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INTERNATIONAL PANEL TÜRKİYE-INDIA HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS

Edited by:
Omair ANAS
Yalçın KAYALI

CIWAD India-Centre for India West Asia Dialogue

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Programme Coordinator
Prof. Dr. Ali Merthan DÜNDAR

Redactor
M. Aysun HARPER

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TÜRKİYE AND INDIA MILITARY COOPERATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

*Haluk KARADAĞ**

Relations between Türkiye and India date back centuries. The Mughal Empire was the last Turkish state to rule in the lands of India, which witnessed power struggles involving various Turkish tribes in certain periods of history. The geography of India came under the domination of the British from the 18th century, who held the administration of these lands until the end of the World War II. In 1947, it was divided into two Pakistan and India. In relations with Türkiye, the material and moral support provided by Indian Muslims in the Turkish War of Independence led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk against the imperialist states after the First World War still preserves its place in the memory of the Turkish people. Afterward, there was not much development in the relations between the two countries, and as mentioned above, the British colonial empire also played a role. During the Cold War, there was no significant military cooperation between the two countries who were on the same side, as part of the containment doctrine applied by the United States against the Soviet Union. The closeness that has developed between Pakistan and Türkiye, which has problematic relations with India and has come to the brink of war, especially in the Kashmir issue, also plays a role in this.

The reflection of the political cooperation between Türkiye and Pakistan on military relations has caused India to keep a distance from Türkiye. After the September 11, 2001 attacks in the USA, a rapprochement process emerged between Türkiye and India, who sent military units to Afghanistan to support NATO operations within the scope of the fight against terrorism initiated in the global system. In this, the "The Istanbul Summit for Friendship and Cooperation in the Heart of Asia" meetings, which commenced through the

* *Assoc. Prof., Baskent University Department of Political Science and International Relations, Ankara, Türkiye. hkaradag@baskent.edu.tr*

initiative of Ankara, had an important place. The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process - HoA-IP, which includes 16 countries and 12 regional and international organizations, together with India, was among the developments that paved the way for cooperation between both countries. This initiation aimed to create a platform that puts forward the economic and political cooperation opportunities that focus on regional security in Afghanistan and solve regional problems through neoliberal policies. After the first meetings held on November 2, 2011, this cooperation gained continuity within the framework of the Implementation Plan Concept for the Counter-Terrorism CBM, which was held in Ankara on September 4, 2012.¹

However, despite the development of these projects, Türkiye's perspective on the problems in the region was mostly affected by the perspective of Pakistan and thus, Ankara continued its course of action as more Islamabad-centered. Therefore, the political attitude in question has led to the perception of Türkiye's relations with the countries of the region through Pakistan. For this reason, military cooperation with India, which has the second largest population in the world did (could) not advance, following a rather limited course. The Indian government has made statements stating that it is against Türkiye's operation in northern Syria in 2019.² While President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's mention of the Kashmir issue in the text of his speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 21, 2022, was welcomed by Pakistan, it led to negative statements on the Indian side.³ Türkiye's stance in favor of Pakistan caused India to take the side of Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Despite the negative political atmosphere between Türkiye and India, there are some positive developments within the scope of military cooperation. One of these is mutual military personnel visits at the

¹ India Ministry of External Affairs, India-Turkey Relations, Retrieved from: https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Turkey_Brief_Unclas_29_Jan_2013.pdf (11 November 2022).

² The Times of India, India slams Turkey for its 'unilateral military offensive' in northeast Syria, Retrieved from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-slams-turkey-for-its-unilateral-military-offensive-in-northeast-syria/articleshow/71520852.cms> (11 November 2022).

³ Prashant Ja, Turkish President Erdogan raises Kashmir at UN meet again. There is a difference, Hindustan Times, Retrieved from: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/turkish-prez-erdogan-raises-kashmir-at-un-meet-again-there-is-a-difference-101663781800581.html> (11 November 2022).

general/admiral level, while another is the execution of military training and drills, and the last one is signing agreements regarding the purchase of military weapon systems and other defense systems.

Mutual Military Personnel Visits

The direct relations between Türkiye and the Indian Armed Forces have remained distant for many years due to friendly relations with Pakistan. In the aforementioned process, reciprocal relations were maintained between military personnel assigned only within the scope of United Nations peacekeeping operations, apart from military attachés, but these processes did not go beyond individual efforts. However, in recent years, mutual military personnel visits have started to be carried out as a result of the dialogues between governments. In particular, the officers studying at the Indian Defense College in May 2012 visited Türkiye and contributed to the cooperation process. In November 2012, Admiral Murat Emin Murat Bilgel, the Commander of the Turkish Naval Forces (Navy Commander), visited India. During this visit, Admiral Bilgel held various consultations with senior military personnel of the Indian Navy in New Delhi, Agra, and Mumbai. In October 2021, some personnel from the Indian Navy participated in the Situational Awareness at Sea training held at the Maritime Security Center of Excellence in Türkiye.⁴

Bilateral Military Exercises and Operations

Apart from the issues mentioned above, various cooperation activities have started to be carried out recently between the warships of the navies of both countries. One of them was the drill known as Passage Exercise (PASSEX) during a routine visit to Mumbai city by Turkish Navy warships on 10-11 July 2011. The warships participating in the said exercise carried out activities such as target recognition, communication with visual signals, and the manoeuvres by officers of the watch.⁵

⁴ India Ministry of External Affairs, India-Turkey Relations, Retrieved from: https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Turkey_Brief_Unclas_29_Jan_2013.pdf (11 November 2022).

