Some aspects of Turco-African Relations with special reference to the Sudan

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Introduction

Turkey’s relation with Africa is old, it goes back to the sixteenth century. It had developed political, cultural and economic relations with the Arab North African countries, the Nilotic Sudan and some strategic parts in East Africa. There was no significant presence or relation with Sub-Saharan Africa. However, the religious bond linked nearly all-African Muslims especially those of Bilad al-Sudan and North-East Africa with the Ottoman Caliphate – the Servitor of the Two Holy Places – Mecca and Medina is of great significance. Although the Sudan is an Afro-Arab country, much influenced by the Ottoman Empire, like other Arab countries, I am considering it in this paper as a Sub-Saharan African country.

Africa with its vast resources now represents the world new Economic Frontier and hence it is laid open to tough competition among the highly developed nations. Mighty in civilization, well armed as a regional power and equipped with the characteristic of a modern state. Turkey aims at developing its relations with the African continent. In 1998, an Action Plan of the Turkish Foreign Policy of Opening Up to Africa was initiated. On 21st, September 2005. H. E. Mr. Abdullah Gül, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, of the Republic of Turkey, in his speech to the 60th session of United Nations General Assembly states: “We attach great importance to furthering our relations and cooperation with the African Continent. According to an Action plan Turkey is vigorously developing its relations with Africa as a whole. We recently opened an office in Addis Ababa to serve as a coordinating Centre for Turkish humanitarian and developmental assistance to the continent.

The Turkish Government has also declared the year 2005 as the year of Africa. We will continue with our contributions to international institutions, working to alleviate the suffering and eliminate diseases and hunger in the continent. In short, Turkey could play an important role in the African conti-
In order to expand its economic relations and to become a model of modernization to others.

Successive Turkish governments since 1961 have asserted the goodwill expressed by the Deputy Prime Minister. Some progress has been achieved with countries like South Africa and the Sudan. Yet, much remains to be accomplished.

No sooner had the Sudan attained its independence from the Anglo-Egyptian imperial rule on January 1st, 1956 than it started interacting freely with other nations. Its main objective was to uphold the principles of freedom, justice, equality and social progress for all human beings. It aimed at establishing friendly relations sustained by economic cooperation with other nations. The Sudan as a big country, located in the heart of Africa, bordering with nine states and endowed with immense untapped natural resources, strives to develop its own economy. The Republic of Turkey and the Sudan can achieve the desired economic development for both states through a concerted partnership.

**Turco-Sudanese Relations 1527-1820**

The Sudan occupies a very significant position in the annals of the Turco-African relations. The Ottoman conquest of Egypt by Sultan Selim I in 1517 reduced Egypt to a province (eyelet). It became part of the mighty Ottoman Empire (1299-1918) which had assumed the role of defending Islam and expanding its frontiers.¹

In their attempt to put an end the Portuguese menace to which aims severe the trade routes along which the spice of the East flowed to Egypt and Syria and then to Europe. The Ottomans decided to close the Red Sea to the Portuguese. Consequently they occupied some strategic points, including the Sudanese Port of Suwakin (and Masawwa) in 1527². The occupation of Suwakin brought the ottoman Sultans into direct contact with the Funj Kingdom (1504-1821).

In an important document presented to Grand Vizier in Istanbul the Ottoman “frontier strategy” seem to have been discussed. It was then proposed to conquer the land between Suwakin and the Nile including the Atbara Valley. Although some fighting might have broken in the hinterland of Suwakin, the Funj control of that region remained intact.

Between 1556 and 1584, the Imperial Divan in Istanbul authorized a number of aggressive campaigns to conquer Abysinia and Funj Sultanate; such a venture could ensure control of the whole of North-East Africa with its
resources of gold, gum and “enslavable population”. Two new provinces were to be established, the first was the eyalet of Habesh with Suwakin as its headquarters and supply basis. Though the Ottoman troops advanced into Eritrea, the attempt to invade Abyssinia from Suwakin failed and was abandoned in 1579.³

The second new province was established in 1565 when Ottoman forces advanced up the Nile Valley South of the 1st Cataract into the region of Ibrim after which the new province was named. There the Ottoman army “fought with Arab tribes and rulers subordinate to the Funj”. Gradually the Ottoman forces pushed up the 3rd Cataract. It was probably at this juncture that the two Ottoman fortresses of Ibrim and Say were established to guard off the eyalet of Egypt from Funj attacks.

