

INDIA-TURKEY RELATIONS: FROM HAND SHAKING TO ARM WRESTLING

AV CHANDRASEKARAN

INTRODUCTION

India-Turkey relations nose-dived into a steep spiral post the Pahalgam massacre in Jammu and Kashmir on April 22, 2025, when 26 tourists were identified and shot dead, sending shockwaves across India. The massacre bore the hallmarks of a Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) sponsored operation which breached the tolerance of India. With Pakistan identified as the sponsor of the terror, it came as no surprise when Turkey, its new old friend, threw its weight behind Pakistan, urged both India and Pakistan to de-escalate, and endorsed Pakistan's call for a neutral probe. Turkey's choice of siding with Pakistan and not condemning the terrorist attack did not go down well with the Indian establishment.

Turkey has been the third largest arms supplier to Pakistan after China and the Netherlands but its role in the post-Pahalgam attack by offering an unspecified number of drones to Pakistan just prior to the Indian attacks on May 7, 2025, on the terrorists' hideouts in Pakistan, was the last straw. Further, it was deeply involved in the short skirmish between India and

Group Captain **AV Chandrasekaran** (Retd) served in the Indian Air Force for 35 years and has handled various operational assignments.

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Pakistan by sharing operational techniques and supplying remotely piloted aircraft battle plans, thus, playing an almost direct role in the hostilities. Two Turkish military operatives were killed when they were manning the Turkish systems as Pakistan did not have the requisite operational experience to operate the Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles.¹ The sailing in of a Turkish Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) corvette, the TCG *Buyukada*, into Karachi port during the conflict sent mixed signals

to India over the not so well disposition of Turkey towards India. The Turkish Ambassador to Pakistan Dr Irfan Neziroglu said the visit of the ship was to express solidarity with Pakistan.²

The landing of a Turkish military C-130 post the Pahalgam attack also sent conflicting signals to India. Was Turkey tempting fate and prompting India to take offensive action against its assets in Pakistan so that it could be drawn into the conflict? If Turkey was nursing such ill-intentions, it would have serious ramifications for the future trajectory of India-Turkey relations. The necessity of a third nation warship in its port is also evidence of Pakistan's nervousness about a possible retaliation by India and also its own inherent military weakness to counter an Indian attack, thus, necessitating assistance by a third country.

Further, to continue to provoke India, a Turkish Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)-backed Islamist group in Bangladesh, under the title "Saltanat-e-Bangla", has published a map pronouncing a greater Bangladesh

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1. Shivani Sharma, "Turkey Helped Pak Attack India, Sent 350+ drones, Military Operatives", <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/turkey-helped-pak-army-plan-attack-on-india-supplied-350-drones-military-operatives-sources-2724565-2025-05-14>. Accessed on May 18, 2025.
 2. "Why Did Turkish Warship TCG *Buyukada's* Arrive at Karachi Port Amid India-Pakistan Tensions", The Week News Desk, <https://www.theweek.in/news/world/2025/05/05/turkish-warship-tcg-buyukada-arrives-at-karachi-port-amid-india-pakistan-tensions.html>. Accessed on May 18, 2025.

that includes Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and the entire northeastern India, in addition to the Myanmar Arakan state. The map was openly displayed in universities across Bangladesh and this brazen act of imperilling Indian sovereignty with the active participation of the Turkish NGO has been viewed with alarm and concern in India.³ India has taken certain firm actions against Turkey and has revoked the security clearance for the Turkish firm Celebi Airport Services which was carrying out ground handling functions in major Indian airports, citing national security threats. In view of the sizeable footfall of Indian tourists visiting the country, India has asked its citizens to boycott Turkey and not visit it. The relationship seems to be heading into strong headwinds, and further turbulent times seem to be in the offing. What does the future hold for India-Turkey relations? This paper aims to analyse the path ahead for both countries and whether they will go on a confrontational path and the global impact thereafter.

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HISTORICAL CONNECTION

India and Turkey shared warm and cordial relations pre-Indian independence, with many supporters from the Indian subcontinent supporting the Turkish freedom struggle from 1919-22 under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Mahatma Gandhi had initiated a resolute step in support of justice for the Turks as they had been treated shabbily post World War I. The other prominent Indian supporters included Dr MA Ansari who was deeply involved in both the Indian independence and Khilafat movements. The Khilafat movement was basically a political campaign which was spearheaded by the Indian

3. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "Turkish NGO Maps Greater Bangladesh with Indian States", <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/turkey-backed-group-in-bangladesh-circulates-greater-bangladesh-map-showing-indian-territory/articleshow>. Accessed on May 18, 2025.

Muslims protesting against the proposed dismemberment of the erstwhile Ottoman Empire by the victorious Balkan League forces.⁴ It was Dr Ansari who led a mercy medical outreach to treat the wounded Turkish soldiers who were fighting against the Balkan League comprising Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro and Greece. The Balkan League emerged victorious and put an end to centuries of Ottoman rule over the Europeans and the outcome saw a truncated Turkey losing most of its land holdings and almost 65 per cent of its European population.⁵ Both India and Turkey enjoyed harmonious connections and the cordial relations continued post Indian independence. In 1948, Turkey was among the first European nations to recognise Indian independence from the British.

