# TURKEY’S JOURNEY AND PAKISTAN

Turkey is very strategically positioned as the bridge between the West and the Middle East. More importantly, it is the most westernized Muslim state in the Middle East. After the fall of the Ottoman Caliphate, Turkey was crafted as a new liberal state under Kamal Ataturk. The Kemalists carved Turkey into a secular authoritarian state which mimicked the West in every facet, and they kept a tight control on state’s machinery. Kemalists pushed for a liberal and secular Turkey with an ambition to join the European Union. The country has been a member of NATO since 1952, the Council of Europe since 1949, and the OECD since 1961. With strict control of the state and the army, the Kemalists formulated the constitution to make the country secular with little or no room for religious movements or political dissent. The country went as far as to ban head scarves for girls in educational institutions. When Turkey started under Kamal Ataturk, everyone envisioned Turkey to follow the western model and Turkey did for some time, but eventually Turkey paved its own path for development. The Turkish Model is a term coined to describe Turkey’s development voyage. The origin of the term is still unsure, but according to Turkish political economist, Professor Aydin Yalcin, the notion of Turkish model had basically arisen outside Turkey (Shlykov, 2018).

The western media made the term widespread, and Turkey was seen as a unique case as it was the only functioning system with western democracy, secularism, and Islamic values and principles (Mango, 1993). At one time, the Turkish model was an inspiration for countries like Tunisia, Egypt, and the Muslim brotherhood. The model was considered a success which combined the Islamic and modern values as the West sees them as mutually exclusive. The forced secularization did well to portray Turkey as a friendly state to Western democracies and Turkey was hailed as a champion of democracy for the undemocratic Middle East. At a meeting with Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, the U.S. President George Bush said: “Turkey is indeed a friend, a partner of the United States. And it’s also a model to others, especially those newly independent Republics of Central Asia (Shlykov, 2018). A brief look at the history will help understand the development of the model and Turkey’s journey.

Circled by Kemalism, the religious fervor in Turkey was choked. Turkey’s spring came around 1950 when a new party, Democrat Party (DP), led by Adnan Menderes formed the new government after the first free and fair elections. Menderes promised to make the country little America and worked to get it aligned with the West. It was this time when people got the sense that religious freedom can be enjoyed in a western style democracy. The Kemalists resented Menderes and considered him a force of counter-revolution and this hatred culminated in a military coup on May 27, 1960. The Yassiada island became a prison for hundreds of DP members and the leader of DP, Adnan Menderes was hung on the gallows on September 17, 1961, (Akyol, 2012).

The secular military junta kept a tight hold on the state functioning and all dissenting voices were disbanded to ensure the forced secularism thrived until Ozal revolution in 1980. The next 10 years were called, “the Ozal decade” which marked the lslamo-liberal synthesis. Turgut Ozal was a devoted Muslim, and he based his policies on the notion of three freedoms: of ideas, religion, and enterprise (Akyol, 2012). Turkey’s economy was opened and the decades-old Kemalist protectionism gave way to free market principles. The Kemalists despised Ozal just as they had earlier opposed Adnan Menderes and there was an unsettling paranoia in their camp. Ozal’s sudden demise opened the door for the military junta to control state affairs again, but this time people had realized the potential of protest to cause change and they were ready to raise dissenting voices.

The decades of the 1990s is called Turkey’s “lost decade” as Turkey slipped deeper in economic problems (Akyol, 2012). This led to the rise of Justice and Development Party (AKP), the religious party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. AKP declared that it was not a religious party, but that AKP ideology was democratic conservatism. The rise of religious leaning party also unsettled the West because they believed, erroneously, that a party of devoted Muslims will be illiberal and undemocratic. However, the rise of AKP was in line with classical liberalism that had earlier been championed by the Ottoman empire, reignited by the Ozal revolution, but was resented by the Kemalists. More importantly, the legacy of free-market capitalism that Ozal left behind was a pivotal in establishing AKP as a political force to be reckoned with. Islam is a business-friendly religion as it promotes free, fair, inclusive, and socially responsible business and commercial activity. Interestingly free markets have a lot of overlapping features with democratic principles such as plurality and diversity, principles which are also championed by the social vision of Islam.

With the rise of AKP, Turkey abandoned its principle of noninvolvement and adopted a new policy of zero problems with neighbors. AKP tried to mend relations with Turkey’s neighbors and Turkey became active in Middle Eastern politics. AKP also became the first political party in Turkey’s history to have survived and reversed a military coup. The secular military tried once more to undo Erdogan’s feats, but Erdogan face-timed the Turkish people urging them to defend the gains and progress made by the Turkish.