In about 1584, the Mahas region was conquered and named a sanjak. It was used as supply base for conquest of the Funj Sultanate, which was reputed to control the rich sources of gold, gum, ivory and slaves. At Hanek, 10 kilometers south of the 3rd Cataract the Ottoman forces attacked the Funj army in a fierce battle. The Ottoman advance was checked divisively in 1584. Since then the Imperial Divan abandoned its imperial deigns and adopted a passive defensive policy. At Hanek an official frontier was fixed where it remained until 1820 when the Turko-Egyptian forces invaded the Funj Sultanate.

The two fortresses of Ibrim and Say were garrisoned by janissaries, some of whom where probably Bosnians and Hungarians (or Maygars, the descendants of whom were known locally as Majarab) and also some local Arabs. The two fortresses remained military establishments whose wages came from Cairo until 1794.

Since there were no major military engagements, there were few reinforcements. Hence recruitments to the garrisons became partly hereditary and partly from local inhabitants.

True military competence was slowly eroded, since neither the Funj nor the Ottomans Sultanates showed great interest in the region between the 1st and the 3rd Cataracts after 1600 D. However, the region enjoyed a great measure of peace for most of the period under discussion and trade caravans passed regularly between Sinnar, Shendi, Suwakin, and the Ottoman provinces of Egypt and the Hijaz⁴. It was through this trade route that the country was exposed to cultural and religious influences that flourished in the neighboring lands of the Ottoman Caliphate.
The Turkish Rule 1821 – 1855

In 1821 the Sultan of the decaying Funj Kingdom capitulated to the Turkish army that was sent by Muhammad Ali, the Wali (viceroy) of Egypt. The invasion was launched in the name of the Ottoman Caliph. The “Turkish” rule dominated the Sudan for over sixty years.

The term “Egyptian” or “Turko-Egyptian” is often used to describe the period under discussion. The Sudan was not conquered or ruled by true Egyptians but “by a Turkish speaking body since medieval times” – few Egyptians attained senior administrative of military posts in the Sudan, but were “assigned junior posts in the administration and the army. Consequently, the Sudanese (and European) historians called those rulers Turks and called the period under discussion the Turkiyya, because, the Sudan was “Egyptian only in the sense that it was a dependency of the Ottoman province of Egypt”5. The designation Turco-Egyptian is probably more accommodating since it embraces the Egyptian cultural influence. However, the terms Turk, Turkish (or Ottoman Turk) is probably more correct in the context of this paper and hence it is preferred to others.

Muhammad Ali primary objective in invading the Sudan was the “exploitation of Sudanese human economic resources 6 to build an independent, modern state. The Turkish adventure was by and large unsuccessful: the regime was met with resistance, which became widespread as a result of harsh fiscal policies and maladministration. The opposition culminated into the Mahdist Revolution in 1882.

Muhammed Ali’s derive to exploit Sudanese gold was also unsuccessful. However he was more successful in expanding agriculture, trough improved irrigation systemmand introducing new plants. Indeed all Sudanese products and exports were a government monopoly.

On the other hand the Turkish regime had left some legacies of positive significanceç It dates the beginning of modern Sudanese history, and uniting the Sudan in its present frontiers. To the first conquered territories of Sinnar and Kordofan; The Red Sea Hills, Kassala, Equatoria, Bahr el Ghazal and Darfur were added. It also started the modernization, i.e. “the introduction of methods of political and economic organization and techniques of production transport, and communications derived from those employed in European States- all of which substantially modified the structure of the antecedent traditional society”.7

The three principal innovations were fire arms, streamers and electric telegraphs, all of which were used in extending the government authority. A
new system of administration similar to the Turkish model was instituted. The
government was highly centralized under the leadership of a single governor-
general, assisted by provincial administrators. Orthodox Sunni Islam was pro-
moted at the expense of the traditional Sufi orders. A new legal system based
on the Hanafi School of law, prevalent at the Ottoman Empire, with a new hier-
archy of qadis and muftis dependent on government support was introduced.
Use of Christians (from Europe and Egypt) in the government service aroused
the Sudanese resentment. The Sudanese people disliked the attitudes of
Europeans and were not in favor of the secular laws introduced by the rulers.8

