

Research Article

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Turkish Communication foreign policy in the Middle East after the Islamic Awakening and approaches to odds with the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

The fact is that Turkey is geopolitically the most stable, powerful, and important country derived from the Ottoman Empire with the empire collapsed after the First World War. Given the being in Europe and a member of NATO at one hand, and implementing key activities in the Caucasus and West Asia on the other hand, Turkey has become to one of the most influential communities in the region. A country who are implementing a mosaic politics without a single and fixed policy about countries in the region from a long time ago especially from the Islamic awakening to the epoch of intensified Salafism and Takfiri groups' activities such as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. For an example, the policies against Syria have been highly variable ranging from very good to very challenging relations. In the present study, authors are trying to explain what have been the most important Turkey's geopolitical objectives for isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran as a competitor and regional power from the Islamic awakening onward? Of among, the approaches such as the expansion a comprehensive relation with the United States of America, Israel, Saudi Arabia and adopting a hostile stance against Iran's allies including Iraq, Syria, etc will be discussed. Finally, the impacts of these policies on Iran's security and stability in West Asia will be presented. The issue will be explained using Cohen-Huntington theories and combined historical-historical sociology approaches.

Keywords

Turkey,
Justice and
Development Party ,
Security and Stability,
Political Isolation,
the Islamic Republic of
Iran.

Introduction

Before discussing of conditions and geopolitical features of Turkey, it must be presented a scientific, concrete, and sound definition on geopolitics meaning. Among broad descriptions provided for geopolitics, researchers in this paper are trying to explore this concept relying on what is presented by Saul. B. Cohen, a western politician and theorist of geopolitics. According to Cohen perspective, geopolitics is an applied study on relationship between geographical space and politics. Now, with a brief understanding of the concept of

geopolitics, we can draw a general schema of Turkey's situation geopolitically.

Geographic position: Turkey is a country located in West Asia and South-East Europe, in the Northern Hemisphere (35 to 24 degree of north latitude, and 26 to 45 degree of east longitude) with an area of 814578 km², (23720 km² located in Europe) consisted of the peninsula of Anatolia (97% of Turkey's territory and located in Asian side) and East Terrace (3% of Turkey's

territory and located in European side). Turkey is linked to the sea in three ways, and has two European and six Asian neighbors. This country is bordered by Commonwealth countries from northeastern side (610km), by the Islamic Republic of Iran from the east (454km), by Iraq and Syria from the south (331km and 877km respectively), as well as by Greece and Bulgaria from the west (212km and 269km respectively). Turkey is surrounded by Black sea (in the north), The Marmara and Aegean (in the Northwest and West respectively) and Mediterranean Sea (in the south), that are linked to the high seas through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. This gives a superior situation to this country geopolitically.

Geostrategic position: Turkey's special position geographically has also brought a strategic position on this country. Turkey serves as a bridge linking two important and strategic areas of the Middle East and Balkans. The existence of oil wells and numerous crises in the Middle East have increased Turkey's importance and also it can be a corridor for the passage of consumer goods of Europe to the Middle East due to proximity to the Black Sea, The Aegean, and the Mediterranean and because of two important straits of Bosphorus and Dardanelles. In the early period of the Cold War, because of the fear of the former Soviet invasion, Turkey joined NATO as the eastern arm of the West block. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there was a likelihood the importance of Turkey's role may be diminished, however the issue was again considered by the West due to the neighborhood of Turkey with commonwealth countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia) and also for many rich oil and gas resources in this region. At the occupation of Kuwait by the *Baathist* regime of Iraq and during the *Persian Gulf War*, Turkey opened a front in parallel to the Saudi in the north of Iraq and actively assisted the allied powers against Iraqi forces in Kuwait. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Western countries tried to limit Iran's penetration in the region and increase their own presence through enhancing Turkey's influence to the Central Asia and the Caucasus and by monopolizing markets of the region. Therefore, the question is that what are the most important Turkey's geopolitical approaches for isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran? According to the authors of this article, a number of approaches such as a comprehensive expansion of relations with the United State of America, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and embracing a hostile stance against Iran's allies including Iraq, Syria, etc can be mentioned in this regard. So the paper attempts to demonstrate this hypothesis using written and virtual sources, historic-historical sociology

methods and also by applying a combination of Cohen-Huntington theories.

