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Construction the Pattern of Cooperation and Competition in Iran-Turkey Relations (2011-2023)

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey have fluctuated from cooperation to competition since their inception. The perception of Turkey as a relatively secular country, allied with the West and a member of NATO has made it a challenging player in the intellectual structure of Iranian decision-makers. The two countries have different ideas about regional role, regional order, and regional leadership. Tehran's threatening perception of the Zangezur Corridor and Israel's growing influence in Turkey and Azerbaijan have exacerbated pessimism in this regard. At the same time, the historical relations between the two neighboring countries and cooperation in economic fields are considered a pivotal factor in advanc-

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ing Iran's neighborhood policy and regional economic diplomacy. The experience of cooperation in the Qatar crisis and the referendum in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region in 2017 also showed that Tehran and Ankara have common interests, at least in some thematic areas. The main question of this article is what factor has led to the sinusoidal fluctuation in Iran-Turkey relations between 2011 and 2023. This article is descriptive-analytical, and the required information was collected through library methods and reference to reliable internet sources.

Instead of relying on the pattern of formation of cooperation and competition in a priori and predetermined formats, the present study uses an a posteriori and structuralist approach, which believes that relationships are formed in a context of bilateral and multilateral interactions.

Under the influence of intellectual and normative structures, relations between Iran and Turkey have tended towards strategic competition and confrontation rather than cooperation. Ankara's policy of active presence in the Levant and Persian Gulf subsystems has been accompanied by entry into Tehran's traditional sphere of influence, making conflict of interests between the two sides inevitable. In Syria, Ankara has refused to normalize relations with the central government and, by continuing its presence on Syrian soil and providing multi-layered support to the opposition, has created a serious challenge to the restoration of the Assad government's sovereignty as a strategic ally of Iran. In Iraq, Turkey has also assumed a historical responsibility to protect the country's Sunni and Turkmen minorities, having crossed Iran's red lines in Iraq on numerous occasions. What adds to the complexity of this situation is the continued direct Turkish military presence in northern Syria and Iraq and the lack of a clear perspective for changing this situation.

The dominance of the confrontational approach in bilateral relations has also overshadowed the prospects for achieving cooperation. Rather than being in line with the long-term goals and interests of both sides, the cooperation that has been formed has its roots in environmental requirements, including the gaps in Turkey's relations with the United States and Europe, as well as the preference for profits from trade with Iran under sanctions, and has at times led Tehran and Ankara to adopt a tactical cooperation strategy.

The crisis-ridden economy, the confrontation with the United States, and the Kurdish issue in general have affected Tehran and Ankara, albeit to different degrees. The second Karabakh war in 2020, as well as Azerbaijan's recent advances in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, have changed the dynamics in the region in Turkey's favor, adding to Tehran's threatening perception of the developments.

From the perspective of Iranian officials, Israel's increased influence in the South Caucasus region, especially its strategic relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan, along with the normalization and improvement of Ankara's relations with Tel Aviv, have also contributed to the insecurity of Iran's northern borders. The power vacuum resulting from Russia's presence in the Ukrainian war also intensifies the scope of the conflicts between Tehran and Ankara in Syria and Karabakh. Therefore, Iran and Turkey's different perceptions and understandings of security and threats in the Levant and the Persian Gulf have been the factor behind the fluctuation in bilateral relations, which are mainly confrontational and competitive, and less cooperative. In such circumstances, the economic relations between the two sides, under conditions of sanctions and some environmental opportunities resulting from the activism of rival or challenging identities, including tactical cooperation in the Qatar crisis, the Kurdistan Regional Government referendum, and cooperation during the 2016 coup, act as a moderator of the aforementioned mainstream.

The perceptions and understandings of security and threat have been the factor in establishing various forms of Hobbesian (confrontation), Lockean (competition), and Kantian (cooperation) culture in Iran-Turkey relations during the period under discussion. In the positive aspect of establishing a desirable regional order, numerous cases of conflict and divergence of interests between Iran and Turkey are visible, including in the Syrian and Karabakh crises. In cases of attempts to prevent the establishment of an undesirable regional order, the two sides have reached a kind of tactical cooperation in the form of negative and passive action. Some economic areas of bilateral interactions have also had an intermediate status as a gray area of relations.

Key words: Karabakh crisis, Threat Construction, Iran-Türkiye Relations, Zangezur

Corridor, Regional Order.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.