



India and The Rise of Turkism

This article is based on “[Doing Business with Turkey](#)” which was published in the Indian Express on 16/11/2021. It talks about Turkey's expanding influence in Eurasian region and the consequences it holds for India.

Internationalism based on religion, region or secular ideologies has always run headlong into resistance from sectarianism and nationalism. However, these calls for regionalism, internationalism as well as religious and ethnic solidarity often end up as instruments for the pursuit of national interest.

At present, the best suited example of playing the internationalist card for national interest is the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who seeks to reshape his modern nation with the imprint of its earlier Islamic and military glory.

With Turkish presence gradually becoming dominant in the Arab world and in India's neighbourhood as an ally to China, Pakistan and Afghanistan, it becomes necessary for India to turn the tables and start looking towards Turkey as a possible ally.

Expansion of Turkey's Influence

- **Origin of Pan-Turkism:** The origin of the ideology of pan-Turkism dates back to the mid-19th century when campaigns **for uniting Turkic people in Russia** gained traction.
 - Its geographic scope eventually became much wider, covering the huge spread of Turkic people from the “**Balkans to the Great Wall of China**”.
 - However, in the 20th century, the decline of Turkey began with the integration of Turkic people into other states.
- **Increasing Influence of Turkey:**
 - **Economic Influence:** Nearly 5,000 Turkish companies work in Central Asia. Turkish annual trade with the region is around \$10 billion.
 - Turkey has also made **impressive progress in building transportation corridors to Central Asia and beyond**, to China, Georgia and Azerbaijan.
 - **Turkey's Armed Power:** Turkey has stunned much of the world with its **military power projection into the region**; in the [Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict](#), Turkish military intervention decisively tilted the war in favour of the latter.
 - **Geopolitical Influence:** For the Central Asian states, living under the shadow of Chinese economic power and Russian military power, **Turkey offers a chance for economic diversification** and greater strategic autonomy.
 - Turkey's good relations with both Afghanistan and Pakistan have also given space for Ankara to present itself as a **mediator between the warring South Asian neighbours**.
 - Turkey's “[Heart of Asia](#)” **conference or the Istanbul Process** has been a major diplomatic vehicle for attempted Afghan reconciliation in the last few years.
 - **The Ambitious Turkey:** Turkey is a NATO member, however, the fact has not stopped the country from **establishing a strategic liaison with Russia**.

- Despite Turkey's criticism of [China's repression of Turkic Uighurs](#) in Xinjiang, the former shares deep economic collaboration with Beijing.
- Moreover, Ankara's ambitious pursuit of the Islamic world's leadership has not led it to break **diplomatic ties with Israel**.
- **Causes of Expanding Turkish Influence:** Over the last three decades, a number of **soft power initiatives** in education, culture, and religion have raised Turkey's profile in Central Asia and generated new bonds with the region's elites.
 - Though, it is in the **domains of hard power; commercial and military** that Turkey's progress has been impressive.

Challenges for India

- **Complexes India's Eurasian Policy:** The rise of pan-Turkism is bound to have important consequences for Afghanistan, the Caucasus, Central Asia and, **more broadly on [India's Eurasian neighbourhood](#)**.
 - Pan-Turkism certainly adds another layer of complexity to Eurasian geopolitics.
- **Different Approach in Global Politics: India's opposition to alliances and Turkey's alignments** reflected **divergent international orientations** of Delhi and Ankara after the [Second World War](#).
 - The shared secular values between Delhi and Ankara in the pre-Erdogan era were not enough to overcome the strategic differences between the two in the [Cold War](#).
 - Moreover, the current **differences between Delhi and Ankara over Kashmir, Pakistan and Afghanistan** are real and serious.
 - Turkey's growing role in Afghanistan opens a more difficult phase in relations between Delhi and Ankara.
- **Increasing Bilateral Ties with Pakistan:** Turkey's deepening bilateral military-security cooperation with Pakistan made it even harder for Delhi to take a positive view of Ankara.
 - Turkey has become the **most active international supporter of Pakistan** on the Kashmir question.

Way Forward

- **Arranging Strategic Dialogues:** The current political divergence only reinforces the case for a **sustained dialogue between the two governments** and the strategic communities of the two countries.
 - Dealing with Turkey must now be an important part of India's foreign and security policy.
- **Lessons From Turkey's Geopolitics:** Turkey's own geopolitics offers valuable lessons on how to deal with Ankara; Turkey's enduring enthusiasm for Pakistan does not preclude it from doing business (economic and strategic) with India.
 - India, along with maintaining good ties with Saudi Arabia (who considers itself the leader of the Arab world), can also adopt Turkey's approach of maintaining diplomatic ties with both sides.
- **Taking Advantages of Turkey's Politics:** Many Arab leaders reject the policies of the Turkish President that remind them of Ottoman imperialism.
 - They resent his support of groups that seek to overthrow moderate governments in the Middle East. This opens a range of **new opportunities for Indian foreign and security policy in Eurasia**.

Conclusion

- Independent India has struggled to develop good relations with Turkey over the decades. However, **a hard-headed approach in Delhi** might now open new possibilities with Ankara.
- With Turkey set to play a major role in Afghanistan, **India needs to vigorously challenge the former's positions** where it must, and, at the same time, **prepare for a more intensive bilateral engagement**.

Drishti Mains Question

Turkey plays a significant role in India's Eurasia policy. Comment.

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