

NÜKLEER ANLAŞMADAN SONRA İRAN-TÜRKİYE İLİŞKİLERİ: BİR KOMPARTMANTALİZASYON ÖRNEK OLAYI

ÖZ

Birçok gözlemcinin beklentisinin aksine Türkiye, İran'ın nükleer programı etrafında uzun süreden beri devam eden anlaşmazlığın siyasi yoldan çözümünü amaçlayan ve P5+1 grubu ülkeleri ile İran arasında Temmuz 2015'te uzlaşmaya varılan nükleer anlaşmaya karşı 'ihtiyatlı' bir tutum aldı. Türkiye ve İran arasındaki ilişkiler nükleer anlaşmadan kısa bir süre sonra, muhtemelen jeopolitik kaygılar nedeniyle ciddi şekilde kötüleşti. İki ülke ilişkileri Ankara ve Tahran arasında üst düzey ziyaretlerde görüldüğü gibi kısa sürede normalleşti, fakat görüş ayrılıkları ve jeopolitik kaygılar aşılmadı. Bu makalede İran-Türkiye ilişkilerinde eşzamanlı olarak ortaya çıkan fakat birbirine zıt, birisi çatışma ve rekabet, diğeri işbirliği ve diyalog doğrultusunda etkili olan iki eğilime dikkat çekilmektedir. Bu iki zıt eğilimin eşzamanlı olarak ortaya çıkmasıyla Ankara ile Tahran arasında görünürde hızlı şekilde değişen ilişkileri açıklamak için bu çalışmada 'kompartmentleşme' kavramı önerilmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk-İran ilişkileri, nükleer anlaşma, Ortadoğu, Erdoğan, Ruhani, kompartmentleştirme, Suriye krizi, mezhepçilik

العلاقات الإيرانية – التركية بعد الاتفاقية النووية : نموذج واقعي للتمايز

على عكس توقعات كثير من المتابعين، فإن تركيا اتخذت موقفا متحفظا ازاء الاتفاق النووي الذي يرمي الى حل الخلاف الدائر منذ مدة طويلة حول برنامج ايران النووي والذي انتهى بالاتفاق الذي حصل بين ايران ومجموعة 5 + 1 في شهر تموز/ يوليو من عام 2015. وقد ساءت العلاقات القائمة بين تركيا وايران بشكل جدي بعد فترة قصيرة من ابرام الاتفاق النووي، ويحتمل ان يكون ذلك قد جرى بسبب مخاوف جيوبوليتيكية. وكما لوحظ في الزيارات القصيرة التي تمت على المستويات العليا بين انقرة وطهران، فإن العلاقات بين الطرفين عادت الى وضعها الطبيعي خلال فترة قصيرة، غير انه لم يمكن تحطّي الاختلافات في وجهات النظر والمخاوف الجيوبوليتيكية. ويلفت هذا المقال الى لفت الانتباه الى منعطفين مؤثرين ومتضادين ظهرا في وقت واحد في العلاقات الإيرانية – التركية، اذ يستند احدهما على الصراع والمنافسة، بينما يستند الآخر على التعاون والحوار. وقد تم استعمال مفهوم «التوافق» في هذه الدراسة لتوضيح العلاقات المتغيرة بشكل سريع بين انقرة وطهران ازاء ظهور هذين المنعطفين المتضادين في وقت متزامن.

الكلمات الدالّة : العلاقات التركية – الإيرانية، الاتفاق النووي، الشرق الأوسط، اردوغان، روحاني، التوافق، الأزمة السورية، الطائفية.

IRAN AND TURKEY RELATIONS AFTER THE NUCLEAR DEAL: A CASE FOR COMPARTMENTALIZATION

ABSTRACT

Contrary to the expectations of many observers, Turkey adopted a 'cautious' stand with regard to the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1, finalized in July 2015, which aimed at a political solution to the long-lasting controversy over Iran's nuclear program. Relations between Turkey and Iran worsened considerably soon after the nuclear deal, arguably for geopolitical reasons. While the two countries quickly reinstated their relations, as signified by high-level visits between Ankara and Tehran, they have not overcome their differences and geopolitical concerns. This article draws attention to the two simultaneously working but contrasting trends in Iran-Turkey relations: one working for conflict and competition and the other for cooperation and dialogue. In order to explain the seemingly rapid changes in relations between Ankara and Tehran through the simultaneous operation of these two contrasting trends, this study offers the concept of compartmentalization.

Keywords: Turkish-Iranian Relations, Nuclear Deal, Middle East, Erdoğan, Rouhani, Compartmentalization, Syrian Crisis, Sectarianism.

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Introduction

Iran and Turkey are two neighboring countries that have experienced a complicated relationship for a long time. As underlined by Gökhan Çetinsaya, a survey of the history of relations between Iran and Turkey displays two contrasting, but virtually simultaneous trends.¹ On the one hand, there is a trend of cooperation and dialogue on certain political, economic and security issues. On the other hand, there is a trend of competition and conflict that may be derived from some geopolitical and ideological factors. Despite the profound differences and disagreements on many issues, the two countries have managed to maintain their relations at a certain level. Pragmatism, conflict and cooperation are inherent parts of this relationship. Hence, we cannot talk about an all-out friendship or hostility between Iran and Turkey.

The complicated nature of bilateral relations between the two countries has become very clear over the last decade. Ankara and Tehran achieved an unprecedented period of improvement in their economic and political relations between 2001-2011. But even then, Turkish-Iranian relations did not evolve into a strategic partnership because of fundamental differences between the two countries in their alliances, political strategies and regional perspectives.² Furthermore, a number of regional developments, including the uprising in Syria and competition over Iraq, have stirred disagreement and tension between the two countries. Their differences on regional issues did not, however, cease the existence of cooperation and dialogue between Iran and Turkey on bilateral political and economic issues. Indeed, in order to promote their relations, Ankara and Tehran agreed to establish High-Level Cooperation Council and signed preferential trade agreement in January 2014.

Likewise, Turkey's relations with Iran after the nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, JCPOA) have illustrated the complicated nature of their relations. The aspect of competition and conflict prevailed over Ankara-Tehran relations for a while after the deal. Turkey was branded by some as the "lawyer" of the Iranian nuclear program because of its vocal support for Iran's "peaceful nuclear program", and its criticism of the sanctions imposed on that country.³ It was estimated in many circles, therefore, that

1 Gökhan Çetinsaya, "Essential Friends and Natural Enemies: The Historic Roots of Turkish Iranian Relations", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September 2003), pp. 16-32. See also Süleyman Elik, *Iran-Turkey Relations, 1979-2011: Conceptualising the Dynamics of Politics, Religion and Security in Middle-Power States*, (New York: Routledge, 2013); Robert W. Olson, *Turkey-Iran Relations, 1979-2004: Revolution, Ideology, War, coups and geopolitics*, (Costa Mesa, CA; Mazda Pub., 2004).

