

Turkey-Iran Reconciliatory Relations: Internal and External Factors

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Abstract: *As the two main powers in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran have for several centuries been constrained in the structural contradiction by factors such as the leadership in the Islamic world, the influence of geopolitics, the unrest of the minority nationalities, and the difference of political patterns. However, the relations between the two nations have obviously improved in recent years with the change in the political situation in the Middle East and the promotion of its political development and economic problems and the political Islamism inside the two nations. Actually the improvement of the relations between Turkey and Iran has played an important role in balancing the interference of the US force and maintaining the peace and the stability in this region. But since the structural contradiction between the two nations is not easy to overcome, it will depend on the development of the situation in the region and the two nations to decide their future relations between them.*

Key Words: *Turkey; Iran; Reconciliation; Middle East Security*

Over the centuries, the relationship between Turkey and Iran has

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always been in a "regional structural hostility," which mainly was caused by their status in the system and sub-system level. Under this structural contradictions, Turkey and Iran have maintained a relationship of long-term conflict and temporary cooperation. Since the Islamic Iranian revolution in 1979, there has been an effort to overcome the hostility and seize the opportunity to establish cooperation under the influence of internal and external factors. During the 30 years after the Iranian revolution, the relationship between the two countries has experienced economic and trade expansion between 1979 and 1988; hostility and strengthened conflict from 1988 to 2002; and a comprehensive political reconciliation and close economic cooperation since 2002. This article shows that although the relationship between Turkey and Iran has been filled with hostility for a long time, when some domestic and international factors appear, these two major powers in the Middle East may still have the chance to reconcile and establish a close cooperation relationship.

I The Background of the Structural Contradiction between Turkey and Iran

Since the 16th century, a number of important factors has determined the development of relations between Turkey and Iran, and constituted the structural contradictions. Among the factors of the structural contradictions, **the first** is the geographical location of the two countries. As neighboring countries in the eastern part of the Middle East, both have a vast territory and large population. As major Middle Eastern powers they geographically connect Central Asia and the Caucasus region and are the portal for Europe into these two areas. However, both locations have their own advantages. Iran's geographical location is conducive to control the energy of the oil-rich Persian Gulf region, and also has religious influence on the Shiite Muslims in Central Asia and the Caucasus, while Turkey's location

has more international strategic value as it not only connects Asia and Europe, but also occupies the five sea passages including the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, Marmara, Aegean and the Mediterranean which has a close relationship with trade and energy (Erhan & Aydin, 2008). The characteristic of this geographical composition is the root of Turkey's and Iran's conflict which has been caused by the competition for control and impact of this region.

The second factor is the minority issues that the two countries have been both facing. These two countries are multi-ethnic, and are worried about their restless minorities. In Iran, the largest minority is Azerbaijani, accounting for 25% of the population. The Azerbaijani language belongs to Turkic languages, and is closely related with Turkey. From the 18th century to the early 20th century, Iran had been ruled by the Turcoman dynasty. After the 20th century, although the Persians had established their own domination in Iran, the Pan-Turkism of the Turkic peoples has still remained extremely sensitive, especially the potential irredentism of its ethnic minorities in northern Azerbaijan. Therefore, when the Young Turks movement trumpeted the Pan-Turkism around the neighboring countries in the early 20th century, it caused serious conflict between Iran and Turkey. For Turkey, there have been 15% Kurds in the total population. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Kurds have become the most troublesome minority in Turkey. They repeatedly fought against the central government for autonomy and independence in the 1920s, 1930s and 1980s. Turkey's main Kurdish political force is the PKK. After the Government's crackdown, many members decamped to Iraq and Iran. For years, the Iranian government has had acquiescence or even support for the PKK militants launching attacks against Turkey from its territory, which became an important focus of conflict between the two countries. In addition, Turkey has also accused Iran of assisting Armenian ethnic minorities in its territory to fight against Turkey's government. Besides, Turkey also was very worried about

Iran's impact on its Shiite, Alevi, and Qizilbash populations.

The third factor is the religious sectarian division. In the early Ottoman Empire and Safavid Empire, the two countries were the two main leaders of Sunni and Shite Islam respectively. Since then, from the 16th to the 20th century, the Ottoman on behalf of the Sunni had competed for the leadership of the Muslim world with the Shi'ite Safavid and Qajars, which has become a decisive factor in the conflict. After the 16th century, this competition led to a series of diplomatic competitions and the military conflict. The Sultan Selim I of the Ottoman Empire defeated Safavid in 1514. The rise of the Turkish movement spreading pan-Sunni ideology after the 20th century was a nightmare for Iran. At that time, Young Turks launched the Pan-Islamic movement that even had an impact on the elite group of Iran (Karal & Tavhi, 1988: 126-146). Meanwhile, the Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid I also made every effort to inspire Iran's Shiite clerics to launch a Jihad holy war and overthrow the Iranian monarchy and also tried to unify the entire Muslim world under the Ottoman Empire. Although the Ottoman Empire's attempt did not succeed, the complexity of competing for the Islam leadership still was contained in the two cultural traditions.

The fourth factor is the two distinct political models of Turkey and Iran respectively in the late 20th century. The two different choices of governmental institution have become the major source of ideological differences. When Iran and Turkey finished their constitutional revolutions in 1905 and 1908 respectively, the two countries faced new choices of political systems. At that time, the founder of the Republic of Turkey Kemal Atatiirk had tried to persuade the Pahlavi Dynasty to give up the monarchy for a republic, but failed. The result of Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979 was that they established a theocratic system after the overthrow of the monarchy. Therefore, Iran broke off relations with the Western world and NATO and also intensified the conflict with Turkey in terms of their political

ideology. Turkey's secular government worried that the Iran would spread the revolutionary movement into the entire Middle East. Iran, on the other hand, accused Turkey for sheltering those refugees fleeing from the Iranian Islamic revolution. The population of these refugees was about 600,000 to 1,000,000 who were mainly members of the Mujahedin-el Khalq and other political organizations against the Iranian regime, as well as military groups supporting for the Pahlavi monarchy. During this political conflict, Turkey called itself a model of secularization and modernization in the Muslim world, and Iran self-proclaimed the nation as the model for the Islamists.