A NATION TRANSFORMED

The Cold War between the powers of the western hemisphere and the then erstwhile Soviet Union saw two blocs emerging and pitted against each other. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) saw the grouping of the western powers, and the Warsaw Pact saw the amalgamation of the East European countries under the protection of the Soviet umbrella. The nations in the other parts of the world were unfortunately drawn into this intense power rivalry. Turkey became a member of NATO but India chose to follow the non-aligned path, thus, leading to differing strategic orientations which were not viewed positively by the USA and its allies. India's path of non-alignment did not endear it with the Soviet Union either but India under Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru stood steadfast in its global engagement tactics, ably supported by countries like Yugoslavia and Egypt. In 1971, to counter Pakistan, aided by a belligerent USA, a friendship treaty was signed by India with the USSR which offered a comprehensive security partnership. This security alliance stood India in good stead and led to the comprehensive

4. "Khilafat Movement", <https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/freedom-movement-detail.htm?17>. Accessed on May 18, 2025.

5. Eyal Ginio, "The Ottoman Culture of Defeat: The Balkan Wars and Their Aftermath", <https://www.insightturkey.com/book-reviews/the-ottoman-culture-of-defeat-the-balkan-wars-and-their-aftermath>. Accessed on May 18, 2025.

defeat of Pakistan, and the birth of Bangladesh. During this period, India and Turkey were virtually on opposing sides as Pakistan then was a member of the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and was an ally of the USA which automatically drew Turkey closer to Pakistan. This alignment limited the interactions between India and Turkey due to differing ideologies but trade and commerce experienced a positive evolution during the 1970s and 1980s and saw the signing of a Bilateral Trade Agreement in 1973 which paved the way for the successful establishment of the Joint Commission on Economic and Technical Cooperation (JCETC) in 1983.⁶

Further, India and Turkey were in support of opposing sides in the Afghan War when India backed the USSR, and Turkey, as a member of NATO automatically supported the USA and, hence, the relationship was shaped by hidden intricacies. It was in 1986 when the Prime Minister of Turkey Mr. Tugut Ozal visited India that the relations saw an upward swing and both countries expressed keenness in developing shared interests and also agreed upon the mutual housing of defence attaches in their embassies.⁷ Further, the globalisation also facilitated enhancement of their commercial relations. The India-Turkey Joint Business Council (JBC) was launched in 1996, which was a combined effort by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK) to further encourage trade and commerce between the two countries.⁸ The countries kept building their economic relations steadily despite political upheavals all around.

PARTNER TO DISRUPTOR

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) won Turkey's national elections in 2002. He triggered the pride of

6. "India-Turkey Relations", https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/CountryQuickLink/840_Turkey_December_2014_eng_1_.pdf. Accessed on May 18, 2025.

7. Ministry of External Affairs Central Europe Division, "India-Türkiye Relations", https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/19_-08-_2023_Websites_India_-_Turkiye_Relations__1_.pdf. Accessed on May 19, 2025.

8. Rashmi Gujarati and Hayri Uygun, "Bilateral Trade: Between India and Turkey", *Journal of Business and Trade (JOINBAT)* 1(1), 53-60, 2020, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/1931427>. Accessed on May 19, 2025.

the Turks, promising an assured and dynamic Turkish nationalism. He then proceeded to artfully project himself as a people's man and a universalist modern Muslim. It was during the initial presidency of Mr. Erdogan that the period from 2002-10 saw a positive shift of economic priorities and witnessed upgraded high level conferences with India and a heightened focus on trade and commerce; and the decade and a half following 2002 saw thriving trade touch a volume of \$8.7 billion.⁹ It is an established fact that Erdogan salvaged Turkey's flapping economy, which was suffering from widespread joblessness and a galloping inflation. Meanwhile, he implanted quite a bit of conservative theology and encouraged performative patriotism by the masses, which the greater number of the Turks did not seem to mind since the economy and Turkey's status in the world remained unaffected.

Turkey always maintained a close relationship with Pakistan as both were part of the same centres of power which was pro-American, and had a number of agreements starting as early as 1954. Increasing bilateral cooperation between the two countries was witnessed, and during the Cyprus crisis of 1972, when the Turks aggressed on the Cypriots and Greece, Pakistan was the only country that backed Turkey's aggression and also committed to send a military force to assist Turkey.¹⁰ There was also a defence treaty which was signed in 1980 by the two countries that aimed to optimise defence coordination which also included weapon transfers. This treaty also saw the Pakistani F-16s undergoing a midlife update in the 2000s by Turkey.¹¹ The bond was further strengthened post 9/11 and there were regular joint exercises and cross-training between the forces of the two countries.

9. "India-Turkey Joint Statement during the State Visit of the President of Turkey to India (30 April to 1 May 2017)", https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28433/IndiaTurkey_Joint_Statement_during_the_State_Visit_of_the_President_of_Turkey_to_India_30_April_to_1_May_2017. Accessed on May 18, 2025.

