

Bilateral Ties Between Afghanistan and Turkey and the Impact of Soft Power Policies

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Abstract: The historical formation and development of Turkey-Afghanistan relations, as well as the religious, social, and historical closeness of these two countries to each other, are studied in detail in the article. We can see that bilateral relations were carried out at an intense level during the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey. For the cultural development of Afghanistan, he contributed to the country's development by effectively using his cultural diplomacy, and "soft power" tools, in particular: TIKa, Yunus Emro Institute, and public diplomacy. In particular, he raised the level of Afghan students by providing them with various educational grants along with the construction of schools, providing health care, and educational institutions with the necessary equipment, and improving the training of the Afghan military.

1 INTRODUCTION

The historical foundations of the relations between Afghanistan and the Ottoman Empire, and later Turkey, have led to a heightened level of engagement in the 20th century, persisting and evolving even in the contemporary, challenging era. A thorough examination of the historical progression of these cooperative ties opens avenues for novel approaches in modern international relations.


In the context of Afghanistan, two key elements within its society - the Sunni religious majority and the Turkic-speaking minority, comprising Uzbeks and Turkmens - hold significance for Turkey. Turkey has consistently demonstrated a keen interest in supporting the Turkic-speaking minority in Afghanistan. This commitment is particularly evident in its backing of figures like former Vice President Abdul Rashid Dostum, providing insight into Turkey's approach.


The establishment of Afghan-Turkish schools, the augmentation of Turkish scholarships, and the broadening scope of recipients, especially among the


youth, contribute to training personnel and fostering cultural exchange. Additionally, efforts to enhance the presence of the Yunus Emre Foundation, showcasing Turkish shows and films, and promoting the Turkish language hold crucial roles in Turkey's implementation of soft power in Afghanistan. This influence is particularly pronounced in the northern and northwestern regions of Afghanistan, where Turkic-speaking communities reside. Turkey's TIKa organization significantly contributes to these processes.


2 FINDINGS

Turkey and Afghanistan share numerous similarities, with the religious factor being of paramount importance. Turkey has historically shown significant interest in Central Asia, and the relationship between these two nations has proven mutually beneficial. Scholars such as Kubilayhan Erman, Salim Coşce, Shimshir Bilal, Selcuk Çolakoglu, S. Aria, Salehi Zarghona, Faizullayev A, Zabihullah Dashti have

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extensively studied the ties between Turkey and Afghanistan.

The roots of their relationship can be traced back to the 1920s when ideas of national liberation gained traction globally. In Turkey, social thought flourished in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, attracting the hopes of peoples and groups in Eastern regions, particularly Turkestan and neighboring Afghanistan, for support from the "Young Turks" organization and government. This movement became an ideological force for modernist movements in Central and South Asia and North Africa, leading to a renewed impetus in cooperation between Afghanistan and Turkey.

In 1921, the Turkey-Afghanistan Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in Moscow, marking the beginning of a rare example of friendship and cooperation in history. The Afghan people hold a special place in the hearts of the Turkish nation for their support during the Turkish War of Independence. Similarly, Afghanistan, during Amonullah Khan's reign, drew inspiration from Turkish modernization, with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk serving as a role model for the new Afghan state.

The collaboration extended to healthcare and education, as Turkish specialists played a crucial role in building Afghanistan's first modern state hospital in 1912. Notably, Fakri Pasha, a renowned defender of Medina during World War I, was sent as the first ambassador to Afghanistan, showcasing Turkey's commitment to bilateral relations.

The formal establishment of diplomatic ties occurred on June 10, 1921, with Mustafa Kemal personally raising the flag at the opening ceremony of the Afghan embassy in Ankara. Further strengthening the relationship, Fahrettin Pasha was appointed as ambassador and extraordinary representative in Kabul on March 1, 1922. Afghanistan celebrated Turkey's victory over the Greeks on August 30, 1922, as a national holiday, and the announcement of the Republic in Turkey was met with great satisfaction in Afghanistan.

The modernization of Turkey directly influenced Afghanistan, leading to a state visit by Amonullah Khan and Queen Suraiya in May 1928. This marked the first state visit to the Republic of Turkey, emphasizing the strong ties between the two nations. During Zahirshah's reign, Turkey actively supported Afghanistan in regional and international matters, mediating between Iran and Afghanistan in border disputes.

In 1934, Turkey played a pivotal role in resolving the longstanding border issue between Afghanistan and Iran, demarcating a 300 km border that had been unresolved for over a thousand years. Afghanistan's

membership in the League of Nations in 1934, initiated by Turkey, solidified its status as a full-fledged subject of international relations. Additionally, in 1937, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan signed the Saadabad Pact, establishing the first regional organization in which Afghanistan participated.

The theoretical aspects of these relations highlight Turkey's special and unique approach to Afghanistan's security. Barry Buzan's concept of regional security, emphasizing interdependence among actors, is reflected in Turkey's actions to secure Afghanistan. Turkey's contributions to Afghanistan's participation in international and regional processes underscore its unparalleled support for the nation's activities on the global stage.

The creation of a regional security belt for Turkey was deemed an urgent matter, with Afghanistan seen as a crucial component. Turkey established the Saadabad Pact to form a security line from Central Asia to the Balkans, countering potential Soviet expansion in the south. The Soviets aimed to spread communism in the Balkans, Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, leading to tensions. Afghanistan, declaring neutrality during World War II, avoided foreign invasion.