1. Theoretical framework

In this study, both *Shatter Belt theory* of Cohen and Samuel Huntington Hypothesis have been applied depending on their closeness to the issue under study. In short, Cohen's theory known as the world's geopolitical system theory addresses geopolitics and describes the terms, frameworks, and theories within domain with a universal view on hierarchy of geopolitical units, sub-national units, independent countries, sub-countries, and also geopolitical areas and geostrategic domains. Besides focusing on restructuring of different areas in the glob geopolitically, the major powers in it, and the universal networks connecting them together, the theory is seeking to explain why some regions are more important than others strategically; some districts are geopolitically marginalized and why the Middle East is yet a fragile strip. In his book, Cohen states that the emergence of the United States of America as the only superpower in the world and the globalization process have failed to reduce the importance of geography as a crucial strategic and political factor.

Furthermore, the geopolitical theory of Huntington is a spatial school of epistemological approaches in geography that focuses on distribution, arrangement, and discipline of phenomena as well as on structures, systems and interactions within geographical space. Quantitativism, measuring, geometric-mathematical patterns, illustrating and mapping, modeling, designing and geometric shapes for showing and explaining distributed patterns, structures, systems, and interactions are among issues that are of special importance in this school. There is no any restriction on geographical scale in this way, and distributive patterns, structures and spatial systems are considered in all of the scales. With the geopolitical theory of uni-multi polar arrangement, Huntington argues that the global politics are always formed around or for power and that today's international relations are changing. The universal power structure was basically bipolar during Cold War, but the emerging structure is very different. After addressing conceivable types of order in the world, Huntington assumes the present order i.e. geopolitical transition period as a uni-multi polar order. In a unipolar system, the superpower can effectively resolve the internationally important problems by itself. But in a multipolar system, the main powers have comparable potency that are able to develop various patterns through collaborating and competing with each other (Huntington, 1998: 82-93). Based on this unit-multi

polar system, the United States of America is only a country that is superior compared to other countries in all economical, military, diplomatic, technological, cultural, and ideological grounds and can also effectively develop its interests all around the world. On the second level of the system are regional powers that are important in their respective area, but they cannot expand their interests over the world as the U.S.A can (Hafeznia, 2011:54-55). Those who are globally in the third place or in the second rank regionally, are sub-regional powers who are in conflict with top powers in terms of interests (Ibid:57).

Problem description

Today's Turkey is a survivor of the great Ottoman Empire. With the gradual breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, *Mustafa Kemal* known as Atatürk founded the Great National Assembly in 1920 and this was the end of life for the Ottoman Caliphate with the respective deposing of the Ottoman Sultan, and announcing the republic and secular government 2 and 4 years later (Pourgashtal, 2008: 78-94). Turkey is important in different geopolitical aspects that can be discussed as follows:

1. Geopolitical position: Turkey is consisted of the peninsula of Anatolia and East Thrace that respectively constitute Asian and European territories of the country. These two are related to each other by the Sea of Marmara and two strategic straits of Dardanelles and Bosphorus.

2. One of the most important reasons for accepting Turkey in NATO was because of Turkey's neighborhood with the Soviet Union. Accordingly, Turkey was considered as one of the critical security loops encompassed by two treaties- *Baghdad* and *SETO*- with respectively British and USA to prevent from the spread of communist influence in under their control areas.

From the perspective of Turkey's constitution, the political system of the country is established based on secular ideas and Islam is not proposed as an official religion. The constitution of this country is derived from the constitution of Switzerland, Italy, Poland, France and it has been entirely revised in 1982.

