

Iran's Nuclear Program and Turkey: Changing Perceptions, Interests and Need for Revision

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Abstract: *During the AKP era, Turkish-Iranian relations benefit from the new dynamism in regional affairs, especially in the Middle East, based on the pro-active foreign policy approach. In the decades before the AKP government, Iran was perceived by Turkish elites as the ideological other and rival. The decade after the new millennium witnessed a perception change led by Foreign Minister Davuto lu who replaced the old mindset based on mistrust with a course centered on cooperation in several significant fields. Nevertheless, Iran's disputed nuclear program is an important barrier for closer relations. Although the Iranian nuclear program is perceived as a serious threat by the international community, Turkey has, in line with the new mindset of cooperation, vigorously advocated the right of Iran to develop peaceful civilian nuclear technology. Thus, Turkey has not suspected Tehran of secret uranium enrichment activities. The Arab Spring was the breaking point in Ankara's miscalculated Iran perception. After a concretization of differences of interests, mainly on Syrian issue, the position of Ankara toward Tehran has noticeably changed. Ankara has realized that the differences with Iran remain despite Turkey's constrictive new Iran approach. A cooperation-oriented relationship has been replaced with a latent conflictual one due to diametrical interests of both countries during and after the Arab Spring, in particular because of different positions on Syria. After this perception change, Turkey had to respond and take measures, especially in defense policy, which has driven Turkey into more intensive cooperation with the USA and NATO at the expense of her independent proactive regional policy. This article explores the reasons for the persisting and changing perceptions of Turkey on Iran and seeks to analyze the motivations of Turkey's Iran policy as it relates to Ankara's changing security perceptions, in particular with respect to Iranian nuclear and ballistic technology programs.*

Keywords: Iran, Nuclear Dispute, Proliferation, Nuclear Program, Turkey, Turkish Iran Policy, Turkey's Position to Iran's Nuclear Program, Ballistic Technology, Missiles, Shahab, Turkish Security Policy, AKP Iran Policy, Davuto lu, Erdo an, Ahmadinejad, USA, IAEA, NATO, Israel, Missile Defense System, Missile Shield

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Introduction

Iran is considered to be a key actor within the framework of Turkish regional policy orientation during the AKP era. Recently, it has become one of the neighboring countries to benefit most benefiting from Turkey's new regional policy. While Ankara and Tehran have different perceptions and interests when it comes to some relevant issues, such as policy on Syria after the Arab Spring, indicators of increased trade volume, cooperation in natural gas supply and the Turkey-Iran rail road joint project demonstrate that the new regional policy has begun to be fruitful for both countries. Nevertheless, Iran's disputed nuclear program, which Iran has persistently and emphatically stated it would proceed with, is one breaking point and an important barrier for a close relationship.

This article tries to understand Turkey's position towards Iran's nuclear program in the AKP era, the possible motives of Ankara's course with respect to the Iranian nuclear dispute and how this controversial nuclear program affects Turkey's policy towards Iran. In addition, the article also analyzes the influence of the issue on regional and global affairs, especially in terms of Turkey's perceptions which are different from the Western position. Finally, the effects of Iran's nuclear program in current and future Turkish security perceptions and consequences of this perception will be explored.

Motives for Iran's Nuclear Activities

For decades, Tehran has been taking various steps to acquire nuclear technology. There are several reasons for Iran's desire to obtain nuclear technology. The official position of Tehran, according to the statements of Iranian decision makers, is that uranium enrichment activities are only for peaceful civilian purposes as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) formally permits it. According to the official reason, nuclear technology should enable the country to end its dependency on fossil energy resources.¹ Moreover, this would save for Iran a considerable additional value and economic surplus for her fragile economy. In this respect, Iran's motivation is, according to the Tehran's decision makers, reasonable and rational.

Currently 190 countries are in party to the NPT. The treaty acknowledges the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely the United State of America, the United Kingdom, France, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China as official nuclear powers. Iran and Turkey are in the first group of countries that signed the NPT, whereas Israel, India and Pakistan are not signatory states of the treaty. India and Pakistan have developed and tested their own nuclear weapons. Although it is not officially confirmed, it is generally assumed and accepted that Israel has nuclear weapons in its arsenal.² As a country developing its own nuclear program, Iran differs from the latter countries on the grounds that it is still under the obligations of the NPT.

The legal framework of the NPT allows for the possibility of using nuclear technology only for peaceful reasons. A country which intends to develop nuclear technology can both build nuclear power plants only for energy production by obtaining low-enriched uranium or get nuclear weapons by enriching uranium to a higher rate as well. This is called the 'dual character' of nuclear technology. This dilemma is the core of the conflict in case of Iran's nuclear program.