10. Syed Shafiq, "China, Pakistan Want Turkey To Replace Saudi Arabia As The Leader Of Islamic World?" <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/china-pakistan-want-turkey-to-replace-saudi-arabia-as-the-leader-of-islamic-world/>. Accessed on May 19, 2025.

11. Sushant Singh, "Pakistan F-16 Controversy: Three Key Questions, Evidence on the Ground and in the Air", <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/indian-air-force-pakistan-f-16-shot-down-balakot-air-strike-abhinandan-5663980/>. Accessed on May 19, 2025.

Turkey's divergences and animosity with India probably stem from the friendly relations that India has with Cyprus, Armenia and Greece. India has been supportive of Cyprus ever since it became an independent nation in 1960, freeing itself from the British colonial rule. In 1974, when Turkey invaded Cyprus and occupied half of it, the first nation to protest was India. Turkey continues to hold the captured territory till date though half a century has passed since its illegal invasion. The Western powers that always like to ride high on morals, have neither condemned it nor made any attempt to negotiate a positive outcome. India's continuing support to Cyprus was viewed with irritation by Turkey. Further, India did not endear itself to Turkey over Turkey's action against Syria, which was also condemned by many nations, and also due to the moral stance India had taken on Armenia and Greece.¹²

It is a historical fact that Turkey and Armenia have always had a strained relationship over the Armenian genocide and Turkey's decision to back Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Further, Turkey's decision to supplement Azerbaijan with generous military assistance of drones which profoundly influenced the outcome of the war in favour of Azerbaijan and led to Armenia losing the disputed territory, also had a telling effect on the relations.¹³ India and Armenia have always had a friendly connection, as Armenia is an ally of Russia, and India and Russia have shared very strong bonds for over five decades. Armenia had always been unwavering in its support to India over Kashmir in the United Nations and other fora, wherever the topic came up for discussion. India entered into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement with Armenia in 2019 which resulted in an enhanced trade and defence relationship.¹⁴ As a part of this ongoing agreement, India

12. Indrani Bagchi, "India Criticizes Turkey's Military Action, in Syria, Calls for Restraint", <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-criticises-turkeys-military-action-in-syria-calls-for-restraint/articleshow/71524160.cms>. Accessed on May 20, 2025.

13. Mathew Droin and Tina Dolbaia, "A Renewed Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Reading Between the Front Lines", <https://www.csis.org/analysis/renewed-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-reading-between-front-lines>. Accessed on May 20, 2025.

14. Nvard Chalikyán and Benyamin Poghosyan, "The Geopolitical Aspects of the India-Armenia Partnership", <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-geopolitical-aspects-of-the-india-armenia-partnership>. Accessed on March 20, 2025.

The Brahmos missiles, once supplied to Greece and deployed in the disputed Eastern Aegean Islands can be a forceful deterrent for intruding Turkish naval vessels. This sale can put Turkey in a great deal of strategic vulnerability.

supplied Armenia with Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers and Swati radars which was not received well by Turkey and only increased its animosity towards India.

India and Greece have always enjoyed a warm friendship, and Greece as a member of NATO, has always been supportive of India's just quest to emerge as a world power. India's augmented interests in the Mediterranean are due to its growing energy demands as rich oil and gas resources are available in abundance

in the region.¹⁵ Greece has always been supportive of India on the Kashmir issue and has also been among the first to condemn terrorism in any form. When Pakistan requested Greece to supply batteries for its submarine fleet, the Government of Greece refused to supply the same due to India's request to it to not facilitate Pakistan's military modernisation.¹⁶ Further, Greece is in sync with India's maritime strategy in the areas of navigation and security, and India can facilitate the balancing of the antagonistic influence of hostile powers in the region. The Indian Air Force further participated in a military exercise organised by Greece from March 31 to April 11, 2025, with nine other nations.¹⁷ Greece desires to purchase strategic weaponry from India, and the Brahmos cruise missile is on top of the list. The Brahmos missiles, once supplied to Greece and deployed in the disputed Eastern Aegean Islands can be a forceful deterrent for intruding Turkish naval vessels. This sale can put Turkey in a great deal of strategic vulnerability as the efficacy of the Brahmos missiles was seen in the May 2025 clash with Pakistan. India's closeness with

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15. Abhay Rathore, "Why India's Growing Closeness to Armenia and Greece Will Trouble the Turkey, Azerbaijan and Pakistan Axis", <https://swarajyamag.com/politics/why-indias-growing-closeness-to-armenia-and-greece-will-trouble-the-turkey-azerbaijan-and-pakistan-axis>. Accessed on May 20, 2025.
 16. "Greece Rejects Pakistan's Request for Submarine Batteries", *Greek News*, <https://greekcitytimes.com/2023/04/07/greece-rejects-pakistans-request-for-submarine-batteries/>. Accessed on May 21, 2025.
 17. Ministry of Defence, "Indian Air Force to Participate in Multi-Nation Air Exercise Iniochos-25", <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2116710>. Accessed on May 20, 2025.

Greece has been the cause of great heartburn for Turkey.

