



**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
SOCIAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF ANKARA  
INSTITUTE FOR GRADUATE STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**CONTINUITY IN TURKEY-IRAN RELATIONS: MAIN ISSUES THAT  
IMPROVE AND DISRUPT RELATIONS**

**MASTER'S THESIS**

**ENES AYIK**

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**SEPTEMBER 2022**



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## THESIS APPROVAL

This is to certify that the thesis defense examination for the thesis titled .....(title) prepared by .....(Full Name) with student number .....(student number) studying in the field of .....(department name) Department .....(program name) Program has been conducted in accordance with the related clauses of the Graduate Studies and Examination Code of YÖK (Council of Higher Education) on ../../..(date) at ....(hour), and has been approved by majority of votes/by unanimous vote.

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The thesis has been approved by the Institute Board with the decision dated ...../...../..... and numbered .....

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## **PLAGIARISM**

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all materials and results that are not original to this work. I declare that this thesis is written according to the writing rules of Social Sciences University of Ankara, Institute of Social Sciences.



Enes AYIK

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## ÖZET

### **Türkiye-İran İlişkilerinde Süreklilik: İlişkileri Geliştiren ve Bozan Temel Meseleler**

Ortadoğu'nun Arap olmayan en büyük ve en güçlü iki ülkesi olan Türkiye ve İran, çok köklü bir ilişki geçmişine sahiptir. Ama daha da önemlisi, rekabet ve iş birliğinin bir arada yaşandığı iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler, iki ülkenin kuruluşundan ve hatta Osmanlı ve Safevi/Kaçar dönemlerinden bu yana büyük ölçüde aynı çerçevede kalmış ve aynı konular etrafında şekillenmiştir. Türkiye ve İran bazı konularda hep iş birliği yapmışken, diğerlerinde hep rekabet ve çatışma içerisinde olmuşlardır. Bu bağlamda bu çalışma, Türkiye-İran ilişkilerindeki istikrar ve sürekliliğin ve iş birliği ile rekabet/çatışma arasındaki dengenin nasıl oluştuğunu ortaya koymaya çalışacaktır. Buna göre bu çalışma, iki ülke arasındaki ilişkileri belirli başlıklar altında inceleyerek Türkiye-İran ilişkilerindeki birtakım düzenlilikleri ve kalıpları ortaya koymaya çalışacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Türkiye-İran İlişkileri, Türk Dış Politikası, İran Dış Politikası, Pan-Türkçülük, Pan-İrancılık, Şiiilik, Sünnilik, Kürt Sorunu

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Continuity in Turkey-Iran Relations: Main Issues that Improve and Disrupt Relations**

Turkey and Iran, the two largest and most powerful non-Arap countries in the Middle East, have a very deep-rooted history of relations. But more importantly, the relations between the two countries, where competition and cooperation coexist, have largely remained within the same framework and have been shaped around the same issues since the establishment of the two countries and even the Ottoman and Safavid/Qajar periods. While Turkey and Iran have always cooperated on some issues, they have always been in competition and conflict in others. In this context, this study will try to reveal how the stability and continuity and the balance between cooperation and competition/conflict are formed in Turkey-Iran relations. Accordingly, this study will try to reveal some regularities and patterns in Turkey-Iran relations by examining the relations between the two countries under certain headings.

**Key Words:** Turkey-Iran Relations, Turkish Foreign Policy, Iranian Foreign Policy, Pan-Turkism, Pan-Iranism, Shiism, Sunnism, Kurdish Question

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATION**

**ASALA:** Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia

**CENTO:** Central Treaty Organization

**CUP:** Committee of Union and Progress

**ECO:** Economic Cooperation Organization

**EU:** European Union

**ENKS:** Kurdish National Council in Syria

**INSTC:** International North–South Transport Corridor

**JCPOA:** Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

**JDP:** Justice and Development Party

**KDPI:** Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran

**NATO:** North Atlantic Treaty Organization

**PJAK:** Kurdish Free Life Party

**PKK:** Kurdish Workers Party

**PYD:** Democratic Union Party

**RCD:** Regional Cooperation for Development Organization

**RPP:** Republican People's Party

**TUİK:** Turkish Statistical Institute

**US:** United States

**USSR:** Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

**YPG:** People's Defense Units

# CHAPTER I

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Turkey and Iran are two deep-rooted states that have always had a great importance in the formation of both regional and global policies since their establishment. While Turkey has risen in international politics as a modern and secular nation-state on the legacy of the Sunni Ottoman empire, Iran has moved on to build a new civilization on the legacy of both the Persian-Sassanid and Shiite Safavid-Qajar empires. In this context, the ethnic, religious, political and cultural spheres of influence of both countries have spread over a wide geography where they can project their power beyond their borders. While Turkey's sphere of influence extends from the West to the Turkish and Sunni world, Iran's ranges, as Reisinezhad says, from the peoples celebrating Nowruz on March 21 to those mourning the death of Imam Hussein in Muharram (Reisinezhad, 2019, p. 332). Also, both are part of the Islamic world and are located in a very strategic position that gives them the chance to put their weight in both regional and global politics.

In this respect, Turkey and Iran already had a deep-rooted state tradition and foreign policy ground from the very beginning of their establishment. For this reason, Turkey and Iran, unlike their weak and failed neighbors, have always had the necessary self-confidence and social will to defend themselves against foreign invasions and attacks even in their weakest times, and thus have been able to establish relations with all countries based on sovereign equality of states, rejecting all kinds of domination. More importantly, Turkey and Iran have become increasingly critical playmakers in both regional and global politics, challenging the superpowers' regional and global ambitions that harm their own interests and security. In this respect, just like many ancient empires that have risen on the lands of Anatolia and Iran for thousands of years, today Turkey and Iran continue a similar rise, albeit with modern methods.

The relations between Turkey and Iran also have a deep-rooted history. The border between the two countries has remained largely unchanged since the Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin (also known as the Treaty of Zuhab) of 1639 signed between the Ottomans and the Safavids. Moreover, since the two countries were built on the legacy of the Ottoman and Safavid-Qajars in the early 1920s, relations between the two countries have shown remarkable stability. The relations between the two countries have always followed a balanced course between cooperation and competition/conflict, and in this respect, there has never been a golden age or rupture in Turkey-Iran relations (Aksu, Şahinoğlu, & Uygur, 2019, p. 55). According to Ayman, the most important reason for this remarkable stability in the relations between Turkey and Iran is that both sides have realized that they cannot destroy each other and therefore they have to accept the existence of each other (Ayman, 2010, p. 7).

As a matter of fact, this study also will try to reveal how this stability in Turkey-Iran relations has been/is achieved with a new perspective and compartmentalization method. Accordingly, this study will focus on continuity rather than change in Turkey-Iran relations. In this vein, the factors that have shown continuity between the past and the present in Turkey-Iran relations will be analyzed separately under the headings of cooperation and competition/conflict in Turkey-Iran relations. At the same time, this study will try to explain as much as possible how the balance between cooperation and competition/conflict has been/is achieved or determined in Turkey-Iran relations. Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive explanation of how continuity and the balance of cooperation and competition/conflict in Turkey-Iran relations have been/are determined by examining Turkey-Iran relations from many different angles.

To this end, after this introduction section of the study, in the second chapter, the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study will be clarified. Accordingly, first of all, some preliminary assessments will be made about the nature and structure of Turkey-Iran relations. In this context, it will be tried to explain how Turkey-Iran relations should be viewed and what should be understood from some concepts used for the relations between the two countries. Afterwards, the general parameters of Turkish and Iranian foreign policies will be revealed. Thus, it will be possible to get an idea about where Turkey-Iran relations are positioned in both Turkish and Iranian foreign policies. In the third chapter, Turkey-Iran relations will be discussed chronologically under two headings

as the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Republic period. This will both provide a preliminary preparation for the next chapters and contribute to the understanding of the general course of Turkish-Iranian relations.

In the fourth chapter, the factors that make the cooperation and rapprochement between Turkey and Iran permanent will be addressed. Accordingly, the geopolitical, economic and security dependency between the two countries will be analyzed under separate headings. Also, the changes in the level of dependency between the two countries over time in these three areas and the effect of these changes on the relations between the two countries will be tried to be revealed. In the fifth chapter, this time, the factors that perpetuate the competition and conflict in the relations between the two countries will be discussed. In this context, it will be attempted to show how Pan-Turkism-Pan-Iranism, Shiism-Sunnism and the Kurdish Question create insecurity and conflict in the relations between the two countries. In the sixth chapter (conclusion), a general summary and evaluation of the study will be made.

Indeed, it was originally planned to have a topic in the fourth chapter that would deal with the impact of Islam on the rapprochement between Turkey and Iran over the last hundred years. However, due to the difficulties of collecting data on many different subjects and then compiling and evaluating them, this subject has been excluded from the scope of this chapter. In the same way, in the fifth chapter, it was also planned to have a topic that would include the distrust and competition created by the relations of the two countries with third parties (such as states, sub-state entities and collective security organizations). However, this was also abandoned for the same reasons, otherwise it would not have been possible to complete this work.

## **1.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Turkey-Iran relations are widely analyzed in the literature in two main periods, namely the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic. Accordingly, while it is widely argued that Turkish-Iranian relations during the Pahlavi period were mostly based on mutual trust and cooperation, there is a common belief that bilateral relations in the Islamic Republic period followed a balance line between cooperation and competition/conflict.

Studies emphasizing mutual understanding and cooperation in Turkish-Iranian relations in the Pahlavi period highlight two points. The first of these is Reza Shah's personal sympathy for Mustafa Kemal and taking his revolutions as an example in transforming Iran into a modern state. The second is that both countries were in the same camp in the face of the common Soviet threat during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah. Accordingly, these two factors had such a weight in the relations that the issues of distrust between the two countries were thrown aside and a form of relationship based on mutual trust and solidarity was developed.

Against this, there is a shared opinion in the literature that both cooperation and competition/conflict in Turkish-Iranian relations have been experienced at the same time since the Islamic Revolution. In this context, while the cooperation between the two countries is explained by the geopolitical dependence between the two countries and the common threats and interests of the two countries, the competition/conflict is sometimes explained by the differences of interest and sometimes by different threat perceptions of the two countries.

In addition, there is a confusion in the relations between the two countries about which concept to use in opposition to cooperation in Turkey-Iran relations. Therefore, it is possible to encounter many different terms in the literature such as competition, rivalry, conflict, enmity, and even frenemies, which emphasize the simultaneous experience of friendship and enmity between Turkey and Iran. That's why S. Gülden Ayman (2014), in her work "Between Friendly Competition and Fierce Rivalry", tries to explain Turkey-Iran relations by drawing a distinction between competition and rivalry.

On the other hand, some studies approach the changes in Turkish-Iranian relations with suspicion and draw attention to the continuity and stability in bilateral relations. According to these studies, although the Pahlavi dynasty collapsed in 1979 and the Islamic Republic was established in its place, the general course of Turkey-Iran relations has always remained the same since the establishment of the two countries. For example, Gökhan Çetinsaya (2003), in his work "Essential Friends and Natural Enemies: The Historical Roots of Turkish-Iranian Relations", tries to show that Turkish-Iranian relations have always remained within the same framework and always revolved around the same topics.

## **1.2 AIM**

The aim of this study is to show the continuity and stability in Turkey-Iran relations by revealing certain regularities and patterns in the relations between the two countries, where cooperation and competition/conflict have always co-existed. To this end, this study will try to uncover some fixed or durable factors/determinants that perpetuate cooperation and competition/conflict between Turkey and Iran. In other words, this study will argue that some fixed or durable factors/determinants, regardless of the period of the Pahlavi or the Islamic Republic, have created an environment of continuous cooperation and insecurity/competition/conflict between Turkey and Iran. In this vein, this study will claim that since the establishment of the two countries, Turkey-Iran relations have always been shaped around the same topics and remained within the same framework.<sup>1</sup>

## **1.3 IMPORTANCE**

Turkey-Iran relations are widely analyzed in the literature in two periods, namely the Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic. However, this causes us to ignore the continuity in both Turkish and Iranian foreign policy in particular, and the continuity in Turkey-Iran relations in general. Furthermore, it is not possible to understand the changes and fluctuations in Turkey-Iran relations without understanding the specific patterns and regularities in the two countries relations. In this respect, revealing the existing patterns and regularities in Turkey-Iran relations will not only provide us with more meaningful information about the complex nature and structure of the Turkish-Iranian relations, but also enable us to better understand the fluctuations in the two countries relations. This will also enable us to see the limitations and cooperation opportunities between Turkey and Iran.

In addition, this study differs from other studies in that it deals with the Turkish-Iranian relations as a whole, that is, without limiting it to a certain period, in a comprehensive way with geopolitics, economy, security, religion, culture and political dimensions. In other words, this study does not focus only on a specific period or subject,

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<sup>1</sup> Even though it will not claim that Turkey-Iran relations are completely stable and unchanging.

but tries to deal with all aspects of Turkish-Iranian relations from the establishment of the two countries to the present day. Also, this study includes not only the official relations between Ankara and Tehran, but also all kinds of semi-official and unofficial relations between the people, organizations, institutions, etc. of the two countries, in order to reveal the sources of cooperation and competition/conflict between Turkey and Iran.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- Do Turkey-Iran relations always revolve around the same topics and remain within the same framework?
- Why do Turkey-Iran relations follow a balance line between continuous cooperation and competition/conflict?
- Why is change so hard in Turkey-Iran relations?

#### **1.5 METHOD**

In this study, the compartmentalization method will be used to examine Turkey-Iran relations. According to the Cambridge dictionary, compartmentalization is “the act of separating something into parts and not allowing those parts to mix together” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). In this context, a fine distinction will be made between different issues and problems in Turkish-Iranian relations in this study. In this way, it will be possible to explain exactly where and on which issues Turkey and Iran cooperate or enter into competition/conflict.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To see how compartmentalization has previously applied to Turkish-Iranian relations, see: Bayram Sinkaya (2016), “Iran and Turkey Relations After the Nuclear Deal: A Case for Compartmentalization”, *Ortadoğu Etütleri*, Vol: 8, No: 1, pp. 81-100 and Bayram Sinkaya (2019), “Turkey-Iran Relations after the JDP”, *Institut français d’études anatoliennes*, İstanbul.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **2. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 THE NATURE OF TURKEY-IRAN RELATIONS**

Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, it has become quite common for Turkish and Iranian leaders and authorities to constantly accuse the other country of pursuing hostile policies, while at the same time emphasizing the friendship and cooperation between the two countries. Therefore, it is now quite normal for a Turkish or Iranian leader to emphasize the friendship and cooperation between the two countries, just the day after accusing the other country of supporting terrorist organizations or pursuing expansionist policies. In the same way, it has long ceased to be an odd situation for the official or private Turkish or Iranian media to report one after another about both the friendship and enmity between Turkey and Iran. Or, it is quite usual to see that certain newspapers, news channels or magazines in both countries often highlight the friendship and partnerships between the two countries, while others constantly highlight the distrust and hostility between the two countries.

When Turkey-Iran relations are examined more carefully, it can be seen that the same situation was experienced between the two countries even before the Islamic revolution. In other words, just as in the Islamic Republic period, both friendship/cooperation and enmity/competition between Turkey and Iran were constantly emphasized during the Pahlavi period. As a matter of fact, when Turkey-Iran relations are analyzed as a whole without being divided into two as the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Republic period, it can be seen that certain durable factors/determinants have constantly brought the two countries closer or distanced themselves from each other since the establishment of the two countries. For this reason, it can be said that there has been a continuity and stability in Turkey-Iran relations, where cooperation and

competition/conflict have been experienced together since the establishment of the two countries.

In this respect, considering Turkey and Iran as a whole, from ordinary citizens to high-level leaders, it can be mentioned that there are some durable factors/determinants that have brought Turkey and Iran closer and distanced themselves from each other since the establishment of the two countries. These can be divided into two parts as durable factors/determinants that bring the two countries closer to each other and causing cooperation, and durable factors/determinants that distance the two countries from each other and causing competition/conflict.

The first of durable factors/determinants that brings Turkey and Iran closer and motivates cooperation between the two countries is the common Muslim identity of the people of the two countries. Since the establishment of Turkey and Iran, Islam has led to a rapprochement and cooperation between the two countries, sometimes implicitly as an element that unites Turkey and Iran against imperialism and foreign invasions as in the 1920's and 1930s, and sometimes openly as in the formation of the D8 in 1997. In this respect, the common Muslim identity of the people of Turkey and Iran has always been a facilitating factor for cooperation and solidarity between the two countries.

A second durable factor/determinant that brings Turkey and Iran closer and perpetuate cooperation between the two countries is the geopolitical interdependence between the two countries, as the two countries are highly interdependent in many ways in terms of geopolitics. In its simplest form, while Turkey is Iran's most important land corridor opening to the West, Iran is a key country that connects Turkey with the East. At the same time, both countries have shared interests in cooperating for trade routes between Asia and Europe to pass through Turkey and Iran.

A third durable factor/determinant is the common interests of Turkey and Iran in economic cooperation. As two neighboring countries, Turkey and Iran have always felt the need to develop the economic relations between them, and therefore they have always been very eager and in an intense effort to develop their bilateral economic relations since their establishment. From this point of view, economic relations have been a very important factor/determinant in the development of relations between Turkey and Iran and also in easing the political tensions between the two countries.

A fourth important durable factor/determinant that has been effective in the rapprochement and development of relations between Turkey and Iran has been the security dependency between the two countries. It has always been of vital importance for Turkey and Iran to cooperate against threats from both religious and separatist terrorist organizations and all kinds of illegal activities such as drug trade and irregular migration movements, as well as the troublesome interventions of imperialist powers in their peripheral areas, in order to maintain peace and security both within the country and in the region.

On the other hand, the first of the durable factors/determinants causing distrust, competition and conflict between Turkey and Iran is Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism. Since their establishment, Turkey and Iran have been the centers of development of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism respectively, and also, implicitly or explicitly, Turkey has claimed the leadership of the ancient Turkic peoples, while Iran has claimed the leadership of the ancient Iranian peoples. However, due to the Turkish population in Iran and the Kurdish population in Turkey, Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism have not only created competition between the two countries, but also posed a direct threat to the territorial integrity of both countries.

A second durable factor/determinant that distances Turkey and Iran from each other and creates competition and conflict between the two countries is the Shiite-Sunni sectarian divide between the two countries. In fact, as mentioned before, Islam has created a common identity between Turks and Iranians and played a very important role in the integration of these nations. For instance, many basic religious terms used in Anatolian Turkish today, such as namaz (prayer), abdest (ablution), oruç (fasting), and bayram (eid), have been passed from Persian to Turkish. However, some critical developments, such as the establishment of the Shiite Safavid Empire in 1501 and the transition of the caliphate from Mamluks to the Ottoman Empire in 1517, have been the source of sectarian rivalries and conflicts between turkey and Iran today.

A third durable factor/determinant that creates competition and conflict between Turkey and Iran is the Kurdish Question. The Kurdish Question, just like Shiism and Sunnism, was inherited from the Ottoman and Safavid-Qajars to Turkey and Iran. This is why Kurdish nationalists see the Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin, which draws the current Turkey-

Iran border, as the division of the Kurds into two (Sinkaya, 2018, p. 840). However, it cannot be said that much has changed about the Kurdish Question since then. Both countries still try to keep centrifugal Kurdish groups under their control, and in turn, the Kurdish groups use the two countries against each other to gain or maintain their autonomy.

A fourth important durable factor/determinant that creates distrust between Turkey and Iran and leads to competition and conflict is the relations the two countries have developed with third parties. Since their establishment, the relations that Turkey and Iran have independently developed with third countries, sub-state entities and collective security organizations have always distanced the two countries from each other and created distrust, competition and conflict between them. Especially, Turkey's relations with the West and NATO and Iran's relations with sub-state entities have created a constant distrust between the two countries. In a way, the more the friends of Turkey and Iran differ, the more the insecurity and conflict between them increases.

