

## Effect of Turkey's domestic mutations on the national safety of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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**Abstract:** The rise of Islamists (the AKP) in Turkey, in 2002, fundamentally changed the discourse of this country's foreign policy, particularly towards Iran. Ankara put all of its best efforts, so that by entering spheres of interaction and convergence with an international system, it would generally develop the domain of its economical and political penetration based on its interests. Now, the regional and international policies of the AKP are aligned to convergence with the condition of being a member of the Europe Union and they are seeking the realization of Turkey's old and historical wish by using all of the possible means; So much that they have reviewed their ideology, views and party's programs and they have done some noticeable economical and political reformations in order to become a member of the Europe Union. In the recent years, the relations of Iran and Turkey has developed, and a relative sustainability that is dominant on the relations of Iran and Turkey has been the reason that some misunderstandings have been overcome and a proper basis for a bilateral trust has been established. Cooperation between the two countries Iran and Turkey in political, security, economical and cultural fields has developed and the long-term cooperation of the future in the security field, fighting terrorism and establishing the pipelines of natural gas transmission has been taken to the consideration of the two countries. Iran and Turkey are strongly against Israel's penetration in the north of Iraq and Kurd's separatism from Iraq's central government. Development of the volume of commercial and trade exchanges of Iran and Turkey in the recent years is obvious for everyone.

**Key words:** *Foreign Policy; The AKP; Islamists; Iran*

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### 1. Introduction

This writing seeks an understanding of the new foreign policy of Turkey and the important issues that it is facing in the Middle East region and its effect, particularly on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Existence of the different and opposing political forces in the domestic policy of Turkey have turned this country to a different phenomenon than its neighbors. In the domestic political context of Turkey, two different forces are driving this country toward different directions by two motive motors. One of these two motive motors is Islamism, that despite the long ride of mutation which has gone through so many ups and downs, right not it is dominant in the Turkish community and a moderate interpretation of it has the political power in its hands. Another force is Laicism and Kemalism which moves in the opposite direction of the first force. Although these two political sources have some mutual theories within Turkey's political community in some domains, however, conflict and discord are regulations that are ruling the relationship between these two. Turkey is geographically a neighbor of the countries Iran, Iraq and Russia and undoubtedly, the internal mutations

of these countries affect the other neighboring countries. The mutual issues have made these three countries to have cooperation and conflict with one another. Among these, the greatest concern is about Turkey, because this country does not think that Iraq's mutations after occupation is beneficial for Turkey and it is strongly concerned that federalism in Iraq would cause autonomy and even separation of the Kurdish regions of Turkey. Turkey is worried for its status with the West. Turkey is concerned that the recent mutations of the Middle East and Iraq would create some conditions that the importance of that country for Iraq goes away and this itself would become a deterrent in the process of Turkey's membership in the Europe Union. The issue of Kurds is one of the most important barriers of Turkey's membership in the Europe Union. The disturbances that have been done by the Kurds of Turkey who seek separation and PPK have made this country face several security threads. It is stated that about 30 thousand people have been killed in this conflicts and many more have become homeless and their economical and social costs cannot be calculated. From past till now the issue of Kurds has created some tensions and insecurity in the relations of Turkey with its neighbors (Lavasani, 2005). The relations of Turkey and Iran are based on the historical past and there are so many mutual

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interests about the Middle East issue between these two countries. By considering the Middle East strategy of Turkey, three factors have fundamental roles in the alignment of the interests of Iran and Turkey, these three factors are: religion, security and economics. True religion of Islam has an effective role in unifying the countries of the Middle East. Cooperation of Iran and Turkey in the security domain is a proper field for the alignment of the two countries. One of the main items of the alignment of Iran and Turkey in the issue of Kurds and political future is Iraq. Undoubtedly, Iran and Turkey are both opposed to the separatism of Kurds in the north of Iraq. The economic and business domain is another factor of the alignment of Iran and Turkey's interests and the growth of commercial and trade exchanges between the two countries is a good indicative of this affair (Naghdi Nejad, 2011).