⁵ Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry of Defence, India Turkey Naval Exercise, Retrieved from: <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=75703> (11 Kasım 2022).

A military delegation from the Turkish Navy made a coordinated visit to New Delhi and Mumbai on 19-22 September 2012. In addition, a group of representatives from the Turkish Naval Forces participated in the Regatta Admiral's Cup held at the Indian Naval Academy in Kerala between 27 November and 1 December 2012.⁶

Apart from the above-mentioned activities, Indian Armed Forces personnel worked in cooperation with Turkish military personnel in various military missions abroad. Although the Turkish Armed Forces mainly serve in military missions within the scope of NATO, it participates in United Nations peacekeeping operations with some units. Indian Armed Forces are also known to be heavily involved in UN peacekeeping operations. As a result, the military personnel of the two countries serving in the same missions fulfill many tasks together. As an example, in the operation known as the United Nations Mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) based in Naqoura in Lebanon, some Turkish and Indian headquarters officers work collaboratively and contribute to the establishment of international peace and security in cooperation.

Agreements for the Sale of Military Weapon Systems and Other Defense Systems

The most striking example in this regard is the participation of Turkish companies in an important tender within the scope of the five large fleet support shipbuilding opened by the Indian Ministry of Defense and being the winner as a result of the tender. A consortium of Sedef, Sefine, and Anadolu Shipyards, known as TAIS, participated in the tender for the construction of five ships, each of which has a size of 45,000 tons, and was the party that submitted the most appropriate bid in the tender worth 2.3 billion USD. In the tender opened in 2019, the world's leading Russian, German, and South Korean companies were among the competitors of TAIS, but TAIS won the tender as the party that submitted the most appropriate bid. The said tender has made history as the largest and most comprehensive tender the Turkish defense industry has ever received abroad. However, the statements made by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan regarding the Kashmir region during the 74th General Assembly meetings of the United Nations on September 24,

⁶ India Ministry of External Affairs, India-Turkey Relations, Retrieved from: https://mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Turkey_Brief_Unclas_29_Jan_2013.pdf (11 November 2022).

2019, drew a reaction in the Indian media, and calls for a boycott were made to cancel the tender.⁷

Apart from the aforementioned field of activity, Savronik, which was established in 1986 to support the Turkish defense industry, participated in various tenders in India, won them, and continued its activities in India. This company carries out various activities in India with the partnership established under the name of "Savronik Systems India". The partnership formed with STFA, a Turkish company gained appreciation with several projects, including the Atal Tunnel project, the Pir-Panjal Railway tunnel (Banihal-India), known as the longest railway tunnel, the Chenani-Nashri tunnel, which is the longest highway tunnel, and finally the long highway tunnel (J&K-India), also known as the T-9 Railway tunnel (Assam-India), which contributes to the interconnection of existing strategic roads in India.⁸

Conclusion

Turkish and Indian societies, which are not very different from each other historically and culturally, have many common features at the level of states. The cooperation activities between the two countries, whose mutual trade volume is approximately 8 billion USD, can increase.⁹ Considering that India is the second most populous country in the world after the People's Republic of China, this cooperation also has a large economic capacity. For this reason, increasing the bilateral trade volume with India by following neoliberal policies is in favor of both countries. In the military field, the aforementioned

⁷ Kerim Ülker, Hindistan Türk şirketlerin kazandığı 2.3 milyar dolarlık ihaleyi imzaladı. Dünya Gazetesi, 24 November 2020.

Martin Manaranche, Indian MoD Signed A Contract With Turkey's TAIS Shipyards For 5 Fleet Support Vessels, Naval News, Retrieved from: <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/05/indian-mod-signed-a-contract-with-turkeys-tais-shipyards-for-5-fleet-support-vessels/> (13 November 2022)

⁸ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, A Turkish connection to Atal Tunnel, The Economic Times, Retrieved from: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/turkish-connection-to-atal-tunnel/articleshow/78477966.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst (13 November 2022).

Erkan Yılmaz, Hindistan'daki Atal Tüneli'nde Türk Mühendislerin İmzası Var, Retrieved from: <https://www.tasimadunyasi.com/karayolu/hindistandaki-atal-tunelinde-turk-muhen-dislerin-imzasi-var-h8024.html> (13 November 2022).

⁹ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hindistan'ın Ekonomisi, Retrieved from: <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/hindistan-ekonomisi.tr.mfa> (15 November 2022).

cooperation opportunities present a multidimensional structure that includes unlimited opportunities. Although there are many opportunities for cooperation between the two countries, especially in the context of naval forces, the abundance of the said opportunities in the field of combating global terrorism draws attention.

However, Türkiye has been shaping its relations with India through Pakistan for years. This situation is the most important factor preventing the further development of Türkiye-India relations. Considering Türkiye's cultural, historical, and economic power, it is within Türkiye's existing capacity to develop friendly relations with both Pakistan and India by using her soft power. With the recent "Asian Re-fopening" initiated by the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the necessity of re-evaluating the relations between Türkiye and India for maintaining an effective foreign policy in Asia and developing a strategic cooperation plan emerged. In this respect, the current efforts to establish constructive and sustainable relations with both Pakistan and India can be paced. In addition, the Republic of Türkiye can play an important role in establishing "positive peace" between both countries, as she is one of the few countries that has the potential to act as a mediator between Pakistan and India from a historical, cultural, and military perspective.

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