Due to all these durable factors/determinants or phenomena, both cooperation and competition/conflict between Turkey and Iran have become inevitable and continuous since their establishment. For this reason, Turkey-Iran relations have always followed a balance line between cooperation and competition/conflict, regardless of the Pahlavi or Islamic Republic periods. However, due to the changes in the conjuncture (both domestic, regional and global), sometimes cooperation and solidarity and sometimes insecurity, competition and conflict have come to the fore between the two countries. Nevertheless, as stated before, there has never been a rupture or a golden age in the relations between Turkey and Iran, despite the government and regime changes in the two countries and the great changes in the regional and global conjuncture.

Meanwhile, it does not seem possible to define relations other than cooperation and solidarity in Turkey-Iran relations with a specific term such as competition, rivalry, conflict or enmity. For example, the term of rivalry is used in international politics for situations where the parties compete but do not pose a threat to each other's survival. In contrast, the term of enmity is used for rivals who act with the motive of destroying each other (Donnelly, 2005, pp. 46-47). However, both terms are neither sufficient to describe Turkey-Iran relations on their own, nor accurately reflect bilateral relations. In the

simplest of terms, although Turkey and Iran do not act with the motive of destroying each other, they can be partially defined as enemies, as they also endanger each other's territorial integrity and regime (or survival) due to the reasons listed above. Therefore, it should be taken into account that no matter what term is used in Turkish-Iranian relations, this term alone is not enough and contains elements from other terms in itself.

## **2.2 THE MAIN PARAMETERS OF TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY**

It can be said that Turkish foreign policy is built on the legacy of the Ottoman empire and the lessons learned from its collapse. First of all, the founders of the Republic of Turkey were only able to save a relatively small piece of land in Anatolia from the huge Ottoman Empire, which once spread over three continents. This great territorial shrinkage was even unthinkable for the Ottomans at that time, as the regions that were seen as inseparable parts of the Empire in geopolitical, economic and religious terms were lost. That is why Falih Rıfkı Atay, in his work "Zeytindağı", says: "We thought that the Turkish nation would not be able to survive if we left Vardar, Tripoli, Crete and Medina." (Atay, 1998, p. 6). However, the obvious fact was that the founders of Turkey had to make concessions even from the borders of the National Pact (Misak-ı Milli), which was accepted on January 28, 1920, during the Lausanne Treaty negotiations that ended the Turkish War of Independence (Küçük, 2020, s. 173-175).

For this reason, the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed at a time when the Republic of Turkey was being tried to be established under difficult conditions, has not been a completely satisfactory treaty for Turkey as it contained important regulations against Turkey. As a result, Turkey has continued to look for opportunities to correct the regulations against itself in the Treaty of Lausanne, which it accepted in the early 1920s due to its weak position against the occupying powers, as far as its power and conditions allowed. Thus, the problems arising from certain regulations in the Treaty of Lausanne against Turkey have continued to occupy Turkish foreign policy until today, even though the Turkish leaders set aside the country's imperial past and followed a status quo policy in international politics after the establishment of Turkey.

For example, Turkish leaders, who skillfully evaluated the international political conjuncture before the Second World War, when France was preparing to give

independence to Syria, brought the Hatay issue to the agenda, and finally, on June 29, 1939, enabled Hatay to join Turkey (Atabey, 2015, p. 194). Yet, since Syria never wanted to accept Hatay's accession to Turkey, Hatay has also become a subject of debate between Syria and Turkey from time to time.

Likewise, despite the arrangements in the Treaty of Lausanne, the subsequent discussions about the status of the islands in the Aegean (such as who owns some rocks and whether it is legal to arm the islands) and the status of Cyprus have turned into a serious problem area between Turkey and Greece. These discussions have also deepened the territorial waters and continental shelf delimitation problem between Turkey and other regional countries. Consequently, Turkey's disagreements with Greece in both the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas have had significant effects on Turkish foreign policy, as it has been a very important determinant in its relations with many regional and non-regional countries for decades.

The rights of the Turkish minorities in the Balkans, Crimea, Batumi, Syria and Iraq, which were once under Ottoman rule, have also continued to be among the areas of interest of Turkish foreign policy after the establishment of Turkey. These problem areas have entered the agenda of Turkish foreign policy when the Turkish minorities living in these regions faced serious security problems or when conditions revealed new situations, such as the possibility of a positive change in their status quo or the situations where they could be used as leverage/trump card for Turkey (See Alpkaya, 2008, p. 163).

Another important regulation of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty against Turkey was the restrictions imposed on Turkey's sovereignty over the Dardanelles and Istanbul Straits by the Lausanne Straits Convention, which was a part of the treaty. As a matter of fact, with the change of conjuncture in the 1930s, Turkey opened the status of the straits to discussion, arguing that there were fundamental changes in the conditions under which the treaty was made (*rebus sic stantibus*), and as a result, the Montreux Convention, which rearranged the status of the straits, was signed between Turkey and other parties on July 20, 1936 (Soysal, 2020, pp. 273-274). Thus, the status of the Turkish Straits was revised with this convention, but since neither Turkey nor the other parties using the straits were fully satisfied with the terms of the convention, the discussions on it have continued until today.

The Armenian issue, which remained from the last period of the Ottoman Empire, has also occupied Turkish Foreign Policy throughout the history of Turkey. While Armenians claim that they were subjected to genocide due to some events during the First World War, Turkey firmly opposes these claims. For this reason, the Armenian lobby in the world has been trying to make third countries recognize the so-called Armenian genocide for the last hundred years. Against these efforts of the Armenian lobby, Turkey has been trying to prevent these allegations from being recognized by third countries. In addition, the Armenian terrorist organization ASALA's armed attacks against Turkish diplomats in many countries of the world in the 1970s and 1980s and the Armenian occupation of Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh region after the collapse of the Soviet Union further deteriorated Turkish-Armenian relations. As a consequence, the border between Turkey and Armenia has been closed since 1993.

The geopolitical position of Turkey, which was founded in the lands that were once the heartland of the Ottoman Empire, is also one of the most important factors affecting Turkish foreign policy (Adeel, 2016). The country, which stands like a bridge between Asia and Europe, also controls the strategic Istanbul and Dardanelles Straits that connect the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. With this geopolitical position, Turkey is of critical importance in providing the land connection between Asia and Europe, as well as the sea connection between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In this regard, Turkey is one of the most advantageous countries in the world in terms of land, sea and even air transportation. Therefore, it is not surprising that Turkey has direct economic and political relations with almost every country in the world. But equally important, this geopolitical position makes Turkey a country that cannot be ignored in the establishment of regional and global political, military and economic relations and the creation of pacts. That is why, Turkish decision makers have great advantages both against regional and global powers.

However, Turkey is also located in a very problematic geography, as it is surrounded by five unstable regions, namely the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and even the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean. From this point of view, the geopolitical position of Turkey also makes the country very vulnerable to external crises and attacks. Any crisis or war that breaks out in any of these five regions directly affects Turkey and often leaves Turkey with significant economic, social and security problems.

It is also a fact that Turkey is a country that has perceived serious security threats from many of its neighboring countries since its establishment. For this reason, special attention has always been paid to the development of the capabilities of the Turkish army, and in this context, the Turkish army has been constantly used as a deterrent tool in foreign policy. In addition, the fact that the cadres who founded the Republic of Turkey were of military origin and that the army was able to maintain its autonomy from elected politicians until recently enabled the Turkish army to be an influential actor in both the domestic and foreign policy of Turkey (See Duman, 2019, pp. 145-164).

In the meantime, only 3 percent of Turkey's territory is located in Europe. However, there is a huge Western influence in the country (Oran, 2009, p. 21). This influence has started with the Westernization efforts of Turkey's predecessor, the Ottoman Empire, to adapt to the changing world conditions before its collapse. In this respect, the reforms made in the field of secularism, education, gender equality and economic development during the Atatürk period (1923-1938) were the continuation of the steps taken towards Westernization in the last period of the Ottoman Empire (Önsoy, 1989, p. 376). Yet, it was after the Second World War that Turkey has begun to become a truly Western country. This process, which started with the holding of the first multi-party elections in Turkey on 21 July 1946 and Turkey's official membership to NATO on 18 February 1952, has continued with Turkey's EU membership process since 1959. Since then, Turkey has largely turned its face to the West and has tried to carry out its foreign policy in line with the West as much as possible.

On the other hand, Turkey is a country where the vast majority of the population is Muslim. Due to this religious element, when an attack on Muslims (e.g., Bosnians, Chechens and Rohingyas) takes place anywhere in the world, a reaction occurs in the Turkish public opinion, which forces Turkish decision makers to take action on the rights of the Muslim people in question. However, Turkey is also a country that has separated religion and state affairs from each other on the way of secularization and westernization (Oran, 2009, pp. 20-21). For this reason, since the establishment of Turkey, sharia has been seen as one of the most serious threats to the regime in Turkey, along with Kurdishism and communism. Hence, Turkey has been a moderate Islamic country with both a Muslim and a secular identity. Accordingly, Turkey has undertaken the mission of being a bridge between the West and the Islamic world from time to time, as it has both

a secular and an Islamic identity. But at the same time, due to its Islamic identity, Turkey has also experienced difficulties in fully participating in the Western camp, especially in terms of full membership to the EU.

The national identity of the newly established Republic of Turkey, which has transformed from an empire to a nation-state, is based on Turkish nationalism. According to this definition, everyone who is bound to the Republic of Turkey by citizenship is considered Turkish, regardless of their ethnic origin. In a way, this nationalism is seen as the spirit of the country and the guarantee of its existence (Copeaux, 2008, p. 45). Therefore, the politicization of ethnic differences within the country is not allowed in order for the nation to remain in unity and integrity. At this point, the most serious dilemma of Turkish foreign policy has been the Kurdish question. Because about half of the Kurds, who have been divided between four different countries and have been in rebellion since the 1800s, live in Turkey. For this reason, Turkey has neither the conditions to solve the Kurdish question on its own, nor the means to prevent the use of the Kurds by rival or enemy forces.

As a consequence, the Kurdish question has had a very restrictive effect on Turkish foreign policy. First of all, the most important agenda item in Turkey's relations with Syria, Iraq and Iran has always been the Kurds. The cooperation and conflict between Turkey and these neighboring countries has, to a great extent, always been about the control of the Kurds. Secondly, Turkey has been in favor of the status quo in its relations with all countries and has been reluctant in principle to support the independence of regions such as Catalonia, Kosovo, Chechnya and Scotland. Third, Turkey has made concessions on human rights and democracy in order to suppress PKK terrorism and prevent the Kurds from developing a separate identity from Turkey. This has also delayed the transition to modernity in Turkey and has been the most serious obstacle in Turkey's EU membership process (Oran, 2009, p. 28). Last but not least, whenever Turkey had a crisis with another country, the other party has always applied for the Kurdish card and Turkey have had to make important concessions each time.

## **2.3 THE MAIN PARAMETERS OF IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY**

There are many factors that shape Iran's foreign policy. Chief among these is the country's energy resources. Because, the discoveries made since the beginning of the twentieth century have proved that Iran has enormous energy reserves. Iran has been one of the few richest countries in the world in terms of both oil and natural gas reserves. Moreover, Iran's neighboring countries are also very rich in energy reserves, and due to Iran's geopolitical position, it has very important advantages in exporting these energy reserves to world markets under its own control. For this reason, energy has had a great influence on Iran's both domestic and foreign policy since its establishment. However, the D'arcy concessions given to the British Anglo Iranian Oil Company by the Qajars in 1901 caused the country to not be able to benefit from its own energy reserves for decades. Although a new agreement was made with the company in 1933, the conditions could not be improved. As a result, D'arcy concessions were finally canceled by the Iranian parliament in 1951. However, this step resulted in a joint British and US coup against Mossadegh, who was trying to save his country's resources from exploitation (Cleveland & Bunton, 2009 , pp. 290-292).

In the following years, Iran increased its dominance over its oil reserves and started to generate enormous revenues, especially after the 1973 Arab-Israeli War (Abrahamian, 2008, pp. 123-124). Nevertheless, in his memoirs, Mohammad Reza Shah also implied that the United States and Britain were uncomfortable with Iran's growing dominance and independence over energy resources, and that the intermittent student protests and media criticisms against him since the late 1950s were encouraged within this framework (Pahlavi, 1980, pp. 145-146). Moreover, after the Islamic revolution, with the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war and the introduction of American sanctions, Iran has been far below its capacity to develop its energy industry and export its energy resources. From this point of view, Tehran's dominance over its natural resources has been one of the most important domestic and foreign agenda items in both the Pahlavi and Islamic Republic periods.

Despite its enormous geopolitical advantages, Iran is also located in perhaps the most unstable geography in the world. Most of Iran's neighboring countries have gained their independence relatively recently, and moreover, they have difficulties in

maintaining their independence and integrity due to the internal problems they experience (administrative failures, coups, civil wars etc.) and the border problems between them. From neighboring countries, Iraq (1932), Pakistan (1947), Kuwait (1961), Oman (1970), Qatar (1971), UAE (1971) and Bahrain (1971) gained their independence from Britain. Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, on the other hand, gained their independence from Soviet Russia only in 1991. In addition, Iran was occupied by the British and Russians in both the First and Second World Wars and faced the threat of Soviet invasion during the Cold War. After the collapse of the Soviets, Iran began to be described by the US as a rogue state and terrorist financier, and therefore, it has constantly faced threats of invasion by the US this time. For these reasons, Iran has not been able to develop deep and durable relations with any of its neighbors, and it has also continued to face constant threats of invasion.

The ethnic distribution of Iran also makes the country vulnerable to foreign interventions and division. Because, except for the Persians, all Iranian societies are divided from each other by the borders surrounding the country. The Kurds are divided into four parts between Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. Azeris and Turkmen were separated from each other by the Soviet-Iranian border until 1991, then by the Azerbaijan-Iran and Turkmenistan-Iran borders. The Arabs living in Khuzestan are separated from each other by the Iraqi border, and the Balochis are separated from each other by the Iran-Pakistan border (Nirumand, 1988, p. 184).

That is why, during the Pahlavi period, the monarchy was preferred to unite these different language and cultured peoples instead of the republican administration (Pahlavi, 1980, p. 51). Likewise, after the 1979 revolution, the theocratic government was chosen to unite all these peoples on the common ground of Islam or, more specifically, Shi'ism. Also, since Reza Shah, the administrations in Iran have opposed the demands for autonomy and have seen a strong centrally managed army essential for the survival and modernization of the country (Ibid, p. 140). Because, as stated before, the country has faced many threats of invasion since its establishment, and for this reason, Iran has given great importance to armament and even sought to obtain nuclear power in the very early periods.

In the meantime, three types of national identities can be mentioned that connect or separate these Iranian ethnic groups from each other. The first of these is ethnic Persian, Azeri, Turkmen, Kurdish, Baloch and Arab nationalisms, which have a divisive feature. Regardless of the Pahlavi or the Islamic Republic periods, Persian nationalism has always been at the center of the country's national identity, and there has also been a constant policy of Persianization in the country. In line with this policy, great restrictions have been placed on the use of ethnic languages and Persian language, culture and history have been imposed on other ethnic groups. Other ethnic groups other than Persians, on the other hand, have been demanding autonomy or independence for decades, and some are still waging an armed struggle to this end.

A second kind of national identity brings all these Iranian peoples together on the common denominator of being Iranian. According to this definition, Iran is the common “homeland” of all Iranian peoples, regardless of their ethnic origin (Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Baloch etc.). In other words, the name Iran is accepted as the name of a geography without any political meaning (like Anatolia and Mesopotamia). Instead, Iran is seen as a civilization center on which many states were founded and does not belong to any ethnic group. The fact that all peoples of Iran had a share in the Tobacco Revolt (1890-91), the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), the nationalization of Iranian oil under the leadership of Mosaddegh (1951-53) or the Islamic Revolution (1979) has made a very important contribution to the formation of this identity. In this respect, it doesn't matter if those who lead or have a share in these events are Persians, Turks, Kurds, etc. The important thing is that everyone who sees Iran as a homeland believes in their shared destiny and acts accordingly. Also, Shiism is one of the most important components of this Iranian identity and has an important role in bringing different ethnic groups together.

Lastly, it can be mentioned about a Pan-Turkist and Pan-Iranist national identity definition that divides the country into two parts. Azeris, Turkmens, Qashqais, Şahseven and other Turkish-speaking Iranians meet under the Turkish identity and desire to unite with other Turkic societies. Persians, Kurds, Balochis, Lurs and other Iranian-speaking peoples want to reunite the peoples who formed the Med, Persian and Sassanid empires of the past. The reflections of this identification on Iran's foreign policy will be explained in detail later under the title of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism. However, it should be noted here that this identification can be used in many different meanings.

In terms of religious belief, Iran is a country where the vast majority of the population is Muslim. However, the country adheres to the “twelve imams” branch of the Shiite sect of Islam (Avery, Mostofi, & Afary, 2022). Therefore, the function of Islam as a bridge between Iran and other Muslim countries is very limited. Rather, it has a function that separates Iran from the Sunni Islamic world. But at the same time, Shiism gives Iran the opportunity to project its power over a very wide geography. For this reason, Shiism has always been one of the natural elements of power that Iran can use in its foreign policy. At the same time, as mentioned before, Shiism has always maintained its importance as it has an important function in bringing different ethnic groups together in a common ground in Iran. However, it should also be noted that the Kurds and Balochis, who make up a significant part of the Iranian population, are mostly Sunni Muslims (Ibid). This has led these ethnic groups to be religiously marginalized and tend to see themselves mostly outside of Iran.

To sum up, Iran's geopolitical position, geographical breadth and energy resources provide the country with very important advantages in foreign policy. However, Iran is a country that has faced the threat of disintegration and foreign invasions since its establishment. Moreover, Iran lacks the support of great powers or alliances to guarantee the security of the country, which Mesbahi calls strategic "loneliness" (See Mesbahi, 2011, pp. 9-34). Even during the Pahlavi era, no country had given Iran a security guarantee regarding the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country against foreign invasions. For this reason, Iran has given great importance to relying on its own power and armament. Iran has also aimed to preserve the status quo and expand its sphere of influence by assuming the leadership of the Shiite and ancient Iranian peoples (Reisinezhad, 2019, pp. 325-338). In this regard, contrary to popular belief, Iran's support for non-state armed organizations goes back a long time before the Islamic Republic. Since the second half of the 1950s, Iran has supported sub-state formations in many countries, especially Iraqi Kurds and Lebanese Shiites, against Pan-Arabism and Soviet expansionism at that time. However, while Iran's support to sub-state organizations during the Pahlavi period was not seen as a serious threat to international peace and security, it has been seen as a sponsorship of terrorism since the Islamic Revolution (Ibid, pp. 2-3).

## **CHAPTER III**

### **3. TURKEY-IRAN RELATIONS SINCE 1920'S**

#### **3.1 TURKEY-IRAN RELATIONS BEFORE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

The first relations between Turkey and Iran were established in the years just before the establishment of the two countries. In these years, while a war of liberation was fought under the leadership of Atatürk in Turkey, Reza Shah, who seized power with a coup in 1921, was trying to re-establish the state authority in Iran. Under such a situation, the need for cooperation between the Ankara government and Reza Khan to save their country from the internal turmoil and defend their country against the occupying forces caused the two sides to approach each other with sympathy. Thus, informal contacts between the Ankara government and Iran started (Çetinsaya, 2000, pp. 775-786). As a result, Iran officially recognized the Ankara government by appointing Mofakhan Eshag as ambassador to Ankara on June 22, 1922. In return for this, Muhittin Akyüz, the Ankara government's first ambassador to Iran, officially took office on 7 February 1923 (Soysal, 2000, p. 282).