Iran's aim to become a nuclear power as regardless of civilian or military purposes as can be explained by Iran's desire to become the leading power in the region. Becoming a nuclear power is considered by Iran as an important indicator in terms of the level of development and stage of technological progress. Therefore nuclear technology is as an achievement which would bring prestige to the Iranian regime. Iran has been in a state of international political and economic isolation as a result of some chronic and acute conflicts with the West, especially with the USA, and regime has failed to present a successful profile in regional and global integration.

Because of this, for Iranian decision-makers, the "triumph of the nuclear program" would be introduced as the success of the country and strengthen its ideology as well as its regime.

In addition, Iran has come to be a great challenge against the existing international structure, particularly the United States and Israel. The nuclear program not only enhances external pressure on Tehran, but also serves as a means of maintaining internal stability by reinforcing the perception in Iranian society of an external enemy.

From Tehran's point of view, the USA and Israel are perceived as the main sources of threats to its security. The United States, as a global superpower, has considerable influence over the region, while Israel, as a key regional power in Middle East politics, is the most serious focus of Iran's threat perceptions. Even during the Shah's regime, Tehran strongly protested Israel's bid for a nuclear weapon, which was not in accordance with Shah Reza Pahlavi's rhetoric of making the Middle East a nuclear-free zone, by announcing that this situation would create an asymmetric power relationship in the region.³

Also, since the Islamic Revolution, Israel has been perceived by Iranian decision-makers as a serious threat to the security of Iran, especially due to its possession of weapons of mass destruction and its powerful standing army. Antagonistically and ideologically, Israel is an enemy figure in the imagination of the Iranian regime and political elites. Since the Islamic revolution, Tehran has described Israel as the ideological opponent and as the "other" which consolidates the society around the Islamic regime, and strengthens its identity and foundations. Israel's nuclear weapons and military superiority intensifies this perception in Iran.

Furthermore, the increasing density of the US military presence in the region might be one of the reasons of Iranian decision-makers for developing a military nuclear program. The US military presence in the region, the US Embassy in Baghdad – the largest Embassy of the United States in the world – and several US military bases in neighboring countries including those in Turkey and US aircraft carriers navigating in close waters strengthen the Iranian perception that the US is a security threat and even considered as a quasi "regional power".

Iran is surrounded by nuclear powers. Indeed, aside from the regional rival, Israel, and the global rival, the USA, also Russia, India and Pakistan are nuclear military powers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia removed all its nuclear weapons and missiles from former Soviet regions, and deployed them on its own territory. Thus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan lost their nuclear weapons. Today in Russia, there exist over 2000 ready-to-use nuclear warheads of various degrees of destructive power along with medium, long-range and intercontinental missile carrier systems.⁴ India and Pakistan possess considerable numbers of nuclear warheads and adequate carrier missile systems, too. Also China, geographically not too far from Iran, is a nuclear power and possesses sophisticated technology and nuclear war heads. This situation has immense significance in creating a perception in Tehran of being a country surrounded by nuclear powers.

The conclusion that can be inferred from this situation is that Iranian decision-makers have sufficient reasons to use nuclear power for military purposes. The world's negative perception of Iran's regime also reinforces the belief that Iran could take steps to use this power for military purposes.

Suspicious over Iran's Nuclear Program

Iran categorically and vigorously declares that its nuclear program is only for civilian purposes. However, Western countries and the international community, particularly the EU, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the US and Israel, have strong suspicions that Tehran is obtaining nuclear weapons.⁵ The first and foremost cause of this suspicion is that Iran's nuclear program cannot be limited one hundred percent exclusively for civilian purposes due to the dual character of nuclear technology. The international community cannot trust the Iranian government because of the distortion of the facts about the ongoing process of uranium

enrichment. Beyond doubt there has been lack of transparency in Iran's nuclear program from the beginning on, which seriously undermined the confidence of the international community and the West on Tehran's declarations. Another reason that the trust of the international community and the West is undermined is the hostile anti-Israeli rhetoric of Iranian decision-makers (especially that of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad) as well as the general anti-Israeli attitude of Iranian perception in the region. In line with this general attitude, Ahmadinejad's excessive statements which claim that "Israel should be wiped off the map"⁶ deepened the rift between Iran and the West first and foremost on the nuclear issue.

Iran has been trying to run its nuclear program regardless of the international community's objections. Since the beginning of the nuclear program, Iran has not provided the necessary transparency and hampered the controls of the IAEA; Iran's nuclear program drew the attention of Western states after the establishment of a centrifuge facility at Natanz in 2002. The reports of the facility by the IAEA demonstrated that Iran did not fulfill the provisions of the NPT. Subsequently, the Western powers⁷ took several initiatives in order to solve the problem through diplomatic means. Since Iran turned down the demands for confidence-building measures, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted Resolution 1696 on July 31, 2006. The UNSC resolution called upon Iran to end the uranium enrichment process immediately and demanded that "Iran shall suspend all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, including research and development, to be verified by the IAEA."⁸ However, Iran rejected the resolution and carried on with its nuclear program as scheduled. Furthermore, Iranian President Ahmadinejad announced the opening of 10 more new nuclear facilities in various parts of Iran.