On the cultural level, the first lithographic printing press was introduced
and a paper factory was established. Some Turkish words entered Sudanese
Arabic and also some military expressions designating ranks became widespread. Turkish costume, especially the type used by religious dignitaries, and
soldiers prevailed among comparable sectors of the Sudanese Society.9

The extensive Turkish rule “to exploit Sudanese resources as well as the
socio-economic and technological innovations” that they instituted had pro-
found effect on the traditional Sudanese Society, provided disconnect and
revolts, which culminate in the Mahdist revolution, in 1885.10

The Mahdist revolution can now be seen as an independent movement to
free the country from foreign rule.

Britain, which had in 1882 occupied Egypt, refused to intervene on the
Khedive’s request to suppress the revolutionary Sudanese Provinces. By June
1892 Britain, then at the height of its imperial derive, decided to conquer the
Sudan by a joint Anglo-Egyptian army. Britain sought control over the Sudan
to ward off European powers that were encroaching over Britain’s spheres of
influence. The official British justification for the conquest was the restora-
tion, of the Turco-Egyptian sovereignty.

This conquest began another phase of foreign rule which to most con-
temporary Sudanese did not differ from the former Turkish administration, in
its structure and attitude to issue like taxation, hence, they called the new gov-
ernment al-Turkiyya al Thaniya, the second Turkish government.

The Sudan was henceforth ruled by virtue of Anglo-Egyptian Agreement,
or the condominium, which came in effect on 19 January 1899. Although there
was no specific mention of word sovereignty in the text of agreement; sover-
eignty was theoretically jointly shared between Great Britain and Egypt. The
British ignored the claims of the Ottoman Sultan to sovereignty over the
Sudan, and disregarded the fact that Egypt was still nominally par of the
Ottoman Empire. Yes a hinted above the administrative system of government was generally grafted onto that of the preceding Turkish administration\(^1\). Henceforth relations between the Sudan and the Ottoman Empire, except for that with the Fur Sultanate were discontinued.

**The Ottoman Empire and the Fur Sultanate**

In 1898, ‘Ali Dinar, one of the claimants to the Fur Sultanate throne succeeded in installing himself at Al-Fashir. He was sympathetic to the Ottomans in the First World War. His hostility to the British was expressed in religious-political terms. Enver Pasha, the Ottoman War minister wrote to the Ali Dinar on February 3\(^{rd}\) 1915 inviting people of Darfur to join the Ottomans against their common enemy, the British. The condominium government sent a force, which included aircrafts, against the Sudan. He was defeated on May 22nd 1916, and hence forth the relations with the Ottoman Empire were sealed off completely.\(^12\)

**The Turkish Republic and its Foreign Policy**

The establishment of the Republic of Turkey in October 1923 and the abolition of the Caliph by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk constituted an important landmark in the history of Turkey. The main objection to discharge, on the party of conservative Turkey, “was that in endangered the links of the Turkish people both with their own Islamic and imperial pact, and with the larger Muslim World of which they had so long been the leaders”.\(^13\) Henceforth a national secular modern state based on contemporary European civilization, was by end large accomplished.

Ataturk was decisive in the direction of the foreign policy of the new republic, it was a natural corollary to this drastic transformation: Turks have always gone towards the West… “Peace at home and Peace in the World”, the two statement of Ataturk remain of paramount importance to Turkish foreign policy.\(^14\)

The Western orientation of the Turkish Republic was continued and strengthened after the Second World War where it became a staunch ally of the West. e.g. through its membership of NATO. It is significant to note that Europe is still Turkey’s largest trading partner, and Turkey was accepted in 1992 as an associate member of the Western European Union, and further more the United States is Turkey’s primary ally.\(^15\)

With the decline of the Soviet Union in the 1980s, Turkey endeavored to enhance trade relations, spread Turkish influence with the Central Asian States. Turkey “is functioning as their gateway to the West”.