## **2. AKP (Justice and Development Party)**

The AKP is the dominant political party in Turkey. This party introduces itself as the right-wing and centrist parties. The founders and current senior members of this party were among students of "Najm eddin Arbakani", the leader of the Islamist parties welfare, virtue and happiness and who has succeeded from it in 2001 (AD), but they still carry their Islamism titles with themselves (Kouh Navard, 2007). The AKP was founded twelve years ago by "Rajab Tayeb Erdogan" with the split from the party of "Najm eddin Arbakani". The first Islamist party of Turkey was founded in 1960 AD and with the name of <<National System>> and ten years after the coup, another party with the name <<National Health>> was formed and after the coup of September 12, 1980 this party was also closed and after four years and along with the freedom of the parties, "Arbakani" founded the <<Welfare>> party. The Islamists of Turkey founded the AKP from the modern layer of the Welfare party which was disbanded. After the occurrence of the White Coup against "Arbakani" and the dissolution of the Welfare Party, which he led, by the constitution court, "Arbakani" was forced to resign. The conflict between of the conservatives of the party led by "Rajayi" was short and reformists led by "Abdollah Gülen" was intensified about the understanding of Islam and its interpretation in the everyday issues; so much that "Rajayi Kutan" established the Happiness Party with the conservative Islamic orientations, after the dissolution of the Virtue Party. And also its reformists and modernists founded the AK Party with the leadership of "Erdogan" and "Abdollah Gülen" (Gareth, 2007).

## **3. Foreign Policy of the AKP**

In occupation of Iraq by America, the Turkish parliament with one different vote of 500 people prevented America from using the bases in Turkey. And also "Erdogan" tried to improve the relations the neighboring countries. About the relations of

Iran and Turkey, we must say that the relations between Iran and Turkey are darker compared to the early time of Erdogan's period, but we must be fair and state that it is better than the premiership of "Suleiman Demirel," or "Bülent Ecevit"s. Because at that time, the Islamist parties in Turkey were under so much pressure, but right now there are also two concerns. One of them is the Turnkey's interference in Syria and the fear that Turkey wants to enter Syria or Turkey intends to create a buffer zone in Syrian territories, which is not at all good for Turkey and the region. Second issue is advertisements and some of the speeches by "Abdollah Gülen" and Erdogan himself about Shiite and this religion. The dominant AK party has also had a successful performance in the field of foreign policy. Particularly, about supporting the membership of Turkey in the Europe Union, this party succeeded to enhance its popularity. Erdogan's success in determination of the date of the beginning of the discussions regarding joining the Europe Union was the reason that people see him as a national hero. Erdogan's government's stand in the America's war against Iraq also dramatically increased the reputation of this group in the public opinions, because the public opinion of Turkey was strongly against war. Orientation of Turkish foreign policy about the Middle East issues, particularly about the 33-day war Lebanese Hezbollah and Israel and also condemning Israel's violent actions about the occupied territories, again helped the popularity of this party to increase in the public opinion. Overall it can be said that the AK Party in this period, in addition to maintaining the relations with West, was also seeking development of relations with Islamic world and East. A series of these actions caused Turkish people to come to this belief that Erdogan's government has had a successful foreign policy and thus they believe that they can vote for this party again.

## **4. Iran and Turkey's relations**

Iran and Turkey are considered as two of the powerful actors in their surrounding region, and each of them seek specific purposes. Establishing warm and friendly relations between the two powerful neighbors has a huge significance and various components affect the relations between this two. Turkey is trying to achieve a better status in the Middle East compared to the one in the past and to play a more effective role in its crisis and The Islamic Republic of Iran also follows specific purposes in the region that so many of them are in harmony with and in the same direction as the purposes of Turkey. This issue, in turn, has a considerable impact on the expansion of the bilateral relations between Iran and Turkey. It seems that three elements, religion, economics and security play the main role in the alignment of the interests of Iran and Turkey and in fact, the fundamental fields of the expansion of the relations between these two countries are these three elements. In contrast, we can refer to the three

divergent elements in the relations of Iran and Turkey, which are: 1. the role of regional and international powers. 2. Turkey's secular system.