Another problem was the level of enriched uranium. Uranium fuel for most reactors producing electric energy is enriched to around 4 percent purity. The IAEA inspectors found out, however, that Iran had also enriched uranium on high levels.⁹ Contrary to the claims of the Iranian government, in August 2003 the IAEA reported that particles of highly enriched uranium had been identified in the samples taken from Natanz.¹⁰ The reports of the IAEA revealed that Iran produced approximately an additional 679 kilograms, which reached a total of 6876 kilograms of uranium hexafluoride (UF₆) enriched up to 5 per cent U-235, and 43.8 kilograms of UF₆ enriched up to 20 per cent U-235. There are civilian uses for 20 per cent enriched uranium, but it is also a significant technical step towards producing weapons-grade uranium. According to reports, Tehran increased its highly enriched uranium stocks to the amount of 189.4 kilograms in total.¹¹ In 2012 the IAEA reported that it had found traces of uranium enriched up to 27 per cent at the Fordow enrichment plant near Qom.¹² Iran claimed the higher-grade enrichment may have happened for technical reasons beyond the operator's control. However, the finding will intensify existing concerns that Iran is merely using the current round of international talks to play for time while it pursues its nuclear ambitions. The IAEA's report also confirmed that Tehran had added a further 350 centrifuges which are capable of churning out 20 percent uranium this year at the Fordow facility, in addition to 700 installed earlier. It is also remarkable that Iran produces polonium 210 which can be used as an energy source for deep space satellites, although Tehran does not possess space technology yet. Polonium 210 along with beryllium, however is used as a neutron trigger in the production of nuclear bombs, and Iran also has been trying to produce this element.¹³

Another reason for suspicions about the Iranian nuclear program is the military control of the facilities. The centrifuge technology which Iran uses is developed under the control and management of *Iran Defense Industries Organization* (a governmental organization that operates from military bases of the Iranian Army). It therefore not only overshadows the claimed civilian character of the program, but also underlines the military characteristic of it.¹⁴

In 1987, Iran obtained a 15-page document from A. Q. Khan through an illegal network. Mohamed El Baradei, the former director of the IAEA, stated that this document is associated with the equipment of nuclear weapon.¹⁵ The document includes some evidences that support the modification of the Shahab-3 ballistic missiles in order to install nuclear warheads in them.¹⁶ Also the IAEA report of 2011, which were based on the intelligence analyses of 10 governments, indicated that Iran was secretly working on nuclear weaponry.¹⁷ According to some analyses,

even if Iran's goal is not to build a nuclear weapon, the nuclear program will enable a "breakout" capability that would enable them to construct one within a short period should it make the political decision to do so.¹⁸

Iran's Ballistic Technology

Iran is also an actor that is developing ballistic missile technology in addition to its nuclear activities. Iran can also produce missiles on its own.¹⁹ Although some authors mention the correlation between Iran's ballistic technology and its nuclear program,²⁰ the link between these two issues has not been discussed profoundly enough in academic literature. The development of Iran's ballistic technology is particularly important in connection with the nuclear program. In fact, Iran's missile technology should be considered as a supplemental indicator in examining Tehran's ambitions within the context of the nuclear program. With Israel, Iran possesses the most sophisticated and effective ballistic technology and missile arsenal in the region.

Immediately after the fall of the Shah's regime in 1979, Iran started to develop its ballistic missile technology. Thanks to the support and contributions of various countries, Iran eventually obtained medium and short-range ballistic missiles. The US is confident that Iran has been developing long-range ballistic technology as well.²¹ Some reports also assume that Iran is developing long-range missile technology, or at least has the potential to develop it.²² Others claim that Iran has the ballistic technology to make missiles with a range of up to 10,000 kilometers.²³

It is estimated that there are more than 600 operational missiles in Iran. They include Shahab-3 missiles, namely the Shahab-3A, Shahab-3B, and Shahab-4 (Sajjil-1 and Sajjil-2), which have the range of over 2000 kilometers.²⁴ The Shahab-3 is a mobile missile which has a range of 1500 kilometers and more importantly is capable of carrying a single warhead. It was originally based on the North Korean Dong ballistic missile technology, which leads to the thought that Iran and North Korea have cooperated in transferring missile technology.²⁵ The latest version of the Shahab type missiles is the Sajjil-2 with an estimated range up to 2400 kilometers.²⁶ Iran also has several short-range missiles, such as the 150 kilometer range CSS-8 (approximately 200 units), the 280 kilometer range M-11 (30-50 units), the 300 kilometer range SCUD-B (100-400 units), and the 500 kilometers range SCUD-C (100 - 170 units).²⁷