The political disagreements between Turkey and India also are over the issue of the FetullahGülenMovementwithitsheadquarters in Saylorburg in the USA and a presence in over 180 countries. Turkey declared the Gulen Movement a terrorist organisation in May 2016, and placed unreasonable pressure on the Indian government to shut down the Gülen schools in Delhi and elsewhere in the country

but India has resisted the attempts and demanded evidence that would hold good in court and, hence, has not closed the schools.¹⁸

India was rightly pained when Turkey was struck by a devastating earthquake and the Indians were the first responders, rushing in maximum aid, along with Indian military medical professionals.

ROOTS OF A ROCKY RELATIONSHIP

India has its own list of issues against Turkey that has pitted it against the country. However, India was rightly pained when Turkey was struck by a devastating earthquake and the Indians were the first responders, rushing in maximum aid, along with Indian military medical professionals. Turkey's stance against India in the recent standoff between India and Pakistan in May 2025 left the Indians feeling a sense of betrayal. In addition, the following were some of the causes for the widening gap in relations between India and Turkey.

- (i) The source of tension from India's viewpoint is the stand that Erdogan always takes on Kashmir at multiple fora, including the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) which has been infringing on India's internal affairs and supporting a fellow Islamic state that stands accused of being the terror patron. Further, he continues to disseminate a wrong narrative that Kashmir should be immediately demilitarised, and

18. "Close Gulen's Institutions in India, Demands Turkey", <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Close-Gulen%E2%80%99s-institutions-in-India-demands-Turkey/article14559016.ece>. Accessed on May 20, 2025.

implores Kashmiris living all over the world to return to Kashmir. Unfortunately, his clarion call for demilitarisation does not include Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). He has also broached the idea of a multinational peace force for the security of the region and continues projecting Kashmir as a grave international issue which requires international intervention. Further, Turkey and Pakistan use the OIC platform to amplify narratives on India's Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA)/National Register of Citizens (NRC), claiming Islamophobia.¹⁹

- (ii) Turkey's official broadcasting service "TRT World" which has been recently banned in India, centres on Kashmir's social, political, and security scenarios through doctored videos, with the majority of the contributors being young Kashmiri scholars. The doctored videos and the spin doctrine that are periodically broadcast by TRT World are highly advanced and masterfully executed. Their visual presentation, coupled with the graphics, is comparable to some of the best in the world and can instantly appeal to various human rights organisations in the world, thus, fortifying the false narrative over the happenings in Kashmir. It is no surprise that TRT World has 50 Pakistanis in its staff of 300 working from Istanbul. TRT World and Anadolu Agency were among the first international platforms to echo Pakistan's stand on the abrogation of Article 370.²⁰
- (iii) It is reasonably assumed that yet another trigger for Erdogan's anti-India stance is India's refusal to share nuclear technology with Turkey. Erdogan had been pushing for nuclear technology cooperation aggressively during his visits to India in 2017 and 2018 but India has always been conservative in sharing nuclear technology.²¹

19. "Erdogan Assures Support to Khan over Kashmir Crisis", <https://www.trtworld.com/turkey/erdogan-assures-support-to-khan-over-kashmir-crisis-28782>. Accessed on May 20, 2025.

20. "7 Factors that Forced India to Crack Down on Turkey's TRT", <https://www.firstpost.com/world/india-bans-blocks-trt-world-media-boycott-turkey-tensions-with-pakistan-operation-sindoor-13888418.html>. Accessed on May 21, 2025.

21. Prabhash K Dutta, "Beyond Aamir-Lady Erdogan Meet: How Indo-Turkish Relations Have Changed", <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/aamir-khan-emine-erdogan-meet-india-turkey-relations-1712832-2020-08-19>. Accessed on May 21, 2025.

- (iv) India's exclusion from the Turkey-led dialogue on Afghanistan in 2010²² and Ankara's attempts to obstruct India's membership in the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG), both supposedly under Pakistan's pressure, had increased stress in the relationship. Erdogan's attempts to amplify Turkey's influence among South Asian Muslims comes against the backdrop of his pitch to challenge Saudi Arabia's dominance in the Islamic world, and his attempt to bully the benign Islamic nations in India's neighbourhood.
- (v) GASAM, a Turkish think-tank led by Ali Sahin, a Turkish politician and former minister, who has had his graduate and post-graduate education in Karachi, is a close confidante of Erdogan and a key figure in Turkey's close relations with Pakistan. GASAM functions as a leading platform for propagating Turkey's Islamic agenda among the South Asian Muslims. Mr. Ali Sahin spearheads a targeted strategy proclaiming that the Indian Muslims are being singularly targeted for their beliefs and are being subdued by Hindu nationalist forces. He intends to capitalise on the fears of the Muslim community and create restlessness among them. This is also to ensure that the Muslims' faith in the Indian constitutional and democratic system is undermined by raising issues like the Babri Masjid demolition and beef lynching cases. This organisation has the full support of Pakistan and Mr. Ali Sahin was conferred the Sitara-i-Pakistan by the president of Pakistan in 2020.²³
- (vi) Turkey continues to maintain a close relationship through funding and weaponry with both Pakistan's and Bangladesh's Jamaat-e-Islami, a fundamentalist Islamic organisation which advocates the strict implementation of Islam in all walks of life, and rejects secularism. The

22. "Afghanistan-India-Pakistan Trialogue 2009: A Report", https://in.boell.org/sites/default/files/afghanistan_india_pakistan_trialogue_2009.pdf. Accessed on May 21, 2025.