3. Ethnic minorities. With the rise of the AKP in the year 2000, the conflict between Islamists and Kemalists<sup>†</sup> was not created about the way of having relations with Iran. Many of the agreements that were already reached between Iran and Turkey were implemented in the time of Erdogan. After administration of the AK government (justice and development) in Turkey, the relations of the two countries Iran and Turkey developed more than before. In general since the year 2001 and after, several activities have been done in the field of expanding the relations of these two countries, including: Holding joint security commissions in order to provide security for borders and fighting terrorism, establishing and opening Iran to Turkey the pipeline of the natural gas transmission, expanding the artistic and cultural relations and the officials of both of the countries visiting each other. The pragmatic approach of Iran in the domain of foreign policy and Kemalist's finding out that Iran does not support Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey, was effective in improving these relations. The pressing need of Turkey for the oil and gas interests of Iran made Kemalists agree with the implementation of the 1996 agreement with Iran. During Erdogan's visit in Iran in the July of 2004, an agreement was signed between Iran and Turkey and both of them emphasized on believing that PPK is a terrorist and after that the two countries have put a persistent effort to protect their borders from the PPK (Stephen Larbay, 107).

### 5. Effective components in the relations of Iran and Turkey

After the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, a wave of its effectiveness was created in the region that it was more the natural result of the revolution than to be the result of the policy making. This issue, by stimulating the West, was the thing that caused some of the neighbors of Iran to be concerned including Turkey that in the long term created some problems in the relations of the two countries. Western media presented conflict as the difference between the political systems of Iran and Turkey and they tried to take advantage of this issue to create some tension in the relations of the two neighbors. It was while at the same time, the West had a rapprochement with the communist governments<sup>‡</sup>.

Adopting pragmatic and realistic policies by Iran in the recent years has been effective on the relations of this country with the neighboring countries, particularly Turkey, in a way that the relations of the two countries, especially in the past few years, compared to the previous periods, have reached sustainability and reliability in addition to

being distanced from the past ups and downs. Of course in reaching this point, adopting détente of Turkey with the neighbors by considering the necessity of implementation of its conditions with the criteria of the Europe Union has also been effective. Beside this issue, Iraq's mutations and the mutual concerns of the two countries about this region has also had its own impact on the relations of the two countries. One of the most important means for reaching the desired level of relations of Iran and Turkey is implementing the principles of mutual respect and building trust in relations.

In general, the range of the relations of Iran and Turkey has very broad and vast dimensions due to the neighborhood and its levels and the predicted mechanisms direct them. For example, economic relations in the country, especially in the recent years, have become more widespread. In the meeting of "Tayeb Erdogan", the Turkish prime minister with "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad", President of Iran in December of 2006, the prime minister of Turkey by referring to the fact that the level of trade exchanges between the two countries have grown five times in the past four years, believed that it is an indicative of the warm relations of Tehran and Ankara and added that: in the year 2002, the level of the exchanges of the two country was 1.2 billion dollars and it was supposed to increase to 5 billion dollars in the fastest time, that today it is fortunately 6 billion dollars and we hope that this number would increase to the number 10 billion dollars in the near future. Iran's President also embraced Erdogan's suggestion for increasing the level of exchanges to 10 billion dollars<sup>§</sup>.

