Life*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1990, p. 86.

and development of close ties between Turkey and Pakistan drew India and Turkey further adrift. India's relations with Greece and its support for the UN Resolution on Cyprus in 1974 coupled with Turkey supporting Pakistan's stand on Kashmir did not help in maintaining and improving bilateral relations. Thus, despite the first cultural agreement with Turkey in 1951 by India's first education minister, Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Turkey in 1960, bilateral relations remained at low ebb till Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal's trip to India in 1986. Signalling a change, Özal commented in the *Economic Times*, "Given the momentum of rapid and sustained growth in both our countries, "I believe, the time is ripe and opportunities are in front of us to develop joint economic interest with a view to realising durable and concrete cooperation."<sup>135</sup> Despite no tangible results, the visit signaled some forward movement. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's return visit to Turkey in July 1988, however did result in Turkey banning re-routing of nuclear inverters to Pakistan, and also granted permission to the screening of Sir Richard Attenborough's film 'Gandhi' in Turkey<sup>136</sup>.

However, the real thrust towards revitalising the bilateral relationship was obtained during and after the visit of Turkey's Prime Minister Bülent Ecevit's visit to India in March 2000. Mr. Ecevit shared India's concerns on the issue of cross-border terrorism by pointing out that Turkey had itself been faced with similar menace for a long time posed by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) aided by its southern neighbours<sup>137</sup>. Pakistan's role and intentions in the Kargil war in 1999

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<sup>135</sup> Turkey: An Economic Times Special Feature", *The Economic Times* (New Delhi), April 29, 1988, quoted by Aswini K Mohapatra in "Bridge to Anatolia: An Overview of Indo Turkish Relations", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* (Ankara), 39,, 2008, p. 166.

<sup>136</sup> Aswini K Mohapatra, "Bridge to Anatolia: An Overview of Indo Turkish Relations", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* (Ankara), 39, , 2008, p. 167

<sup>137</sup> Ishtiaq Ahmad, "Turkey and Pakistan: Bridging the Growing Divergence", *Perceptions*, 5 (3), September/November 2000, quoted by Aswini K Mohapatra in "Bridge to Anatolia: An Overview of Indo Turkish Relations", *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* (Ankara), 39, 2008, p.167.

as well as its support to the Taliban in Afghanistan in late 1990s could have been some of the contributory factors towards the Turkish Prime Minister refusing to visit Pakistan after the visit to India and his joint statement at the end of his visit where he declared their “conviction” that the suppression of international terrorism “regardless of its origin and motivation” was an “essential element” for maintenance of international peace and security<sup>138</sup>. Subsequently, the launch of Global War on Terror (GWOT) after the 9/11 attack brought the two nations closer in a bid to fight and defeat global terror. Rise of both, Turkey and India in their respective regions as major economic powers in the first decade of twenty first century has further brought in issues of convergence between the two countries. It would be however, wrong to assess that the two countries have overcome differences and are presently on path to long term strategic partnership. In order to examine the future contours of improved bilateral relationship between the two, it is necessary to take a brief overview of the lingering issues of divergence and constantly evolving issues of convergence.

### **From an Era of ‘Exclusion and Divergence’ to a Relationship of ‘Convergence and Inclusive Partnership’**

As mentioned earlier, India and Turkey did not share a very fruitful partnership through the twentieth century. Amongst the traditional issues of divergence, the two most prominent have been Turkey joining the NATO during the cold war era and secondly and more significantly, Turkey’s strong ties with Pakistan. While the issue of Turkey being in NATO has lost significance as an issue of divergence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and end of Cold War, its relationship with Pakistan has often hampered growth of its ties with India. With Pakistan, Turkey shares strong military ties, has often supported Pakistan’s stance on Kashmir and even alluded to Pakistan’s concerns in Afghanistan when it didn’t invite India to a Trilateral Dialogue on Afghanistan in 2010. It was even reported that Turkey was putting hurdles in India’s membership

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<sup>138</sup> C. Raja Mohan, “India Wins over Turkey”, *The Hindu*, April 02, 2000.

to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) owing to its stance that Pakistan too must be granted similar exemptions<sup>139</sup>.