But despite mutual visits and ambassador appointments, as well as attempts by the Soviets to mediate, a treaty of friendship between the two countries could not be signed before the establishment of the two countries. The first reason for this was the distrust created by the Shiite-Sunni rivalry of the past. A second reason was Iran's concern that the Pan-Turkist policies of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), which had been operating in Iranian Azerbaijan for years and also occupied Iran, would somehow continue. A third reason was the distrust created by the independence efforts of the Kurdish tribes between the two countries. A fourth reason was Iran's concern about attracting the UK's reaction by signing an agreement with Turkey (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, pp. 204-207). The final reason was the inconvenience caused by Iran's

demand for land (including Mosul and even Diyarbakır) from Turkey at the Paris Peace Conference (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, pp. 206-207 and Schofield, pp. 417-418).

However, the fact that Reza Shah took Atatürk's Turkey as a model in the reconstruction and modernization of Iran and closely followed the developments in Turkey in this context played an important role in the softening of the insecurity in Turkish-Iranian relations. For this reason, after the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey on October 29, 1923, the declaration of a Republic in Iran was also raised. Yet, since the abolition of the caliphate in Turkey on March 3, 1924 was not welcomed by the ulama (clergy) in Iran, Reza Khan gave up declaring a Republic in Iran and as a result, the Pahlavi dynasty was established on December 12, 1925. Although this development was not welcomed in Turkey at first, mutual visits continued between the two countries and Turkey made a gesture by sending demonstration planes to Reza Shah's coronation ceremony on April 25, 1926 (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, pp. 357-358).

More importantly, a "Friendship and Security Agreement" was signed between the two countries on April 22, 1926, three days before the coronation of Reza Shah. With the signing of this agreement, the two countries reached a 5-year agreement on "neutrality", "non-aggression" and "friendly" relations. Thus, Iran's concern that Turkey would raise an uprising in Iranian Azerbaijan and, in turn, Turkey's concern that Iran would support the establishment of a Kurdish state was temporarily eliminated (Özgiray, 1995, p. 688). Additionally, with the signing of this agreement, it would be possible for the two countries to get rid of loneliness, show solidarity against colonialist powers and develop their commercial relations in order to revive their backward economies (Metin C. , 2021).

Yet, despite the signed agreement, Iran's tolerant attitude towards the Kurdish rebels during the Ağrı rebellions that continued between May 1926 and September 1930, caused a serious tension and distrust between Turkey and Iran. During this period, rebels fleeing Turkish security forces often crossed over to the Iranian side of the border to avoid pursuit, thereby using Iranian territory as a safe base. In turn, Iran, despite all the calls of Turkey, persistently refrained from taking effective measures against the rebels. For this reason, there was even a danger of breaking the diplomatic relations between Turkey and

Iran. But with the ongoing negotiations of the parties, an additional protocol was signed to the 1926 agreement on June 15, 1928, to eliminate the distrust between the two countries (Gönlübol, 1987, p. 90).

After the suppression of the Ağrı Revolt in 1930, the border problem between Turkey and Iran was finally resolved with the border agreement signed on January 23, 1932. Following this agreement, the border was given its current form with an agreement signed on May 27, 1937. According to this agreement, while Mount Ağrı was completely left to Turkey, Kotur was given to Iran in return (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, p. 363). In addition to this, the Friendship and Security Agreement of 1926 was also renewed on November 5, 1932, upon its expiration. On this date, two new agreements were signed between Turkey and Iran in Ankara, one of which was the "Friendship Agreement" and the other was the "Security, Neutrality and Economic Cooperation Agreement" (Soysal, 2000, p. 283).

After the signing of the last agreements mentioned above, relations between Turkey and Iran took on a truly friendly atmosphere. These friendly relations were further strengthened with the visit of Reza Shah Pahlavi to Turkey on June 10, 1934 (Saray, 2006, p. 123). This visit, which lasted for 27 days in total, was also Reza Shah's first and only trip abroad. During the visit, the issues of economic relations, railway transportation, military cooperation and partnership against the Kurdish uprisings were discussed. One of the positive results of the visit was the withdrawal of Iran from the temporary membership elections of the League of Nations in favor of Turkey in the same year. In addition, upon Reza Shah's application to Turkey to solve the border problem between Iran and Afghanistan, Turkey assigned Fahrettin Pasha to solve the problem and as a result, the problem was solved in November 1935 (Yıldırım, 2009, pp. 60-62).

In October 1936, a Turkish delegation headed by Cemal Hüsnü Taray went to Iran and held talks there that lasted for 6 months. Consequently, a series of agreements between Turkey and Iran on extradition, residence, customs, trade, road transport, judicial assistance, air transportation and veterinary services were signed on April 21, 1937. After a while, as a result of negotiations that have been going on for several years, the Saadabad Pact was signed between Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan on July 8, 1937. Thus, the agreement between Turkey and Iran on "neutrality", "respect for common borders" and

establishing “friendly” relations was extended to include the four regional countries. Yet, with the outbreak of the Second World War after a while, the atmosphere of cooperation and solidarity between Turkey and Iran deteriorated again. In the meantime, after Atatürk passed away on November 10, 1938, a month of mourning was declared in the palace in Iran (Çetinsaya, 1999a, pp. 170-175).

In August 1941, Iran was occupied by the British and Soviets, and as a result, Reza Shah was forced to resign and his son Mohammad Reza Shah was replaced on the throne. The new Iranian Shah, Mohammad Reza, left the bureaucratic and administrative institutions of the country to Britain and the United States, provided that he had a say over the military (Duman, 2016, p. 18). For this reason, in the 1940s, there was no significant development in the diplomatic relations between Turkey and Iran due to both the occupation of Iran and the conditions of war. But Turkey opposed the occupation of Iran and supported the preservation of the country's territorial integrity. Also, with the appointment of Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu to the Iranian Embassy in October 1949, the relations between the two countries started to develop again. In his speech on November 1, 1949, President İsmet İnönü said that sincere relations with Iran continue and they are working to further develop relations (Ibid, p. 23).

While entering the 1950s in this atmosphere, relations deteriorated for a while during the presidency of Mossadegh in Iran between 1951-1953. This is because, while Turkey focused on improving its relations with the West during these years, Mossadegh adopted an anti-Western attitude in Iran. Also, Turkey did not consider Prime Minister Mossadegh's position on the nationalization of Iranian oil to be correct, as it thought that it would have negative consequences in the future. Turkey was worried that the Mossadegh movement would cause the pro-Soviet Tudeh Party to gain strength and Iran to fall under Soviet influence. For this reason, diplomatic contacts between Turkey and Iran between 1951-1953 were reduced to a minimum. In addition, Turkey took a stance on the side of Britain on the nationalization of oil and participated in the oil embargo that Britain placed on Iran (Çetinsaya, 2006, p. 10). Consequently, after two tense years, the overthrow of Mossadegh with the joint coup organized by the US and Britain was welcomed in Turkey (Ibid, p. 26).

Thus, Mohammad Reza Shah's return to power in Iran after the 1953 coup, with the support of the West, had a positive impact on Turkey-Iran relations. Because now both countries were willing to act together with the West and cooperate with each other in the face of the common Soviet threat. As a result, the Baghdad Pact was established on February 24, 1955, with the agreements made between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Britain. However, after the coup on 14 July 1958, Iraq withdrew from the pact (March 24, 1959) and as a result CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) was established in its place on August 18, 1959. The headquarters of CENTO was moved to Ankara and the organization continued its existence until the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 (Dursun, 1991, pp. 446-447). However, the fact that Turkey had already secured its security with its NATO membership prevented it from making a military contribution to the organization, and therefore the organization was ineffective in military cooperation (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, p. 803).

Nevertheless, the two countries made great efforts to maintain mutual cooperation and showed special sensitivity to prevent deterioration of relations. For example, in the early 1960s, despite the fact that there was a Turkish Ambassador in Iran, Selim Sarper was sent to Tehran to meet with the Shah as a special envoy in order to alleviate the concerns of the Shah, who heard that Adnan Menderes<sup>3</sup> was going to visit Moscow. Likewise, after the May 27, 1960 coup in Turkey, the National Unity Committee, which took over the administration, relieved the Shah of Iran by declaring their loyalty to CENTO as well as NATO (Mangör, 2020, pp. 181-182). Moreover, this sensitivity continued mutually between the two countries throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, the CENTO countries, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan also established the Regional Cooperation for Development Organization (RCD) in 1964 to improve the economic relations between them (MFA, 2022).

Thus, until the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the relations between Turkey and Iran followed a relatively positive course due to the sensitive attitudes of both Turkish and Iranian leaders, the common Soviet threat, the desire of both countries to act with the West and the need for cooperation in the economic field. But at the same time, there were many issues that fed the distrust between Turkey and Iran during this period. For example,

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<sup>3</sup> Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey between 1950-60

the strengthening of the anti-Shah rhetoric in parallel with the growth of the leftist movement in Turkey, Turkey's reluctance to allocate troops to CENTO, and the fact that the economic relations between the two countries could not be sufficiently developed despite the RCD were the factors that disturbed Iran. In contrast, Turkey was disturbed by Mohammad Reza Shah's Aryanist rhetoric, the relations he developed with the Iraqi Kurds, and all his efforts to increase the Iranian influence in the region since the 1960s (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, pp. 801-804).

### **3.2 TURKEY-IRAN RELATIONS AFTER THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Turkey-Iran relations continued uninterruptedly. Turkey declared its recognition of the new Iranian regime on February 14, 1979, just two days after the revolution took place. The main reason for this immediate recognition was Turkey's concern about Iran's internal collapse and the Soviet occupation of the country. In this respect, Turkey followed a policy from the beginning of the revolution to support the re-establishment of the central authority in Iran and to prevent the country from being occupied by a foreign power, especially the Soviets. Additionally, although Turkey did not want to spoil its relations with Mohammad Reza Shah, as stated earlier, it was disturbed by his aim of making Iran a regional power and considering the Kurds as part of Iran (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, pp. 801-805). For this reason, Turkey also had the expectation that the fall of the Shah's regime in Iran would yield positive results in its favor.

This immediate recognition of Turkey was also welcomed in Iran. Yet, Turkish-Iranian relations were also inevitably affected to some extent by the revolution in Iran. One of the first reflections was the announcement of the new Iranian regime on March 11, 1979 that it would withdraw from the CENTO. However, Iran's withdrawal from CENTO, which already had no important function, did not pose a problem for Turkey, as the important thing for Turkey was not military but economic cooperation (Ibid, p. 805). As a matter of fact, shortly after Iran's decision to withdraw, Pakistan (12 March) and Turkey (13 March) also decided to withdraw from the organization and consequently the organization was dissolved. Thus, CENTO, which existed for more than twenty years, disappeared into history without ever meeting expectations. However, the CENTO

countries, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, also declared that their bilateral relations and cooperation within the scope of the RCD would not be damaged (Soysal, 1991, p. 495).

The main development that would determine the direction of Turkey-Iran relations throughout the 1980s was Iraq's declaration of war against Iran on September 22, 10 days after the military coup of September 12, 1980 in Turkey. During the 8-year Iran-Iraq War, Turkey preferred to remain neutral and within this framework, it maintained its relations with both Iran and Iraq. As a result of this neutrality policy, Turkey's commercial relations with both Iran and Iraq gained a significant momentum. As a matter of fact, during the 8-year war, Turkey's trade relations with Iran increased three to four times above the normal course in some years. In addition, the RCD, established in 1964 between Turkey, Iran and Pakistan, was replaced by the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) between the same countries in 1985. Moreover, the organization has expanded even further with the participation of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan in 1992 (MFA, 2022).

In the meantime, the course of Turkish-Iranian relations after the Islamic Revolution regarding the Azeri and Kurdish Question was quite similar to the situation in the 1920s. On the one hand, Iran was concerned about any attempt by Turkey against the Azeri Turks, just as it was in the 1920s. For example, in June 1979, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Gündüz Ökçün, visited Iran and met with Khomeini. However, after meeting with Khomeini, Ökçün also visited the Azeri-origin dissident Ayatollah Shariatmadari, which made Iran suspect that Turkey would support Azeri nationalism (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, p. 806). This suspicion gained a very serious character with the establishment of new Turkic Republics after the collapse of the Soviets. As a result, since the 1990s, there have been serious tensions between Turkey and Iran regarding the newly independent Turkic Republics.

On the other hand, Turkey began to be concerned about the Kurdish policy of the new Iranian regime, similar to that of the 1920s. Because just as the Kurdish insurgencies in Turkey gradually increased in the 1920s, the PKK took the stage this time after the 1979 Revolution. Again, similar agreements to the agreements made between Turkey and Iran after 1926 were also made after 1979. An agreement was first made between Turkey and Iran on the PKK in 1984, followed by new agreements and guarantees in the 1990s.

However, just like in the 1920s, Iran did not take any effective measure on the border and preferred to be tolerant against the PKK. Moreover, just like the relations Turkey and Iran developed with Simko Agha in the 1920s, this time the two countries started to develop similar relations with the Iraqi Kurds.

Another important result of the 1979 revolution was the emergence of a new ground for the revival of the Shiite-Sunni rivalry of the past, which was shelved during the Pahlavi period. However, during the 1980s and 1990s, a secularism-reactionism debate took place between Turkey and Iran, rather than a Shiite-Sunni conflict. While Turkey accused Iran of trying to export its reactionary and Islamist regime to Turkey, Iran criticized Turkey's secular regime and even accused Turkey of trying to propagate its secular regime with the support of the West and Israel.

The tension, however, stemmed mostly from Iran's efforts to export its Islamic regime to Turkey. As a matter of fact, after the Islamic Revolution, many Islamic formations supported by Iran or inspired by the Iranian revolution appeared in Turkey. These formations challenged Turkey's secular regime, as they aimed to establish a sharia order in Turkey. Moreover, some of their leaders, including Hüseyin Velioğlu, went to Iran and received ideological and military training there. Iranian intelligence, on the other hand, used these Islamists to assassinate foreign diplomats and opponents of the Islamic regime, as well as many well-known Kemalist and secular Turkish citizens. Along with these assassinations, the terror inflicted by the Kurdish Hezbollah led by Hüseyin Velioğlu in southeast Turkey throughout the 1990s caused a great reaction against Iran in the Turkish public opinion (Jenkins, 2012, pp. 19-20). As a result, During the 1980s and (especially) the 1990s, among other issues, a very intense regime exportation and Iran-backed terrorism debate took place between Turkey and Iran.

But towards the end of the 1990s, the tension between Turkey and Iran gradually started to normalize and become more rational. To cite a few reasons for this, firstly, with the election of reformer Khatami as president in the May 1997 elections in Iran, and then Erbakan's resignation in Turkey in June 1997, the secularism-reactionism and the regime exportation debates between Turkey and Iran have now largely disappeared. Secondly, Turkey has taken control of the PKK and Kurdish Hezbollah since the second half of the 1990s, and as a result, while PKK leader Öcalan was captured in February 1999, Hüseyin

Velioğlu was killed in an operation in January 2000 (Milliyet, 2000). Thus, the tension created by the PKK and Kurdish Hezbollah in the relations between the two countries decreased. Finally, the intense competition and conflict between Turkey and Iran in Central Asia and the Caucasus at the beginning of the 1990s has now left its place to more cautious and rational policies.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the same topics were on the table as usual during the visit of Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer to Iran in June 2002. During the visit, Turkey complained about Iran's support for Islamist groups and the PKK. In response, Iran expressed its concerns that Turkey supports the People's Mujahideen Organization, the Azerbaijani Unity Movement and the Southern Azerbaijan National Awakening Movement. In addition to these issues of insecurity, Turkey and Iran, as usual, also discussed the possibilities of cooperation on regional security and the development of economic relations between the two countries (Olson, 2005, pp. 142-143).

On the other hand, while the tension in Turkish-Iranian relations decreased, a new era in Turkey-Iran relations began, which would last until the Arab Spring, with the US launching a "war on terror" campaign after 9/11 and the JDP's rise to power in the November 2002 elections in Turkey.

During this period, Turkey and Iran significantly increased their cooperation in the field of security. The cooperation between Turkey and Iran in the field of security first intensified after the US intervention in Iraq in March 2003. Turkey and Iran worked together to prevent the escalation of violence in the region and the establishment of an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq. In this context, Turkey and Iran jointly supported the preservation of peace in Iraq and the protection of the country's territorial integrity. After the establishment of PJAK, the Iranian branch of the PKK, in May 2004, Turkey and Iran increased their cooperation on the PKK terrorism as well. During Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Iran in July 2004, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Turkey and Iran on security cooperation against the PKK/PJAK. As a result, in the following years, Turkey and Iran started intelligence sharing and even coordinated operations (although not a joint operation) against the PKK/PJAK (Jenkins, 2012, pp. 32-33).

There was also an important development in the economic relations between Turkey and Iran during this period. As a matter of fact, the total trade volume between the two countries, which was around 1 billion dollars in the early 2000s, reached 10 billion dollars in 2008 and 16 billion dollars in 2011.

While the economic relations were developing gradually, the increasing economic sanctions of the UN and the US against Iran as of December 2006 created the danger of deterioration of these relations. For this reason, Turkey opposed the imposition of economic sanctions against Iran due to its nuclear program. Turkey's most serious initiative in this regard was realized in the beginning of 2010, when large-scale UN sanctions against Iran came to the agenda. Turkey, together with Brazil, created a nuclear swap formula with Iran to avoid the imposition of new sanctions. But this plan was not accepted and new sanctions were imposed on Iran with the vote held in the UN Security Council in June 2010 (Yeşilyurt, 2013, p. 457). Following these sanctions, the US also introduced new heavy sanctions against Iran during the 2010's. These sanctions have created a serious obstacle to the development of economic relations between Turkey and Iran in the following years.

On the other hand, despite the solidarity and cooperation in Turkish-Iranian relations in the 2000s, the competition and conflict between Turkey and Iran also continued as usual in this period. For example, after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, although both Turkey and Iran opposed the escalation of violence in the country and supported the country's territorial integrity, they also engaged in a fierce struggle to strengthen their influence in the region. Turkey and Iran followed quite different policies regarding Kurds, Turkmen, Shiites and Sunnis in the country and supported different groups within this framework. In the same way, despite the remarkable development in economic relations, a positive dependency could not be created between the two countries. As a matter of fact, the expanding trade volume between the two countries was largely based on Turkey's increasing energy need due to the expansion in the Turkish economy in the 2000s (Pulat, 2018, pp. 106-107).

After the outbreak of the Arab Spring, as usual, both cooperation and competition/conflict have continued to be experienced together in Turkish-Iranian relations. Turkey and Iran have cooperated, albeit at a minimum, to prevent the spread of

terrorism and extremism in the region and to prevent non-regional powers from redesigning the region in line with their own interests. In this context, Turkey and Iran have made joint efforts to restore peace in the region and, in particular, to protect the territorial integrity of Iraq and Syria. In the same vein, Turkey and Iran have continued their efforts to develop their bilateral economic relations. The most important step taken in this regard has been the preferential trade agreement signed between the two countries on January 29, 2014. Within the framework of the agreement, which entered into force on January 1, 2015, customs duties were reduced on 265 products and the trade volume between the two countries was targeted to reach \$35 billion by the end of 2015 (Bloomberg HT, 2015). In addition, Turkey has continued to oppose the embargoes against Iran during this period and has given political support to Iran in this regard.

However, despite this cooperation between the two countries, there have been serious differences in the policies of Turkey and Iran regarding the developments after the Arab Spring. In the countries where the crisis has erupted, Turkey has begun to pursue a policy of supporting pro-Muslim Brotherhood groups, while Iran has continued to support its traditional Shiite allies. However, this policy difference has brought Turkey and Iran into a dangerous confrontation. Especially in countries such as Yemen, Iraq and Syria, Turkey and Iran have entered into a serious conflict. This confrontation has also been a serious obstacle to the development of cooperation between the two countries. As a matter of fact, despite all efforts, the desired cooperation between Turkey and Iran on both security and economic cooperation has not been achieved. For example, as mentioned above, with the preferential trade agreement that entered into force in January 2015, the two countries aimed to increase the trade volume between them to \$35 billion in 2015. However, the total trade volume between the two countries remained at \$9.7 billion at the end of 2015, falling behind that of 2014 (\$13.7 billion). This also shows that the two countries have imposed a covert embargo on each other by reducing purchases from each other, except for essential products, due to the disputes between them in the region (Çetingüleç, 2016).