2.1. Turkish politics for isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran after Islamic awakening

> Turkey's relations with the Zionist regime

At first, it should be said that the Jews have long had a positive opinion about Turks, because Sultan Bayazid's

(1481-1512) allowed those Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal & Spain) to enter to the Ottoman Territory. Of course it was mostly USA pressure that Turkey recognized Israel as a result of *De facto* in March 1949. 12 months later, diplomatic relations formed between these two countries. The legal justification of Turkey for recognizing Israel was that, recognizing the regime that has been already identified by the UN is among requirements in the international law. The establishment of clear ties with the Zionist regime was a bold action by the Turks. Some of the most important reasons for establishing relationships between Turkey and the Zionist regime are:

- **Economical purposes**
- **Military purposes**
- **confronting with Syrian movements**
- **using Jewish lobbies to pave the way for joining European Union**
- **The spread of tensions between Turkey and Syria**

Basically, many believe that the role of Turkey in recent crises of the region is rooted in neo-Ottomanism policies and that the country is seeking to increase its power regionally. But the authors of this study believe that Turkey's foreign policy is actually a combination of increased power and security balances based on which, Ankara must have a geopolitical look at the Syria's crises. In fact, the combined strategy of soft and hard power has become a turning point in Turkish diplomacy system. But the basic problem in the crisis on relations between Ankara and Damascus must be sought in the geopolitical environment surrounded by Turkey. According to Turkey's perspective, after the Iraq war in 2003, a new environment has been created. It must be said that two neighboring Arab countries of Turkey -Iraq and Syria- are dominated by Iran. This is an unprecedented development throughout the history of competition between Iran and Turkey (Cornell, 2012: 55-58).

Although Turkey has attempted to establish alliances with Shiite Arabs in the region, and also Erdogan was the first Sunni leader who visited the tomb of Imam Ali in Najaf on March 2013, but in a strategic competition against Iran, Turkey does not have a chance to attract the Shiite majority. Given the fact in the new realistic context, Turkey approached to Iraqi Kurds to put more pressure on Syria as well as to maximize its own interests. Thereby, Ankara tried to neutralize Damascus' role (Kurdistan Workers' Movement) with an active presence in the north of Iraq. The fact is that the crisis between Ankara and Damascus must not be sought in

political ideology suggested from Turkey but instead it must be searched in the changing pattern of Turkish elites in interpreting of the Middle East geographically and geopolitically. Therefore, it can be suggested that a lot of policies adopted by Turkish government against Syria are attributed to the realistic factors that are in fact reflecting structural and strategic changes within countries around of Turkey (Alessandria, 2012:96).

The holistic development of relations between Turkey and the USA

According to evidence in recent years, the United States is still praising Turkey despite all problems in promoting the intended targets in this country. Even Americans have kept silent about Turkey's support for Extremist groups and intensified terrorist operations backed by Turkey in Syria so that, the US Secretary of State, *John Kerry*, has introduced Turkey as one of the most determined countries in the world in fighting against terrorism. The intended goals of the US in cooperating with Turkey are not yet clear and they will surely apply the maximum effort to keep them secret. Furthermore, the Middle East has been always a critical location for America and this country has tried to further influence in the region for all time. Under such circumstances, establishing relations with Turkey may be the only way for the US.

The current state of relationship between Turkey and the USA

Nowadays, America and Turkey are faced with some similar and important challenges regionally that provided a path for them to cooperate with each other. Some problems are, the Palestinian Hamas Movement, Iran's nuclear program, civil war in Syria, and relations with the Zionist regime. But now there is a deep gap relating discourse and practical reality between the two countries. The gap is due to the fact that some needs are not met by the other party. While America is most required a powerful and durable ally in the Middle East, recent riots and developments in and out of Turkey has greatly reduced the influence of the country in the region. On the other hand, multiple America's policies against Turkey have offended the Turkish leaders (Bowang, 2013: 11).