2 S. Gülden Ayman, "Turkey and Iran: Between Friendly Competition and Fierce Rivalry", *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (Winter 2014), pp. 6-26; Bayram Sinkaya, "Rationalization of Turkey-Iran Relations: Prospects and Limits", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 12 (Spring 2012), pp. 137-156.

3 Semih İdiz, "Erdoğan İran'ın Avukatı değil," *Milliyet*, 27 October 2009; Yigal Schleifer, "Ankara is Wild Card in Effort to Slap Iran with UN Sanctions," *Eurasinet.org*, 15 April 2010, <http://www.eur->

Turkey would welcome the deal between Iran and the P5+1, which achieved a diplomatic solution for the long time controversy over the Iranian nuclear program.⁴ Accordingly, Turkey was estimated to be one of the major winners of the deal both because of the removal of sanctions in the neighboring country and because of the resilient Turkish-Iranian friendship. Contrary to the expectation that Turkey would welcome the deal between Iran and the P5+1, statements by Turkish officials with regard to implications of the deal were extremely cautious. By welcoming the deal, they asked Iran to revise its regional policies. Moreover, relations between Ankara and Tehran worsened soon after the nuclear deal, as shown in the last minute cancelation of Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif's visit to Turkey in August 2015. After that, relations between Ankara and Tehran worsened still further because of continuous mutual accusations, mostly voiced by official and pro-government media in Iran and Turkey respectively. Against this background, the trend of cooperation and dialogue resurfaced with a visit paid by then Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu to Tehran on March 4, 2016. Soon after this visit, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani went to Ankara and, together with his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, co-chaired the third meeting of the High Level Cooperation Council on April 16, 2016.

This article aims to analyze the interplay between the competing trends of conflict and cooperation between Iran and Turkey. It argues that the two neighbors have compartmentalized their relations particularly after 2002, which has allowed them to keep their differences at a certain point, and to be able to improve bilateral relations. The compartmentalization of relations between Ankara and Tehran could be observed after the nuclear deal that helped Iran and Turkey to develop bilateral relations despite their differences on a number of regional issues.

Compartmentalization of Relations between Ankara and Tehran

The competing trends have raised two different difficulties when trying to understand the complicated nature of Iran-Turkey relations. First, the competing trends lead to a perception of an apparent rise and fall of friendly or contentious relations between Ankara and Tehran. Then, a considerable part of the relevant literature attempts to explain one of the rising trends, either conflict or cooperation.⁵ However, despite the perception of swift changes in

asianet.org/departments/insightb/articles/eav041610.shtml [Last visited 8 June 2016]. See also, Robert Tait, "Turkish PM Exposes Nuclear Rift in NATO," *The Guardian*, 26 October 2009.

4 See, Altay Atlı, "Turkey's Euphoria over Iran Nuclear Deal," *Asia Times*, 17 July 2015, <http://atimes.com/2015/07/turkeys-euphoria-over-iran-nuclear-deal/> [Last visited 8 June 2016].

5 See, Stephen Larrabee, "The Turkish-Iranian Alliance That Wasn't", *Foreign Affairs*, 11 July 2012, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2012-07-11/turkish-iranian-alliance-wasnt> [Last visited 8 June 2016]; Gareth Jenkins, "Occasional Allies, Enduring Rivals: Turkey's Relations with Iran," *Central Asia – Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Paper*, (May 2012); Daphne Mccurdy, "Turkish-Iranian Relations: When Opposites Attract", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2008), pp. 87-106.

relations between the two countries, neither the competition and conflict, nor the cooperation and dialogue decisively prevail over bilateral relations between the two countries. Turkey's relations with post-deal Iran, first worsening and then improving in a short span of time, prove this conclusion. This situation raises the second question in addressing Turkey-Iran relations: how can we explain the existence of virtually simultaneous but contrasting trends in Iranian-Turkish relations? In other words, how can one explain Turkey's cautious optimism to the deal that was ensued by a worsening of bilateral relations with Iran, and the later improvements in bilateral ties under the same ruling governments in a short period?

Most analysts were tempted to explain the complicated nature of bilateral relations as pragmatism. This view assumes that Iran-Turkey relations are centered on a historical rivalry which was accompanied by interwoven geopolitical and ideological considerations. However, given their economic and political settings, the two countries found it pragmatic to enhance their bilateral political and economic relations.⁶ Actually, this is a common tendency in the literature to explain improvements in Iranian-Turkish relations through pragmatism, and conflicts through geopolitical and ideological reasons. However, this perspective falls short of explaining the reasons for change between pragmatism and rivalry. It also underestimates the simultaneous operation of the two trends of conflict and cooperation.

In order to overcome these questions, this article offers the concept of "compartmentalization" to explain the complicated nature of bilateral relations between Iran and Turkey.⁷ Actually, it is a foreign policy behavior that has been practiced by many governments to cope with complex interactions in contemporary world affairs.⁸ When they cannot afford abandoning dividends of cooperation, the acting governments tend to compartmentalize their

6 See, Şafak Baş, "Pragmatism and Rivalry: The Nature of Turkey-Iran Relations", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2013); Merve Tahiroğlu & Behnam Ben Taleblu, "Turkey and Iran: The Best of Frenemies", *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Spring 2015), pp. 123-134.