23. Abhinav Pandya, "Turkey's Islamist Agenda in India", <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/turkey-s-islamist-agenda-in-india.pdf>. Accessed on May 21, 2025.

Jamaat in both countries has taken a hardline stance against India and poses serious security risks.²⁴

- (vii) Further, Turkey also funds and arms the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army also known as Harakah Al Yaqin, led by Ataullah Abu Ammar Jununi who was born in Karachi, Pakistan, and lived in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.²⁵ This is designated as a terrorist group by the Government of Myanmar. His group was largely responsible for recruiting underage boys for fighting against Myanmar and was also involved in smuggling and prostitution rackets. One of the core points concerning the Rohingyas is their uncompromising attitude—the majority of them are radicalised Muslims. They are against secular individuals, nations, and governments, and India is in their crosshairs as the Indian government has been reluctant to allow them to enter India as refugees. Though Jununi has recently been arrested in Bangladesh, his followers continue to pose security risks to India through illegal entry.²⁶
- (viii) India's DCM Shriram Industries signed a joint partnership deal with Zyrone Dynamics, a Turkish UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) manufacturer, and holds a 30 per cent stake in the company. This investment was made in 2021, with DCM Shriram investing US\$ 1 million. The partnership agreement was signed at the International Defence Industries Fair in Istanbul²⁷ and aimed to develop and manufacture versatile drones for various applications, including defence, agriculture, and strategic use. However, the Turkish government imposed a comprehensive ban on the export of military

24. "Bangladesh Rejects Turkey's Offer Due to Erdoğan's Support for Jamaat-e-Islami", *Nordic Monitor*, <https://nordicmonitor.com/2019/09/bangladesh-rejects-turkeys-offer-due-to-erdogans-support-to-jamaat-e-islami/>. Accessed on May 25, 2025.

25. "Rohingya Camps Turn Into Hub of Global Terrorism; Pose Big Security Threat To India, B'Desh: OPED", <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/rohingya-camps-turn-into-hub-of-global-terrorism/>. Accessed on May 26, 2025.

26. "Illegal Rohingyas Have no Fundamental Right to Reside in India, Asserts Govt in SC", <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/illegal-rohingyas-have-no-fundamental-right-to-reside-in-india-asserts-govt-in>. Accessed on May 26, 2025.

27. "India's DCM Shriram Buys 30% Stake in Turkish Drone Maker", <https://www.theweek.in/news/biz-tech/2021/08/20/india-dcm-shriram-buy-30-stake-in-turkish-drone-maker.html>. Accessed on May 26, 2025.

equipment to India in 2024, which has put India on the list of countries to which Ankara will not supply military and defence products. But military exports, including the Bayraktar drones continue unabated to Pakistan.

INDIAN CIVIL AVIATION'S DEPENDENCE ON TURKEY: IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS

Air India Express and Indigo, India's two biggest commercial air carriers are largely dependent on Turkey for the maintenance of their aircraft fleet. Turkish Technic is a subsidiary of Turkish Airlines and offers upkeep through Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) to the Indian aircraft. Turkish Technic has signed a pact with Air India Express, a subsidiary of the Air India group, to service their Boeing 737 fleet. The agreement covers the component support and solution needs of 190 Boeing 737-8 and 737-10 aircraft, enabling Air India Express to benefit from the considerable component services such as resource aggregation, repair, overhaul, modification, and logistics services of Turkish Technic. Making the best use of its comprehensive global value chain and technical expertise, Turkish Technic continues to strengthen the operational efficiency and fleet reliability of the Air India Express fleet.²⁸

Further, Indigo and Turkish Technic entered into a deal at the MRO Middle East 2025, to basically cover the redelivery checks of IndiGo's 10+ Airbus A320 neo aircraft which are done in Turkish Technic's Istanbul Atatürk and Sabiha Gökçen Airport facilities. Redelivery checks in aviation are full scale inspections performed on an aircraft when it is returned to its lessor at the end of a lease.²⁹ These checks validate the aircraft's condition against the lease agreement's redelivery conditions, fulfilling compliance with sets of regulations and forestalling potential financial penalties for

28. "Turkish Technic and Air India Sign New Agreement", <https://www.timesaerospace.aero/news/maintenance/turkish-technic-and-air-india-sign-new-agreement>. Accessed on May 26, 2025.

29. "Turkish Technic and IndiGo Strengthen Partnership", <https://www.timesaerospace.aero/news/maintenance/turkish-technic-and-indigo-strengthen-partnership>. Accessed on May 26, 2025.