Turkey's policy against recent Takfiri-salafi movements (a case study of ISIS)

Recent developments in Iraq and Syria where have some shared border with Turkey, and Islamic State (*IS*, *ISIS*, or *ISIL*) terrorist attacks in June 2014 turned all eyes

towards Turkey. It appears to be a closely associated between the rise of IS and their recent actions against Kurds. Since the beginning of ISIS attacks, the terrorist group has been at war with Kurds in both Iraq and Turkey and the war is also underway in the Kurdish regions. It is believed that Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are among the main supporters of this terrorist group, and assistances given by Turkey are even further. The fact is that, people who are willing to join *ISIS* come together in Istanbul and Ankara from around the world, and then they easily pass the border through *Urfa*, *Gaziantep*, and *Hatay*. Crossing the border without any hindrance is a questionable issue. Turkish helps logistically have also been quiet evident. After 30th April election and *Heidar al-Abadi* as prime minister to be appointed in Iraq, the signs of improved relations were seen between two countries, but their views on the fight against *IS* are different.

On the other hand, Iraq was unhappy about Turkey's aids to the Iraqi Kurds because there are still some fundamental conflicts between Iraq and the Kurds around problems such as energy sources, sharing of oil revenues, the problem of Kirkuk, budget of Iraqi Kurdistan region, and some other issues that may be reappeared because of *ISIS*. In addition, Turkey's passive position against the Islamic State and the massacre in *Kobani* has most revealed the contradictory aspects of Turkey's foreign policy. Today, the lack of serious action against massacre of *ISIS* in *Kobani* indicates the contradiction once again. It can be claimed that Turkey has been a supporter for terrorist groups and extremists including *ISIS* from the very beginning crisis in Syria. However Turkey opted to change its official stance after introducing *ISIS* as a terrorist group. Moreover, *ISIS*, as an enemy for the Syrian government, continues to supply Turkey's interests. Therefore, if Turkey is not able to changes its own policies, then in addition to instability of the security environment in surrounding, it will also intensify the internal instability especially in Kurdish areas, and the terrorist cells and takfiri ideas to grow (<http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/page/1939615>).

Turkey's appeasement policy towards disaster in Kobani

At the moment, Turkey is faced a crisis in the southern borders for hosting around 180 thousands refugees of *Kobani*. So far, over 30 people have been killed in objections to Turkey's policy toward *Kobani* and Kurdish protesters clash with police forces, nationalists and Islamists. Given the importance of Turkey's role on the crisis in Syria and Iraq, addressing the origins of recent events can draw a more clear picture on

conditions faced Turkey's government with, that will be examined below:

First, Turkey's government's reluctance to help to cope with *ISIS* and pushing back them from *Kobani* is a headstrong, point-seeking, and ambiguous position.

Second, by equating *ISIS* and the *PKK* threats, Turkey's government has deemed the seriousness of the *ISIS* and the extremists treat particularly in polarization of the ethnic and religious layers in Turkish society less important.

Third, Turkey's lack of serious action against *ISIS* terrorism and focus on the collapse the Syrian government at any cost can damage to Turkey's relation with Iran, because in addition to intensifying regional instability, it also can lead to a gap between Shiites and Sunnis in the Islamic world.

Forth, *Erdogen* has stipulated any help from Turkey to Syrian Kurds to stop the Treaty of *de facto* between Kurds and *Bashar al-Assad* and joining them to *anti-Assad rebel's alliance* which of course, this condition will be unlikely to prove due to common positions both Syrian Kurds and *Bashar al-Assad* regime against terrorism.

Fifth, *Erdogan's* government passivity only brings the fact to mind that he is effectively supporting of *ISIS* terrorists or at least indicates that the fear of Turkish government for Kurdish people's protection units in Syria (*PKK* sub-division) is more than that for *ISIS* group.

Sixth, *Abdullah Ocalan* (leader of the *PKK* imprisoned in Turkey) has warned that the peace talks with Turkey's government will be terminated if the Jihadists are allowed to win. The end of the peace talks may probably be a starting point of tensions that Turkish government was hoped to terminate them. Undoubtedly, *Justice & Development Party* will be the loser at such an atmosphere of instability and in particular it can be a cause to escape the foreign investments of the country.