Post-World War II, Turkey signed new international agreements, straining relations as Afghanistan pursued a neutral policy. During Zahir Shah's rule, Turkey invested significantly in Afghanistan's education system to counter radical religious influences. Turkey aided in opening 627 schools, establishing military schools, girls' lyceums, and various university faculties in Kabul.

Afghanistan reciprocated Turkey's support, backing Turkey on the Cyprus issue in 1955 and expressing solidarity on Soviet arms sales to Syria. Despite U.S. opposition, Turkey actively sought to protect Afghanistan from Soviet influence. Until 1970, Afghan military leaders received education in Turkey, and Turkish military materials were used in Afghan establishments.

Facing a dilemma in the 1980s with the Soviet expansion into Afghanistan, Turkey condemned the invasion but avoided measures affecting Soviet relations. After the Soviet Union's collapse, Afghanistan gained strategic importance in Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey maintained ties with the north of Afghanistan, supported General Dostum, and provided financial aid until the Taliban's rise in 1997.

Turkey did not recognize the Taliban regime, condemning their violence. Relations were limited to technical and humanitarian spheres during the Taliban rule. Many Afghans sought refuge in Turkey

during this period. Since 2002, Turkey's approach to Afghanistan focuses on unity, security, political structure, and combating terrorism. Relations entered a new stage in 2002, marked by official visits between Afghan and Turkish leaders in 2002 and 2005.

During this period, Turkey's relations with Afghanistan saw an increased focus on "soft power" factors, particularly following the Cold War and, notably, during the tenure of the AKP party, which assumed power in 2002. "Soft power" institutions, such as the influential Yunus Emre Institute, gained prominence globally. Established as a non-profit organization in 2007, the institute, named after the 14th-century figure Yunus Emre, aims to promote Turkish culture worldwide and has expanded its activities into various regions, including Afghanistan.

The Yunus Emre Institute has been actively involved in Afghanistan, contributing to the expansion of Turkey's educational programs in the country. By 2019, the institute had implemented approximately 400 projects in Afghanistan, with a notable achievement being the establishment of Turkology departments in numerous Afghan universities. Turkish, as a result of these initiatives, became the second most studied language among Afghans after English.

A significant event took place on July 24, 2016, with the visit of Dr. Serdar, the executive head of TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency), to Afghanistan. During this visit, the Faculty of Turkish Language and Literature was inaugurated at Kabul University, marking a noteworthy development. TIKA, beyond its cultural contributions, has undertaken over 700 projects encompassing education, healthcare, and other sectors in Afghanistan. Among these initiatives, TIKA reconstructed the Kabul military school, originally established by the Turkish government in 1933, and built 42 schools in the Mazar-e-Sharif province.

The schools constructed by TIKA are equipped with internet systems, chemistry, biology, and physics laboratories, benefiting approximately 8,000 students. To date, TIKA has successfully completed and inaugurated 90 schools in Afghanistan. Additionally, TIKA has played a crucial role in humanitarian aid, particularly in road construction and technical assistance. The agency has also been actively involved in granting scholarships to Afghan students.

Another significant endeavour was the establishment of the "Society of Unity and Solidarity with Afghan Refugees in Turkey." Turkey sent skilled coaches educated in the country to

Afghanistan, demonstrating enthusiasm in preparing students for the Science Olympiad. Notably, Turkey launched seven vocational schools in major Afghan cities, creating valuable opportunities for Afghans and ethnic Uzbeks to pursue education in Turkey. Overall, TIKA has constructed more than 100 schools in Afghanistan, providing quality education to over 120,000 students.

3 CONCLUSION

The establishment and evolution of cooperation between Afghanistan and Turkey occurred during a period marked by unique historical processes. Turkey, becoming an ideological and cultural leader for Afghan modernism, sent specialists who played a crucial role in guiding Afghanistan in various fields such as technology, military, health, and education. Turkey significantly contributed to Afghanistan's engagement in regional and international agreements, elevating it to a full-fledged participant in global affairs. Expressing dissatisfaction with the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan, Turkey's relations with the country stagnated during the Soviet presence.

Despite the halt in official relations, Turkey continued to engage with ethnic Turkic populations in Afghanistan. Throughout the war years, Turkey became a primary destination for many Afghan emigrants, and this trend persisted even during the Taliban rule. Numerous Afghan refugees, particularly of Uzbek, Turkmen, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik backgrounds, found refuge in Turkey, with around 3,000 settling in various Turkish cities and many obtaining Turkish citizenship.

Turkey's support for the formation and development of Afghanistan's state institutions has been ongoing, with a continued commitment to this support. As the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan approaches, Turkey aims to enhance its role in the region, leveraging soft power factors and public diplomacy in the new era. Evaluating Turkey's increased role in Afghanistan yields two contrasting perspectives.

On one hand, positive assessments highlight the religious commonality between Turkey and Afghanistan, Ankara's capacity to improve economic and educational conditions, its neutrality in internal affairs, and its significance within NATO. On the other hand, there are concerns about Turkey's pursuit of pan-Turkism leadership, attempts to secularize society, and potential displeasure from regional rivals, posing challenges to Afghanistan's interests.

The future of Turkey's role in Afghanistan hinges on various domestic variables, particularly the composition of the Kabul government. While some welcome Turkey's expanded presence and role, particularly in economic and diplomatic realms, there is widespread opposition to Turkey's military involvement. It is anticipated that Turkey may assume a more substantial economic, diplomatic, and political role in Afghanistan in the future, contingent upon Turkey's actions and the preferences of the current Afghan elite.

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