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 separation 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

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 now 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 threats. 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
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
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 Arbakan", the leader of the Islamist
parties welfare, virtue and happiness and who has
seceded from it in 2001 (AD), but they still carry
they 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 Arbakan". 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, "Arbakan"
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 "Arbakan" and
the dissolution of the Welfare Party, which he led, by
the constitution court "Arbakan" 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† 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‡.

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§.

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 id no thave 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

† Secularism
‡ http://www.torkiye.com/ravabet.phd
§ 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 reformation 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’s 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 be 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 irreplaceable 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

** 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 NK:
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 been 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 European Union, it would have some opportunities and some threats to Iran, but the opportunities will be more than the threats which is beneficial to Iran.

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