TÜRKIYE'S FOREIGN POLICY UNDER THE AKP

Implications and Challenges for India

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Dedicated to the memory of
Dr. S. Kalyanaraman
A colleague, mentor and a friend

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The views expressed in the book and any omissions and errors are mine and mine alone.

New Delhi
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Md. Muddassir Quamar

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Türkiye emerged out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founding father of modern Türkiye and the first president, started a process of reformation and rebuilding of the state influenced by the ideas of nationalism, laicism and modernism.[1] Kemalism, as it came to be known, emerged as the most dominant ideology and remained the guiding principle of the Republic for decades to come, shaping the culture, politics, society and foreign policy. Turkish leaders followed the founding principles to govern and the ideals of the state were zealously guarded by the elites, especially the security establishment.[2] Gradually, as Türkiye witnessed socio-political and economic transformations and adjusted to changing international realities, the Kemalist ideological basis of the state was also affected. A key facet in this transition was the widescale political and economic changes in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly under Turgut Özal's government. These resulted in a process of democratisation, which was reflected in the vibrant political culture and broadening of public debate to include emerging middle classes and rural population who also represented the religiously inclined.[3] Nonetheless, the elites remained guarded about preserving the foundations of the state, especially its secularist principles, as demonstrated in the soft coup to dismiss Necmettin Erbakan's government in 1997.[4]

The growing tide of religious revivalism, however, could not be kept away from politics and in 2002, a new religiously sensitive party with nationalism and neoliberalism at the core of its ideology came into power. The advent of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP) at the turn of the millennium and its remaining in power since 2002 redefined the core principles of the Turkish state and politics.[5] The AKP came to power through democratic elections and has ruled the country since then under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan — first as prime minister (2003–2014) and later as

president (2014 onwards). In the early years, Erdoğan remained committed to democratisation and introduced gradual reforms in social, cultural, political economic and foreign policy realms, which were appreciated domestically as well as internationally. But with every passing election and growing domestic challenges, Erdoğan took recourse to populism and authoritarianism to neutralise the opposition and continue in power.[6] This pushed back the democratisation process, which was instrumental in bringing him to power in the first place.

Erdoğan's recourse to reinvigorating the Ottoman and Islamic glory of the past and the abhorrence of laicism gradually reshaped Turkish politics, society and foreign policy. Erdoğan's commitment to the founding principles of the Republic, however, remained the same but represented a populist approach; he adopted the incrementalist policy, and trod a fine line on issues that could create controversies, such as religious education and the hijab. With regard to foreign policy, Erdoğan did not abandon the quest for European Union (EU) accession and continued maintaining Türkiye's strong relationship with the United States (US).[7] Simultaneously, he tried to broaden the horizons of Turkish foreign policy towards Asia and Africa, mainly focusing on the economic opportunities they offered as the global economic centre moved away from Europe and North America. This resulted in fast economic growth and justified the rationale for foreign policy recalibration. With an improved economic policy, a better investment environment and a continuous increase in foreign trade, Türkiye was able to fast reverse the downward economic trend of the 1990s.

The early economic and foreign policy successes of the AKP government created a euphoria around the "Turkish model", encouraging other Muslim countries, especially in the Middle East, to emulate it to overcome their democratic deficit and economic troubles.[8] However, the Arab Spring protests and the crisis it created in the region challenged Türkiye's Middle East policy and impacted its domestic politics. The downward spiral in the democratisation process since the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the 2016 failed coup as well as economic stagnation undermined the narrative of Türkiye being a 'model' Muslim country. Since 2011, Turkish foreign policy choices, especially its priorities in the Middle East, have come under intense scrutiny for aggravating the regional instability and insecurity.[9]

Foreign Policy Priorities

Türkiye is an important country in the Eurasia region. Its geostrategic location at the crossroads of Asia and Europe puts it in a unique position to identify with multiple regions. Türkiye, therefore, simultaneously considers itself a Mediterranean, European and Asian country. The geography, together with the size of its economy and demography, gives it an advantage over other Middle Eastern countries. It witnessed rapid democratisation during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and is among the most stable polities in the region. Moreover, Türkiye is a major military in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and among the most advanced and modernised militaries in its immediate neighbourhood. All these advantages and the changing global order, from bipolarity to multipolarity with a brief interlude of unipolarity, have allowed Türkiye to extensively expand its external relations and find a place as a multi-regional middle power.[10] A key aspect of this self-reflection has been Türkiye's quest for enhancing its comprehensive power and to a great degree this pursuit has defined Turkish foreign policy for the better part of its post-Cold War history.

In many ways, after gaining power the AKP strengthened and accelerated the post-Cold War foreign policy recalibration, leading to a continuity in foreign policy.[11] During this period the underlying principles of Türkiye's foreign policy were economic growth and strategic autonomy. A degree of success in these allowed Türkiye to play a proactive role in regional and global affairs as a middle power. It also led to a serious expansion of Türkiye's engagements with Asia and Africa, and more specifically with its Middle Eastern neighbourhood. Ankara continued to cultivate relations with the Western powers and did not give up the pursuit of joining the EU or partnering with the US. For a short period, this policy worked smoothly as external relations expanded along with fast economic growth accompanying EU accession talks and improved relations with Asia and the Middle East. Nonetheless, it did not take long for problems with neighbours, including Greece, Cyprus and Armenia, to resurface while troubles began in relations with Israel due to Ankara's vocal support of Palestinians, challenging its quest for "strategic depth" and "zero-problem with neighbours".[12]

As far as Türkiye's middle power aspirations are concerned, the scholarly debate focuses on its economic rise, increase in soft power, ability to exert force in the neighbourhood and building partnerships in Asia and Africa.[13] Some have underlined Türkiye's growing contribution in global governance as a sign of its middle power capacity.[14] Similarly, the compulsion to make a turnaround in its

Syria policy and join the Astana process has been highlighted as a testimony of Türkiye's adaptability and pragmatism.[15] However, others have emphasised the fraying of relations with its neighbours as a reaffirmation of the inherent limitation in Turkish foreign policy.[16] Along with tensions with the US and the suspension of accession talks with the EU, the problems with neighbours underlined the limitations of Türkiye's middle power aspirations. Hence, it is argued that "although Türkiye has showed a willingness to play a middle power role, its ability to shape the international agenda has been considerably limited".[17] Moreover, domestic setbacks, especially "in democratisation and economic development have limited Türkiye's soft power capabilities and attractiveness in the eyes of regional and international actors".[18]

Türkiye also witnessed the rise of Ottoman, Islamic and nationalist consciousness in its politics during the twenty-first century and in addition to middle power pursuit, this has been an important determinant of Turkish foreign policy. Türkiye, therefore, has taken great interest in developments in the Islamic world, especially in the Middle East and Turkic-speaking countries. Türkiye has also been taking a keen interest in expanding relations with countries in South Asia, especially Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Ankara's proactive raising of global Islamic issues including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Rohingya displacement and the Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) dispute between India and Pakistan underlines Erdoğan's pursuit of global Islamic leadership, causing competition with other established Muslim powers including Saudi Arabia and Iran. Türkiye has increasingly been using its Islamic identity to promote its foreign policy goals that are motivated by the idea of reviving the Ottoman Empire's glory as is reflected in the strategic depth doctrine propounded by Ahmet Davutoğlu, which envisaged Türkiye's return to its historical greatness through both geopolitical influence and soft power.[19]

Türkiye in the Middle East and South Asia

A key aspect of Turkish foreign policy, especially in its immediate neighbourhood, is the quest for regional influence. While this has caused problem with its immediate neighbours, in the Middle East it led to problems in relations with Israel and competition and confrontation with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt and Iran. This rift became more pronounced in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2011 wherein Türkiye's posture caused friction with its Middle Eastern neighbours. At the doctrinal level, the AKP's portrayal of Türkiye as the abode of moderate and accommodative Islam that is at peace with democracy led Ankara to support the

tide of political change in the Arab world. However, given the historical Arab–Turkish baggage, this was perceived in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries as a quest for reviving Ottoman dominance, leading to serious tensions with Arab powers, as well as Iran and Israel. The military interventions in Syria and Iraq under the guise of supporting the opposition, fighting Kurds and providing humanitarian assistance to the victims of regime brutality and terrorism heightened the suspicion of Ankara following a neo-Ottoman policy.

While Türkiye under the AKP vouched for strategic depth in the Middle East through friendly foreign policy; in reality, this only antagonised its neighbours and friends by adopting an aggressive posture. In Syria, for example, after the Arab Spring protests, the Turkish position of support for the opposition ended the friendly relations with Bashar al-Assad. This was a significant departure from the pragmatic policy being followed until 2010. Under the philosophy of "zero-problem with neighbours", the AKP had started to mend its relations with the Assad regime and this resulted in improved ties and growing trade and commerce. During this period, Erdoğan hosted Assad in Türkiye on several occasions and even called him his "brother". Ankara abandoned this rapprochement in the wake of the Arab Spring protests that began in Syria in March 2011 and adopted a policy of active intervention. This was veiled under the principle of supporting democratic yearning but arguably was guided by the desire to gain strategic influence.

Türkiye adopted a similar policy vis-à-vis other countries in the Middle East after the Arab Spring protests broke out. Initially, Ankara received a positive response in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, prompting Erdoğan to undertake several visits to regional capitals. However, as the situation evolved Türkiye started to receive backlash from the Arab states, which recalled the colonial Ottoman history and argued that Turkish policy in the region reflected "neo-Ottomanism". It was underlined that an aggressive Turkish policy in the region can lead to serious regional instability. After the Russian and Iranian interventions in Syria, the fall of Mohammed Morsi's government in Egypt and the rise of Khalifa Haftar in Libya, Türkiye's plans in the region received serious reversals and it was forced to take a relook at its policy priorities.

In South Asia, Türkiye's foreign policy has been defined by growing strategic relations with Pakistan, improvements in relations with Bangladesh, quest for a greater role in Afghanistan and complicated relations with India. With Pakistan, relations have improved in multiple domains including political engagement,

economic growth and defence and security partnership besides greater geo-economic and geo-political convergence.[20] With Bangladesh, commercial relations have improved with relative growth in security-related engagement and support for Dhaka's position on the Rohingya issue.[21] In Afghanistan, Ankara's initial response to the withdrawal of US forces and return of the Taliban in August 2021 was to seek a greater role in partnership with Doha and Islamabad; however, this has not materialised.[22] With India, Türkiye's relations have been marked by an increase in economic and commercial engagements and attempts at better political and diplomatic relations only to be derailed by its vocal support for Pakistan on Kashmir.[23]

Implications for India

Unlike other Muslim powers, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as smaller oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States, including the UAE and Qatar, Türkiye's relations with India have remained frozen in the Cold War dynamics with the Pakistan factor seriously impacting the relations. And despite the potential, Ankara-New Delhi ties have remained lukewarm. Though trade ties have improved, it is just a fraction of India's trade with other major Middle Eastern countries. The potential for the two-way flow of trade and investments in automobile, petrochemical, pharmaceutical, IT, tourism, construction, infrastructure development, textile and agriculture industries remains unexploited. Türkiye's close association with Pakistan and its insensitive statements on J&K, especially after the abrogation of Article 370 by India in August 2019, have seriously affected the bilateral ties. In addition to the Pakistan factor, one of the key reasons for Türkiye's stand on J&K is Erdoğan's quest for a leadership role in the Muslim world including in South Asia. Türkiye has also been working to gain sympathy and support of Indian Muslims, including in J&K, as a way of enhancing its soft power. Türkiye's foreign policy ambitions, its expansion of relations with Asia and Africa, quest for influence in MENA and growing inroads in South Asia have serious implications for India. With respect to bilateral relations, although efforts are on to moderate the mutual antagonism and improve ties, the political differences are likely to persist until there is a change in the Turkish attitude on Kashmir either as a result of internal political change or policy recalibration. Discussions between India's prime minister and Türkiye's president on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit meeting at Samarkand[24] and between India's external affairs minister and Türkiye's foreign minister in New York on the sidelines of the

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) session[25] in September 2022 have not produced any breakthrough thus far.

Definition, Rationale and Structure

With this backdrop, it is pertinent to ask some questions such as what are the drivers of Turkish foreign policy and how have they shaped Ankara's foreign policy priorities, including in the MENA and South Asia regions. What are the major components of Turkish foreign policy and how they affect India? Given the allegations of growing neo-Ottomanism, it is especially important to reflect on the role of the Ottoman and Kemalist past in determining Turkish foreign policy behaviour in the twenty-first century. Moreover, without reflecting on the foreign policy orientation during the Cold War era and the post-Cold War recalibration, a study of Türkiye's international relations and foreign policy in contemporary times will remain incomplete. From India's point of view, it is even more important to reflect on Turkish foreign policy in MENA and South Asia, especially its relations with Pakistan and how that impacts India. Finally, it is relevant to ask about the evolution, present status and future prospects of the bilateral relations between Türkiye and India and what could be the ways to change Türkiye's attitude towards India.

The study finds that Türkiye's historical consciousness rooted in both the idea of a glorious Ottoman past and Kemalist nationalist pride and its domestic political and foreign policy trajectory during the Cold War have had an extraordinary impact on its foreign policy recalibration since then. It argues that Türkiye's desire for a greater role in international politics and influence in the Islamic world motivates its foreign policy behaviour as reflected in its middle power pursuit and proactive approach in the neighbourhood and the wider Islamic world. The study further notes that Türkiye's foreign policy ambitions are limited by its worsening economic performance and degrading political situation, and recommends that India should use economic diplomacy to change antagonistic Turkish behaviour towards it and neutralise the Pakistan factor.

The study is divided into five chapters besides this **Introduction**. The second chapter **The Glorious Past: Ottoman and Kemalist Consciousness** aims to explain how the past, both Ottoman and Kemalist, plays an important role in determining the identity politics in Türkiye in the twenty-first century and how this has been instrumental in shaping the ideational aspect of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP and Erdoğan. It concludes that this historical consciousness about a glorious past has contributed to Türkiye adopting an

assertive foreign policy . The third chapter titled **Discovering the Self in a Bipolar and Unipolar World** examines Turkish foreign policy approaches during and after the Cold War. It argues that during the Cold War, its foreign policy was marked by a distinctive Western orientation with the membership of NATO and relations with the US and Europe forming the backbone of Türkiye's international relations. It further underlines the post-Cold War foreign policy recalibration resulting from the end of strategic insecurity due to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the recognition of the need to end over-reliance on the West.

Chapter Four **Breaking the Mould: Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century** analyses the changing foreign policy behaviour and Türkiye's approach in the new millennium both at the ideational level and in practice. It underlines the major determinants of Ankara's international relations including the strategic depth and blue homeland doctrines, the ideological basis of the AKP and Erdoğan's personality as well as the conceptual ideas of neo-Ottomanism and pan-Islamism. In addition to mapping the evolution of Turkish foreign policy with established and emerging global powers, the chapter examines the policy of expanding relations with the neighbourhood and beyond. It goes on to argue that one of the key departures in Türkiye's foreign policy in the twenty-first century is the end of its identification with the West or the end of the Western-orientation. It further notes how the quest for power and status at the systemic level determines Ankara's foreign policy choices, especially in the context of the changing global order wherein Türkiye wants to be recognised as a middle power.

In Chapter Five **Strategic Overreach: Türkiye and MENA,** Turkish foreign policy choices in the region are extensively examined. The study divides the Turkish approach towards the region into two distinct phases: the first with roots in the foreign policy recalibration of the 1990s, which took a concrete shape after the AKP's coming to power in 2002; this phase was marked by relative success in expanding relations with the regional countries, especially in terms of creating economic interdependencies, and it ends with the beginning of the Arab Spring uprisings in December 2010. The second phase begins with the Arab Spring wherein Türkiye's proactive and aggressive approach created serious regional contestations and competitions, unravelling the goodwill earned over the earlier phase. During this phase, it is argued that Türkiye's regional policy was transformed from "zero-problem" with neighbours to zero-friends in the neighbourhood. The chapter also notes Türkiye's effort to change its foreign

policy approach in the post-Covid-19 era; however, it underlines that it is yet to reach a stage wherein it can be identified as the beginning of a new phase.

The final chapter **Turkish Foreign Policy and Implications for India** focuses on the evolution of India's relations with Türkiye in contemporary times and underlines how they have been affected by various bilateral, regional and international developments. The chapter also examines the evolution of Türkiye's relations with Pakistan and identifies it as a major factor in Indo–Turkish relations. It notes that Türkiye's inability to de-hyphenate Pakistan in its approach towards India has been a major hurdle in the improvement of bilateral ties between India and Türkiye. In addition, the chapter sheds light on how Türkiye's foreign policy approach at the regional level in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood and at the systemic level vis-à-vis the US–China–Russia global power politics affects India. Based on these observations, the chapter offers policy recommendations on how India can approach Türkiye at the bilateral and regional levels to safeguard its interest and what could be the possible ways to de-hyphenate Pakistan in their bilateral relations.

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CHAPTER TWO

THE GLORIOUS PAST: OTTOMAN AND KEMALIST CONSCIOUSNESS

A fundamental question one grapples with while studying Turkish foreign policy is the relationship between contemporary Türkiye and its Ottoman and Kemalist pasts and how this has affected, shaped and influenced the worldview of Turkish leaders, decision-makers and elites, both in terms of Turkish identity and the Turkish approach to the outside world. In other words, to what extent does history informs Türkiye's self-perception about its place in the world. Any examination of Turkish foreign policy in the twenty-first century must grapple with the question of how to account for Türkiye's Ottoman and Kemalist pasts and how, if at all, this history has shaped the republic's outlook towards its surroundings and the world at large.

In a way, this also relates to the consciousness of Turkish national identity. The question of identity in Turkish foreign policy acquires serious manifestations because of two polar opposite assertions. One suggests the idea that Turkish nationalism is a complete break from its Ottoman past, while the other underlines the inherent continuation of the Ottoman past despite the bid, at least in the formative era of the Turkish Republic or the Kemalist era, to adopt a fresh and 'modern' identity.[1] This dichotomy in Turkish historiography is indicative of the contestation within Türkiye about its identity and its relationship with its Ottoman and Kemalist past. At the same time, this is reflective of the evolution of the Turkish nation since the birth of the republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire.

The question of the Turkish identity is also linked to its foreign policy because of the claims, mostly from the critics of foreign policy under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, that Türkiye has been following a "neo-Ottoman" policy of reviving the "glorious past" of the Ottoman Empire, especially in the territories that were under Ottoman domination. The notion that Türkiye is following a

neo-Ottoman foreign policy gained credence particularly in the context of the Turkish response to the 2011 Arab uprisings.[2] Linked with the question of identity is the idea of an ideological change in Turkish foreign policy that is motivated by Islamic consciousness based on the religious-conservative roots of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* or AKP).[3] The primary motive for both, neo-Ottomanism and Islamism, is the expansion of Turkish sphere of influence and Turkish soft power, riding on the economic growth experienced in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

At the conceptual level, this is linked to the strategic depth doctrine propounded by Ahmet Davutoğlu, the academic and politician, who conceptualised Türkiye's place in the world as being at the centre of regional and global politics. He also emphasised the need for Ankara to gain strategic influence in the immediate neighbourhood and the periphery surrounding it to create a sphere of influence, and to gradually expand Turkish influence in the world by using its Islamic identity.[4] Based on this idea, Davutoğlu proposed adopting a policy of "zero-problem with neighbours", which determined Turkish foreign policy in the initial years of the AKP's rule.[5] Although Türkiye had some success in adopting this in praxis, problems started within a decade before it completely unravelled in the wake of Arab Spring.[6]

While historiography continues to grapple with the ways and means in which the Ottoman past shaped the Turkish future, the question of identity and ideology in Turkish foreign policy cannot be seen in isolation from history. Turkish foreign policy in the twenty-first century, its relations with the world and Turkish understanding of its place in the global system cannot be understood, explained or examined without reflecting on the past, both Ottoman and Kemalist (during the formative decades of the republic). Two important questions need to be examined here: one, how did the Ottoman and Kemalist elites look at the world and what were the major determinants of the Ottoman and Kemalist outlook and worldview towards the self and the outside? And two, how did the end of the empire and the birth of the republic affect the collective consciousness of the Turkish people towards themselves and the world at large?

The Ottoman Era

It is never easy to understand and examine historical events and the impact they might have on the future. Nevertheless, all civilisations and empires have had a profound impact on their successor states. This is true for Türkiye, as much as it is true for Iran, Egypt, India, China, Russia, England, Hungary, Germany, France, Indonesia and other modern states that find lineage with ancient and

medieval empires. In the case of Türkiye, the interlinkages with the Ottoman past are strong and despite the break from the past brought about by the events in the early twentieth century, the Turkish identity cannot be detached from the Ottoman consciousness. The over 600-year-long history and geographical extent of the Ottoman Empire; its heterogeneity and demographic diversity in terms of ethnicity, cultural practices and faith; the trade linkages and mobility of people within the Empire and the outside world at different times; the wars fought by the Sultans' armies; and the legal and political structures created within the Empire's territories are all part of Turkish consciousness in one way or the other and manifest in different ways in Turkish politics, society, cultural expressions and, of course, foreign policy.

The Ottoman Empire originated as a small Turkmen principality in northwest Anatolia founded by Osman I (r. 1289–1326),[7] after whose name the Empire built by his successors later came to be known. Osman's sons and grandsons, Orhan (r. 1326–62), Murad I (r. 1362–89) and Bayezid I (r. 1380–1402) continued to widen the territorial expanse of the dynastic rule, leading to the expansion of the state from Anatolia to the Balkans and the emergence of the Ottomans as one of the major Muslim states at the western end of the Islamic territories. Bayezid I was also the first Ottoman ruler to use Sultan as his title.[8] During the brief period between 1402 and 1413, the Ottoman dynasty was involved in a fraternal fight and civil war, leading to chaos and instability, which ended with the rise of Mehmed I. This period is also known as the interregnum period in Ottoman history.[9] During the next hundred years or so under Mehmed I (r. 1413–21), Murad II (r. 1421–44 and 1446–51), Mehmed II (r. 1444–46 and 1451–81) and Bayezid II (r. 1481–1512), the Ottoman state stabilised as one of the major world empires at the time, while continuing its consolidation and expansion.

Constantinople, the seat of the Roman Empire, considered one of the greatest cities to have developed in ancient times and surviving through the medieval and modern periods, came under the Ottoman control in 1453 under the rule of Mehmed II.[10] But it was during the short rule of Selim I (r. 1512–20) that the Ottoman Empire expanded to include large parts of Arabia including Egypt, Palestine, Levant and Hejaz, leading to its emergence as the preeminent Muslim empire in the world, perhaps only rivalled by the Mughals in India, whose empire at the time was still in its early stages of evolution. Selim was also the first Ottoman ruler to adopt the title of *Khadim al-Harmain al-Sharifain* (Protector of the Two Holy Places) in 1517, gaining Islamic legitimacy for the

Sultan and bringing the institution of the Caliphate under the realm of Ottoman rulers.[11]

The Ottoman Empire reached its zenith in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries under the reigns of Suleyman I (r. 1520–66), Selim II (r. 1566–74), Murad III (r. 1574–95), Mehmed III (r. 1595–1603), Ahmed I (r. 1603–17), Osman II (r. 1618–22), Murad IV (r. 1623–40), Ibrahim (r. 1640–48), Mehmed IV (r. 1648–87), Suleyman II (r. 1687–91) and Ahmed II (r. 1691–95). During these two centuries, the Ottoman Empire not only gained stability and expansion but was also recognised as one of the most powerful empires in the world, gaining the admiration and envy of rival empires in Asia and Europe.[12] This was also one of the most important periods in Ottoman history in terms of the shaping of Ottoman relations with its surroundings, and, in turn, determining the Ottoman consciousness of the world and world affairs. In the long run, this can be considered as the most influential period in determining Ottoman and Turkish self-perception. In many ways, this period was marked by relative stability and consolidation, but at the same time, it was one of the most significant in terms of continued Ottoman conquests and expansions and truces and agreements.[13]

The Ottoman Empire survived for another two hundred years,[14] and the end of the Empire was brought about only by World War I. While the eighteenth century was marked by relative calm, peace and status quo with limited expansion, the nineteenth century witnessed the shrinking, decline, and decay of the Empire from within. The nineteenth century was also the era of reforms and revolutions that eventually led to the end of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century and the birth of modern Türkiye in its current form.[15] During these two centuries, the Empire was ruled by numerous Sultans; and while many proved to be strong, influential and powerful leaders, there were periods when the Ottoman Sultan was reduced to a symbolic ruler and the affairs of the Empire were controlled by powerful *viziers* (ministers), courtiers, *janissaries* (generals), *ulemas*, bureaucrats and noblemen.[16]

This status quo of the grand *viziers* (prime ministers) gaining control of the vast Ottoman bureaucracy became the norm after 1839. This was also the period of the Tanzimat reforms,[17] which the rise of Abdelhemid II ended restoring the absolute rule of the Sultan. The rise of the Young Turks movement in 1908 coincided with the Second Constitutional Period and the reign of Mehmed V was again a largely symbolic one. The outbreak of World War I and the Ottoman decision to join the war along with the Central Powers, who were eventually

defeated, led to the signing of the Treaty of Sèvres on 10 August 1920. The Treaty ceded most of the non-Turkish Ottoman territories, especially in the Middle East and North Africa, to the Allied Powers – Great Britain, France and Italy. This was one of the primary factors that proved consequential to the rise of the Turkish national movement led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who commanded the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1923). The Turks eventually defeated the Allied Powers' army in Anatolia and forced the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) to supersede the Treaty of Sèvres.

Mehmed VI was the last Ottoman Sultan. He was deposed on 1 November 1922 by the Young Turks who had taken over the seat of power during the War of Independence. The signing of the Treaty of Lausanne on 24 July 1923 consolidated the position of the Young Turks, leading to the declaration of the Turkish Republic on 29 October 1923. For a brief period, from the deposition of Mehmed VI until the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate on 3 March 1924, Abdelmejid II (1922–24) held the office of the Caliph. Hence, the reign of Ottoman Sultans came to an end in 1922, and the Ottoman Caliphate ended in 1924.

Legal Frameworks

A key aspect of the Ottoman Empire was the vast legal and jurisprudential structure that informed the Sultanate's understanding of the world; and, in turn, contributed to the Ottoman laws, rules and regulations. The common understanding of the Ottoman Empire's relations with the outside world is based on the Islamic jurisprudential (sharia) divisions of *Dar al-Islam* (Abode of Islam) and *Dar al-Harb* (Abode of War).[18] This is appropriate because a religious understanding and motivation was significant in Ottoman expansionism and conquests. However, scholars have underlined that this was at times mere rhetoric for the Sultan to gain legitimacy for his actions and claim suzerainty over the territory within the existing Islamic religious framework.[19] The Sultans, when it came to practical matters of the affairs of the state, including relations with the outside world, were more pragmatic, both for political and economic purposes.[20] Discussing the relationship of the Ottoman Empire with the outside world and the worldview of the Ottoman elites about their surroundings, Suraiya Faroqhi, a well-known historian of the Ottoman Empire, notes, "While the dichotomies established by Islamic law were certainly important,… the Ottoman ruling group also made a large number of very matter-of-fact decisions, based on expediency and taking into account what was possible under given circumstances".[21]

Notably, the legal framework of Islamic territories versus non-Islamic territories did not determine the political actions of the Empire and the Sultan. The Sultan, thus, not only waged war against Christian or 'infidel' rulers but also fought Muslim rulers and states, such as the Persian-Safavid and Egyptian-Mamluk rulers, to expand the Ottoman territories. At the same time, non-Islamic rulers who acceded suzerainty to the Ottoman Sultan and paid tribute were considered part of *Dar al-Islam* within the *dhimmi* framework. In the early phase of the Ottoman expansion, principalities, such as Dubrovnik, Moldavia, Transylvania and Walachia, that were ruled by Christian dynasties but paid tributes to the Ottoman Sultan were allowed political and legal autonomy and were considered part of the Ottoman territories.[22] Hence, the religious normative foundation of the Empire only partly determined the Ottoman worldview; in reality, the approach to the outside world was shaped by pragmatic and worldly considerations.

A similar dichotomy can be observed in the use of the terms Sultan and Caliph. The fact that the Ottoman ruler was both the political head of the Empire and after 1517, the religious leader of the Islamic *ummah* (community/nation) as the Caliph was not unique to Ottomans. This idea of embedded political-religious leadership, even if at times only symbolic, was common to the Islamic dynasties that ruled over Arabia and other parts of the world.[23] For the Ottoman rulers, in most cases, the idea of being the Caliph was largely symbolic of their suzerainty over Hejaz, their custodianship of the Holy places (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem) and their pre-eminence among the Muslim rulers across the world. However, in affairs of the state, the Ottoman rulers preferred to act as a Sultan than as a Caliph. Thus, for example, the antagonistic relations and conquests by the Ottoman Sultans were not confined to Christian European states but also to Muslim Safavid-Persian and Mamluk-Egyptian Empires.[24]

The duality of the Ottoman legal framework was also reflected in the formulation of laws. While the sharia was the guiding principle for deriving laws, the Sultan also had the authority to pass orders in the form of decrees (*kanun*) on issues that did not come under religious jurisprudence, especially in the matter of trade, commerce, taxation, administration of land and so on. Selcuk A. Somel, a Turkish historian, notes that "The institution of the sultanate was based mainly on Turco-Mongol political traditions, which considered the absolute rule of a monarch a sign of God's (or 'heavenly') approval. In this context, Sultans had legitimate authority to formulate legal rules (*kanun*) independent of Islamic

law. Thus, the Ottoman legal system consisted of two sets of laws, the *şeriat* and the *kanun*".[25]

Notably, despite the Islamic foundations of the legal and jurisprudential framework of the Empire, when it came to the Sultan and the Ottoman elites' understanding of the world and their conduct of relations with the outside world, these were guided by Islam but not exclusively. Rather they were shaped by worldly affairs as well and marked by pragmatism. Nonetheless, Islam remained central to the conceptualisation and legitimisation of the Sultan's actions. Faroqhi argues, "It would certainly be unrealistic to deny the centrality of Islam…", but it was this centrality that allowed the Ottoman elites to "react to the 'people outside the pale' with much more pragmatism."[26] Thus, she underlines, "The rules of the political game were quite often developed and brought into play without there being a great need for day-to-day reference to religious law" wherein "the sultans' prerogative to set the ground rules by promulgating decrees (*kanun*)" was equally important, if not more or less important than the sharia.[27]

Political Structures

The Ottoman Empire revolved around the dynastic rule of the Sultans and the relationship they established with the people (*reyaya*) who came under their rule. While the Sultans were absolute rulers, the Ottoman political structure was vast and decentralised, leading to the development of a large bureaucracy. In the process of the evolution of Ottoman politics, a vast network of elites emerged that had close ties with the Sultan's courts, and hence, had a significant influence in shaping the Ottoman worldview.[28] Notably, the Ottoman polity did not remain constant over the 600 years but the political structure that emerged during the evolutionary phase did take a stable shape and played a significant role in creating the Ottoman relations with the outside world.[29] One of the constant features of the Ottoman Empire that marked the continuity in their dynastic rule was the strong bureaucracy that formed the Sultan's court and the vast network of political, military, religious and economic elites that formed the loyal arms of the state. A vast majority of these were residents of Istanbul, the bustling seat of the Empire, making the city central to the Empire's relations with the outside world.

The Ottoman Empire was spread through a vast territory encompassing several geographical landmasses from Anatolia to the Caucuses and Balkans in the west and from the Mediterranean to North Africa and Arabia in the east.

Most of the Ottoman territories were divided into *vilayets* (provinces), and the demography constituted multiple ethnicities and faiths, many of whom spoke different languages, even though Turkish was the language of the court and the elites.[30] Despite the Islamic nature of the Empire and the state, because of its multi-ethnic and multi-faith population and the spiritual and material (*Din-u Devlet*) leadership of the Sultan, the Ottoman political structure was not "exclusively Islamic". Colin Imber notes that in the Ottoman state, "The only loyalty demanded of its multifarious inhabitants was allegiance to the sultan, and this consisted simply of not rebelling and paying taxes. It was ultimately the person of the sultan and not religious, ethnic or other identity that held the Empire together".[31]

Despite the multi-ethnic and multi-religious demography, the political offices and bureaucracy were exclusively held by Muslims, except in the case of tax collectors wherein Jews and Christians were also appointed. The latter was mainly a result of the fact that many of the successful businessmen, merchants and traders of Istanbul belonged to the Jewish and Armenian Christian communities and had business networks in different parts of the Ottoman territories as well in the outside world. In terms of ethnicity, a majority of bureaucracy and political offices were held by Turks, Albanians, Circassians and Caucasians while Turks, Bosnians and Arabs dominated the religious and judicial offices.[32] Among the military elite were Turks, Albanians and Circassians, while most of the foot soldiers came from the Kurdish community. The multi-ethnic experiences drawn from both the large masses of the Ottoman subjects and the majority of the officials and elites, both in Istanbul and the provinces, contributed to the shaping of the Ottoman consciousness and worldview about the Empire as well as its relations with the world.[33] In other words, despite the Islamic and Turkish nature of the Empire, the day-to-day experience of the Ottoman elites was cosmopolitan in a medieval sense of the word.

