

## TURKEY’S HUMANITARIAN ACTIONS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN: A POLICY ALTERNATIVE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

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### Abstract

*Despite its military engagements in Afghanistan, Turkey is overwhelmingly active in Afghanistan and Pakistan on the humanitarian front as well. This paper deliberates upon Turkish humanitarian responses in both the countries in peace buildings as well as in natural disasters responses. For this purpose, humanitarian role of Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) and Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) have been discussed in details in order to see whether their roles have furthered the “brotherhood-oriented relationship” to a high level of engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region or not. This study finds that their humanitarian actions have given Turkey a leading role in the region to involve both the countries in trilateral diplomatic initiatives, institutional building and transforming their relations for sustainable peace and development. Keeping the alternate effects on the region, in the end, shortcomings and policy recommendations have also been given.*

### Key Words

Humanitarian Actions, Conflict Resolutions, Humanitarian Diplomacy, Mediation, Man-made and Natural Disasters.

### Introduction

The multifaceted challenges in the modern complex world have transcended the political boundaries, thereby disturbing the collective

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security and international peace. Complex humanitarian crisis in any part of the world is no more a national issue that the traditionalists once thought. This includes both man-made and natural disasters.

Rather than “winning” the “war on terror”, its longevity in Afghanistan and Pakistan has ended up in massive humanitarian crises,<sup>1</sup> political instabilities and has created a dent in international system that risked international norms and human rights.

Actions have hardly been recognized as a method of counter insurgency. It may probably be due to myopic security and state-centric policy orientations. These narrow approaches fell short not only in analyzing the modern complex world politics, as Keohane and Nye argue, but also are inadequate to provide “human security” arising from non-military threats (Keohane & Nye, 2011).

The moral instinctiveness, as the liberalists argue, always compels others to help those in sufferings. The main question in the end of twentieth century was that why those who lived relatively in comfort and security had cared more for the suffering of others in major humanitarian crises of the world (Wheeler , 1997). Leaders of the states have a moral duty to exercise their power in order to minimise human sufferings in other states in addition to their constitutional responsibilities. Humane political leader sometimes confronts such moral choices that the international community wants him or her to be. Unlike the realists’ schools of thoughts, if national interest is the highest obligation that a political leader is expected to fulfil, then the humanitarian crises in Somalia and Bosnia would have been left to those people to sort out themselves, and “the international moral controversies surrounding them would not have arisen” (Jackson, 1993).

Humanitarian catastrophes are closely connected to the security and peace of the world. Neglecting them are considered as a moral and human rights violation. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, during his speech at Nobel Peace Prize ceremony in 2001

described humanitarian actions and human rights as two sides of the same coin struggling equally for a fair and more peaceful world. To him, humanitarianism is an important pillar of new liberal world order that fills the vacuum left by the globalization. He said, "today's real borders are not between nations, but between powerful and powerless, free and fettered, privileged and humiliated. Today, no walls can separate humanitarian or human rights crises in one part of the world from national security crises in the other" (Annan, 2001). The international humanitarian law, four Geneva Conventions and the additional protocols are providing moral high grounds for states and international organisations to help those in distress for the maintenance of international security and peace.

Turkey, a new humanitarian in the arena, has been providing humanitarian assistance not only at bilateral level, but also to UN agencies and NGOs. Its humanitarian diplomacy has attained international recognition and enhanced its scope in the field of humanitarianism. In July 2014, Turkey has become member of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and Donor Support Group (ODSG) (Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.a). According to Global Humanitarian Assistance report, 2016, it has been the second largest donor humanitarian country in the world and has contributed nearly \$ 3.2 billion humanitarian assistance in 2015 (Global Humanitarian Assistance Report, 2016).

Thus its humanitarian actions in both Afghanistan and Pakistan have paved the way for Turkey to mediate in trilateral strategic dialogues in order to facilitate sustainable peace and development. Its humanitarian organizations, particularly TIKA and TRCS, are not only channelizing the humanitarian diplomacy, but are also constructively improving political engagements and relationships of both the states in the region.

### **Turkey Humanitarian Diplomacy and Conflict Mediation**

Turkey humanitarian diplomacy, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOF), is influenced by its geography and history with

the aim to create a stable international society irrespective of race, gender or religion. It is further influenced by human centered and conscious driven approaches such as peacebuilding, conflict resolutions and comprehensive development in humanitarian crises of all sort for a prosperous and safer world (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.a).