Things have however started changing. A number of high level visits in recent past stand testimony to it. India's External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid visited Turkey on July 24-25, 2013 wherein both countries agreed to draw up an action plan for the years 2014-16 to boost cooperation in various fields. *"This new action plan will strengthen the defence and strategic cooperation as well as culture, education, science, technology, sports and the links between the people of two countries. The agreed action plan for 2014-16 will bring about greater economic co-operation and investment"* said Khurshid<sup>140</sup>. Indian President Pranab Mukerjee too visited Turkey in October, signalling a definite recognition of the potential of Indo-Turkey ties.

Trade is emerging as a major source of convergence. The trade volume between the two countries has tripled since Turkish President Abdullah Gül, who described India as "the country of opportunities," visited India at the beginning of 2010. Turkey and India hope to increase their bilateral trade volume, which now stands at nearly \$7.5 billion, to \$15 billion by 2015. "We should be able to hit a bilateral trade volume of \$15 billion by the year 2015," said Susmita G. Thomas, Indian ambassador to Ankara<sup>141</sup>. The two countries are making considerable efforts to boost bilateral trade. More and more Turkish and Indian businesspeople are looking for investment opportunities in the other country. Presently, bilateral trade India has the advantage over Turkey. Last year (2011), Turkey's imports from India reached \$6.5 billion,

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<sup>139</sup> Indrani Bagchi, Turkey-Pak ties pose hurdle to India's entry to NSG club, *Times of India*, February 21, 2013, available at [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-02-21/india/37220266\\_1\\_nsg-membership-india-s-nsg-waiver-for-nuclear-commerce](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-02-21/india/37220266_1_nsg-membership-india-s-nsg-waiver-for-nuclear-commerce), (Accessed August 12, 2013).

<sup>140</sup> Indian Foreign Minister cites 'new chapter' in relations with Turkey, Terminal X, July 26, 2013, available at <http://www.terminalx.org/2013/07/indian-fm-cites-new-chapter-in-relations-with-turkey.html>, (Accessed August 12, 2013).

<sup>141</sup> Aydin Albayrak, Turkey and India working to increase bilateral trade to \$15 billion by 2015, *Today's Zaman*, July 9, 2012, available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-286010-turkey-and-india-working-to-increase-bilateral-trade-to-15-billion-by-2015.html>, (Accessed August 12, 2013).



while exports remained at a modest \$750 million. One of the areas that might help Turkey get the gap narrower is construction and infrastructure. Given that India is planning to invest \$500 billion in infrastructure development and construction within the next five years, the country represents a good market for Turkish firms<sup>142</sup>. In India, the food industry and related areas are also promising fields for Turkish investors wherein the Indian government plans to spend \$19 billion on food processing and related areas by 2015.

Strategically too, there are growing areas of consensus. India and Turkey have long term and strategic interests in Afghanistan. Turkey had taken the lead in 2011 to begin the Istanbul Process to find solutions to Afghanistan's problems. The Istanbul Process culminated in the annual "Heart of Asia" regional conference on Afghanistan held in Almaty, Kazakhstan in April 2013 with both India and Turkey playing important roles. In the context of the planned 2014 withdrawal of NATO and U.S. troops from Afghanistan, both India and Turkey realise the need to evolve an integrated approach.

On Iran nuclear issue, Turkey had evolved as a key interlocutor when in 2010, in conjunction with Brazil, it worked out a swap deal. While it could not get the deal through, it highlighted Turkey's growing stature in the region. India too has supported peaceful resolution of Iran nuclear issue and finds convergence with Turkey.

Even on Kashmir, Turkey, in recent years has refrained from supporting Pakistan's position. This change has been evident ever since the visit of Turkey's Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr. Bulent Ecevit in April 2000. In a joint statement issued after the visit, India and Turkey declared their "conviction" that the suppression of international terrorism, "regardless of its origin and motivation" is an "essential element" for maintenance of international peace and security and proclaimed the shared values

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<sup>142</sup> Aydin Albayrak, Turkey and India working to increase bilateral trade to \$15 billion by 2015, *Today's Zaman*, July 9, 2012, available at <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-286010-turkey-and-india-working-to-increase-bilateral-trade-to-15-billion-by-2015.html>, (Accessed August 12, 2013).

of “secularism and democracy” as the foundations of a new political relationship between the two nations. Mr. Ecevit left no one in doubt here about the waning significance of the historic ties with Pakistan and the need for modernity and moderation in the Islamic world. At a press conference, Mr. Ecevit said Turkey was “not happy” with the military rule in Pakistan and called for an early restoration of democracy there. Asked about his decision not to stop over in Islamabad while coming here, Mr. Ecevit said his objective was “to give a new impetus to relations with India” and did not want to mix it up with a visit to Pakistan<sup>143</sup>.