Overall it must be said that the key point in the relations of Iran and Turkey is the necessity of changing the mindset that it would also be possible by changing the point of view. In Turkey, affected by the negative publicity in its creation, America, Israel and their domestic corollaries have a special role, it is being tried to show Iran as a interferer country that supports terrorism, whereas Iraq's mutations the fact that America's claims against this country and the presence of Israel in the north of Iraq was not proven, unveiled so many of these deceptions and this mutation has such results that it made even the part of secular body of Turkey that did not have a positive view of Iran to reconsider their view. And also in Iran some of the experts believe that Turkey is the factor of America and Israel, whereas the relations of Turkey with these two countries have been based on providing mutual interest, creating equation with countries and neighbors and also considering the particular temporal circumstances. Iraq's mutations, rejecting the legislation of the passage of US soldiers through Turkey's territory in the parliament of this country and also the relative coldness of the relations of Ankara - Tel - Aviv compared to the past Because of Israel's interventions in the north of Iraq, it indicates that Turkish people consider their own interests more in

<sup>†</sup> Secularism

<sup>‡</sup> <http://www.torkiye.com/ravabet.phd>

<sup>§</sup> <http://www.president.ir/fa/view.phd>

adjusting their own foreign policies and they have an accurate understanding of the situations.

## **6. Turkey's place in the modern Middle East with taking a look at Iran's interests**

In the note that "Rajab Tayeb Erdogan", the prime minister of Turkey has written in order to be included in the magazine "Russia's global affairs" (August 2004), he mentions the perspective of Turkey about the Great Middle East. From Erdogan's point of view, the countries shall take reformations seriously. He pointed out that today the region of the Middle East is going through one of its worst periods. It seems that there is long distance to the salvation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, whereas the circumstance of Iraq has not improved that much that would give real hope to the Iraqi people or the international society. But a promising dynamic is emerging. People and governments of the region have found out the need for reformation and the international society has announced its desire to help. About the project of the great Middle East, given the ambitious nature of the project, its dimensions and problems and the views that the people of the region has of the West's policies which are traditionally pessimistic, it is no surprise that the invention of the great Middle East was questioned at the very beginning. Nevertheless, we must avoid ambiguous descriptions and evaluate this invention based on its specifications; the positive and negative specifications of Turkey as a country which is affected by the mutations of the Middle East, necessarily looks at this invention with a realistic and constructive perspective (Naeemi, 2004)\*. In general, the project of the great Middle East of America encountered a deadlock, due to the lack of compliance with the realities of the region and the fact that America's perspective only focuses on the surface in adoption of such decision, and the largest symbol of this deadlock is the victory of Islamic forces and the fact that the discussion of Islam was highlighted in the current regional mutations. Following these changes, America entered another stage that the new Middle East project is the brainchild of these changes. In fact, after the incidents of the July 2006 and fierce resistance of Hezbollah in Lebanon against the transgressions of the Zionist regime, which made the West' political assembly and its regional supporters concerned, Condoleezza Rice, America's Secretary of State, in the interview dated August 7, 2006 with Time Magazine claimed that: <<The regional crisis indicate that a flied has been provided for the rise of a new Middle East and America's government

intends to create a new Middle East by using the opportunities which have been created by the crisis in this region>>. In addition, George Bush also said in his annual speech in the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006: <<It is necessary to consult with the moderate forces and moderate voices in the Middle East, and in fact to mobilize them>> (IT, 2007).

According to the new Middle East project, it is not American's intention to target the Islamic world seamlessly, but they rather intend to separate a part of Islamic world, which is the Sunni Muslims from the other one (Shiite Muslims) and by creating division and enemies, they want to directly aim the spearhead of their attacks at the Shiite Muslims, particularly the Islamic Republic of Iran and they intend to weaken Iran's trump card and reach their long-term purpose. The political arms of the implementation of these two approaches are America's regional allies and UN Security Council and its military arms are also the direct military presence and also using the Al-Qaeda terrorists and Baathists, with the purpose of creating a sectarian gap. In the new project of the Middle East, Israel has a special role and status. Shimon Peres has stated in the statements which are dated August second 2006, at the Washington Institute for Middle East Policy: << Either the Middle East will remain regionally Arab and generally Sunni or the Middle East will go under the spell of Iran and mostly Shiite>>. Overall, America and Israel have attempted to highlight Iranians and Shiite Muslims as a thread and not only for the West, but also for the Islamic world. Controversy against Iran's nuclear program, the charge of Iraq's being devoured and penetrated by Iran and then the charge of Iran's interfere in the Lebanon's affairs are evaluated in this respect. The United State, by creating a gap in the Islamic world, wants Iran's isolation, and it is seeking to reduce the power of Shiite Muslims in Iraq, to completely disarmament of Hezbollah in Lebanon and eventually to strengthen Israel. This issue is also desirable for the regional allies of America. Cooperation of Turkey as a Muslim country and particularly with the governance of an Islamist government, with the Islamic republic of Iran can have a major impact on the failure of America's new Middle East project.