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **4. DURABLE FACTORS CAUSING COOPERATION AND SOLIDARITY BETWEEN TURKEY AND IRAN**

#### **4.1 GEOPOLITICAL INTERDEPENDENCE**

Turkey and Iran are two countries that are geographically in a very critical position and have significant geopolitical advantages. While Iran is located at the intersection of the Indian subcontinent, Central Asia, Caucasus, Anatolia and the Arabian Middle East, Turkey provides the land connection between the Balkans and the Caucasus/Iran/Arabian Middle East. Both countries also have access to the open seas through their thousands of kilometers of coastlines. Accordingly, Turkey has the opportunity to establish direct relations with all countries that have access to the open seas through its sea border gates in the Mediterranean, Aegean and Black Seas. In the same way, Iran has the opportunity to open up to the world via the Caspian Sea in the North and the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean in the South. At the same time, while Turkey has close neighborly relations with the Black Sea and Mediterranean countries, Iran has close neighborly relations with the Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf countries.

Furthermore, Iran has important advantages in connecting the countries that do not have an outlet to the open seas in Central Asia and the Caucasus to the world markets through the Persian Gulf. Likewise, Turkey controls the Dardanelles and Bosphorus, which are strategic waterways connecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. In this respect, both Turkey and Iran are located in a very strategic position between not only the East and the West, but also between the North and the South. In addition, considering the geographical size of Turkey and Iran, both have great advantages in attracting political and commercial relations in the surrounding regions in the direction they want and protecting their interests.

Considering these geopolitical advantages of Turkey and Iran, it is useful to be a little cautious to say that there is a geopolitical dependency between the two countries. Because, in order to talk about a geopolitical dependency between the two countries, the connection of the two countries with the world must be dependent on each other to a significant extent. In other words, Turkey and Iran must either have no or lack of alternative ways to maintain their political, cultural or commercial relations with third countries. From this point of view, it is not possible to talk about an absolute dependency between Turkey and Iran, as both countries have many different alternative routes that allow them to connect with the world both by land and sea. However, as the cost of using alternative routes increases for the two countries in their relations with third countries, whether by sea or land, the interdependence between the two countries also increases.

Cost increases in transportation are usually experienced when various crises/wars break out on alternative routes or when transit countries increase taxes to increase their revenues. On the contrary, the emergence of new alternative routes or the decrease in the cost of alternative routes also reduces the degree of geopolitical dependence between the two countries. From this point of view, the changes (decrease or increase) in the geopolitical dependence between Turkey and Iran over time are quite natural. As a matter of fact, there have been significant changes in the level of geopolitical dependency between Turkey and Iran in the last hundred years. While in some periods Turkey became more dependent on Iran, in others Iran became more dependent on Turkey. In this respect, it can be said that there is a certain amount of continuous interdependence between the two countries, as in the other two subjects that will be discussed in this study, but the intensity of the dependency between the two countries changes from period to period, as will be tried to be shown in this study.

From the Iranian point of view, it seems that Iran has had various alternative routes in several different directions to maintain its relations with the West since its establishment. The first is the Suez Canal route, which has been in service since 1869. This route is useful for maintaining trade between the south of the country and the West. However, this route can sometimes become completely or partially unusable or very costly in cases such as the closure of the Suez Canal or the deterioration of Iran's relations with Egypt. For example, the canal has been closed many times in history. The canal was initially closed for a year between 1956 and 1957 during the Suez crisis. Again, after the

1967 Arab-Israeli war, the canal remained closed for eight years until 1975. Finally, in 2004 and 2021, the canal was closed for three and seven days, respectively, due to the blockage of the canal as a result of ship accidents (Tuncer, 2021).

In addition, the Suez route is very costly for the export and import needs of the northern regions of Iran. Because although great progress has been made in connecting the northern regions of the country to the ports in the South, there are still significant disadvantages in terms of distance and cost. For this reason, Iran has used or had to use routes in the direction of the Mediterranean and Black Seas in order to connect the North of the country to the world, to create alternative routes to Suez and also to ensure that trade routes pass through Iran.

As for reaching the Mediterranean, Iran has had two main options to reach the Mediterranean since its establishment. The first is to cross Iraq and reach Syrian ports or transit both Iraq and Syria and reach Lebanese ports (Karaaslan, 2021, p. 33). The second is to pass through Turkey instead of Iraq and reach the ports of Syria and Lebanon or directly to the ports of Turkey in the Mediterranean. The intensity of Iran's use of these routes within the needs and conditions has changed from period to period. However, considering the tensions Iran has experienced with Iraq and Syria in the last hundred years and the instability in these countries, the most reliable route has been reaching the Mediterranean via Turkey. In addition, during the times when Iran had problems with Iraq, Turkey became the only land gateway of Iran to the Mediterranean and the Middle East. For example, during the Iran-Iraq war, Iran used Turkey's territory to obtain the weapons it needed from Israel (See Hunter, 1986, p. 2).

As for reaching the Black Sea, on the other hand, two critical ports in the Black Sea have come to the fore for Iran since its establishment. The first of these connects the North of Iran to the port of Batum through the Caucasus and the other to the port of Trabzon via Eastern Anatolia. However, since its establishment, Iran has been dependent on the port of Batumi due to the lack of a modern port in Trabzon and the poor conditions of transportation. This dependency, which could only be reduced over time, was an important problem for Iran, especially during the Reza Shah period. For this reason, Iran has tried to establish road and railway lines that will connect the Northern regions of Iran

to the ports in the South of the country, since the period of Reza Shah, in order to get rid of its dependence on the Soviets<sup>4</sup>.

Also, Iran has made intense negotiations with Turkey for the improvement of transportation routes between Tabriz and Trabzon. In this context, since the 1930s, Iran has agreed with Turkey on the completion of the roads on the Tabriz-Erzurum-Trabzon line, the construction of a railway if possible, and the modernization of the Trabzon port. However, despite the time that has passed, the transportation facilities on this line could not be brought to the desired level. Trabzon-Erzurum railway has not yet been built and it was only possible to build a modern port in Trabzon in 1954. Between 1980 and 1988, the port became Iran's main gateway to the West, and as a result, it was expanded and modernized again in this period, as it could not respond to the increasing traffic. However, with the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran's desire to use its own ports in the south of the country has brought traffic at the port of Trabzon to a standstill (Okur, 2016, pp. 253-254 and Deniz Haber Ajansı, 2015).

Nonetheless, the port of Trabzon is still a very attractive route for Iran in its relations with the West. Because, for example, the distance between Bandar Abbas port in the south of Iran and Tabriz in the north of the country is 1863 kilometers, while the distance between Tabriz and Trabzon is only 845 kilometers. Therefore, it takes longer and more costly to transport imported products from the port of Bandar Abbas to the northern regions of Iran compared to Trabzon port. In the same way, it is much less costly and shorter to deliver imported products from many European countries to the Trabzon port compared to the Bandar Abbas port. For this reason, Turkey and Iran continue to come together frequently in order to further reduce the costs in the use of Trabzon port and for both sides to benefit from the cooperation.

By land vehicles, on the other hand, Iran has two main options for reaching Europe without interruption, the Iran – Caucasus – Russia - Northern Europe (Iran – USSR - Northern Europe until 1991) and the Iran – Turkey - Southeast Europe route. However, the former route is not preferred by Iran as it is longer and more costly. However, efforts

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<sup>4</sup> For example, the Trans-Iranian railway connecting the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf was completed in 1938. However, ironically, this railway line, which was built with the aim of liberating Iran from dependence on the way to full independence, was also the main reason for the occupation of the country in the Second World War.

to develop transportation facilities on this route by combining the Iranian railways with the railways in the Caucasus and Russia within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project have been continuing since the beginning of the 2000s (T.C. Tahran Büyükelçiliği Ticaret Müşavirliği, 2019, pp. 10-11).<sup>5</sup> The latter route, on the other hand, is both much more economical and takes a much shorter time for Iranian transporters. Moreover, the cheapness of fuel in Iran provides important advantages for Iranian companies in international transportation. As a matter of fact, Iranian vehicles come first in the number of foreign vehicles transiting Turkey in recent years (Uluslararası Nakliyeciler Derneği, 2018).

Turkey and Iran are also located on the historical silk road that connects China and India to Europe. This road is seen as the most important alternative to the Suez Canal. Therefore, Turkey and Iran have developed the road and rail links between them, not only to improve the economic, cultural and security relations between them, but also to become a transit country between East and West. However, the efforts to improve transportation opportunities between the two countries have progressed very slowly. For example, the railway connection between Turkey and Iran was established only in 1971, long after the foundation of the two countries (Kardaş, 2016, p. 215).<sup>6</sup> In 2009, it was announced that the train line between Istanbul and Tehran would also be connected to Islamabad, but the project was suspended in 2011 for various reasons. About 10 years later, on December 21, 2021, the first freight train departing from Islamabad arrived in Ankara on January 5, 2022, after a journey of 13 days. This train line is expected to provide significant advantages in terms of time and cost compared to sea transportation between Pakistan and Istanbul (Tesnim Haber Ajansı, 2022). In addition, efforts are still continuing to ensure that this railway line continues uninterruptedly from China to Britain.

Looking at the geopolitical dependency between Turkey and Iran from Turkey's point of view, it is seen that there is a similar situation for Turkey as for Iran. Until 1991, Turkey had two options, Soviet Russia and Iran, to establish a connection with the Eastern world, apart from sea transportation. For this reason, Iran was of critical importance for

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<sup>5</sup> Shown as an alternative to China's new Silk Road project, INSTC is a project to connect India to Russia and Northern Europe via Iran and the Caucasus/Caspian Sea.

<sup>6</sup> In addition, since there is no railway line between Tatvan and Van, transportation on this line is provided with the help of ferries. But this, in turn, causes significant disruptions in the railway transportation between Turkey and Iran.

Turkey as it was the only alternative to the Soviets in this period. However, Turkey's geopolitical dependence on Iran was less important during this period due to the lack of transportation opportunities through Iran and the lack of independent states to trade with in the direction of Soviet Russia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, a new era has started for Turkey with the establishment of new states in the Caucasus and Central Asia. After this date, Turkey has tried to develop its relations with these newly established states both politically, culturally and commercially.

In this period, Turkey has had the option of establishing relations with Azerbaijan and Central Asian states through its three neighboring countries Georgia, Armenia and Iran. However, the Armenian route connecting Turkey to Azerbaijan and Central Asia has almost never been opened. For this reason, Turkey has tried to reach Azerbaijan and Central Asia via Iran and Georgia. But since it is more advantageous in terms of time and cost, 90% of the transportation between Turkey and the Central Asian Republics is made through Iran today (Yücel, 2021). In this respect, Turkey's dependence on Iran in its trade with Central Asian countries is very high. The Georgia-Azerbaijan route, which is considered as an alternative to Iran crossings, has problems such as lack of road safety and broken roads. For this reason, under the current conditions, this line has still not been an alternative to the Iranian route for shipments to the Central Asian Republics (Asım, 2007, p. 19). But if Turkey can solve its problems with Armenia, there will be a great reduction in Turkey's dependence on Iran. As a matter of fact, after the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, negotiations to open the Zangezur corridor and normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia are still ongoing.

Finally, it should be noted that Turkey and Iran are highly dependent on each other in terms of using each other's airspace. Although it is legally controversial, it is very common for states to close their airspaces to each other. For example, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt closed their airspaces to Qatar on June 5, 2017, with which they broke off all diplomatic relations on the grounds that it supports terrorism and destabilizes the region. For this reason, Qatar had to operate its flights over Iran and Turkey until the crisis was resolved in January 2021, after 3.5 years (Uçar, 2021). Similarly, Pakistan closed its airspace to all military and civilian flights for almost 5 months, from February 26, 2019 to July 16, 2019, due to the tensions with India over the Kashmir issue. This

decision caused the flight routes to change and increased the costs significantly (NTV, 2019). From the perspective of Turkey and Iran, it can be said that the need for the two countries to use each other's airspace has an important function in preventing the escalation of the crises.

#### **4.2 ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE**

Turkey and Iran are two countries with a great economic potential with their unique geopolitical advantages and rich natural and human resources. Yet, both countries have been facing great difficulties in realizing this potential since their establishment for various reasons. Therefore, as two neighboring countries, it has always been of critical importance for Turkey and Iran to cooperate in the economic field in order to overcome the problems they face and develop their fragile economies. Hence, economic relations have always played a critical role in the development of Turkish-Iranian relations. Turkey and Iran have always sought cooperation with each other in order to strengthen their economies and establish friendly relations. In addition, it can be said that the geopolitical interdependence between the two countries also creates an economic interdependence between the two countries.

When they were founded in the early 1920s, Turkey and Iran were skeptical of cooperation with developed countries of the time in economic development as they were afraid of becoming dependent on external powers and losing their sovereignty like their predecessors, the Ottomans and Qajars. Therefore, they both were very meticulous in ensuring their economic independence against external powers that were accustomed to exploiting their countries with the economic privileges they obtained during the late Ottomans and Qajars period. Accordingly, both Turkey and Iran pursued a determined policy of removing economic concessions made to foreign countries during the Ottoman and Qajar periods, and embarked on long-term investment moves such as state-sponsored industrialization and the construction of roads and railways to ensure their economic independence.

Since Turkey and Iran did not want to be dependent on foreign powers for economic development, they considered developing economic relations between themselves as very important for their political and economic independence. For this

reason, even before the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in 1923 and the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925, the two countries held talks to improve their political and economic relations. In these meetings, besides the issues of neutrality, friendship and security, the opening of consulates, the development of trade relations, the strengthening of the railway and road infrastructure, the development of post-telegraph services and the increase of export and import opportunities to Europe via Turkey were discussed between the two countries (Aydın, 2012, p. 185).

Nevertheless, Turkey imposed some economic sanctions on Iran during this period, as it was disturbed by Reza Khan's relations with Simko and his general Kurdish policy. Turkey increased customs duties for Iranian goods and imposed taxes on transit commercial goods (Çetinsaya, 1999a, p. 151). In this regard, Turkey put an important obstacle in front of Iran's connection with the world and the development of its Northern regions. But, with the signing of the 1926 Friendship and Security Agreement between the two countries on April 22, the economic sanctions imposed by Turkey on Iran were lifted and the distrust between the two countries eased to a large extent (Ibid, p. 153). Thus, the way for the establishment of friendly relations and the development of economic relations between the two countries was opened.

Yet, despite the agreement made, the problems created by the Kurdish rebels on the Turkish-Iranian border during the Ağrı rebellion (1926-30) further fueled the distrust between the two countries. That's why, when the rebels ambushed a Turkish military unit and smuggled some officers and soldiers to Iran in October 1927, Turkey sent a note to Iran threatening to cut off diplomatic relations, and also decided to stop transit trade with Iran. Fortunately, as Iran took Turkey's note seriously, Turkey stopped escalating the crisis any further (Ibid, p. 157). After a while, in addition to the 1926 agreement, a two-article protocol was signed between Turkey and Iran on June 15, 1928. While the first article of the protocol was aimed at developing cooperation in the field of security, the second was aimed at improving economic relations between the two countries (Soysal, 2000, p. 283).

In this respect, the Kurdish revolts and other issues of insecurity that continued throughout the 1920s damaged Turkish-Iranian political and commercial relations. But especially Iran's geopolitical dependence on Turkey and the two countries' need for

cooperation against imperialism were important factors in preventing the rupture of relations and signing cooperation agreements. In addition, after the end of the Ağrı rebellions in September 1930, the tension between the two countries decreased to a large extent. As a result, on January 23, 1932, besides the signing of an agreement for the development of mutual trade relations, the border problem between the two countries, which had been going on for years, was finally resolved (Özgiray, 1995, p. 693). Thereafter, upon the expiration of the 1926 Friendship Agreement, two new agreements were signed between Turkey and Iran on November 5, 1932, which included provisions for the development of economic and commercial relations (Soysal, 2000, pp. 428-434).

With the resolution of the border problem and the conclusion of a new friendship agreement in 1932, a suitable ground was formed for the revival of economic relations between Turkey and Iran. As a matter of fact, throughout the 1930s, Turkey and Iran continued to make intense efforts to improve their bilateral economic relations. During this period, while Iran was eager to unite its road and rail links with Turkey in order to get rid of its dependence on the Soviets and to develop its trade opportunities, Turkey was making efforts to make Iran a close ally and wanted to become an important transit country connecting Iran to foreign markets (Atuk, 2017, p. 233). In this respect, both Turkey and Iran considered economic cooperation with each other as very important in terms of their interests.

As a result, throughout the 1930s, Turkish and Iranian officials held talks to implement transportation projects that were put forward to improve road and rail links between the two countries. One of the most discussed of these projects was the reconstruction of the historical Tabriz-Erzurum-Trabzon road and, if possible, the construction of a railway on this line.<sup>7</sup> With this project, it was aimed to reduce Iran's dependence on the port of Batumi and to provide economic revitalization in the northern regions of Iran. It was also aimed to connect the other railway lines of the two countries to each other in the future so that Iran could reach Mersin and Samsun ports (Atuk, 2017, pp. 224-239 and Aydın, 2012, pp. 184-191). Thus, Turkey would become a transit country of strategic importance connecting Iran to the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

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<sup>7</sup> For example, when Reza Shah came to Turkey in 1934, he followed this route and observed the condition of the roads himself.

However, it should be noted that the development of transportation infrastructure between the two countries has progressed very slowly due to both financial inadequacies and some geographical, economic and political reasons. For example, as stated before, the railway connection between Turkey and Iran could only be established in 1971, while the railway connection between Tabriz-Erzurum-Trabzon was never established. In the same way, infrastructure developments required for road transport between Turkey and Iran have also progressed very slowly. Gürbulak/Bazargan Border Gate (Ağrı), which is the first modern border gate between Turkey and Iran, was opened as late as 1953. The Esendere/Sero Border Gate (Hakkâri) was opened in 1964 and the Kapıköy/Razi Border Gate (the border gate where the railway line passes, which was opened in 1971) was opened in 2010. Meanwhile, Borualan Border Gate, which was opened by Turkey in January 1985, was closed indefinitely due to the fact that the opposite border gate was not opened by Iran (Haberler.com, 2020).

After the Second World War, with the liberation of Iran from the occupation and the revival of bilateral diplomatic relations between Turkey and Iran, cooperation agreements to develop economic relations continued to be signed between the two countries. On December 25, 1949, an agreement was signed between the two countries, aiming to improve the transportation of passengers and goods, as well as the transit shipment through the two countries. Also on the same date, a Payment Agreement was signed between the two countries in order to facilitate the development of transit trade and the making of payments between the two countries. Another agreement signed between the two countries is the Agreement on the Establishment of Commercial Air Services, which was signed on March 20, 1951. With this agreement, it was aimed to establish scheduled flight services between the two countries and to improve air transportation (Kara, 2010, p. 261). On 13 October 1956, another agreement was signed between Turkey and Iran aimed at developing transit trade (Ibid, p. 275).

With the establishment of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, the member countries aimed to develop their economic relations as well as their military cooperation. As a matter of fact, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan established the Regional Cooperation for Development Organization (RCD) in July 1964. The main purpose of the RCD/ECO has been to facilitate trade between member countries and to integrate the economies of the member countries with the world economy. In this framework, the member states have aimed to

strengthen the transportation and communication infrastructure among them (MFA, 2022). In fact, Mohammad Reza Shah even hoped to transform the RCD into a common market, but this was never realized (Saikal, 2007, p. 454). After the Islamic Revolution, the name of the organization was changed to the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in January 1985 and the number of members was increased to 10 with the participation of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan in 1992 (MFA, 2022).