The organizational structure of its humanitarian system is designed to respond instantly to any sort of humanitarian crises and to deliver assistance to the sufferers without any hindrance. The system has been institutionally divided into three pillars: the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD); the Turkish Red Crescent (TRCS); and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA). These agencies perform their separate humanitarian functions. TIKA, for instance, focuses on social and economic development by providing technical cooperation, while the rests are focusing on humanitarian relief in the time of conflicts and natural disasters (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.a).

This hierarchical structure and its selfless service is paying off in terms of its increasing responsibility in the UN humanitarian system. This has in fact contributed too to its soft power image in the international community. Many Turkish public institutions and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as IHH, TIKA, TRCS and AFAD have contributed increasingly to this ascending humanitarian power. The open presence of Turkish agencies and NGOs in the streets of Somalia, Gaza, Myanmar, Afghanistan and elsewhere attest to this fact (Davutoğlu, 2013). The current government has adopted mediation and humanitarianism as important components of its foreign policy in international conflicts that can abridge the East and West divides (Kalin, 2011).

“Mediation for Peace”—one of its initiative launched with Finland in September 2010—has achieved much success and fame in conflicts resolution. UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution in its support and created a ‘Group of Friends’ on Mediation. The “Group of Friends” has further grown over the past years to 47 members. Similarly, the initiative of “Africa Opening” in 2008, the “Alliance of

Civilization”, Israeli-Syrian negotiations, Bosnian-Serbian reconciliation, etc. have tested Turkey’s mediational role in recent times (Third Istanbul Conference on Mediation, n.a).

Similarly, in Syrian humanitarian crisis it has contributed (total aid \$ 9 bn) 20 times more aid to the Syrian refugees than that of the aid received from international organisations (kizil, 2016). World first Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016 was hosted under the auspice of UN. It has been hosting regularly Istanbul Conference on Mediation since 25 February 2012 that provides a platform for experts, practitioners as well as civil society activists in the international peace and conflicts resolution (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.a).

These humanitarian endeavors have enhanced its mediation skills, overcoming humanitarian crises and improving cooperation. Toward the region under the study, it has extended all possible means of mediation and humanitarian actions that can bring closeness in their peculiar relationship (Kalin, 2011).

### **Nature of Conflict and Humanitarian Situations in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

The scale of human suffering is large since World War II, according to United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson. Today 130 million people in 40 countries are dependent on humanitarian assistance of the UN and other partners (UNOCHA, August 19, 2016). At the end of 2015, more than 40.8 million people were internally displaced due to armed conflicts and natural disasters. In the current decade, average 25.4 million have been displaced by natural disasters each year (UNOCHA, 2016). Afghanistan and Pakistan are not exceptions in this regards.

Afghanistan remains “one of the most dangerous and crisis ridden countries in the world” for the last four decades (Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017). The “war on terror” has been noted as the “longest war” that has brought incalculable and unprecedented humanitarian crises. The security situation is abysmal and is deteriorated in 33 out of 34 province. According to humanitarian Needs

Overview, 2017, the country has witnessed displacement every week in 2016 due to wars and internal strife. The continued geographic spreading and deepening of the conflict has increased the number of people dependency on humanitarian assistance by 13 per cent (now 9.3 million in total). In the year 2016, a highest record of displacement was observed. The situation was alarming after repatriation of refugees started from Pakistan and neighbouring countries (Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017).

Besides the threat of war, the people are vulnerable to sudden shocks of natural disasters. In preceding years, almost every province in the country was hit either by natural disasters or armed conflict. Whereas, nineteen provinces were hit by both. Every year, approximately 230,000 people are affected by natural calamities. It was estimated that in 2017 more than 2 million people have life threatening emergency situation in Afghanistan (Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2017).

Similarly, Pakistan, since 9/11 has been facing both internal and external threats of terrorism. It had to fight war in the tribal agencies and settled areas which resulted into unprecedented humanitarian catastrophes. Since 2008, due to war on terror in the erstwhile FATA (now merged areas), 5.3 million people have been displaced—some of them “multiple times” (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2016).

According to South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) 2014, from 2009 to 2014 more than 2,551 civilians have died in FATA. More than 3 million have been displaced and become IDPs due to military operation in Swat and Dir. The fighting between the military and Taliban resulted in the destruction of 60 per cent infrastructure in the region. Almost 45 per cent houses in FATA were fully damaged. Similarly, 68 per cent of the roads and 74 per cent of the markets were destroyed (Pakistan: IDP/Returnee Survey of Humanitarian needs in KP and FATA, 2016). More than 114533 families displaced this time and 1.3 million People affected (Khan, Xiaoying & Kanwal, 2016). Some 200 families became refugees by crossing boarder into

Afghanistan (Pakistanis who fled army offensive begin to return home: Official, 2017).