The decision-making and implementation by the Ottoman bureaucracy emanated from the authority of the Sultan as the absolute ruler emanating from the dynastic rule based on the succession principle of primogeniture, though there were occasional disruptions due to fraternal feuds. The diverse Ottoman elites played a significant role in both decision-making and its implementation, thus becoming the bridge between the Sultan and the *reyaya*. Even the religious and educational elites occasionally had influence on decision-making and implementation because of their proximity to members of the ruling dynasty or through influential elites, which included *kadis* (judges), influential *dervishes*

(Sufi mystics) and *ulemas*.[34] The *ulemas* and *dervishes* did not automatically wield influence by virtue of their position, rather they gained influence through their network and connections in the court. Faroqhi notes,

> Quite obviously, *kadis* were the backbone of local administration, and thus they, along with their hierarchical superiors the army judges (*kadiasker*) and the chief jurisconsult (*seyhulislam*) figure prominently within the Ottoman elites. Whether dervishes should be considered part of this illustrious group is less easy to determine: an urban sheik of an order esteemed at court, who might have had the ears of viziers and sultans, obviously had a good claim to form part of the ruling group. But this is not true of the head of a dervish lodge somewhere in the depths of Anatolia or the Balkans, who had trouble defending his modest tax immunities from the demands of provincial governors.[35]

The period of reforms and constitutionalism, including during the Tanzimat era (1839–76), that spans over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also had a significant impact on the Ottoman self-perception and worldview. This was also the period when the Sultan's role in the administration got reduced while the *viziers*, *janissaries* and *kadis* gained significant power and authority, further contributing to the shaping of Ottoman relations with the outside world.[36]

Economic and Trade Links

Trade and mercantile links with Europe, Africa and Asia played an important role in forming the Ottoman perspective and ties with the rest of the world. Although the vast expanse of the Ottoman territories at its peak were agrarian lands and the majority of their population were farming or nomadic communities, there were many urban trading centres and mercantile communities that developed and populated the Ottoman territories.[37] These urban centres, including Istanbul, Izmir, Aleppo, Damascus, Cairo, Baghdad, Jeddah, Tripoli, Beirut and many other business centres and ports, attracted large volumes of domestic and international commerce. Trade and mercantile activities, both domestic and international, whether with China, India, Arabia, Africa, Russia or Europe formed one of the most important components of the cosmopolitanism that existed in the Ottoman Empire.[38] This cosmopolitanism, both in terms of linguistic, ethnic and sectarian diversity among the Muslim and non-Muslims subjects as well as the merchants of different faiths who were welcomed to carry out trade and commerce in the Ottoman urban centres, was responsible for the emergence of secular laws (*kanun*) in addition to sharia laws for the governance of the day-to-day activities of the Empire.[39]

The Ottoman trade with the outside world was based on the import of commodities from far-off areas such as silk and porcelain from China, spices and cotton textile from India, horses and dates from Arabia, agricultural and food products from Persia and glasswork, woollen clothes and gunpowder from Europe.[40] Trade and business were carried out through both land and sea and passed through South Asia, Central Asia, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula, Levant and Mediterranean as well as Europe, the Caucuses, Balkans and Black Sea. Besides, traders and merchants were instrumental in the export of commodities, both agricultural products as well as manufactured goods, from the Ottoman territories to different parts of the world.[41]

Hence, the vast network of trade and mercantile linkages both land- and sea-based that traversed the Ottoman territories as well as the outside world shaped the Ottoman view of the world around it, and, in turn, created the Ottoman place in the global system at the time. In other words, trade, commerce and business played a significant role in making the Ottoman Empire a global economic centre, especially in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. And even though the industrial revolution in Europe caused the ascendance of European traders and merchants, it did not lead to a sudden decline in mercantile centres in Ottoman territories, which continued to attract traders from across the world. This also played an important part in the Ottoman efforts to reform and set up industries and manufacturing bases during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

With specific reference to India, the Ottomans had developed trade, mercantile and diplomatic linkages with different Indian rulers including the Mughals, the State of Mysore during Tipu Sultan's reign (1782–99) and with British India. As noted by a scholar, among the Indian ruling dynasties, the "Bahmanids were the first… to establish diplomatic contacts with the Ottomans".[42] Subsequently, "Muslim rulers of Gujarat and after them the Mughals (sic.)" established relations with the Ottomans. "The relations were also established by the Nizam of Hyderabad, Tipu Sultan of Mysore and the Nawab of Arcot", while the Ottomans had also established diplomatic contact with British India.[43] Most of these contacts between the Muslim rulers of India was guided by economic and commercial considerations as well as religious consciousness. There are also reports about the connections between the Ottomans and the Malabar struggle against Portuguese effort to establish their dominion in the region.[44] These links were, however, neither extensive nor direct, given the geographic distance.

Society and Culture

Cultural and social exchanges within the vast geographic expanse of the Ottoman Empire, and with Europe, Asia and Africa also contributed to the Ottoman understanding and linkages with the world. Religious practices and pilgrimages to Makkah, Madinah and Jerusalem, Najaf and Karbala and *ziyarets* (visitation) to tombs and lodges of Sufi saints in Anatolia, the Balkans and Caucuses were important in the intermixing of Ottoman masses and elites with the masses and religious elites from across the Muslim world as well as with the Jewish and Christian subjects of the Empire. The Sultans extended financial benefits and administrative security to many of the pilgrimage and sacred sites in Hejaz, the Levant, North Africa, Anatolia and the Balkans as part of their patronage network acquiescing legitimacy to the Sultan. This was not confined to Muslim religious sites. Thus, for example, during the reign of Suleyman I, many non-Muslim religious sites in Jerusalem were extended endowments for refurbishment and restoration.[45]

Besides, linguistic and ethnic diversity also contributed to the cosmopolitanism that informed the Ottoman elites' consciousness and views about the world. The religious networks and linkages, accounts of travellers, visitors and the exchange of emissaries with European and Asian empires and principalities as well as literary works informed the Ottoman understanding of and relationship with the outside world.[46] Faroqhi notes how the dispatches sent by the Ottoman ambassadors, who had become a regular feature since the early eighteenth century in Persia, Austria, Russia, Germany and Spain, were a major source of information for the Ottoman elites, shaping their views about the world around them.[47] Notably, given the vast geographical span of the Empire and the hierarchical social system prevalent at the structural level, it would be wrong to assume that the level of information and understanding among the masses and the elites were the same. Similarly, given the methods of information exchange, misinformation, prejudices and false information were quite prevalent and might have also contributed to the worldview of the elites. Nonetheless, in medieval times, this was not unique to the Ottoman Empire.

War and Peace

The Ottoman Empire, like most of the ancient and medieval empires, expanded via wars and conquests. The story of the origin, evolution and consolidation and then the decay and decline of the Empire thus cannot be detached from the wars, conquests, revolts, repressions and peace treaties. As noted, one of the guiding principles for the wars and conquests was the religious understanding of *Dar al-*

Islam and *Dar al-Harb,* but this did not entirely explain the Ottoman approach. The competition, rivalries, tensions and co-existence with their counterparts in Arabia, Persia and Europe underline that the Ottoman approach was as much guided by Islamic principles as it was guided by the political desire to expand and the Ottoman Sultan's ability to raise and command a large military that was an extraordinary fighting force on land and water. In a way, the decline of the Empire was also commensurate with the decline of the Ottoman military power and the rise of stronger militaries in Europe, which was riding the wave of the first industrial revolution that had mostly escaped the agrarian-based Ottoman territories.[48]

While the early conquests and consolidation established the Ottoman Empire as a preeminent Islamic ruling dynasty in the world, placing it among the great world powers at the time, its gradual decline in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries until the eventual collapse in the early twentieth century had weakened its position among the world powers. Both the rise and the fall of the Empire thus shaped the Ottoman consciousness and the impacts of this were seen in the evolution of modern Turkish consciousness, self-perception and identity.[49] This is vital to understanding the dichotomous secular-religious nationalism that played a prominent role in Turkish politics in the early period of the Republic and the later decades of the twentieth century. Identity politics remains a major area of contestation among Turkish political parties and masses in the twenty-first century, wherein the conservative and religiously oriented advocate for owning the Ottoman past while the secularist and Kemalist remain reluctant to do so. In other words, the consciousness about the "glorious past" and its religious and secular dichotomies have been instrumental in shaping the worldview of modern Türkiye and its leaders including Atatürk and Erdoğan and has contributed to their foreign policies.

End of the Empire

The Ottoman Empire survived for over 600 years and ended at the cusp of a new era when the world was experiencing insurmountable problems and challenges. The Empire was struggling with multiple internal and external challenges and the issues it faced were extraordinarily complex. These included challenges from within and from the peripheries of the Empire including the Arabs that constituted the vast areas in the desert in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. It was also facing challenges from outside, especially from rival European empires who had modernised faster after the industrial revolution and had begun to take over vast territories in Asia and Africa from the Ottoman

influence or rule. In addition, there were revolts and movements for reform from within. The Constitutional and Young Turks movements and the increasing call for reforms and adoption of the industrial revolution from within the Ottoman elites had started to have a significant impact on the Sublime Porte.

To add to this, World War I, the Arab Revolt in Hejaz and the fast spread of modern thought among a section of the young military officers and cultural elites had led to the weakening of the authority of the Sultan, who had mostly become a puppet in the hands of *viziers* and *janissaries*. But the greatest impact on the Turkish psyche that contributed significantly to shaping the worldview, self-perception and ideology of the new leaders of Türkiye, the Young Turks, was the Ottoman defeat in World War I. This defeat not only proved to be the final step in the Ottoman decline but also led to the Allied Powers forcing the Ottoman Empire to sign the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and relinquish control over its vast remaining territories, taking them over either as protectorates or establishing their suzerainty over them. This Treaty was seen as a humiliation by the Young Turks and Turkish nationalists who then started the Turkish War of Independence, which ended with the Treaty of Lausanne (1923), marking the birth of the modern Turkish Republic.

These events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries made a significant impact on the future of Türkiye, the Turkish view of the world around it and its place in it. During the Kemalist era, Turkish foreign policy was shaped by the consciousness of the decay and decline of the Ottoman Empire. Secular nationalism began to emerge as the predominant ideology since it was viewed as the saviour of the Turkish people from the humiliation imposed on them by the Allied Powers during World War I. Not to suggest that realpolitik did not have anything to do with the foreign policy approach, but the consciousness of Ottoman humiliation was a major contributor to Turkish psyche. As is discussed in Chapter Four, Turkish foreign policy gained a new consciousness in the later decades of the twentieth century, which revolved around the assertion of a glorious past and reclaiming the Ottoman identity. This later contributed to Erdoğan's counter-cultural revolution.[50]

The Kemalist Era

Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was a charismatic figure who played a leadership role in the nationalist struggle in bringing the curtain down on the 600-year rule of the Ottoman dynasty and establishing the modern Republic of Türkiye. As its first president, Atatürk was instrumental in consolidating the Republic and left a deep

influence on the future leaders of Türkiye, who strived to uphold the ideals followed by the founding leader. Scholars underline that it is difficult to define Kemalism as an ideology because there is no definitive work that underlines the ideological or philosophical underpinning of Atatürk's actions and decisions.[51] During his life as the leader of Türkiye, one of the key ideas that drove the Turkish elite was to achieve the goal of modernisation, an ideal derived from the French idea of laicism. This involved modernising Turkish society and shedding medieval tendencies, especially concerning science and technology, as well as focusing on separating religion from politics and public life.[52] On 1 March 1924, in the Grand National Assembly, while debating the motion on the abolition of the Caliphate, Mustafa Kemal said,

> There is a need to separate Islam from its traditional place in politics and to elevate it in its appropriate place. This is necessary for both the nation's worldly and spiritual happiness. We have to urgently and definitively relieve our sacred and holy beliefs and values from the dark and uncertain stage of political greed and of politics. This is the only way to elevate the Muslim religion.[53]

This statement, in a way, underlined one of the most important components of the Kemalist ideology. The idea continues to resonate in Turkish politics in the twenty-first century wherein a broad section of the people believe in the idea that Islam as a faith should be limited to the private lives and spiritual wellbeing of individuals and society, while politics should be separated from religion and should be guided by secular considerations.[54] Another important component of Kemalism was Turkish nationalism. This was vital for creating the Turkish identity and consciousness among the people. Nationalist consciousness had gripped Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and Atatürk adopted it during his days as a unionist officer in the Ottoman military.[55] After the foundation of the Republic, Turkish nationalism became the defining principle in creating a sense of identity and purpose for both the elites and the masses and continues to be the most important component of Turkish polity in the twenty-first century, cutting across parties, groups and leaders.[56] The homogenising tendencies of Turkish nationalism have also led to a sense of alienation and marginalisation among Kurds and other minorities.

In other words, Kemalism adopted the path of nationalism and secularism and insisted on shedding any religious or Islamic association with Turkish identity, politics and society.[57] It was as much a reactionary response to the Ottoman decay, decline and defeat, as it was an embrace of modernity and

secularism.[58] The evolution of secular nationalism as the primary basis of Turkish national identity and as the determinant for Turkish polity revolved around Atatürk—the father of modern Türkiye. Kemalism evolved into Türkiye's primary ideology in the interwar period and determined the course of the republic for the coming decades, dominating Turkish polity, society and foreign policy.[59] It was not until the advent of the AKP and Erdoğan that Kemalism was relegated to the background in Turkish politics and foreign policy.

Politics and Foreign Policy

Mustafa Kemal was an army officer, a national leader and a member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), the most prominent wing of the Young Turks movement.[60] The CUP played a critical role in the 1908 Revolution and in managing the affairs of the Empire during the Second Constitutional Period (1912–18). Mustafa Kemal, at the time was commanding the Ottoman army at the Syrian front and had made a name for himself by his able leadership of the forces. His leadership and war fighting acumen came to the fore most prominently during the Gallipoli campaign, which created folklore around his heroics.[61] In the post-war period, he was sent to Anatolia to consolidate the Empire and control the internal strife in the Anatolian heartland. While he strengthened security and imposed order, he also developed close contacts with the nationalist and unionist leaders who were demanding reforms and democratisation of the government. Eventually, through his activities Mustafa Kemal climbed up the leadership ladder in the CUP and led a nationalist struggle in the War of Independence. After the deposition of Sultan Mehmed VI, he emerged as the leader of the unionist movement that waged a political and military struggle against dynastic rule as well as against the European powers. He founded the *Halk Firkasi* (People's Party) in December 1922 as part of his plans to establish a modern Turkish Republic. The Treaty of Lausanne established Mustafa Kemal as the undisputed leader of the nationalist faction within Türkiye.[62]

With the declaration of the Republic and the appointment of Mustafa Kemal as the president, the Kemalist era formally started and continued until the death of the Atatürk. However, in reality, the Kemalist influence was profoundly felt in Turkish politics for decades to come.[63] Atatürk died in 1938 but his legacy shaped Türkiye's future in all aspects of life including politics, society and foreign policy.[64] And, despite the rise of religious-nationalist consciousness during the Erdoğan era, Kemalism remains one of the most important components of contemporary Turkish polity and public life.[65] Atatürk established a centralised,

one-party rule in Türkiye and ruled with an iron fist to eliminate all dissent and any public expression of religion or Islamic symbolism, including the Turkish hat (*fez*) worn by men and headscarf (*hijab*) worn by women.[66] In 1928, he changed the Turkish language script from Arabic to Latin and in 1932, the Arabic Azan (call for prayers) was replaced with a Turkish translation; this practice continued until 1950 when the country reverted to the Arabic Azan. The forced secularisation contributed to the Kemalist Republic's unpopularity among the masses, especially among the rural and conservative communities, particularly in the Anatolian heartland.[67]

The secular-nationalist consciousness gained wide acceptance among the elites and the urban dwellers, but the vast majority of Turks who populated the Anatolian heartlands remained unconvinced of the top-down reforms and lived a religious life, at least in the confines of their homes and private lives.[68] Nonetheless, the state gained a secular identity and secular-nationalism became the guiding principle for the state and the elites. Hence, from the Ottoman principle of religious pragmatism, the ideological basis of the state transitioned to secular-nationalism with notable impact on foreign policy as well. This had a significant impact on the Turkish national identity wherein during the formative era of the Turkish Republic, Kemalism was defined as representing the ideals of republicanism, secularism, nationalism, populism, statism and reformism.[69]

The 1920s and 1930s were the formative period of the Republic and in terms of policy and governance it was focused on political, economic and social reforms to bring Türkiye out of its perceived backwardness and turn it towards modernisation. This was also the period when Turkish polity became inward-looking as Atatürk's focus shifted to the consolidation of the gains made during the struggle for independence, avoiding any source of friction both within the Republic and in the government. Hence, any dissent was seen as a sign of weakness of the political system. It meant that many of his close aides who had earlier formed the inner circle of the leader, including during his association with the Young Turks, were gradually sidelined.[70]

In the foreign policy realm, the new Republic's approach was marked by caution and the focus was on preserving and consolidating the status quo and protecting the hard-won Republic. This was also the time when Türkiye was coming to terms with the loss of territories in the Balkans and MENA to European powers, including Britain, France and Italy. Hence the relationship between Türkiye and the European powers was marked by tension and friction.[71] Gradually, the situation started to change in the 1930s as Türkiye adopted

pragmatism in its foreign relations with a focus on improving trade and business ties with the neighbourhood for the economic wellbeing of its people as well as for diplomatic and political recognition.[72] There was some concern about showing any signs of weakness to the European powers, which could lead to further loss of territory. Türkiye also maintained good relations with Russia to avoid any war as well as for the consolidation of the Turkish Republic.[73]

Mustafa Aydin, a well-known Turkish academic and scholar of international relations and foreign policy, notes, "During the early years of the Ottoman Empire, its [Turkish] foreign policy was motivated by its military-offensive character".[74] In the later period, "when the Empire first stagnated and then started to crumble, the main foreign policy objective was the preservation of the status quo by military and diplomatic means, of which the latter had had very little significance".[75] However, the birth of the Republic coincided with notable political transformations around it with many erstwhile empires being replaced by modern republics, signalling a change in the international system. He further argues that in these changed circumstances Türkiye no longer had the desire or capacity to expand and the primary foreign policy challenge for the new Republic was to respond to "the new international system without endangering the existence of the state".[76]

Aydin underlines that

> Atatürk's new directions for Turkish foreign policy were thus enormously important. His foreign policy objectives reflected a departure from the militant expansionist ideology of the Ottoman Empire. He was genuinely concerned with independence and sovereignty, thus with his motto of peace at home, peace in the world; he, while aiming to preserve the status quo, sought a deliberate break with the Ottoman past in virtually every aspect of life. Nonetheless, the new Türkiye could not totally dissociate itself from its Ottoman heritage. Today, the Turkish nation carries the deep impressions of the historical experiences of being reduced from a vast empire to extinction, and then having to struggle back to save the national homeland and its independence. The struggle for survival and the play of realpolitik in the international arena, together with an imperial past and a huge cultural heritage left strong imprints on the national philosophy of Turkey and the character of its people.[77]

Notwithstanding the new political environment, it was not possible for Türkiye to totally dissociate from its Ottoman heritage. Thus, both the Ottoman past and the Kemalist struggle form important components of Turkish foreign policy

in contemporary times. Accordingly, "The struggle for survival and the play of realpolitik in the international arena, together with an imperial past and a huge cultural heritage left strong imprints on the national philosophy of Turkey and the character of its people".[78] This in a way sums up the trajectory of Turkish foreign policy in the Kemalist era as well as underscores the significance of history in contemporary Turkish foreign policy.

In 1938, after Atatürk's death, his close aide and prime minister until 1937, Ismet Inonu, replaced him as the president of Türkiye and as the chief of the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*; CHP), which had dominated the one-party system in Türkiye since the formation of the Republic. This happened despite the differences that had cropped up between the two leaders towards the final months of Atatürk's life, forcing Inonu to resign as prime minister. The new president continued the policy and ideology of Atatürk until 1945, years that were marked by the end of World War II. Inonu gradually began taking reformatory steps, and between 1945 and 1950, the first steps for the establishment of a democratic political system were taken.[79] Eventually, in 1950, the first multiparty elections were held in Türkiye, which led to the defeat of the Inonu-led CHP and the emergence of the newly formed Democratic Party (DP) under the leadership of Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes, who respectively became the president and prime minister of Türkiye. These internal political transitions together with the changes at the global level profoundly impacted Turkish foreign policy praxis.

Economic and Social Issues

Besides the political structures that were established under Atatürk, the key drivers for reforms in Türkiye in the 1920s and 1930s were economic and social change. Atatürk was concerned about the socio-economic backwardness that prevailed in the late Ottoman period in the vast territories of the Empire and considered this a major reason for the decay and decline in the country's fortunes. It was for this reason that modernisation, industrialisation and secularisation began to dominate the policies and programmes of the centralised government.[80] Social reforms meant forced secularisation and complete control of religious institutions by the government. Some of the moves such as the ban on religious symbolism in public, the change of script to Latin and the ban on Arabic Azan were welcomed in the urban centres and among the elites but were disliked by the masses in rural and far-off areas. Nonetheless, these issues are still debated and discussed in Turkish politics and social circles and are deeply divisive issues.[81]

Economist Ali Bayar notes,

> During the first years of the Republic, the Kemalist regime was primarily preoccupied by political and cultural reforms in order to consolidate its newly born revolutionary power and to make Turkey a modern Western country. Education was secularised, Islamic legal codes were replaced by Western codes, the Latin alphabet was adopted in place of the Arabic one, etc.[82]

An important component of the reforms was economic modernisation, which had a significant impact on the future generations. While ideologically Türkiye rejected both the capitalist and socialist economic models, Mustafa Kemal's government did not take any radical measures to end private ownership. However, it did interfere in private businesses and investments. One of the key factors that prevented any radical economic policy was the economic component of the Treaty of Lausanne that "constrained the ability of the government to formulate an economic development strategy" until 1929.[83] Gradually, however, several factors combined to force a change in the strategy. Both the impact of the Great Depression and the expiration of the economic restrictions in 1929 were instrumental in the policy change towards reforms and modernisation.

Several steps were taken to modernise the infrastructure in the country, for example, a new network of railways was constructed in the 1930s.[84] The state also consolidated many industries as well as the banking and financial sectors under its umbrella and gradually introduced a more liberal economic structure. As noted earlier, some degree of industrialisation had been introduced during the late Ottoman period and the Kemalist state built upon it to give impetus to manufacturing and industries to compete with the market economies in Europe.[85] In 1933, the first five-year plan was introduced, which led to the consolidation of banking sectors and industries; the second five-year plan (1938–43) led to a proliferation of small and medium industries. This was the period when the state remained the primary driver of economic growth and development; the process being disrupted by the outbreak of World War II. Eventually, in the 1950s, Türkiye adopted the capitalist economic model with efforts towards its integration into the Western political-economic model.[86]

Türkiye and World War II

During World War II, Türkiye faced some serious dilemmas. The new Republic was still going through a transitionary phase and the humungous political, economic, social and foreign policy transitions brought about by Atatürk were

yet to take a concrete shape. There was widespread confusion among the elites and masses as the government was not ready to commit to any of the warring side fearing retribution from the other. As Türkiye had declined as a political and military power reducing its external influence, it strived to maintain good relations with all its neighbours as the leaders did not wish to enter another phase of war and strife, which could have proved detrimental to their reform project. As the clouds of war began to hover over Europe with Italy and Germany entering a military alliance and undertaking a revisionist enterprise to redraw the borders, France, Britain and the Soviet Union also entered into mutual defence pacts.[87]

Türkiye was courted by both parties, but President Inonu resisted demands from either side to join the war, underlining not only the inability of the Turkish military to commit either manpower or other resources but also the lack of desire to re-enter a period of war and turmoil, given its experience of the World War I.[88] At the same time, the government in Ankara continued to maintain communications with all belligerents including Germany and Italy, and even signed a treaty of friendship with Germany in 1941 to avoid any attack on Turkish territories. Maintaining neutrality and remaining uninvolved in the War was becoming increasingly difficult for Türkiye given the widespread calls from both sides for it to declare its inclinations joining the war. But Inonu remained non-committal until the War entered its conclusive phase. It was only in February 1945 that Türkiye finally declared a war on Germany, mainly to be able to participate in the United Nations, which had started to take a preliminary shape by then; but practically, Türkiye did not participate in World War II.[89]

Türkiye's conduct in World War II underlined Turkish dilemmas regarding the security and consolidation of the Republic. It also set the tone for a pragmatic foreign policy behaviour of the Turkish Republic in the decades to come. Hence, during the Cold War period, Türkiye despite maintaining close ties with the West did not ignore the Soviet Union.[90] Pragmatism and realpolitik rooted in Kemalist nationalism were the guiding principles for the Turkish conduct, wherein the leadership put the security and territorial integrity of the country over heeding the calls to join the war to defeat fascism and Nazism. Although the Turkish conduct was seen as "immoral" and Türkiye's image took a hit among many in Europe and across the world, for the Turkish leadership, the ability to keep the country out of the war and to avoid getting embroiled in costly fighting was a successful strategy.

Conclusion

This chapter addressed the question of the historical basis of Turkish foreign policy conduct in the twenty-first century. The consciousness formed during the Ottoman and Kemalist eras have strongly contributed to the creation of a modern Turkish identity. Despite the variations in the approach with religious-pragmatic tendencies contrasted by a nationalist-secularist approach, consciousness of the self was one of the binding threads between the two eras and contributed to the development of a strong Turkish identity. The consciousness about a glorious past, both of the Ottoman Empire and the Kemalist nationalism, contributed to Türkiye adopting an assertive foreign policy in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Apparently, Türkiye sees itself as a Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Eurasian power and wants to emulate the great power status of the Ottoman era. This idea does not emanate entirely from the religious-nationalist consciousness of President Erdoğan and the AKP, as is popularly understood. Instead, it is based on the idea that in the hundred years since the establishment of the Republic, Türkiye has accumulated gross national power because of its economic growth, soft power and military modernisation and has emerged as a stable polity that is ready to play a greater role in regional and global politics. This consciousness, which is reflected in the conduct of foreign relations, emanates predominantly from the Turkish identity and ideology that is engrained in the glorification of the past and encompasses the Islamist-secular divide that has dominated the domestic politics. Between the consciousness of the historical past and the assertive foreign policy conduct in the twenty-first century lies the story of Türkiye's foreign policy during the Cold War era and its adjustment to the new world order in the post-Cold War period.

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CHAPTER THREE

DISCOVERING THE SELF IN A BIPOLAR AND A UNIPOLAR WORLD

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Republic of Türkiye had a profound impact on all aspects of the Turkish state and society. This was not only because of the territorial retraction but also because of the collective psychology and memory, which had a determining impact on domestic policies and foreign policy. One of the key outcomes impacting Türkiye's international relations was taking a step back to focus on internal stability and state building. This manifested in Türkiye taking less interest in regional and international developments during the interwar period and eschewing involvement in World War II, as noted in the previous chapter. However, in the post-World War II era, Ankara could no longer remain distanced from regional and international developments and gingerly began its journey of self-discovery in a new international system defined by a bipolar world order. It was, hence, not a coincidence that the early years of the post-World War II period were marked by significant political changes within Türkiye, as it took steps towards democratisation. In retrospect, those initial steps fell short and the internal struggle to define the nature of the state and the political system continues to haunt Türkiye even as the Republic marks its centenary.

Notwithstanding the internal political turmoil due to the growing polarisation among the nationalists, the leftists and Islamists and the military's propensity to appoint itself as the guardian of the state and society, [1] developments during the Cold War era were crucial for laying the foundations of Turkish foreign policy in the twenty-first century. The Cold War heightened Türkiye's security threats vis-à-vis Soviet expansionism. Fear of leftist militancy further contributed to the increased threat perception.[2] The threat to security was partly a result of Türkiye's perceived military weakness against stronger militaries of the Soviet Union and its allies in the Middle East. Hence, despite

the not-so-distant memory of being defeated by the Western powers in World War I, Türkiye resorted to external balancing, choosing to develop close ties with the United States (US) and Western Europe to counter Soviet domination in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions.[3] Türkiye was also courted by the US, which had emerged as a major power in the interwar period, with an eye on its geopolitical significance in containing the spread of communism and expanding Soviet influence, especially in the Balkans and the Middle East.[4] Besides, Turkish elites' fascination with the West and enthusiasm for modernisation played a key role in Ankara preferring an alliance with the US during the Cold War.

Foreign Policy During the Cold War

Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War era provides significant insights into the country's foreign policymaking and behaviour. It underlines that for the first time since the end of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of modern Türkiye, Turkish elites were feeling confident about playing a role in international politics albeit only in the immediate neighbourhood.[5] Türkiye's leaders at the time were guided not only by strategic considerations in deciding their foreign policy but also by a desire of finding a place in the international order. After the transition from the Ottoman Empire to the Turkish Republic, roughly during the interwar period, Türkiye began to develop an independent identity within the international system. Though in a bipolar world this was marked by extraordinary identification with the West and alliance with the US, Turkish foreign policy choices were also determined by other factors, as discussed later in this chapter. Notably, the Cold War era allowed Türkiye to come into its own and stand on its feet in the new world order. By becoming part of the Western block, Türkiye played a major role in its surroundings, namely in the Balkans, Mediterranean and Caucasus in limiting the Soviet threat.[6]

Ironically, identification with the West did not lead to an enduring democracy and the democratic experiment was interrupted by repeated military takeovers in 1960, 1971, 1982 and 1997.[7] However, this had little impact on the foreign policy choices as the coups were marked more by the civil-military tussle than any significant change in the composition of the secular-nationalist elites. In addition, during the Cold War, the securitisation of domestic politics and foreign policy discourse and dependence on the West for security and economic prosperity were instrumental in the continuation of foreign policy despite changes in the government and military interventions.

Determinants

While the international environment plays an important role in determining foreign policy approach of any country, history, geography and domestic politics also contribute to shaping foreign policy and relations.[8] In the case of Türkiye, as noted in Chapter Two, its history has been critical in defining the consciousness of the Turkish elites and the society, which, in turn, continues to impact foreign policy behaviour. At the same time, Türkiye's attitude towards the outside world has been influenced by the consciousness to be identified as a modern Western country. Thus, it is important to underline that "the foreign policy of every single state is an integral part of its peculiar system of government", and hence is unique in many ways.[9] Mustafa Aydin, a noted scholar of Turkish foreign policy, argues,

> … our understanding of foreign policies is likely to be much more productive if we avoid starting from the assumption that there are general forms of behaviour in international relations which could explain all the relationships between states. Instead each case needs to be located in its specific conditionalities within the international system.[10]

In the case of Türkiye too, it is important to note that its geopolitical location in the international system, the prevailing world order and the political discourses within the country combined to create a unique foreign policy behaviour. Notwithstanding the immediate issues (or the *conjunctural variables*),[11] three factors—geography, domestic politics and Western-orientation—can be considered as the major determinants (or the *structural variables*) that were crucial in shaping Türkiye's attitude towards the world during the Cold War. Thus, it is important to examine these determinants to understand Turkish foreign policy behaviour during this period.

Geography

A sense of geography and geopolitical location plays a crucial role in determining the foreign policy behaviour of a country.[12] In the case of Türkiye, the transition from an Empire to a Republic meant a change in geography, both in size and expanse and, in turn, the location of the Republic. Hence, from ruling the whole of the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa and Eastern Mediterranean region, Türkiye became confined to the Anatolian heartland with a small territory located in Europe across the Bosporus. So, the geography of the new Republic changed, and along with it changed its security concerns and foreign policy behaviour. This change in geography also positioned Türkiye to be located

at the crossroad of multiple regional sub-systems from the Mediterranean to the Middle Eastern region and the South Caucasus and the Balkans to North Africa. This allowed it to play a far greater role in Cold War politics than its size and status in the international system would have allowed otherwise.[13]

Türkiye lies in between three major water bodies: the Black Sea in the north, the Aegean Sea in the west and the Mediterranean Sea in the south. Additionally, Türkiye identifies with the Caspian Sea region because of its relations with the Turkic-speaking former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus and its dependence on the region for energy security.[14] Obviously, the Sea of Marmara also forms an important marker of Turkish maritime linkages with Europe. Türkiye shares borders with Greece and Bulgaria in the northwest, Georgia in the northeast and Armenia, Azerbaijan (through the Nakhchivan autonomous region) and Iran in the east. Towards the southeast lie Iraq and Syria, with the border with the latter stretching up to the Mediterranean Sea near the Mount Kilic region.

In terms of its location, hence, Türkiye cannot be confined to one region as it straddles multiple regions. Aydin notes, "Not only does Turkey not appear to fit any one geographical category, but it does not fit any one cultural, political or economic category either".[15] In that sense, Türkiye can be considered a Middle Eastern, Mediterranean and European country with vital historical, political, economic, cultural and geographical links with the Balkans, Caucasus and Caspian regions.

This straddling of multiple geographies has been instrumental in according Türkiye its geostrategic significance in international politics, and, in turn, has influenced Turkish foreign policy behaviour and decisions. Hence, Aydin underlines:

> Turkey is not one of the great powers of the twentieth century. Its geopolitical location, however, has enabled it to play a potentially higher role in world politics than would have been otherwise possible. It holds the key not only to the Turkish Straits but lies along the roads from the Balkans to the Middle East and from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf.[16]

A key component of Türkiye's geography playing an important role in foreign policy is that the country is a bridge between Europe, Asia and the Middle East not only in the geographical sense but also in the political and cultural sense.

Türkiye's geographical and geopolitical location also accords it a self-consciousness about its external outlook and the core and periphery in foreign relations. Hence, the immediate neighbourhood of Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans, South Caucasus, Caspian and the Middle East form the core of Turkish foreign policy priorities.[17] However, the historical experience and the orientation of the elites at the time of the foundation of the Republic led to Turkish foreign policy becoming Western-oriented or Eurocentric although the experiences of World War I and the War of Independence ensured that the Turkish elites remained inwardly inclined during the interwar period.[18] This also reflects in Türkiye ignoring its immediate neighbourhood in the south for most of the Cold War period with little attempt to develop relations with Middle Eastern countries. In addition to the historical experience, economic compulsions, geopolitical factors and cultural aspirations, were vital in determining its Western-orientation. Thus, it can be argued that its geographical location accorded Türkiye an extraordinary advantage in terms of its role in regional and global developments but its historical experiences belied the geographical logic of its foreign policy creating a dichotomy that continues to trouble Turkish policy makers.