A ‘damp lease’ in aircraft leasing is a trade arrangement whereby the lessor provides the aircraft and some of the crew (usually, the cockpit crew), while the lessee is responsible for the rest of the crew, maintenance, and insurance.

the lessee. These checks encompass multiple aspects of the aircraft, including the airframe, engine, components, and cabin, to evaluate their operational worthiness and identify any necessary repairs. The checks are primarily to ensure that the aircraft complies with all the relevant aviation regulations, such as airworthiness standards and fire safety requirements. Engine borescope inspections and high-powered runs are typically included to assess the condition of the engines and ensure they are within acceptable parameters. The costs involved are huge but there are no details available as to how much both Indigo and Air India pay to Turkish Technic.

IndiGo, in addition to its own fleet, also leases Airbus A320 aircraft, on both on wet and damp lease. IndiGo has wet-leased A320 aircraft from various airlines, including Freebird Airlines which is a Turkish airline, Smart Lynx Airlines, a Latvian airline, among others. Wet leasing involves renting the aircraft along with the crew, maintenance, and insurance. IndiGo also operates A320 aircraft on damp leases and secondary leases. IndiGo had received the approval of the Government of India to renew the wet lease of 11 Airbus A320 aircraft, a move that is expected to bolster its operational capacity and enhance service efficiency.³⁰ On similar lines, a ‘damp lease’ in aircraft leasing is a trade arrangement whereby the lessor provides the aircraft and some of the crew (usually, the cockpit crew), while the lessee is responsible for the rest of the crew, maintenance, and insurance. IndiGo has been resorting to leasing A320s to manage fleet issues, including the grounding of planes due to engine issues, maintenance constraints, and supply chain disruptions.

30. Rohit Vaid, “IndiGo Secures Approval for Wet Lease Renewals of 11 A320 Aircraft”, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/logistics/indigo-secures-approval-for-wet-lease-renewals-of-11-a320-aircraft/article68829179.ece>. Accessed on May 26, 2025.

Indigo also has a codeshare agreement with Turkish Airlines: a codeshare agreement is essentially an agreement between airlines to sell seats on each other's flights. This conveys the impression of the airlines flying to more destinations. By doing so, the airlines typically share the revenue on those tickets. This arrangement benefits Turkish Airlines more than its due share as Istanbul becomes the hub for all Indian passengers bound for Europe. Though Indigo argues that the cost benefits the Indian customers, it has been brought out that this is an unequal partnership that only tilts the financial favour on the Turkish side, allowing it to capture Indian passengers for its network, while Indigo plays the role of a feeder airline to Turkish Airlines thereby effectively depriving other carriers, both domestic and friendly international airlines which provide direct or point-to-point services to long haul destinations of passengers.

Dependence on foreign firms can expose the Indian economy to risks associated with changes in global markets or political instability and over-reliance on foreign firms can stifle innovation and technological advancements within India.

SUGGESTED COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGIES AND REALIGNMENT

It is proposed that both Air India Express and Indigo Airlines may optimise the network and reevaluate the strategic partnership with Turkish Technic as a strategic pivot and start exploring complementary opportunities for their MRO and redelivery checks. A company in India named GMR Aero Technic (GAT) that operates from Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad is an authorised MRO services provider for Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)-registered B737/A320 aircraft, including performing redelivery checks. It has FAA approval for performing C-checks and Non-destructive Testing (NDT) inspections, which are crucial for redelivery checks.³¹

31. "GMR Aero Technic, MRO Brochure 30082024", https://www.gmraerotech.in/pdf/MRO_Brochure_15102024.pdf. Accessed on May 27, 2025.

India also has another 70-year-old company, “Air Works”, which specialises in providing aircraft maintenance. It is the largest privately-owned, integrated aviation services provider in India. Established in 1951, Air Works has a pan-India presence with a network across 27 cities and is staffed by about 1,500 people. The company offers a wide range of aviation services, including MRO for scheduled airlines, organisations, individuals, and defence services. There is also a possibility of this company being acquired by the Adani Group.

When an Indian service provider that is equally competent, with the necessary certification, is ignored for a foreign entity, it leads to missed opportunities to foster local economic growth through assured employment, and may also result in cultural misunderstandings, leading to communication confusion, and a lack of understanding of the local regulations. Furthermore, there will be a depreciated local investment and the opportunity of technology transfer may also be missed. Over-reliance on foreign firms, especially based in a hostile Turkey can lead to a loss of control over strategic decisions and resources. Dependence on foreign firms can expose the Indian economy to risks associated with changes in global markets or political instability and over-reliance on foreign firms can stifle innovation and technological advancements within India.

SECURITY HAZARDS WITH FOREIGN HANDLERS

Patronising a foreign firm with a hostile attitude towards India also poses multiple security risks, primarily stemming from data protection, intellectual property, and regulatory compliance concerns. The foreign firms may have different security standards, potentially leading to vulnerabilities in data handling and Intellectual Property (IP) protection, as they may not adhere to the same security protocols and data protection standards as Indian firms, potentially creating vulnerabilities in data handling and storage. Reliance on foreign firms increases the risk of cyber attacks, as their systems and infrastructure may be more susceptible to breaches due to weaker security measures or lack of knowledge about the local cyber landscape.

The possibility of cyber attacks on commercial airlines can have serious consequences on passenger safety and goods transshipment.