Under Erdogan’s leadership, Turkey’s economy performed remarkably well which contributed to AKP winning consecutive elections. When Erdogan controlled the rein of Turkish economy, people were waiting for a rabbit out of hat magic to safe the sinking Turkish economy (Patton, 2006). Turkey’s economy was at stalemate, the lira had devalued nearly 50%, poverty levels below what it had been in 1994, and investors’ confidence was all time low. The AKP took pragmatic decisions with already in place IMF economic stability plan which helped control the soaring inflation, bulging unemployment and sinking currency value. Turkey enjoyed rapid economic turn around because of structural changes, productivity growth and a broadening base of economic activity (Acemoglu, 2015).

The austerity measures were taken across the government: ministries were reduced, govt buildings were made available for productive usage, and extra vehicle entourages were sold. The tourism industry grew from $10 billion to $34 billion dollars in Erdogan’s tenure. Also, projects like Istanbul Canal project, cost around $16 billion dollars, are underway to transform the economic activities and complement Bosporus strait. AKP stayed with the neoliberal policies championed by IMF and supported by EU. Turkey had 19 arrangements with IMF which she finally closed in 2013 and Erdogan underscored that Turkey’s chapter with IMF is over. The unorthodox economic measures of Erdogan helped Turkey leave the IMF basket. This naturally led to political influence and social prestige.

Some experts are suggesting that the Turkish model is unravelling. Turkey is becoming increasingly authoritarian and unstable, under the same leader who once received so much adulation”, (Taspinar, 2014). In a nation-wide referendum, Erdogan had voted himself as the President of Turkey with constitutional provisions to control the budget, military, economy, and other affairs. Turkey now sits at a totally different position from the one it started under Erdogan which has raised eyebrows. Also, the economy is downturn with experts projecting, Turkey might fall back to IMF’s basket.

Pakistan and Turkey have traditionally enjoyed closed relations, but they become very close after Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf, a political party led by cricketer turned-statesman, Imran Khan, rose to power. Imran Khan respects Turkey’s progress under Erdogan. The Prime Minister is also a fan of Turkish historical drama. He has encouraged Pakistanis, especially the youth, to watch Ertugral, a worldwide super hit series telling the story of the early rise of the Ottomans, for its apt depiction of the enlightened principles of Islamic governance and morality. The Pakistani Premier wants the youth to get an idea of the factors that made Muslims politically influential on a global level in the past. This signifies the beginning of a new era of cultural cooperation and exchange with Turkey. Both countries are also very vocal on Muslim issues like the occupation of Palestine and Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and other relevant issues concerning Muslims.

The Turkish model of development has directed the country for a century, but the model is not easily replicable. Turkey has looped from a forced secularism under Ataturk to a moderate political Islam under Erdogan. Pakistan’s history has been different from that of Turkey, but the democratic and political arrangements in the country certainly resemble some of the key features adopted by Turkey. Moreover, some of the economic measures undertaken by Imran mimic Erdogan’s early days in power like government cost cutting and broadening economic activities. However, Pakistan is charting its own historical course of development.

The mutual respect between the top leadership of the two countries has brought them together and can certainly increase the mutual complementarities. Both countries also enjoy strategic cooperation with China and advocate balanced relationship with the United States. Both countries have been deeply involved in a just inclusive and peaceful resolution of the conflict in Afghanistan. Their sincerity is this respect is beyond question.

Pakistan has undoubtedly been the most important stakeholder in the peace building in Afghanistan. Regional spoilers like India have not been successful in their manipulation of Afghanistan. Though the sudden US withdrawal did complicate the situation in Afghanistan, yet with relatively peaceful takeover of Kabul by the Afghan Taliban, things will inevitably be stabilized. Since continued conflict will be good neither for Afghanistan, nor Pakistan nor the region, so Pakistan is urging all parties in Afghanistan and all players in the region to focus on peaceful means to ending the conflict. Both Pakistan and Turkey have generously hosted massive refugee populations over a long period of time. This is another point of convergence for both countries to stress the importance of giving up conflict in favor of peaceful resolution of political crisis.

Pakistan can draw positive lessons from the Turkish model of development under Erdogan for its own sustainable inclusive development. Erdogan’s popularity in Pakistan as a great statesman can help in the acceptance and diffusion of Turkish development lessons across different social strata. However, for development to be durable and meaningful it has to be an indigenous process driven mainly by the people of the country with widespread intersectoral collaborations as vertical development measures do not prove to be successful in the long run. Pakistan can benefit from the advanced science and technology industries of Turkey to boost its own export sectors especially the drone and tourism industry. The joint venture on Anka military drones is in the pipeline between them. Both countries have the potential to become leaders of the Muslim world and the relationship between the two needs more active cooperation across different areas in view of its immense potential. Pakistan like any other country needs strong friends and Turkey’s global standing as a reliable partner is an asset for Pakistan. Moderate political Islam favored by Turkey and Pakistan provides the world with a sound governance option based upon the inherent compatibility of Islamic values and democratic principles.