During the Cold War, Türkiye's Western-oriented approach to foreign policy was also linked to its geographical and geopolitical locations. Its insecurities vis-à-vis regional and global politics were important determinants of foreign policy. The fact that the Soviet Union, one of the two global powers at the time, was a neighbour with which Türkiye shared borders and the geopolitical space in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions made Türkiye strategically vulnerable to Soviet expansionism. Nonetheless, this also gave Türkiye strategic significance in the US and Western geopolitical calculations, which were focused on containing the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

Political System

If geography plays an important role in foreign policy, domestic political factors – a combination of the worldview of the ruling elite, the character and orientation of the leader, whether democratically elected or otherwise, and the dominant political discourse at the time – are vital in determining foreign policy behaviour of a country.[19] This is true in the case of Türkiye as much as in any other country. Hence, the domestic political environment during the Cold War impacted the foreign policy decision-making in Ankara. During the first fifteen years after the end of World War II, Türkiye experienced far-reaching political, economic and foreign policy changes.[20] The change in foreign policy behaviour

was primarily linked to the changing geopolitical environment in the world and its impact on Türkiye's immediate environs, but simultaneously it was impacted by the changes in domestic politics. The government of Ismet Inonu, who had succeeded Mustafa Kemal Atatürk as the president of Türkiye, took time to come into its own while struggling to respond to the international pressure to join World War II. However, soon after the war ended, it started to show signs of a change towards a more democratic political system.[21]

A policy of gradual democratisation was adopted by President Inonu and among the key steps taken was ending the one-party political system and the introduction of multi-party elections.[22] This led to the formation of the Democratic Party (DP) in January 1946. Notably, DP had branched out of the ruling Republican People's Party (CHP) and in that sense did not differ much ideologically. But it gradually moved towards populist nationalism unlike the CHP, which had remained ultra-secularist; this helped the DP win the first multi-party election in 1950.[23] Some might argue that the initial efforts towards democratisation were symbolic and did not necessarily reflect bottom-up politics.[24] However, the way the DP was able to capture the imagination of the masses and gain popular support among the public underlined the yearning for change as well as the general disenchantment with the one-party rule of the CHP, which while having been a major catalyst in the foundation of the state and providing it stability, had failed in responding to the need for economic reforms and progress.[25] Nonetheless, the CHP under Inonu, allowed the emergence of the DP as an opposition party without supressing dissent.[26]

The change in the domestic political environment and the election of DP under the leadership of Celal Bayar and Adnan Menderes had a deep impact on domestic politics and foreign policy.[27] Some consider this as a watershed moment in the history of the Republic.[28] The political opening was followed by economic liberalisation—a clear break from the past. In the 1950s, the Turkish economy began to transit from a state-controlled and planned economy to one that was integrated into the Western capitalist economy.[29] The terms of these became clearer later but the foundations for the transition had been laid during the late 1940s and early 1950s. And certainly its impact was witnessed in foreign policy. Erik J. Zürcher, a well-known historian of Türkiye, underlines:

> Turkey in these years [the 1950s] became a solid – albeit peripheral – part of the political and military structure the United States and its allies built up to safeguard the continued existence of democracy and free

> enterprise in their countries. This was a major break with the Kemalist foreign policy of cautious neutralism.[30]

In 1950, Türkiye formally started the process for joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and became a member in 1952. The decision to join NATO was based on both domestic political changes and the existing geopolitical situation in the neighbourhood. At one level, Türkiye did not want to show any vulnerability to the Soviet Union, which had expanded to become an immediate neighbour. At another level, Ankara was able to overcome the Sèvres Syndrome to develop a Western orientation in its foreign policy.[31] Hence, both the domestic political environment and the Cold War geopolitics contributed to the change.

Western-Orientation

Besides geography and politics, a key determinant of Turkish foreign policy since the foundation of the Republic was its relations with the West and the US. And, although in the twenty-first century the nature of this relationship changed, it remains a major component of Türkiye's international politics. During the interwar period Ankara remained cautious (often described as the Sèvres Syndrome), this wariness was shed during the Cold War and Türkiye's foreign policy became overwhelmingly orientated towards the West.[32] The elites' desire to be recognised as a modern, Western or European country was one of the core objectives of Kemalist politics. While the political and economic situation had started to change, the political culture remained embedded in the idea of modernisation and secularisation. Nevin Yurdsever Ates, a Turkish social scientist, notes that besides the geographical and geopolitical logic of the foreign policy behaviour during the Cold War, Western-orientation was a direct outcome of the ideological underpinnings of the Kemalist state rooted in the values of modernisation, Westernisation and secularisation. He argues,

> … Turkey's tight links with the West were the [result of] diverse Westernization efforts, mainly beginning with Mustafa Kemal's revolution. After the death of Mustafa Kemal, Turkish government leaders understood the concept of Westernization as establishing close relations with the West and especially after the 1947 Truman Doctrine, Turkey was one of the most steadfast ally of the West. Therefore, Turkey identified and coordinated her national interests generally as an ally of the West and especially of the USA.[33]

While there is a consensus on the Western-orientation of Turkish foreign policy during the Cold War, many argue that it was not the result of the ideological drivers of the modern Republic alone, it had a historical significance as well. Aydin notes,

> One of the fundamental features of Turkish foreign policy has been its Western orientation. Despite the fact that Turkey had fought against the Western powers during the First World War, after independence it opted for the Western world. This was expressed first in cultural and, after the Second World War, in political and military terms. This orientation has been deliberate and continues to be a policy choice that cannot be explained with the limited aim of 'countering an imminent threat' or such formulations as 'the economic interests of the ruling elite.' These kinds of explanation would not only be unsatisfactory, but also misleading. Instead, one should look into Turkish history which has helped to shape Turkish understanding of its environment and its governmental philosophy.[34]

He elaborates that "Throughout their history, the Turks have been connected to the West, first as a conquering superior and enemy, then as a component part, later as an admirer and unsuccessful imitator, and in the end as a follower and ally".[35] Notwithstanding the historical, geographical and geopolitical logic of identification with the West, the ideological underpinning of the leaders to be identified as secular and Western, and not as Islamic and Middle Eastern played, a key role in determining Türkiye's foreign policy choices during the Cold War period.[36]

External Relations

Türkiye began becoming part of the US-led Western alliance soon after World War II and the alliance with the West defined its external relations for most of the Cold War era. This did not change despite domestic political upheavals witnessed in almost every decade. Neither were they significantly altered by the challenges faced in bilateral relations with the US and European powers over issues such as the Cyprus conflict and the Cuban missile affair nor the internal problems with the country's Kurdish population, which intensified in the 1980s. In a way, Türkiye's external relations were marked by continuity, not to suggest that there were no ups and downs in relations with its allies and neighbours. The relations with the outside world mostly revolved around the US–Europe and the Soviet Union as Türkiye's geostrategic location served as one of the buffers

between the two blocks in the bipolar world.[37] This situation did not allow Ankara much scope for developing ties beyond its immediate neighbourhood in the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, Balkans and South Caucasus. It was only after the end of the Cold War that Türkiye began to gradually recalibrate its foreign policy to develop relations with the wider world.

The US and Europe

Türkiye's relations with the US and European countries were marked by a strategic alliance based on common threat perceptions against the Soviet Union.[38] The most important landmark in building this alliance was the US' *Truman Doctrine,* and its *Marshall Plan,* that was unveiled in 1947 and formulated keeping in consideration the security and integrity of Türkiye and Greece. It was based on their utility as a buffer between the Soviet sphere of influence and American interests. The immediate reason for this US move was Britain's expression of its inability to continue its external military support to the two countries.[39] For the US, it was important to keep Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East immune from Soviet dominance. But these were subsequent developments, the preliminary path for the alliance was paved towards the end of World War II. Türkiye for the most part eschewed joining the War but towards its end, in February 1945, declared a war on Germany and joined the Allied Powers.[40] By this time, it had already become clear that Germany and the Axis Powers were losing and Türkiye did not want to miss out on being part of the victorious alliance that was to shape the future of international politics.

In April 1945, Türkiye participated in the San Francisco conference that laid the foundations of the United Nations (UN) and became a signatory to the UN charter as a founding member. Domestic factors, such as continued economic stagnation and decline under the Soviet-socialist style planned economic model, were critical in convincing Turkish leaders to look to the US and Western Europe for a liberalised economic model and free market.[41] Also, by 1945 Türkiye's relationship with the Soviet Union had become tense over border disputes and Russia's insistence on forming a joint defence force to control the Black Sea. Türkiye was not ready to form this force, which resulted in Russia and Türkiye not renewing their friendship treaty after it lapsed in 1945.[42] Türkiye's ability to withstand Soviet pressure underlined the possibilities of improving relations with the US, which itself was guided by concerns to contain Soviet expansionism. This led to the development of a security alliance with the US in the 1950s.[43] The Marshall Plan played an important role in the Turkish leadership deciding to develop closer relations with the US and Europe.[44]

In part, these external developments were responsible for internal changes in Türkiye that led to the election of the DP in the 1950 elections. By this time, Türkiye was already a member of the Organisation of European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the precursor to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Council of Europe. After the formation of NATO, Türkiye was keen on joining the security block and was inducted in 1952.[45] Turkish participation in the Korean War was instrumental in convincing NATO and paving the way for a long security alliance with the West. In terms of realpolitik, the decision to join NATO was an outcome of the threat perception against the Soviet Union, but the enthusiasm among the Turkish elites went beyond realpolitik.[46]

The alliance with the West was instrumental in Türkiye joining the Baghdad Pact (1955), along with the UK, Iran, Iraq and Pakistan, which became the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1960 after the Ba'athist coup in Baghdad led to Iraq's exit. Though the alliance with the West was a guiding principle in Turkish foreign policy behaviour during the Cold War, Türkiye did face challenges due to the Cyprus issue, which led to the deterioration of relations with Greece in the 1960s and 1970s and continues to haunt the relations even today.[47] Besides the Cold War geopolitics, economic and security imperatives contributed to Turkish relations with the US and Europe. Ankara signed several agreements with the US that focused on military and economic cooperation. In 1954, Türkiye and the US signed an agreement to host a US military base in the country. However, in the 1960s, this increased Türkiye–US security and military alliance met with opposition and protest from the left-leaning intelligentsia, labour and student unions and nationalist parties, who saw this as a sign of extraordinary Turkish dependence on the US.[48]

The American position on the Cyprus issue did not help matters, leading to widespread opposition and suggestions that Türkiye should explore a non-alignment policy along the lines of what was followed by India and some other post-colonial states.[49] This has also been described by some as a return or continuation of the Sèvres Syndrome. At the same time, moves by the US of withdrawing Jupiter nuclear missiles from Türkiye in return for the Soviet Union not stationing its missiles in Cuba proved to be an irritant for the alliance. Another issue cropped up in the 1970s when Prime Minister Nihat Erim's government gave in to the US pressure to ban poppy cultivation; the decision was reversed after Bulent Ecevit formed the government in 1974. But tensions with Greece on the Cyprus issue re-erupted the same year and escalated to the

extent of Turkish military intervention on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots. Besides leading to a serious friction with Greece, a fellow member of NATO, this act invited an arms embargo by the US, which remained in place until 1978. These developments forced Türkiye to look for alternatives and explore possibilities of developing economic ties with European countries, including seeking political engagements with the Soviet Union.[50]

After facing challenges in the 1970s, Türkiye–US relations started to regain normalcy in the 1980s. The 1982 coup brought a new set of leaders to power under the military's oversight. The coup prompted criticism by the European Council, which Türkiye was an associate member of and led to the deterioration of ties with Europe with which Türkiye was seeking greater economic integration. This deterioration continued through the 1990s.[51] This was contrary to the relations with the US, which began to improve after the coup as the US viewed it from a security perspective. The fact that the military was again in the driving seat was seen positively in the US, as despite the political bitterness, the militaries of the two countries continued to enjoy close relations. Additionally, two major regional developments in 1979 – the fall of the Shah in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – led to a revival of bilateral relations.[52] These reaffirmed the continued significance of Türkiye as a major regional ally of the US for stability and security in the Middle East. For the Turkish leadership, the improvement in relations with the US was seen as beneficial for political, economic and security purposes. Improvement in ties with the US endured major global developments including the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the problems in the Middle East, the Gulf crisis, and the post-Cold War recalibration in Turkish foreign policy in the 1990s.

The Soviet Union

In the 1920s and 1930s, Türkiye maintained good relations with Russia. Despite being on opposite sides in World War I and the unresolved border issues, the two countries signed a friendship treaty in 1921, which was replaced by the 1925 Treaty of Friendship and Neutrality that was based on political and security convergence.[53] For the Soviet Union, a treaty with Türkiye provided an opportunity to expand the communist ideology and Soviet sphere of influence. Whereas for Türkiye this was a strategic compulsion as the leadership was not only trying to overcome the Ottoman defeat in World War I but also struggling with internal disorder and chaos and mounting pressure from the victorious powers to take over the remaining Ottoman territories.[54] The new Turkish leadership deemed it necessary to secure some external support and the Soviet

willingness to extend that was welcomed. This laid the foundation of close cooperation between the Soviet Union and Türkiye during the interwar period.[55] However, during and after World War II, this situation changed dramatically. Internally, Türkiye was yearning for change to be able to cope with the economic problems and externally, Soviet demands were being seen as creating national security challenges, which led to the end of the 1925 Türkiye–Soviet Union friendship treaty.

The Westward shift in Türkiye's external relations after World War II meant that relations with the Soviet Union nosedived. Soviet belligerence in negotiating the renewal of the 1925 treaty compelled the Turkish government to look for alternatives and seek close ties with the US and Western Europe. Turkish foreign policy was guided by Pax-Americana in the 1950s and 1960s, but troubles in relations with the US over Cyprus and other issues led Ankara to seek rapprochement with the Soviet Union in the 1970s, though this did not necessarily materialise despite occasional political engagements.[56] An area of possible cooperation was the Cyprus issue that had caused serious trouble in the Türkiye–US relations. Although Moscow was favourably inclined to the Greek Cypriot leadership, it was willing to be accommodative of Turkish concerns unlike the US. For the Soviet Union, this was also a strategic compulsion as it did not want NATO intervention on the island. This led to many visits between Turkish and Soviet leaders between 1974 and 1978.[57] Ankara was also predisposed to improving relations with Moscow for economic reasons as the Turkish economy was facing serious troubles. However, the revival of Türkiye–US relations after the end of the US arms embargo in 1978 led to a reversal in Turkish–Soviet relations. Domestic and regional developments underlined Ankara's continued alliance with the West and relations with the Soviet Union went on the back burner. Türkiye–Russia relations only started to witness a change after the end of the Cold War.

The Middle East

Türkiye shared a complicated relationship with the Middle Eastern states during the Cold War period. The fact that most of the regional states were until fairly recently, directly or indirectly, ruled from Istanbul and that the collective memory among the Turks had become bitter after the 1916 Arab Revolt, which was viewed as partly responsible for the Ottoman military defeat in the Middle East by the British and French forces, made it difficult for the Turkish elites to seek better relations with the post-Ottoman Arab states. Moreover, during the interwar period, most of these territories were under British or French mandate

and the absence of strong Turkish relations with either of them made the development of close Türkiye–Arab ties impossible. In the aftermath of World War II, while Türkiye moved closer to the US, a majority of the post-colonial Arab states were swayed by the nationalist and Ba'athist tide, and these moved closer to the Soviet Union, making it unfeasible for Türkiye to have any functional relations with the Arab world.[58]

In the early 1950s, the US tried to bring Türkiye and Egypt closer for developing a strong anti-Soviet block in the region; however, this could not materialise due to the 1952 revolution in Egypt that brought Gamal Abdel Nasser to power.[59] Notwithstanding this effort, deep suspicion of Arab nationalism in Türkiye, Ankara's position on the Arab–Israeli conflict and the Palestinian issue and the collective Arab memory of Ottoman "imperialism" did not leave much scope for a rapprochement between Türkiye and Egypt. Furthermore, Türkiye, following America's cue, not only recognised Israel in 1949 (the first predominantly Muslim country to do so), but also developed close coordination with the Israeli government on security and strategic issues. This left the Arab countries utterly annoyed and diminished any possibility of a rapprochement. During the Suez crisis, Türkiye did not come out openly in support of Egypt, further reducing any chance of a diplomatic opening. Zürcher underlines:

> Turkey's DP government intensely disliked Nasser and saw him as a communist agent. During the Suez crisis, it felt it had to support Egypt verbally, but it did so in rather equivocal terms and Turkey and the Baghdad Pact continued to be regarded as puppets of Western imperialism in much of the Arab world.[60]

Relations between Türkiye and Syria were also strained for much of the 1950s. The Ba'athist coup in Baghdad in 1958, the only friend of Ankara in the region at the time, added to Türkiye's complete isolation in the region during the Cold War.[61] Bitterness of the Arab role in the defeat of Ottoman militaries during World War I, Türkiye's alliance with the US and the West and relations with Israel did not allow any significant change in the status quo during 1960s and 1970s either. Changes in the regional situation, especially the Camp David Accords (1978) and the Egypt–Israel peace treaty (1979), the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979) did create possibilities for improvement in relations in the 1980s. However, the Iran–Iraq war, troubled relations with Syria and Iraq over the distribution of Tigris and Euphrates waters and Egyptian isolation from the Arab world did not allow the

potential to turn into any tangible reality. In 1990–91, the Cold War came to an end after the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the world witnessed a unipolar moment that allowed the US to restore the status quo ante in Kuwait. This turn of events provided Türkiye with an opportunity to strengthen its alliance with the US. As a result, Türkiye participated in the US-led military alliance Operation Desert Storm.[62] Nonetheless, any real opening with the Arab world had to wait for another decade as Ankara gradually began to reorient its foreign policy to adjust to the post-Cold War world order.

The Balkans, South Caucasus and Eastern Mediterranean

Türkiye's relations with its other neighbours in the Balkans, Caucasus and Eastern Mediterranean during the Cold War were also guided by its alliance with the US and the West. Perhaps the only exception to this rule was its relations with Greece due to the Cyprus conflict, which was one of the major reasons for trouble in Türkiye–US relations during the 1960s and 1970s. Türkiye faced challenges in the Balkans due to its alliance with the West, and as a result of the Turkish decision to contribute troops for the Korean War, communist Bulgaria expelled nearly a quarter million Turkic Muslims, creating serious demographic challenges for Türkiye.[63] American efforts to counter Soviet influence in the region by encouraging the formation of the Balkan Pact (1953) did not lead to any tangible results, and this proved as ineffective as the Baghdad Pact in preventing the rise of communism or containing Soviet influence.[64]

Türkiye and Greece enjoyed good relations for a brief period until the eruption of trouble in Cyprus. The rise of Greek nationalism in Cyprus and the marginalisation of the minority Turkic Muslims, who comprised about 20 per cent of the island's population, led to a serious churn in Türkiye–Greece relations. Türkiye initially was opposed to either the island becoming a part of Greece or becoming an independent republic, but in 1959, after trilateral discussions between Türkiye, Britain and Greece, Ankara agreed to the formation of an independent Republic of Cyprus with the three countries acting as guarantors to maintain the status quo on the autonomy of the Turkic minority was concerned.[65] Cyprus became an independent state in 1960. However, problems started soon thereafter when the Cypriot government of Archbishop Makarios introduced constitutional amendments in 1964 to limit the autonomy of the minority population.[66] This move threatened to erupt into a full-fledged war between Türkiye and Greece over Cyprus and it was American mediation that brought the situation under control.[67] However, a confidential letter by

President Lyndon B. Johnson to Turkish leader Inonu threatening military action if Türkiye intervened in Cyprus led to a serious souring of Türkiye–US relations with many within the country raising doubts about American commitment towards Türkiye's security concerns and demanding greater self-reliance and autonomy.[68] The problem re-emerged in 1974 with Türkiye finally intervening militarily in Cyprus on behalf of the Turkish Cypriots. This intervention eventually led to the declaration of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in 1983, which to date is only recognised by the Turkish Republic. This remains a bone of contention between Türkiye and Cyprus and in Türkiye–Greece relations.

Türkiye also faced serious challenges in the South Caucasus as Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan became part of the Soviet Union, bringing the Soviet threat closer to its border in the east. It was also challenged due to its historical acrimony with Armenia as during the first two decades of the twentieth century the Armenian minority in the Ottoman territories faced serious threats from Turkish nationalists, who saw the Armenians as the fifth column in their struggle against Russia and later against the European powers.[69] As violence against Armenians increased during the World War I, it led to accusations of the Ottoman government carrying out genocide against its Armenian population, which remains a major problem in Türkiye–Armenia and Türkiye–West relations even today. Türkiye continues to deny that the nationalist leadership followed a policy of genocide against Armenians even though evidence suggests mass murder of Armenians at the hands of nationalist Young Turks militias and Kurdish soldiers of the Ottoman army.[70] Notwithstanding these accusations, it was not until the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the post-Soviet republics in the South Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) that Türkiye began to develop closer relations with the region.

Post-Cold War Recalibration

The end of the Cold War changed the complexion of international politics as the world moved from bipolarity to unipolarity. The disintegration of the Soviet Union meant the emergence of the US as the lone superpower. Although the unipolar moment in the global order did not last long, gradually giving way to multipolarity with the emergence of regional and middle powers in international politics,[71] states had to adjust to the new realities in world politics. The changing global political dynamics provided Turkish leaders with an opportunity to rethink their approach towards the outside world.[72] This was a long, arduous and

hard process of pondering and self-discovery for the Turkish state in a new international system. A key component of the recalibration in foreign policy was the decision to move away from extraordinary identification with the West and find a unique place in the new multipolar world order by expanding Türkiye's external relations with its immediate neighbourhood as well as among the Turkic-speaking and Islamic world. Hence, after the end of the Cold War, Türkiye started a journey of redefining its foreign policy and external relations, which began to reflect in Ankara's foreign relations in the new millennium. The foreign policy recalibration coincided with the effort towards gaining legitimacy through electoral politics that brought populist forces to the fore impacting both the foreign policy discourse and praxis.[73]

Internal Political Churnings

The September 1980 coup brought a new military-backed dispensation under the rule of General Kenan Evren and the National Security Council (NSC). This was formalised through the 1982 constitution with Evren becoming president.[74] The military was looking to reform the political system, which it saw as decadent and self-destructive, and hence a new system was put in place under the guardianship of the armed forces. All old political parties and leaders were banned from active politics for a decade, some were detained and tried but most were set free under the condition of having no future role in political life. After the constitution came into force, a parliamentary election was held in 1983, and the Motherland Party (*Anavatan Partisi*; ANAP) led by Turgut Özal won. Hence, with President Evren and Prime Minister Özal as leaders that were overseen by the NSC, Türkiye commenced a fresh course of politics with economic liberalisation, and gradual political opening.[75]

Özal replaced Evren as president in 1988 and dominated the political scene in the country until his sudden demise in 1993 despite some ups and downs in his party's fortunes. While economic liberalisation brought prosperity and greater opportunities for the middle class, the gradual political opening led to the emergence of a rich but conservative class that backed politicians taking a more populist approach and showed acceptance of the sensitive but contentious religious issues. Hence, a new class of moderate-Islamist or Islam-sensitive politicians gained popularity who were backed by neo-rich conservative Sunni Muslims, mostly from the Anatolian heartland. Among the leaders to emerge from this group was the Welfare Party's (*Refah Partisi*; RP) Necemettin Erbakan, who briefly became prime minister in 1996–97 and was removed in a soft coup orchestrated by the military accusing Erbakan government of mixing religion

with politics.[76] While the 1980s brought political and economic stability, the end of the Özal era meant a return of political instability under coalition governments and increasing economic problems due to governance mismanagement, corruption and crony capitalism.[77]

For leaders, the perceptible uncertainties in the late 1990s posed serious problems in charting out a new political, economic and foreign policy to adjust to the changing global realities. A perceptive need for political stability was felt both among the elites and the masses, and the rise of Justice and Development Party (AKP) can be seen on this context. The AKP was in a way the amalgamation of Islamism and economic liberalism, bringing together the legacies of Özal and Erbakan to fuse a new populist political dispensation. Ever since it won the 2002 parliamentary elections, the AKP and Erdoğan have dominated the political scene in Türkiye. In the early phase (the initial two terms) this was due to their ability to deliver on economic and political promises and subsequently by manipulating nationalist and religious political sentiments and dividing the opposition – a phenomenon not without precedent in Türkiye.[78] The 1980s and 1990s were also characterised by the rise of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the military's action against it, leading to questions on human rights violations gaining prominence in foreign policy discourse.

Notwithstanding the political situation, Turkish foreign policy also needed to respond to the changes in the external environment. This required a long and hard reflection on foreign policy issues, which the political instability made difficult. The 1990s were also marked by the widening of the pool of actors who could contribute to foreign policymaking. For a large part until the 1980s, Turkish elites were composed of a small class of secular nationalists who had their roots either in the military, judiciary or bureaucracy. This began to change with the expansion of the political class and the emergence of a large business community that had benefitted from the riches brought by economic liberalisation. To an extent, in addition to the military and political elites, this was a period of the formation of a "civil society" in the country that had also begun to contribute to foreign policymaking by acting as pressure groups and through political connections.[79] Hence, although the foreign policy conduct of Türkiye in the 1990s was characterised by confusion and inept handling of serious issues, there were greater discussions and debates on foreign policy matters and orientation with increasing demand for a complete overhaul of how Türkiye viewed itself and its external environment.

Impact of the External Environment

The end of the Cold War suddenly changed the immediate external environment of Türkiye. During the Cold War, Türkiye was surrounded by the Soviet Union almost from all four sides as the South Caucasus, Black Sea, Balkans and part of the Middle East (Syria and Iraq) either joined the USSR or came under its influence. This meant that for the duration of the Cold War, Türkiye had extraordinary threat perception vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, and the alliance with the US and Western Europe was a way of external balancing. Soviet disintegrations, retraction and retreat meant that Türkiye was suddenly the biggest and strongest power in its immediate neighbourhood as smaller post-Soviet states surrounded it. This had a serious impact on the Turkish thought process and foreign policy behaviour. The emergence of Turkic republics (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) was seen as an advent of a new era in the Turkish ruling circle with President Özal terming it as the rise of a "Turkic century" and soft power from Anatolia to China.[80] Türkiye gradually started its outreach to the Caspian and Central Asia region by forming the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı*; TİKA) in 1992 to develop ties among the Turkic-speaking world.[81]

While it made strides in the east, Ankara also took steps to consolidate its position as a leading regional actor in the Black Sea region by forming the Organization of Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in 1992 with all countries having a direct or indirect link to the Black Sea as its members. This meant that like in the South Caucasus and Caspian Sea regions, Türkiye again took the initiative to develop ties with post-Soviet states in the Balkans and became integrated into the regional complex.[82] But unlike in the east, west and north, relations with its southern neighbours in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean remained a challenge. While the Cyprus issue prevented any chance of warming relations with Greece, relations with the Arab–Middle East continued to be cold due to Türkiye's good relations with Israel as well as border and water disputes with Syria and Iraq.[83] It was not till the advent of the AKP that Türkiye could turn around its relations with the Arab world with some success until the Turkish response to the Arab Spring uprisings unravelled relations.[84]

Besides outreach in the neighbourhood, Türkiye strived to strengthen relations with the US and Western Europe for both security and economic cooperation. This became even more necessary as the Soviet Union's

disintegration and retreat increased Türkiye's strategic and economic reliance on the West.[85] Türkiye had sought greater economic integration with Europe for a long time and had formally applied for membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), the precursor to the European Union (EU), in 1987. Despite some progress towards accession in 1997 and 1999, EU membership was elusive because of a lack of internal democratisation and issues of human rights especially related to the action against the PKK and exclusive policies against Kurds.[86] Moreover, there was apprehension among EU members about the cultural and religious differences that contributed to suspicions of Turkish commitments to democracy and human rights. This, in turn, reaffirmed the doubts among a section of the Turkish public and elites about the West's commitment towards Turkish security. However, economic compulsions made Ankara aspire for EU accession as this was seen as a possible solution to the economic woes. Hence, despite the end of the Soviet threat, Türkiye's orientation to the West, in the form of relations with NATO and EU, continued for strategic and economic reasons.

Adjusting to Global Politics

The end of the Cold War was also significant in changing the way Türkiye looked at itself and its role in the world. A major factor for such a turnaround was the beginning of unipolar world order and Türkiye, while continuing to have close ties with the US, began re-orienting its inward-looking character to become outward looking. Barry Rubin, a US-born Israeli scholar of Turkish politics and international relations notes:

> The Cold War's end, however, forced a major reassessment of Turkey's geostrategic role. Since then, the country has become [a] far more active international player. It played a central part in the 1991 Gulf War and, for the first time, began to be an important actor in the Middle East. Crises in Bosnia and Kosovo, among other events, made Turkey a central factor in the turbulent Balkans and southeastern Europe. The independence of ethnically Turkish republics from the Soviet Union also made Turkey a leading force in the Caucuses and Central Asia, areas of strategic importance and potential oil wealth.[87]

This assessment of the impact on Türkiye's external environment and reassessment of its role in the neighbourhood underlines the process of adjusting to the post-Cold War regional and global geopolitical environment. Türkiye was filling the vacuum created by the disintegration of the USSR in its immediate

neighbourhood and in the process, strengthening its role in the international system.

The dramatic turnaround in the global geopolitical environment with the competitive power politics of the pre-Cold War and Cold War periods no longer a concern, Türkiye was more confident of its ability to play a role in international politics, at least in its immediate neighbourhood.[88] As noted by historian William Hale, "The end of Cold War, the collapse of communist rule in eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union during 1989–91, altered Turkey's international environment as profoundly as either of the two previous transformations, of 1918–23 and 1945".[89] Rubin sums up the transformation in Turkish consciousness towards international politics noting, "Since the establishment of the republic by Kemal Atatürk in 1923, the country followed a relatively consistent course… generally inward-looking and avoid[ing] foreign entanglements…"[90] for two reasons: one, the historical memory of the disastrous Ottoman campaign in World War I, and two, a need for socio-economic revival. However, both these factors no longer inhibited Türkiye in the post-Cold War period because of the rise of a general consciousness to claim a rightful place in the international system and to expand economic relations with the world beyond Europe.

Middle Power Aspirations

Turkish foreign policy reorientation in the aftermath of the Cold War was also a reaction to the gradual shift in global politics from unipolarity to multipolarity. While the US emerged as the lone superpower after the end of the Cold War, its primacy was soon challenged by the emergence of middle powers in major regional subsystems from East Asia to the Persian Gulf. This gave rise to a greater discourse in the world on South-South cooperation and the need to move the global order away from Eurocentrism.[91] Such discourses meant the formation and strengthening of regional and international multilateral organisations as the world entered a new millennium. Economic crises in the US in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and its impact on Europe and the developed countries, meant a serious churn in global politics as well as a sign of shifting of the global economic nerve centre from the US and Europe to Asia.[92]

The change from bipolarity to unipolarity and then to multipolarity meant that regional powers, such as Türkiye, India, Brazil, South Africa, Germany, Japan, Australia, Malaysia etc., that were earlier part of either the Western alliance or formed the Soviet sphere of influence started to aspire to become

middle powers.[93] For Türkiye, this provided an opportunity to be able to play an important role in multiple regional complexes and in the process enhance its international status. The broad contours of this change in foreign policy behaviour were yet to become clear but had started reflecting in the foreign policy discourse and conduct in the 1990s. In other words, the signs of the change in Turkish foreign policy and its middle power aspirations had begun to emerge gradually after the end of the Cold War.[94]

Conclusion

Turkish foreign policy in the Cold War era was marked by a distinctive Western-orientation with membership of NATO and relations with the US and Western Europe forming the backbone of Türkiye's international politics. This was based on two principles: avoiding external entanglements and focussing on nation-building with roots in Atatürk's modernisation ideals. This meant closer identification with the Soviet Union in the interwar period and alliance with the West during the Cold War era. In that respect, historical memory, political aspirations and geopolitical vulnerabilities guided Turkish foreign policy before and during the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, a change in the international and regional environment started a turnaround in foreign policy discourse and thought process. The focus gradually shifted from an inward-looking state-building to an outward-looking emphasis on finding a rightful place in the international order and expanding economic ties with the neighbourhood and beyond to accelerate economic growth.

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CHAPTER FOUR

BREAKING THE MOULD: FOREIGN POLICY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Türkiye began recalibrating its foreign policy after the Cold War to adjust to the changing strategic environment in the immediate neighbourhood and capitalise on the flux in international politics. In the late 1990s, key aspects of the domestic debate on reorienting Turkish foreign policy were to maximise Turkish influence, expand external relations and gain global status as a middle power in an increasingly multipolar world.[1] This in practice meant taking a leadership role in the Black Sea region and the Turkic-speaking world in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia along with maintaining strong strategic, political, economic and security relations with the US and Western Europe.[2] Besides, Turkish elites and foreign policy analysts emphasised on the need to expand relations with the wider world, especially in the Global South, to forge economic partnerships and gain status.[3] Despite such articulations, the expansion of foreign relations could not take off in the 1990s due to domestic political instability in the post-Özal period and the chronic lack of capacity, especially in the economic domain.

The beginning of the twenty-first century coincided with a political transition in Türkiye. This was significant as the new dispensation did not adhere to the strict division of religion and politics imbibed through Kemalist nationalism and was more sensitive to the religious sentiments of the majority population. This led to the new forces, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, facing allegations of pursuing an Islamist agenda. Nonetheless, the fact that they had come to power through a free and fair election underlined their populist appeal. This was unprecedented at two levels: one, this was the first time since 1950 that Türkiye had witnessed a major political transition through a free and fair election with one party gaining clear majority in the National Assembly,[4] and two, a religiously sensitive party had come to power and was able to hold on to it for a longer duration.[5] While being

moderately Islamist, and a political outsider, the AKP was also an advocate of liberal economy and had its roots in the right-wing nationalist political trend, which had witnessed a gradual rise since the 1980s. Thus, nationalism, economic liberalism and religious conservatism formed the core of the AKP's ideology, and a combination of these has been witnessed in Türkiye's domestic politics and foreign policy behaviour during the two decades of the AKP's rule since 2002. Besides identity politics and ideological leanings, Erdoğan's personality, who has ruled Türkiye as prime minister (2003–2014) and president (2014 onwards) since 2003, is also a factor in foreign policymaking.

Although assessments of Turkish foreign policy conduct in the two decades of the AKP's rule tend to get embroiled in polemics, given the polarising and at times undiplomatic utterances of the Turkish leader, for a better understanding of Ankara's foreign policy choices and conduct it is important to look at these more systematically from a foreign policy analysis perspective.

Domestic Transitions

Foreign policy cannot be detached from domestic politics. In democratic political systems, it is relatively easier to underline the domestic determinants of foreign policy wherein political parties, pressure groups and business lobbies—that can be collectively defined as civil society—might have a significant say in foreign policymaking.[6] Besides, the government and its agencies including the bureaucracy, the security apparatus, the ruling party and the leaders contribute to foreign policy decision making.[7] In other words, since in democratic political systems the political apparatus and its role is clearly defined, it is relatively easier to identify the sources of decision-making and the determinants of foreign policy. Alternatively, authoritarian or autocratic systems are marked by opacity in decision making, and hence, it becomes difficult to identify, analyse and explain the domestic determinants of foreign policy.[8] Although one might argue that it is easy to identify the source of decision-making since in autocratic or authoritarian systems the power lies in the leader who takes all decisions, this might not necessarily always be an accurate assessment. As political scientist Barbara Geddes notes, different kinds of non-democratic regimes have different ways of responding to society and unelected leaders hinge their legitimacy by responding to societal aspirations in different ways.[9] In the case of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, Shibli Telhami underlines that this matters more in the case of foreign policy.[10] Hence, opaqueness in the process of decision-making does not indicate an absence of societal aspirations, or in some cases public

opinion, as one of the drivers of decision making, although it does make it difficult to discern them with any degree of clarity.[11]

The Turkish case is unique because of the chequered history of democratisation in the country and the evolution of the AKP rule into an "elected autocracy" under Erdoğan.[12] The domestic political transitions—initially, the AKP's coming to power and later, Türkiye's transformation to an elected autocratic regime under Erdoğan—had wide-ranging implications for Türkiye's foreign policy. It is, therefore, important to understand the AKP's advent in domestic politics, its support base, ideological leanings and Erdoğan's rise as its undisputed leader. It is equally necessary to understand the functioning of the inter-linkages between domestic politics and foreign policy.