Coupled with the war on terror, natural disasters too in the past decade had wrought havoc. In 2005, earthquake in Azad-Kashmir affected 12 million people. The flood in July 2010 affected 20 million people in the country which is 12 per cent of the entire population (Arai, 2012). Famine like situation in the Thar Sindh in 2014 and the earthquake in 2015 in the northern parts of the country affected the local population to the worst. The country has shown little progress on the economic front that could barely withstand any sort of humanitarian crises (Global Humanitarian Assistance, 2010). Financial support is always needed to address the humanitarian situation. In 2017, according to Humanitarian Strategic Plan Overview, \$ 339 million was required (Pakistan: Humanitarian Strategic Plan Overview- 2017, 2017).

### **The Role of TIKA and TRCS in Afghanistan and Pakistan**

Started in 1990's with the aim of providing humanitarian aid in Bosnian crises, Turkey's humanitarian organisations have been carrying out services in almost 100 countries around the world. The expansion of its humanitarian sector depends upon the reforms brought about the current regime that minimised the bureaucratic hurdles in line with its national interests. In fact, it has "enlarged the geographical scope of their activities and made them as representative of Turkey abroad" (Çelik & İşeri, 2016). According to TIKA report, 2013, Numan Kurtulmuş, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, is of the view that due its humanitarian sector, Turkey is competing for global interests too (Bıçaksız, 2013).

Each passing year, the official development assistance of Turkey is growing rapidly, leading to emerge the biggest humanitarian donor country in the world. As its economy grew by 2.9 per cent in 2014, the official development assistance reached to 8.6 per cent in the same year. In other words, in 2014, the official development assistance of Turkey was approximately \$ 3 billion—an increase of 8.6 per cent compared to the preceding years (TIKA, 2014).

## **The Case of TIKA**

Although being a member of NATO ally, Turkish troops are not taking part in the combat operations in Afghanistan (Erman, Roy & Bruguere, 2010). Probably this can also be the reason that the Turkish humanitarian organisations and troops are respected, and their representatives are allowed to work freely throughout Afghanistan. As a result its humanitarian organisations have been engaged in many projects in twenty four provinces of Afghanistan. It has been providing relief assistance, reconstructing and developing institutions in Afghanistan.

In this regards, TIKA has completed 250 educational projects. Until 2007, it has completed construction of 24 schools under the Construction of Educational Project. Similarly, 200 health projects have provided healthcare services to more than 5 million people. It has been operating three hospitals, two mobile hospitals and child health clinics that provide services collectively to more than thousands patients per day. The Afghanistan Health Projects has trained 147 health experts and doctors in Turkey. Similarly, water and sanitation projects have been started in Baghlan, Balkh, Faryab Takhar and Kabul benefiting total 0.4 million people (TIKA, n.a).

As a part of developmental schemes, construction of roads and bridges as well as institutional strengthening are the major initiatives that TIKA has undertaken in Afghanistan. It has been supervising Wardak and Jawzjan Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) at the community level. Under the project TIKA has completed 200 projects and has spent \$ 20 million in Wardak province. Many initiatives have been taken such as vocational training, construction of model police station in district Meydan Shahr, Wardak Turkish-Afghan Friendship forest, Fruit Growing Project and construction of Pol-i-Sokhta and Mirwais flyover in Kabul and other regions (TIKA, n.a). Since 2004, it has also been providing training to educationists, health workers, agriculturists, judges, prosecutors, and engineers, financial and administrative experts etc (TIKA, 2016).

On the other hand, TIKA activities in Pakistan have largely focused on relief operations in humanitarian crises. According to OCHA fact sheet, from 2004 to 2006, Turkey has provided \$ 66 million humanitarian aid, out of which \$ 25 million was provided bilaterally in the earthquake 2005 (Pakistan Floods 2010: Country Aid Factsheet #6, Fiscal Year (FY) 2010, 2010). It was the leading organization in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the earthquake affected areas in 2005. The agency has constructed a new administrative complex, associated infrastructure and local government building in Muzafferabad, Kashmir (Siyahkalem, 2017).

Similarly since 2010, TIKA has completed 94 projects in health, education, water and sanitation and agriculture sectors in Pakistan. It has also carried out relief operations in IDPs crisis from time to time. In the post-flood 2010, the organization has provided medical apparatuses and instruments to hospitals in the affected areas and has distributed tents, Ramadan relief supply kits, foods packages and blankets to the flood victims. Moreover, it has constructed a vocational education centers for training women. In Muzaffargarh, it has constructed a school with 32 classroom. A 90 beds hospital was also constructed there (TIKA, 2016).

