



Turkey's Caucasus Policy Increases Tension with Iran

OE Watch Commentary: Turkish and Iranian tensions sparked after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a speech in Azerbaijan that included verses by a nationalist Azeri poet on December 10, 2020. Iran perceived this as Turkey's outreach for stronger bonds with Azerbaijan and as a threat to its sovereignty due to its large Azeri minority. Iran views Turkey's growing influence in the Caucasus and active involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a threat to its interests in the region. While the first accompanying article highlights the implications of Turkey's Caucasus policy on its relations with other regional players, the second article reports on the tension between Turkey and Iran.

The first article from *al-Monitor*, an independent news organization with analysts from the Middle East, claims that the Turkish President's outreach to Azerbaijan may signal a shift in Turkish foreign policy. The author claims that part of this foreign policy readjustment entails Turkish military and security cooperation with the Central Asian Turkic republics to isolate Iran and counterbalance Russia in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions. To achieve its objectives, the author states that Turkey would need to rely on its Western allies and reset its relations with the United States under the new administration. However, this strategy seems to complicate Turkey's foreign policy in other regions in the Eastern Mediterranean, Syria, and Libya where it needs cooperation from Russia and Iran in Syria to counterbalance its Western allies.

According to the second article from the Turkish pro-government newspaper, *Sabah*, Turkey, with its role in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, has changed the balance of power in the Caucasus at the expense of Russia and most importantly Iran. The author, known for his close ties to the Turkish government, states that there are a few major reasons why Iran quickly condemned the reading of the poem by the Turkish President. First, Turkey's increasing regional influence and the capabilities it displayed in support of Azerbaijan is unsettling for Iran. Second, the role of Israeli drones in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the prospects of an Israel with improved relations with Turkey is a serious concern for Iran. Third, Iran is concerned about the new US administration's Middle East policy and its implications on Iran's regional policy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“To counterbalance Russia and isolate Iran to the north, that is the Black Sea and the Caucasus, Turkey would need to lean on the Western security bloc...”



Visit of Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Azerbaijan, 2020.

Source: The Presidential Press and Information Office of Azerbaijan via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Recep_Tayyip_Erdogan_2020_visit_to_Baku_with_Illham_Aliyev_33.jpg, Attribution: Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International



Continued: Turkey's Caucasus Policy Increases Tension with Iran

Source: Metin Gürcan, "Is Turkey on course of foreign policy shift with pan-Turkist flavor?" *al-Monitor* (an independent news organization based in Washington DC with analysts from the Middle East), 24 December 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/12/turkey-russia-iran-foreign-policy-shift-to-panturkist-flavor.html>

On Dec. 10, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attended a celebratory military parade in Baku, where his speech included verses by a nationalist Azeri poet that sparked a diplomatic row with Iran. For some Turkish observers, Erdogan's speech resonated as the signal of a shift in Ankara's foreign policy.

... Erdogan's emphasis on stronger bonds with Azerbaijan reinforced anticipation that the focus of his foreign policy will increasingly shift from the Arab world to the Caucasus, the Black Sea and Caspian basins, and Central Asia. Efforts to invigorate ties including military and security cooperation with the Central Asian Turkic republics — which Ankara has neglected for some time — should not come as a surprise.

Whether this new inclination is a transient or lasting one is hard to gauge, given the fast U-turns in Erdogan's foreign policy record. Still, judging by the writings of scholars close to the government, Ankara appears on course to enter the new year with a pan-Turkist perspective at the expense of angering Moscow and Tehran.

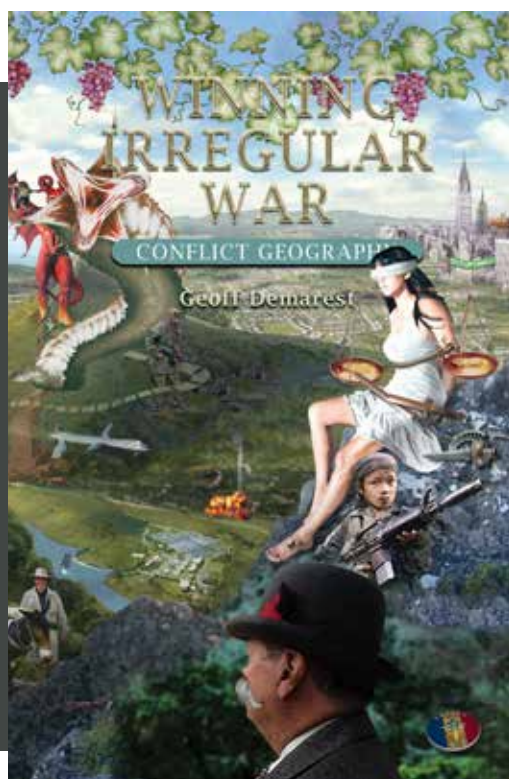
... Seemingly, Ankara's preparations for a Joe Biden White House involve plans... that would aim to isolate Iran and contain Russia in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions with Israel's support. Such objectives, Ankara seems to believe, will strike a chord with the Biden administration, which assumes office Jan. 20.

Yet such a shift would come with the increased risk of a geopolitical disconnect between Turkey's postures to the north and the south. To counterbalance Russia and isolate Iran to the north, that is the Black Sea and the Caucasus, Turkey would need to lean on the Western security bloc, get NATO involved, improve ties with Ukraine and Israel and, most importantly, reset ties with Washington under the Biden administration.

Source: Burhanettin Duran, "Ortadoğu yeni döneme girerken İran'ın derdi? (Iran's problem as the Middle East enters a new era?)," *Sabah* (Turkish pro-government newspaper), 15 December 2020. <https://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/duran/2020/12/15/ortadogu-yeni-doneme-girerken-iranin-derdi>

The balance of power in the Caucasus has shifted against Russia and especially against Iran. Tehran is envious that Ankara has accomplished in a few years what they have been pursuing for a decade. Moreover, with each move, Ankara exhibits more effectiveness. For Tehran, Israel joining Turkey-Azerbaijan cooperation is also a nightmare scenario...

The Arab countries are developing new relations with Ankara and Tel Aviv, including Arab regimes that side with Israel against Iran. In this new era, the big game is between regional powers [including] Turkey, Iran and Israel and Ankara has the upper hand. The Iranian elite should now put aside their nationalistic sentiments and exaggerated hopes and focus on the new reality of regional geopolitics.



Geoff Demarest's *Winning Irregular War* is about a broader set of conflicts than just 'insurgency.' In its 144 sections, Geoff Demarest uses a distinct, reconciled, more effective strategic grammar that draws on the disciplines of law and geography over political science. As Geoff Demarest puts it: "I hope that some of the ideas in it will be contagious."

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195392/download>