The AKP emerged as a credible and strong political party as a result of the political opening and economic liberalisation that was witnessed in the country through the 1980s and 1990s.[13] The empowerment of the opposition political voices, and business classes from the Anatolian heartland, during the Kenan Evren–Turgut Özal period led to the growth of a new political nexus between religion, nationalism and economic liberalism wherein faith, piety and orthodoxy along with Turkish nationalist identity and neoliberal economic policy became a major rallying point for gaining popular support.[14] This first became discernible with the rise of Özal, and his *Anavatan Partisi* (Motherland Party; ANAP), who dominated the political scene between 1983 and 1993. This was followed by a degree of political uncertainty and instability associated with coalition politics.

Meanwhile Türkiye had already witnessed the emergence of many small parties who despite their religious leanings did not want to be identified as such because of the constitutional ban on political organisations being based on religion.[15] Among them was the Necemettin Erbakan-led *Refah Partisi* (Welfare Party; RP) that had gained a significant following in the 1980s and eventually emerged as the single-largest party in the 1996 general election, leading to Erbakan's election as prime minister. The Erbakan government could not survive for long because of the military's intervention over his religious leanings. A soft coup in 1997 brought ANAP leader Ahmet Yilmaz back at the helm of the government.[16] However, this did not deter others with similar ideological roots to rally around individual leaders and gain a substantive support base while also working towards putting a more unified political front.

The AKP was the outcome of the process of amalgamation of various conservative-democratic-neoliberal voices.[17] The party was formed in 2001 with

the coming together of many politicians and leaders of social-conservative, religious, nationalist and neoliberal backgrounds. The majority of the party leaders, such as Abdullah Gül and Erdoğan, belonged to the reformist section of the banned *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party; FP), RP's successor after it was disbanded in 1998. The other major contributor was ANAP, which split into two with many of its leaders joining the AKP. In the AKP's definition, it is a conservative-democratic party that abides by the Turkish constitution and believes in empowering the voices of the marginalised.[18]

Right from its inception, the AKP has been branded as Islamist for taking up the religious agenda and for going soft on religious conservative issues.[19] It faced a probable ban in 2002, days before the parliamentary elections in November, when the party's constitutionality was challenged in the court. The issue cropped up again in 2008 but the AKP escaped with a court ruling in its favour. At the time of its first electoral victory in 2002, Erdoğan—the most prominent face of the AKP—was serving a ban on sitting in the parliament or heading the government for reading an allegedly inciting poem in a public meeting while he was the mayor of Istanbul. After the AKP won an overwhelming majority in the parliamentary election of 2002, the ban on Erdoğan was lifted through a constitutional amendment and he became a member of the Grand National Assembly (parliament). He won a by-election in March 2003 and subsequently replaced Gül as prime minister.

The advent of the AKP and Erdoğan changed the complexion of politics in the country. In the early phase of the party's rule, this was hailed as a democratisation model in the Muslim world.[20] After coming to power, the AKP took measures to broaden the political spectrum, especially by limiting the power of the deep state[21] and expanding the role of political parties and civil society.[22] Scholars identify three major factors that contributed to the majority of the Turkish electorate to vote the AKP to power in 2002. First, the economic mismanagement and fallouts of political instability in the late 1990s made the people yearn for the political stability and economic growth witnessed during the Özal period between 1983 and 1993. Second, Türkiye had witnessed a gradual democratic consolidation since the 1980s, which broadened the scope for the emergence of several political parties that could participate in the elections, opening the space for newer parties such as the AKP. Third, the country had witnessed a trend of Islamic revivalism since the 1980s, which led to the formation of many smaller Islamic-leaning parties. The AKP's rise reflected the consolidation of such voices that effectively challenged the extraordinary

emphasis on secularism in public life by capitalising on the ongoing counter-cultural revolution.[23]

The domestic transition was bound to have a profound impact on foreign policy. One of the key aspects of this impact was a gradual shift from Western-orientation to focus on Asia and the Middle East in addition to the Balkans, South Caucasus and Eastern Mediterranean regions.[24] The most important factor for this reorientation was the AKP's desire to gain status in the international system and maximise Türkiye's global reach to serve its interests defined in terms of gaining economic prosperity, ensuring national security and acquiring political influence.[25] Additionally, there was an underlying desire to capitalise on Türkiye's Muslim identity by reaching out to the Muslim states and to gain some of the lost connections of the Ottoman past. This was termed by the critics of the party as a policy of Islamisation and neo-Ottomanism.[26]

Hence, from the point of view of understanding the drivers of the AKP's foreign policy, identity politics and ideological leanings play a prominent role. Notwithstanding these drivers, the AKP also showed pragmatism in both delineating its foreign policy priorities as well as its conduct, at least during the early phase of being in power. Gradually, pragmatism was replaced by a strategic overreach, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings seriously affecting bilateral relations with numerous countries over time.[27] Since 2021, for a variety of factors, most importantly the economic compulsions accentuated by the Covid-19 pandemic, Ankara is showing signs of a reset in external relations—though it might be too early to suggest an enduring trend.[28]

Determinants of Foreign Policy under the AKP

Turkish foreign policy under the AKP can be broadly divided into two distinct phases. The first phase between 2002 and 2010 was marked with relative success as Türkiye maintained friendly relations with its traditional partners in the West and immediate neighbourhood while also gaining friends in the periphery and the wider world. The second phase began with the outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings wherein Türkiye's response and picking up of contentious issues harmed its regional and international position and undermined its relations with a majority of traditional and new partners. In other words, if the first phase was marked by pragmatism, the second phase was marked by strategic overreach. If Ankara's efforts to reset external relations beginning in 2021, and marked by post-Covid-19 economic compulsions endure, it might indicate the beginning of a new phase, the contours of which are yet to become clear.

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, five political/ideological factors—that can be described as *conjunctural variables*[29]—have dominated Turkish foreign policy behaviour and conduct. The first variable is the doctrine of *Strategic Depth* (*Stratejik Derinlik*), which had in its realm the "zero-problem with neighbours" policy. The second variable is the *Blue Homeland* (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine that focuses on enhancing Türkiye's power in the maritime domain. The third is President Erdoğan's personality. He has dominated the political scene in Türkiye for close to two decades since his ascendance to power in 2003. The other two variables are pan-Islamism and neo-Ottomanism, which have at times guided Turkish foreign policy behaviour.

Strategic Depth

The strategic depth doctrine has its roots in the post-Cold War recalibration in Turkish foreign policy in response to global and regional geopolitical changes after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.[30] The recalibration was partly rooted in the idea of rediscovering Türkiye's "glorious" past, as has been discussed in chapter two, and expanding its sphere of influence far beyond its immediate neighbourhood in the Turkic and Islamic worlds.[31] Nonetheless, it was not until 2001 when Ahmet Davutoğlu, who was at the time a professor of international relations at Beykent University in Istanbul, wrote the book *Stratejik Derinlik: Turkiye'nin Uluslararasi Konumu (Strategic Depth: Türkiye's International Position)* that the idea was clearly and effectively outlined.[32] After the AKP and Erdoğan came to power in 2002 and 2003, Davutoğlu's ideas were adopted by the ruling party as its foreign policy doctrine, making it popular and fashionable. After becoming prime minister, Erdoğan appointed Davutoğlu as his chief foreign policy advisor and thus strategic depth doctrine began to be reflected in Ankara's foreign policy conduct. It achieved significant success and gained international recognition in the early phase.

Israeli scholar of Turkish foreign policy, Alexander Murinson notes:

> The origins of this doctrine can be traced to Ozal's neo-Ottomanism, 'the multi-dimensional' foreign policy of the Erbakan government and Davutoglu's innovative approach to geopolitics. The main thesis of this doctrine is that strategic depth is predicated on geographical depth and historical depth. Consequently, Turkey, as a result of its historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire, possesses great geographical depth. According to Davutoglu, 'This geographical depth places Turkey right at the centre of many geopolitical areas of influence.' The 'strategic depth' doctrine

> calls for an activist engagement with all regional systems in Turkey's neighbourhood.[33]

Davutoğlu underlined the geographical and historical factors that lend Türkiye the ability to exert influence in more than one region. He noted, "In terms of geography, Türkiye occupies a unique space. As a large country in the midst of Afro–Eurasia's vast landmass, it may be defined as a central country with multiple regional identities that cannot be reduced to one unified character".[34] He argued, "In terms of its area of influence, Türkiye is a Middle Eastern, Balkan, Caucasian, Central Asian, Caspian, Mediterranean, Gulf, and Black Sea country". What Davutoğlu emphasised was that Türkiye's geography, which traverses multiple geopolitical regions, together with its historical role as an influential power, provides it with the ability to play a much larger role in regional and global politics in the twenty-first century, going beyond its function as "frontier country" or "bridge country", which it played during the Cold War and in the post-Cold War geopolitics, respectively. In that sense, he recommended that:

> Turkey should make its role of a peripheral country part of its past, and appropriate a new position: one of providing security and stability not only for itself, but also for its neighboring regions. 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.[35]

In practice, what Davutoğlu was implying was for Türkiye to attain a global middle power status in an increasingly multipolar international order where not only great powers or big powers, such as the US, European Union (EU) and Russia, have a considerable say, but emerging or regional powers, such as China, India, Germany, Japan, Türkiye, Brazil etc., would also be able to exert influence in shaping international norms as well as have a greater say in international politics.[36] For this, Davutoğlu recommended adopting a pro-active foreign policy to improve relations with countries in the immediate and extended neighbourhood and gaining influence in Türkiye's environs including in the Black Sea, Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Caucasus, Caspian and the Persian Gulf regions, as well as in the Turkic-speaking and Muslim countries. Davutoğlu further stressed the need for Türkiye to continue to have good relations with global powers and work with them in a harmonious environment rather than in a competitive manner to enhance Türkiye's global status.[37]

One of the key components of the strategic depth doctrine was a zero-problem policy toward Türkiye's neighbours.[38] This was the most discernible aspect of foreign policy in the first phase of the AKP–Erdoğan's government, and arguably quite successful. During this period, Türkiye improved relations with Syria, resolved problems with Georgia, improved ties with Iraq including with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), developed relations with Bulgaria, opened dialogue with Armenia and Greece and enhanced contacts with Iran. It gradually went beyond its immediate neighbourhood in the Balkans, South Caucasus and Eastern Mediterranean to develop relations with the Arab Gulf countries and with Afghanistan and Pakistan in South Asia. However, it was not long before, that the "zero-problem" policy discovered its limits, especially in context of the problems with Israel that erupted in the wake of Operation Cast Lead in 2008–09 and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident. After the Arab Spring uprisings, the Turkish role in Arab affairs and its support for political Islam created challenges for its relations with Arab powers. Hence, in the second phase of the AKP's foreign policy, the zero-problem policy gradually gave way to zero friends in the neighbourhood.[39]

Like the zero-problem policy, the strategic depth doctrine met its limits in the second phase.[40] During this period, Türkiye's relations with the European Union (EU) and the United States (US) deteriorated while relations with MENA and Eastern Mediterranean countries became constrained. In retrospect, one can argue that this was inevitable given the historical baggage between Arabs and Turks and the chronic lack of economic capacity as far as Türkiye was concerned. Nonetheless, Ankara in pursuit of global power and status made the mistake of strategic overreach, such as intervening in Syria, picking up a fight with Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, undermining relations with the US and neglecting relations with the EU, which had become critical of the growing authoritarian nature of the AKP government, especially its response to the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the July 2016 coup attempt. But the biggest single event that substantially undermined the effectiveness of the strategic depth doctrine, both in its ideational and functional aspects, was the Arab Spring uprisings and Türkiye's response to them.[41]

The Blue Homeland

While the strategic depth policy focused on geography, geopolitics, the neighbourhood and global status, the Blue Homeland (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine emphasised on the maritime domain.[42] The doctrine was in the making since the mid-2000s, and ideas about creating a maritime sphere of influence had been

discussed among Turkish nationalist naval officers at the time.[43] The main purpose of the doctrine was to underline Türkiye's territorial boundaries, continental shelf and Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Black Sea, Sea of Marmara, Aegean Sea and Mediterranean Sea, which earmarked an area of 462,000 square kilometres as an area of Turkish maritime domain.[44] The idea emanates from a need felt among a section of Turkish naval officers who wanted to undo the historical shortcoming of the Ottoman Empire and the Kemalist Republic of not investing in developing a maritime deterrence to secure Türkiye's boundaries and national interest.[45] Despite its origins in the mid-2000s, it was not until the issue of defining the EEZ in the Eastern Mediterranean and Turkish moves in Libya in the late-2010s that the doctrine came into international prominence.

The core idea promulgated in the Blue Homeland is to undo the injustice meted out to Türkiye through the Seville map, which was implicitly accepted by the EU in 2004, and the Montego Bay Convention (1982), which Türkiye believes unduly favours Greece in Eastern Mediterranean and leaves no scope for Türkiye to claim the resources in the Mediterranean Sea.[46] Since 2016, Türkiye has followed the idea of claiming the entirety of the water surrounding it as its EEZ, emanating both from Ankara's security concerns and economic interests. This has led to serious disputes with other Eastern Mediterranean countries that formed the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) without Türkiye, enraging Ankara and Erdoğan, who claimed that Türkiye will not back out from claiming its share in the energy resources in its EEZs and continental shelf.[47] Besides the immediate waters surrounding Türkiye, the Blue Homeland doctrine, like the strategic depth on land, envisages creating a Turkish maritime sphere of influence far beyond its surrounding water, including in the Red Sea, Western Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf to maximise Türkiye's strategic advantages in the seas. The formulators of the doctrine viewed it as a historical weakness for Türkiye and envisioned it as a significant area of geopolitical competition in the twenty-first century.[48]

Erdoğan's Personality

The twentieth-century politics in Türkiye revolved around Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's personality. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, Erdoğan emerged as a central figure in Turkish politics. While being a charismatic and polarising figure, Erdoğan has had a considerable influence on Türkiye's foreign policy. The sheer body of work on Erdoğan's personality and its impact on Türkiye's foreign policy is testimony to his influence on decision making.

Erdoğan has attracted the attention of researchers focusing on the impact of leadership on foreign policy and although many have been critical of his "aggressive" style while others acknowledge his "pragmatism", both agree on his overbearing influence on decision making.[49] To an extent, Turkish foreign policy during these twenty years (and continuing) has become synonymous with Erdoğan's personality. Even though some caution about overstating Erdoğan's influence or his role, they acknowledge his transformative impact on domestic politics and foreign policy.[50]

What is important, however, is to delineate how this influence is exerted. In other words, whether Erdoğan's influence is at the ideational level or in praxis only or a mix of both? Looking at it from the evolution of Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War period, the influence appears more in the style of diplomacy than at the ideational level. For one, the ideas that have guided Turkish foreign policy under Erdoğan have roots in the domestic political changes in the late twentieth century and global geopolitical changes in the post-Cold War period. Perhaps, the only serious dimension that Erdoğan has added in terms of the ideational aspect of foreign policy is bringing the ideological component of pan-Islamism to reach out to the Muslim-majority countries across the world. On the contrary, in praxis Erdoğan's shadow looms large over external relations, both in terms of bringing clarity to foreign policy goals and in proactive, at times even aggressive, pursuit of those objectives. Hence, for example, if the larger goal was to create an area of influence in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions, Erdoğan continued to build on his predecessors' work to push for strengthening Turkish relations with regional countries. He further pursued the policy of expanding relations with the hitherto ignored neighbourhood, including the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. As discussed later in this chapter, if his personalised style of foreign policy conduct was crucial in the early successes, his shadow loomed large over Turkish overreach in the later part of his government, which led to foreign policy reverses to the extent of Türkiye facing serious regional and international isolation.

Pan-Islamism

The AKP emerged on the Turkish political scene as a result of the unification of three ideological leanings: religious-conservatism, Turkish nationalism and economic neo-liberalism. While neo-liberal economic policies and Turkish nationalism had guided Ankara's foreign policy since the 1980s, religious-conservatism added the Islamic identity and brotherhood, in other words a pan-Islamic dimension to the foreign policy realm. This is reflected at three different

levels. Firstly, it led to Türkiye trying to end its 'isolation' from the Muslim world and starting to work on being identified as a Muslim country and part of the Islamic *ummah* (broadly, the global Muslim community). This was an outcome of Türkiye's identity crisis at the domestic and international levels because of extreme secularisation. Under the AKP and Erdoğan this crisis took a different form wherein Türkiye began veering towards identification as a Muslim country.[51]

Secondly, this meant that Türkiye raised "Islamic issues" at global forums. So, for example, the issue of non-resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the continued non-realisation of the Palestinian statehood was raised at multiple international forums including the United Nations and bilaterally with Israel.[52] Similarly, the Kashmir issue between India–Pakistan was raised by Erdoğan at various international forums.[53] In the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings, Türkiye also took the mantle of promoting the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) and political Islam as the viable alternative to hereditary and military rules in MENA.[54] Thirdly, Türkiye and Erdoğan started staking claims of Islamic leadership or the leadership of the Islamic *ummah*, alarming the traditional stakeholders of such claims, namely Saudi Arabia and Iran.[55] This, for instance, led to Türkiye, Malaysia and Pakistan trying to have a parallel Islamic summit in December 2019 as an alternative to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) leadership summit. The attempt, however, could not materialise for a variety of reasons and ultimately fizzled out.

Analysts and critics attribute the problems faced by Turkish foreign policy during the second phase of Erdoğan's rule to the pan-Islamic agenda followed by the AKP. It is argued that Erdoğan had started to see himself as a "Sultan" or a "Caliph" with dreams of reviving the glory of the Ottoman Empire as the leader of the Islamic world.[56] The first country with which Türkiye's relations began to sour over this pursuit of pan-Islamic issues was Israel.[57] Thus, Erdoğan's vocal criticism of Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories did not go down well with Tel Aviv, leading to serious deterioration of ties in the wake of Operation Cast Lead in 2008–09 and the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010.[58] The pan-Islamic agenda also led to serious troubles in Türkiye's relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE, in addition to preventing warming of relations with Iran.

Neo-Ottomanism

Finally, Türkiye's foreign policy in the twenty-first century has been guided by a neo-Ottoman agenda. Although this fits well within the ideology-identity politics of the AKP and Erdoğan, originally the idea of reviving the lost Ottoman glory of the past was brought into the public domain during the Özal government in the early 1990s.[59] What this meant was not a new project of colonisation but the recovery of lost Turkish sphere of influence in areas where the erstwhile Ottoman Empire had wielded influence. In practice, this was most aptly reflected in the strategic depth doctrine of Davutoğlu and overlapped with the pan-Islamic agenda of the AKP and Erdoğan. At the ideational level, this has been one of the most important aspects of Turkish foreign policy wherein the idea is to increase Türkiye's comprehensive national power to the extent of gaining middle power status if not emerging as a global power as was the case during the heydays of the Ottoman Empire.

Some of the Turkish achievements, especially its notable economic growth in the first decade of the twenty-first century and being part of the G20 were viewed in Ankara as signs of the possibility of joining the ranks of middle powers and the way forward for emerging as a major power.[60] Nonetheless, this also led to serious problems in relations with the outside world as Ankara was viewed externally as growing increasingly belligerent and impinging on the sovereignty of smaller countries and rival powers, thereby leading to serious reversals in bilateral ties.

External Relations

Türkiye's external relations witnessed a sea change during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. One of the key distinctions from the Cold War era was moving away from the West-centric approach, that is, an end to Western-orientation in Türkiye's international relations. However, this did not involve Türkiye turning away from the US and Europe, rather it continued pursuing good relations with the US, remained a NATO member and continued seeking EU membership. Nonetheless, relations and alignment with the West (US and EU) did not remain the abiding principle of Türkiye's foreign policy. In other words, Türkiye was no longer willing to confine its foreign relations to only being an ally of the West. Its aspiration was to be recognised as an independent actor in regional and global politics by emerging as a regional heavyweight in the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and North Africa and the Caspian Sea regions and at the same time strengthen relations with other emerging powers in the Global South.[61] Hence, the focus of Türkiye's foreign relations shifted to

strategic autonomy, middle power aspirations and expansion of relations with the neighbourhood and countries in Africa and Asia.

However, changes in Türkiye's external posture did not always lead to a smooth ride. Ankara faced several diplomatic bumps and ups and downs in relations with global powers, its neighbours and countries outside its immediate neighbourhood. The most important of these transformations was in Türkiye's relations with its traditional partners, the US and Europe, the MENA region as well as the emerging or re-emerging global powers such as Russia and China. While relations with some countries in Asia and Africa also expanded, Türkiye's relations with countries in the immediate neighbourhood, including in the Balkans, South Caucasus and Eastern Mediterranean and the Turkic-speaking world in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia regions strengthened. Except for the case of the transformation, and fluctuations, in relations with MENA countries and the continued static relations with India, which is discussed in detail in chapters five and six respectively, relations with other countries/regions are discussed in this chapter.

Relationship with Traditional Partners

The US

The US was Türkiye's most important ally during the Cold War. While Türkiye viewed the US and NATO as a security guarantee against Soviet expansionism, the US viewed Türkiye as a buffer between the Soviet Union and Western Europe. The situation, however, changed dramatically after the end of the Cold War. The initial Turkish reaction was to seek greater alignment with the US, as witnessed during the Gulf War in 1991 wherein Türkiye participated in the US-led coalition Operation Desert Storm. The situation began to take a new shape as the contours of post-Cold War world politics started to emerge in the late 1990s. In Türkiye, there was a growing recognition that Ankara will have to develop the partnership afresh without any dependency syndrome. On the other hand, Washington viewed Ankara as a "bridge power" between the West and the Middle East. In November 1999, during President Bill Clinton's visit to Ankara, the US and Türkiye entered a "strategic partnership", underlining the growing mutual interest in various strategic domains including regional politics, economy and security.[62]

The strategic partnership framework could not survive the tumultuous domestic, regional and international politics of the early 2000s. Although Türkiye supported Washington's "war on terror" in the wake of the 11

September 2001 attacks and participated in the NATO military intervention in Afghanistan, a rift emerged in the wake of the 2003 US attack on Iraq although the differences were brewing from much earlier.[63] The AKP government had come to power in December 2002 and was facing strong pressure from the streets against joining the war in Iraq. In addition to the public sentiment against the war on a 'fellow Muslim' country, there were concerns among a section of political and military elites on the US undermining the strategic partnership by not giving due recognition to Türkiye's security concerns against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).[64] The security establishment, on the contrary, was warning that a refusal to join the US-led war would undermine the strategic relations. Nonetheless, this warning did not prevent the Grand National Assembly from voting against a bill authorising the deployment of US forces in Türkiye and joining the Iraq war.[65] The rejection of the bill was viewed as a serious breach of trust in the US and proved to be a critical juncture in determining the shape of the Türkiye–US relations in the future.

Mark R. Parris, who was the US ambassador to Türkiye between 1997 and 2000, notes that the Turkish refusal to join the Iraq war was a "watershed" moment in Türkiye–US relations.[66] Although the Turkish parliament later approved another bill for the deployment of Turkish forces in northern Iraq, it did not authorise Türkiye to join the 2003 US-led military campaign in Iraq, seriously affecting the bilateral relations. Hence, post-Iraq war, the contours of Türkiye–US relations shifted to a new dynamic. Parris underlines that although the AKP's coming to power and differences over the war on Iraq marked an important shift, "[b]elow the surface, however, some key assumptions on which the notion of broad-gauged U.S.-Turkish strategic partnership rested were already changing".[67] The initial days of the AKP government witnessed a serious churn in relations with the US.

Gradually a new normalcy set in and during President George W. Bush's second term, the US and Türkiye signed an agreement on shared vision and structured dialogue. Problems cropped up again in October 2007 in response to the PKK's killing of 12 Turkish troops in northern Iraq, prompting the Grand National Assembly to pass a bill authorising the military to unilaterally intervene in Iraq in order to eliminate the PKK threat. However, the US was uncomfortable with the Turkish decision as the Kurds in Iraq were an ally against post-Saddam insurgency, which, in turn, had caused serious casualties to the US forces.[68] The AKP's overwhelming return to power in 2007 and Barack Obama's election in 2008 generated hope for a reset in ties. In April 2009, Obama

famously called Türkiye the bridge between the West and East, highlighting the possibility of the US and Türkiye working together for a stable and peaceful Middle East.[69] The Obama administration also called for developing a "model partnership" between the two countries.[70] However, despite these developments, far too many issues had cropped up that were pulling the two in different directions. The deterioration of relations with Israel, US Congress's continued pursuance of the Armenian genocide issue, differences over approach to deal with the Iranian nuclear programme and above all the perception of US not taking Türkiye's security concerns vis-à-vis the PKK seriously underlined the growing divergence between the two sides.[71]

Differences apart, Türkiye and the US agreed to work together on issues of convergence including Türkiye's continued reliance on American military support both in terms of the NATO partnership as well as the acquisition of weapons to boost Türkiye's defence.[72] The outbreak of the Arab Spring uprisings initially created convergences in the sense that the Obama administration viewed Turkish activism and involvement in the regional affairs in a positive light with the belief that Ankara can play a stabilising role in the region as a "model" Muslim and democratic country.[73] However, this hope did not last long as the 2013 Gezi Park protests and the Turkish government's response to it, the complete breakdown of the talks with the PKK by 2015 and the reaction to the 2016 failed coup underlined the authoritarian turn in the AKP and Erdoğan's politics. Moreover, the backlash from the regional countries on Türkiye's proactive and aggressive behaviour in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings highlighted the limits of Türkiye playing a stabilising role in the region.

Although the Türkiye–US relations did not completely break down, tensions prevailed due to various issues that created hurdles in bilateral relations. Primarily, these challenges reflected domestic transitions and the changing views in Ankara and Washington with both viewing the other with doubts, leading to the mutual trust hitting rock bottom. Wide-ranging differences on issues such as the Syrian conflict wherein the US viewed the Kurds as an ally in defeating the Islamic State (ISIS) while Türkiye saw them as a security threat due to the PKK insurgency, created serious rifts. There were other contentious issues including the alleged involvement of Fethullah Gülen in the 2016 failed coup and the US' refusal to extradite him to Türkiye, serious divergence on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, recognition of the Armenian genocide by the US and the Turkish decision to procure and deploy the Russian S-400 missile defence system. These

led to recurring friction and public expression of differences and disappointment, thus harming the bilateral ties.

Under the Trump administration, the two sides tried to work together and manage contentious issues through summit meetings; President Trump blamed the Obama administration for creating problems in bilateral relations.[74] Notably, while the Trump–Erdoğan dialogues could not resolve the outstanding issues, they prevented further deterioration in ties. Trump also resisted Congressional pressure to impose stringent sanctions on Türkiye over its procurement of S-400 from Russia. However, in July 2019, he invoked the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) to remove Türkiye from the F-35 fighter jet programme and in December 2020, imposed sanctions on individuals associated with Turkish arms procurement agency, including on Ismail Demir, the chief of Turkish Presidency of Defence Industries (SSB).[75]

The Biden administration was not as keen as the Trump administration to manage relations with Türkiye, although Erdoğan had hoped to develop Trump-like working relations with Biden.[76] In April 2021, these relations were hampered by Biden officially recognising the mass murder of Armenians in 1915 under Ottoman Empire as "genocide".[77] Partly the continued chill pushed Ankara to rethink its foreign policy priorities in the neighbourhood and lead it to take reconciliatory steps towards regional countries. At the same time, Türkiye's emergence as a regional power, especially in the wake of continued American proclivity to giving confusing signals concerning their Middle East policy and Qatar's ability to withstand the Arab quartet blockade between 2017 and 2021, compelled many regional countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt to explore a reconciliation with Türkiye.[78]

Biden's tough approach toned down after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Washington and its Western European allies viewed Türkiye as an important buffer between Russian ambitions and European security.[79] Türkiye, on the other hand, adopted a more nuanced and in a way neutral approach towards the Ukraine conflict, underlining its strategic autonomy. While it condemned the Russian invasion as a violation of international law, it refused to bandwagon with the West (the US, UK and EU) to take action against Russia because of its economic compulsions and stable relations with Russia.[80] It has simultaneously provided Ukraine with Bayraktar TB2 drones, which have proved effective in Ukrainian defence against the Russian offensive. Türkiye also leveraged Sweden and Finland's quest of joining NATO to its advantage by seeking US support against the PKK threat, especially in the light of the

formation of an autonomous Kurdish controlled region (Rojava) in northern Syria. But most importantly, Ankara has emerged as a credible neutral country which is willing to host any negotiations between the warring sides with the expectation that this will enhance Türkiye's global stature.

Türkiye–US relations have come a long way from the Cold War dynamics wherein the two considered each other as indispensable allies despite occasional differences. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, bilateral relations have transformed to become more transactional and issue based. While the NATO membership and defence relations have withstood the test of time,[81] the nature of relations has changed with Türkiye focusing on strategic autonomy and national interest, while the US is hoping to leverage the security partnership to achieve strategic goals in the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. At the same time, Ankara does not wish the relations with the US to fray completely, given its continued reliance on it for military hardware and external balancing, which in part, contribute towards a continuation in relations despite serious ruptures witnessed over the two decades since 2001.

The European Union

Türkiye shares a complicated relationship with the EU. It is marked by Ankara's aspirations to join the grouping while the EU finds it difficult to develop the requisite consensus to admit Türkiye. The process goes back to Cold War era relations wherein EU's predecessors saw Türkiye as an important ally against the Soviet threat while Türkiye aspired for economic and political integration with Europe.[82] The post-Cold War foreign policy recalibration and the AKP's coming to power fundamentally transformed the Turkish attitude towards EU accession, looking at it more as an economic opportunity and a transactional matter and no longer as a question of Türkiye's identity.[83] The EU attitude, on the other hand, continues to be guided by a lack of consensus on whether to admit Türkiye by disregarding concerns over democratic backsliding, incidents of human rights violation and throttling of freedoms.[84]

Under the AKP and Erdoğan, the Türkiye–EU relations have gone through two different phases. The initial enthusiasm for the strengthening of democracy and steps taken by the new government towards democratisation by reducing the involvement of the military in politics evoked a positive response from the EU. This led to the start of the EU accession negotiations in 2004–05 under the Copenhagen political criteria.[85] Turkish scholar Soli Özel notes that the AKP was so keen for Türkiye to join the EU that it worked "on a platform of

unabashed and unconditional pursuit of EU membership despite its Islamist pedigree".[86] This process continued with the EU accession talks but as the negotiations dragged on, the enthusiasm among the ruling party and elites started to wane, especially with shifts in the global economic centre from the West to East. Moreover, the public discourses within EU member countries on Türkiye's credentials as an EU-candidate led to public and government backlash in Türkiye, underlining the role of identity politics in the stalemate that has defined the relationship.

Ziya Öniş, a Turkish scholar of international relations, argues:

> Indeed, there was no single turning point, but several interrelated turning points: a number of factors were at work to bring about this dramatic change of mood both on the part of the AK Party elite as well as the public at large. The intense debate generated in the aftermath of the Brussels Summit of 2004 concerning Turkey's European credentials, particularly in core EU countries such as France and Germany, helped to initiate a serious nationalist backlash in Turkey, and strengthened the standing of anti-EU, anti-reform groups both within the state and in society at large. Turkish media representations of Europe as a monolithic bloc also contributed to this change of mood. The increasing questioning of the very basis of Turkish membership and Turkey's European credentials by influential political figures at the very core of Europe such as Sarkozy in France and Merkel in Germany at a time when the decision to open up accession negotiations had already been taken made a deep impact in terms of influencing this change of mood in Turkish domestic politics. Indeed, public support for EU membership dropped strikingly from a peak of 74% in 2002 to around 50% by 2006 and 2007.[87]

This lack of enthusiasm, however, did not completely derail the process as both Türkiye and the EU continued to engage in accession negotiations. Nonetheless, incidents such as the banning of the Kurdish parties and growing concerns over media freedom stalled any meaningful progress.

The next phase started in the second decade of the twenty-first century. Although marked by some positive developments, such as the EU–Türkiye agreement on managing refugee inflow from Iraq and Syria and Türkiye taking reformatory steps to make its judiciary more independent, this phase witnessed a complete breakdown in relations and the end of the accession talks. In March 2019, the EU parliament voted to suspend the accession talks with Türkiye.[88] Among the most important issues that led to the decision were incidents such as

the crackdown on the 2013 Gezi Park protestors, the complete breakdown in peace talks with the PKK by 2015, the retribution politics after the 2016 failed coup, the banning of Kurdish parties, the clampdown on media and above all, the growing authoritarian turn of the Erdoğan government. On its part, the discourse and opinion in Türkiye turned against pursuing EU membership and Europeanisation alleging an inherent bias and hostility within the EU against Türkiye. Developments within the EU, and the Brexit saga, also impacted the Turkish thought process that was by now focused on developing economic ties with the emerging powers in Asia and Africa rather than focusing on Europe and the EU.

Relations with other Global Powers

Türkiye's relations with the other global powers, namely Russia and China, have undergone sea changes during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The internal changes in Türkiye and foreign policy re-orientation in light of the global and regional developments have played a crucial role in Türkiye developing closer contacts with Russia and China, both of which have emerged as alternative power centres to the US and are considered to hold the convergent view of the need to challenge the US-led global order. Türkiye, on the other hand, has also emerged as a regional power in Eurasia, which means that Ankara cannot ignore Moscow and Beijing even though it is a NATO member and the Western powers do not want Türkiye to develop strategic ties with Russia and China at the cost of undermining relations with them. Türkiye has been deftly pursuing relations with both Russia and China as well as balancing ties with the West. Türkiye's ambitions to be recognised as a middle power, which can exert influence in multiple regional complexes in its surrounding, have also contributed to Ankara's close engagements with Moscow and Beijing.