7 This concept is already employed in some analyses of Iranian-Turkish relations. See, Michael Rubin, "Iran-Turkey trade jumps again", *American Enterprise Institute*, 5 March, 2013, <http://www.aei.org/publication/iran-turkey-trade-jumps-again/> [Last visited 8 May 2016]; Samuel Brannen, "The Turkey, Iran, Russia Nexus: Evolving Power Dynamics in the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 12 November 2013, http://csis.org/files/publication/131112_Brannen_TurkeyRussiaIranNexus_Web.pdf [Last visited 8 May 2016]; Bayram Sinkaya, "Turkish PM Erdoğan's Visit to Tehran: A New Milestone in Relations Between Turkey and Iran", *ORSAM Foreign Policy Analysis*, 31 January 2014, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/showArticle.aspx?ID=2586> [Last visited 8 May 2016]; Aaron Stein, "Turkey-Iran Compartmentalize Ties to Sidestep Differences", *World Politics Review*, 11 June 2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13852/turkey-iran-compartmentalize-ties-to-sidestep-differences> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

8 For instance see, Stewart M. Patrick, "Learning to Compartmentalize: How to Prevent Big Power Frictions from Becoming Major Global Headaches", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 4 June 2014, <http://blogs.cfr.org/patrick/2014/06/04/learning-to-compartmentalize-how-to-prevent-big-power-frictions-from-becoming-major-global-headaches/> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

relations in order to differentiate sources of conflict and possible forms of cooperation. The compartmentalization of foreign policy issues may be built on common concerns, shared interests and issues of divergence. It does not mean the elimination of disagreements and conflictual issues between the states; however, the acting governments are willing and careful to keep potentially adverse effects of their disagreements on overall relations at a minimum level. In other words, they do not allow their differences, the trend of conflict and competition, to spoil and dominate over spheres of cooperation.

The compartmentalization of relations between Iran and Turkey could be observed particularly after 2002, when Turkish President Ahmet N. Sezer paid an official visit to Tehran. This visit paved the ground for a “rationalization” of Iran-Turkey relations, that is, keeping their ideological differences aside and focusing on common interests and cooperation.⁹ Subsequently, political, economic, and security relations between Ankara and Tehran improved considerably. The AK Party government that came to power in Turkey in November 2002 bolstered this process. Once regarded as a threat among the Turkish elites, Iran came to be viewed as a partner in Ankara on regional security issues and fighting against PKK terrorism.¹⁰ The volume of bilateral trade between the two countries increased from its level of 1.2 billion USD in 2001 to 15 billion USD in 2011,¹¹ and 2009 was designated “Turkey-Iran Culture Year.” Meanwhile, Turkey lent support to Iran’s peaceful nuclear activities.

However, the rationalization and compartmentalization of relations between Iran and Turkey did not evolve into a “strategic partnership.” A number of factors limited further progress in Iran-Turkey relations. In other words, the trend of competition and conflict continued to affect relations between the two countries.¹² First of all, fundamental political differences between Iran and Turkey shaped their foreign policy orientations towards contradictory ways. Despite moderation in its internal and external policies, still “revolutionary” Iran has a particular vision on international relations and perspectives on regional issues that differ from those of liberal and Western-oriented Turkey. As an extension of their different worldviews, Iran and Turkey have developed strategic relations and alliances confronting each other. Additionally, the rationalized and compartmentalized relations between Ankara and Tehran

9 Sinkaya, “Rationalization of Turkey-Iran Relations: Prospects and Limits”, pp.138-42.

10 Özden Zeynep Oktav, “Changing Security Perceptions in Turkish-Iranian Relations,” *Perceptions*, Vol.9 (2004), pp.103-117; Bülent Aras and Rabia K. Polat, “From Conflict to Cooperation: Desecuritization of Turkey’s Relations with Syria and Iran,” *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 39, No.5 (2008), pp. 495-515.

11 “İran-Türkiye ticaret hacmi 15 milyar dolara ulaştı,” *Mehr Haber Ajansı*, 4 January 2012, <http://haber.irankulturevi.com/Iran-Turkiye-ticaret-hacmi-15-milyar-dolara-ulasti-1134i.cgi> [Last visited 8 June 2016].

12 Ayman, “Turkey and Iran: Between Friendly Competition and Fierce Rivalry”, pp.12-22; Sinkaya, “Rationalization of Turkey-Iran Relations: Prospects and Limits”, pp.148-51.

have been challenged by the regional implications of the Arab Spring.¹³ The two countries' regional policies greatly diverged particularly over the crisis in Syria, where Turkey staunchly supported the opposition that fights against the Assad administration, who has been resolutely backed by Iran.

Despite their divergence on regional issues and disagreements on the Syrian issue, Ankara and Tehran maintained good relations on a bilateral level.¹⁴ Mutual high-level visits at the level of prime minister and president continued. Moreover, the two countries signed a Preferential Trade Agreement and established a High-level Cooperation Council in 2014. Thus, the two neighbors managed to keep the effects of their regional differences contained and they improved their bilateral relations.

Turkey and Iran's Nuclear Program

Iranian nuclear program turned into a controversial issue between Iran and the West after the revelation of undeclared nuclear facilities in Natanz and Arak in August 2002. Accordingly, Iran was building a uranium enrichment facility and a heavy-water reactor, which arguably accelerated the weaponization of Iran's nuclear program. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) also raised some concerns about the Iranian government's failure to conform to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) regulations and the existence of undeclared nuclear material in Iran. Some officials and security elite in Turkey, including the Chief of the General Staff, voiced their concerns with the nuclear program of Iran, describing it as a threat to regional security and to Turkey's national interests. However, the ruling AK Party government, which was keen on improving economic relations with Iran, remained almost indifferent to the issue and adopted a wait-and-see policy. Additionally, Turkey acknowledged Iran's right to have peaceful nuclear technology, provided that it was operated under international agreements and the NPT, and advocated a diplomatic solution to the issue.¹⁵

13 Bülent Aras & Emirhan Yorulmazlar, "Turkey and Iran After the Arab Spring: Finding A Middle Ground," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2014); Hamid Ahmadi & Fahimeh Ghorbani, "The Impact of Syrian Crisis on Iran-Turkey Relations," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2014).

14 Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Tehran in March 2012 and January 2014. His Iranian counterpart, Deputy President Mohammad Riza Rahimi visited Turkey in October 2012, which was followed by the visit of Iranian President Rouhani in June 2014. Erdoğan, who became president of Turkey in August 2014, paid a visit to Tehran in April 2015.

15 For Turkey's conventional position towards the Iranian nuclear program see, Bayram Sinkaya "Turkey and the Iranian Nuclear Issue: From a Passive Stance to the Actual Contributor to the Peaceful Solution?" *ORSAM Foreign Policy Analysis*, December 2010 <http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/showArticle.aspx?ID=323> [Last visited 8 June 2016]; Aylin G. Gürzel and Eyüp Ersoy, "Turkey and Iran's nuclear program," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2012), pp. 37-50; R.G. Bonab, "Turkey's Emerging Role as a Mediator on Iran's Nuclear Activities," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2009), pp.161-175; Kadir Üstün, "Turkey's Iran Policy: Between Diplomacy and Sanctions", *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2010), pp. 19-26.