In February, 2008, Turkey's foreign minister paid an official visit to India, becoming the first Turkish foreign minister to visit the country in three decades. It was followed by the trip by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan in November 2008. In February 2010, Turkish President Abdullah Gul made a landmark visit to India, making it the first by a Turkish head of State in the past 15 years. During his visit, the two countries signed joint declarations on scientific and technological cooperation and also a joint declaration on terrorism<sup>144</sup>.

In the field of defence ties, India and Turkey do not have a history of great relations. There have, however been efforts in recent past to revive this important facet of relationship. India Turkey defence ties were revived in 1987 with the re-opening of Defence Attaches office in Ankara. The Indian minister of state for defence visited Turkey in September 1993 to attend the International Defence Industry and Civil Aviation Fair, a step considered as big towards progressing mutual defence ties. Turkish Chief of General Staff, Gen Ismail Hakki Karadayi visited India in 1998 followed by visit of Gen Hilmi Özkök in 2004.

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<sup>143</sup> C. Raja Mohan, India wins over Turkey, *The Hindu*, April 01, 2000, available at <http://hindu.com/2000/04/02/stories/01020007.htm>, (Accessed August 12, 2013)

<sup>144</sup> Sandeep Dixhit, Turkey agrees to work closely with India on global terrorism, *The Hindu*, February 10, 2010, available at <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/article103944.ece>, (Accessed August 12, 2013)

The Turkish Defence Minister Mr Sabahattin Çakmakoglu visited India in 2001 at the head of a large delegation which also included Secretary of Defence Industry. The same year a four member Turkish Naval delegation led by Chief of Staff Navy visited Mumbai to attend the Fleet Review and a two member delegation from the Army visited defence Expo in Delhi. Gen. Mehmet Ilker Basbug, Turkey's Chief of General Staff (presently in jail on charges of undermining democratic government) visited India on March 31, 2008 and held talks with the Indian Army chief, Gen. Deepak Kapoor. Talks focused on global terrorism and UN peacekeeping missions. 'Both countries have pledged to improve military bilateral relations in terms of training at defence institutions', a Ministry of Defence (MoD) statement said on the visit. This was the first time a Turkish army chief visited India. From Indian side, high level defence visits have been by Chairman of Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC) and Chief of Air Staff (CAS) Air Chief Marshall V. P. Naik (2011) and Chief of Naval Staff Admiral Nirmal Verma (2011).

In the past, there was minor trade in military goods like some explosives and ammunition etc but nothing substantive. There have been talks and attempts on exchanging slots for training of officers in each other's training institutions like the NDC and Staff College. A delegation from the National Defence College (NDC), New Delhi, visited Turkey on an official visit during May 2012. The visit of Commander of the Turkish Armed Forces, General Necdet Ozel, to New Delhi in April 2013 is yet another indication towards a realisation of enhancing defence ties between the countries.

## **Opportunities**

As rising regional and economic powers, Turkey and India share great opportunities in enhancing ties. Both are part of G20 group of economic powers. With Turkey rated as the 16<sup>th</sup> largest economy<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Economic Outlook, Home Page of Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Investment Support and Promotion Agency, available at <http://www.invest.gov.tr/en-us/turkey/factsandfigures/pages/economy.aspx>, (Accessed August 19, 2013).

and India the fourth largest economy<sup>146</sup> (likely to overtake Japan by 2015 to become the third largest economy), there is tremendous scope not only in enhancing mutual trade but also playing a significant role in shaping world economics. As mentioned earlier, the goal of increasing the bilateral trade to \$15 billion by 2015 holds great promise. A bilateral FTA could further ease and enhance scope of bilateral trade.

Despite being a nuclear weapons power, India has always supported nuclear disarmament. With Turkey sharing same values, both could help shape world opinion in this regard. Also, both are located in a neighbourhood susceptible to nuclear proliferation (Iran in West Asia and Pakistan in South Asia), bringing together their shared concerns.