Given the cost focus in the airline industry in view of the profitability issues, it may well be a fact that the choice of Turkish Technic and the likes based in Turkey may have been for the aforementioned reason. However, notwithstanding this, the intangible risks of data security, cyber risks, etc. may be taken into consideration to work towards moving the whole MRO (or a major part of it) to Indian vendors such as GMR/Air Works.

FUTURE OF INDIA-TURKEY TRAJECTORY

It is a fact that the bilateral trade between India and Turkey is tilted in favour of India but there are certain factors that are necessary to be weighed in before we chart the future trajectory of bilateral relations between the two nations. A thorough reassessment of the relationship may be in order in view of the multiple divergences between the two countries, with differing ideologies. While trade and commerce are important, so are factors like national safety, vital interests, and political considerations which can outweigh economic gains and, hence, become a strategic necessity. India may prioritise strategic alliances and partnerships with Turkey only if this aligns with India's broader geopolitical goals. Turkey has been observed violating international norms and affecting India's political standing through anti-India strategic postures on a number of occasions and, hence, India should leverage its strategic position in the global arena to offset Turkey's false narratives. India has positioned itself as a similarly indispensable node for regional connectivity and has actively shaped and initiated major connectivity projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the India-Middle East Economic Corridor (IMEEC), and making the fullest use of this advantage, probably try to move away from Turkey—this is not to suggest cutting off of all relations. The following are suggested to offset Turkey's hostile attitude towards India.

- (i) **On Offence:** While Turkey has imposed a blanket ban on the sale of any kind of weaponry, including drones, to India, surprisingly a large

portion of India's exports to Turkey can be used in making drones. Among Indian exports, engineering goods account for the largest volume which include aluminum and aluminum products, auto components, aircraft parts, telecom instruments, electric machinery and equipment: these products are extensively used in the drones' electronic systems, including avionics, communication modules, and control systems; and sensor equipment such as imaging and surveillance systems.³² If India considers a ban on these goods, Turkey may be forced to seek an alternate source of supply which can adversely impact its production with a possible rise in the cost. The construction, automotive and electronic sectors of Turkey will face severe headwinds in the short term and a financial loss in the long term, thus, forcing Turkey to evaluate its options. This would also help India to expand its domestic market.

- (ii) **Vote With Our Wallets:** Currently, Turkey is facing economic pressures and currency devaluation, and would find it difficult to alienate India. Turkey is also grappling with stubborn inflation and a worsening cost-of-living crisis, applying sustained pressure on households and businesses. The tourism and education flow from India to Turkey also represents a significant source of foreign currency. However, if India takes a principled stand based on Turkey's misadventurism and gets into a planning mode to discourage Indians from travelling to Turkey, the following may be considered;
- (a) The Turkish visas are very costly in comparison to the US and British visas. A Turkish multiple entry visa costs almost Rs. 34,000 in comparison to a multiple entry British visa which costs only Rs. 12,500 and a US multiple entry that visa costs around Rs. 15,500. The time for getting a Turkish multiple entry visa is almost 21 days which is much more in comparison to either a British or a Schengen visa to European destinations.

32. Pathikrit Sanyal, "Are Indian Exports to Turkey Powering Its Drones?" <https://www.indiatoday.in/diu/story/are-indian-exports-to-turkey-powering-its-drones-2723672-2025-05-12>. Accessed on May 27, 2025.

- (b) There is an increased traffic of vacationers from India towards foreign destinations and this is bound to increase as our country becomes more prosperous. However, travel to countries that are inimical to us and overtly belligerent is not exactly desirable. While it may not be feasible to overtly proscribe such travel, in the past, the Tourism Department/Ministry has run good promotional campaigns such as “Incredible India”. A similar campaign to promote and prioritise locations that are ‘friendly’ to us (meaning avoiding unfriendly countries) should be taken up through government initiatives, travel platforms, and social media engagement. The campaign should highlight ‘alternatives’ to countries that may be on our black list like Turkey, Azerbaijan, China and Maldives, to name a few. If Maldives boasts of corals/islands/water sports, a couple of alternative countries may be suggested which would boast of the same natural scenarios. A systematic and determined effort by the Government of India to identify countries which are on friendly terms with India may also fetch economic benefits for travellers who would benefit the country of the intended travel with confirmed business. The government can ensure visa facilitation, offering financial incentives or travel subsidies for specific destinations, especially those that are less visited but offer unique experiences. The Indian Tourism Ministry can team up with the Tourism Boards from other countries to create joint marketing campaigns and promote their destinations to Indian travellers. It is also essential to highlight destinations that offer a good balance of affordability and unique experiences, especially for budget-conscious travellers. There is a need to encourage travel agencies to offer attractive packages to international destinations, making these more accessible for Indian travellers.
- (c) Turkey was a preferred destination for Indian film shooting, especially from Bollywood. The sought-after places in Turkey

Turkey's obsession with Islamic solidarity may pose a geopolitical challenge to India, to counter which, India may have to start strategising its own diplomatic initiatives and keep a close watch on it.

include Cappadocia and Izmir—these places have been featured in a number of Bollywood movies. The Indian film crews contributed a significant amount to Turkey and choosing alternate locations can cause a financial dent to the country. On similar lines, Turkish actors, film-makers and production houses should not be permitted to work in the Indian entertainment industry. Even if 50 per cent of the traffic is diverted, it would cause lot of 'news' and hit hard psychologically.