However, despite the time that has passed, it is difficult to say that sufficient progress has been made in terms of legal regulations and transportation infrastructure that will facilitate trade between the member states of RCD/ECO. For example, as stated before, the first railway trade on the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul route was only possible in January 2022. Efforts to connect this line to Europe via the Marmaray tunnel in Istanbul are still in progress (TCDD Taşımacılık, 2022). In addition, since the railway connection is cut around Lake Van, transportation is provided by ferries and therefore problems are frequently encountered. As a consequence, the desired momentum in the trade volume between the member states of ECO has not yet been achieved.

| Turkey-Iran Trade Relations Between 1969-1979 (\$) |            |             |             |              |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| Years                                              | Export     | Import      | Volume      | Balance      |
| 1969                                               | 4.795.410  | 1.168.827   | 5.964.237   | 3.626.583    |
| 1970                                               | 5.245.295  | 34.643      | 5.279.938   | 5.210.652    |
| 1971                                               | 4.131.406  | 4.610.169   | 8.741.575   | -478.763     |
| 1972                                               | 12.042.936 | 14.602.473  | 26.645.409  | -2.559.537   |
| 1973                                               | 11.967.758 | 14.719.035  | 26.686.793  | -2.751.277   |
| 1974                                               | 15.065.918 | 42.347.968  | 57.413.886  | -27.282.050  |
| 1975                                               | 37.101.320 | 26.113.672  | 63.214.992  | 10.987.648   |
| 1976                                               | 33.552.772 | 109.366.372 | 142.919.144 | -75.813.600  |
| 1977                                               | 48.562.783 | 165.030.377 | 213.593.160 | -116.467.594 |
| 1978                                               | 44.732.534 | 488.497.974 | 533.230.508 | -443.765.440 |
| 1979                                               | 11.815.229 | 175.861.470 | 187.676.699 | -164.046.241 |

Source: TUIK, edited by Arslan & Kabasakal, 2021 pp. 1273-1274

In the same way, the increase in the bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Iran within the scope of RCD/ECO has fallen short of expectations. As can be seen in the table above, from a few years after the establishment of the RCD until the end of 1979, the bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Iran remained at very low numbers. Nevertheless, in the same period, efforts to develop economic relations between the two

countries continued. For example, in June 1975, Turkish President Korutürk made an official visit to Iran, and as a result of this visit, a series of technical and commercial agreements were signed between the two countries, and Iran agreed to give a loan of 1.2 billion dollars to Turkey. Later, this time the Shah of Iran visited Turkey on October 28, yet the visit could not meet Turkey's expectations. While Turkey wanted industrial investments and oil pipelines to carry Iranian oil to Turkish refineries, Iran was willing to give loans for the construction of ports and roads that would facilitate the import of European products needed by its industry (Tuncer H. , 2014, pp. 94-95).

With the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War on September 22, 1980, a significant momentum was achieved in Turkish-Iranian economic relations due to the fact that Turkey became a very strategic country for Iran and remained neutral in the 8-year war. Shortly after the war broke out, in April 1981 and March 1982, Turkey and Iran signed several exchange agreements between them. With these agreements, Iran received processed products and foodstuffs such as barley and wheat from Turkey in exchange for oil. Thus, by the year 1983, as a result of a significant increase in the trade volume between the two countries, Turkey had become Iran's largest commercial partner (Jenkins, 2012, p. 17). In 1984, during Prime Minister Turgut Özal's visit to Iran on April 28-May 1, an agreement was reached between the two countries for Turkey to export at least \$1.2 billion worth of exports to Iran within a year (T.C. Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 1984, p. 5).

| Turkey-Iran Trade Relations Between 1980-1989 (1000\$) |           |           |           |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Years                                                  | Export    | Import    | Volume    | Balance  |
| 1980                                                   | 84.821    | 802.503   | 887.324   | -717.682 |
| 1981                                                   | 233.569   | 514.835   | 748.404   | -281.266 |
| 1982                                                   | 791.065   | 747.707   | 1.538.772 | 43.358   |
| 1983                                                   | 1.087.717 | 1.222.052 | 2.309.769 | -134.335 |
| 1984                                                   | 751.062   | 1.565.662 | 2.316.724 | -814.601 |
| 1985                                                   | 1.078.851 | 1.264.654 | 2.343.505 | -185.803 |
| 1986                                                   | 564.358   | 221.343   | 785.701   | 343.015  |
| 1987                                                   | 439.699   | 947.593   | 1.389.292 | -507.894 |
| 1988                                                   | 545.600   | 659.800   | 1.205.400 | -114.200 |
| 1989                                                   | 561.033   | 233.474   | 794.507   | 327.559  |

Source: TÜİK, edited by Arslan & Kabasakal, 2021 p. 1274

As a result, despite the political tension regarding the regime exportation discussions and the emerging PKK threat, as seen in the table above, there was a

significant increase in the commercial relations between the two countries in the first half of the 1980s. But towards the end of the war, as Iran's dependence on Turkey decreased and the political tensions between the two countries gradually intensified, a significant decrease was observed in the trade volume between the two countries (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2010, p. 156).

As a matter of fact, after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, a serious trust problem arose between Turkey and Iran, due to the decrease in tolerance between the two countries in political matters and new regional and global developments. As a result, the total trade volume between the two countries, which fell below 1 billion dollars after the end of the Iran-Iraq war, followed a similar course throughout the 1990s. As can be seen in the table below, the annual trade volume between the two countries was always below one billion dollars, except for 1996.

| Turkey-Iran Trade Relations Between 1990-1999 (1000\$) |         |         |           |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------|-----------|----------|
| Years                                                  | Export  | Import  | Volume    | Balance  |
| 1990                                                   | 495.482 | 492.399 | 987.881   | 3.083    |
| 1991                                                   | 486.903 | 90.537  | 577.440   | 406.366  |
| 1992                                                   | 455.285 | 364.822 | 820.107   | 90.463   |
| 1993                                                   | 289.546 | 667.026 | 958.572   | -377.480 |
| 1994                                                   | 249.815 | 692.408 | 942.223   | -442.593 |
| 1995                                                   | 268.433 | 689.476 | 957.909   | -421.043 |
| 1996                                                   | 297.521 | 806.335 | 1.103.856 | -508.814 |
| 1997                                                   | 307.007 | 646.401 | 953.408   | -339.394 |
| 1998                                                   | 194.696 | 433.026 | 627.722   | -238.330 |
| 1999                                                   | 157.814 | 635.928 | 793.742   | -478.114 |

Source: TUIK, edited by Arslan & Kabasakal, 2021 pp. 1274-1275

But with the signing of a gas purchase-sale agreement between the two countries in August 1996, an important step was taken in the revival of commercial relations. In the same year, although the United States imposed sanctions on Iran's energy sector, with this agreement, Turkey agreed to buy \$23 billion worth of natural gas from Iran for 25 years. Thus, the continuation of cooperation between Turkey and Iran in the field of energy for more than two decades has been guaranteed. With the said agreement, the first gas shipment to Turkey was planned to be in December 1999, but due to financial and technical reasons, gas flow started in December 2001 (İnat, 2015, p. 12 and Sinkaya, 2012, p. 141).

While entering the 2000s, Turkey's focus on economic relations with neighboring countries by putting aside the past political tensions and the successful implementation of this policy by the JDP, which came to power in the November 2002 elections, led to an important development in the Turkish-Iranian economic relations in the 2000's. The total trade volume between the two countries, which was just over 1 billion dollars in 2000, increased regularly in the following years and reached 10 billion dollars in 2008. Although the total trade volume between the two countries decreased to 5 billion dollars in 2009 with the effect of the global economic crisis, it recovered in 2010 and reached 10 billion dollars again. In this regard, an important development took place in the commercial relations between the two countries in the 2000s. That's also why Turkey has opposed the economic sanctions imposed on Iran by UN resolutions since 2006 and attempted to mediate with Brazil in 2010 to prevent new large-scale sanctions against Iran.

| Turkey-Iran Trade Relations Between 2000-2010 (1000\$) |           |           |            |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|
| Years                                                  | Export    | Import    | Volume     | Balance    |
| 2000                                                   | 235.784   | 815.730   | 1.051.514  | -579.946   |
| 2001                                                   | 360.535   | 839.800   | 1.200.336  | -479.264   |
| 2002                                                   | 333.962   | 920.971   | 1.254.934  | -587.009   |
| 2003                                                   | 533.786   | 1.860.682 | 2.394.469  | -1.326.896 |
| 2004                                                   | 813.031   | 1.962.058 | 2.775.090  | -1.149.027 |
| 2005                                                   | 912.940   | 3.469.706 | 4.382.646  | -2.556.766 |
| 2006                                                   | 1.066.901 | 5.626.610 | 6.693.512  | -4.559.708 |
| 2007                                                   | 1.441.190 | 6.615.394 | 8.056.584  | -5.174.204 |
| 2008                                                   | 2.029.760 | 8.199.689 | 10.229.449 | -6.169.929 |
| 2009                                                   | 2.024.546 | 3.405.986 | 5.430.532  | -1.381.440 |
| 2010                                                   | 3.044.177 | 7.645.008 | 10.689.185 | -4.600.831 |

Source: TUIK, edited by Arslan & Kabasakal, 2021 pp. 1275-1276

The annual trade volume between Turkey and Iran, which reached 16 billion dollars in 2011 and 22 billion dollars in 2012, reached the highest figures in history in the early 2010s. However, due to the negative consequences of both the Arab Spring and the large-scale economic sanctions imposed on Iran, the trade volume between the two countries started to decline again in the following years. As a result, the annual trade volume between the two countries, which decreased to 14 billion dollars in 2013 and to 13 billion dollars in 2014, stabilized at around 10 billion dollars in the period from the beginning of 2015 to the end of 2018. Even worse, the total trade volume between the two countries decreased further due to the new harsh sanctions announced by the US

against Iran in 2018 and the Covid-19 pandemic, remaining at 6 billion dollars in 2019 and 3 billion dollars in 2020.

| Turkey-Iran Trade Relations Between 2011-2020 (1000\$) |           |            |            |            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Years                                                  | Export    | Import     | Volume     | Balance    |
| 2011                                                   | 3.589.635 | 12.461.532 | 16.051.167 | -8.871.897 |
| 2012                                                   | 9.921.602 | 11.964.779 | 21.886.381 | -2.043.177 |
| 2013                                                   | 4.192.511 | 10.383.217 | 14.575.728 | -6.190.706 |
| 2014                                                   | 3.886.190 | 9.833.290  | 13.719.480 | -5.947.100 |
| 2015                                                   | 3.663.760 | 6.096.242  | 9.760.002  | -2.432.482 |
| 2016                                                   | 4.966.176 | 4.699.777  | 9.665.953  | +266.399   |
| 2017                                                   | 3.259.270 | 7.492.104  | 10.751.374 | -4.232.834 |
| 2018                                                   | 2.393.608 | 6.931.257  | 9.324.865  | -4.537.649 |
| 2019                                                   | 2.737.000 | 3.608.000  | 6.345.000  | -871.000   |
| 2020                                                   | 2.253.000 | 1.193.000  | 3.446.000  | 1.060.000  |

Source: TUIK, edited by Arslan & Kabasakal, 2021 p. 1276

Meanwhile, Turkey's energy imports from Iran have had a significant weight in Turkey-Iran trade relations since the 2000s. Nevertheless, the two countries have also made great efforts to increase their economic cooperation in other fields besides energy. For example, in 2001, the Turkey-Iran Business Council was established under the umbrella of the Foreign Economic Relations Board. The Business Council have aimed to take initiatives for the removal of trade barriers between the two countries and to inform business people about potential investment areas. In this respect, the scope of economic cooperation has been tried to be expanded by encouraging private sector investments between the two countries (DEİK, 2022).

Another important development in the economic relations between the two countries was the signing of a Preferential Trade Agreement in January 2014, as a result of negotiations that lasted for 10 years, and its entry into force in January 2015. With this agreement, it is aimed to create fair competition conditions and diversify trade by reducing tariffs and increasing quotas between the two countries. Under this agreement, customs duties were reduced on 265 products in the first stage. Thus, an important step has been taken to remove trade barriers between the two countries and to establish a safe and predictable environment. In addition, negotiations are underway to expand the scope of the agreement in order to reach the target of 35 billion dollars trade volume between the two countries (Özçelik M. , p. 1).

Lastly, it should be noted that there is a mutual visa exemption agreement for the citizens of the two countries for travels not exceeding 90 days. For this reason, especially the number of Iranian citizens visiting Turkey is increasing every year. For instance, while the number of Iranian tourists coming to Turkey was around 380 thousand in 2000, it has increased continuously and exceeded 2 million in 2017, 2018 and 2019. This number is expected to increase even further in the coming years. On the other hand, although the desired momentum has not yet been achieved in the number of Turkish tourists visiting Iran, Iran also has very important advantages in attracting millions of Turkish tourists.

The following tables show the number of Iranian Tourists visiting Turkey between the years 2000 and 2021:

| Number of Iranian Tourists Visiting Turkey Between 2000-2011 |                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Years                                                        | Iranian tourists |
| 2000                                                         | 380.819          |
| 2001                                                         | 327.067          |
| 2002                                                         | 432.281          |
| 2003                                                         | 494.977          |
| 2004                                                         | 631.522          |
| 2005                                                         | 957.245          |
| 2006                                                         | 865.942          |
| 2007                                                         | 1.058.206        |
| 2008                                                         | 1.134.965        |
| 2009                                                         | 1.383.261        |
| 2010                                                         | 1.885.097        |
| 2011                                                         | 1.879.304        |

Source: TÜİK, edited by Yeşilyurt, N., 2013, p. 460

| Number of Iranian Tourists Visiting Turkey Between 2012-2021 |                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Years                                                        | Iranian tourists (thousand people) |
| 2012                                                         | 1.186                              |
| 2013                                                         | 1.196                              |
| 2014                                                         | 1.569                              |
| 2015                                                         | 1.700                              |
| 2016                                                         | 1.665                              |
| 2017                                                         | 2.501                              |
| 2018                                                         | 2.001                              |
| 2019                                                         | 2.102                              |
| 2020                                                         | 385                                |
| 2021                                                         | 1.153                              |

Source: Turizm Günlüğü, 2022

### 4.3 SECURITY INTERDEPENDENCE

Turkey and Iran have always needed to cooperate with each other to counter the ambitions of the expansionist powers, fight terrorism and separatist movements, and prevent illegal activities such as drug trafficking, smuggling and irregular migration. This cooperation has mostly been compulsory due to nature of transnational problems and the limited number of countries in the region where the two countries can show solidarity apart from global powers. But the two countries have not been equally dependent on each other in all these security issues. For example, since the flow of drug trade and migration movements is from East to West, Turkey has been the party that is more dependent on cooperation. However, Iran, which has been under the pressure of foreign powers since its establishment and failed to become a member of a security organization such as NATO, is the party that needs more cooperation against the ambitions of the expansionist powers.

Also, the need for cooperation between the two countries in the field of security has changed significantly over time. This change has occurred especially when one of the two countries is faced with a serious internal or external threat. In other words, when one of the parties is faced with an urgent security threat, such as an invasion or attack, it has begun to need more cooperation with the other party. Thus, both countries have cooperated continuously since they are faced with different security risks in many aspects and cannot cope with them on their own.

Hence, Turkey and Iran have signed many cooperation agreements in the field of security since their establishment. The first of these is the Friendship and Security Agreement signed between the two countries on April 22, 1926. With this agreement, the two countries showed their willingness to cooperate and overcome the distrust and problems between them. In these years, while Iran was trying to consolidate its independence against Soviet and British colonialism - which was also Iran's main foreign policy target during the Reza Shah period - Turkey was the only country with which Iran could cooperate in the region (Hambly, 2007, pp. 213-244). Turkey, on the other hand, was particularly disturbed by the British ambitions in the region and considered Iran's

political integrity and independence very important for its own security (Metin B. , 2012, p. 169).

Turkey also needed cooperation with Iran in the face of Kurdish uprisings. As a matter of fact, with the 1926 agreement, the two countries promised that they would not support each other's separatist movements and would not take any offensive action against each other. In addition, the scope of this agreement was further expanded with the additional two-article protocol signed on 15 June 1928. With the following statement in the first article, *"If one of the parties to the agreement encounters a hostile action by one or more states, the other party will make every effort to find a solution to the situation. If, despite this effort, the war becomes a fait accompli, the allied parties agree to re-examine the situation between them."* the two countries agreed to cooperate against a possible Soviet or British intervention (Soysal, 2000, p. 287 and Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, pp. 361-362).

In this regard, this cooperation was of critical importance as both countries were surrounded by imperialist powers. While Iran was trying to get rid of its dependence on the Soviet and British, as stated before, Turkey suspected that these forces as well as France, Italy, Greece were supporting/would support the Kurdish rebels for their own interests. Moreover, as understood from the British reports of the period, these powers even aimed to overthrow the republican regime in Turkey by supporting the anti-Kemalist pro-monarchist Turkish opposition (Değerli, 2008, pp. 113-132).

Therefore, both countries had to rely primarily on their own power and follow a policy of balance between the great powers as well as to be in solidarity with each other. As a matter of fact, the intense threats perceived by both countries from expansionist and colonialist powers during the 1920s and 1930s played a critical role in the rapprochement and solidarity of the two countries. Also, if Iran had chosen to support Kurdish revolts and Turkey had chosen to support Azeri separatism, both countries could have caused each other's collapse. In this regard, the security of both countries was closely linked with each other. For this reason, the two countries avoided hostile attitudes towards each other and found it more appropriate to cooperate in terms of their interests. Thus, on November 5, 1932, two new agreements were signed between the two countries, namely the "Turkey-Iran Friendship Agreement" and the "Security, Neutrality and Economic

Cooperation Agreement". As stated before, these agreements were actually renewed versions of the agreements signed in 1926 and 1928.

The articles of the "Security, Neutrality and Economic Cooperation Agreement" were briefly as follows:

**Article 1.** *If one of the two countries is attacked by a third state, the other state is obliged to remain neutral.*

**Article 2.** *The states parties undertake not to attack each other under any circumstances and not to participate in the economic and political alliance and agreement of third states against either of the two countries.*

**Article 3.** *The states parties must maintain their neutrality with arms against third states' use of their territory to engage in hostile or military actions against either of the two countries.*

**Article 4.** *If one of the parties to the agreement encounters a hostile action by one or more states, the other party will make every effort to find a solution to the situation. If, despite this effort, the war becomes a fait accompli, the allied parties agree to re-examine the situation between them.*

**Article 5.** *Each state party undertakes not to allow the formation of organizations or communities in its territory aimed at disrupting the peace and security of the other state party and changing its government.*

**Article 6.** *The states parties agreed to regulate matters of economic cooperation as soon as possible.*

**Article 7.** *The states parties may freely establish relations with third states, provided that they comply with the obligations of this agreement.*

**Article 8.** *This agreement between the two states is valid for five years. If it is not eliminated by one of the contracting states six months before the expiry of the agreement, it will automatically be valid for another five years.<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> For the full text of the agreement, see: Soysal, 2000, pp. 432-434

As can be seen from the above articles, the two countries have promised each other that they will be in solidarity against foreign interventions and will not support organizations or communities that pose a threat to each other's regimes.