## **7. Mutual Perspective of Iran and Turkey about the issue of the Kurds**

In fact, Iran and Turkey have mutual interests in association with Kurds in the Middle East level. Both of the countries have a powerful Kurd minority in their countries. Whether in Turkey's Kurdistan or in the Kurdistan province of Iran, some terrorist groups are active that have made these two countries concerned. On the other hand, it is very important for Iran to have Turkey by its side or at least as an irrespective country, regarding Iran's nuclear case and the probability of America's next actions. To this end, Iran has many ways that among them we can

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\*\* This issue has been extracted from an article with the title of <<Turkey and the Great Middle East>> which was written by "Rajab Tayeb Erdogan", in order to be included in the magazine "Russia's global affairs" (August 2004) and it has been translated by Hamid Reza Naeemi. For more information visit this website N.K:  
<http://www.Torkiye.com/siyasat/ar/khavar.php>

refer to economical interests of Turkey as a result of the expansion of business relations with Iran and also Iran's cooperation with Turkey in the repression of separatist Kurds in Turkey. But the agreement of the countries which have a Kurd minority in the region for repressing the Kurds has a long history which includes the countries, Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Since the Kurds of Iraq are in the position of power, this repression has been focused on the other parts of Kurdistan. Power of the Kurds of Iraq has been effective on increasing the separatist movements of the other Kurds of the countries of the region, and especially when they are associated with the evil goals of America and Israel's stimulations. America is attempting to separate the countries of the region and artificial nation building in order to strengthen its penetration. Israel has also made the countries Iran and Turkey concerned by being present in the north of Iraq after the fall of Saddam. After Iraq's occupation, Israeli goods have developed in the Kurdistan of Iraq and this country has been active in broad projects in the north of Iraq. These activities coincided with the formation of a Kurdish state in northern Iraq. Therefore, the security cooperation of Iran and Turkey in the Middle East brings mutual achievements for both countries, in order to deal with ethnic conflicts and acts of the international powers.

## 8. Conclusion

The foreign policies of Turkey have adopted a modern approach since the rise of the AKP and they have faced some changes. Iran and Turkey are two historical and democratic countries, with social and cultural communions and they are two regional powers in the Middle East, that having long and sustainable borders and presence of the cultural, political and economical cooperation fields of the two countries and lack of territorial and border disputes in a political free space can be the cause of the creation of a powerful alliance, from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean Sea. Iran and Turkey are members of the ECO Economic Cooperation Organization and the G8. Both of these countries have a close cooperation in the fields of regional crisis and fighting with terrorism and separatism of the Kurds. Thus, Iran and Turkey, by considering the regional influence, have competition with each other in some domains and in other domains they have cooperation. The relations of Turkey with America and Israel and also different geopolitical orientation and economical competition are the barriers of the close relations of these two countries. And the competition areas of Iran and Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus can be analyzed. We can easily analyze the relations of these two countries in terms of cooperation and competition. The cooperation domain of these two countries in the recent years can be reviewed with regard to Border security, neighborhood and influence of geopolitics, economical cooperation, and Turkey's cooperation and support for Iran's nuclear program. If Turkey

joined the Europe Union, it would have some opportunities and some threats to Iran, but the opportunities will be more than the threads which is beneficial to Iran.

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