Russia

Türkiye's foreign policy recalibration in the 1990s also meant expanding relations with non-Western global powers, including Russia. Türkiye had shared a tumultuous relationship with the Soviet Union given the security dynamics in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean region during the Cold War.[89] However, in the 1990s, the situation changed dramatically with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of Cold War. The arrival of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia in 2000 and Erdoğan's election as prime minister in 2003 changed the dynamics with notable improvement in bilateral ties. Putin's visit in 2004 was the first-ever visit by a Russian head of state to

Türkiye. The visit was reciprocated by Erdoğan in 2005. Since then, the two leaders have met multiple times. Among the key issues that created opportunities for improvement in ties were the changing geopolitical dynamics in the Black Sea region and the economic convergence, especially in the field of energy security.[90] Economic relations and convergence on regional issues as well as commitments on fighting terror and respecting the sovereignty of regional states led to the warming of ties in the early years of the AKP government.

The economic convergence between Moscow and Ankara who were both looking to develop economic relations with regional countries and the wider world was the driving force in the development of bilateral ties. Some geopolitical convergence was also present, especially in Central Asia. Developments related to the Arab Spring uprisings, however, created a divergence in Russian–Turkish approaches with the two countries finding themselves on the other side of the divide in Syria. Eventually, Türkiye was forced to rethink its policy of confronting Russia and adopt a policy of cooperation instead. In November 2015, the relations came to a head over a Turkish F-16 fighter jet downing a Russian Sukhoi Su-24M attack aircraft alleging violation of Turkish airspace. The situation brought the two on the verge of war, but a restrained Russian response led to Türkiye eventually apologising for the downing of the aircraft in June 2016. Russia's vocal condemnation of the July 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye led to the warming of ties.

The evolution of Türkiye–Russia relations has not been smooth with several contentious issues creating hurdles. In addition to the Syrian conflict, Ankara and Moscow found themselves supporting opposite sides in the Libyan and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts, but they have found ways to overcome differences and focus on areas of cooperation. Besides economic and energy security issues, Türkiye and Russia have also entered strategic agreements with Türkiye procuring the Russian S-400 missile defence system despite threats from the US of punitive action under CAATSA. From the Turkish point of view, this was an important move to underline its strategic autonomy and reduce its reliance on the US. For Russia, this was not only a way to showcase its strategic influence but also to create a wedge between Ankara and Washington, which could have prevented the development of Russian–Turkish ties.

The Turkish response to the Ukraine crisis in 2022 further underlined the challenges facing Russia–Türkiye relations reflecting the complexities in relations. For Türkiye, the issue was more complicated because of the asymmetry between the two countries, as noted by strategic analyst Galip Dalay.[91] Hence, Türkiye

took a cautious approach of condemning the Russian attack on Ukraine, but at the same time did not join the West in imposing punitive sanctions on Russia. Moscow has been appreciative of Türkiye's fine and delicate balancing act in response to the Ukraine crisis, further highlighting how far the two countries have reached in their relations from the Cold War era adversarial ties.[92] Dalay notes that the personalities of Erdoğan and Putin, in addition to the Russian and Turkish recalibration in their foreign policies and the growing distrust of the West in both countries, have played an important role in creating the competitive cooperation between Ankara and Moscow.[93]

China

Türkiye–China relations are premised on China's growing economic might and outward expansion through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But before the two countries reached the current state of friendly bilateral ties, Türkiye and China had a tumultuous relationship. Türkiye followed the US policy on the People's Republic of China (PRC) until the 1960s and recognised only the Republic of China (RoC; Taiwan). Taking a cue from the US policy shift, Türkiye normalised relations with PRC and established diplomatic relations with it in 1971, recognising it as the sole representative of China.[94] However, for a variety of reasons the relations progressed slowly despite a flurry of bilateral diplomatic activities. It was only in the 1980s with Türkiye looking for fast economic growth that Türkiye–China relations took off and witnessed substantial progress in commercial ties. Bilateral trade which was US$19 million in 1981 reached US$283 million in 1990.[95] In the meantime, regular exchange of visits and China's changed attitude towards the Soviet Union created a degree of trust between Ankara and Beijing, leading to the flourishing of ties.

Post-Cold War geopolitical changes and the changed political circumstances in the Eurasia region created challenges for Türkiye–China relations. Turkish support for independent Central Asian republics and the policy of expanding influence among the Turkic-speaking world created serious distrust in China of Türkiye's intention with the Uighur population in the Xinjiang region. Beijing suspected Ankara of supporting the separatist movement in Xinjiang and sympathising with the idea of an independent Republic of East Turkestan. The Turkish policy of creating a pan-Turkic regional bloc and the growing domestic interest in the Uighur population was seen in Beijing with suspicion, seriously affecting bilateral ties in the early 1990s.[96] In the meantime, as the number of Uighurs seeking asylum in Türkiye increased, so did their political activism. The 1992 Turkish parliamentary resolution of seeking an investigation of human

rights abuse against the Uighur population in China ruffled feathers in Beijing. By the mid-1990s, based on economic considerations Türkiye began reviewing its Uighur policy to strengthen relations with China. This led to an improvement in commercial ties with bilateral trade crossing the US$1 billion mark for the first time in 2000.[97]

When the AKP came to power in Ankara, Türkiye's relations with China were already going through a strong phase. The new leadership in Türkiye was keen on capitalising the possibility of expanding relations with rising powers in Asia in order to find new partners in addition to the US and Europe. Both economic and geopolitical considerations were instrumental in the change in Turkish attitude. With the global economic nerve centre shifting to Asia with the rise of China, India and other countries in East and Southeast Asia, Türkiye was keen to strengthen ties with Asia.[98] This led to numerous exchange of visits between the Turkish and Chinese leadership in the first decade of the twenty-first century and resulted in greater political and diplomatic understanding and strengthening of commercial relations. By 2010, the bilateral trade between Türkiye and China reached close to US$20 billion.[99] Meanwhile, although the AKP government moderated the domestic discourse on the Uighur issue, it did not completely give up its support for the Uighur diaspora in the country. The two countries also attempted to develop security and military cooperation, though with limited success.

A major crisis gripped Türkiye–China relations in 2009 over unrest and riots in Urumqi, the capital of the Xinjiang region. The brutal suppression of the protests attracted a strong international reaction. Türkiye criticised the Chinese security forces' action and Prime Minister Erdoğan termed the Chinese response to the protests and riots as "almost genocide".[100] Türkiye also took a lead in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to raise the issue and condemn the Chinese action. This reaction seriously damaged bilateral relations and China termed Erdoğan's statements as "irresponsible".[101] It took some time for the heat to pass over with both sides gradually tempering down public criticism and engaging in bilateral discussions with a focus on commercial relations. In the meantime, Ankara started developing commercial relations with Taiwan, but continued to eschew any political engagement.[102]

Beijing's launch of the BRI in 2013 changed the dynamics between China and Türkiye. Ankara gradually embraced the BRI as the two countries found convergence in developing connectivity in the Eurasia region along the ancient and medieval Silk route.[103] They also invested diplomatic and political capital in

developing strategic relations, the intent for which had been signed in 2010.[104] This resulted in the diversification of ties from economic, political and cultural relations to the security and defence realm. Besides, Chinese investments in creating connectivity infrastructure in Eurasia under the BRI created unprecedented convergence of interest between the two countries, which also forced Türkiye to eschew its criticism of the Chinese repression in Xinjiang.[105] The Uighur diaspora in Türkiye has also been put under control to avoid any backlash from China. Nonetheless, the bilateral trade curve has flattened at US$20–25 billion between 2011 and 2020, underlining the limits of economic cooperation.[106]

Ankara–Beijing relations in the twenty-first century have taken the shape of a partnership between two aspirational powers—China, a rising global power and Türkiye, an emerging middle power. The Uighur issue and Türkiye's relations with Taiwan remain a point of contention though. For Türkiye, the challenge is multifaceted; while Ankara looks towards Beijing and Moscow to expand its global relations beyond the US, EU and NATO, Turkish leaders do not want to give an impression of siding with Russia and China in the growing geopolitical tension between the transatlantic US–Europe alliance and the emerging Russia–China bloc. The focus is on underlining Turkish strategic autonomy and decision-making is transactional and issue based.

Neighbourhood and Beyond

In the post-Cold War period, Türkiye emerged as a regional power in its neighbourhood in the Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. The AKP government gradually transformed relations with regional countries to develop closer ties with them and emerged as a game changer in several regional conflicts such as in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh. This created challenges for Türkiye vis-à-vis its relations with regional and international powers due to the clash of ambitions. Regardless of these challenges, Türkiye continued to engage in power politics without necessarily allowing the relations with regional and international powers to derail completely. A case in point is the challenges it faced in Syria, Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh with Russia. Ankara did not let bilateral cooperation slip away and managed the differences over these conflicts with Moscow. A similar situation can be viewed in the case of the US and NATO wherein differences over Cyprus, Eastern Mediterranean and Syria were not allowed to deteriorate the relations to a point of no return. Türkiye's ability to emerge as a major power in its immediate surrounding in the Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, Caucasus and Caspian

regions and the strengthening of its relations with the wider world in Asia, Africa and Latin America allowed it to engage in power politics with the aspiration to gain status as a middle power.

The Balkans, East Mediterranean, South Caucasus and Caspian Regions

Türkiye's policy of zero-problem with neighbours enabled it to improve relations with most countries in the Black Sea and surrounding regions.[107] While problems with Georgia and Bulgaria were resolved gradually, Azerbaijan emerged as one of Türkiye's closest partners in the region. Relations with Greece remained problematic due to the Cyprus dispute and the overlapping claims over EEZs in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas. That international law gives an edge to Greek claims has not helped Türkiye's case, but Ankara refused to budge.[108] Besides, the Blue Homeland policy designed to create a Turkish hegemony in the waters surrounding it created additional rifts with Greece. With Armenia, several attempts to resolve problems had failed in the past, but the Turkish support for Azerbaijan in the September–November 2020 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the short war's outcome forced Armenia to seek reconciliation with Türkiye. In the meantime, Türkiye's close partnership with the Central Asian republics under the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Organisation of Turkic States (OTS; formed in 2009) led Türkiye to emerge as a major actor in the Caspian and Central Asia regions.

While Türkiye's belligerent policies in Eastern Mediterranean, including the military intervention in Libya, created serious rifts with regional countries particularly with Egypt, Israel and Greece, Ankara adopted a course correction since 2021, keeping the economic cost in mind.[109] Türkiye's strong-arm diplomacy in the region has been backed by its military interventions and fast-developing defence industry to create strategic leverage for Ankara. In 2022, after Russia attacked Ukraine, Türkiye adopted a policy of walking a tight rope between the US, NATO and EU on the one hand, and Russia on the other, thus underlining its strategic importance in the region. While it eschewed taking sides and bandwagon with the Western powers in placing sanctions on Russia, it did not condone Moscow's actions in Ukraine either. Ankara's continued support for the sovereignty of Ukraine put it in a unique position of being the only NATO member that is directly supporting Ukraine without hampering relations with Moscow.

Asia, Africa and Latin America

Besides the immediate neighbourhood, Türkiye developed relations with the wider world in Asia, Africa and Latin America mainly for economic cooperation.[110] One of the main planks on which Türkiye based its outreach to the world beyond its immediate neighbourhood is Islamic solidarity. This led to the development of close partnerships with countries in South Asia including Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh and in Southeast Asia with Indonesia and Malaysia. In the Sahel region the relations with Senegal, Tunisia and Algeria improved and in the Horn of Africa, Türkiye developed relations with Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. But pan-Islamism is not the only plank that was used to reach out to the wider world. Türkiye also developed close ties with important powers in different regional complexes, including Japan and South Korea in East Asia, Brazil and Argentina in Latin America and South Africa, Nigeria and Mali in Africa.[111] In addition, Türkiye utilised economic incentives, financial aid and politics of the Global South to reach out to smaller countries in different parts of the world.

Türkiye's keen interest in South Asian politics and growing relations with Pakistan and Bangladesh have made it a country of concern for India despite the geographic distance between the two countries. The endurance of Türkiye–Pakistan relations and how these impact India is discussed in greater detail in chapter six. Türkiye's quest to expand relations with Bangladesh and attempts to seek a role in Afghanistan are notable. In the case of Bangladesh, the raising of the Rohingya issue at several forums contradicted the Indian position. In Afghanistan, Türkiye took to proactive diplomacy to step up its presence in the South Asian country in the wake of the chaotic US withdrawal from the country, which brought the Taliban back to power after twenty years. Even during the twenty-year conflict that began with the US invasion in 2001, Türkiye had made its presence felt by joining the war with the US and offering to mediate between various factions within Afghanistan. The fact that two of Türkiye's closest international allies, Qatar and Pakistan, were playing a crucial role in the transition process in Afghanistan raised hope in Ankara that it can establish its presence in the country and play an influential role in shaping its future, although this could not materialise.[112]

Conclusion

Turkish foreign policy in the twenty-first century, both the ideational aspect and in praxis, has come a long way from what it was in the twentieth century. From eschewing external exposure during the interwar period until 1945 to joining the

Western alliance during the Cold War, Türkiye recalibrated its foreign policy and external relations to develop an independent identity for itself as a regional and emerging power based on the aspiration of reviving the glory of the Ottoman past and ideological leaning of recognition as a major Muslim power. In the process, Türkiye created a mixed legacy of some successes and many failures but also considerably expanded its external relations. Türkiye is recognised as an important power in its immediate surrounding in the wider Eurasia region and as an emerging global actor as one of the middle powers. This process was steered by the AKP government and its leader Erdoğan. He has dominated and controlled the domestic politics and foreign policy decision-making in the country for close to twenty years and is now recognised as one of the most prominent figures in modern Türkiye, perhaps only second to Atatürk, the father of the Republic. The process was not free from challenges with serious problems facing Turkish foreign policy in its relations with the neighbours and global powers, but this did not deter Ankara from pursuing its objective of gaining power and status. As Türkiye continues to pursue the path of power- and status-seeking foreign policy, it is bound to face further challenges and rifts with neighbours and global powers. The question, however, remains whether Türkiye has the wherewithal to sustain the power politics it has entangled itself into.

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CHAPTER FIVE

STRATEGIC OVERREACH: TÜRKIYE AND MENA

Turkish foreign policy approach towards the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries witnessed a transformation under the AKP government as part of Ankara's effort to redefine its external relations away from the Cold War dynamics and Western-orientation.[1] The process, as noted in the preceding chapters, started in the 1990s as Türkiye began to adjust to the new global and regional geopolitical realities after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. However, domestic political instability did not allow for a serious foreign policy realignment until the advent of the AKP and the rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the undisputed leader of Türkiye.[2] Under the AKP and Erdoğan, Türkiye used economic leverage and religious identity to work on improving bilateral relations with regional countries within the normative framework of "strategic depth" and "zero-problem with neighbours".[3] The emphasis on improving relations with Asia underlined the shift from Western-orientation towards a multi-vectored engagement with non-Western powers, such as Russia, China, India, Japan and others, without necessarily ignoring relations with the West, including the US and Europe.[4]

In MENA, this meant rapid improvement in relations with Arab countries including Syria, Iraq and the Gulf states as well as with Egypt, Tunisia and other Maghreb countries.[5] Simultaneously, Türkiye's ties with Israel continued to be warm, at least in the early phase of the AKP government, while Ankara also invested time and energy in improving relations with Tehran.[6] The momentum generated due to the zero-problem policy and economic opportunities soon lost steam due to the growing pan-Islamic and neo-Ottoman streaks in the Turkish approach.[7] The first country with which cordial relations gave way to confrontation was Israel. This was due to Türkiye's vocal support for the Palestinian national movement and overt and undiplomatic criticism of Israeli policies in the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[8] Türkiye–Israel

relations hit a major challenge during the 2008–09 Operation Cast Lead by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) in the Gaza Strip and broke down in the wake of the Mavi Marmara incident in 2010. Strains in relations with Arab countries began to show after the outbreak of the Arab Spring protests and the Turkish response to it evoked counter measures, sharpening the regional geopolitical divide.[9]

Ankara's support for groups that called for dislodging hereditary and monarchical leaders to be replaced by elected governments worsened the matter. Türkiye's backing of Islamist movements, in particular, the Muslim Brotherhood that had gained unprecedented public support in regional countries, including in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, set alarm bells ringing in Arab capitals that were already under pressure from the streets and international public opinion.[10] For them, the threat was real not only because Ankara was projecting the "Turkish model" of an Islamic, democratic and republic political system as an alternative to "non-democratic" Arab model of politics, but also because it was proactively supporting Islamist movements that were calling for a radical change to Islamic republicanism and elected governments.

Between 2011 and 2013, Erdoğan toured the region from the Gulf to North Africa and was welcomed by humongous crowds on the streets. This led Arab countries to believe that Ankara was pursuing neo-Ottoman and pan-Islamic dreams, which resulted in serious rupture in Arab-Turkish relations and allowed Egypt and Syria to emerge as major battlegrounds. During the nearly one-year presidency of Mohammed Morsi in Egypt in 2012–13, the Turkish neo-Ottoman threat became real and serious and contributed to the Saudi–Emirati support for the military coup led by Abdel Fattah El-Sisi against the elected government of Morsi. From here on, Arab–Turkish relations were defined by geopolitical contestation and confrontation until a change in regional approach ensued in 2021 with geo-economic reconciliation set in motion at least partially by the Covid-19 pandemic.

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Turkish foreign policy towards MENA can be broadly divided into two distinct phases. The first phase lasted until 2010 wherein the relations were marked by the strengthening of bilateral ties, especially in the economic domain and the resolution of some of the outstanding problems with Syria and Iraq. This phase was also marked by a limited continuity in relations with Israel, which eventually gave way to a break down in relations. The next phase started with the outbreak of the Arab Spring protests in 2010–11 and was initially marked by a growing Turkish regional

popularity and influence that gradually led to the sharpening of geopolitical competition and tensions. This phase continued until the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic. A fresh trend of geo-economic driven reconciliations started in the post-Covid-19 scenario, coinciding with the change of administration in the US from Donald Trump to Joe Biden and the systemic changes ensued by the sharpening of US-China geopolitical divide. Although encouraging from the point of view of regional security and stability, the series of reconciliations is yet to acquire an enduring streak, which can then be termed as the beginning of a new phase.

Incentives for a Change in Approach

The end of the Cold War witnessed a rethink on foreign policy and relations in Ankara. The domestic political discourse was focused on expanding Türkiye's foreign relations beyond the Cold War dynamics of alliance and identification with the West.[11] Geopolitical factors apart, this rethink was a product of the desire to expand Türkiye's economic ties with the world, seek economic engagements with Asia, Africa and Latin America and move away from the dependence on Europe and the US.[12] As much as economic factors were encouraging the argument in favour of expanding foreign relations, the strategic and ideological underpinnings along with nationalist and Islamist anti-Western discourses were paving the ground for a re-orientation of foreign policy away from strategic alliance with the West.[13] The coming to power of the AKP in 2002 strengthened this discourse and accelerated a reorientation.

From a normative perspective, two parallel processes set the path for the foreign policy reorientation. Firstly, a domestic political discourse rooted in nationalist and cultural disenchantment from the West and secondly, the global geopolitical and geo-economic shifts wherein the world was moving towards multipolarity while the economic nerve centre was shifting to Asia with the rise of China, Japan, India, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia. In MENA, this meant serious and continuous diplomatic and political efforts aimed at overcoming the hurdles created by historical events and mutual antagonistic perceptions built over decades. The Turks had held Arabs in disdain for they had, in the Turkish view, played into the hands of British manipulations to lead the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire during World War I, which led to the loss of Ottoman territories in the Arabian Peninsula and contributed to the fall of the Empire.[14] The Arabs, on the other hand, recalled the Ottoman rule over Arabia as an imperialist enterprise and disliked the Cold War era Turkish

identification with the West and Israel as much as they derided the Kemalist era secularisation.[15]

Economic Imperatives

It required more than the reorientation from the West to East on the Turkish part for a breakthrough in relations with Arab countries. The most important aspect of this was the economic imperative of expanding relations with the regional countries to be able to achieve high growth rates and stake claim to a multi-regional power. Türkiye had witnessed a severe financial crisis in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This created the imperative for a broad economic reform as well as the expansion of external economic relations with the neighbourhood, including in MENA.[16] In the 1990s, Ankara had already started the process for greater economic interdependencies with the Black Sea, Balkans and Central Asia regions. This was replicated in MENA during the first phase of the AKP government.

Scholars have noted the significance of the economic component in the improvement of Türkiye's ties with Middle Eastern countries, including in the Persian Gulf, under the AKP rule. Iranian–American scholar Nader Habibi notes, "Since the mid-1980s, Türkiye has initiated liberal export oriented economic reforms with the goal of developing a competitive, export-oriented economy—and the promotion of trade, investment, and exports was the top priority of the AKP government's foreign policy in its first decade of governance".[17] He further underlines that the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries were a priority in Türkiye's change of approach towards the Arab world, given the economic potentials. Strategic analyst Kemal Kirişci proposes that the rise of Türkiye as a "trading state" contributed to its foreign policy reorientation in the 1990s and 2000s.[18] Another Turkish scholar Mehmet Özkan also underlines the economic foundation of the changes in Turkish foreign policy, especially in the context of expanding relations with Asia and Africa.[19]

Mustafa Kutlay of City University in London argues that "establishment of the economic fundamentals of the new Turkish foreign policy goes back to the 2001 economic crisis" that created the imperatives to seriously look at the Arab Middle East as economic partners.[20] Economic necessities including the external dependence on energy security thus mattered significantly in transforming Türkiye's relations with the MENA countries in the AKP era. It was not only bilateral trade that witnessed an increase since 2002 but growth was also noticed in business, investments, tourism etc., which created further imperatives for

strengthening ties.[21] These imperatives also forced Türkiye and its Arab neighbours to resolve some of the outstanding political issues between them. This also generated a genuine momentum in relations with GCC countries, Egypt and Iran, creating greater economic interdependencies and political desire to improve relations. Thus, economic factors played an important role in redefining Türkiye's foreign policy approach towards the MENA region. This led to the burgeoning of trade and commercial relations with Gulf countries as well as with Egypt, Syria and Iraq, creating a more cordial environment for resolution of outstanding issues.

Political Aspirations

The economic imperatives were not the only thing that catalysed the Turkish approach towards the MENA region, political aspirations of becoming a multi-regional power, a global middle power also contributed towards Türkiye seeking improvement in relations with neighbours in MENA.[22] This obviously manifested through the zero-problem with neighbours policy and the strategic depth doctrine with the debate gradually shifting to Türkiye being a model democratic Muslim country. From the point of view of middle power aspirations, many Turkish scholars have noted the significance of reorienting the foreign relations to have a wider network of political, economic and diplomatic relations so as to capitalise on Türkiye's historical role, its geographic location and the size of its population and economy. The most important of these articulations came from the academic and politician Ahmet Davutoğlu who conceptualised the strategic depth doctrine.[23] Davutoğlu noted the need for Türkiye to reinvent its history and capitalise on its geography to maximise its power and status in a changing world order. Davutoğlu's ideas manifested in the form of the AKP's political aspirations for greater regional influence in its surroundings, including in MENA.

Scholars have noted the utility of middle power aspirations in defining Türkiye's changed approach towards MENA under the AKP. Meliha Altunışık, Professor of International Relations at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara, for example, notes the significance of Türkiye's pursual of a soft power approach in the Middle East in the 2000s in order to maximise its leadership position.[24] Hasan Yalçın of Ankara-based think tank SETA underlines the importance of Türkiye's increased material capacity in terms of its economic growth and military capabilities contributing towards its middle power aspirations as is reflected in its changed foreign policy behaviour, including in the Middle East.[25] Emel Parlar Dal, a professor at Marmara University, Istanbul,

on the other hand, highlights Türkiye's role as "mediator" and "humanitarian actor" to emphasise the significance of middle power aspirations motivating the reorientation towards the Middle East.[26] She argues:

> Turkey's efforts for gradual normalisation of its relations with the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, with some of its neighbours in other surrounding regions, like Armenia, also opened up space for Turkish foreign policy to take on new and more diversified foreign policy roles with a global connection, such as mediator, peace-broker, humanitarian actor and development aid contributor.[27]

Dal further notes that the Turkish approach of playing a proactive role through multilateral forums, including the United Nations in the 2000s, was to be able to achieve middle power status in global politics. Therefore, one "witnessed a significant number of Turkish attempts in forging its regionalization and international socialization in formal and informal regional and international institutions and groups".[28] Henri J. Barkey of the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, suggests:

> Turkey's new activism in the Middle East and the world in general is driven by two important factors. The first is the deep structural change that has transformed the Turkish economy from an inward looking to a robust export-driven one that is engaged in a continuous search for new markets. Today it is the world's 16th largest economy. The second is Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, AKP, leadership's ambitions to transform Turkey into a global actor.[29]

Besides middle power aspirations, Türkiye was also motivated by the desire to gain regional influence in MENA by projecting the Türkiye model of political stability, democratic governance and economic growth. Türkiye's success at forging better relations with the MENA countries and proactive role in creating a more cohesive and stable regional environment through political and economic cooperation created the idea of Türkiye being a model state for the Arab and Muslim world. The idea was rooted in the domestic political transitions since the 1980s that had economic growth and democratisation at its core, and these became interwoven with foreign policy successes in the first phase of the AKP era to suggest that Türkiye should be seen as a model Middle Eastern and Muslim country.[30] This gained greater credence in the early days of the Arab Spring uprisings with many commentators and analysts endorsing the idea of replicating the Türkiye model in the Arab world.[31] The idea had first gained popularity in the early 1990s when many new republics emerged in the Eurasia

region after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. British journalist and author Andrew Mango notes how Catherine Lalumière, then Secretary General of the Council of Europe, during her visit to the newly founded Central Asian republics in 1992 underlined that Türkiye can serve as a "model" for their progress and development.[32]

The same notion acquired a distinct Middle Eastern and Islamic connotation after the AKP government's success in presenting itself as Islamic and democratic that simultaneously advanced democratisation at home and stability in the neighbourhood as well as is able to achieve economic successes. Altunışık points out how the idea of the Türkiye model gained currency in the US power circles during Bill Clinton administration (1993–2000) and how this was reinforced in the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks under the George Bush administration (2001–08).[33] These notions were certainly received in Türkiye as an affirmation of the AKP's successful governance model. The US endorsement of Türkiye as a model Islamic-democratic country gained the most attention during Barack Obama's speech in the Turkish parliament in April 2009. It was his first international trip as president and Türkiye was included in his itinerary.[34] The idea gained greater popularity during 2011–12 in the wake of the Arab Spring protests wherein many Turkish and international scholars began to weigh-in on the pros and cons of such articulations.[35]

Systemic and Regional Factors

The change of approach towards the region was also partly facilitated by systemic and regional factors, including the growing multipolarity in world politics. The rise of G20 economies, which challenged the centrality of G7 in the global economy, indicated the broadening of the base of the neoliberal economic structure and brought home the fact that emerging Asian and the Global South countries will demand a greater say in laying the economic standards for the world. Hence, the rise of China, India, South Korea, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Iran, Türkiye, Indonesia and Malaysia created the incentive for Türkiye to undertake a proactive role in regional and international politics.[36] Besides, regional developments in MENA in the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) in response created a power vacuum that regional countries like Türkiye and Iran sought to capitalise on. There were also the issues of regional conflicts, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, which underlined the loss of American credibility as a mediator and provided an opportunity for Türkiye to increase its engagements in regional conflicts by offering itself as a mediator.[37]

Improvements in Ties, 2002–10

The transformation in the Turkish approach towards MENA led to a significant improvement in Türkiye's ties with the regional countries. This was achieved through a multi-faceted approach wherein Ankara engaged with the regional countries bilaterally as well as by participated in regional forums and issues. In an effort to replicate its successes in the Black Sea region and Turkic-speaking countries in the Caspian Sea region, Türkiye through multiple engagements promoted the idea of regional economic integration by signing or proposing Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with regional countries. At the same time, it engaged more extensively with regional issues including the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and Iranian nuclear programme. This was an attempt to become a mediator in contentious regional issues. Türkiye also engaged with regional multilateral forums and organisations such as the League of Arab States, the African Union (AU), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), underlining its willingness to become more integrated into the region. Türkiye's Islamic identity was used by the AKP to highlight its regional commitments as well as a soft power tool to promote its interests and achieve its goals. Although, as it later became apparent, the Turkish approach was bound to fail given the gap between capacity and ambition, but it did, at least during the first phase of the AKP rule, improve Ankara's relations with multiple regional countries.

Syria

One of the most important regional countries with which Türkiye began a process of reconciliation under the AKP was Syria. The two countries share a nearly 900-kilometre-long boundary through the entire breadth of Syria's north from Iraq to the Mediterranean Sea. Before the signing of the Adana Agreement in 1998, Ankara and Damascus shared an acrimonious relation with three main contentious issues causing friction. These included the Syrian claims over Türkiye's southern Hatay province, water sharing dispute over the Tigris–Euphrates river system and internal security issues in Türkiye due to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan; PKK) insurgency and Syria providing refuge to the insurgents. The dispute had led to a threat of war in 1997 with Türkiye amassing a large army on the Türkiye–Syria border, demanding that Damascus stops giving refuge to Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK.[38] The signing of the Adana Agreement after considerable negotiations mediated by Egypt averted a military showdown and reduced tension between the two neighbours.[39]

As part of its foreign policy reorientation, the AKP government began serious diplomatic engagement with Syria to enhance bilateral relations. This led to consistent improvement in ties to the extent that Syria emerged as one of the steadfast friends of Türkiye in the Arab world in the first decade of the twenty-first century.[40] The situation continued until the advent of the Arab Spring protests in Syria wherein the Turkish approach of supporting the opposition and rebels seeking to overthrow Bashar al-Assad's regime led to a breakdown in ties. Nonetheless, between 2002 and 2011, Türkiye and Syria witnessed an upswing in ties with strong economic cooperation, political understanding and cooperation on regional issues. The normalisation of relations after the Adana Agreement and confidence building measures by both sides had paved way for improved relations. Although challenges remained, the Syrian closure of the PKK camps and expulsion of its leaders, including Öcalan, indicated a willingness on part of the two countries to improve ties.[41]

The 2003 US invasion of Iraq and the regional imbalance it created due to the removal of Saddam Hussein brought Ankara and Damascus together as both were concerned about the regional security implications. Subsequent developments in Iraq, especially the carving out of the autonomous Kurdistan region in the north heightened their security concerns with both having substantive Kurdish population and Türkiye facing Kurdish insurgency since the 1980s. Moreover, Turkish support for Syria over events in Lebanon in 2005 after Rafiq Hariri's assassination indicated the willingness on part of Ankara to extend political support to Damascus.[42] Türkiye also attempted the end of Syria's isolation from the West by facilitating talks with France and the US. Moreover, it brokered talks between Syria and the Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki in 2009–10 to help end differences over the situation in Iraq.[43] Türkiye attempted a mediation between Israel and Syria to bring about an agreement over the Golan Heights, and reportedly the two were close to a breakthrough in 2008 before the process got derailed over the Israeli military action in the Gaza Strip after Hamas's provocative actions against Israel.[44] As late as January 2011, Assad was praising Türkiye as a 'model' country in the region and its mediatory roles in facilitating Syria's return to the international fold.[45]

It was not only the political component in relations that was improving. Türkiye and Syria had also made progress on the water sharing of Euphrates besides some growth in bilateral trade. In 2004, Assad and Erdoğan exchanged visits and an FTA was signed between the two countries, which came into effect in 2007. This gave a boost to bilateral trade and commerce as well as brought

Turkish investments into Syria. Additionally, it aided the two-way flow of tourists. Trade increased from US$ 724 million in 2000 to US$ 1.5 billion in 2008, and reached US$ 2.66 billion in 2010.[46] During his visit to Syria in 2007, Erdoğan stated that Türkiye–Syria trade would reach US$ 5 billion by 2012.[47] However, trade and commerce took a hit after 2011 due to the Turkish stand on the protests in Syria. Nonetheless, until 2010, there was a momentum in ties towards greater cooperation on political, strategic and economic issues. In 2009, for example, Türkiye and Syria had decided to lift the requirement for visas for travel between the two countries. The sea change in the bilateral relations between 1998 and 2010, thus, has been described as the "desecuritization" of Türkiye's relations with Syria.[48]

Iraq

The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 created serious differences between Türkiye and the US. Turkish refusal to participate in the military operation and denial of use of Turkish military bases for the launch of the attack generated a serious rethink in Washington and Pentagon. Although subsequently Ankara did try damage control by offering to participate in the US military operation if Turkish concerns regarding Kurdish insurgency were taken into account, it did not reduce the doubts that had crept in the bilateral relations. In hindsight, the principal Turkish concerns of regional instability and power vacuum due to Saddam's removal and the security threats emanating from the internal turmoil in Iraq proved accurate.[49] However, this had its repercussions, the most important being increased US reliance on Iraqi Kurds to facilitate the removal of the Ba'athist regime and the subsequent Sunni and Shiite insurgencies that complicated US's exit plans from Iraq. This created another challenge for Türkiye as the Kurdish insurgency in the country had not subsided despite the capture of Öcalan in 1999, hence, Türkiye vehemently opposed carving out an autonomous Kurdistan region in Iraq.[50] A variety of domestic, regional and international factors, which were responsible for change in Türkiye foreign policy approach under the AKP, contributed to Türkiye reconsidering its position on Iraq and this led to a gradual turnaround in relations. Nonetheless, until 2007, the Turkish approach was mired in hesitation on how to deal with the Iraqi Kurds and even though the AKP was inclined towards a more reconciliatory position, the Kemalist-secularist establishment, especially the military, was preoccupied with its security implications, impeding any meaningful progress.[51]

By the mid-2000s, the AKP was fully in control of domestic politics and foreign policy and had outlined the idea of zero-problem with neighbours, including with Iraq. One of the most important components of change that came with respect to Iraq was the acceptance of the Kurdish autonomy within the Iraqi constitutional framework and recognition of the demographic and political diversity without comprising on Iraqi unity and sovereignty.[52] But this recognition was not devoid of domestic considerations. The AKP was keen to resolve Türkiye's Kurdish problem through negotiations and peace talks and was looking to the Iraqi Kurds to help facilitate talks with the PKK.[53] Good relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was also seen as a way to dislodge the PKK from its hideouts in the Qandil Mountains in northwest Iraq. At the same time, this was seen as an economically viable proposition, given the abundance of energy in the Iraqi Kurdistan region and Turkish dependence on energy imports for domestic needs.[54] This turnaround resulted in the opening of a Turkish consulate in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, in March 2010. Türkiye–KRG relations have since fluctuated between economic cooperation and political understanding and anxieties over security related to the PKK's insurgency and hideouts in Iraq, the presence of Turkish military bases in northern Iraq and suspicion of Kurds seeking an independent Kurdish state.