The organization is also providing its services in many other projects such as Basira Emine Erdogan Daanish Care Girls School in Muzaffergarh, Neonatal Unit in Okara district hospital, goat breeding in cooperation with the Faisalabad University in 2014, Turkish language department at NUML, Lahore children's hospital bone marrow transplant center, police training, young diplomat training and Afghanistan-Pakistan joint Desktop Exercise (2012) (TIKA, 2015).

### **The Case of TRCS**

In a similar way, TRCS, working in 78 countries, has also been active in humanitarian and developmental operations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Due to its successful services in the humanitarian sector, the organization was a leading contestant for presidency of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 2017 (Turkish Red Crescent eyes IFRC 2017 presidency, 2016).

Although, its primary objective is to provide relief assistance in conflicts, yet reconstruction and development of the conflict affected communities is an additional part of its operations.

In collaboration with the Afghanistan Red Crescent Society, TRCS has distributed food packages as part of Afghanistan Humanitarian Relief Operation projects in the catastrophic flood of April and May 2014 that killed 256 people and affected five provinces in the northern part of the country. It was the first organization to deliver humanitarian relief assistance to 1'400 flood affected families and victims in earthquake 2015 earthquake (Afghanistan: Flash Floods and Landslides, 2014). Since 9/11, along with TIKA, the organization has been engaged in different developmental projects ranging from relief assistance to the IDPs rehabilitations and reconstruction operations in Afghanistan.

Similarly, in Pakistan TRCS has launched massive humanitarian operations in the wake of 2005 earthquake which continued till October 2010. The post disaster peacebuilding activities included establishment of hospital worth \$ 5 million and sheltering 70'000 people in Muzaffarabad. A logistic center in Islamabad was established in order to reach to the victims more quickly and to oversee the relief operations easily (The Turkish Red Crescent's aid to Pakistan Continues, 2005). A reconstruction project worth \$ 1.4 million was carried out in November 2007 in the region. Additionally, under the Capacity Building Project, \$ 3.5 million was spent by the organizations in the region (Turkish Red Crescent's Relief ....2008). During the IDPs crisis in 2009, TRCS provided a consignment of medical supplies and ten tons of emergency relief worth \$ 0.3 million to the IDPs Special Support Group (Relief Activities of Turkish Red Crescent for IDPs in Pakistan, 2009).

During the flood in 2010, a crisis desk was established on 7/24 hours basis for coordinating relief activities in Pakistan. Emergency food and non-food items were dispatched by air, road and railways from Turkey, and distributed it food items to almost 215,987 affected families. It also sheltered 2725 families in the post-flood period. All the

flood relief activities cost approximately \$ 32.2 million (TRCS Activity Report, n.a). It also set up containers camps worth \$ 640'000 in Wam Dabuna and Wam Sra Khezai in 2008 earthquake in Baluchistan. The organisation is also engaged with the Pakistan Red Crescent Society and other NGOs in rehabilitation work (Pakistan: The Quetta earthquake..., 2009).

### **Effects of Humanitarian Actions on Pak-Afghan Relations and the Role of Turkey**

Developed and developing states have been quasi-dependent on the information and expertise of their INGOs working in disasters and conflicts (Çelik & İşeri, 2016). It is, thus, not ironic that the donor state mediates between 'rival recipient states' on "humanitarian grounds" for the purpose of conflict resolutions and peacebuilding. In a similar way, Turkey tries to build a peaceful environment with its close neighbors and other part of the world through these organizations.

The humanitarian actions of TRC and TIKA, along with other Turkish humanitarian NGOs, have on one hand earned much praises and appreciations at the international level, but on the other have strengthened the country's image in mediation in international conflicts. Today as new humanitarian in the global humanitarian system, Turkey has been playing an important role in mediation in international conflicts.

Its humanitarian actions in the region under the study have provided a fertile ground for its diplomatic initiatives to mend ties of both the countries. Relationship with both states are deeper having strong historical, religious and cultural ties. Its presence is not merely a part of NATO led mission, but also a "brotherhood duty". The aforementioned humanitarian operations of these two organizations have made Turkey a popular humanitarian supporter in both the countries. Its diplomatic initiatives may not have changed the situation in the region, but have certainly brought the two countries closer together that have never been done by any other country. In this regard, several reconciliatory attempts have been carried out to fill the trust deficit between the two countries.

Turkey has initiated a trilateral cooperation called Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Summit for the purpose of improving relations and minimizing the trust-deficit between the two countries. Since 2007, it has held each year eight summits until 2014. The focus of all these summits have been cooperation in the field of economics, terrorism, peace, sharing intelligence, military and politics in the region. It was for the first time that the military and intelligence chiefs of both the states had come together in 2009 summit.