On the other hand, Iraq also had similar concerns with Turkey and Iran after gaining independence from Britain in 1932. Iraq was worried that Iran would provoke its Shiite and Kurdish population due to the ongoing border problems between them. At the same time, Iraq was struggling to prove its independence against Britain (Soysal, 2000, p. 590). Thus, upon Iraq's offer in 1933, the three countries sought to establish a regional pact between them. After four years of negotiations and Iran's resolution of border problems with Turkey, Iraq and Afghanistan, the Saadabad Pact was signed between the four countries on July 8, 1937 (Saikal, 2007, p. 433). The Saadabad Pact included issues such as "not to interfere in each other's internal affairs", "respect for common borders", "non-aggression" and "good neighborly relations" (Yıldırım E. , 2009, p. 63). The terms of the agreement were briefly as follows;

**Article 1.** *The contracting parties undertake not to interfere in each other's internal affairs.*

**Article 2.** *The contracting parties undertake to respect the common borders between them.*

**Article 3.** *The contracting parties agree to consult with each other in all kinds of international disputes concerning their common interests.*

**Article 4.** *The contracting parties undertake not to attack each other, alone or together with other states, under any circumstances.*

**Article 5.** *In the event of an attack, the attacked state has the right to defend itself, but it will notify the League of Nations for the solution of the problem.*

**Article 6.** *If one of the contracting parties launches an attack against a third state that is not a party to the agreement, the other state party may terminate this agreement in relation to the attacking party without prior notice.*

**Article 7.** *The contracting parties undertake to prevent the establishment and action of armed gangs, unions or organizations aimed at disrupting the order, security or governmental regime of other parties within their borders.*

**Article 8.** *The contracting parties undertake to settle any dispute that may arise between them by peaceful means.*

**Article 9.** *The contracting parties accept that their obligations under the League of Nations Law are superior to the obligations accepted by this agreement.*<sup>9</sup>

As it is understood from the articles of the pact, the states parties primarily aimed to establish an environment of peace between them. In other words, the main purpose of the pact was to prevent the parties from supporting each other's separatist movements or opponents of the regime due to the problems and insecurity between them. In addition, as seen in the articles, the pact did not contain a provision for cooperation against foreign interventions. Nonetheless, as the problems would be resolved and peace would be established between the four countries with the pact, the parties would also become more prepared and confident against foreign interventions. It was also a fact that the states parties were not in a position to form an alliance against the great powers of the time regarding common defense.

Because of this, the Pact could not show much effectiveness other than showing the desire for good neighborly and friendship between the states parties. As a result, with the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939 and the British and Soviet occupation of Iran in August 1941, the Pact became completely dysfunctional (Metin C. , 2021). Nevertheless, Turkey opposed the invasion of Iran and conveyed its dissatisfaction with the violation of Iran's sovereignty to all relevant countries of the period. As a matter of fact, the invasion of Iran could also set a precedent for an invasion operation against Turkey, for example, a similar invasion could be attempted for the opening of Turkish straits in the future (Deringil, 2014, p. 156, and Çetinsaya, 1999b, p. 48).

After the end of the Second World War, the Soviets' demand for land and bases from Turkey and their refusal to withdraw from the North of Iran brought Turkey and

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<sup>9</sup> For the full text of the agreement, see: Soysal, 2000, pp. 592-595

Iran closer in the face of the common Soviet threat (Gürün, 1983, p. 347). Both countries acted with Western countries against the Soviets and sought ways to increase cooperation between them. In the following years, the possibility of redesigning the Saadabad Pact came to the fore, but this did not happen as the two countries found an organization that would not be supported by the US had a low chance of success. Consequently, as a result of the need for a regional defense and security organization among the countries of the region, the Baghdad Pact was established between Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Britain in November 1955 (Soysal, 1986, p. 3150).

The purpose of this organization, known as the Baghdad Pact, was to bring the states of the region together in a common organization, to prevent the Soviet expansion into the to the Middle East, to connect the defense of the region to the Western defense system and to protect the interests of the West in the region. However, although the pact aimed at cooperation between the countries of the region in the field of defense and security, it could not be successful due to the mistakes in its establishment. As a matter of fact, after the coup in July 1958, Iraq announced its withdrawal from the pact in March 1959. Thereupon, the headquarters of the organization was moved to Ankara and its name was changed to CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). CENTO, which includes members of the Baghdad Pact outside of Iraq, shifted its activities to the field of economic, cultural and technical cooperation (Dursun, 1991, pp. 446-447).

In this respect, a comprehensive de facto military cooperation between Turkey and Iran in the field of joint defense could not be realized under the roof of CENTO. Nonetheless, the two countries continued to support each other's sovereignty against the occupying forces. One of the most important indicators of this was seen after the Islamic Revolution. Turkey immediately declared its recognition of the new Iranian regime in order not to allow any foreign intervention, especially from the Soviets. For this reason, Turkey preferred to see all the conflicts in Iran after the revolution as Iran's internal affairs. Moreover, although the new Iranian regime adopted an anti-US and anti-Western attitude, Turkey did not take a position against Iran. For instance, while Turkey condemned the attack on the US embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979, it also rejected the US request to use the airbase in Incirlik to rescue the hostages (Ayman, 2010, p. 10). Turkey opposed any foreign intervention against Iran and tried to give it the necessary support in this regard.

After the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, Turkey still did not change its stance. In fact, Turkey, which helped Iran to supply the commercial goods and military materials it needed during the war, had a very important role in preventing the collapse of Iran. But in the meantime, the PKK, which took the advantage of the power vacuum in the region during the war, started to infiltrate Turkey and thus became a threat to Turkey's national security. As a result, upon the request of Turkey, a cooperation agreement was signed between Turkey and Iran in 1984 against the increasing PKK threat. In the following years, negotiations on joint action against the PKK terrorism continued, and consequently, new cooperation agreements were signed between the two countries during the 1990's (Olson, 2005, pp. 21-26).

With the end of the Cold War, the common Soviet threat, which had been ongoing almost since the establishment of the two countries, disappeared. However, as the US began to make military interventions in the Middle East, this time the two countries began to feel the need to cooperate against the US. The US, which started to define Iran as a rogue state, was posing a threat, especially for Iran, as it could initiate a military intervention against this country. However, with its actions in the region, the US was leaving both countries with many security risks. This was especially the case when the establishment of a Kurdish state in Northern Iraq came to the fore after the First and Second Gulf Wars. Both countries were concerned that a Kurdish state to be established under the influence of foreign powers would destabilize the region and endanger their own security. For this reason, both Turkey and Iran have always opposed a Kurdish state to be established under the control of foreign powers.

Moreover, the unsuccessful military interventions of the US in both Iraq and Afghanistan have led to the emergence of civil wars and chaos in the region. As a result, the economies of the countries in the region deteriorated, the PKK and radical Islamist organizations gained strength and migration movements were triggered. All these security problems required solidarity and cooperation between Turkey and Iran. Consequently, Turkey and Iran, especially in the 2000s, agreed to prevent the escalation of violence in the region and to act together against the PKK terrorism. In particular, Iran's recognition of the PKK as a terrorist organization during Prime Minister Erdogan's visit to Tehran on July 28-30, 2004 was a very important step in relations. In the following years, the two

countries started to share intelligence and even coordinated operations against the PKK and PJAK (Hürriyet, 2008).

In the post-Arab Spring period, due to the crises in Syria and Iraq, which are closely related to the security of both countries, it has remained critically important for the two countries to cooperate with each other on regional security. For this reason, Turkey and Iran have been in constant coordination to ensure that these crises do not get out of control in a way that endanger the security of both countries. Therefore, as before, Turkey and Iran continued to oppose the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the North of Iraq, and also opposed the establishment of a PKK/PYD-led Kurdish autonomous region in the North East of Syria with the support of the US. At the same time, the two countries have agreed to defeat ISIS and other radical jihadist terrorist organizations in both Iraq and Syria, even though there was no de facto military cooperation between the two countries.

Furthermore, Turkey and Iran together tried to prevent the third states, especially the US and Israel, from taking unilateral steps to redesign the region. On this occasion, after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016, Turkey and Iran, together with Russia, started to engage in multilateral negotiations to end terrorism and violence in Syria and to restore peace. The first of these meetings, called the Astana talks, was held on January 23, 2017, and the last (the 17th) was held on December 21-22, 2021, with ongoing periodic meetings. As a result of these meetings, a partial ceasefire was achieved between the regime forces and the opposition, and the parties also agreed to cooperate in the fight against terrorism and the territorial integrity of Syria.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **5. DURABLE FACTORS CAUSING COMPETITION AND CONFLICT BETWEEN TURKEY AND IRAN**

#### **5.1 PAN-TURKISM VS. PAN-IRANISM**

The conflict between Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism is a very influential but less discussed issue on Turkey-Iran relations. Pan-Turkism, also known as Turanism, is an irredentist political movement that was first discussed by intellectuals such as Yusuf Akçura and Ziya Gökalp in the early 1900s and aimed to unite Turkish-speaking peoples living in Anatolia, Crimea, Cyprus, Bayırbucak, Mosul, North-South Azerbaijan and Turkistan (See Akçura, 1976, pp. 19-37 and Gökalp, 2019, pp. 21-24). Pan-Iranism is another irredentist political thought put forward by Mahmoud Afshar Yazdi in the early 1920s against Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism and aimed to unite Iranian-speaking peoples such as Persians, Tajiks, Pashtuns, Kurds and Balochis, as well as Azaris who allegedly later became Turkic (Pan Iranist Party, 2009).

Turanism and Aryanism, on the other hand, can be said to be broader versions of these two political movements. However, unlike Hungarian Turanism, Turkish Turanism tends not to include non-Turkish people in Turanism. Therefore, it can be said that Turkish Turanism is used in the same sense as Pan-Turkism (Özdoğan, 2008, p. 394). Aryanism<sup>10</sup>, on the other hand, is a racist/linguistic theory that argues that many Europeans, along with Iranians, Indians, and Armenians, are of the same origin. In Iran, it has often been used interchangeably with Pan-Iranism, as it gives Iran a chance to associate itself with European countries and the Indian subcontinent, and is probably found less threatening by its neighbors.

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<sup>10</sup> Today, the use of the term Indo-European, which refers only to linguistic similarities, is preferred throughout the world.

However, it can be said that there are different versions of Pan-Iranism as well. For example, those who use Iran to describe a geography with historical, linguistic and cultural affinity like Turan use Pan-Iranism in the above sense. However, those who see Iran as a center of civilization also include Shi'ism in Pan-Iranism and therefore see geographies such as Iraq and Bahrain as a part of the great Iranian civilization. Thus, as well as communities celebrating Nowruz in the new Iranian Year, those who mourn Imam Hussein during Ashura, are considered a part of Iranian civilization (See Reisinezhad, 2019, pp. 331-333). Moreover, Pan-Iranism is also often used to mean a political movement that aims to ensure the national unity of Iran and whose field of activity is limited only to the borders of the modern Iranian state. The most important components of this movement, sometimes also called Iranianism, are a common history, a common religion, a common culture and a common geography (See Akbarzadeh & Barry, 2016, pp. 613-629).<sup>11</sup> Finally, although Pan-Persian nationalism and Pan-Iranism are also incorrectly used interchangeably, it can be said that Pan-Persianism is simply a movement aimed at uniting only Persian-speaking peoples.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, it can be said that while Turanism/Pan-Turkism expresses a clearer meaning and target, Pan-Iranism has a much more flexible meaning. At the same time, and perhaps for this reason, Pan-Turkism can be accepted as an ideal (ülkü), while Pan-Iranism has had a form that has taken on different meanings from period to period or person to person. In other words, while Pan-Turkism is a dream that many people sincerely wish to come true one day, Pan-Iranism is an “inconsistent” and mostly “defensive” movement to keep Iran together, to oppose Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism and, if possible, to expand Iran's sphere of influence.

Nevertheless, both of these political movements have shown limited development since they were put forward. While Pan-Iranism has gained popularity mostly among the Persians, Pashtuns and Tajiks, Pan-Turkism has more developed among the Oghuz Turks<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> This Pan-Iranism corresponds to the second type of national identity definition described above under the heading of general parameters of Iranian foreign policy.

<sup>12</sup> In other words, the unity of Persians, Pashtuns and Tajiks

<sup>13</sup> Turkic peoples living in Turkey, Cyprus, Crimea, Syria, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan are considered to be mostly Oghuz.

One of the important reasons for this limited development is the conflict between the two movements. Iran, which has been ruled by Turks for hundreds of years and has a large Turkic population, has always worried that Pan-Turkism would endanger its territorial integrity. For the same reason, Turkey has also been disturbed by the Pan-Iranists' recognition of the Kurds as an Iranian nation. Also, the definition of Azeris as a Turkified Iranian nation by Pan-Iranists and the encouragement of this propaganda by the Iranian officials has always angered Pan-Turkists. For this reason, Pan-Turkists and Pan-Iranists have always tried to prevent each other's development. Nonetheless, Turkey and Iran, at least at the state level, have carefully tried to avoid provoking each other on this issue since their establishment. However, this effort has only been fulfilled for the Turks living in Iran and the Kurds living in Turkey, which has never been fully achieved. Thus, in one way or another, both movements have preserved their existence and have continued to develop until today. As a result, Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism have always created distrust in Turkey-Iran relations and adversely affected bilateral relations.

This distrust stemming from Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism can easily be seen in the last hundred years of relations between the two countries. During the 1920's and 1930's, while Turkey was worried about Iran's efforts to have good relations with Turkey's separatist Kurds, Reza Shah's remarks as *"I think that Turkey has an eye on Iranian Azerbaijan. Turkey wants to annex this place. In fact, Turkey does not follow such a policy now. Mustafa Kemal Pasha is a very intelligent person. But after him, Turkey can again adopt the policy of the Union and Progress government."* reveal this mutual distrust (Arar, 1981, p. 16).<sup>14</sup>

For this reason, during the Reza Shah period, the friendship and security agreements signed between the two countries between 1926 and 1932 and the Saadabad Pact signed in 1937 were mostly aimed at eliminating this distrust. Moreover, under Atatürk's leadership, Turkey completely abandoned the Pan-Turkist policy of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), instead adopting a non-irredentist type of nationalism known as Kemalist nationalism. Iran under Reza Shah, on the other hand, followed an ambiguous policy that can be considered as a mixture of Pan-Iranism (limited

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<sup>14</sup> Reza Shah made this speech to Major Hosamettin Tugaç, the Turkish Attaché in Tehran.

to Iran's borders) and Aryanism. Thus, the governments of the two countries avoided irredentist policies that would provoke each other.

In addition, until the collapse of the Soviets in 1991, there was an insurmountable Soviet barrier in front of Pan-Turkism, and probably Iran was also worried that the Soviets, rather than Turkey, would try to gather Iranian ethnic groups under its flag.

Nevertheless, it was still not possible to say that the distrust between the two countries had been completely eliminated. Because, despite the agreements made between the two countries, the two countries' administrations could change their attitudes with the change of conditions, or Pan-Turkist and Pan-Iranist movements could have increased their influence on power. It was also a fact that both Pan-Turkism and Pan-Iranism existed in various forms in both countries.

In Turkey, especially since the 1930s, a Pan-Turkist movement has emerged against official-Kemalist nationalism. Pan-Turkists gathered around the magazines published by ideologists such as Nihal Atsız (Atsız Mecmua, Orhun, Türk Sazı), Reha Oğuz Türkkan (Bozkurt, Ergenekon, Gökbörü), Fethi Tevetoğlu (Kopuz) and Rıza Nur (Tanrıdağ) tried to spread their Turkist-Turanist ideas. In these magazines published between 1931 and 1944, Pan-Turkists defended the superiority of the Turkish race and advocated the realization of the Turan ideal by liberating the Turks living outside Anatolia from captivity. Therefore, they criticized the peaceful foreign policy understanding of Kemalist nationalism and also defined Iranians as "historical enemies" along with Russians, Chinese, Armenians and Greeks (Bölükbaşı, 2018, pp. 47-56 and Özdoğan, 2008, p. 400).

Moreover, with the outbreak of the Second World War, critical articles appeared in the Turkish media against the Persian-based management approach in Iran. For example, in October 1941, Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın, in his column in the Cumhuriyet, criticized the situation of Iranian Turks who were deprived of their citizenship, language and cultural rights. In response to this, critical articles against Turkey also began to be published in the Iranian media. In the newspapers, it was claimed that the Turks in Iran enjoyed all the rights like every Iranian, and that even the Azeris were old Persians who were forcibly Turkified in the sixteenth century. It was also stated that speaking Persian, the official language of Iran, was compulsory for everyone (Hasanlı, 2005, pp. 53-54).

The situation of the Iranian Turks, who were exposed to the policy of Persianization, seems to have also appeared on the agenda of the Turkish political and military elites. During a RPP (Republican People's Party) parliamentary group meeting in the last quarter of 1941, the then foreign minister Saraçoğlu was asked about whether Turkey had taken any action regarding the situation of the Iranian Turks, and he replied, "It is natural that we consider the Turks in Iran, without drifting into the war" (Çetinsaya, 2003, p. 125).

In fact, Kemalists were also affected by the ultra-nationalist waves that spread throughout the world in the interwar period. Also, it was not yet clear what kind of results the conflict between the status quo and revisionist states would create. Therefore, with the outbreak of the Second World War, Turkey considered the idea of uniting with outside Turks neither a possible possibility nor a utopian dream (Özdoğan, 2008, p. 402). That's why, while Iran was under Soviet and British occupation, Turkey increased its intelligence activities in Iran, took an official interest in the situation of the Kashkay Turks and gave scholarships to many Azeri students to study in Turkey. The Iranian authorities, on the other hand, tended to see these attempts of Turkey, which remained silent on the oppression of Iranian Turks throughout the 1920s and 1930s, as a return to CUP policies (Çetinsaya, 2003, p. 125). Also, at a time when Azeris were organizing with Soviet support, the rise of pro-Turkey propaganda in Iranian Azerbaijan probably reinforced these suspicions (See Hasanlı, 2005, p. 66).

However, with the change of conditions towards the end of the war, Pan-Turkist policies were abandoned again and this was tried to be proven with the lawsuit filed against 23 important Turkist-Turanist figures in 1944.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, during the Reza Shah administration, policies that could disturb Turkey were also implemented in Iran. Official or private, textbooks, magazines or newspapers were propagating that all peoples of Iran, including Azeris, were Aryan. For example, in the first history textbook (Hasan Pirniya's *Tarikh-e Qadim-e Iran*) published under the auspices of the Ministry of Education in 1928, mankind was divided into races

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<sup>15</sup> As a result of the trials held between September 7, 1944 and March 29, 1945, some iconic figures, including Zeki Velidi Togan, Hüseyin Nihal Atsız, Alparslan Türkeş and Reha Oğuz Türkkan, were sentenced to various punishments. However, they were soon re-tried and released on March 31, 1947.

such as Semitic, Aryan, etc., and it was tried to show that the Aryans were a supreme race. To give another example, in a 4th grade text book (Vezerat-e Farhang, Ketab-e Chaharom-e Ebtedayi) published in 1931, it was stated that "The people of Iran are part of the Aryan race and their current language is Persian." (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2011, p. 456). Thus, a state-sponsored propaganda was carried out that all Iranian peoples were unique not only in terms of history, language and culture, but also in terms of race.

The Iranian media was also conducting this propaganda. For example, after the publication of a report by the research commission of the League of Nations on the ethnic structure of the Iranian people in 1933, Setare newspaper reacted as follows: "It seems that the report author has no knowledge of ethnography. The author doesn't know that Kurds and Lurs are the cleanest Iranians. As for the Iranian Turks, they are no different from the Persians in terms of race." (Nesibli, 2020). The same propaganda was repeated in the newspaper Ittila'at, this time for Azeris, on the developments in Iranian Azerbaijan during the Second World War. Accordingly, it was argued that the common history, religion, culture and race made Azerbaijan an integral part of Iran. Also, in the same newspaper, it was claimed that Turkish was imposed on the region by the barbarian Tatar and Mongol invaders, and finally, it was asked in the newspaper: "who would exchange the cultured and world famous literature of Ferdowsi, Sa'adi, Mowlavi, and Hafez for the uncouth and unknown babble of the Turkic plunderers?" (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 218-219).