- (d) India's reliance on marble from Turkey was to the tune of Rs. 2,500 crore and amounted to 70 per cent of India's total marble imports. This may be scaled down and alternate sources like Iran, Italy and Egypt may be explored. Import of Turkish apples may be banned and they may be sourced from New Zealand and Iran if the domestic produce is considered inadequate.
- (i) **Diplomatic Entente:** India and Turkey have neither broadly shared interests nor values. They limit their mutual commitments just to working together on trade, and responding to contingencies—but only by India and not the other way round: Operation Dost in India offered help to Turkey when it was struck by an earthquake. In the recent past, Turkey has been presenting a new unsettling front that is way off track from its proclaimed neutrality. Turkey's obsession with Islamic solidarity may pose a geopolitical challenge to India, to counter which, India may have to start strategising its own diplomatic initiatives and keep a close watch on it. Turkey has annoyed many nations with its abrasiveness and India may cultivate some of these nations to forge a front against Turkey and make it realise that it cannot take unreasonable stands and get away with them.
- (a) **Armenia:** India has always maintained close relations with Armenia and has been supportive of its legitimate aspirations. It

has supplied weaponry to Armenia to protect itself against the combined onslaught by Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenia may be cultivated as a strategic ally to counter Turkey in the South Caucasus region and put a brake on its expansionist agenda. India has been supplying Armenia with weapon systems which include the Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launchers, Akash air defence systems and 155 MM artillery guns.³³ It is essential for India to help Armenia to defend against the Turkish supplied drones to Azerbaijan in a conflict as the tensions continue simmering. This could be publicised also to bring out the ineffectiveness and vulnerability of the Turkish drones and can make a huge dent in their armament export market. India's strategic partnership with Armenia can also consolidate India's position as a major power in Eurasia. This will also hasten the proposed INSTC, which intends to link India with Europe through Armenia and Iran.

- (b) **Saudi Arabia:** Though Saudi Arabia and Turkey are predominantly Sunni countries, their differing opinions on the Salafist movement is a key tension point. Turkey uses the Salafist movement to interfere in the affairs of Syria, a fellow Arab nation. On the contrary, Saudi Arabia does not consider Turkey as an Arab nation and, hence, does not want it entering its domain where Saudi Arabia is considered the leader among the 22 Arab states. Turkey

33. Ashutosh Gupta, "The Evolving India-Armenia Defense Partnership: Analyzing India's Strategic Shift as a Security Partner in the Caucasus", <https://thegeopolitics.com/the-evolving-india-armenia-defense-partnership-analyzing-indias-strategic-shift-as-a-security-partner-in-the-caucasus>. Accessed on June 4, 2025.

internationalising the issue of the murder of journalist Khashoggi in Istanbul on October 2, 2018, and trying to pin the blame on the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Salman was not received well in the kingdom. Further, Turkey is trying to pose a direct challenge to Saudi Arabia in its regional dominated areas of influence, including Palestine. Turkey has entered into a US\$ 3 billion contract to supply Bayraktar drones to Saudi Arabia. The failure of these drones against Indian air defences was also watched with interest in the Middle East. India has been enjoying more than cordial relations with Saudi Arabia with huge Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the Arab kingdom in the offing. India can effectively use its hedge with the Saudis to keep Turkey under check. Turkey's close relations with Qatar also do not endear it to Saudi Arabia. These pressure points can be effectively applied to corner Turkey. The OIC's anti-Indian stance on Kashmir can also be effectively cushioned by partnering with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, two allies of India which also have foggy relations with Turkey.

- (c) **Kurds' Plight:** The Turks have been waging a brutal and incessant battle against the Kurds who have been fighting for their rights for over half a century. This Turkish onslaught, a cruel war primarily in Turkey's southeastern region, has resulted in widespread death, marked by gross human rights violations, involving extra judicial killings, torture, and mass imprisonment of civilians, forced displacement of the Kurds, and has resulted in deep political divisions. India should help the Kurds as they struggle to defend their culture, their moderate interpretation of their religion and their human rights against the Turkish state which treats them as sub-human. The plight of the Kurds should be brought out in all forums possible, including the UN Security Council, Human Rights Commission, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS). In both

the SCO and BRICS, India can highlight the Kurds' right of self-determination under international law to encourage dialogue and peaceful resolution of the issue.

CONCLUSION

Turkey's interference in the Indian subcontinent, particularly with Pakistan and now with the present regime in Bangladesh, has become a source of worry for India; this interference has been sparked by collective religious affiliation and military cooperation. It is a no brainer that today India has been pushed aside to accommodate Pakistan as far as Turkish foreign policy is concerned despite India's multiple goodwill gestures. India needs to steadfastly improve and cement deep connections with Turkey's neighbours, Greece, Cyprus, Armenia, and Israel, to ensure the containment of Turkey's power in bullying the neighbours. India, therefore, should spare no effort to approach this problem through multiple strategies to ensure its own security.

