

**A Review of the Article:
“Regional Aspirations and Limits of Power:
Turkish-Iranian Relations in the New Middle East”
By S. Gülden Ayman**

Introduction

Iran and Turkey are two major players in the ‘New-Middle-East.’ Their rivalry or cooperation would remain a major factor in shaping future course of the region.

The article: “Regional aspirations and limits of power: Turkish-Iranian relations in the New Middle East”, [Hellenic Studies, Center For Hellenic Studies And Research Canada, University of Crete and University of the Aegean, Volume 20, Issue 1, Spring 2012] is written by Professor Ms. Gülden Ayman who is Associate Professor of International Relations in the Faculty of Political Sciences at Turkey’s Marmara University

Summary

The article asserts that regional ambitions of Iran are not a recent phenomena; history gave Iranian people both a sense of national grandeur and victimization that are mutually reinforcing. Iran was an empire until the 19th century. The direct and indirect interference of the Great Powers in Iranian affairs in the 19th and 20th centuries provoked it to become a regional power. On the other hand, after the War of Independence in 1923, for a long time the Turkish foreign policy elite tended not to believe that Turkey was able to change or control the course of events in the Middle East. Turkish elite advocated that Turkey should concentrate on its domestic problems and consider exerting its power only if Turkey was faced with visible threats.

Despite both countries joining hands in 2004 to find a solution of Iraq war (during and after) and taking joint actions against Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) both have their differences as well. With the fading of Turkish hopes to become a member of EU and US war in Iraq, Turkey’s perception of security risks was multiplied. As Iran has found itself encircled with American troops and bases with the American invasion of Afghanistan followed by Iraq. In addition, both states have major stakes in Syria, because Turkey shares the largest border with Syria, its concerns are: possible Syrian disintegration and resultant massive wave of refugees, an increase in Kurdistan Workers’ Party’s (PKK) activity along the border, the emergence of an independent Kurdish state, the reappearance of the Turkish-Syrian disputes over Hatay province or the sharing of water resources.

For Iran, the possible fall of the Assad regime would increase Iran's isolation and cut direct links between Tehran and its Hezbollah ally in Lebanon. From the Iranian

standpoint, Turkey may not be perceived as a fully reliable partner because of its institutional ties with the US, whereas, US-Iran conflict limits Turkey's desire to extend the relations to all fields.

Appraisal

The paper gives a good account of Turkey/Iran competition in various spheres but does not indicate that there is an intense rivalry between them. Moreover, the writer concludes the write-up on rather mixed possibilities. After reading this paper, the following points are noteworthy:-

- The historical glory of Persian Empire and Ottoman Empire may catch the imagination of various elites and academia in the two countries but, no such pride is discernable in these states' actionable agenda.
- The emergence of post-Kemalist Turkey with a deeply-engrained religious ethos has a soothing effect on the country's relations with the Islamist Iran. This explains in part the soft-paddling on the divergences.
- In the contemporary scenario, the Iranian edge is attested by the following:-
 - Firstly, the Arab Shia population imparts of the Middle East have susceptibility to influences from Iran. (e.g. connections with Iraq, Syria and Lebanon's Hizbullah, besides Eastern parts of Saudi Arabia).
 - Secondly, the Central Asian region though Turkic in race and aspirations, remains a common ground with Iran because of the historic Persian civilizational imprint on their psyche.
 - Thirdly, the production of oil and significant influence on global oil trade.
- Following points flag the Turkish standing:-
 - Firstly, as writer has elaborated, Turkey is not seen as a model and ally in the Middle Eastern countries because of its erstwhile identification with Europe and colonial hangovers. Therefore, it is rather a new comer in Middle Eastern affairs.
 - Secondly, PKK and the Kurds in Iraq and Syria are a trouble for Turkey. The remedy lies in cooperation with Iran and not in hostility
 - Thirdly, the resurgence of Islamist party in Turkey is taking it away from Israel and NATO/US. In recent aces, the Turkish posture on Palestine has earned its leadership wide acclaim. (At one point, the Turkish Prime Minister was seen by some Arab quarters as the most popular leader on the street, following Jamal Abdul Naser).
 - Fourthly, Turkey is a major military power in Europe only 'second best to Britain'. The expansion of its military machine can be troublesome in the perception of European states as well.
 - Fifthly, Turkey's decision to stay away from NATO'/US invasion of Iraq indicates that it is less likely to become part of any other such plan of NATO/US in this region; in addition rather Turkey has a sympathetic

stance on Iran's nuclear program which is the bone of contention between US/Europe and Iran.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, the drop scene in Syria will certainly have an impact on the relationship between both the states. However, only a big war can alter Iran's position in the region. Given the prevailing regional political situation, Turkey may not become the part of that war. But, after having established that in near future, there is very little possibility of Turkish Iranian altercation; this Reviewer would like to ask here is: What if Turkey and Iran become ally in the region? How would this alliance affect the regional and global politics?