Militarily too, both countries are major powers. Turkey is a significant military power in the region and has the second largest military in NATO (After the US) and India is the fourth largest army in the world. But for Pakistan-Turkey military ties, there are tremendous opportunities for defence cooperation. As India moves towards modernisation and indigenisation of its defence forces and its defence industry so is Turkey looking forward to increasing the potential of its defence industry and become one of world's largest by 2016 with an annual turnover of US \$ 8 billion and exports of US \$ 2 billion, thus giving adequate opportunity to cooperate for both countries.

Both support each other in the endeavour for seat in UNSC. While India supported Turkey's bid in 2009-10, Turkey voted for India in 2011-12. Afghanistan provides another opportunity and area of enhancing ties and cooperation. Both countries are working towards a peaceful resolution of the crisis in Afghanistan. Whether through the Istanbul Process or through other regional initiatives, both countries can work towards finding a long lasting solution towards peace in the region.

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<sup>146</sup> India probably world's 3rd largest economy: OECD, *The Economic Times*, May 30, 2013, available at [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-05-30/news/39603030\\_1\\_gdp-growth-third-largest-economy-economic-growth-projection](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013-05-30/news/39603030_1_gdp-growth-third-largest-economy-economic-growth-projection), (Accessed August 19, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

India-Turkey ties have come a long way from the cold war era. There is a clear realisation that both need to increase cooperation in all spheres including trade and defence. As Turkey continues its quest for a leadership role in West Asian region, India continues to rise steadily in South Asia. Both with similar views in global geo-politics would do well to shed their respective traditional inhibitions and explore the vast potential of cooperation and development.

# CONCLUSION

The birth of Turkey from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire and its evolution through the twentieth century has clearly highlighted the transformation of this nation which was born in the shadows of World War I and by the end of the century was ready to take on its rightful place in the region. The evolution has not been gradual, often interrupted by intermittent domestic and external factors. While the initial period up to World War II was a period of caution and consolidation, period of 1970s and 1990s projected streaks of belligerence in Turkish foreign policy and its latent desire perhaps to regain the leadership role. The complete transformation of its foreign policy towards the turn of this century, however laid the present foundation for its possible emergence as a leader in the West Asian region.

Turkey has been assisted by numerous factors which contributed to its growth in the region and a clear recognition of Turkey as a power to reckon with in the region. AKP led government has ensured political stability over a decade leading to uninterrupted continuation of domestic and foreign policy objectives. At the same time, strong economic growth and a well focused 'Energy Strategy' has given the necessary boost to Turkey's image in the region, especially the immediate Muslim neighbourhood. Reining in of armed forces too has resulted in multiple including alleviating the fears within the neighborhood of any 'Neo Ottoman' designs of Turkish armed forces and the nation.

Outlining Turkey's vision for 2023, its centenary of independence, Ahmet Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs talked of Turkey emerging as a global power and an active contributor to global order in cultural economic political sense. He said, "Turkey as a country having relations with all over the world with all international organisations. Today Turkey is a member of NATO, we hope will be member of EU, Turkey is a member of OIC. Turkey has established Turkish-speaking States Council, Turkey is in UN, in G-20, in Alliances of Civilisations, Turkey is the observer country of ASEAN, Turkey is the strategic dialogue country with the Arab League with GCC. We are a strategic dialog partner of the African Union..... Now we are either member or strategic dialog partner or observer of all international

organisations. Our role will be much more diversified in the next 12 years. Not only in strategic issues but as a strategic country we will be more active in human rights issues, environmental issues, and poverty and prosperity type of social issues. In short this is our strategic objective; a democratic country with a strong economic structure, a regional, European and global power. Our dynamism will achieve that goal<sup>147</sup>".

However, this is not to conclude that Turkey is now totally resurgent. Turkey realises that the road ahead is all but easy. There are still numerous challenges, some of them very critical, which Turkey will need to overcome if it is to be counted and recognised as a viable regional power and an aspirant for leadership role in the region. These challenges that it faces, some internal and some external have the potential to derail the entire process it started more than a decade ago. The Gezi Park protests in June 2013 have demonstrated how quickly the AKP government which has looked in total control can suddenly look so vulnerable.