Ankara's relations with Baghdad further improved with Türkiye trying to emerge as a major regional player and attempting to stabilise Iraq after the fall of Saddam. One of the outcomes of this growing engagement was improvement in commercial relations and trade between the two countries. In 2003, for example, bilateral trade was US$ 934 million, it increased to 6.18 billion in 2010 and as of 2020, Türkiye–Iraq bilateral trade reached US$ 17.33 billion.[55] Improvement in relations also resulted in some understanding on other contentious issues, such as water sharing of the Tigris–Euphrates river system. In the past, this had created considerable challenges in relations between Türkiye, Iraq and Syria with Turkish dams controlling the flow of water, affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions in the lower riparian countries and causing frequent droughts in Iraq and water shortages in Syria.[56] Although, till date these countries have not signed any formal agreement on water sharing, better political understanding on other contentious issues and improvement in economic relations has created a cooperative atmosphere between Türkiye, Iraq and Syria on this matter. Unlike Syria and Egypt, Türkiye's relations with Iraq (both Baghdad and Erbil) was not significantly affected in the wake of Arab Spring but were marked by fluctuations between phases of engagement and cooperation and tension over the Turkish military presence and incursions in Iraqi territories.

Egypt

Türkiye's relations with Egypt improved under the AKP. But unlike Syria and Iraq, the process had started much earlier, going back to the change in Egyptian foreign policy outlook under Anwar Sadat. During Hosni Mubarak's rule, Türkiye and Egypt shared cordial relations with gradual expansion in trade and commercial exchanges.[57] After the AKP came to power, it continued the policy of improving ties with the neighbourhood in line with its overall approach towards MENA, which was focused on mercantilist expansion and political reconciliations for greater regional influence and at the same time responding to systemic and regional developments.[58] The AKP made overtures to have good relations with the Mubarak regime and at the same time it attempted to broker a reconciliation between the Muslim Brotherhood, its ideological counterpart in Egypt, and the Egyptian regime.[59] Political visits expressed intentions on both sides to strengthen relations and in 2005, the two countries signed an FTA to boost commercial relations.

At the same time, divergences emerged over the Palestinian national movement. While the Mubarak regime was more inclined towards supporting the secular Fatah movement, the AKP was positioning Hamas as a legitimate political movement, especially in the wake of 2006 victory of the latter in the Palestinian general elections.[60] There were also some concerns in Egypt over Turkish activism to manage the Israeli–Palestinian and intra-Palestinian conflicts in the wake of the Israel–Gaza war in 2008–09. Egypt was sceptical of Türkiye's growing international posturing as the sole defender of the Palestinians in the Islamic world.[61] Nonetheless, the two sides continued to engage in diplomatic and political parleys, without expressing differences in public, and this kept the relations going. The situation, however, went out of hand during the Arab Spring protests and Türkiye's strong expression of support for the popular upsurge against Mubarak underlined the limits of the pragmatism. After the fall of Mubarak, Türkiye emerged as one of the leading supporters of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, and the two and half years between the fall of Mubarak and removal of Morsi were one of the friendliest periods in Turkish–Egyptian relations.[62] But it took a turn for the worse after 2013 until reconciliation attempts ensued in 2021.

The GCC States

Türkiye's approach towards the Gulf Arab countries changed considerably under the AKP government. There was an emphasis on improving trade and commercial relations, which grew rapidly in the 2000s with Saudi Arabia, United

Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar emerging as important trading partners.[63] Besides bilateral trade and commerce, there was a two-way flow of investments and tourism which created strong economic ties. Although attempts to improve economic relations had been made earlier as well, regional and domestic challenges had prevented any significant progress.[64] With the AKP's focus on diversifying economic relations with the Middle East, things took a turn for stronger economic ties. Şaban Kardaş of Tobb University of Economics and Technology in Ankara notes that one of the key factors that created momentum for greater economic engagements with the GCC countries in the 2000s was the "complementary economic structures, which offered a good basis to deepen investment and trade connections".[65] The expansion of economic relations also made strategic and market sense as the Gulf countries, with vast sovereign wealth, were looking to diversify their strategic investments and Türkiye's strong economic performance appeared to be a sensible choice. On the other hand, Türkiye was also looking to attract international investments and markets for exports and the Gulf countries were an attractive destination.[66]

The complementarity led to a growth in trade, business and investments. Between 2002 and 2010, the bilateral trade between Türkiye and the GCC increased from US$ 3.99 billion to US$ 10.08 billion.[67] Additionally, while there was significant increase in foreign direct investments from the Gulf countries in the Turkish market in various sectors, several of Turkish companies, especially in construction sector, became engaged in the Gulf market. Manufactured and agriculture products and trade in energy dominated the relations. In 2005, Türkiye and the GCC countries signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) to monitor economic cooperation and explore newer areas for collaboration.[68] There were also talks about signing an FTA in 2009–10 before the process derailed due to divergences over the Arab Spring protests. The economic cooperation was accompanied by a strategic convergence due to regional developments and mutual security concerns, mainly emanating from the crisis in Iraq in the aftermath of the US invasion and the fall of Saddam. In addition, there were mutual concerns over the Iranian nuclear programme and Iran's increased involvement in Iraqi politics. These created a diplomatic and political desire in Ankara to develop stronger ties with the GCC countries.[69]

Iran

Iran was another country with which Türkiye's relations witnessed the emergence of a new dynamics. In fact, the developments related to Iraq war in

2003 and the situation in Iraq in its aftermath made Türkiye and Iran major regional actors, given the power vacuum created by the fall of Saddam and dismantling of the Iraqi pole in regional geopolitics. Historically, the two had shared complicated relations over a variety of issues, including the clash of empires and claims over Islamic leadership and competition in the South Caucasus and Caspian regions but they had been brought together in the Cold War by the alliance with the West. The situation changed dramatically in the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution. In the 1990s, the Erbakan government tried to improve relations by visiting Tehran, but the domestic situation soon unravelled to derail the process.[70] The coming to power of the AKP changed the situation. In addition to regional politics and stability in Iraq, energy and Kurdish issues created convergences between the two. On the other hand, geopolitical competition led to divergences, especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring uprisings as the two found themselves on the opposite sides of the divide, especially in Syria.[71]

From 2002 to 2010, Türkiye and Iran shared cordial yet complex relations. Both sides had certain drivers that pushed them to pursue closer relations. For Iran, the developments in Iraq and the rise of an Islamic government in Türkiye were an attractive proposition, besides the possibilities of greater economic cooperation.[72] For Türkiye, the crisis in Iraq and challenges pertaining to Iran's nuclear programme with Türkiye attempting to mediate a resolution created the incentives for better relations. In 2010, Türkiye and Brazil mediated an agreement with Iran to ship 1,200 kg of low-enriched uranium to Türkiye for safe keeping in order to resolve the nuclear issue. However, Turkish efforts could not create any serious breakthrough towards a resolution. The economic factor with Türkiye's dependence on energy imports was also a driver in improving ties.[73] The mutuality of concern with regard to the Kurdish question created complementarities between Ankara and Tehran.

Economic relations, especially in the energy sector, in addition to established people-to-people contacts provided the foundation for improvement in Türkiye–Iran ties under the AKP. Within a few years of the AKP coming to power, Türkiye was importing nearly a third of its gas from Iran thanks mostly to the 25-year gas supply agreement in 1996 despite the challenges that remained due to pricing and other issues.[74] Besides energy, trade, commerce and investments increased during the 2000s. Religious and leisure tourism also increased due to improved political and economic relations. At the core, however, Ankara and Tehran continued to view each other with suspicion due to

geopolitical imperatives. Their rivalry for influence and power goes beyond MENA to the South Caucasus and Caspian regions wherein both want to develop greater trade and commercial interdependencies and act as a central regional power. There are also challenges with regard to both seeing themselves as an Islamic or Muslim power, which prevents them from seeking any serious rapprochement. There is also the nuclear component. Some underline the proximity in Turkish–Pakistani ties as a hedging strategy against the chances of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, in which case Türkiye will require Pakistani support—the only Muslim country to possess nuclear weapons.[75] Istanbul-based journalist and author Gareth Jenkins, thus, defines the two as "occasional allies" who are "enduring rivals".[76]

Israel and the Palestinians

Israel was the only country in the region with which Türkiye had strong bilateral ties before the AKP came to power. This was mainly a product of the Cold War politics and Türkiye's alliance with the West. The two shared strong political, economic and strategic ties, and for long Türkiye was the only Muslim country that recognised Israel and had diplomatic relations with it, before Egypt did so in 1979. Good relations continued after the AKP's elections as Ankara pushed for stronger relations with other regional countries without jeopardising relations with Israel as it fit the zero-problems with neighbours approach.[77] The situation could not sustain for long though, Ankara started projecting itself as a supporter of the Palestinian cause to gain acceptance and legitimacy in the MENA and Muslim countries and this led to a serious churn and an eventual breakdown in relations over the 2008–09 Israeli military operation against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident.[78] While the Israeli side perceived this a result of shift in Turkish foreign policy towards support for political Islam, Turkish scholars explained it as a product of Ankara's positioning itself as a regional power and mediator, which was not in accordance with Israeli interests.[79]

Before Türkiye began a more vocal support for the Palestinian cause and started courting Hamas as an alternative to the Fatah within Palestinian national movement, it had hosted a Palestinian Embassy, including a defence wing, in Ankara for long and had supported Palestinians all along. Israel knew this and yet worked hard to improve relations with Turkey because it was the only prominent Muslim country that had good relations with it. For a politically isolated Israel this relationship was important. At one stage, Israel wanted to lay a water pipeline from Manavgat River in Türkiye. Israel even provided

technology to various defence companies in Türkiye, creating strategic ties. But the coming to power of the AKP altered the situation.

The political and diplomatic problems affected the strategic ties, but economic and commercial relations continued despite the lack of warmth. In 2000, for example, Türkiye–Israel bilateral trade was worth US$ 1.12 billion and as of 2010, it had reached US$ 3.7 billion. And, although the ties remained cold through the Arab Spring decade between 2011 and 2020, the volume of bilateral trade reached US$ 6.17 billion in 2020.[80] Nonetheless, there was a significant decrease in defence trade during this period. During the Arab Spring protests, while Israel took a less proactive approach towards regional developments, Türkiye chose a proactive foreign policy with the aim of emerging as the main regional power broker. The occasional burst of clashes between Israel and Hamas and the Israeli refusal to apologise for the Mavi Marmara incident diminished any scope for improvement in the bilateral relations in the early 2010s. In 2013, Prime Minister Netanyahu apologised for the loss of Turkish lives and in 2016 Israel agreed to give compensation to the kin of Turkish victims.[81] Nonetheless, it took another four years for Türkiye and Israel to begin a process of reconciliation, which has now gradually eased tensions; although it remains to be seen if the process endures.

Jordan, Lebanon and the Maghreb Countries

As part of Türkiye's foreign policy shift, the AKP government expanded relations with smaller or distant regional countries including Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. Until the Arab Spring protests, relations with these countries progressed slowly, but steadily, especially with Libya and Tunisia with which Türkiye had begun to develop economic and trade relations. However, the process was affected by the Arab Spring events. In Tunisia, Turkish activism resulted in strong ties between Ankara and the Ennahda-led governments, which was leading the transition in the country after the Arab Spring uprisings. The unravelling of Tunisian exceptionalism after the election of President Kais Saied did affect the relations but unlike in Egypt in 2013, Ankara took a cautious view of the developments. The Turkish approach towards the regional countries was mostly based on enhancing soft power and economic relations and creating strategic depth for Türkiye in its neighbourhood across the Mediterranean.[82] This policy seemed to have succeeded to a large extent until December 2010 when the Arab Spring protest started and challenged the Turkish approach. The Turkish approach unravelled in the next two-three years and gave way to intense geopolitical competition for power and influence among

the major regional actors including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE along with Türkiye.

Arab Spring and Strategic Overreach

Ankara saw the Arab Spring protests as an opportunity to expand its regional influence. There were two major aspects that drove the Turkish response to the events that started in Tunisia in December 2010 and spread like wildfire in the Arab world. Firstly, Ankara saw this as a way to promote itself as a model democratic-Islamic country. However, in the backdrop was the ambition to encourage Islamist or Islam-inspired forces in respective countries to take over political institutions and model them on the Turkish political system wherein electoral politics can become the ladder to establish an Islamic republic. This would have not only enhanced Türkiye's position in the region but would have also allowed it extraordinary influence through political and economic engagements. Among the Turkish ruling elites, this was viewed as a way to enhance Türkiye's status as a preeminent Islamic power and as a primary actor in regional politics. Perhaps, the historical role played by the Ottoman Empire in the MENA region was viewed as a template and Arab Spring was seen as creating the window of opportunity to revive the "glorious past." Secondly, Ankara wanted to establish itself as an arbiter in MENA politics and power struggle.[83] It desired to be a kind of a power broker or axis power that the regional states would gravitate towards to gain legitimacy and status through economic and political interdependencies. It also wanted the global community to recognise its ability to steer the region towards stability and security by promoting democratic transitions in regional countries.

Both these aspects, that is, to gain recognition as a middle power or a multi-regional actor and gaining a greater influence in MENA emanated from the core of Turkish foreign policy reorientation that started in the 1990s and strengthened under the AKP rule. Neo-Ottomanism and pan-Islamism were the two ideational components of this foreign policy approach, which was articulated in the strategic depth doctrine and zero-problem policy. Ironically, Turkish response to the Arab Spring ran counter to the zero-problem policy, but with the benefit of hindsight it can be prudently argued that the tactical aspect of the zero-problem policy could have been easily ignored over the normative ambition of strategic depth and pan-Islamism.[84] The Turkish alacrity to seek strategic depth and promote pan-Islamism boomeranged as Ankara faced resistance from various regional quarters, which visualised the Turkish response as a return of the Ottoman Empire trying to control the fate of the Arab–Islamic world. It also led

to an accusation against Erdoğan that he was seeking to emerge as the neo-Ottoman Sultan or a Caliph of the Islamic world.[85] Turkish activism, along with Iranian expansionism, alarmed the Arab–Gulf monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who decided to take counter-measures to stem the tide of expansion of religious forces in regional politics. It was despite this decision running counter to their initial response to the events in Syria where they had, along with Jordan, extended support to opposition forces comprising of religious groups. Notwithstanding this contradiction, their approach brought them the moniker of "counter-revolutionary" forces.[86]

Ankara's proactive response to the events of the Arab Spring were welcomed on the Arab streets, which at the time was brimming with hope of change and democratisation. The regimes or the remnants of it were on the defensive in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria and in other parts of the region and were sulking on the growing popularity of Türkiye and Erdoğan but were unable to do much as they were fighting for their survival. Erdoğan made several trips to the region, including to Cairo, Tripoli and Tunis where he was received by huge crowds who welcomed him as a democratic leader. In September 2011, his first "Arab Spring tour" came against the backdrop of a resounding victory in the general elections at home and the deterioration of ties with Israel amidst the 2010 Mavi Marmara incident.[87] Erdoğan was looking to emerge as a global Islamic leader through these tours. During his address at Cairo University, he raised the issues of freedom, democracy and rights and extended support for the Palestinian cause. For Arab leaders, Erdoğan was presenting a formidable challenge for he was not only presenting Türkiye as a model but was also trying to champion the emotive Palestinian issue.[88]

This led to an increase in tension between Türkiye and Arab countries, who were facing the ire of their own people. Relations with the Syrian regime deteriorated as it continued to crackdown on the protests while Ankara pressed Assad to step down. With Egypt, Türkiye was able to develop a cordial relationship during the transition phase, and after Morsi came to power, Türkiye–Egypt relations were said to be in a golden phase. In Libya, Türkiye was interested in safeguarding its investments worth billions of dollars, while in Tunisia, the rise of Ennahda led to the development of proximate relations. In the Gulf region, Türkiye and Qatar began to develop close relations based on mutuality of views on different regional matters, whereas Saudi Arabia and the UAE were finding it difficult to let Türkiye continue supporting Islamist forces, which they saw as major regional and internal security threat. Iran, another

ambitious regional power that was using the Arab Spring events to expand its influence, was also watching out for Turkish manoeuvres with elements of competition and rivalry as well as hope for cooperation and collaboration.

Turkish manoeuvres and proactive policy created serious challenges in its relations with the regional countries. Ankara clashed with Damascus, and Tehran and Moscow, for influence in Syria. Its relations with Israel deteriorated because of activism on the Palestinian issue. Its relations with Egypt declined after Türkiye criticised the 2013 coup and the removal of the Morsi government. This also caused problems with Saudi Arabia and the UAE, who were supporting the removal of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Egypt. Later, the Turkish response to the Qatar crisis and its lapping of the Khashoggi murder to undermine Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's rise created serious tensions. The acrimonious relations enmeshed in geopolitical competition continued until 2020 when Ankara began to rethink its regional policy.

Intervention in Syria

Syria was one of the key regional countries where Türkiye's strategic overreach was witnessed in the wake of Arab Spring. Ankara's initial reaction was to call for the Assad regime to respect the democratic yearning of the people and step down.[89] That Assad had been an ally of Türkiye for over a decade did not prevent Erdoğan from outrightly calling for him to step down. This was seen in Damascus as a call for a regime change through external intervention.[90] Notwithstanding this reaction, Türkiye extended its support for the nascent opposition breakaway of the Syrian armed forces, the Free Syrian Army (FSA) comprising mainly of Sunni Arabs but also some minority groups, including Turkmen and others.[91] The FSA received regional and international support through 2012, but accusations of its linkages with the Muslim Brotherhood and the international jihadi network of al-Qaeda and Islamic State (ISIS) and internal factionalism led the regional and international support drying up that eventually caused the gradual disintegration of the FSA. However, Türkiye and Qatar continued to back the group and subsequently its sucessors as legitimate opposition in Syria.

On the other hand, the Assad regime enlisted Iran's support to thwart the uprising against it and succeeded in its propaganda of painting the entire opposition as jihadi-terrorists, which partly legitimised its brutal crackdown on anyone suspected of involvement in the political and militant opposition to the

regime.[92] However, as the civil war raged with blood being shed with impunity by both the regime and the opposition forces, by 2013 the battleground witnessed the entry of ISIS, which had by then emerged as a serious threat in Iraq. This entry led to the civil war becoming wide open with three major combatants—the Syrian Armed Forces protecting the regime, the FSA, which mostly comprised of rebels from the armed forces, and the ISIS, which mostly comprised of foreign fighters. In 2014–15, the civil war peaked with casualties mounting and the number of internally displaced and refugees in neighbouring countries swelling to millions. By 2015, despite the support of Iran, Hezbollah and many Shi'ite militias comprising of fighters from both Syria and outside, the regime was on the retreat with vast swathes of land in the north, northwest, south and southeast coming under the control of the Kurdish Syrian Democratic Front (SDF), the FSA and ISIS-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra.[93]

In September 2015, with Iranian help the Syrian regime enlisted the support of Vladimir Putin. The Russian entry with full military force gradually transformed the complexion of the war in favour of the regime.[94] This initially led to serious tension between Türkiye and Russia to the extent that in November 2015, the Turkish Armed Forced shot down a Russian fighter jet in northern Syria, alleging violation of Turkish airspace. This event further heightened the Türkiye–Russia tension over Syria.[95] However, this incident also proved a catalyst for Ankara to make a U-turn in its Syria policy. It was compelled to change its approach towards the civil war because it found itself isolated. Most of the international support for the opposition groups had dried up due to accusations of ties with jihadist organisations and the Russian and Iranian support had emboldened the regime. A key factor in the change of approach was the consolidation of Kurdish groups in northern Syria in the region bordering Türkiye and the emergence of the autonomous Rojava region under the Democratic Union Party (PYD)-led SDF[96] and its armed wing People's Protection Unit (YPG).

For Türkiye, the rise of a de facto Kurdish autonomous region close to its borders with Syria caused alarm bells and gradually became the biggest security threat. The US support of the SDF, even though primarily to defeat the ISIS, created tensions between the two NATO allies. Ankara then started to coordinate with Russia and Iran with the hope that it will bring stability in the beleaguered country and prevent a Kurdish consolidation across its southern border. It joined the Astana Peace Process in 2017.[97] In the meantime, its relations with the US continued to deteriorate over differences on the handling

of the crisis in Syria. The refugee influx from Iraq and Syria to Western Europe through Türkiye affected relations with the EU, which also became alarmed by the internal crackdown on opposition, the media and Kurdish activists on suspicion of involvement in the 2016 coup attempt. This led to the EU parliament voting to end the accession talks with Türkiye in March 2019.[98]

In the meantime, the Kurdish issue continued to animate Turkish involvement in Syria. Since 2016, Ankara conducted four major operations in northern Syria to carve out a 30-km buffer zone to prevent the PKK from taking shelter in Rojava, which is under SDF–PYD–YPG's control.[99] As of 2022, Ankara was not able to achieve the stated objective of a 30-km buffer, nonetheless it controls nearly 8,300 sq km along north and north-west Syria including the towns of Afrin, Bab, Jarablus, Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain. Türkiye was planning a fifth military operation to achieve the buffer zone and take control of the towns of Tal Rifaat and Manbij,[100] but faced mounting pressure from its international partners, including the US, which wants to protect its clients in Rojava, and Russia and Iran, who want to prevent undermining of the Syrian sovereignty and any showdown between Turkish and the Assad regime's forces.

Confrontation with Egypt

In Egypt, the Arab Spring protests took a different turn compared to Syria and Libya. Egypt did not devolve into a civil war as Mubarak was forced by the deep state to step down. It created an euphoria on the streets and hope for democratic reforms gained strength due to the way the transition was handled by the armed forces led by General Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and the caretaker government headed by Prime Minister Ahmed Shafik. The transition ensured free and fair elections for the Constituent Assembly and presidency, wherein the Muslim Brotherhood emerged as the leading political force.[101] Mohamed Morsi, a member of the Brotherhood, became president in June 2012. The Brotherhood's inability to reconcile with the secular credentials of the state and entrenched power of the deep state and armed forces, disregard for the broader secular fabric of the Egyptian political structure and overlooking of the increasing alienation of the minority Christian demography led to its insistence on declaring Egypt as an Islamic country to be governed under sharia laws, overlooking even the counsel offered by closest ally and supporter Erdoğan.[102] This created widespread discontent among a section of society that received support from the deep state and it came out on the streets to protest. The military under Abdel Fattah El-Sisi then mounted a coup and dismissed the Morsi government in July 2013. This was the end of the brief close partnership between Türkiye and Egypt as

Ankara vehemently criticised the dismissal of an elected government as the murder of democracy. On the other hand, Egypt considered the Turkish outburst as interference in its internal affairs.[103]

Since 2013, Türkiye–Egypt relations became increasingly tense and were marked by confrontation and acrimony. Ankara extended support for the Muslim Brotherhood and in addition to giving refuge to its members it also supported their sit-in demanding restoration of Morsi's elected government. The Egyptian Armed Forces, however, were in no mood for reconciliation and received tacit support from across the region, especially from Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Jordan, who had been unnerved by the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, fearing it can inspire Islamist movements across the region.[104] Saudi Arabia and the UAE announced financial support for the Egyptian government to manage the economy while Türkiye remained critical of the developments. Qatar, which had just witnessed a transfer of power from Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani to his son Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani in June 2013, gradually gravitated towards Türkiye and the Muslim Brotherhood to support their demands. The July 2013 events in Egypt were also the first clear marker of the growing geopolitical divide in the region with Türkiye–Qatar–Muslim Brotherhood–Hamas forming one pillar and Saudi-Arabia–UAE–Egypt–Jordan forming the other. Iran–Syria–Hezbollah formed the third pillar in the contentious regional geopolitical competition that ensued.

Involvement in Tunisia

In addition to Syria and Egypt, Türkiye also became involved in Tunisia. The situation in Tunisia took a completely different turn. Although it finally witnessed the same fate as Egypt, it took a longer time and an elected president to suspend the democratic process, apparently to fight the mounting economic challenge.[105] Notwithstanding the events since 2021, Türkiye shared a cordial and friendly relations with Tunisia since the beginning of the *thawra al-karama* (revolution for dignity) also known as Jasmine revolution in 2010–11, and the transitions it went through. Ennahda, the main Islamist party, shared strong ties with the AKP and the Turkish government and this helped in enlisting Turkish support for the democratic process and transition in Tunisia. In September 2011, the two countries signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which resulted in close political and diplomatic engagements and economic and security cooperation.[106] Türkiye also offered financial and technical support for the successive government to come to power in Tunisia. In 2012, the two countries decided to form a High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC), which

met frequently and monitored the strengthening of bilateral ties with several high level exchange of visits including by Erdoğan in 2013, 2017 and 2019.[107] Türkiye also adjusted to the internal developments in Tunisia by widening its network of political engagements beyond Ennahda. In 2021, when President Kais Saied suspended the parliament and took control of the judiciary and imposed emergency laws, Türkiye was circumspect in criticising the moves so as to not burn bridges with the new dispensation.[108]

Interference in Libya

The situation in Libya after the Arab Spring protest mirrored the developments in Syria and Yemen with the country devolving into a civil war. However, the internal conflict took a different turn due to the NATO military intervention in March 2011, which led to the quick dismissal of Muammar Qaddafi and his eventual brutal assassination in October. This pushed Libya into one-after-another political crises, and from 2014 a full-blown civil war ensued between various factions. Türkiye–Egypt tensions, with the larger regional geopolitical divide as the backdrop, also played out in Libya with Egypt and the UAE supporting the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Hifter. On the other hand, Türkiye and Qatar extended support for the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (GNA).[109] The infighting took a serious turn in 2019 when the LNA threatened to dislodge the GNA by mounting a siege on the capital city of Tripoli. This galvanised the Turkish forces, which were seeking greater influence in Eastern Mediterranean and claim resources, to sign a maritime security agreement with the GNA and led to Turkish military intervention in January 2020, which within months changed the direction of the internal conflict by pushing the LNA back.[110] In October 2020, a UN-sponsored ceasefire was signed between the different factions. Although since then fighting has stopped, the political crisis has continued unabated.

Like the Syrian civil war, the conflict in Libya became a regional conflict with international involvement and ramifications. It attracted regional and international powers including Egypt, Türkiye, the US, Russia, France, Italy, Qatar and the UAE. While the US-led NATO objective of bringing Qaddafi down and quickly stabilising the country under a pro-US government proved disastrous, the EU, Russia, Türkiye, Qatar, Egypt and the UAE were motivated by strategic and geopolitical interests ranging from security threats from terrorism to establishing naval presence, preventing refugee influx and claiming a share in the vast energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. Regarding Türkiye, one of the key factors that motivated it to intervene in Libya was the

energy and maritime geopolitics that played out in Eastern Mediterranean with a focus on countering the consolidation of the Egypt–Israel–Greece block in taking control of the maritime resources.[111]

The Eastern Mediterranean region is a gas rich area and the discovery of several gas fields since the early 2000s enhanced its geopolitical value, especially as Egypt and Israel have succeeded in finding gas fields in their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the Mediterranean Sea. This led to other regional countries, including Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon and Türkiye, claiming rights to EEZs and exploring them for energy resources. However, many regional countries have overlapping EEZ claims and based on their interests differ in defining EEZs. This has led to Greece and Türkiye and Israel and Lebanon having serious differences and challenging the others' claims.[112] Türkiye became increasingly concerned after it recognised that Egypt, Cyprus, Greece and Israel, all of which had bilateral problems with it, were moving towards forming a bloc to develop a network of underwater gas pipelines in order to control the energy resources and routes in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Discussions among these four countries to collaborate and consolidate their resources to make Eastern Mediterranean into a global gas production and export hub with joint infrastructure and pipelines connecting regional countries with Europe alarmed Ankara. [113] In 2019, the informal grouping took the shape of Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), headquartered in Cairo, with Egypt, Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Jordan and Palestine as founding members; France joined the grouping later.[114] The exclusion of Türkiye, Lebanon, Syria and Libya from the EMGF raised eyebrows and caused a serious churn with Ankara vowing to not let go of its claims in Eastern Mediterranean.[115] In response, in November 2019, Türkiye signed an agreement with Libya's GNA on maritime boundaries and sharing of EEZs. This manifested in the rising of tensions between Egypt and Türkiye and the eventual Turkish interference in Libya.[116]

Türkiye in Iraq

Türkiye's involvement in Iraq is limited to concerns about the Kurdish problem, mainly within Türkiye but also its transnational manifestation. This has sometimes resulted in tensions with the dispensation in Baghdad, but has also encouraged cooperation as was the case during the 2017 Kurdistan regional independence referendum that brought Türkiye, Iraq, Syria and Iran together to thwart any attempt at the formation of an independent Kurdistan state in the Kurdish dominated areas in the four countries.[117] Nonetheless, Türkiye's engagement with the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern

Iraq has been mostly cordial with energy security and Turkish military action against the PKK hideouts in the Qandil Mountains being the most important components of the cooperation. For the KRG maintaining friendly relations with Türkiye becomes important as Türkiye is one of the largest importers of energy from the KRG, hence it makes economic and trade sense. In lieu of allowing the Turkish security forces to undertake military action against the PKK hideouts, the two major factions within the KRG, the Barzani family-led Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Talabani family-led Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), both hobnob with businessmen and the political establishment in Türkiye to establish strong trade and economic links. This arrangement has worked well but occasionally has caused problems and friction with Baghdad and other external actors in the country, especially Iran, which sees Turkish involvement in Iraq as a threat to Iranian ambitions. The Arab Gulf countries also see Turkish military presence in Iraq as a threat to regional security and stability.

Challenging Saudi Arabia and Competition with the UAE

Turkish military interventions in regional conflicts and geopolitical competition with regional powers emanate from its ambition to emerge as a strong regional power and be recognised as a middle power. This fits well with the Turkish foreign policy doctrine of strategic depth that envisages the revival of Türkiye's status as was during the Ottoman Empire. This led to differences and disputes with regional countries that viewed Turkish ambitions as a threat. As noted in the preceding paragraphs in this chapter, Türkiye's relations with Syria and Egypt went downhill in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings because of direct Turkish involvement in these countries. In the case of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the situation was somewhat different. Türkiye engaged in competitive geopolitics with the two oil-rich Arab Gulf countries with the objective of transforming the region according to Turkish political interests. In that sense, one can define the Turkish regional policy as revivalist wherein Ankara was looking to revive the "glorious past" of the Ottoman Empire in MENA region. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, on the other hand, preferred the status quo in the regional order with the US acting as an external security guarantor.

Türkiye, thus, engaged in competition with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE. In the case of Saudi Arabia, some of the statements by Turkish officials were seen as challenging the Saudi custodianship of the Two Holy Mosques in Makkah and Madinah, one of the primary planks in Saudi claim of legitimacy to rule over the Arabian Peninsula and the leadership of the broader Islamic world.[118] At the

same time, in 2019, Türkiye along with Pakistan and Malaysia tried to mount a challenge to Saudi leadership by holding a parallel Islamic summit in Kuala Lumpur. For Saudis, this was not acceptable and by putting financial pressure on both Pakistan and Malaysia, they thwarted the Turkish attempt.[119] With UAE and Egypt, Türkiye was engaged in competitive politics in Libya and the Horn of Africa.[120] Ankara also blamed the UAE of funding the 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye, which led to a complete breakdown in bilateral ties. Turkish vocal support for the Palestinian movement, criticism of Israeli actions against Hamas in the Gaza Strip and support for the transnational Muslim Brotherhood movement in the region presented a threat not only to Saudi–UAE claims of leadership but also to their own internal security.[121] Türkiye's rivalry with Saudi Arabia and the UAE manifested itself most clearly through the Qatar crisis and the Khashoggi affair.

The Qatar Crisis

A blockade by the Arab quartet (Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain) imposed on Qatar on 5 June 2017 caused a huge regional crisis. That the move came during the month of Ramadan was seen in Qatar as a way not only to act against the Qatari ruling family but also to punish the Qatari people and press them to revolt against the Al-Thani rule. Doha, however, not only quickly overcame the initial shock to gain composure but also used its financial heft and geopolitical network to thwart any attempt by the quartet to press it to accept any of their demands. That the demands included the closure of Turkish military base in Doha and stopping support for the Muslim Brotherhood underlined that the quartet was concerned by the growing Turkish–Qatari–Muslim Brotherhood nexus.[122] Among the regional countries, Türkiye and Iran came out in support of Qatar while the two other GCC countries, Oman and Kuwait, took a neutral stand. In addition to expanding economic cooperation, Türkiye rushed to increase its military presence in Qatar and signed a bilateral security agreement with the Gulf country. Iran, on the other hand, enhanced trade and commercial engagements with Qatar. Oman too came to the aid of Qatar to overcome the economic impact of the boycott by helping it carry out trading activities through its port. Turkish policy over the Qatar crisis in 2017 led to deterioration of ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE. The end of the crisis in January 2021 was one of the factors that helped in the beginning of Türkiye's diplomatic engagements with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the UAE.

The Khashoggi Affair

Jamal Khashoggi, a Saudi dissident journalist and columnist for the *Washington Post*, was murdered on 2 October 2018 inside the Saudi consulate in Istanbul by agents affiliated with Saudi intelligence agencies, who were allegedly in direct contact with Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, caused international shock and condemnation. Saudi Arabia and its leadership had to face international isolation courtesy the Turkish refusal to let go of the incident and to deal with it in a discreet and diplomatic manner, which the Saudis had hoped for. Given the Turkish–Saudi geopolitical dynamics, the aggressive posture adopted by Türkiye and personally by Erdoğan was understandable. But this led to a serious crisis in relations between the two countries that continued until 2021. Turkish authorities blamed the Saudi agencies of blocking the investigation into the murder, while the Saudis continued to deny the involvement of the crown prince.[123] However, what irked the Saudis most was that the Turkish activism caused not only international embarrassment and brought the spotlight on the pitiable human rights record inside the Kingdom, but it also galvanised the anti-Saudi forces in Washington and other Western capitals to press for diplomatic and political action against it.[124] Additionally, it brought to the fore the critical humanitarian situation in Yemen that was worsened by the Saudi-led military intervention in the beleaguered Arab country. It was only in 2021 that the Turks and Saudis began taking diplomatic and political steps towards a reconciliation, mainly to tap the economic potentials in the bilateral relations.