The initial attempts by the EU-3 (Britain, France and Germany) to find a peaceful solution to the Iranian nuclear issue had failed by mid-2005, when hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the new president of Iran. At that point, the Iranian nuclear file was transferred by the IAEA to the UN Security Council. Consequently, Turkey was forced by its Western allies to clarify its position with regard to the nuclear issue. US officials in particular asked for precise Turkish cooperation with the measures to be taken against Iran's nuclear program. The ensuing conflict and the rise of the tension between Iran and the United States further disturbed Turkey. The Turkish government was anxious about a possible American military operation to destroy Iranian nuclear facilities, or heavy sanctions aimed at isolating Iran, which, they feared, would worsen regional instability. On the other hand, Turkey wished to preserve good neighborly relations with Iran, which is a promising worthwhile market for Turkish goods and provides for a remarkable proportion of Turkish demand for oil and natural gas.

Consequently Turkey abandoned its passive policy and decided to play the role of facilitator in order to achieve a political solution to the nuclear controversy. A diplomatic solution for the issue would relieve Turkey from the difficult task of balancing between its close allies and its warm relations with its neighbor, and would prevent the potential adverse effects of a growing confrontation between Iran and the West. In this regard, Turkey hosted a meeting between Javier Solana, then High Commissioner of the EU in charge of negotiations with Iran, and Ali Laricani, then chief negotiator of Iran, in Ankara in April 2007. Having repeated the recognition of Iranian nuclear rights, Turkish officials asked their Iranian counterparts to play an affirmative role during the negotiations and to increase Iran's cooperation with the IAEA in order to allay various Western concerns. However, several rounds of negotiations remained inconclusive and the UN Security Council issued a number of resolutions [Resolutions 1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), 1835 (2008)], which asked Iran to halt its uranium enrichment program and have complete cooperation with the IAEA, and envisaged limited sanctions against Iran for its nuclear and missile programs.

After the failure of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 (the permanent five states sitting in the UN Security Council plus Germany, which replaced the EU-3 to negotiate with Iran in June 2006, also called EU3+3),¹⁶ Turkey took a further step and attempted to mediate officially between the parties, in order to prevent the rise of tensions and to solve the conflict through diplomatic channels. In a visit to Washington D.C. in November 2008, then Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that Turkey, relying on its previous experienc-

16 See, Oliver Meier, "European Efforts to Solve the Conflict Over Iran's Nuclear Programme: How has the European Union Performed?", EU Non-Proliferation Consortium, Non-Proliferation Papers, No. 27, February 2013, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC_no-27.pdf [Last visited 8 June 2016].

es, could officially mediate between the United States and Iran.¹⁷ Although Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State of the United States, welcomed the Turkish bid for the mediation, Iran publicly rejected it, with President Ahmadinejad stating that there was no need for Turkey's mediation.¹⁸ Despite the rejection of its mediation attempt, the Turkish government adopted a stand, which was perceived as pro-Iranian. Prime Minister Erdoğan admonished the West on several occasions of being hypocritical by having nuclear weapons themselves and remaining silent towards some other nuclear countries that are not a party to the NPT, and stated that no one has the right to threaten Iran for its peaceful nuclear program.¹⁹ It was statements like these that had some pundits criticizing Erdoğan of playing the "lawyer" of Iran role.²⁰

Nevertheless, Turkey actually became a mediator following the failure of negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 on a proposition to provide the Tehran Research Reactor with uranium fuel in return for Iran shipping its enriched uranium stockpile abroad. Then, Mohamad El-Baradei, Director of the IAEA at the time, put forward the idea of placing Iran's low-enriched uranium in the custody of neighboring Turkey, until the Vienna group – Britain, United States and France – could supply Iran with uranium fuel. The idea was immediately accepted by Turkey and backed by the United States and Russia. Iran, however, was cautious towards Baradei's suggestion and announced that it would not ship its low-enriched uranium outside the country. Nevertheless, Turkey continued to press Iran to make a compromise to accept the uranium swap agreement, and continuously talked to officials of the United States, the EU countries, and the IAEA.²¹ In April 2010, upon the request of President Obama, Brazil also got involved in Turkey's mediation efforts. Finally, Brazil and Turkey persuaded Iran to sign the Tehran Declaration in May 2010 as a framework for the swap deal between the Vienna group and Iran. However, the Vienna group found the declaration inadequate and rejected it, which ensued a new round of UN Security Council resolution (RES 1929) against Iran. Turkey, then occupying one of the temporary seats on the UN Security Council, voted against Resolution 1929, which imposed heavy sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program.

17 "Erdoğan Washington'da Konuştu," *Hürriyet*, 14 November 2008.

18 "Ahmadinejad: No need for Turkish mediation," *Press TV*, 11 March 2009.

19 Erdoğan said, "The permanent members of the UN Security Council all have nuclear arsenals and then there are countries which are not members of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) which also have nuclear weapons. So although Iran doesn't have a weapon, those who say Iran shouldn't have them are those countries which do." Robert Tait, "Turkish PM Exposes Nuclear Rift in NATO," *The Guardian*, 26 October 2009.

20 İdiz, "Erdoğan İran'ın Avukatı değil,"; Schleifer, "Ankara is Wild Card in Effort to Slap Iran with UN Sanctions."

21 Bayram Sinkaya, "İran'ın Nükleer Programı Karşısında Türkiye'nin Tutumu ve Uranyum Takası Muhabakatı," *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol.2, No.18 (June 2010), pp. 66-78.

Having been disappointed by both the rejection of the Tehran Declaration and the adoption of new sanctions against Iran, Turkey publicly criticized the West. Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stated that the rejection of the declaration that accomplished nearly everything demanded by Western officials meant that the West wished to keep its monopoly over nuclear technology.²² Additionally, Turkey blamed the Western countries for acting hypocritical because they did not recognize Iran's peaceful nuclear rights, while at the same time they ignored Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons. Moreover, Turkey became critical of the sanctions that were arguably drafted by a few countries and forced on the remaining members of the UN to adopt them. Turkey also criticized the sanctions themselves, arguing that they would be inconclusive, but would result in further radicalization of an isolated Iran. Although it followed suit in adopting the sanctions designated by the UN Security Council, the Turkish government publicly challenged and criticized the unilateral US and EU sanctions on Iran.