The Kurdish issue will continue to remain a major challenge. Its successful outcome could dictate to a great measure both; internal security as well as political leverage for Prime Minister Erdogan as he seeks his political future in the country beyond 2015, when he would become ineligible for another term as the Prime Minister. Related to Erdogan is how the constitution shapes up which is being reworked presently under a chosen committee. With rumours of AKP attempting to insert an Islamic agenda into it, it could completely transform Turkish identity and resultantly its relations in the neighbourhood. It could also polarise the society into liberals and seculars versus the Islamist which may not be conducive to Turkey growth as a regional leader. It could also result in final closure on its attempts to gain entry into the EU.

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<sup>147</sup> Speech entitled "Vision 2023: Turkey's Foreign Policy Objectives" delivered by H.E. Ahmet Davutođlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Turkey Investor Conference: The road to 2023 organised by Goldman Sachs (London, November 22, 2011), available at [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-\\_vision-2023\\_-turkey\\_s-foreign-policy-objectives\\_-\\_delivered-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-entitled-_vision-2023_-turkey_s-foreign-policy-objectives_-_delivered-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-af.en.mfa), (Accessed August 29, 2013).

Thus, Turkey stands at the crossroads in its quest for leadership role in the region. It has done all it requires to emerge as a power in the region; rapprochement with the neighbours, consistent economic growth, key interlocutor role in critical regional disputes, efforts to reform domestic policies etc. It is already a key, active and independent player in regional affairs. It has made itself more 'benign' than ever before and has attempted to break free from the shadows of US-West dominated past. With the Arab world and the neighbours, it has attempted to project an image of acceptability and reconciliation. However, there is a limit to the extent which Turkey can control the external environment. In light of the 'Arab Spring' protests, Turkey's famed "Zero Problems with Neighbours" lies shattered and exposed. Events in Syria, Libya and Egypt have exposed the limitations of its policies and the extent of its influence. Also, the Arab world is yet to be convinced that Turkey is on their side and whether Turkey can be given the status of a regional power.

To be fair to Turkey, most of the issues troubling Turkey's regional standing in recent times have, however, been more of their own creation than faults in Turkey's dealing with them. Israel's attack on the Gaza aid flotilla and killing of Turkish citizens was an attack on Turkey's sovereignty and Israel's refusal to apologise left Turkey with no other option but to sever ties. Similarly, the 'Arab Spring' was a manifestation of internal turmoil in respective countries which threatened to engulf the region and Turkey was forced to make a choice and, in most cases, it chose to side with change. The overthrow of dictators and the rise of the Islamists post the Arab revolutions are threatening to bring about a new political order in the region, one which Turkey will have to find a way to accept and deal with. With the region going through a political transformation, Turkey is realising that a soft power-based foreign policy was successful and gave returns with minimum risks only when the region was stable. In present and evolving circumstances, Turkey will have to invent new strategies to remain strong and relevant in the region.

Ties with Iran will play a major role. Both will have to take a long term perspective of their relations and minor irritants will have to be overcome for larger long term gains. In addition, the Arab world led by Saudi Arabia will need to remain positively engaged. Emergence



of Egypt in future may signal the birth of another pole in the region and Turkey will need to remain vigilant to such developments and forge relationships accordingly. But right now, it is Syrian crisis that has split regional loyalties down the middle which will be an acid test of Turkey's capabilities as a regional leader. Turkey will thus need to tread carefully in the region in its quest for leadership in the region. How Turkey handles these and other allied issues will perhaps dictate the emergence of Turkey as a true regional power.

Turkey is one of the major regional powers in West Asia. Born from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has taken time to consolidate and establish itself as a prosperous modern state. It has overcome military coups and economic crisis in past decades and is now emerging as a revitalized country with a host of opportunities for expansion. The countries of the region have often seen it with contempt and suspicion due to the Ottoman legacy as also its Western orientation in earlier part of its short modern history. However, Turkey under the leadership of current Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and its visionary foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu have, over the past decade reoriented Turkish policies in an attempt to not only befriend the neighbourhood but also emerge as a major interlocutor and a potential leader in the region. Although, initial attempts and especially the foreign policy initiative of “Zero Problem with Neighbours” yielded initial success, the recent Arab uprisings as well as other domestic challenges are forcing a rethink in Turkey. Rapidly changing balance of power in the region, its acceptance within the region and the Islamic world and its ability to balance its domestic and regional issues will dictate Turkey's future in the region in the coming years.



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