Iran's missile technology poses a serious threat to its neighbors. Iran is superior with regard to missile technology in comparison with Turkey and other significant regional actors such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and it is a serious threat to all of the US and NATO military bases in the region and to Israel. Iran's medium-range missiles cover the entire Middle East basin as well as all of Turkey's national borders and important parts of Europe. In some analyses, it is estimated that the more advanced generation of Shahab missiles might even be able to have an intercontinental range.²⁸ Considering the assumption that Iran could develop long-range missiles by 2015, it would increase security risks, not only for Turkey and regional actors, but also on a global level.²⁹ When the suspicious nuclear program of Iran is considered, Iran's efforts to develop middle and long-range missile technology cannot be regarded without its nuclear ambitions. In all likelihood, other regional actors have to face the missile capability of Iran squarely in connection with the nuclear program of this country.

International Perceptions on Tehran's Uranium Enrichment Activities

How global powers, regional actors and international organizations perceive and consider Iran's nuclear program is crucial to Turkish foreign policy. International actors' attitudes towards Iran's nuclear program have not been static and have shown changes from a historical perspective. These changes are related to the international actors' perception of Tehran's motivations for acquiring nuclear technology.

Western actors supported Iran's nuclear program during the Shah's Regime. However, after Khomeini's revolution in 1979 and the foundation of the Islamic regime, the perception in

the West about Iran's ambitions for nuclear technology shifted remarkably. Since the mid-1980s, Western countries' concerns on whether or not Iran has been trying to acquire nuclear technology have increased year by year,³⁰ which caused an increasing negative perception about the aims of the nuclear program in the country. These changing perceptions about the nuclear program were mostly caused because of the ideological anti-US and anti-Israeli position of the new regime in Iran and the hostile and provocative attitude of Iranian decision makers both in rhetoric and in political decisions.

The Iranian nuclear program is being perceived not only by the USA and Israel but also by the EU and most Western states as a threat. This is a perception that is connected with the radical ideological position of the Islamic Republic against Israel and the USA. In addition, the subsequent isolation policy towards Iran by the USA as a result of this perception of Iran as a threat also complicates Tehran's relations with the international community and international organizations.

The perception of an accretive threat replaced the mistrust in the West towards Iran's nuclear program in the early 2000s. The fact was that Iran's nuclear program was not transparent and its remarkable progress increased doubts in the international community over Iran. Tehran is also reluctant to convince the international community. On the contrary, this mistrust of the West was reinforced by Iran's actions to expand the facilities of the dubious nuclear program, when Iranians aggravated IAEA inspections³¹ and IAEA inspectors found evidence of highly-enriched uranium beside the low-enriched one.³² In consequence of the growing mistrust among all international actors, particularly by the USA, the UNSC and the EU, it was generally agreed to pursue a policy to bring the program to a halt. However, hitherto only the USA among them has a clear response which proposes that economic sanctions would be able to stop the program.³³ It is essential for the international community that Iran suspend all its nuclear activities until it builds up trust. Recently, Iran has been accused of not informing the IAEA in time about a new facility that was built near Qum to enrich uranium. Despite all warnings, Iran still has been carrying on its nuclear activities.³⁴

The Justice and Development Party's Iran Policy

Till the success of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the parliamentary elections of 2001, Ankara was reserved and deliberate, even relatively pro-Western on the nuclear issue. This position began to change gradually after the first AKP-government. Upon coming to power, the AKP tried to intensify Turkey's regional role which had already started in the early 1990s with a more active and independent foreign policy. Turkish-Iranian relations benefit from this new foreign policy approach. In this period, Ankara's acting in harmony with the USA and the NATO, especially in regional issues, considerably declined. The bearish attitude of the European Union against Turkish accession gave reason and also strengthened a more regional oriented foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. The traditional ideological roots of the AKP, based on the Islamist *Milli Görüş* tradition, also alleviated such an active role for more cooperation in the Middle East. Thereby a more self-contained regional policy concept has emerged.

Especially after the Islamic Revolution, Iran was perceived by Kemalist elites as the ideological other of Turkey – a regime which is the opposite one of Ankara's. Additionally Tehran pursued, according to Ankara's perception, a regime-export-policy and so posed a threat to the laical regime of Turkey.³⁵ This perception, – based more on clichés than on facts – the established ideological image of Iran and the foreign policy paradigm based on that as well, however, were changed by AKP-decision makers and replaced with new concepts.