Turkey's active mediation attempts ceased after the rejection of the Tehran declaration and it returned to the role of facilitator. In order to facilitate a diplomatic solution, Turkey willingly hosted a new round of negotiations in Istanbul, on January 21-22, 2011, between Catherine Ashton, then High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and representing the P5+1, and Said Jalili, then chief nuclear negotiator for Iran.²³ The parties met again in Istanbul in April 2012. However, because of simmering tensions between Ankara and Tehran as a result of their differences on regional policies, particularly with regard to Syria, the venue for the later negotiations was changed.²⁴ Still, Turkey hosted low-level talks between the P5+1 and Iran in Istanbul in July 2012.

Hassan Rouhani was inaugurated as the new president of Iran in August 2013, and promised to reach a diplomatic solution over the nuclear controversy. Turkish President Abdullah Gül met his Iranian counterpart in New York, on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, in September 2013. Then Foreign Minister Davutoğlu also met with Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif. Turkey asked Iran to assume a constructive role to reach a solution in Syria and declared its readiness to facilitate negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran, which were expected to restart within a short time. The talks between the P5+1 and Iran started in November 2013 in Geneva, alongside secret talks between Iran and the United States. But this time, Turkey did not

22 Murat Yetkin, "Davutoğlu: Bugün İran'a, Yarın Türkiye'ye," *Radikal*, 25 September 2010. Also, see: "Ne Müeyyide Uygulayacağımızı İsrail Biliyor," *Newsweek Türkiye* – Interview, retrieved in, *Habertürk* (website), 10 July 2010, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/531166-ne-mueyyide-uygulayacagimizi-israil-biliyor> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

23 "Iran nuclear talks start in Turkey," *The Guardian*, 21 January 2011.

24 Aaron Stein, "Turkey and Iran's Complicated Relationship," *EDAM Non-Proliferation Policy Briefs*, no. 3, November 2012.

play a considerable role in the negotiation process other than encouraging the parties to reach a peaceful solution.

Despite the high-level visits between Ankara and Tehran, the nuclear issue lost its prominent place in Turkey-Iran relations. However, both Turkish and Iranian officials declared their happiness with the initial achievements in the talks on Iran's nuclear program and their joint opposition to the existence of WMDs in the region. Iranian officials also thanked Turkey for its support for the Iranian nuclear program, and its efforts to find a political solution and the removal of sanctions against Iran.²⁵ Furthermore, Zarif stated that Turkey provided a good model for neighborly relations between Iran and the surrounding countries.²⁶

Turkish Reactions to the Deal: “Cautious Optimism”

After twenty-months of negotiations, Iran agreed with the P5+1 on JCPOA in Vienna on July 14, 2014. Thus, the long-standing controversy between Iran and the West was resolved through diplomatic channels. Accordingly, Iran agreed to limit its enrichment activities and open all nuclear facilities to verification of the IAEA under the Additional Protocol, in return for removal of all sanctions related to the Iranian nuclear program.²⁷

The deal between Iran and the West stirred widespread interest around the world. However, Turkish public opinion and the elite were divided in their view of the potential effects of the deal on Turkey. A great part of the elite were concerned with the implications of the deal on Turkey-Iran relations and regional affairs, anxious that the deal would give Iran a free hand in regional politics, which would make it more powerful and aggressive.²⁸ The removal of sanctions and the transfer of frozen Iranian assets estimated at around 100 billion USD might embolden Iran to pursue an aggressive agenda in the Middle East. Additionally, they were concerned with the idea of a ‘grand bargain’ between Iran and the United States, and fears that growing cooperation between Iran and the United States in the region could eventually work against

25 “Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Hükümeti ile İran İslam Cumhuriyeti Arasında Yayınlanan Ortak Bildiri,” T.C. Başbakanlık, 10 June 2014, http://www.basbakanlik.gov.tr/Forms/_Article/pg_Article.aspx?Id=ac-f5a83e-d621-4619-b9da-a23854a66a38 [Last visited 8 June 2016].

26 Zarif stated, “I wish our other neighbors would follow Turkey’s example and help in finding a solution to the nuclear issue. Our nuclear program is to no one’s detriment, they shouldn’t be worried ... Turkey has all along supported our right to peaceful nuclear activities.” See, “Iran says sees more steps ahead in nuclear talks,” Reuters, 17 December 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-nuclear-zarif-idUSKBN0JV0RE20141217> [Last visited 30 May 2016].

27 “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” Vienna, 14 July 2015, available at http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/docs/iran_agreement/iran_joint-comprehensive-plan-of-action_en.pdf [Last visited 30 May 2016].

28 İbrahim Karagül, “Tanklar Kabe’ye dayanacak,” Yeni Şafak, 12 August 2015.

Turkey's interests.²⁹ In addition to the bombastic statements of some Iranian politicians claiming the rise of Iranian power in the region to "control four Arab capitals"³⁰, the spread of views arguing that the United States decided to side with "Shiite Iran" in regional politics contributed to a negative presentation in Turkey of the deal.³¹ Given the highly polarized situation in the Middle East, an 'implicit alignment' between the two former enemies would upset the regional balances not only against Saudi Arabia and Israel, but also against Turkey.³²

A considerable number of Turkish elites were, however, optimistic with regard to the outcomes of the nuclear deal between Iran and the P5+1.³³ First of all, the deal would decrease the tension over the nuclear program and relieve Turkey of having to balance its relations with Iran and the West. Moreover, the deal would end – at least temporarily – potential risks for Turkish security deriving from a nuclear Iran.³⁴ Additionally, Iran's political and economic reintegration into the international system with the removal of sanctions would improve overall security and economic conditions around the region. Finally, the removal of the sanctions as part of the deal would help to boost Turkey-Iran trade relations. Iran has been a promising market for Turkish exports. Rıza Eser, Chair of the Turkish-Iranian Business Council, estimated that Turkish exports to Iran could reach 8-10 billion USD from its current level of 4 billion USD.³⁵ Iran was also regarded by some parts of the Turkish elite as a viable source of oil and gas. Furthermore, considering the fact that Turkey has been trying to be an energy hub in the region, the improvement of relations between Iran and the West would facilitate Iranian participation in transnational gas pipelines. Finally, if the current process should result in Iranian membership in the WTO, then commercial standards would be set up, and tariffs would be decreased, which would boost Turkey-Iran economic relations.

29 Abdullah Muradoğlu, "İran'da çifte kavrulmuş bayram!" *Yeni Şafak*, 19 July 2015; Hilal Kaplan, "Türkiye'ye Karşı İran Birliği," *Sabah*, 19 August 2015.