In March 2011, the three countries conducted joint military exercises called Military Operations in Urban Terrain (MOUT), combat Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and Combat Order and Training Control in Turkey. Although, these engagements may not have yielded drastic results to solve decades old problems, but they had kept the line of communication open (Kaya, 2013). After the eighth summit, no further advancement has been made—probably due to the current crises in the Middle East and Syrian refugees’ problem that has diverted Turkey’s attention from the Pak-Afghan region.

Similarly, in November 2011, Turkey had started another diplomatic initiative called, “Istanbul for Afghanistan” which aimed at finding sustainable solution to the Afghanistan’s problem by involving its bordering countries. The summit was attended by several countries’ leaders and representatives. The leaders of Pak-Afghan have shown trusts in Turkey to mediate in the regional issues. The then president Hamid Karzai in his visit to Ankara in December 2011 preferred Turkey to facilitate Afghan Taliban talks. On his visit to Pakistan the then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said, “Turkey will stay in Afghanistan even after all the other forces left, and will leave only when our Afghan brothers and sisters tell us” (Kaya, 2013).

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ahmet Davutoğlu, is of the view that Turkey would continue its humanitarian diplomacy in the region particularly in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of NATO. The level of trust of the leaderships and of the people in both the countries upon Turkey has always encouraged it to impartially intervene in the regional conflict and other pertinent issues (Davutoğlu, 2013).

Against this backdrop, using its humanitarian diplomacy effectively, Turkey in the current situation is the only country that can bring both Afghanistan and Pakistan together. Perhaps Turkey's humanitarian actions in the region have taken her to a larger political engagements in order to find a practical solution to the long standing issues between the two states.

## **Conclusion**

Rebuilding societies in post-conflicts through humanitarian actions has always been an uphill task. Since the end of the cold war, the intra-state wars such as ethnic and sectarian wars have become the norm and the subsequent humanitarian crises as the cry of the day that have brought unprecedented security challenges for international community. Conflicts, internal wars, natural disasters, epidemics, refugees and internal displacement are no more sovereignty issue, but are threats to entire human security and international peace. Responding to these humanitarian crisis is now a moral obligation for every big and small states, particularly for those who have the capacity to pursue humanitarian diplomacy.

The role of TIKA and TRCS in this regard has multiplied the Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy in international conflicts and disasters. These organizations are important pillars of Turkey's foreign policy intended to boost the country image at the international arena through its humanitarian activities (TIKA, 2013).

These organizations have been used as part and parcel of its foreign policy and humanitarian diplomacy that made Turkey to act more decisively in the international conflicts and peace (Kalin, 2011). Yet, the role of these organisations have been confined by the government to relief assistance and humanitarian disasters. As new-humanitarians, these organisations may be involved in more proactive way in conflict resolutions and mediations by giving them greater autonomy in the humanitarian sector as well as in policy guideline. As these organisations have first-interaction-community-experiences which can thus be utilized for better policy guidance.

Its humanitarian role and non-combat approach in Afghanistan has made it more generous country in the region. This exceptional quality can be utilized to bring both the countries to table—which other stakeholders have rarely brought. Turkey-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Summit is a good example of it. However, these diplomatic initiatives may not have solved the decades old animosities between the two countries, but this channel of communication must be kept open.

It is understandable that the Syrian conflict on the door step and hosting 5 million Syrian Refugees have distracted the Turkey's attention from Afghan-Pakistan issue, but there is greater need and urgency to be done in the Trilateral Strategic Summits in the post US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The declining trend in its humanitarian assistance in the region, particularly in Afghanistan, will undermine the hard-gains. As of 2011 and 2012, Afghanistan was the largest recipients of Turkish assistance by 29.6 per cent (Yildiz, 2012), but in 2013 it became as the 4<sup>th</sup> (Pakistan as the 5<sup>th</sup>) recipients of its development assistance (Yildiz, 2011).

Low humanitarian funding for both the countries, as warned by OCHA Operations Director John Ging, “could undermine efforts to bring meaningful development to vulnerable communities in those countries” (UNOCHA, 2013, June 06). Champa Patel, South Asia Director of Amnesty International, opined that the current global shifting in humanitarian assistance to new humanitarian crises in the Middle East has diverted the world's attention from the humanitarian disaster in the region (Amnesty International, 2016). Low response from the international community could risk the local population of falling back to militancy and terrorism. Keeping its humanitarian endeavours in view, the need of the hour for Turkey is to engage itself in the on-going peace talks in a constructive way by taking all the stakeholders on board particularly in post American withdrawal.

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