The zero problems with neighbors – concept of foreign minister Davutoğlu set the goal of putting an end to what he calls alienation of Turkey's neighboring countries.³⁶ In this context improving intensive relations with Iran fit together with the new foreign policy concept of the AKP. According to Davutoğlu, Turkey does not perceive Iran as a threat for Turkish national security.³⁷ Upon coming to power, the AKP tried to intensify Turkey's regional role, which had

already started in the early 1990s, with a more active and independent foreign policy. Turkish-Iranian relations benefit from this new foreign policy approach. He underlines that there has been a historical balance between Turkey and Iran since the 16th century,³⁸ and the border between Iran and Turkey has not changed for over 370 years.³⁹ From the perspective of Davuto lu, relations should not be characterized by the previous conflictual nonproductive competition and ideologically opposite perceptions, but rather Turkey-Iran relations should be reevaluated in order to find a balance between the geographical/historical determinants and cyclical/systemic attributes.⁴⁰ In this context, keeping the existing status quo with Iran is a significant milestone for Turkey, especially relating to Ankara's new pro-active regional policy in the Middle East. Any destabilization of Iran which could emerge from an internal or international factor would be from Ankara's perception a destabilizing effect against the remaining status quo.

Despite several relevant differences, some fields of cooperation between the two neighboring countries have been expanding for several years. Ankara benefits from cooperation with Iran in a couple of highly critical fields. The most significant and strategic one is the natural gas supply of Turkey from Iran. Turkey is dependent on fossil energy sources and tries to follow a strategy of diversification of its energy suppliers. Turkey's one-sided dependency, especially on Russian natural gas, is a serious source of concern for Ankara. Iran is an available alternative fossil energy supplier in the region.

The other significant interest of Turkey is the enduring cooperation with Tehran against the Kurdish separatist movement PKK. Turkey is not the only country that suffers from the separatist Kurdish movement. Iran also struggles against a branch of the PKK in its territory called the PJAK and has been relatively co-operative with Ankara.⁴¹ Particularly since the US invasion of Iraq, both Turkey and Iran have been troubled about their standing alone against Kurdish separatism and PKK terrorism that originates in Northern Iraq, which squeezed both countries into a more intensive intelligence exchange and operational cooperation fighting against the PKK/PJAK.

Also, economic relations between Turkey and Iran rely on the bilateral commerce. Bilateral trade gradually increased from around 1.2 billion dollars in 2001 to 4.3 billion dollars in 2005 and 10 billion dollar in 2010. It exceeded 15 billion dollars in 2011,⁴² and increased to approximately 20 billion dollars in 2013. The main trade relations between Iran and Turkey consist of Turkish energy imports. Iran provided nearly one fourth of Turkish national gas consumption and oil imports in 2011 which makes Iran the second largest provider of natural gas to Turkey after Russia.⁴³

Perceptions of Turkish Decision Makers on Iran's Nuclear Program

As emphasized above, Foreign Minister Davuto lu re-evaluated Ankara's Iran policy corresponding to a theoretical balance between geographical/historical determinants and cyclical/systemic attributes.⁴⁴ The first one is to be called a continual factor, however the second one not. It is a changing process factor in the relations in which third party influences affect Turkey's interests.

In this sense, Iran's nuclear activities and related problems could be considered a cyclic/systemic factor. The conflict does not depend on Turkey's position and in any case Turkey is negatively affected by it. By considering the increasing relevance of Iran for Turkey, Ankara has become tenderer and more vulnerable on difficulties of Tehran at the international level, most notably on the nuclear issue. Any further sanctions or a military intervention would have severe undesirable impacts on Turkey.

On account of this, Turkey, with its increasing active and influential role, not least as non-permanent member of the UNSC, tried to initialize a mediator role between Iran and the international community. During this active initiative and increasing involvement in the Iranian nuclear issue, Ankara's rhetoric and actions have gradually changed from a neutral position to a much more partisan one. More and more, the position of Turkey on the Iranian nuclear issue

differs from the USA, the EU and other international actors. Prime Minister Erdoğan stated that Turkey was completely against nuclear weapons in the Middle East and there was only one country in the region, namely Israel, that possessed nuclear weapons.⁴⁵ In addition, Erdoğan emphasized that he believed that Iran wanted to produce nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.⁴⁶ Also, during his official visit to the US, Prime Minister Erdoğan continued to point to Israel's possession of nuclear weapons in the context of Iran's nuclear program; he held a long conversation with U.S. President Barack Obama, expressing clearly the Turkish thesis outlined on Iran and emphasized that Israel is known to have nuclear weapons in the Middle East. Erdoğan said, "those who criticize Iran's nuclear program continue to possess the same weapons. I think that those who take this stance, who want these arrogant sanctions [on Iran], need to first give these [weapons] up. We shared this opinion with our Iranian friends, our brothers".⁴⁷

Ankara has continued to follow this pro-Iranian policy and rhetoric vigorously at the international level. A draft resolution proposed by the 5+1 group, consisting of five permanent members of the UNSC and Germany, to condemn Iran was approved with 12 in favor, 2 against (Turkey and Brazil) and 1 abstention (Lebanon).⁴⁸ It can be interpreted from the fact that Turkey voted against the draft resolution that Turkey differs from the mainstream course of the international community on this issue.