30 "Sanaa is the forth Arab capital to join the Iranian revolution," *Middle East Monitor*, 27 September 2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20140927-sanaa-is-the-fourth-arab-capital-to-join-the-iranian-revolution/> [Last visited 30 May 2016]; Samia Nakhoul, "Iran expands regional 'empire' ahead of nuclear deal," *Reuters*, 23 March 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-iran-region-insight-idUSKBN0MJ1G520150323> [Last visited 30 May 2016].

31 Robert Fisk, "Iran nuclear deal: America has taken Iran's side – to the fury of Israel and Saudi Arabia," *Independent*, 15 July 2015.

32 "İran bölgede güven vermiyor," *Anadolu Agency*, 12 August 2015, <http://www.haberler.com/iran-bolgede-guven-vermiyor-7591323-haber/> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

33 Sinan Ülgen, Mustafa Kibaroğlu, Doruk Ergun, "Ankara Neden İran ile İmzalanan Anlaşmayı Memnuniyetle Karşılmalı," *EDAM Tartışma Kağıtları Serisi*, No.3, 15 July 2015.

34 Mensur Akgün, "İran uzlaşması Türkiye için ne demek?" *Star*, 19 July 2015.

35 "İran'a ambargo kaldırılırsa..." *CNN Türk*, 7April 2015, <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/ekonomi/dunya/irana-ambargo-kaldirilirs>[Last visited 8 May 2016].

The Turkish government's approach to the deal was indecisive, and was dubbed by some analysts as "cautious optimism."³⁶ For instance, the then Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek shared his views immediately via Twitter, where he wrote, "the Iran nuclear deal is great news for the Turkish economy and will boost bilateral trade and investments."³⁷ Likewise, Taner Yıldız, then Energy Minister, also welcomed the deal, anticipating that it would help energy relations between Turkey and Iran.³⁸ In the same vein, Nihat Zeybekçi, then Minister of Economy, called Iran "a country for opportunities."³⁹ According to these figures, the removal of sanctions would be important for the flow of foreign investments into Iran, as well as for the price of oil. Prime Minister Davutoğlu expressed his pleasure with the deal and called the removal of sanctions a positive development. Reminding people of the similarities between the recent deal and the Tehran declaration that had been mediated by Turkey and Brazil, he added, "I wish this agreement had been reached earlier."⁴⁰ President Erdoğan congratulated his Iranian counterpart on a phone call. The uncertain effects of the deal on Iran's regional policies, however, fueled Turkey's concerns. The official statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs congratulated the parties for achieving a diplomatic solution, and underlined that "full implementation of the deal is vital for regional security, stability, and peace." Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Foreign Minister, stated that he welcomed the deal, but asked Iran to "review its role particularly in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen" and asked it to "give up sectarian-driven policies."⁴¹

In fact, Turkey was accusing Iran for some time of seeking domination in the region, destabilizing regional countries, and pursuing a sectarian agenda. On one occasion, President Erdoğan, just before his visit to Tehran in April 2015, blamed Iran for "seeking domination" in the region and asked Iran to withdraw its forces and advisors from Syria, Iraq and Yemen. He asked Iran to respect the territorial integrity of those countries.⁴² Various Turkish officials have also raised similar concerns with regard to Iran's regional policies on different accounts.

36 Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey and Iran nuclear negotiations: cautious optimism," Daily Sabah, 9 June 2015.

37 "İran'ın nükleer anlaşması Türkiye'yi nasıl etkileyecek?" Habertürk Ekonomi, 14 July 2015, <http://www.haberturk.com/ekonomi/ekonomi/haber/1102928-iran-pazari-aciliyor-yatirimcilar-kapida-bekliyor> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

38 "Taner Yıldız'dan nükleer anlaşmaya ilk yorum," Star, 14 July 2015, <http://haber.star.com.tr/guncel/taner-yildizdan-nukleer-anlasmaya-ilk-yorum/haber-1043786> [Last visited 1 June 2016].

39 "İran fırsatlar ülkesi haline gelecek," TRT Haber, 2 October 2015, <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/ekonomi/iran-firsatlar-ulkesi-haline-gelecek-206471.html> [Last visited 1 June 2016].

40 "World leaders welcome Iran nuclear deal," AA, 14 July 2015, <http://aa.com.tr/en/politics/world-leaders-welcome-iran-nuclear-deal/26174> [Last visited 30 May 2016].

41 "Çavuşoğlu'ndan İran açıklaması," NTV, 14 July 2015 <http://www.ntv.com.tr/dunya/cavusoglundan-iran-aciklamasi,GHcso1DOIEyZYtXNgFBww> [Last visited 30 May 2016]; "Turkish FM welcomes nuke deal, but calls on Iran to revize regional policies," Hürriyet Daily News, 14 July 2015.

42 "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan'dan İran'a Tepki," Hürriyet, 27 March 2015.

On the occasion of the deal's 'implementation day' in January 2016, welcoming the removal of sanctions imposed on Iran, then Prime Minister Davutoğlu asked Iran for "constructive contribution" on regional politics. He expressed hope that the development paved the way for "a perspective for joint efforts aimed at ending destruction and violence in the region."⁴³ The Turkish call for Iran to "help reestablish security and stability in the region" was repeated in a statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which added that Iran should act "responsibly in a manner that does not encourage disintegration."⁴⁴ While addressing Turkish ambassadors currently serving in different countries, in January 2016, President Erdoğan reiterated his criticisms of Iranian foreign policy towards the region. He stated that Iran has been "using conflicts in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen in order to expand its sphere of influence in the region," and blamed Iran for "turning sectarian divisions into conflicts by lighting the fuse of a new and dangerous course."⁴⁵

The Competing Trends in Iran-Turkey Relations after the Deal: A Showcase of Compartmentalization

Surprisingly, relations between Iran and Turkey worsened in the aftermath of the deal. In other words, the trend of conflict and competition dominated Ankara-Tehran relations—at least for a while. Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif cancelled his planned visit to Ankara in August 2015 at the last minute. He stated that the visit was cancelled because there wasn't enough time to meet Turkish officials—President Erdoğan being in İstanbul while Prime Minister Davutoğlu and Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu were in Ankara. However, it was reported that President Erdoğan did not accept to receive Zarif in reaction to some inappropriate news about his family that had appeared in official Iranian media.⁴⁶ This political tension coincided with the rise of terror attacks perpetrated by the PKK. Some analysts claimed that it was not surprising that terror events in Turkey escalated after the nuclear-deal and pointed out increasing Iranian support for the PKK.⁴⁷ This was followed by mutual ac-

43 "Turkey welcomes Iran nuclear deal, hopes for 'constructive contribution' on regional conflict," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 18 January 2016.

