

Iran and Turkey: Friend or Foe?



[Iranian] President Hassan Rouhani welcomes Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Saadabad Palace, 7 April 2015.

Source: Tasnim News Agency via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:President_Hassan_Rouhani_welcomes_Turkish_President_Recep_Tayyip_Erdo%C4%9Fan_in_Saadabad_Palace_02.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“secular-democratic model.” By comparison Iran has had “a weaker influence and even at times entertained conflictual relations with states like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for its attempt to import Shiite Islam.”

The second article from pro-government *Daily Sabah* echoes similar points about the ongoing rivalry between Turkey and Iran, but it also notes several key issues that they collaborate on. The first collaboration effort pertains to how to deal their Kurdish minorities. Both Turkey and Iran have armed Kurdish minority groups seeking to either gain more rights or independence. Curbing aspirations of their Kurdish populations has led to increased cooperation. Turkey also desires to collaborate with Iran and Russia to prevent the establishment of any Kurdish entity in Syria that could “provoke similar secessionist demands at home.” Second, a new tacit alliance formed by Turkey, Qatar and Iran against a Saudi-led axis has brought Iran and Turkey even closer. Third, Turkey’s drift from Western alliances has brought Turkey and Iran closer as Iran is facing United States imposed sanctions. Finally, Iran and Turkey are interdependent on the issue of natural gas: Iran needs markets for its natural gas and Turkey needs a gas supply for its domestic consumption. Aside from these factors, regional dynamics will also play a significant role in shaping relations, which the article describes as “co-opetitive” (competitive and cooperative). **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

OE Watch Commentary: Turkey and Iran, the two non-Arab states in the Middle East, are key countries in the region. The Turkey-Iran border goes back to the signing of the Qasr-i Shirin treaty in 1693, which brought an end to 150 years of intermittent warfare between the Ottomans and Safavid Dynasty and established a boundary between the two empires that has remained unchanged until today. Relations have been dominated by alternating phases of imperial and religious rivalry and cooperation, with a steady underlying competitive streak for regional dominance. The accompanying passages discuss recent dynamics between the two countries, including where their interests align and diverge.

According to the first article from *Al-Monitor*, there are several challenges that prevent the two countries from forming more stable relations. First, in Syria, Turkey and Iran have been on opposite sides of the conflict despite ongoing dialogue between them facilitated by Russia. While Tehran supports al-Assad’s regime in favor of the status quo, Turkey has actively supported the armed opposition group seeking to oust Bashar al-Assad. Additionally, Iran remains wary of the presence of Turkish troops in Syria. Tehran’s willingness to act as a broker between Ankara and Damascus all depends on Russian consent. Second, although both Iran and Turkey have attempted to develop a joint strategy to combat Kurdish groups fighting against their governments, “cooperation remains limited.” The latest cooperation of this nature was announced by Turkey in March 2019 but “...Turkey’s statement has been rejected by Iran’s armed forces several times and Tehran refrained from giving clear details about the extent of the cooperation.” Another point of contention is rivalry over influence in the central Asian Republics. Turkey appeals to the central Asian Republics through economic influence with 4,000 Turkish companies investing and operating in the region and the

“The most important matter [between Iran and Turkey] is how to find a common ground in Syria.”



Continued: Iran and Turkey: Friend or Foe?

Source: Pinar Tremblay, “Is Iran-Turkey rapprochement sustainable?” *Al-monitor.com*, 01 October 2019. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/09/turkey-iran-experts-ask-if-rapprochement-sustainable.print.html>

Yet, there are many challenges behind the smiles of Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who meet regularly as part of trilateral Astana summits. We rarely hear about the sustainability of Iranian-Turkish rapprochement in the media. The relations between the two are anything but stable...

A high-level bureaucrat from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Al-Monitor, “The most important matter [between Iran and Turkey] is how to find common ground in Syria. Turkey no longer calls for the ouster of [Syrian President Bashar] al-Assad. Yet, Tehran is not happy about our presence in northern Syria. Can Tehran play the role of broker between Ankara and Damascus? If Russia allows that, it may be possible. It will depend on how they approach the [Kurdistan Workers Party] PKK, which Turkey considers a terrorist organization and the same as other Kurdish groups in the region such as the YPG [People’s Protection Units].”

... “Despite much talk and attempts to bolster bilateral cooperation on the Kurdish issue, which is conceived as a grave security challenge for both countries, cooperation remains limited. The latest example has been the declaration of a joint operation by Turkish-Iranian forces against the PKK in March 2019. However, Turkey’s statement has been rejected by Iran’s armed forces several times and Tehran refrained from giving clear details about the extent of the cooperation.”...

...rivalry over the central Asian republics is another potential hurdle for bilateral relations... “Turkey had appealed to many of the Turkic states of central Asia by virtue of a flourishing economy and a secular-democratic model, while Iran had retained a weaker influence and even at times entertained conflictual relations with states like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for its attempt to import Shiite Islam...”

Source: Görkem Dirik, “Co-opetition in Turkey-Iran relations,” *Dailysabah.com*, 19 July 2019. <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/07/19/co-opetition-in-turkey-iran-relations>

Yet, there are many challenges behind the smiles of Erdogan and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, who meet regularly as part of trilateral Astana summits. We rarely hear about the sustainability of Iranian-Turkish rapprochement in the media. The relations between the two are anything but stable...

A high-level bureaucrat from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Al-Monitor, “The most important matter [between Iran and Turkey] is how to find common ground in Syria. Turkey no longer calls for the ouster of [Syrian President Bashar] al-Assad. Yet, Tehran is not happy about our presence in northern Syria. Can Tehran play the role of broker between Ankara and Damascus? If Russia allows that, it may be possible. It will depend on how they approach the [Kurdistan Workers Party] PKK, which Turkey considers a terrorist organization and the same as other Kurdish groups in the region such as the YPG [People’s Protection Units].”

... “Despite much talk and attempts to bolster bilateral cooperation on the Kurdish issue, which is conceived as a grave security challenge for both countries, cooperation remains limited. The latest example has been the declaration of a joint operation by Turkish-Iranian forces against the PKK in March 2019. However, Turkey’s statement has been rejected by Iran’s armed forces several times and Tehran refrained from giving clear details about the extent of the cooperation.”...

...rivalry over the central Asian republics is another potential hurdle for bilateral relations... “Turkey had appealed to many of the Turkic states of central Asia by virtue of a flourishing economy and a secular-democratic model, while Iran had retained a weaker influence and even at times entertained conflictual relations with states like Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan for its attempt to import Shiite Islam...”