This policy indirectly supports a possible military orientation of the Iranian nuclear program by relating Iran's nuclear activity with Israel's nuclear weapons and indirectly legitimates Iranian ambitions. It is especially ominous in consideration of the fact that Iran's President Ahmadinejad verbally offended Israel several times, which undermined the trust of the international community and the West on the civil character of the Iranian nuclear program. In line with this general attitude, Ahmadinejad's excessive statements which claim that "Israel should be wiped off the map"⁴⁹ deepened the rift between Iran and the West first and foremost in the nuclear issue. The reason for the fact that Ankara mentions Israeli nuclear weapons as an argument regarding the Iranian nuclear dispute at the highest stage can be interpreted directly as encouragement, even advocacy of Tehran. This approach strengthens Tehran's position that excoriates Israel because of its nuclear arsenal, which brings about an asymmetric power relation in the region, and thus legitimizes Tehran's nuclear program as well.

Turkey's Strategy towards Nuclear Dispute

Regarding the existing problems over the nuclear program between Iran and the international community, the Turkish stand on the issue diverges essentially from the general perception of the international community. The most significant strategy difference between Turkey and the international community is based on the fact that Ankara 1) does not mistrust Iran's official declaration about the peaceful goal of the nuclear program and emphasizes that it is Iran's legal right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes, 2) postulates a general nuclear free Middle East including Israel, 3) criticizes the international community's position towards the Iranian nuclear program as double moral standard, because the USA and the West condemn Tehran due to presumptions about an ongoing nuclear program, whereas Israel and the Western powers already possess nuclear weapons, 4) acts on the assumption that the sanctions on Iran and the lack of diplomatic dialogue and mistrust complicate a possible constructive resolution of the conflict, and 5) prefers dialogue instead of exemption of Iran from the international community, which reinforces the alienation of Tehran from the rest of the world and makes a possible integration of the country into an economic and political network of cooperation and integration.

Turkish Policy between Rhetoric and Realpolitik

Hypothetically, Turkey has two alternatives if Iran indeed develops a nuclear weapon. Turkey could pursue either to develop its own nuclear military technology, or to adopt a security policy under the NATO umbrella which would make Turkey more dependent on the West. From a military point of view, a defense strategy that is built on conventional weapons against a nuclear-

armed country is unrealistic. In this sense, it may seem reasonable for Turkey to develop its own nuclear program. However, since this would trigger an arms race in the region and lead to a negative approach of the international community and a breach of the NPT as well, Turkey would not take that option. Within the perspective of realpolitik in the case of Turkey, to produce its own nuclear weapons is not possible in economic and political terms. The cost of implementation of possible economic sanctions to the country as a result of marginalization may be more devastating than the budget reserved for the nuclear purposes itself.

The second possibility is more likely because Turkey is a NATO member and already hosts NATO tactical nuclear weapons on its territory. Yet this makes Turkey more dependent on the USA and NATO. Therefore, both scenarios would have a single result: Turkey would not be able to continue its relatively independent regional policies in adjacent areas. Turkey will be forced to further cooperation and joint action with the West within the framework of security and defense policy against Iran. This will reduce Ankara to an actor which would be unable to define its own regional priorities independently, similarly to that during the Cold War, which would restrict cooperation opportunities and the foreign political orientation of Turkey.

Turkey's Ambitions for Missile Technology as an Indicator of Policy Change

Ankara's ambitions to obtain ballistic technology and possess indigenous missile production could be considered as a latent indicator of policy change in matters of Iran's nuclear program. The assumption that Iran's nuclear program would cause a regional arms race is approved in the case of Turkey's reaction to missile programs in neighboring countries, primarily in Iran. Though foreign minister Davuto lu does not perceive Iran as a threat, facts speak clearly against it. Turkey obviously feels threatened and fragile because of her weakness in comparison with Iran (and also with Syria), especially because of the lack of counteractive measures in the case of a missile attack. In the Syria crisis, it turned out to be a clear weakness that Turkey was not able to protect itself in the case of a missile attack from Syria.

Recently, Turkey has decided to start contract negotiations with the Chinese company CPMIEC in a six-year project to acquire long-range missiles and air defense systems. With the contract, Turkey will be getting four systems of the FD-2000 missile defense system type from the Chinese company, but according to Turkish officials, the country needs up to 15-20 such batteries to offer full protection of its territory. Turkey hopes in the future to produce the rest of the long-range missiles it needs with local resources.

From the perspective of Ankara, the most important criteria for Turkey's choice of the Chinese company was the opportunity of technology-transfer which other bidders did not offer in the official tender. In comparison, not only with Iran but also with other regional players like Syria and Israel, Turkey's missile capabilities are extremely weak. In this context, Ankara's decision of developing more effective ballistic missile defense capability could be considered a reaction to counterbalance Iranian middle and long range missile systems.