44 "Turkey welcomes Iran nuclear deal, hopes for 'constructive contribution' on regional conflict."

45 "Turkey have paid the heaviest price in the struggle against terror," Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 12 January 2016, <https://www.tcgb.gov.tr/en/news/542/37543/turkey-has-paid-the-heaviest-price-in-the-struggle-against-terror.html> [Last visited 30 May 2016]; Emre Peker, "Turkey hails Iran nuclear deal," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 January 2016.

46 "Erdoğan daughter heads hospital for ISIL," *Press TV*, 21 July 2015.

47 Ardan Zentürk, "Kürtler'in değil, İran'ın PKK'lı 'vekalet savaşı'," *Star*, 13 August 2015; Musa Kartoğlu, "Yerli İstihbarat ve İran-Kandil trafiği," *Star*, 20 August 2015. See also, Joshua Walker and Gabriel Mitchell, "Is Turkey's War on Terror a Consequence of the Iran Deal?" *War on the Rocks* (<http://warontherocks.com>), 25 August 2015, <http://warontherocks.com/2015/08/is-turkeys-war-on-terror-a-consequence-of-the-iran-deal/> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

cusations between the high-level officials in Ankara and Tehran and severe critiques of each other in official or pro-government media.⁴⁸

The sudden and unexpected deterioration in Turkey-Iran relations is mostly attributed to and explained by the resurfacing of an historical rivalry between the two countries, which was accelerated by the rise of Iran's regional power.⁴⁹ Accordingly, the two countries are destined to compete with each other either on religious/ideological or geopolitical grounds. Indeed, the nuclear deal has contributed to Iran's regional status in two ways. First, it has ended the international campaign to isolate Iran from regional and international affairs. Moreover, Iran has started to be seen as a partner in the solution of regional issues such as the Syrian crisis and the fight against violent extremism represented by ISIS. For example, Iran became a member of the International Syria Support Group, a number of countries brought together by Russia and the United States. Second, with the removal of sanctions, Iran has become able to reach its frozen assets outside the country, which have been estimated to be tens of billions of dollars, adding the prospect of a flourishing Iranian economy.

Yet, one can hardly conceive that the decline in Turkish-Iranian relations stemmed from the rise of Iranian regional power. First of all, the deal did solve a lasting issue, but did not suddenly change regional settings. If the Iranian economy really booms, Turkey is most likely to benefit from such a development. As for treating Iran as a partner in the solution of regional issues, it has been a long-time call of Turkey. Then, how can we explain the cautious optimism on the Turkish side towards the deal and the worsening relations between Ankara and Tehran?

Above all else, contrary to Turkey's expectations, Iran did not revise its regional policies. In other words, Iranian policy of so-called 'constructive interaction' was not reflected in the Middle East. Whatever the reasons for the failure of a policy change on the Iranian side, Tehran increased its strategic cooperation with Russia. After the cancellation of his visit to Ankara, Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif went to Beirut, Damascus and Moscow. The strategic

48 Some of the Turkish media blamed Iran for supporting Russian crusade that kill many innocent Muslims, while the Iranian media claimed Turkey supports extremist organizations like ISIS. See, Semih İdiz, "Turkish, Iranian media trade barbs," *Al-Monitor*, 18 August 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2015/08/turkey-iran-syria-media-war-isis.html> [Last visited 28 May 2016]; Dorian Jones, "Turkey-Iran Tensions on Rise," *Voice of America*, 19 August 2015, <http://www.voanews.com/content/turkish-iranian-tensions-on-the-increase/2923792.html> [Last visited 28 May 2016]; "Turkey, Iran in war of words over Syria," *Hurriyet Daily News*, 6 December 2015; Arash Karami, "Did Erdogan threaten Iran," *Al-Monitor*, 8 December 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/erdogan-islamic-state-oil-iran-media-warn.html> [Last visited 30 May 2016].

49 Cengiz Çandar, "Are Turkey and Iran reviving a 16th century conflict?" *Al-Monitor*, 10 December 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/12/turkey-iran-rivalry-in-mesopotamia-revisited.html> [Last visited 30 May 2016].

partnership between Iran and Russia covering economic and military cooperation was consolidated by Putin's visit to Tehran in November 2015. Russian involvement in the Syrian crisis in September 2015, and the Russian-Iranian cooperation to support the Assad administration, turned balances on the ground against the allies of Turkey, which was followed by a rise in hostilities between Turkey and Russia. Thus, Turkey became very anxious with growing Russian and Iranian cooperation in Syria. In the meantime, Turkey fostered its relations with Saudi Arabia, to the dismay of Tehran. Given the polarization of the region over the last decade across the two camps led by Iran and Saudi Arabia, the growing relations between Ankara and Riyadh led to some concerns on the Iranian side.

In fact, Turkey has been wary of that polarization that has led to a deepening of sectarian cleavages in the region. According to Turkish officials, Iran has played a major role in this process. The culminating geopolitical challenges increased Turkish concerns. First, Turkish officials thought that the sectarian policies pursued by Iran have led to regional instability and the rise of extremist groups that are regarded as threats to regional peace and Turkish security. Additionally, Iran was regarded to be exploiting regional crises and sectarian divisions in order to increase its regional power. Moreover, Turkey felt surrounded by Iran-led sectarian forces in Iraq and the PKK affiliated Kurds in Syria, arguably supported by Iran throughout its southern borders. Under these conditions, the pro-government media both in Turkey and in Iran severely criticized and attacked each other. The baseless reports in the Iranian media claiming the involvement of President Erdoğan's family in some activities allegedly supporting ISIS further increased the tensions between Ankara and Tehran.⁵⁰ Consequently, the growing geopolitical concerns in Ankara with regard to Iran's regional policies and media wars between the two countries led to a decline in Turkish-Iranian relations.