Partnership with Qatar

Among the Arab Gulf countries Türkiye's relations with Qatar took a different trajectory. The two found various reasons for greater cooperation and collaboration, both ideological and geopolitical. Ideologically, their sympathies with forces of political Islam, especially with the Muslim Brotherhood, brought them closer. Ankara and Doha cooperated in various regional theatres because of this ideological affinity and in most cases they supported either the Muslim Brotherhood directly or its offshoot. This was witnessed in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Horn of Africa, Palestinian territories and Syria.[125] The ideological alignment between Türkiye, Qatar and the Muslim Brotherhood was a major factor in alienating Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt from Türkiye. Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Cairo had gradually declared the Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation due to the heightened threat perception against the transnational movement, its ambitions and growing popularity. At a geopolitical level, Türkiye and Qatar used their financial and military resources in a coordinated manner in various

regional conflicts to advance their influence but found only limited success. The Ankara–Doha partnership strengthened significantly during the Qatar crisis wherein Türkiye emerged as one of the most steadfast supporters of Qatar and Al-Thanis. Türkiye and Qatar, in the process, further strengthened their already robust economic and commercial ties, with the two emerging as one of the strongest trading partners in the region.[126]

Problems with Iran and Israel

The events of Arab Spring did not change the dynamics of ties between the three non-Arab countries in MENA. Türkiye–Israel relations had begun to deteriorate in 2008–09 over Israeli policies in Occupied Territories (the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem), which Türkiye criticised vehemently. The situation continued, rather intensified, after Arab Spring as armed clashes broke out between Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and Hamas with regular intervals.[127] In 2011, Türkiye downgraded diplomatic relations with Israel over the Mavi Marmara incident that occurred in May 2010, recalled its ambassador and suspended military cooperation. Bilateral efforts in 2013, with the Israeli prime minister apologising for the loss of Turkish life generated hope for improvement in relations but it was not until 2016 that the two sides agreed to restore diplomatic relations and resulted in Israel sending compensation to the victims of the Mavi Marmara incident. However, the 2018 US decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel attracted international condemnation and derailed any hopes of improvement in the Türkiye-Israel ties. Türkiye suspended diplomatic relations by recalling the ambassador from Tel Aviv and expelling the Israeli ambassador in Ankara.[128] Türkiye and Israel were also on opposite camps in energy geopolitics and tensions in Eastern Mediterranean that had heightened during 2019–20. It was not until 2021, and under a new government in Israel, that Türkiye and Israel resumed efforts for a reconciliation, but this may still turn out to be another failed attempt. Nonetheless, the trade and commercial relations between Türkiye and Israel have continued.

Türkiye–Iran relations were also affected by the developments related to the Arab Spring uprisings. Their paths clashed in Syria and Iraq, while the tensions and rivalry extended to the Caspian and South Caucasus regions.[129] The two non-Arab regional giants and neighbours have for long shared complicated relations with historical, ethnic and sectarian differences. Despite differences over regional politics, the two have continued to engage in commercial relations, although the amount of bilateral trade is relatively small. Iran condemned the failed coup in Türkiye, but Türkiye did not extend it any serious political support

over its regional rivalries with Arab Gulf states or tensions with the US. Türkiye and Iran have often expressed similar views on regional developments, including the removal of the Morsi government in Egypt, on the Palestinian issue and the signing of Abraham Accords, which both criticised. Their relations can be aptly described as two large neighbours that cannot see eye-to-eye on most regional issues but also cannot ignore each other because of their geographical proximity and the geopolitical dynamics they share with other regional powers.

Economic Crisis and Regional Reconciliations

As noted in this chapter earlier, since 2021, Türkiye has started a parallel process of reconciliations with several regional countries including Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt. Attempts to engage the Syrian regime has also been made. A number of domestic, regional and international factors have galvanised the Turkish reconsideration on relations with these countries. Domestically, Erdoğan's falling political stock and mounting economic problems have forced the AKP government to seek improvement in relations with important regional countries that have the potential to improve trade and commercial ties. At the regional level, Türkiye's growing isolation from regional politics and the geo-economic compulsions in the aftermath of Covid-19, which accentuated the already fragile economic situation, have also contributed to the change in Turkish approach. Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean region and challenges to Türkiye's regional ambitions vis-à-vis the coming together of its regional rivals has forced Ankara to reconsider its regional policies. The Abraham Accords and the growing consolidation of Iranian regional presence are the other important factors that have contributed to the change in approach.

At the systemic level, geopolitical developments, signs of the US reducing its regional commitments and the coming of the Biden administration, which has been focussed on lessening regional tensions, conflicts and commitments unlike the Trump administration that promoted rash behaviour, further contributed to Ankara taking steps to recalibrate its regional position.[130] However, given the unpredictability and complexity of the MENA geopolitics and the impulsiveness generally associated with Erdoğan's diplomatic actions, it would be too early to suggest that the chain of diplomatic events between Türkiye and several regional countries will lead to an enduring trend. More importantly, there are no indications to suggest any normative change in Turkish foreign policy, which continues to be guided by the strategic depth doctrine that seeks to make Türkiye a multi-regional power in its neighbourhood and seek status as a middle power.

Conclusion

Turkish foreign policy in MENA in the twenty-first century has gone through two distinct phases with 2021 indicating the possibility of the beginning of a third phase. The first phase broadly coincided with the coming to power of the AKP and Erdoğan and continued until the advent of the Arab Spring uprisings. During this phase, Türkiye's regional policy was mostly marked by friendly diplomatic outreach to the regional countries and proactive participation in regional issues to burnish its credentials as a major regional power. The economic advantage of improved relations with regional countries was not hidden from anyone and this created a win-win formula for Türkiye and its neighbours in MENA. The second phase began in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings wherein Türkiye sensing an opportunity to strengthen its role as a regional arbiter emerged as a major regional actor and acted as a power broker in the fractious regional politics. It also presented domestic political democratisation and assertion of Islamic identity along with economic growth as a model worth emulating by the regional countries. However, this was bound to create friction with other regional powers that saw Turkish actions as geopolitical moves impinging on their own ambitions and interests, and at times as interference in their internal matters. Thus, they blamed Türkiye of following a neo-Ottoman and pan-Islamic foreign policy agenda. Mostly, this phase was marked by an interventionist and confrontationist approach that underlined Türkiye's strategic overreach in the Middle East. The situation took another turn in 2021 in the aftermath of Covid-19 pandemic, which is yet to take shape as an enduring trend but suggests a possible change in approach that is mainly rooted in geo-economic compulsions. Notwithstanding the twists and turns in the approach, Türkiye's regional policy has been guided by the strategic depth doctrine that envisages capitalising on Türkiye's history and geography to create a Turkish sphere of influence in its neighbourhood that will allow it to emerge as a multi-regional power and seek the status of a middle power.

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CHAPTER SIX

TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

India's relations with Türkiye have remained frozen in time. Over the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Türkiye has emerged as an enigma for India like no other in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The Turkish challenge is especially notable as New Delhi has unravelled the code of developing proximate relations with the broader Islamic world by de-hyphenating the Pakistan factor and by developing bilateral strategic partnerships. This is true for countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Qatar and other Middle Eastern countries with whom India has developed strong partnerships through consistent improvement in bilateral relations since the 1990s. The broader systemic and Pakistan factors that had prevented improvement in relations with the conservative monarchies in the Gulf for most of the Cold War period[1] have in the post-Cold War era given way to improved relations based on economic interdependencies, energy cooperation and people-to-people contacts. With Türkiye, however, this has not happened and the attempts at de-hyphenating Pakistan in the early 2000s have not succeeded, keeping bilateral relations stuck in the Cold War era dynamics.[2] Trade and business between India and Türkiye, although witnessed growth, have consistently remained below potential due to political problems and Türkiye's inability to de-hyphenate Pakistan in relations with India.

Besides the bilateral issues, Türkiye poses significant challenges to India in multiple regions. Turkish policies in the MENA and Gulf regions as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean and Central Asia regions can seriously affect Indian interests. In addition, for India, the Turkish policy of expanding its relations in different parts of the world, including in South Asia, can pose a challenge with economic, political and strategic implications. Challenges can also emerge at the systemic level due to the sharpening global geopolitical divide and Turkish

positioning as a multi-regional balancing power.[3] In the geopolitical divide between the US and its transatlantic partners on the one hand and Russia, China and their allies on the other, Türkiye has been able to position itself as the only major actor to be able to develop issue-based strategic cooperation at various levels and with all actors. Its relations with China have improved significantly in recent years. At the same time, Türkiye has found ways to improve relations with Russia despite being part of NATO. Thus, in the ongoing global geopolitical realignments, Türkiye's hostile actions can have serious implications for India. The systemic changes can have ramifications for the MENA region as well, wherein many have underlined the possibility of the formation of an alignment between Russia, China, Iran and Türkiye to challenge the US-led regional order.[4] This can pose a challenge for Indian interest in the region as well.

From an Indian point of view, Türkiye's growing relations with countries in South Asia are also a serious cause of concern. Türkiye–Pakistan strategic partnership, which has endured despite changed regional and domestic geopolitical circumstances and domestic transitions in both countries, poses a serious and direct strategic challenge for India. For example, Türkiye along with China are the only major actors that continue to support Pakistan over Kashmir. Türkiye's keen interest in South Asian politics, strengthening relations with Pakistan, improving ties with Bangladesh and efforts to seek a role in Afghanistan have made it a country of concern for India despite the geographic distance. In the context of Bangladesh–Myanmar problems, its position on the Rohingya issue runs contrary to Indian interests. Moreover, Türkiye's proactive diplomacy to step up its presence in Afghanistan in the wake of the chaotic US withdrawal from the country, although not materialising, is a cause of worry for India.

The objective of this chapter is to underline how Turkish foreign policy, especially in the MENA and South Asia regions, impinges on India and what could be the implications and challenges for New Delhi as far as Ankara's foreign and regional policies are concerned. It also offers policy recommendations, both with regard to India's general approach towards Türkiye and on specific issues such as the strategic challenge from the Turkish position on the Kashmir issue and the Pakistan factor. The chapter maps the evolution and current status of India's relations with Türkiye as well as Türkiye's relations with Pakistan and underlines the broader implications for India in relation to Turkish foreign policy approaches towards MENA and South Asia. Finally, it offers policy recommendations for India.

Indo–Turkish Relations

Historically, India–Türkiye relations could never really take off. During the medieval period, despite occasional contacts[5] the two remained remote from each other, given the geographical distance. Although there were some political contacts and relations between a few ruling Muslim dynasties in the Western coastal region of India and the Ottoman Empire as well as some diplomatic exchanges with the Mughals and later with British India,[6] there is no evidence to suggest any serious engagements between the Ottoman and Mughal empires despite the two dynasties that established these empires sharing a common heritage.[7] However, the end of the Ottoman Empire and the growing discourse within Türkiye on the abolition of the Caliphate, which eventually took place in 1924, did lead to a section of Muslims in India to call for the restoration of the institution. This call manifested as the Khilafat Movement, which received Mahatma Gandhi's support, who at the time was emerging as a major figure in the Indian national movement. Nevertheless, it did not evoke any response from the Turkish elite who was focused on building a modern and secular Republic.[8] The anti-colonial sentiments in India had also led the Indian National Movement to extend support for the Turkish War of Independence in the early 1920s. After India's independence, even though the two countries immediately established diplomatic relations and there was some goodwill in India for Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's secularisation and modernisation project, the relations were defined by the Cold War dynamics with India and Türkiye finding themselves in different camps in international politics.[9]

The reality of geography and systemic factors did not allow New Delhi and Ankara to develop close relations for most of the Cold War period. When Türkiye became a republic in 1923, India was still struggling for independence from the British. In 1947, Türkiye had already begun moving towards the Western bloc while the newly independent India was brimming with anti-colonial sentiments. Hence, during the Cold War, Türkiye chose to become part of NATO to counter the Soviet threat in its neighbourhood and India took to lead the post-colonial countries through the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) to oppose the division of the world into blocs. Historian William Hale notes that unlike India, Türkiye "was in the middle of a zone of intense rivalry between the superpowers", which determined its choices.[10] This prevented any significant political and diplomatic engagement despite the two countries establishing relations in 1948. The notable bilateral visits between 1948 and 1986 were that of Turkish Prime Minister Adnan Menderes in 1958 and the return visit of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in May 1960.[11] Vice President of India Zakir Hussain visited Türkiye in 1965.[12]

Efforts to Improve Political Contacts

In the 1980s, there were some efforts at increasing bilateral political engagement as both India and Türkiye were trying to diversify external relations with a focus on economic growth. Prime Minister Turgut Özal visited New Delhi in 1986 and this was reciprocated by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1988.[13] A year later President Kenan Evren of Türkiye visited India. Both Özal and Gandhi had taken the leadership role of their respective governments in challenging times and although the political circumstances in India and Türkiye and the individual evolution of both as politicians[14] were entirely different, they had both inherited a country that was facing economic slowdown and a middle-income trap. Hence, both were trying to diversify economic relations with countries beyond their immediate neighbourhood. However, their efforts yielded different results. India had to wait for the election of P.V. Narasimha Rao as prime minister in 1991 to bring far-reaching economic reforms and foreign policy recalibration, which in Türkiye's case Özal succeeded in initiating in the 1980s.

The divergent domestic political circumstances led to the failure of efforts in the 1980s to bring about a change in bilateral ties. The attempts resumed in the 1990s with greater diplomatic and political engagements including high-level visits such as by Indian President Shankar Dayal Sharma in 1993, by Turkish President Suleyman Demirel in 1995 and by Indian President K.R. Narayanan in September 1998. In October 1998, India was represented by Vice President Krishan Kant on the occasion of the 75th anniversary celebrations of the Turkish Republic.[15] These exchanges created the ground for improvement in bilateral ties, and in the early 2000s, the two prime ministerial visits – by Bülent Ecevit in April 2000 and Atal Bihari Vajpayee in September 2003 – raised hopes for greater political understanding and economic engagements.[16] By the mid-2000s, India–Türkiye trade started to pick up but political challenges persisted. Ever since, despite occasional diplomatic and political engagements, the bilateral relations have mostly remained embroiled in political problems, which has also impeded the realisation of economic potential.

The coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan brought a sea change in Türkiye's domestic politics and foreign policy behaviour, as has been noted in the previous chapters. The AKP focused on economic growth and improving commercial ties with the wider world. It was motivated by both the enthusiasm of a post-modernist political organisation, which had combined religious ideological leanings, political nationalism and economic neoliberalism to captivate the people and storm to

power at the dawn of the twenty-first century as well as the motivation to prove its detractors wrong who had doubts about a bunch of political outsiders' ability to govern Türkiye and lead it in the new millennium. The new dispensation in Ankara was also motivated by the hunger for power and the desire to restore Türkiye as a major actor in world politics to bring about fast-paced change in foreign policy praxis. This led to the AKP systematically expanding Türkiye's external relations with a focus on accession to the European Union (EU) and continued strategic partnership with the US on the one hand and improvement in relations with Russia, China and other emerging and regional powers on the other.[17]

In Ankara, relations with India were seen as attractive for economic reasons as India, along with China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia, were leading the world into an Asian century. In other words, if Türkiye was to chart the course of economic growth, expanding relations with Asia, and India, was inevitable. Hence, despite ideological, cultural and religious affinity and proximity with Pakistan, Türkiye has on different occasions showed keenness on developing economic and diplomatic relations with India. Nonetheless, the AKP soon became embroiled in the ideological struggle within Türkiye and began to be pulled apart by its two ideological leanings of being a modernising force that was trying to expand the democratic base of the political system and of being an Islamic revivalist force that was pulling in the direction of emboldening and reclaiming its Islamic identity. This affected the political component of its relations with India.

Hence, the bilateral relations between India and Türkiye during the AKP era can be considered a case of one step forward (economic growth) and two steps back (political bickering). The AKP government has continued to give priority to India (and China) when it comes to developing economic relations with Asia, but on political issues it has always sided with Pakistan on India–Pakistan problems and the Kashmir dispute. Although there have been some notable high-level visits between the two countries during the AKP governments in Ankara, the relations lack political warmth. Erdoğan visited India twice; first as prime minister in November 2008, and again as president in May 2017. In February 2010, Abdullah Gül became the first Turkish president to visit New Delhi in 15 years.[18] From the Indian side, President Pranab Mukherjee visited Ankara in October 2013, which after 1998 was also the first visit to Türkiye by an Indian head of state.[19] In November 2015, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Antalya to attend the G20 summit and also held bilateral talks with President

Erdoğan on the sidelines.[20] This was the first prime ministerial visit to Türkiye after Vajpayee's 2003 visit and it generated hope for improvement in relations. The visit was reciprocated by Erdoğan in 2017 and despite the controversy around his remarks on India–Pakistan conflict, the visit did raise hopes of bettering bilateral ties. There have also been some contacts among defence establishments and leaders, but these failed to create a breakthrough in relations.

Hope for Improved Relations

Erdoğan's 2017 visit was focused on three issues, namely improving trade relations, increasing investments from both sides and focussing on issues related to counterterrorism, especially in the context of the rise of Islamic State (ISIS) and threats from jihadi terrorism.[21] President Erdoğan was accompanied by a large business delegation comprising nearly a hundred businessmen and industrialists. A joint address to the India–Türkiye Business Forum (ITBF) by Prime Minister Modi and President Erdoğan emphasised the potentials regarding trade and investments in various fields and sectors of the economy. Erdoğan also made a pitch for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Türkiye.[22] In addition, the Indian prime minister underlined the "huge potential and opportunity to enhance the bilateral engagement" and said that this can be possible through collaboration in various fields including trade and investments and technological tie-ups.[23]

A joint statement was issued after the bilateral talks, highlighting the importance the two countries attach on improving trade, business and commercial relations.[24] Notably, the statement expressed hope that the bilateral trade will reach US$ 10 billion by 2020 and highlighted the agreement for cooperation in the fields of Information Technology (IT), pharmaceuticals, health and tourism. The statement expressed a "willingness to improve cooperation in the fields of hydrocarbons, renewable energy (solar and wind) and energy efficiency" as well as noted the "immense untapped potential for growth" in bilateral trade and investment.[25] On counterterrorism cooperation, Indian concerns about possibility of radicalisation among its Muslim population and some youth travelling to Syria through Türkiye to join the ISIS led to a greater focus on developing cooperation among intelligence and security agencies to prevent any misuse of leisure travel by those radicalised online in India. Türkiye, at the time, was also facing serious problems regarding jihadi terror as it had experienced a number of terrorist attacks, including the deadly New Year-eve attack in Istanbul in 2016.[26] In the joint statement it was noted that the two

countries "agreed to strengthen cooperation in combating terrorism both at the bilateral level and within the multilateral system".[27]

There was some political momentum at the time of the July 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye and India was among the first to condemn it, thereby generating goodwill in Ankara.[28] During the 2017 visit, Turkish officials raised the issue of the presence of Gülenist networks in India that Türkiye believed had masterminded the coup. This had become an emotive issue for the Turkish side, hence after the failed coup, the Turkish ambassador in New Delhi, Burak Akçapar, said in a media interaction that Gülenists have a presence in India and Ankara expects New Delhi to take action against them.[29] The Indian side, however, took a more cautious approach and did not take any immediate action, underlining the need for evidence of them working in violation of Indian laws.[30] Between 2015 and 2019, several other visits by foreign ministers and other officials took place.

As Türkiye has been taking steps to recalibrate its foreign policy due to geo-economic compulsions since 2021, attempts have again been made to revive political contacts with India. In this regard, the two meetings in September 2022 between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Erdoğan at the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Samarkand and between External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu at the sidelines of United National General Assembly (UNGA) in New York are notable. Nonetheless, these did not lead to any breakthrough until the end of 2022.

Derailment and Heightened Tensions

The momentum generated by the visits and political contacts did not last long as Turkish foreign policy became increasingly embroiled in ideological contestations and turned less pragmatic. This affected relations with India as Türkiye criticised India for changing Jammu and Kashmir's (J&K) constitutional status in August 2019. The political ties froze when during his annual address to UNGA in September 2019 President Erdoğan lashed out at the Indian decision to abrogate Article 370 of the Indian constitution that allowed special status to J&K. This prompted New Delhi to cancel a proposed Ankara visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in October that year.[31] This was in a way the culmination of a cycle wherein Indo–Turkish relations witnessed several ups and downs. The Turkish approach of continuing business as usual with India on the economic aspects while extending political support to Pakistan on disputes between India and Pakistan was no longer acceptable to India, that

underlined that the Turkish criticism was emanating from a lack of appreciation of facts and poor understanding of historical issues in South Asia.[32] President Erdoğan's repetition of criticism of India at the UNGA continued in 2020 and 2021, hardening New Delhi's stance against Ankara not only among the political leadership but also amongst the civil society and academia. During his 2022 UNGA address, Erdoğan again mentioned the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan but the approach was milder that did generate some hope for change.

During the early period of the AKP era, India's relations with Türkiye were marked by political pragmatism and economic growth. This was mostly a result of the momentum generated by the greater political contacts in the 1990s and the exchange of visits by Ecevit and Vajpayee. Selçuk Colakoğlu, a Turkish academic and analyst who tracks the developments related to Türkiye's ties with Asia, has noted that Vajpayee's visit "boosted" Türkiye–India relations with the two charting a "course to develop the multidimensional relationship that had previously eluded them".[33] According to him, the AKP was focussed on deepening economic cooperation with India "without harming its friendly relations with Pakistan".[34] Economic diplomacy through meetings at multilateral forums, especially the G20 summit meetings, "served as a useful platform for developing such cooperation".[35] Subsequently, in the mid-2010s with a new government in New Delhi, another push for improvement in relations was made, but the non-pragmatic approach of the Turkish side on the Pakistan and Kashmir issues derailed the process. This also pushed India to seek greater cooperation with Türkiye's detractors and rivals in Eastern Mediterranean and the South Caucasus and be more forthcoming in criticism of Turkish military interventions in Libya and Syria.

Commercial Ties

India's economic and commercial relations with Türkiye have witnessed an upward swing since the mid-2000s (**Table and Figure 1**). Although India and Türkiye are not major trading partners and do not feature in each other's top 25 trading partners list, the volume of trade is substantial. The trajectory of bilateral trade has been in India's favour since the mid-1990s except for a brief period between 2008 and 2010, when exports and imports reached near parity (**Table and Figure 1**). Notably, although political uncertainties did not allow economic relations to flourish, some increase in the trade bill is noticed. A decline in 2019–20 is attributed to the Covid-19 outbreak and disruptions in the supply chain. In the post-Covid-19 rebound, for the first time the bilateral trade breached

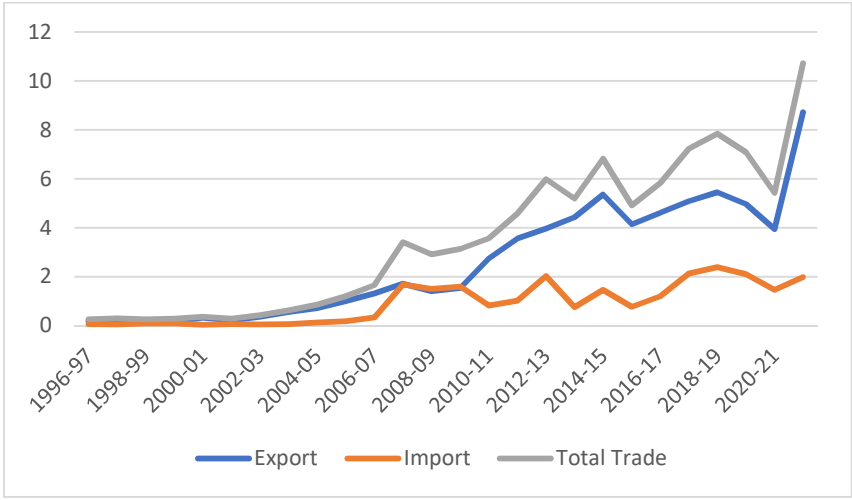
US$ 10 billion mark in 2021–22 with Indian exports contributing US$ 8.7 billion. This also underlines the potential in economic relations if India and Türkiye can manage their political problems.

Table 1: India–Türkiye Bilateral Trade (US$ million)

Financial Year	Export	Import	Total Trade
1996–97	201.84	69.68	271.52
1997–98	244.12	64.32	308.44
1998–99	169.90	98.58	268.48
1999–2000	189.44	96.56	286.00
2000–01	333.63	43.33	376.96
2001–02	219.05	69.36	288.41
2002–03	368.33	59.64	427.97
2003–04	563.34	73.32	636.66
2004–05	723.70	134.92	858.62
2005–06	1,010.08	193.80	1,203.88
2006–07	1,327.30	335.92	1,663.22
2007–08	1,725.61	1,687.59	3,413.20
2008–09	1,416.75	1,504.30	2,921.05
2009-10	1,539.20	1,603.64	3,142.84
2010–11	2,749.15	821.06	3,570.21
2011–12	3,547.26	1,021.91	4,569.17
2012–13	3,963.66	2,034.18	5,997.84
2013–14	4,433.75	760.43	5,194.18
2014–15	5,358.90	1,463.87	6,822.77
2015–16	4,140.00	776.94	4,916.94
2016–17	4,626.59	1,207.31	5,833.90
2017–18	5,090.70	2,132.20	7,222.90
2018–19	5,452.45	2,388.26	7,841.71
2019–20	4,969.47	2,116.56	7,086.03
2020–21	3,952.89	1,467.33	5,420.22
2021–22	8,716.13	1,996.75	10,712.88

Source: Export Import Data Bank, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India.

Figure 1: Bilateral Trade Trajectory (US$ billion)



Source: Export Import Data Bank, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India.

The main items of Indian exports to Türkiye are petroleum and petroleum products, vehicles, textile, plastics in primary forms, organic chemicals etc. On the other hand, most Indian imports from Türkiye comprise of crude minerals and fertilisers, ferrous and non-ferrous ores, power generating equipment, chemicals and cultured pearls and jewellery.[36] Until the outbreak of Covid-19, there was significant momentum with respect to developing economic and commercial relations. In April 2015, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Türkiye (TOBB) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote bilateral trade and economic cooperation. During Erdoğan's 2017 visit, the two sides agreed to intensify commercial engagements and there was an emphasis on two-way flow of investments. Turkish sources suggest that more than 180 Indian companies have operations in Türkiye while as many as 14 Turkish companies have operations in India with nearly US$ 430 million worth of contracts, especially in the construction sector.[37] As of September 2022, Türkiye is ranked 46th in India's overall Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflow with a total investment of US$ 216.11 million since April 2000.[38] Furthermore, during his 2017 visit Erdoğan promulgated the idea of India–Türkiye FTA, but there has been no progress on this ever since. According to Indian sources, many Indian companies, including Mahindra, Tata, Jindal, Birla, Punj Lyod, Wipro etc., have business operations in Türkiye with nearly US$ 125 million investments.[39] In recent years,

Türkiye has emerged as a notable destination for Indian tourists and market for the Indian film industry and there are many potential areas of economic cooperation that can be tapped if political challenges can be overcome.

Türkiye–Pakistan Relations

A key aspect of challenges in Indo–Turkish relations is Türkiye's ties with Pakistan as this has seriously affected the relations between Ankara and New Delhi. Türkiye and Pakistan enjoy strong and friendly relations. In addition to cultural and religious affinities, political, economic and security cooperation have contributed to the strengthening of their relations.[40] Historically, their ties strengthened through the Cold War period as both Ankara and Islamabad gravitated towards the US-led alliance against the Soviet Union.[41] Although in the post-Cold War period their bilateral relations witnessed some stagnation due to divergences on critical issues, namely Afghanistan and Kashmir, and geopolitical compulsions, the relations remained cordial.[42] The ties have flourished in the past two decades and lately, Türkiye has emerged as Pakistan's closest friend, arguably second only to China. The AKP government in Türkiye (since 2002) and the governments in Pakistan under General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008), Nawaz Sharif (2013–2017), Imran Khan (2018–22) and Shahbaz Sharif (2022–) have invested considerable energy in strengthening bilateral relations.

Political Convergence

In the post-Cold War era, Türkiye–Pakistan political relations began to transform after General Musharraf took over the reins of Pakistan in 1999. Musharraf, who had spent some years of his childhood in Türkiye, admired Türkiye for its socio-political transformation under Atatürk and reached out to Ankara to develop political, strategic and commercial relations.[43] Within weeks of assuming power, Musharraf visited Türkiye to discuss the political transition in Pakistan.[44] Subsequently, President Necdet Sezer visited Islamabad in October 2001 and held wide-ranging discussions. The momentum gained a fresh push after the AKP came to power. Under the AKP government, Ankara–Islamabad relations flourished as it fit the broader Turkish foreign policy framework of expanding external relations, including with the Islamic world. In May 2003, Türkiye's Foreign Minister Abdullah Gül (who later served as president from 2007 to 2014) visited Islamabad to explore opportunities for improvement of ties. Gül's visit paved the way for Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit in June 2003, only three months after he assumed the premiership. The focus of

the visit was on economic and commercial ties and the Turkish delegation comprised of more than a hundred businessmen.[45] Musharraf returned the visit in January 2004 and was accorded the honour of addressing the Turkish parliament; this visit proved crucial for the development of close security relations between Ankara and Islamabad as the two signed an MoU on combating international terrorism, including an agreement on exchanging experts and sharing intelligence.[46]

Regular exchange of high-level visits helped develop a stronger political understanding between Ankara and Islamabad on a wide range of domestic, regional and international issues. The cordiality of the relations was reflected in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake that hit Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) in October 2005. Days after the disaster, Erdoğan visited Islamabad to express solidarity and announced a relief package worth US$ 150 million, with US$ 100 million in financial assistance and relief goods worth US$ 50 million, to help deal with the disaster.[47] In addition, Türkiye provided medical assistance and technical support for the rescue operation. Seemingly, this was a return of favour and goodwill as during the 2000 earthquake in Türkiye, Pakistan had sent a plane load of relief material with Prime Minister Sharif himself travelling to deliver the aid and express solidarity. These gestures certainly reflected the compassionate nature of their ties.

The political proximity that has developed between the two countries can be estimated from the number of high-level visits that have taken place in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Erdoğan has visited Pakistan as many as 11 times between 2003 and 2022 – seven times as prime minister, including in June 2003, October 2005, October 2009, October 2010, May 2012, November 2012 and December 2013, and four times as president, including in August 2015, November 2016, February 2017 and February 2020. In the meantime, four presidential and six prime ministerial visits from Pakistan have taken place. Musharraf visited Ankara twice as president in 2004 and 2007 and President Mamnoon Hussain visited Ankara in July 2018 to attend Erdoğan's swearing-in ceremony. In October 2018, President Arif Alvi travelled to Istanbul to attend the inauguration of the new international airport and the reception for Türkiye's 95th Republic Day. Nawaz Sharif visited Türkiye four times as prime minister while Imran Khan's maiden visit to Ankara was in January 2019. Shahbaz Sharif who took over the premiership in April 2022 visited Ankara in May–June 2022.[48]

The regular exchange of visits strengthened bilateral political understanding. A crucial moment came during the failed coup in July 2016 when Nawaz Sharif called Erdoğan to express solidarity with the Turkish government and people and condemned the coup attempt.[49] Within months, he sent his brother, Shahbaz, then chief minister of Pakistan's Punjab province, to congratulate Erdoğan on successfully defeating the "anti-democratic" forces, thereby strengthening the bonds between Ankara and Islamabad. In November 2016, Erdoğan, accompanied with a large business delegation, undertook a two-day visit to Pakistan to thank the Pakistani leadership on their solidarity for democracy in Türkiye. Erdoğan was accorded the honour of addressing a joint session of Pakistan's parliament.[50] In February 2017, Prime Minister Sharif visited Ankara with a large delegation and exchanged views on important bilateral, regional and international issues.

The political convergence strengthened after Imran Khan's election in 2018. Soon after assuming premiership in August 2018, Khan announced his intention of enhancing ties with the "brotherly" country of Türkiye and within six months, in January 2019, visited Türkiye amidst much fanfare.[51] Khan was accompanied by a large delegation and held talks on bilateral issues, including ways to enhance economic and commercial relations and strengthen security and defence ties.[52] The joint statement issued after the talks between Erdoğan and Khan recognised the Turkish support for Pakistan's membership for the Nuclear Supplier's Group (NSG).[53] Khan also thanked Türkiye for opposing the motion to "grey list" Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) plenary meeting in February 2018.[54] In February 2020, Islamabad again hosted Erdoğan with a focus on furthering the political, economic and security cooperation.[55] In addition to other issues, one of the points of discussion during the visit was the signing of an agreement to grant dual citizenship to Pakistani immigrants in Türkiye.[56] Erdoğan participated in the sixth Pakistan–Türkiye High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) meeting and addressed the Pakistani parliament for a record fourth time.[57] Türkiye and Pakistan also cooperated on combating Covid-19 and exchanged medical aid and expertise on how to deal with the unexpected global pandemic.

Islamic Solidarity

Islamic solidarity is an important factor in creating political convergence between Türkiye and Pakistan. The commonality of the idea to develop, or at least project, an alternative global Muslim leadership triggered bonhomie between Erdoğan and Khan. The two, along with Mahathir Mohammed of Malaysia, started

talking about the need for a fresh leadership for the Muslim world to address the conflicts and disputes facing it. At the core of the issue was the perceived dissatisfaction in the larger Islamic world of the Saudi response, by way of its leadership, or the lack of it, in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Arab League, to "burning" conflicts in Palestine and Kashmir.[58] This led to Türkiye, Pakistan and Malaysia calling for a parallel Islamic summit in Kuala Lumpur in December 2019, which Iran also agreed to attend.

The call for a parallel Islamic summit created a serious churn in the relationship between Riyadh and Islamabad with Saudi Arabia making it clear that the summit will be seen as challenging the Kingdom's leadership of the Islamic world. Khan backed out from attending the meeting at the last minute, presumably under Saudi pressure, but continued to court Erdoğan, especially because of the Pakistani frustration over the Arab countries adopting a nuanced position on the Kashmir issue.[59] Islamic solidarity thus is an important factor in the strategic relations between Türkiye and Pakistan and falls within the Turkish foreign policy orientation of developing stronger ties with Muslim-majority countries in the world, including in South Asia, and to stake claim for a leadership position in the Islamic world.