Moreover, Turkey agreed in 2010 to cooperate in the framework of NATO Missile Defense System (MDS).⁵⁰ NATO has considered the anti-missile system over Europe as a protection primarily against Iranian ballistic missiles. However, Turkish decision makers were cautious to avoid identifying Iran as a potential target of the MDS and threatened to block the deal if Iran was explicitly named as a threat. A compromise not to pinpoint Iran was reached with Turkey which has pursued close ties with its neighbor Iran. Turkey also emphasized that the MDS stationed on Turkish territory should be commended by Turkish officials. After this key decision, which was to be considered a clear signal of perception change relating to Iran, Turkey proclaimed it would install sophisticated NATO radar by March 2011. This decision of Turkey came against a backdrop of new Turkish frictions with Iran in the case of Syria. So, Turkey perceives Iran's missiles technology as a threat and it has taken some military measures against it such as the patriot purchase and Missile Shield Project option. Iran's military assertiveness, most notably its frequent boasts about its growing missile abilities, is a cause for concern.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Davutoğlu mentioned that Turkey's hosting of MDS constitutes the Turkish contribution to the defense system being developed in the framework of NATO's new strategic concept and strengthens NATO's defense capacity and Turkey's national defense system as well.

The NATO defense system agreement is comprised of several phases, including the construction of an early warning defense system in Turkey and USS naval vessels, deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, as interceptors against any regional missile threat. In the next phases, land-based interceptors are planned to be deployed in Romania in 2015 and more advanced interceptors are planned to be built in Poland in 2018. An early-warning radar military facility based in Malatya's Kürecik district in eastern Turkey, which is part of the MDS, was formally declared operational and US soldiers have been stationed there since the beginning of 2012. Kürecik in the Malatya province lies some 700 kilometers (435 miles) west of the Turkish-Iranian border. Furthermore in the same context, Turkish officials announced they would buy the US-Patriot (PAC-3) air defense system, with an initial investment of some \$1 billion.

After the MDS was installed in Turkey, Iran criticized Turkey's decision. President Ahmadinejad said that they warned Turkey because the MDS base on Turkish territory was not a correct decision and it was to Turkey's detriment. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast stated "[w]e expect our friend and neighbor (Turkey) to be more careful and not prepare the ground for policies which would lead to tension and, beyond any doubt, to complicated consequences as well". The Turkish government insists the shield does not target a specific country. However the system is capable of countering ballistic missile threats from Turkey's neighbor Iran, which has warned Turkey that deploying the radar at the military installation will escalate regional tensions.

In summary, Turkey obviously intends to strengthen its missile defense capabilities and to balance inequalities with the neighboring countries, especially with Iran, for the short term by cooperating more closely with NATO and the USA, and in the long term, to acquire necessary know-how and technology. The ultimate goal of Turkey is to be able to possess an effective ballistic technology that would act as a deterrent.

Conclusion

For decades, Iran has been taking countless steps to acquire nuclear technology. The West suspects that Iran desires to amass the uranium for the capability to build nuclear weapons, while Iran insists it only wants to fuel civilian reactors. Despite Iran's official position of enriching uranium only for civilian purposes, the international communities, UN, UN Security Council and IAEA have serious doubts about Iran's nuclear program. The reason for these doubts is that Iran has not been able to run a transparent program since its beginning, and there have been several incidents of Iran setting up secret uranium enrichment facilities in different parts of the country. Iran has also been developing its missile technology with a large number of medium range missiles as well, which pose at least a potential threat to all the actors in the region, including Turkey. Global actors and countries in the peripheral range of Iran's missiles are worried about Iran's growing potential military clout based on the potential military dimension of Tehran's nuclear technology and on the missiles with a wide strike radius including parts of Europe. Emerging as a nuclear power in the Middle East, Iran will tip the balances in the region upside-down, which will make Iran the leading power in the region. In addition, it could be said that this development in the region will cause a regional arms race or at least will force regional actors to new defense cooperation.

Despite all the obstacles of Iran linked to its nuclear activities, Turkish-Iranian collaboration has increased uninterruptedly since the early 2000s. During the AKP period, relations have benefitted from the new foreign policy approach of Ankara in regional policy, drafted and led by the Foreign Minister Davutoğlu himself, especially in the Middle East.

Davuto lu seizes Tehran's relevance from a historical-geopolitical angle and contemplates the status-quo with Iran as a crucial factor for the achievements of Ankara's ambitions in the region.