Against the rising trend of conflict and competition in the aftermath of the nuclear deal, a simultaneous trend of cooperation and dialogue also continued to affect Iran-Turkey relations.⁵¹ Despite the worsening political relations between Ankara and Tehran, a growing number of Turkish businessmen turned towards Iran after the deal. Besides small and medium-sized companies that had a long-time interest in the Iranian market, Turkish conglomerates also started to show their interest in Iran. Additionally, new regional developments, including the consolidation of Kurdish autonomy in the north of Syria, alerted both Ankara and Tehran. Meanwhile the growing great-pow-

50 "Iranian media full of lies against Turkey," AA, 26 July 2015, at <http://aa.com.tr/en/world/iranian-media-full-of-lies-against-turkey/18626> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

51 Bayram Sinkaya, "PM Davutoğlu's Visit to Tehran: A New Momentum in Turkey-Iran Relations", ORSAM Foreign Policy Analysis, 7 March 2016, <http://www.orsam.org.tr/en/showArticle.aspx?ID=2967> [Last visited 8 May 2016]; Hassan Ahmadian, "Is Turkey Swaying Back to Iran?", Al-Monitor, 22 March 2016, at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/03/iran-turkey-political-cooperation-davutoglu-zarif.html> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

er involvement in the Syrian crisis lessened the roles of Iran and Turkey on the ground, which led to resentment against the United States and Russia in the two capitals. Eventually, Prime Minister Davutoğlu paid a visit to Tehran on 4 March 2016. On his way to Tehran, he talked on the significance of cooperation with Iran, particularly on economic issues. Davutoğlu also underscored the importance of dialogue between Iran and Turkey, even on issues of disagreement. He stated that disagreements between the countries on regional issues are quite natural, but the lack of interaction is unusual. In Tehran, Davutoğlu publicly stated that they “should not leave the fate of the region to extra-regional powers,” illustrating the resentment against the United States and Russia.

Davutoğlu’s visit to Tehran gave a new momentum to Iran-Turkey relations, and was followed by the visit of President Rouhani to Ankara on 16 April 2016. It is noteworthy that, this visit took place right after the OIC Summit held in İstanbul that heavily criticized Iran for the attacks against the Saudi diplomatic missions in Iran, and for its alleged support for terrorism and its interference in internal affairs of other Muslim countries. Against those criticisms, Rouhani went to Ankara for official bilateral meetings. President Erdoğan and President Rouhani chaired the third meeting of the High Level Cooperation Council, which brought together various ministers from each country to review overall relations. At the end of the meeting, eight memorandums of understanding and agreements on various issues were signed. The parties also renewed their commitment to increase the total amount of bilateral economic transactions to the level of 30 billion USD in a short time. Admitting the existence of disagreements on “certain issues” President Erdoğan stated that the two countries should minimalize differences and maximize commonalities between them.⁵² Rouhani called the differences between Iran and Turkey on some regional issues as “minor differences of opinion” and underlined the commitment of both countries “to bolster their relations in all fields”. In addition to boosting bilateral relations on economic and energy issues, Rouhani and his Turkish colleagues talked on converging interests on preserving the territorial integrity of regional countries, putting an end to war in the region, and fighting against terrorism.⁵³

Conclusion

A survey of the history of Iran-Turkey relations and an analysis of contemporary relations between the two countries shows that it is difficult to talk about a long-term, structural conflict or cooperation between the two coun-

52 “Erdoğan: İran ile Türkiye Arasındaki İş Hacmi Artırılacak”, Haberler.com, 16 April 2016, at <http://www.haberler.com/erdogan-iran-ile-turkiye-arasindaki-is-hacmi-8363333-haber/> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

53 “Iran, Turkey must up anti-terror efforts: Rouhani”, Press TV, 16 April 2016, <http://www.presstv.it/Detail/2016/04/16/461052/Iran-Turkey-Rouhani-Erdogan-Ankara> [Last visited 8 May 2016].

tries. Instead, there are two competing trends that simultaneously lead to both competition and dialogue between Ankara and Tehran. There is no structural foundation for conflict and competition between Iran and Turkey, the two countries sharing a common border that has rarely changed for almost four centuries. There is no historical and territorial disagreement that prevents the two countries from developing good neighborly relations. However, ideological differences, geopolitical concerns and regional rivalry between the two countries can occasionally turn into crises. Notwithstanding ideological and regional differences, Turkey and Iran have managed to develop their relations, particularly since 2002, on the grounds of rationalization and compartmentalization, when they implicitly agreed to put their differences aside and focus on common interests and threats. Additionally, there has been an implicit understanding between Ankara and Tehran to minimize the potential adverse effects of regional differences on bilateral issues and cooperation.

Since the Iranian nuclear program turned into a crisis between Tehran and the West, Turkey was stuck between good neighborly relations with Iran and maintaining its alliance with the United States. In order to ease the tensions and prevent the emergence of another conflict in its region, Turkey attempted to facilitate and mediate nuclear negotiations between Iran and the P5+1. However, after the conclusion of the deal between the parties, Turkey became cautious with its geopolitical implications. Its caution is not drawn by the deal itself, but related to the deal's potential impact on Iran's regional policies. Criticisms that were raised by Turkish officials, led by President Erdoğan, towards Iran's regional policies preceded the finalization of the deal. However, post-deal developments in the Middle East against the interests of Turkey, the rise of PKK terrorism, and baseless claims in respective official and pro-government media, resulted in deterioration of Ankara-Tehran relations. In other words, the trend of conflict and competition has prevailed over cooperative relations between the two countries.

In the meantime, however, there have been some factors that have forced dialogue and cooperation between Ankara and Tehran. On the one hand, Turkey has been increasingly concerned with Iranian regional ambitions and policies, on the other hand the removal of sanctions made Iran a favorable destination for Turkish businesses and a reliable source of energy. Additionally, geopolitical developments such as the rise of religious extremism, consolidation of Kurdish autonomy in the north of Syria, and growing involvement of extra-regional great powers in regional issues, pushed the two countries to manage their differences and focus on common interests. Under these conditions, the Iranian and Turkish governments agreed to put their differences and sources of contention aside, and focus on common interests and shared concerns. Thus, they have compartmentalized their relations into different sectors in order to contain differences, and controversies. In other words, Turkey and Iran have learned to manage regional differences by placing them in

different compartments. However, it does not mean the complete elimination of differences and disagreements, but managing the conflicts to facilitate cooperation and dialogue. With regard to the recent developments in Iran-Turkey relations, geopolitical concerns and regional issues denote the trend of conflict and competition; however, economic opportunities and some other geopolitical developments signify cooperation and dialogue. The ensuing compartmentalization of relations explains the simultaneous existence of two contrasting trends.

The complicated nature of bilateral relations and the simultaneous existence of contrasting trends of cooperation and conflict are by no means peculiar to Iran-Turkey relations. Likewise, the policy of compartmentalization of relations is not limited to the Iran-Turkey case. Thus, the concept of compartmentalization could be employed in other cases in order to explain contrasting trends in bilateral relations.

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