Geopolitical Stirrings

Türkiye and Pakistan over the years developed a common understanding on regional issues and supported each other's actions in their respective neighbourhood. For instance, when in October 2019 Ankara launched a military operation in northern Syria to neutralise the security threat emerging from the Kurdish People's Protection Unit (YPG),[60] Pakistan was among the few countries that extended support to Türkiye.[61] Pakistan was also supportive of Türkiye in the fight against the Kurdish insurgency both within Türkiye and the targeting of the PKK safe havens in Iraq and Syria as well as Turkish actions in Northern Cyprus and Eastern Mediterranean. Pakistani support for the Turkish military intervention in Libya and the military assistance to Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in 2020 helped strengthen the Türkiye–Pakistan strategic relations.

These strategic relations expanded to include countries such as Azerbaijan, Afghanistan and Turkic-speaking countries in Central Asia. In Afghanistan, with the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces and the resurgence of the Taliban, which in August 2021 returned to take control of Kabul and Afghanistan, there were concerns regarding emergence of a Türkiye–Pakistan–Taliban alliance,

which would have led to the expansion of Turkish influence in South Asia. This, however, could not materialise and is unlikely to take a concrete shape, despite some attempts and potentials, due to the lack of economic capacity and internal challenges facing both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Ankara's initial reaction to the Taliban takeover was positive and in Türkiye this was seen as an opportunity to expand Turkish influence in the Southwest Asia region.[62] Initial public statements made by the Taliban regarding a general amnesty, respect for international agreements and boundaries and women's rights were seen as positive gestures in Ankara. Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu said that Türkiye "view[s] positively Taliban's hitherto messages, both to foreigners and diplomatic missions and to its own people. We hope to see the same in their actions as well".[63] Earlier, Erdoğan had emphasised the need to establish direct political contacts with the Taliban and had stated that he would like to personally meet the Taliban leadership if it helps bring peace in the country.[64] Despite these sympathetic expressions, the relations with the Taliban did not progress as planned or expected.

Besides, the Türkiye–Pakistan–Azerbaijan trilateral was able to make serious strategic inroads in the South Caucasus as was noticed during the September–November 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Ankara and Islamabad not only extended military and political support to Baku[65] but also followed it up with hosting the second Türkiye–Pakistan–Azerbaijan trilateral dialogue in Islamabad in January 2021. During the trilateral dialogue, the foreign ministers of the three countries "agreed to strengthen cooperation in diverse fields and people-to-people ties, as well as continue to support each other on all issues involving the three countries' national interests".[66] The *Islamabad Declaration*, which was issued after the meeting, called for enhanced "joint efforts on combating Islamophobia, discrimination and persecution of Muslim minorities, in particular at the regional and international fora, expressing serious concerns over the grave human rights violations and crimes against humanity committed against Muslim communities in various parts of the world".[67] Notably, these three countries are among the five members of the OIC's Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir in addition to Saudi Arabia and Niger.

Ankara and Islamabad have also developed a shared understanding of regional security threats and strive to cooperate for influence in the geographic area traversing South, West and Central Asia. Turkish influence and geopolitical and geo-economic interests in Central Asia are well documented.[68] Similarly, Pakistan considers Afghanistan an area of its geopolitical power play. Türkiye has

ambitions to expand its influence in Southwest Asia and this has led Ankara to take increasing interest in the regional affairs. The most important aspect of their converging interest is the shared threat perception vis-à-vis Afghanistan and the terrorist networks antithetical to them.[69]

Afghanistan, Central Asia and the South Caucasus have conventionally been the focus of regional security cooperation between Türkiye and Pakistan. In the aftermath of the US-led invasion in Afghanistan in 2001, for example, Ankara played a mediatory role in bringing Afghanistan's new leadership and Pakistan to work out their differences. In 2007, a trilateral summit was held in Ankara wherein President Sezer hosted presidents Hamid Karzai and Pervez Musharraf to hold a comprehensive dialogue concerning peace and security in Afghanistan. Following the summit, the *Ankara Declaration* was issued, which emphasised "strengthening bilateral relations, territorial integrity, and non-interference in one another's domestic affairs".[70] With the changed circumstances in Afghanistan after 2021, the role has now reversed with Türkiye looking at Pakistani support to play an important role in Afghanistan, although this has not materialised so far as noted earlier in the chapter.

Commercial Relations

Türkiye–Pakistan commercial relations too have witnessed significant progress in the past few years although they remain much below the trade between India and Türkiye. Bilateral trade increased from US$ 134.19 million in 2000 to US$ 888.92 million in 2019 (**Table 2**). Despite the global business slump due to Covid-19, Türkiye–Pakistan bilateral trade witnessed a notable growth in 2020, mainly on account of the robust Turkish exports that increased from US$ 289.15 million in 2015 to US$ 620.16 million in 2020 (**Table 2**). Among the most important goods of Turkish exports to Pakistan are defence equipment machinery and electrical products, textile and clothing, metals, chemicals, plastic and rubber besides consumer goods, food products etc. Turkish imports from Pakistan include textile and clothing, consumer goods, plastic and rubber, food products, vegetables, chemicals etc.[71]

Table 2: Türkiye–Pakistan Bilateral Trade, 2000-2020 (US$ million)

Year	Exports	Imports	Total Trade
2000	52.11	82.08	134.19
2001	31.19	101.28	132.47
2002	57.34	116.42	173.76
2003	70.35	192.03	262.38

Year	Exports	Imports	Total Trade
2004	86.4	240.72	327.12
2005	187.55	315.46	503.01
2006	129.6	379.64	509.24
2007	157.04	531.62	688.66
2008	155.07	586.24	741.31
2009	162.51	619.22	781.73
2010	248.15	749.93	998.08
2011	213.67	873.13	1,086.8
2012	276.13	555.01	831.14
2013	285.9	436.65	722.55
2014	259.32	435.55	694.87
2015	289.15	310.54	599.69
2016	346.90	263.35	610.25
2017	352.17	323.12	675.29
2018	462.20	330.70	792.9
2019	550.16	306.26	856.42
2020	620.16	268.76	888.92

Source: Adapted from World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS), https://wits.worldbank.org/CountryProfile/en/TUR; and Turkish Statistical Institute, https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Foreign-Trade-Statistics-December-2020-37412&dil=2 (Accessed 12 August 2021).

More than bilateral trade, it is the growing momentum in two-way investments, tourism and regional connectivity that are notable. Pakistan's economic woes have exacerbated, resulting in serious financial challenges with rising external debts and slump in growth. The financial situation has become graver because of the problems with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which had traditionally supported the Pakistani economy by offering generous loans, financial aid and trade, business and work opportunities for Pakistani citizens.[72] In recent years, the Pakistani economy has become increasingly dependent on Chinese investments in the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).[73] Besides China, Türkiye has been extending help to the Pakistani economy with more than 100 Turkish companies doing business in Pakistan as of 2022 and the cumulative Turkish FDI in Pakistan approaching US$ 1 billion as of 2021, according to Pakistani sources.[74] Pakistan has invited Türkiye to invest in projects related to CPEC and in Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across the country.[75]

Moreover, Türkiye and Pakistan intend to sign an FTA although it has remained on hold due to concerns among Pakistani businesses of unfavourable terms. In the meanwhile, they have agreed to work under a Strategic Economic Framework (SEF) to boost bilateral trade and economic cooperation.[76] There are plans to boost regional connectivity and trade through multilateral cooperation with Iran, Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. For example, "in April 2019, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan signed the International Road Transport agreement" to "open a direct Istanbul–Tehran–Islamabad trade corridor with smooth customs control, linking Turkey, Central Asia and Europe".[77] In its wake, a cargo train service between the three cities was started in December 2020.[78] Besides, there are plans for Turkish involvement in the proposed Trans-Afghan railway project and Central Asia–South Asia power project (CASA-1000). Türkiye and Pakistan are also working together to enhance economic cooperation among countries in the Caspian and South Caucasus regions, including Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, and have responded enthusiastically to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through CPEC (Pakistan) and the China–Central Asia–West Asia Economic Corridor (CCAWAEC).[79]

Security and Defence Cooperation

The most important component of the strategic relationship between Türkiye and Pakistan, which is also significant from the Indian point of view, is security and defence cooperation. Türkiye and Pakistan are collaborating in defence manufacturing, arms trade, personnel training and joint exercises. Türkiye has emerged as one of the key arms exporters to Pakistan. Turkish defence manufacturing industry has witnessed a significant boost in the past decades and defence exports have risen 86 per cent between 2010 and 2019.[80] During the same period, Pakistan was the third largest recipient of Turkish arms and military equipment, accounting for nearly 11 per cent of Turkish defence exports.[81] Between 2015 and 2019, Türkiye emerged as the fifth largest arms suppliers to Pakistan behind China, Russia, Italy and the US, and according to some estimates, in 2020–21, Türkiye was the second largest arms exporter to Pakistan after China.[82]

During 2011–13, Türkiye supplied 60 Panter 155mm towed guns to Pakistan as per a deal finalised in 2009, which included the license for production of the guns in Pakistan.[83] In 2015, Pakistan received 34 T-37B trainer aircraft from Türkiye. In 2017 and 2018, Islamabad got 24 ASEPOD Aircraft EO system worth US$ 50 million for use in JF-17 combat aircraft.[84] In 2018, Pakistan Navy launched PNS Moawin, a replenishment tanker built at the

Karachi Shipyard (KSEW) under a joint production agreement with Turkish defence manufacturer, STM.[85] The deal worth US$ 80 million was signed in 2013 between STM and Pakistan's Ministry of Defence. Again in 2018, Türkiye and Pakistan signed an agreement for supply of four MILGEM frigates to Pakistan Navy to be delivered by 2023–25. Accordingly, the first two warships were to be built at Istanbul Shipyard while the next two are to be manufactured at Karachi Shipyard. The first of the four frigates, PNS Babur, which is 99 meters-long and weighs 2,000 tons, was launched on 15 August 2021 in Istanbul and is expected to be inducted into Pakistan's naval fleet in 2023.[86]

In July 2018, Türkiye and Pakistan entered into a US$ 1.5 billion agreement for supplying 30 Turkish-made T-129 Atak helicopters to Pakistan air force.[87] However, this deal has been in limbo due to the US sanctions on a few Turkish individuals and companies over the procurement of S-400 missile system from Russia. Accordingly, Pentagon has refused to issue export licenses for engines and other parts made in the US, forcing Türkiye to seek an extension for the delivery.[88] Besides, Turkish defence manufacturer, Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), has been helping in the upgrade and maintenance of the Pakistan Air Force's (PAF) F-16 fighter jets. In 2008, for example, the TAI and PAF signed a contract for the upgrade and maintenance of 41 F-16 fighter jets of PAF for US$ 64.5 million.[89] In 2016 again, the TAI and PAF began negotiating for an extension of the contract for 74 F-16 jets. Türkiye is also reportedly helping in upgrading three Pakistan Navy submarines.[90]

It is not only Türkiye that supplies equipment to Pakistan. In 2016, for example, Türkiye and Pakistan signed an agreement for the supply of 52 MFI-395 Super Mushshak Trainer Aircraft from Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) to Turkish Air Force. Accordingly, the first batch was delivered in 2020.[91] Besides, media reports suggest that Türkiye and Pakistan have been negotiating the possibilities for the joint production of fighter jets and ballistic missiles.[92] The two countries are keen to further strengthen relations in defence manufacturing as has been noted by their top leadership on different occasions.[93] There are also discussions about cooperation between Türkiye and Pakistan to jointly manufacture drone parts and the supply of Turkish combat and surveillance Unarmed Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) to Pakistani military.[94] There are speculations that Pakistan might help Türkiye acquire nuclear weapon capabilities in case Iran goes nuclear, triggering fears of nuclear proliferation and this is also the reason cited by analysts for close proximity between Ankara and Islamabad.[95]

In addition to arms trade, Turkish and Pakistani militaries share robust relations with regular joint exercises to develop interoperability and joint research and training. In February 2021, for example, Turkish and Pakistani Special Forces held a three-week-long joint military exercise – ATATURK-XI 2021 – in the Khyber Pakhtunkwa region of Pakistan.[96] A few months later, in June, the PAF participated in the International Anatolian Eagle-2021 exercise at the 3rd Main Jet Base in Konya in Türkiye.[97] Such exercises are a common feature between Turkish and Pakistani armed forces. Pakistani military officers regularly attend training programmes in Türkiye. According to some reports, in the two decades since 2000, nearly 1,500 Pakistani Armed Forces personnel have received training in Turkish military schools.[98] Pakistan and Türkiye have a shared understanding of maritime security and Türkiye has been a regular participant in the multination naval exercise, AMAN, conducted by the Pakistani Navy since 2007.[99]

In addition, the Turkish and Pakistani military leadership regularly exchanges views and have established a strong relationship over the years. Ties between the two militaries have been institutionalised through the High Level Military Dialogue Group (HLMDG), which meets annually, alternatively in Ankara and Islamabad. During the HLMDG meeting in Ankara in December 2020, the focus was on enhancing military cooperation and exchanging views on regional security challenges.[100] Türkiye and Pakistan have an institutionalised mechanism through the HLSCC for summit level dialogue to discuss political, economic and security issues of common interest.[101]

The Turkish Challenge for India

Turkish foreign policy behaviour has implications for India at bilateral, regional and systemic levels. At the bilateral level, the Pakistan factor has been significant in keeping the potential in relations unrealised, while the Kashmir issue has seriously disrupted the political ties. At the regional level, Türkiye has emerged as an important power in MENA and Southwest Asia and has expanded its relations in the Caspian and Central Asia regions, thus an antagonistic relation with it can be harmful for India in these regions. At the systemic level, Türkiye has been positioning itself as a middle power by adhering to neutrality in the global rivalries, and this can have some impact on India as well. The most important challenge, however, remains at the bilateral level and pertains to the Pakistan factor that impinges on the situation in J&K. There are also concerns regarding Türkiye trying to gain greater influence among Indian Muslims and extending support to extremist organisations such as the Popular Front of India

(PFI),[102] which has come under the radar of Indian security agencies for its extremist activities that finally led to the banning of the group and a crackdown on its network and leadership in September 2022.[103]

Bilateral Issues: The Pakistan Factor and Kashmir

The Pakistan factor has remained omnipresent in Indo–Turkish relations since the Cold War. As noted earlier in this chapter, Pakistan and Türkiye have developed strategic relations and enjoy extraordinary proximity based on bilateral political convergence, Islamic solidarity, geopolitical interests, trading and commercial ties and strong defence and security relations. Pakistan has used its Islamic credentials since independence to evoke anti-India sentiments in Muslim capitals in the MENA countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and other regional countries. In the past, these countries extended unconditional support to the Pakistani stand on Kashmir to the detriment and dislike of India.[104] However, with improved bilateral relations, the situation has changed in most cases except in the case of Türkiye, wherein Ankara and New Delhi are yet to de-hyphenate the Pakistan factor in their bilateral relations. Ankara's close political relations, economic linkages and ideological synthesis with Islamabad under the AKP have further complicated matters.

Türkiye's special relations with Pakistan have cast a long shadow over relations between India and Türkiye because Ankara's unequivocal support for the Pakistani position on disputes with India makes it difficult for New Delhi to trust it. The confidence building measures through greater political engagements have not succeeded. There are problems at the level of Ankara's understating of New Delhi's sensitivities to internationalisation of the conflict with Pakistan and the Kashmir issue as these are either viewed from the Islamic prism, as projected by Pakistan, or are considered a vestige of colonial past in the subcontinent. The problem with this view is that in India the dispute is not considered an Islamic issue and the colonial history has hardly remained relevant in contemporary times, especially in public memory.[105] For India, the centrality of the problem lies in Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism, which New Delhi has been flagging at various international forums for a long time. At a broader level, the issue has acquired regional and strategic manifestations with India facing a two-front challenge with China and Pakistan in the north and northwest.[106] Moreover, most of the opposition in India over dialogue with Pakistan is not on resolving border disputes or the conflict over Kashmir, rather it is on the issue of Islamabad's constant sponsorship of terrorist activities in South Asia, both in J&K and Afghanistan. It is has been a serious problem that has been causing

instability in South Asia and casting a wide net in MENA, Central Asia and other contiguous regions and the wider world.

Thus, on the issue of international terrorism, the Pakistani harbouring of organisations such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Harkatul Mujahedeen etc., who have also been accused of keeping the insurgency in J&K alive, has been a constant source of friction between India and Pakistan, which Türkiye fails to recognise or take note of. In India, since the 1990s many terrorist attacks, including the 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian parliament, the 2008 Mumbai attacks, two attacks on security forces in 2016 – at an air force station in Pathankot in Punjab in January and at an army brigade head quarter in Uri in September – were attributed to terrorist groups functioning out of Pakistan.[107] Even in February 2019, when India carried out retaliatory air strikes in Pakistan, leading to heightened tensions and fear of an armed conflict, it was in response to a terrorist attack on a security convoy in the town of Pulwama, J&K, by Pakistan-based terrorist groups.[108] The terrorist activities of these groups have not remained confined to the apparently disputed Kashmir region, but have also spread to other parts of India. Hence, during the mid- and late-2000s, one of the major local groups in India that carried out a slew of bombings in different cities across the country, namely the Indian Mujahideen, also had links with Pakistan.[109] Moreover, Islamabad has been responsible for harbouring organisations such as the Taliban responsible for the internal conflict in Afghanistan, and has in the past harboured groups such as al-Qaeda that was responsible for the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US and many bombings and terrorist attacks across MENA and the wider world.[110]

From the Indian point of view, the unconditional political support for Islamabad in Türkiye complicates relations between New Delhi and Ankara. What is even more surprising is that Türkiye itself suffers from the menace of terrorism and undertakes cross-border raids and occupies territory of its neighbouring countries in the name of fighting terrorism and yet it condones terrorism emanating from Pakistan's soil.

The Pakistan factor has also been the main challenge so far as the Turkish position on the dispute over Kashmir is concerned. Türkiye's unequivocal support for the Pakistani position on Kashmir has in recent years completely derailed the political relations between India and Türkiye. Erdoğan has been vocal in raising the issue at various multilateral forums, including at the UNGA.[111] The unnecessary Turkish activism on J&K has led to serious tensions between Ankara and New Delhi since 2019. India took exception to the Turkish

President raising the issue in his UNGA speeches. In 2019, the spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) during a weekly media briefing stated: "We call upon the Turkey government to get a proper understanding of the situation on the ground before they make any further statements on this issue. It is a matter which is completely internal to India".[112] However, this did not deter Türkiye and an almost similar situation arose during the UNGA Summit in 2020 and 2021 when Erdoğan again raised the Kashmir issue, which India termed as "completely unacceptable".[113] In February 2020, when Erdoğan was on an official visit to Pakistan, Kashmir was again raised in public and was included in the joint statement issued by the Turkish and Pakistani leadership. This provoked a sharp Indian reaction with the MEA issuing a statement stating:

> India rejects all references to Jammu & Kashmir, which is an integral and inalienable part of India. We call upon the Turkish leadership to not interfere in India's internal affairs and develop proper understanding of the facts, including the grave threat posed by terrorism emanating from Pakistan to India and the region.[114]

The cancellation of Prime Minister Modi's proposed 2019 visit to Türkiye was not the first time that the Pakistan factor and Türkiye's stand on J&K had created trouble in bilateral relations. For example, soon after the end of the Cold War, as both countries were trying to recalibrate their external relations and approaches, Türkiye took Pakistan's side on the violence in J&K, which was, according to India, being sponsored from across the border in Pakistan. Hence, in 1991, Ankara's condemnation of Indian action in J&K at the OIC foreign ministers meeting led to diplomatic problems between the two countries.[115] Notably, Türkiye has been a founding member of the OIC's Contact Group on Jammu and Kashmir (founded in 1994) and has used the forum to extend support to Pakistan on the Indo–Pakistani dispute over Kashmir. The only time Türkiye showed some pragmatism towards accommodating the Indian position on Kashmir was in the early 2000s when the exchange of visits between Prime Ministers Ecevit (2000) and Vajpayee (2003) generated hopes and called for bilateral settlement of the dispute.[116] According to a Turkish scholar of Asian studies, this was a result of Ankara revising "its traditional stance on Kashmir, from advocating a resolution to the conflict based on UN supervision to calling for a bilateral settlement of the dispute".[117] Notably, this was also the only time in the post-Cold War era when Türkiye–Pakistan relations were stagnant due to divergences on regional and geopolitical issues.[118]

And, although Indo–Turkish relations witnessed some improvement in the economic domain, the Pakistan factor never really allowed the political relations to grow. For instance, on the eve of his visit to India in 2017, Erdoğan in an interview to an Indian television news channel stated that Ankara is willing to host a "multilateral dialogue" to resolve the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan "once and for all".[119] Earlier in August 2016, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu during a visit to Islamabad had said that "Turkey fully supports Pakistan's position on Jammu and Kashmir" and that India should allow the OIC fact-finding team to visit J&K.[120] Subsequently, an OIC delegation led by its Secretary General Iyad Ameen Madani visited Islamabad and the PoK and raised the issue of "human rights violations" and "excessive violence" in J&K.[121] In fact, under the AKP governments, the Turkish support for Pakistan on the Kashmir question has remained steadfast and unconditional. And, besides China, Türkiye is the only major country to have extended support to the Pakistani position on J&K after India's abrogation of the Article 370, which ended the special status of the state.[122]

Regional and Systemic Challenges

A key aspect of the regional challenge for India vis-à-vis Türkiye is on Indian interests in the MENA and Central Asia regions. Türkiye has significantly enhanced its presence and role in MENA since expanding its relations with the regional countries in the first decade of the twenty-first century and through its proactive and aggressive foreign policy actions since the eruption of the Arab Spring uprisings. It has become militarily involved in Syrian and Libyan conflicts, while also having a military presence in Iraq, Qatar and Somalia. Additionally, it has developed strong linkages in the region and played an active role in extending support to Qatar during the Gulf crisis (2017–21).[123] Türkiye has also been supportive of non-state actors such as the transnational Muslim Brotherhood organisation, the Hamas militant organisation in Palestinian territories and the Syrian National Army (SNA) and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in Syria. Türkiye's military prowess and defence exports have been noticed because of its involvement in these conflicts besides the effectiveness of Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones, especially in the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh (2020) between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Libyan conflict (2020) between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the Ukrainian conflict after Russian invasion (2022).

Türkiye's presence in the MENA region goes beyond its immediate foreign policy and security engagements. Ankara wishes to develop a long-term strategic

presence in the region, as has been outlined in Türkiye's strategic depth doctrine,[124] with greater political, economic and security presence and influence in the regional countries. In addition, Türkiye plans to develop as a maritime power and expand its presence beyond its immediate waters in the Black Sea, Aegean Sea and Sea of Marmara, and the Mediterranean Sea, to have a presence in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf and in the Western Indian Ocean, as has been outlined in its Blue Homeland doctrine.[125] Türkiye has also been trying to establish itself as a major power in the Eastern Mediterranean region, which is an energy rich area, and this had led to heightened tensions between Ankara and Cairo in 2020–21. Türkiye's idea of strategic depth goes beyond its immediate neighbourhood to have Turkish area of influence in the Arabian Gulf, South Asia and Central Asia regions, which forms India's immediate and extended neighbourhood. Besides, Türkiye under the AKP has been trying to emerge as an Islamic power in the world, which has led to some friction with countries such as Saudi Arabia. This leads Türkiye to champion perceived global Islamic causes, including the Kashmir issue, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict or the Rohingya problem in Myanmar, all of which affect India directly or indirectly.

Besides, Türkiye's strategic relations with Pakistan and growing interest in South Asia pose some serious challenges for India. Firstly, Ankara and Islamabad have joined forces to run an anti-India propaganda at the global level, questioning Indian sovereignty over J&K; India will have to find effective ways to counter this, as has been discussed in the preceding section. Secondly, the growing security and defence cooperation between Ankara and Islamabad is a threat for India's security both in terms of internal security in context of militancy and terrorism in J&K and security implications in the wider Southwest Asia region, especially in terms of developments in Afghanistan. Here, both India's internal security and security in its viscinity can get affected and harm Indian interests. There are also challenges for maritime security in the western Indian Ocean as India has significant commercial and strategic interests in the region. At the same time, Türkiye wishes to expand its strategic maritime presence in this region by invoking its Ottoman past and by developing close strategic partnerships with Pakistan and China, who are interested in developing maritime presence in the western Indian Ocean region.[126]

Thirdly, with a focus on connectivity and trade, Türkiye and Pakistan have been developing close relations in the South Caucasus, Central Asia and with Afghanistan. This can be detrimental for India's strategic and commercial

interests in this geographically contiguous and geopolitically fragile region. This also pertains to the strong relations between China and Pakistan, at one level, and Türkiye and Pakistan at another level wherein the three can come together to dominate the trade, connectivity and energy resources in Central Asia and the Caspian basin, posing a serious foreign policy challenge for India. Over the years, India has made significant political and diplomatic investment in strengthening relations with the Central Asian countries as well as Afghanistan. This is aimed at exploiting the commercial opportunities on offer pertaining to energy imports and bilateral trade. New Delhi has also invested in connectivity projects such as the Chabahar Port development in Iran to create alternative trade routes between India, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Besides, it is interested in the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that aims to create a multimodal network of ship, rail and road routes for freight movement between India, Central Asia, Russia and Eastern Europe, hence it cannot afford to let anti-India forces gain a dominant position.

The region has emerged as a crucial area for international connectivity projects because of the unexploited trade and commerce potential. China, Russia, Türkiye, Iran, Pakistan and India are the major regional and international powers that are interested in exploiting commercial opportunities by developing connectivity across the region. Through the BRI network, China has moved swiftly to work towards infrastructure and connectivity development and exploiting the resources in the region. Both Türkiye and Pakistan have enthusiastically embraced the Chinese initiatives for commercial gains. Besides, Türkiye has ambitions of its own. It has built strong relationships in the South Caucasus and Central Asia as well as with Pakistan. With Afghanistan under the Taliban, Türkiye and Pakistan can develop transportation corridors and connectivity via the Caspian Sea and Turkmenistan. Regional countries including Iran, Azerbaijan and other Central Asian republics may be willing to join forces for the commercial gains on offer and are likely to gain China's support, which is not only interested but is also already present by developing strategic partnerships with many regional countries.[127]

In addition, Türkiye's foreign policy behaviour and actions can have implications for India in the global geopolitical tensions and competitions between US–EU and Russia–China, that is are often described as the new Cold War. Both Türkiye and India have so far taken a nuanced position on the global politics. India is increasingly getting drawn to positions that seek to contain China due to developments in Indo–Pacific and China's aggressive expansionism

in the Indian Ocean region.[128] But on Russia, New Delhi has refused to take sides by not joining the sanctions regime against Moscow that were imposed by the US and EU countries after the Russian attack on Ukraine. India has instead called for finding ways to end the war and exploring peaceful means for resolution of disputes.[129] Türkiye, on the other hand, has taken a neutral position on both the US–EU problems with Russia and US–China geopolitical tensions. And, since Türkiye does not have any presence in the Indo–Pacific, its positions on Chinese strategic threats might be favourable to China, especially as Türkiye–China relations have been growing and have acquired the status of "strategic partnership" while Türkiye's relations with the US have been troubled due to numerous factors. In addition, Türkiye and China have converged on issues such as connectivity and trade. What is significant from the Indian point of view is Türkiye's quest to emerge as a multi-regional actor and a global middle power, which can impinge on Indian interests in different regions, both in its immediate environment and the extended neighbourhood.

Policy Recommendations for India

Türkiye is neither a direct adversary nor a peer competitor for India. Developing trade relations with India continues to be important for it and will become more so as the Indian economy grows in size and scale. Türkiye also faces serious capacity constraints and resistance from other powers in the region and beyond. In case it continues to follow the contentious foreign policy path then it will have to pay a bigger price than India. There are also some indications of a change in attitude as reflected in efforts at reconciliations with the MENA countries including Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Egypt. Therein lies the hope for New Delhi of influencing Ankara's position on Kashmir that can gradually help in improvement of ties.

In order to mitigate the challenges, New Delhi should think of developing a two-pronged policy of engagement with Türkiye at the bilateral level, underlining the economic incentive of improving relations with India. Here, New Delhi will have to make it absolutely clear both through public expression and through diplomatic engagements that for India the situation in J&K is a no-go area as it is India's internal matter. India's commercial and economic engagement with Türkiye should be made conditional to minimising provocative political actions and statements. This does not mean that New Delhi should shun engagement with Ankara. Instead these steps should lead to better engagement to improve political and diplomatic ties, which, in turn, should also be used to mitigate unnecessary political moves and statements from Ankara.

The linking of commercial interests to respecting political sensitivities should go a long way in underlining the red lines and help avoid undiplomatic moves. Past experiences with countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE can serve as a template for New Delhi to device policies vis-à-vis Türkiye.

Since economic incentives have not worked in the past mainly because the economic ties remain limited and smaller than the potential, India will have to take a more innovative approach of combining geo-economics and geo-politics. This initially will require greater engagement at the Track II level between Indian strategic analysts, researchers and think tanks with considerable understanding of Türkiye and Turkish involvement in Southwest Asia. On the disputes with Pakistan, these forums should mainly underline that Türkiye has no locus standi on Kashmir and the bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan, hence it should take a neutral and non-partisan stand on them. This can gradually be expanded to Track I level and eventually to greater diplomatic and political engagements. The main task for the Track II dialogue should be to emphasise on Türkiye that without de-hyphenating Pakistan, bilateral relations cannot reach their potential. India will also need to develop considerable understanding of the Kurdish problem in Türkiye and appreciate the issue of Kurdish separatism in Türkiye and other regional countries. It should develop greater appreciation of Kurdish aspirations and consider extending support for the Kurdish cause inside Türkiye, if the situation so demands.

At the same time, India should work with important regional countries in the Mediterranean and South, West and Central Asia, including Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Armenia etc., to counter Türkiye's regional ambitions and extend support to them in their bilateral problems with Türkiye. Among specific steps, India should highlight Türkiye's lack of respect of international laws as is reflected in Turkish military interventions in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Cyprus and Nagorno-Karabakh. India should publicly raise this lack of respect in appropriate bilateral and multilateral forums. In terms of more specific steps, India should consider recognising the Armenian genocide of 1915 and commemorate Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day on 24 April every year. Besides, India should also extend its support to Cyprus on its dispute with Türkiye on the Northern Cyprus issue.

In terms of strategy, India needs to become proactive rather than reactive in developing political, commercial and strategic relations with countries in MENA and Central Asia. At the same time, it needs to take steps to not allow Türkiye to gain influence in South Asia. Besides, India should work with other

likeminded countries in MENA and Europe to check Turkish advances in the Mediterranean region and the Arab world. France, Italy, Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, besides Syria, Greece, Armenia and Cyprus are countries who are worried about Turkish expansionism and India should work with them to device steps at the regional level as well as in multilateral forums. This should be aimed at not permanently damaging the scope for improving relations but rather with the objective of minimising the detrimental effect and increasing scope for improving trade and commercial relations, which certainly have immense potential.

Finally, some thought should also be given to organising and hosting seminars and conferences on the subject of external interventions in Syria and Iraq by providing space, support and opportunity to their embassies in New Delhi to reflect on these issues. Candid discussions and clear communication of one's displeasure that any hostile act will be responded to forcefully can go a long way in creating red lines. Further, efforts should also be made by the government, academia and civil society to engage more with the Turkish academia, opposition parties and media to create various levels of dialogue to clearly communicate respective positions on contentious issues.

Conclusion

Indo–Turkish bilateral relations have faced several problems and challenges in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. The potentials in bilateral relations are immense, especially as both are G20 economies and do not have any unresolved bilateral issues. Nevertheless, the economic potentials have hardly been realised and this can mainly be attributed to the lack of warmth in political relations. In fact, despite occasional outbursts of political engagements, India and Türkiye have remained cold to each other politically. In that sense, the bilateral relations, especially the political component of it, can be described as "frozen in time" in the Cold War political dynamics. This has mainly happened because New Delhi and Ankara have failed to effectively de-hyphenate Islamabad in their bilateral dynamics. The Cold War era dynamics of the Pakistan factor and Turkish position on J&K have continued to impede any meaningful development in political relations. This has also affected economic cooperation and harmed bilateral ties, keeping them much below their potential. These need to be effectively managed for India–Türkiye relations to reach their potential. Besides, India faces challenges from Türkiye as it has been expanding its external relations with countries in MENA, South and Central Asia as well as taking

active interest in global politics. These pose strategic challenges for India and it will have to device effective policies to counter them.

Some recent developments indicate that there are scopes for improving ties. Türkiye has been taking steps to reconsider its foreign policy in MENA and taking reconciliatory steps towards regional countries. Much would depend on the outcome of the 2023 presidential and parliamentary elections but notwithstanding whether Erdoğan survives or gives way to a new leadership, the challenges for India will remain more or less the same. Hence, the diplomatic steps of engaging Türkiye and Erdoğan and at the same time developing closer relations with Greece, Cyprus, Armenia and Egypt can prove effective. The situation in Eastern Mediterranean, which has in recent years emerged as a geopolitical entity that connects several countries, including Greece, Türkiye, Cyprus, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and Palestine, is also important from an Indian point of view. The region cuts across old mental maps segmenting Europe, Africa, and the Middle East and is being shaped by several factors including the discovery of natural gas all along Eastern Mediterranean. Secondly, Egypt's reassertion of its historic regional leadership role is notable and thirdly, the growing role of the Gulf countries—the UAE, Qatar and Saudi Arabia—in reshaping the geopolitics of the region can be vital for India's global ambitions. The fourth factor involves Türkiye's sharpening conflicts with Greece, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE which are triggered by President Erdoğan's overweening ambitions. Finally, major powers including France, Russia and China are being drawn into Eastern Mediterranean. India has many old and new partners in the region, and it has begun working with them in multiple formats and overlapping combinations. Meanwhile, there is much to be done in realising the full potential of the "Indo–Abrahamic Accords", especially if Egypt and Saudi Arabia can be brought on board, as has been argued by the Egyptian–American scholar Mohamed Soliman.[130] Recent developments in India's relations with the MENA countries and the establishment of the I2U2 are steps in that direction and can go a long way in creating new templates for India's engagements in MENA.

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