Seventh, the reason for most those who are killed in the Kurdish areas of Turkey has been because of conflicts happened between the rival Kurdish groups i.e. *PKK* supporters and the Islamist Party, *Hüda-Par*, that in fact it represents the intra-ethnic conflicts of the Kurds in Turkey. It should be noted that in early October of this year, a few hundred of *ISIS* supporters together a party so-called *Turkish Hezbollah* launched a protest in the

Fatih area of *Istanbul* carrying banners in support of *ISIS* without any reaction from Turkish security forces.

Therefore, it can totally be said that with the beginning of Syrian crisis, Turkey's geopolitically postmodern goals have been supporting terrorist groups and Extremists in Syria including *ISIS*. To date, Turkey's strategic priority has been breaking down the Syrian government, because the country regards a severe action against *ISIS* as a serious risk of retaliatory attacks by them and the Syrian government can be more empowered. In addition, Turkey's policy against the Kurds is the Syrian Kurds, who are coordinated with the Syrian government according to an unwritten coalition, to prevent them from taking more power.

As a general, regarding Turkey's policies against *the Islamic State* and allowing them to get more power in Syria and Iraq must be said that, if strategic mistakes of Turkey's government leading to strengthening the terrorist group of *ISIS* may not be a lesson for this country, then not only there will be an instability in the security environment in around, but also there will be a domestic volatility particularly in Kurdish area of Turkey with growing the terrorist cells and takfiri ideas.

Turkey's pragmatic policies for isolating the Islamic Republic of Iran

a) The compensation of political and geostrategic failures of the past

It can be argued that Turkey has failed in almost all its goals and strategies of the foreign policy. Turkey is faced with serious challenges to join the European Union. Also, the fall of *Mohammed Morsi* who was a strategic ally for Turkey led Turkish strategy to fail to achieve goals. On the other hand, all Turkey's efforts for breaking down Syria's political system were unsuccessful and *Bashar al-Assad* has remained in power with an authority more than that before had. Furthermore, despite all planning, Turkey could not bring an Iraqi government in power aligning with its own policies. Security crisis in Iraq and Syria and the presence of a new actor in the region means *ISIS*, can be used as a tool by Turkey to reach to the failed goals at one hand, and will be a ground for renewed contribution and to compensate all previous failures on the other hand. Therefore, it seems that Turkey is the only country benefited from the presence of *ISIS* in the region.

b) The implementation of the US's new Middle East Plan

Turkey's regional orientation and its foreign policy suggest that the country is typically a representative of America in the region. Turkey is somehow pursuing the Great Middle East project of America. The cooperation with *ISIS* or at least an implicit silence against it, the opposition with the government *Nouri al-Maliki*, trying to decompose Iraq and provoking Iraqi Kurds for independence, leveraging in the Sunni areas of Iraq, developing crisis in Syria and trying to breakdown the Syrian political system, an active involvement in Afghanistan, dynamic and continuing relationship with *Saudi Arabia*, the cooperation with countries around the *Persian Gulf* etc all and all can only be defined and concluded under the Great Middle East project of America.

c) Assistance to come aligned governments to power

Turkey's approach is seeking to form a *Sunni-Muslim brotherhood* government in Iraq and Syria. In other words, to obtain a regional power, Turkey is trying to create some countries in line with its own objectives and programs. For this purpose, Iraq and Syria as two neighbors are most preferred. However Turkey has a quick look at countries such as Egypt and Afghanistan.

d) Damaging the axis of resistance

Turkey is the only important and powerful country near the *axis of resistance*. Iran, Iraq, Syria, and *Hizbullah* in Lebanon are four countries trying to work together under resistance strategy and are allies for each other against a common enemy. But this has brought inconvenience for Turkey. Therefore, Turkey intends to strengthen its position in the region through implementing of *Muslim brotherhood axis* instead of resistance axis. Thus, regardless of dummy stances against the Zionist regime, Turkey is further seeking to a leading country in the region along with allied countries.