Iranian intellectuals were also trying to reveal the ideological framework of Pan-Iranism in their journals. For example, one of the recurrent themes of Iranshahr, which continued to be published from 1922 to 1927 by Hossein Kazemzadeh, was the harmful consequences of ethnicity. In one article, it was said that "we must eliminate local sects, local dialects, local clothes, local customs, and local sentiments" to make Iranians proud that they are Iranians. Similarly, Ayendeh, founded by Mahmoud Afshar in 1925, drew attention to the importance of central government and national unity. In his writings, Afshar emphasized the importance of making Persian the national language, destroying local and feudal authorities, and eliminating the differences between Iranian peoples for the national unity of Iran. Also, he argued that Iran was under red (Soviet), yellow (Turkish), blue (British), green (Arab) and black (religious) threats. As a solution, he

proposed to move the Arab and Turkic tribes from the border regions to the inner regions of Iran (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 123-125).

Mahmoud Afshar, Reza Shah's aide, also argued that the establishment of a Kurdish state would balance the threat of Pan-Turkism and Pan-Arabism. Therefore, he tried to persuade Reza Shah to support the Ağrı rebellions (1926-1930). In the same way, Foreign Minister Mohammad Reza Khalatbari thought that a Kurdish state to be established would be a good ally for Iran in the region. According to him, the establishment of an independent Kurdish state would not endanger Iran's national integrity, as Iran is not a false state like Iraq or even Turkey. In contrast, Mohammad-Ali Foroughi, the then Iranian ambassador to Turkey, persuaded Reza Shah to cooperate with Turkey against the Kurds. In fact, he also believed that the Kurds were Iranian linguistically, culturally and racially. However, in his opinion, it was enough for Iran to simply put less pressure on the Kurds rather than support them. Thus, if an independent Kurdish state was established, Iran's territorial integrity would not be endangered; otherwise, an independent Kurdish state would endanger Iran's territorial integrity as well (Reisinezhad, 2019, pp. 333-334).

Adopting the latter view, Reza Shah, on the one hand, did not support the Kurdish rebels in accordance with the agreements made with Turkey, on the other hand, he adopted a tolerant policy against the rebels. After the revolt ended, on the one hand, he gave asylum to Ehsan Nouri, the leader of the revolt, and on the other hand, he signed new Friendship and Security agreements with Turkey.<sup>16</sup>

The historian Ahmad Kasravi was also a frequent contributor to Ayende with his articles. He also believed that ethnic diversity in Iran endangered the national integrity of the country. Therefore, in his first major work titled "Azeri: Ya Zaban-i Bastan-i Azerbaijan", which he published after the Khiabani revolt (1920), he tried to prove that Azari, an ancient Iranian language, was destroyed by the Turkic invasions (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 125). After this work of Kasravi, many Iranian intellectual continued to argue that Azeris were an ancient Aryan nation that was later Turkified, and that the original name of Caucasian Azerbaijan was not Azerbaijan but "Arran, Aran or Eran"

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<sup>16</sup> In fact, this policy of Iran has remained unchanged until today and has turned into Iran's usual Kurdish policy.

(Asgharzadeh, 2007, p. 125). In this respect, Kasravi ignited the debates that still continue to this day with this work.

Moreover, during the Reza Shah period, the policies necessary for Azeris to consider themselves Persian/Aryan were also strictly implemented by prohibiting speaking Turkish in government offices and changing Turkish place names. However, these Aryanization/Iranization efforts against Azeris were disturbing some intellectuals, soldiers and bureaucrats in Turkey. They were of the opinion that the Turkish presence in Iran should be preserved as conditions might change in the future (Metin C. , 2021).

For example, one of them was Mehmet Fazlı Güleç, a bureaucrat who had served at various government levels in Turkey for decades. While he was the chairman of the delegation that carried out the border negotiations between Turkey and Iran between 1932-1934, he prepared a report about the Iranian Turks, although it was not related to his duty. In his report, he wrote his views on the need to protect the consciousness of Turkishness in Iran and presented it to the Prime Minister İsmet İnönü on 13 January 1934 (Akcan, 2018, pp. 110-115). However, neither Güleç nor others who think like him were able to influence Atatürk and his entourage, who did not want to engage in adventurous policies with the newly established Republic of Turkey (Metin C. , 2021).

These Aryanism/Pan-Iranism policies in Iran continued during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah. As early as 1958, Mohammad Reza announced that the creation of an "Aryan Confederation" between Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan was under careful scrutiny. Comparing the Aryan Confederation project with the Baghdad Pact, the Shah said: "I am proud that for the first time Persian-speaking nations are forming such a unity—which is aimed at defending their territories against aggression." (TIME, 1958). As understood from the weekly Akis magazine of the period, the Shah also offered Turkey to join the Aryan Confederation. That's why, Celal Bayar, the President of Turkey at the time, made a trip to Afghanistan and then to Pakistan and Iran in August to discuss the issue (Akis, 1958, p. 17). However, it was out of the question for a NATO member Turkic state to be included in such a union. For this reason, it is most likely that Bayar made these trips to discourage the countries of the region from such an initiative.

The Shah's desire to establish an Aryan Confederation was triggered by a series of developments in 1958. At the beginning of the year, as the calendars showed February

1, Egypt and Syria announced that they had established a "United Arab Republic" under the leadership of Jamal Abdul Nasser. Not long after, a Pan-Arabist and Pro-Soviet coup took place in Iraq, a member of the Baghdad Pact, on July 16. After this coup in Iraq, the Shah realized that the Baghdad Pact would not be sufficient to protect neither himself nor the Iranian state (Saikal, 2007, p. 445). While Turkey had already guaranteed its security with its NATO membership, the Arabs were on the way to unification. Because of this, the Shah turned his face to the "Eastern Aryan States" at that time. However, this initiative was only the beginning of Mohammad Reza Shah's Aryan/Pan-Iranist policies.

According to Reisinezhad, the Iraqi coup also triggered the Shah's (or Iran's) sub-state policy. Accordingly, Iran, which lacked the security guarantee of a great power or alliance, have started to support sub-state formations, but especially the Iraqi Kurds and the Lebanese Shiites, through SAVAK at that time (Reisinezhad, 2019, pp. 1-6). In line with this policy, Mohammad Reza Shah and other state officials of the period were making statements that Iran was the protector of Shiites and Kurds. Leaving aside the Shiites, the Shah's Kurdish policy was based on counting them as Aryan/Persian. According to the Shah, the Kurds were "the purest Persians, pure Aryans, from their tradition, their language and their history". When he was asked if there was a "Kurdish Problem" in Iran, he replied, "Absolutely not. It may be in other countries, but not in Iran. The Kurds are 'pure Aryan', like us." (Reisinezhad, 2019, pp. 320-321). These statements of the Shah, who supported the Iraqi Kurds until the mid-1970s, meant that he had the right to support the Kurds of Turkey as well (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, p. 802).

Turkey, on the other hand, was uncomfortable with Iran's support for the Iraqi Kurds, warning that it could trigger separatist movements in both Turkey and Iran (Jenkins, 2012, p. 15). Also, Turkey worried that the Shah's Aryan/Pan-Iranian politics would turn towards the Kurds of Turkey. However, neither the Shah made such an open attempt against Turkey, nor did the Turkish authorities appear to be interested in Iranian Turks between 1945 and 1979. On the contrary, the officials of both countries were mostly in an attitude of understanding each other's concerns on this issue. For example, in 1946 the newspapers "Azat Millet" and "Azerbaycan" were banned from entering Turkey on the grounds that they were making communist propaganda. Again, in 1947, the book of Mustafa Nizamettin Tabrizli, titled "Bugünkü Azerbaycan Davası Esas ve

Sebepleri", which was published in Istanbul, was banned.<sup>17</sup> In the same period, especially in 1948, an increase is observed in the practice of deportation of Iranian Azeris in Turkey (Kara, 2010, pp. 259-260).

Moreover, during the Mohammad Reza Shah period, Pan-Iranists and Pan-Turkists in the two countries, who had the opportunity to gather under various magazines, associations and even right-wing political parties, were also sensitive about this issue. While the Pan-Turkists in Turkey concentrated on the Soviets and Cyprus, the Pan-Iranians in Iran concentrated on Bahrain, Afghanistan and Iraq. But still, from time to time, they could accuse each other of making propaganda and oppressing minorities. For example, Nihal Atsız, in an article published in the "Ötüken" magazine in January 1970, stated that he wanted the relations between Turkey and Iran to remain friendly, while at the same time implying at length that it would be difficult for Iran to be seen as a friendly state under current conditions. In his article, Atsız responded to the criticisms against Pan-Turkism and insults against Turks in the Ayandegan newspaper, one of Iran's popular newspapers of the time, and criticized Iran's oppression of Iranian Turks and its Pan-Iranism policy (Atsız, 1970).

It is also debatable to what extent the sensitive behavior of those with Pan-Iranian or Pan-Turkist goals removes the other country's distrust. This is probably why even the actions of the two countries that did not have a Pan-Turkist or Pan-Iranian purpose were viewed with suspicion in the other country. For example, Turkish Foreign Minister Gündüz Ökçün's visit to Ayatollah Shariatmadari, who was known for his opposition to Khomeini, during his visit to Iran in June 1979, made Iran suspect that Turkey would support Azeri nationalism. That's why, even while the struggle against the Shah was still going on in the streets, the Khomeini supporters, fearing Turkey's influence in Iranian Azerbaijan (and especially its support to Shariatmadari), attempted to attack and set fire to the Tabriz Consulate General (Akdevelioğlu & Kürkçüoğlu, 2009, p. 806).

After the 1979 Revolution, Pan-Iranism has been replaced by Shia politics of the Islamic regime in Iran. The Islamic regime's view of Pan-Iranism and Pan-Turkism was

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<sup>17</sup> There have been similar applications before. In 1931, "Yeni Kafkas", "Otlı Yurt", "Bildiriş" and "Azeri Türk" newspapers and magazines were closed on the grounds that they were publishing against neighboring and friendly governments. In 1938, Mehmet Emin Resulzade's "Lehçe-i Azerbejdzan" and Mehmet Zade Mirza Bala's "Millî Azerbaycan Hareketi" were banned.

clearly laid out in Khomeini's words in December 1979, *"There is no difference between Muslims who speak different languages... It is very probable that such problems have been created by those who do not wish the Muslim countries to be united... They create the issues of nationalism, of pan-Aryanism, pan-Turkism, and such isms, which are contrary to Islamic doctrines."* (MacDonald, 1988 , p. 245). Thus, while Aryanism/Pan-Iranism began to decline in Iran, the politics of the (Shiite) Islamic brotherhood settled at the center of Iranian politics. Nevertheless, Pan-Iranism or even Aryanism has never been abandoned or destroyed in Iran. This movement has continued to exist strongly among Iranian academics, bureaucrats and politicians until today. It was even reflected in the words of President Khatami in 2000, "Nobody has the right to claim to be more Iranian than the Kurds." (Bayat, 2008, p. 35).

On the other hand, with the disappearance of the Soviets, the biggest obstacle to Pan-Turkism, in 1991, there has been a radical change in Turkey's policy towards outside Turks. In the pre-Cold War period, Turkey's policy towards outside Turks was generally in the direction of not dealing them, with the exception of Hatay (1936-1939), Iran (during WW2), Cyprus (a long period) and Bulgaria (1986-1990). However, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey has started to form a comprehensive Turkic world policy towards Central Asia and the Caucasus. In addition, since the first Gulf operation of the US, Iraqi Turkmens have also started to occupy an important place in Turkish foreign policy. Thus, Turkey has also started to defend the rights of Turkish minorities living in other countries. As an exception to this, Turkey has so far followed a cautious policy regarding Iran and the Uyghur Turks. Nonetheless, Turkey has been one of the first countries that Iranian and Uyghur Turks, who are trying to protect their humanitarian, linguistic and cultural rights, took refuge in the face of oppression.

Thus, Iran, which has the largest Turkish minority after Soviet Russia, has begun to perceive an unprecedented threat from Pan-Turkism. As a result, Iran and Turkey have entered into direct competition and even conflict in a total of three regions, with low density in Central Asia and Iraq, and high density in the Caucasus. In Central Asia, while Iran has only been able to improve its relations with Tajikistan in the context of Pan-Iranism, Turkey continues to work resolutely towards the establishment of a Turkish union, which also includes Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan

together with Azerbaijan. In Iraq, Turkey has been trying to organize nationalist Turkmens around the Iraqi Turkmen Front, while Iran has developed relations with Iraqi Turkmens through sectarian ties.

In the Caucasus, on the other hand, Turkey and Iran have entered into a conflict beyond competition. Iran has been greatly disturbed by the developing relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, as it is concerned that Azerbaijan's independence may also affect its own Azeri population. Moreover, the fact that Azerbaijan has preferred to develop its relations with Turkey in the form of "one nation, two states" over ethnic identity and has not paid attention to its sectarian and historical ties with Iran has further increased Iran's concerns. For this reason, Iran has established relatively distant relations with Azerbaijan and adopted a pro-Armenian stance on Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Iran has also tended to see Armenia as a country with historical and cultural ties to itself rather than a Christian state. In addition, Kasravi's claims about the origin of Azeris and the name Azerbaijan in the 1920s began to be discussed intensively by Iranian nationalists with the establishment of the Azerbaijan Republic. In this context, Iranian nationalists strongly oppose discourses such as "United Azerbaijan" and "South Azerbaijan" and accuse Turkey and Azerbaijan of following a policy of irredentism (Ahmadi, 2016, pp. 105-141).

## **5.2 SHIISM VS. SUNNISM**

It is a fact that sectarian relations have had a significant impact on the determination of policies in the Middle East for centuries. Sects come to the fore as a factor that sometimes unites, sometimes divides, and sometimes creates conflict or creates a basis for conflict (Kıran, 2015, p. 172). While people from the same sect feel close to each other, those from different sects exclude each other and sometimes even see each other as enemies that need to be destroyed. Because of this, among the Middle Eastern states, while the states whose people belong to a common sect have the opportunity to stand more stable and stronger, states that do not have a sectarian unity have mostly encountered serious internal and external instability. However, sectarian differences in the Middle East does not only vary from country to country, but also varies considerably between different regions within a country. For this reason, almost all of the Middle Eastern states are very fragile against sectarian disputes.

In fact, Islam has emerged as a religion that approaches and unites all its believers equally, regardless of their language, color or ethnic origin, while at the same time giving the believers of other religions the right to practice their religion. Thanks to this unifying power of Islam, the Muslim and non-Muslim peoples of the Middle East lived together in peace for centuries under the Ottoman flag. However, a political Shiite-Sunni sectarian duality began to emerge among Muslims, as the Safavids, founded in 1501, brought the debates about who would succeed Mohammad after his death, to the political stage. Because of this, the Ottomans and the Safavid/Qajars entered into a Shiite-Sunni rivalry with each other from the beginning of the 1500s until their collapse. As a result of this rivalry, the two sides entered into a dozen battles with each other, but there was no definite winner from the struggle. Ultimately, Shiism has taken root and emerged as the biggest oppositional faith against Sunnism, forming the basis of today's Shiite-Sunni conflicts.

Nonetheless, with the establishment of modern Turkey and Iran in the early 1920s, it can be said that the Shiite-Sunni conflict of the past entered a period of stagnation, at least until the 1950s. The main reason for this was that both countries found it more appropriate for their own future to adopt a western-style modernization rather than following sectarian politics. It was also the age of nationalism now, so neither country (except for the fact that Reza Shah received permission from the Shiite clergy when he took the throne) felt the need to link their legitimacy to a religious reference (Bulaç, 2005, p. 66). Moreover, and more importantly, there was no longer a suitable environment for the two countries to follow religious or sectarian politics. At a time when the vast majority of Muslim countries were under the control of the Soviets, the British or the French, Turkey and Iran decided that it would not be right for their security to use religion or sectarian politics as a foreign policy tool, neither against these colonial powers nor against each other.

As a result of this reality, both countries began to take steps towards abandoning the sectarian politics of the past almost immediately after their establishment. The first and most important steps in this regard were taken by Turkey, especially with the abolition of the caliphate on March 3, 1924. In the following years, both countries took many important steps towards secularization and put great pressure on the clergy to bring religion under state control. Nevertheless, it is quite possible to say that if the Islamic world were not under the control of colonialist powers, both countries would not have

abandoned their religion and sectarian politics so sharply, especially considering the unifying power of the caliphate and Shiism in the two countries.

Ultimately, both countries' emphasis on Western-style modernization rather than religion eliminated much of the hostility stemming from Sunni-Shia rivalry, at least at the state level (Jenkins, 2012, p. 13). Therefore, the main concern of the ruling elites of the two countries in the following decades was the restoration of the clergy's former influence over power. For example, during his visit to Turkey in 1934, Reza Shah asked İsmet İnönü for advice on combating bigotry, and İnönü replied, "Wherever you see a fierce provocation and encouragement, you must first ban (prevent) this aggression, this attack. Everyone should do their religious duties as they wish in order to fulfill the requirements of religion. But they should not create hostility and provocation." (İnönü, 1987, p. 268). On the other hand, Faik Ahmed Barutçu (1894-1959), who criticized Reza Shah's assimilation policy towards the Iranian Turks in his memoirs, approached the issue from a different angle and stated that Reza Shah did us a favor by fighting the Shia clerics and eliminating the Shia-Sunni duality among the Turks (Barutçu, 1977, pp. 234-239).

From the 1950s onwards, on the other hand, Islamic movements in both Turkey and Iran have started to strengthen again and make their voices heard, as a result of the changes in the international conjuncture and the developments in the two countries. But more importantly, from the second half of the 1950s, Iran began to provide aid and support to Shiite communities in the region, but especially to the Lebanese Shiites, through SAVAK at that time. As mentioned earlier, this policy change was triggered by the fact that Iran felt under many threats, such as Communism, Pan-Arabism, and Pan-Turkism, but lacked the security guarantees of a great power or alliances. As a result, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Mohammad Reza Shah established relations with Shiite communities around the world, along with the Kurds, whom he identified as Aryans. In line with this policy, Mohammad Reza was not only introduced himself as the "Aryan Shahanshah" (King of the Kings) or "Aryamehr"<sup>18</sup> (Light of the Aryans) but also as the Shah of a Shiite country, the "Guardian of Shiites" (albeit in a less important way) all over the world (Reisinezhad, 2019, p. 332).

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<sup>18</sup> A title given to Mohammad Reza Shah by the Iranian parliament in 1965.

During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran's relations with the Lebanese Shiite community can be divided into two periods. In the period from the mid-1950s to the June 1967 War, Iran's support for the Lebanese Shiites was shaped around the aim of limiting the radical Arab nationalism led by Jamal Abdul Nasser. In the second period, which lasted from 1967 to 1978, the Shah's concern about Arab nationalism decreased as a result of the June 1967 War, but a new concern arose for the Shah when the Palestinian military organizations began to train Iranian dissidents in Lebanon. Thus, for a long period of time, Iran tried to keep the Lebanese Shiite community under its control by providing money, schools and teachers (Samii, 1997, pp. 66-85). In the same way, after the Iraqi coup in 1958, Iran began to support the Iraqi Shiites against Baghdad at least until the mid-1970's. For example, as understood from a SAVAK document dated February 22, 1965, the Iranian Ambassador to Baghdad, Mehdi Pirasteh, in a speech in front of Abdul-Salam Arif,<sup>19</sup> said that Iran, as the largest Shiite country in the region, would support all Shiites and should maintain this policy all over the world. Upon this speech, Arif left the meeting (Reisinezhad, 2019, p. 321).