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\(^{1}\) Ottoman language.\(^{11}\) The administrative system of government.\(^{12}\) For relations with the Ottoman Empire, except for that with the Fur Sultanate.\(^{13}\) For the establishment of the Republic of Turkey.\(^{14}\) For the foreign policy of the new republic.\(^{15}\) For the Western orientation of the Turkish Republic.
Turkey’s foreign policy towards the Middle East and North Africa is of great significance, because they have benefit of historical, cultural and religious links, and have recently developed strong economic association. However, increased economic and commercial ties with Turkey (and Europe) have led to a sizeable jump in bilateral trade and through sub-system linkages. After a series of criticism from different Arab governments over Turkey’s alignment with Israel, its Western oriented foreign policy and secularist orientation Turkey has largely developed good relations and economic cooperation with those states (as well as the Sudan). All these economic developments and trade relations between Turkey, the North Africa, Middle Eastern States, and its neighbors have supported Turkey’s aspirations to become a regional economic power, of substantial influence.

The emergence of a strong, Turkish entrepreneurial industrial and business class resulted in steady growth of industry and services since World War Two. There was indeed a strong drive to gear Turkish economy to lower prices on export items and open new areas of economic activity to make Turkish products attractive and competitive abroad. The economic factor acquired more regard in foreign policy formulation since World War Two and especially since the advent of globalization.

I have gone into some detail of the philosophy, objectives and historical background of the Turkish foreign policy to demonstrate the factors that may influence its application in Africa. It is within a Western-oriented foreign policy in Africa that its function should be conceived.

The Turkish Policy of Opening up to Africa

The Action Plan of the Turkish Foreign Policy of Opening up to Africa was launched in 1998. Besides asserting itself in different African forums, the plan contains various detailed measures to develop Turkey’s relations with African countries. To pave the way for closer relation, formal diplomatic relations were established in the form of embassies in twelve African states, high level mutual visits were completed. The Action Plan foresees the conclusion of Agreements on trade, joint economic projects, technical and scientific cooperation with African states. It also aims at providing, through the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TIKA) technical assistant, short term programs. Cooperation between the private business sectors of Turkey and Africa is also encouraged. Indeed some of these ideas have already been implemented in some African States.

The action plan envisages the implementation of Cultural Agreements and Cultural Exchange Programmes with African countries. The Projected
Institute of African Studies, within the foreign Policy Institute Turkey, is a highly commendable step for the promotion cultural exchange. In this regard, I believe additional support through the suggested instruments, such as technical assistance and academic institutional twinning, will promote the development of various forms of trade cooperation involving governments’ authorities, civil society’s business associations such as Chambers of Commerce or Industry.\textsuperscript{18}

Regional forums like the Common Market of Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) in which both the Sudan and South Africa are members. Offer many opportunities for economic cooperation. Some items of the Action Plan were already concluded with some African Sates, like South Africa and the Sudan.

The implementation of the terms of the Plan of Action will in the long run fulfill the mutual object of the Turkish Foreign Office and enhance the prospects of mutual cooperation in the fields of politics and economics. Nonetheless, the Action Plan of the Turkish Foreign Policy for Opening up to Africa may, however, prove very difficult to execute and hence it is pertinent to pose the following questions. Can Turkey in this age of globalization, electronic commerce and cyber economics with only twelve embassies in all Africaachieve the projected objectives? What comparative advantage does it posses in relation to the leading, actors of the World economy-such as U.S.A, Britain, France, China and Japan? “can Turkey offer the best in area of the international investment, international production and technology transfer? Can it fulfill the African aspiration for an increased political and economic liberalization?\textsuperscript{19} The determining factor, that will probably shape the future relations between Turkey and the African States, depends on the degree to which Turkey is going to open up to these developing countries.\textsuperscript{20}

Conemporary Relations with the Sudan

When the Sudan attained its independence in 1956 Turkey was among the first states that established an embassy in Khartoum\textsuperscript{21}. The Sudan reciprocated in 1970 when an embassy was established in Ankara. Hence an era of structured diplomatic relations, based on mutual cooperation, common interest and respect for the sovereignty of the other has begun. During the period of 1970-1980 the two states entered into moderate exchange of goods. Relations did not fare beyond the traditional economic patterns. A major reason for the limited diplomatic relations was the position of the two states towards the running conflict between Israel an the Arab world. The Sudan was (and still is) an ardent supporter of the Palestinians; Turkey while acknowledging the
Palestinian right to rapprochement with Israel which developed into a military pact (USA, Israel and Turkey) came under severe criticism throughout the Arab World. However, at the beginning of the 1980s as a result of economic and political pressure from the West, and internal developments. Turkey began to open up to the Arab states.