The most significant and tangible interest of Turkey has been the enduring cooperation with Tehran against the Kurdish separatist movement PKK, a branch of which is also active on Iranian territory and considered as a threat by Iranian authorities. Another concern of Turkey in terms of its relations with Iran is in the economic field. Economic relations between Turkey and Iran rely on bilateral commerce. Bilateral trade steadily increased from around 1.2 billion dollars in 2001 to nearly 20 billion dollar in 2013. Iran provides closely one fourth of Turkish national gas imports, which makes Iran the second largest natural gas exporter after Russia. Keeping the existing status quo with Iran is a significant milestone for Turkey, especially relating to Ankara's new pro-active regional policy in the Middle East. The existing cooperation would multiply tenfold if there was a solution to the nuclear dispute and a relative integration of Iran as result of a relative normalization of Tehran's relations with the international community. All these factors indicate the relevance of Iran for Turkey and make understandable Turkey's main course by the nuclear dispute.

Despite the nuclear activities of Iran and her existing missile strike power, Turkish officials have declared many times that Iran does not present a threat to Turkish national security. Moreover, Turkey has vigorously advocated the right of Iran to develop peaceful civilian nuclear technology and seemingly did not suspect Tehran's of its at least partly secret uranium enrichment activities. Furthermore Turkey has attempted to play a mediate role both during her non-permanent membership in the UN-Security Council and bilateral and multilateral initiatives.

For a long time, decision makers of Turkey therefore have favored a pragmatic assessment of the matters influencing Turkey's Iran policy, such as the nuclear dispute and putting cooperation forward between the two countries. In this context Turkey has remained on the cooperative path even despite security risks and at the expense of her relations with allies ó most notably with the USA. Also, an ethical-normative approach to the problem has to be considered as a determinant of Ankara's standpoint. This position, rhetorically incorporated by Prime Minister Erdo an himself on the Iranian nuclear dispute has been hallmarked by a normative criticism on Israel as the only actor in the Middle East with nuclear weapons, which indirectly has contributed to a comparative legitimization of Iran's nuclear ambitions as a balance-of-power situation.

Tangible interests to keep on cooperating in multiple fields with Tehran and pragmatism based on that interest on the one hand, and the ethically-normative plea of Erdo an based on Israel's subjective and unique privileged image in the perceptions of the USA and other Western actors on the other, have mostly determined Turkey's approach to Iran's nuclear dispute.

Despite Iran's significance for Ankara as pointed out above; Iran has been acting increasingly contrary to Turkey's interests. Especially after the Arab Spring, the contradiction between Ankara and Tehran is undoubtedly substantiated. While Tehran acted together with Russia and has backed the Nusairi-dominated Assad Regime, Ankara has logistically and diplomatically supported at the highest stage the oppositional Free Syrian Army. The interests of both actors have been in diametrical opposition; Iran intended to preserve the status-quo in Syria, Turkey on the other hand to create a new one to her own advantage. Iran has traditionally been playing the Shia card in Middle East affairs, especially efficiently after the regime change in Iraq as the result of the US invasion. Syria has been considered by Iranian decision makers as the most significant additional component of Tehran's regional policy. Turkey, in contrast, has seen the Syrian civil war as an opportunity to change the established settings of the game in her immediate neighborhood and intended to increase its influence.

After concretization of interest differences between the two countries during and after the Arab Spring, mainly in Syria, the position of Ankara toward Tehran has changed noticeably. The supremacy of Iranian know-how related to her ballistic technology has started to disturb Ankara increasingly. The competition between the two regional powers with inconsistent interests in regional affairs, such as on the Syrian civil war, is a determinant which has forced Turkey to

revise its threat perceptions related to Iran despite the relevance of this country for Turkey. Although Turkey has not clearly changed this official position vis-à-vis Iran's nuclear program yet, there is evidence to suggest that it will reconsider the nuclear activities of Tehran from a more holistic perspective. Turkey perceives Iran's stage on ballistic technology and the existence of an Iranian missile arsenal without any doubt as a potential threat and has taken some military measures against it such as the patriot purchase and Missile Shield Project option. Turkish decision makers were cautious to avoid identifying Iran as a potential target of the MDS and threatened to block the deal if Iran was explicitly named as a threat. But it is more out of diplomatic precaution and politeness than a convincing and calming move.

In consequence of Iran's nuclear ambitions, ballistic technology and armament, Turkey will not be able to maintain its relatively independent regional policies in neighboring regions. Turkey is forced to further cooperation and joint action with the West in the framework of security and a defense policy because of Iran because it is not able to balance Iran in the short-term. This closer security cooperation with the USA and NATO will lead to a more disharmonious regional policy of Turkey which means that Ankara will have to consider predominantly the perceptions of the USA and NATO in regional policy decisions. This might reduce Ankara to being an actor which would be barely able to define its own regional priorities independently, similarly to as it was during the Cold War period. This case exemplifies the difficulties of the new Turkish foreign policy between ethical-normative conceptualization and pro-active regional orientation based on soft power and the borders of it ending where well-tempered initiatives fizzle on realities. In order to minimize damages there is need for extensive revisions in Turkey's policy toward Iran's nuclear program. Ankara also ought to acquire the know-how for necessary ballistic technology in the shortest time possible and to keep an eye on Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

NOTES

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