Seyyed Hossein Nasr<sup>20</sup> also states that the Shah supported all Shiite communities in the region, including Shiites in India, Pakistan and Kashmir. But he also adds that despite his intention, Mohammed Reza Shah rarely supported Afghan Shiites because of his close ties to Afghanistan's Mohammed Zahir Shah (Ibid, p. 321). In the same way, Gökhan Çetinsaya<sup>21</sup> states that Turkey was also concerned about the Shah's claim and initiative to establish patronage over Turkey's Kurds and Alawis during this period. Çetinsaya states that the Turkish authorities believed that the Shah had sent envoys (mullahs) to the Kurdish and Alawi regions of Anatolia, and all this led to mutual accusations and harsh polemics in the Turkish and Iranian media (Çetinsaya, 2003, p. 127). Mehmet Saray<sup>22</sup> also claims that during the same period, Mohammed Reza Shah sent Shiite propagandists to Alawi villages and towns in Turkey's eastern Anatolia. Saray states that Shiite propagandists took Alawite children, whom they deceived during these visits, to the Iranian city of Qom to receive religious education, and that young mullahs who later returned to Turkey started to work in the name of Shiism. However, after

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<sup>19</sup> The president of Iraq from 1963 to 1966

<sup>20</sup> An Iranian Professor

<sup>21</sup> A Turkish Professor

<sup>22</sup> A Turkish Professor

these secret activities of the Shiite propagandists, which had successful results in the 1960s, were discovered by chance, Mohammad Reza Shah, fearing Turkey's reaction, immediately deported the Turkish students in the city Qom (Saray, 2006, pp. 134-135). Considering all this, it can be argued that the Shiite policy of Mohammed Reza Shah, along with his Aryanism/Pan-Iranism policy, created a great discomfort in Turkey at that time.

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the tension between Turkey and Iran arising from the Shiite-Sunni conflict has now become much more visible with the complete politicization of Shiism, as it was in the Safavid era. Accordingly, from this date on, Shiism has replaced the Aryanism policy of the Pahlavi Shahs and became the main foreign policy tool of Iran. Moreover, the Islamic regime has adopted a very ambitious and aggressive foreign policy in comparison to the relatively cautious foreign policy of the Pahlavis. Due to this aggressive Shiite foreign policy of the Islamic regime, Turkey, like all the countries in the region, had to take a defensive position against Shiite expansionism of Iran.

The first measures in this regard were taken after the military coup of September 12, 1980 in Turkey. After the Turkish military took over the administration, religious education was made compulsory in schools on October 18, 1981, and at the same time, there was a significant increase in the number of Imam-Hatip high schools and Quran courses (Şengül, 2005, p. 527). Moreover, it is also claimed that after the September 12 coup d'état, the Turkish military encouraged some Sunni communities to organize and strengthen, or created a suitable infrastructure for them to do so.

The main purpose of this re-Islamization strategy of the secular Turkish military was probably to keep religion under the control of the state and use Islam to achieve national unity.<sup>23</sup> In other words, the state's official interpretation of Islam would contribute to the establishment of national unity against the destructive and divisive Alawi, Kurdish, Communist and radical Islamist movements. Considering the conjuncture of the period (the threat of communism, increasing Kurdish nationalism,

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<sup>23</sup> In fact, it can be said that the re-Islamization process in Turkey started in the 1950s and in Iran in the 1940s. As a matter of fact, after the Democrat Party came to power in Turkey and Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran, very critical decisions were taken towards re-Islamization.

radical/political Islamism triggered by the revolution in Iran, and the possibility of Iran's contact with Turkish Alawis, etc.), this strategy was a necessity in terms of domestic politics. Also, the Sunni communities that would develop and grow under Ankara's control could be used to increase Turkey's influence in the Islamic world.

Nonetheless, despite all the measures taken, after the Islamic revolution, many radical Islamist organizations, foundations or associations were established in Turkey, either inspired by the Islamic revolution or thought to be supported by Iran. Among these, especially the Kurdish Hezbollah(s) caused serious tension in Turkish-Iranian relations. The terror perpetrated by this organization, especially in the Southeast of Turkey in the 1990s, and the assassinations it carried out against secular Turkish journalists, intellectuals or civil servants throughout Turkey, caused great reactions in the Turkish public and media (See Oğuz & Çakır, 2000, s. 259-278).

But the most interesting point was that Hezbollah managed to establish its base among Sunni Kurds, not Alawis. This contradiction stemmed from the intensification of PKK attacks in the 1990s, when Turkish intelligence of the time discovered that Hezbollah could be used against the PKK. For this reason, Hezbollah's activities among the Kurds were tolerated for a while (especially during the 1992-1996 period), but eventually the operations against the organization were increased (in the second half of the 1990s), and the leader of the organization, Hüseyin Velioğlu, was killed on January 17, 2000. Thus, the military branch of the organization was neutralized (Çakır, 2001, pp. 75-77). After a decade, HÜDA PAR (The Party of God), which was founded in December 2012, managed to gather the base that Hezbollah found among the Kurds in the 1990s, and today continues its activities as a legal party away from terrorism.

On the other hand, while radical Islamist organizations were established in Turkey with the support of Iran after the Islamic Revolution, Turkey also witnessed the rise of the "National Vision" movement led by Necmettin Erbakan. More importantly, the National Vision movement was sympathetic to the Iranian Revolution, and some members of the movement even advocated the establishment of the Sharia order in Turkey. For this reason, especially after the Welfare Party won the 1995 elections, a very intense "reactionism" debate took place in Turkey.

The most notable events occurred at the beginning of 1997. First, a speech by Şevki Yılmaz, Rize deputy of the Welfare Party, in which he said "I am Hezbollah and I am honored to be Hezbollah", was broadcast on news channels. In this speech, it was seen that Yılmaz also passionately criticized secularism and Kemalism in Turkey. In the same way, on January 30, 1997, the Ankara Municipality of the Welfare Party organized a "Jerusalem Night" in which posters of Hamas and Hezbollah leaders were hung in the event hall. In addition, Iran's Ambassador to Ankara Mohammed Reza Bagheri, who attended the ceremony, made a speech praising the Iranian regime and criticizing Turkey's secular state order (T24, 2022). While Bagheri, who was declared persona non grata, had yet to leave Turkey, Turkish Deputy Chief of General Staff Cevik Bir described Iran as a "terrorist state" on February 20, which he claimed was supporting the PKK and trying to export its regime (Milliyet, 1997a, p. 1). On February 23, 1997, after the noon prayer at the Fatih Mosque, a group marched with green flags chanting "We want Sharia" and "Long live Hezbollah" (Milliyet, 1997b, p. 3).

Upon such events, the secular Turkish military and media put the National Vision movement under heavy pressure (known as the February 28 process), and as a result, Erbakan had to resign as prime minister on 18 June 1997 and his party was dissolved on 16 January 1998 by the decision of the Constitutional Court. But this decision did not deter the movement. Not long after, the Virtue Party (December 1997-June 2001) was established instead of the Welfare party, and the party kept its old line. For example, Feri Altun, the founder and still the chairman of the "Ehl-i Beyt Foundation", which aims to change Anatolian Alawism along the line of Iranian Shiism, became a parliamentary candidate from the Virtue Party in the 18 April 1999 elections (Tuğal, 2005, p. 494).

In fact, the closeness established between National Vision and the Islamic regime in the 1990s could not be expected to be permanent. Because, after all, the National Vision movement, just like the Islamic regime, claimed to lead or direct the Islamic World (Çiğdem, 2005, p. 28). Therefore, sooner or later, at some point, National Vision and the Islamic regime would come into conflict. Nevertheless, under the atmosphere of the period, from the second half of the 1980s to at least the beginning of the 2000s, there was a very intense polemic of regime exportation between the Turkish and Iranian authorities, both due to the establishment of Iran-related organizations in Turkey and the closeness

between National Vision and the Islamic regime. In this respect, while Turkish authorities accused Iran of trying to export its revolution, Iranian authorities criticized Turkey's secular regime for trying to suppress religious groups and serving Zionism.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that almost all of the major Islamic communities in Turkey, except National Vision, had a negative view of the Islamic regime in Iran (Mert, 2005, p. 415). For example, on March 29, 1997, Fethullah Gülen declared on Samanyolu TV, which is affiliated with his movement, that he found the intervention of the Turkish Armed Forces on February 28 democratic (CNNTÜRK, 2012). In addition, Gülenists drew attention with their frequent anti-Iranian and mostly false and distorted publications in their media, until they were purged after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016. In response, Iran did not allow the Gülenists to open schools in Iran, although they tried to persuade the Iranian authorities through Turkish ministers. Because of that, the Gülenists tried to gather supporters in Iran by translating Said-i Nursi's books into Persian and distributing them (Özçelik, 2017).

On the other hand, the Shiite-Sunni conflict between Turkey and Iran has gained a new look after the JDP (Justice and Development Party), which was founded by a group that broke away from the National Vision movement, came to power in the November 3, 2002 elections. With the JDP's coming to power, the secularism-reactionism debates in Turkey have largely disappeared and JDP began to take a special interest in the Middle East. At first, the JDP tried to carry out Turkey's Middle East policy in cooperation and harmony with the US. Accordingly, Turkey was being presented to Middle Eastern countries as a moderate Islamic country with a predominantly Muslim population but also successfully embracing western norms (secularism, democracy and free market economy). Indeed, this "model" metaphor was first used for Central Asian countries in the 1990s, emphasizing Turkey's Western and democratic identity. However, in the 2000s, this metaphor started to be used for Middle Eastern countries, this time bringing Turkey's Islamic identity to the fore (Atmaca, 2011, p. 181).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that this metaphor of "model country" has not been given an important mission in Turkish foreign policy, apart from showing Turkey's willingness to cooperate with the US in the Middle East. Rather, the JDP's support for the Palestinian cause and its ummah rhetoric towards the Islamic world showed that Turkey

tended to act independently from the US. That's why Iran also appreciated Turkey's anti-Israeli and ummah policy to a certain extent, especially during the 2000's. However, it should also be noted that the JDP has been a party with a conservative and Sunni identity and even aspirations to revive the Sunni Ottoman Empire. For this reason, there have always been signs of sectarian tensions between the JDP and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Under the JDP rule, sectarian tensions between Turkey and Iran were first experienced in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam's regime. Accordingly, Turkey has strongly opposed the exclusion of Sunnis from the Iraqi central government and Iran's growing influence in the country. However, after the Arab Spring broke out, the sectarian tension between Turkey and Iran started to cover the entire Middle East. While Turkey began to support groups affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran continued to support its former Shiite allies. As a result, Turkey and Iran have begun to experience intense sectarian tensions especially over Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. In this context, Turkey and Iran have been on opposite sides in all three countries and have even experienced the danger of coming face to face from time to time. For this reason, since the Arab Spring broke out, Turkey and Iran have intensely accused each other of following sectarian and expansionist policies.

### **5.3 KURDISH QUESTION**

The Kurdish Question, like many other issues, was inherited to Turkey and Iran from the Ottoman and Safavid/Qajars. As a matter of fact, when the role of the Kurdish Question in Turkish-Iranian relations is examined, it is seen that little has changed over the centuries. Just like in the Ottoman and Safavid/Qajar periods, Turkey and Iran have been trying to keep the centrifugal Kurdish groups under their control since their establishment and continue to use them against each other and other powers. In the same way, centrifugal Kurdish groups have also been using the two countries against each other for centuries and causing distrust, competition and conflict between Turkey and Iran. In this respect, it cannot be said that there is a big difference between the role played by Kurdish tribes, mirs, aghas and religious leaders in Turkish-Iranian relations during the Ottoman and Safavid/Qajar periods and the role played by different Kurdish groups in the relations between the two countries today.

The fact that the Kurds have deep-rooted historical, cultural, ethnic, religious/sectarian and linguistic affinities with both Turkey and Iran, on the one hand, provides the centrifugal Kurdish groups with the opportunity to establish close relations with both Turkey and Iran at the same time, and on the other hand, it provides a balance between Turkey and Iran on the issue of Kurds, preventing either side from gaining absolute control over the Kurds, and thus causes the competition and conflict between the two countries to continue. For example, in a report dated 7 May 1926 submitted to the official Turkish authorities, the following expressions are used: “While the Kurdish overlords talk to the Iranians that they are of the same race and cannot leave Iran, they tell Turkey that they are Sunni and that there is an enmity between them and the Qizilbash that will last until the end of the time and (thus) cause some wars and disputes between Turkey and Iran.” (Hülâsa: Kürtlere Dair, 2011, p. 41). Although the report only mentions the Kurds using the two countries against each other, in fact, both countries were also struggling with each other until then to control the centrifugal Kurdish groups, and there has been no change in this regard since the establishment of Turkey and Iran.

For example, in the 1920s, Turkey supported Simko Agha, who rebelled against Iran many times, for various reasons, including ammunition and weapons aid (between 1919 and 1922), while Iran directly or indirectly supported the rebels of Mount Ağrı (1926-1930) (Çetinsaya, 2000, pp. 771-774). For the last few decades, on the other hand, Turkey has been complaining about Iran's support for the PKK, while Iran has been accusing Turkey of supporting the KDPI. In the same way, while Iran, which has been providing financial, armed and political support to the Iraqi Kurds since at least the 1960s, has deep relations with the PUK, Turkey has developed strong economic, military and political relations with the KDP, especially since 2005. Meanwhile, since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, Iran has been acting together with the PYD/YPG, the Syrian branch of the PKK, while Turkey has been supporting ENKS, which is known for its closeness to the KDP. In this respect, since their establishment, Turkey and Iran willingly or unwillingly have used the centrifugal Kurdish groups against each other and other actors, just as other third parties have used the Kurdish Question against the two countries.

## CHAPTER VI

### 6. CONCLUSION

Turkey and Iran are two deep-rooted countries whose historical, ethnic, religious, cultural, linguistic and geographical spheres of influence spread over a very wide geography. While Turkey's sphere of influence extends from Europe to the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Iran's sphere of influence includes the Indian Subcontinent, Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East and the Gulf Region. From this point of view, Turkey and Iran are in the international arena as two multi-regional powers that have the capacity to project their power in many different geographies. For this reason, Turkey and Iran have always had a special importance in both regional and global politics since their establishment. Furthermore, the roots of the relations between these two deep-rooted countries also date back to ancient times. For instance, the border between Turkey and Iran has remained almost the same since the Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin of 1639 between the Ottomans and the Safavids. In addition, many historical, ethnic, religious/sectarian and cultural elements of friendship and enmity from the Ottoman and Safavid/Qajars and even earlier continue to be effective on Turkish-Iranian relations today.

In this context, this study tried to reveal the continuity between the past and the present in Turkish-Iranian relations. Moving from this aim, this study argued that there are some regularities and patterns in the relations between Turkey and Iran that have remained unchanged since the establishment of the two countries, despite the changes in leadership, power and even regime. To reveal this reality, after giving some information about the general framework of Turkish and Iranian foreign policy, first of all, durable factors/determinants that make the cooperation between Turkey and Iran permanent were discussed. In this context, it was claimed that there is a geopolitical, economic and security interdependence between Turkey and Iran, and that this interdependence makes the cooperation between the two countries permanent. Afterwards, this time durable

factors/determinants that perpetuate the competition and conflict between Turkey and Iran were examined. At this point, it was argued that Pan-Turkism-Pan-Iranism and Shiism-Sunnism opposition between Turkey and Iran, as well as the use of different Kurdish groups by the two countries against each other, have created a constant competition and conflict between the two countries.

Thus, in this study, it was also tried to show that both cooperation and competition/conflict have been constantly experienced together in Turkey-Iran relations since the establishment of the two countries and therefore there has never been a golden age or rupture in Turkish-Iranian relations. As a matter of fact, the durable factors/determinants mentioned in this study have always prevented the occurrence of full-fledged cooperation or conflict situation in Turkish-Iranian relations. This is why the two countries cannot achieve the desired cooperation even when the interests of the two countries are in full harmony, or the two countries avoid escalating the tension in cases where the two countries come face to face and are in a dangerous conflict. From this point of view, it can be said that the continuous cooperation and competition/conflict between Turkey and Iran stems from some structural factors that cannot be expected to change in the short term.

For this reason, it is of great importance to ensure that cooperation, rather than competition and conflict, dominates Turkey-Iran relations. The following speech by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk during Reza Shah's visit to Turkey in June 1934 illustrates the importance of Turkish-Iranian friendship: “...*The Turkish nation has been extremely happy and blessed with this visit of the majesty. If the historical course of the Turkish-Iranian relations is examined, it will be seen that these two countries experienced the most difficult periods of their history when they left the path of friendship. In times when the bonds of friendship between them were tight, (on the other hand) they were happy and fortunate. Knowing and appreciating this fact well, the Republic of Turkey has made Turkish-Iranian friendship a main principle of its foreign policy. Thanks to the fact that brotherly Iran, which is under the high rule of His Majesty, has understood this fact in this way, the unshakable and eternal Turkish-Iranian friendship of today has been established...*” (Akşin, 1991, p. 195).

At that time, the distrust and conflict between Turkey and Iran was overcome by the renewal of the Turkish-Iranian Friendship and Security Agreement of 1926 on November 5, 1932, and the concentration of the two countries on common interests, goals and threats. Accordingly, the two countries had agreed on "neutrality", "non-aggression", "non-interference in each other's internal affairs" and establishing "friendly relations". In addition, both countries followed Western-style modernization policies, tried to improve the economic relations between them and opposed foreign interventions together. Thus, the two countries managed to establish a relationship based on mutual trust by concentrating on common goals and giving mutual guarantees for the elements of conflict that create distrust and conflict between them. In other words, the structural factors that create competition and conflict between the two countries discussed in this study were no longer allowed to further disrupt the relations between the two countries and prevent cooperation. The two countries, together with Iraq and Afghanistan, even formed the Saadabad pact on July 8, 1937, thus solving the territorial problems between the countries of the region and establishing a peaceful environment.

Today, the factors that cause distrust and competition/conflict between Turkey and Iran are still the same, but the conjuncture has changed to a great extent. In the 1930s, there were no favorable conditions for a regional competition and confrontation between Turkey and Iran. Instead, both countries were busy pursuing a Western-style modernization policy to adapt to changing world conditions and trying to consolidate the state authority within the country. In addition, lacking security guarantees of great powers or alliances, both countries were trying to consolidate their independence and integrity against the ambitions of expansionist and colonial powers. Therefore, the security concerns, interests and objectives of the two countries, as well as the political, economic and military conditions of the two countries, were largely in harmony. Today, however, it is not possible to say that there is such a degree of harmony of interests and threats between Turkey and Iran.

Therefore, today, there are more difficulties for Turkish and Iranian policy makers to establish relations based on mutual trust and develop cooperation between the two countries. At this point, there are two options for developing cooperation between Turkey and Iran. The first option, as suggested by Sinkaya, is to compartmentalize the relations between the two countries by dividing the sources of conflict and potential areas of

cooperation into different compartments. Thus, Turkey and Iran may focus on the areas of cooperation between the two countries and follow a policy of not allowing distrust/conflict elements to deteriorate bilateral relations. However, it should be noted that compartmentalization does not mean the complete elimination of disagreements and distrust/conflict between the two countries. Rather, it is an effort to minimize adverse effects of differences and distrust/conflict elements on overall bilateral relations and to facilitate dialogue and cooperation. To put it another way, it is an act of minimizing differences and focusing on common concerns and interests of the two countries. Compartmentalization is a preferred foreign policy behavior when governments cannot afford to forego the possible benefits of cooperation, despite disagreements and differences between the two countries (Sinkaya, 2016, pp. 84-98).

The second option is the economic, military and political integration of Turkey and Iran in order to completely eliminate the problems and competition between the two countries. In the past, Turkey and Iran had taken the first steps of integration in this direction with the Saadabad Pact (1937), the Baghdad Pact (1955), CENTO (1959) and the RCD (1964). Today, ECO (1985), of which Turkey and Iran are founding members, continues its activities as an organization with a purpose and spirit in this direction. As a matter of fact, under the roof of ECO, the member countries aim to strengthen their historical and cultural ties, as well as aiming to develop economic cooperation between them (MFA, 2022). The strong historical, religious, ethnic and cultural ties between the ECO member countries Turkey, Iran and Pakistan (the founding countries) and Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, as well as the highly harmonious interests of the member states in cooperation, make it necessary to strengthen and expand the scope of the ECO. This option will not only completely eliminate the problems and insecurity between Turkey and Iran, but also pave the way for peace and prosperity in the region.

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