In 1980s, Turco-Sudanese relations were augmented when the first Trade Protocol for commodity exchange was signed. The volume of trade got to US $ 3,814,000. In 1982 the Sudanese President Ja’far Muhammad Numayri, visited Turkey, in response to an invitation from President Kenan Evren. During that visit a number of political and economic issues were discussed consequently, several economic, technical, cultural and scientific agreements were signed. In 1988, Turkey granted the Sudan a loan of US$ 40,000,000 of which three quarters were assigned to finance capital goods and the rest to consumer goods. The 1990-2001 decade witnessed a marked development in bilateral relations. About twenty five agreements and protocols were signed, ten of which were in the academic sector. The cooperation expanded to provide for various sectors of the economy, e.g. air-transportation, oil, and mineral exploration quality control etc. By 1995 Turkish and Sudanese companies began to invest in both countries.

The cooperation also embraced educational, medical, tourism and artistic sectors; thus a number of agreements and protocols were signed to that effect. In the education sector, for example eight protocols were signed between Sudanese and Turkish universities. A memorandum of understanding to promote the University of Khartoum Unit for Turkish Studies was considered, but not much progress has been achieved as yet. In the field of health, training of medical specialists was agreed upon; a Turkish hospital was established in Khartoum.

The Sudanese aspire to attract Turkish investment, to finance major infrastructure projects, road construction, dams, seaports, telecommunications, transportation, petro-chemical mineral and oil exportation, energy, agro-industry and contracting and construction activities.

Some good progress has already been achieved despite the crucial ideological difference between the government of the Sudan and Turkey. The first is a fundamentalist Islamic state and the second is the citadel of secularism in the Islamic world. Yet they succeeded in accommodating one another and embarked on a new era of Sudanese-Turkish cooperation. The strong commitment of both states to cooperate with a view of achieving their national goals is indeed the key to a bright future.
Notes

1 V. J. Parrey, “The Ottoman Empire” in The New Cambridge Modern History, 1958, p.92.520’pp
2 Ibid.p.521-2
3 John Alexander, “The Ottoman Empire in Nubia” in History of the Ottoman Empire, Some Aspects of the Sudanese Turkish Relations, Y. F. Hasan (editor) KUP, Khartum 2004, pp. 19-20
5 R. Hill, Egypt in the Sudan, OUP, London, 1959, p.10
8 H. A. Ibrahim, op cit, General History of Africa, V 1, p. 374
9 Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim, Awn al Sharif Qasim, Ikhlas Makkawi, History of the Ottoman Empire, pp. 75,76
10 H. A. Ibrahim, op cit, p. 375
11 Yusuf Fadl Hasan, Historical Relationship, “Main Highlights of Sudanese British Relations” in the Sudanese British Relations, Y. F. Hasan (editor) KUP, Khartoum, 2002, pp. 10,11
14 Leonard A. Stone, “Turkish Foreign Policy: Four Pillars of Traditions”, Perception, June-August 2001, p.15
15 B, Rodrick and H, Davidson, Turkey, A Short History, Huntington, 1998, p.227, Stone, op cit, p.27
16 H. Kaan Nazali, “Turkey and North Africa. Challenge and Opportunity” (obtained from the Network)
17 Stone, op cit, Perception, June-August, p.25
18 Numan Hazar, Turkish Policy for Open up to Africa, Centre for Strategic Studies, Khartoum April 1999, http://www.turkishembassy.org/governmentpolitics/foreigns
19 Bedreddin Elbeiti, “Comments on the paper of Dr. Ali Oba some thoughts on the Turkish African Relations” in History of the Ottoman Empire, Some Aspects of the Sudanese Turkish Relations, pp. 68-69
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A. Engin Oba, “Some Thoughts on the Turkish African Relations” in History of the Ottoman Empire, etc, pp.59-66

Most of the data in this subsection is obtained mainly from Ishraga Abbas Abdal Rahman The Sudanese Turkish Economic Relations, in History of the Ottoman Empire (cited already) p.79 (English Section) and pp.135-172 (Arabic Section) and the above mentioned papers of Baha Al Din Hanafi and Numan Hazar. I am also thankful to the Turkish Embassy in Khartoum and Ambassasor al Tirafi Kurmino for supplying me with useful information.