e) Kurds' independence from Baghdad

Turkey is trying in the way that Iraqi Kurds can be independent from Baghdad regime. There will be a lot of advantages for Turkey via achieving this goal. The first benefit is that a Sunni State can be developed in vicinity of Turkey. The fact is that the three governments of Iran, Iraq, and Syria all are Shiite governments. Armenia is also a Turkey's old enemy. In addition, Europeans have not recognized Turkey as a

neighbor too. Thus, Turkey needs at least one ally. The second advantage is the supply of energy sources for Turkey. The third great advantage is that the Iraqi Kurdistan can be a consumer market of Turkey and also be the intended market for exporting and trading.

f) Separating the Sunni regions of Iraq

Under *Iraq and the UK's Treaty* in 1926, Turkey left the north of Iraq and *Mosul* and gave up the claim for sovereignty over these areas. However Turkey has always been at the thought of above regions especially the great province of *Ninawa* centered by *Mosul* and considers those as an extension of its own territory. Hence Turkey is thinking of retake *Mosule*. The idea of influence in the Sunni areas of Iraq by Turkey can be tackled in two ways; the first, is through trying to integrate *Mosule* with Turkey's territory and, the other way is that the Sunni areas of Iraq can be an independent country separated from Baghdad. In both cases, Turkey needs an excuse for entering Iraq. Therefore *ISIS* actions can be the best justification of Turkey for entering Iraq and separating the Sunni areas from that country. Based on this perspective, extending the influence over southern parts of Iraq is one of the goals of Turkey.

Conclusion

The aim of the study was to present an overview of Turkey's geopolitical structure, factors affecting to adopt such a structure, and ultimately the geopolitical relationships between Iran and Turkey. According geopolitical theory of Huntington, it seems that Turkey's geopolitical policies tend more towards the West and are much converged in the US. Such treaties particularly with the Zionist regime have occasionally produced some serious challenges between Iran and Turkey. The fact is that Turkey has examined different strategies facing with developments in West Asia which in many cases has failed. It should also be added the opposition of both Turkey's southern neighbors i.e. Iraq and Iran, to Turkey's policies, so that adopting erroneous policies by Turkey have effectively interrupted the Turkey's aerial and ground connections with other countries in the Middle East. Currently, the Syrian government has managed to control the hostile policies of Turkey to a large extent through extensive reforms in favor of Kurdish minority in Syria and could draw the attention of Turkish politicians to the fact that the security of the fragile borders in the Middle East cannot be divided. In the case of Syria, the West and anti-Syrian axes have completely concluded that first, reaching a consensus against Syria globally or even regionally is impossible; second, the implementation of *Libyan* scenario in Syria

is faced with many problems that make it unlikely to realize; third, insecurity in every corner of the Middle East can be shortly extended to other parts of the region, so the lack of insecurity in Syria has potential for creating insecurity throughout the region. Therefore it can be totally said that Turkey's regime change policies toward those countries who somehow are strategic allies of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been unsuccessful. It should be noted that after Islamic awakening, Ankara's Policies have concentrated on the matters: the implementation of neo-Ottomanism ideas, resolving Kurds crisis, joining the European Union, and finally the isolation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the end it must be acknowledged that Turkey's postmodern objectives in West Asia are faced with a major obstacle means Iran. In other word, the most objectives of Turkey are in conflict with those of Iran. For this reason, the policy of the isolation of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also an important part of Turkey's postmodern goals. Of course it must be emphasized that the relations of Turkey and Iran have never gone to a challenging way but the policies of this country about crisis in Iraq and Syria indicate a real conflict with the interests of Iran. So Turkey's strategies in order to isolate Iran are in some ways that no direct challenge can be developed between two countries such as, a more tightly alliance with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the USA. However there have no any special achievement in this way for Turkey because the evident realities of the region represents

the growing influence of the Islamic- revolutionary thoughts derived from the Islamic Republic of Iran and a great tendency of Islamists and revolutionary forces toward IRIB's ideas and policies which the last case is a popular revolution by *Houthis* in Yemen inspired by Iranian Islamic Revolution.

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