Finally, the fifth factor involves the border disputes, which are also the historical root of the conflict. The boundary of the two countries was mainly determined by the Treaty of Qasr-i Shirin, signed under the Ottoman and the Safavid Empire in 1639. Over the past centuries, there have been no major war because of the boundary conflicts, but there have been armed conflicts due to border disputes since 1639. After the 20th century, the minorities of both countries often used uncertain border areas for activities against the government, which exacerbated the problem of the border disputes. When the Kurds in eastern provinces of Turkey launched an uprising against the government in 1930 in Arzi, the Turkish government protested that these rebels had free access to the Iranian border. To this end, Turkey and Iran signed a formal agreement to adjust the border in 1931 in order to maintain the Turkish border (Alakom, 1998). But even so, the PKK has still continued to use the disputed border areas to launch attacks against Turkey and many times caused tensions between the two countries.

II The Atmosphere of Reconciliation Brought by the Internal Environmental Changes

Although there have been structural contradictions between Turkey and Iran, changes in the external environment could dilute

these contradictions and lead to a partnership between the two countries in a certain period. In recent years, the external environment sometimes strengthened the hostility between the two sides, but the general trend is to considerably lessen the tensions. Historically, the external environmental changes had produced a similar effect between the two. The involvement of Britain and Russia into the region in early 19th century had eased the hostility between the two countries to some extent. At that time, Britain and Russia were once involved in the so-called "Great Game" in this region to compete for control of Central Asia. Turkey and Iran clearly felt their own security threats in this situation. Therefore, when the Russian and British empires were actively engaged in the region, Turkey and Iran had reduced the threat level toward each other.

During the Cold War, when the United States set up the Central Treaty Organization in order to compete with the Soviet Union for influence in the Middle East, Turkey and Iran stopped the conflict and joined the Central Treaty Organization under the influence of the United States. After the 1979 Islamic revolution, Iran has not only radically changed its foreign policy, but also hoped to influence the Shiite population around the country to spread the Islamic Revolution throughout the Middle East. Since then, Iran conducted an eight-year war against Iraq and completely cut off the relations with the United States and Israel. In such changing external environment, Iran has not only greatly reduced the threat concerns on Turkey, but also almost completely changed the awareness of the threat toward Turkey (Chubin, 1997).

During the dramatic changes in the domestic and international environment, Iran moved drastically from the key US ally in the Middle East to the fiercest challenger of US hegemony overnight. In this situation, although Turkey belongs to NATO, and Iran also modestly strengthened relations with the United States after the Islamic Revolution, in the situation of the political and economic

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isolation of Iran and the plight of the Iraqi war, Turkey and Iran still began to establish economic and strategic cooperation. It is worth noting that after the Islamic Revolution, the establishment of trade and economic cooperation with Turkey and Iran quickly expanded as Turkey expressed its willingness to strengthen ties with Iranian Islamic regime. On February 14, 1979, three days after the "Victory Day" of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Turkey recognized the new Iranian regime. Iran's new government welcomed this recognition and declared that Iran would not undermine the relationship with Turkey after withdrawing from the Central Treaty Organization. For Turkey, there were three reasons for the rapid recognition of Iran's new government: First, Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit repeatedly criticized the Pahlavi reign of Iran, therefore they welcomed the new regime; second, Turkey worried that the Islamic revolution would lead to possible civil war and the collapse of the domestic situation, which might not only lead to Soviet intervention, but also might stimulate the eastern border of Turkey's Kurdish separatists, so they must strengthen ties with Iran; third, Turkey believed that Iran would be its trading partner, and Iran's anti-Western stance would also help to improve Turkey's position with its Western allies.

In Iran, it was also urgent to establish economic and trade ties with Turkey. After having a war with Iraq in September 1980, Iran had to face the war with Iraq and also the US economic sanctions; therefore it became crucial for economic cooperation with Turkey. During the war, Iran not only needed to use Turkish ports in the Black Sea and Mediterranean to import strategic materials, but also to buy a variety of household goods from Turkey with only oil and gas, which was also profitable for Turkey. Trade with Iran did not only improve their economic bankruptcy, but it also supported the liberal economic reforms carried out by Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal in the early 1980s. Thus, during the war with Iraq, Iran exceeded 20 billion US dollars trade with Turkey, most of which had been to sell oil to

Turkey in exchange for goods and technical assistance.

After the Iran-Iraq war, because of US intervention in the region and regional changes in the situation, the relations between Turkey and Iran became tense again. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as very few countries dared to challenge the world's only superpower, Iran was in a more difficult situation. Politically, the United States had not only clamped down on Iran in regional affairs, but also opposed Iran's Islamic regime in favor of the "Turkish model". Economically, Iran was usually excluded from the regional natural gas and oil projects, while Turkey received substantial support. Moreover, the US used the "dual containment" policy to put pressure on Iran and Iraq (Özcan & Özdamar, 2009: 121-133), which prompted Iran to alienate Turkey and to develop ties with Russia (Anis & Özbay, 2008: Winter 47-62). In addition, political changes in Central Asia and the Caucasus also harmed the Turkey-Iran relationship. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey and Iran were trying to play their influence on a number of newly independent countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus regions. Therefore, Turkey boasted about its democracy and free economy model, while Iran stressed the combined model of religious ideology and economic interests, which strengthened the hostility between the two countries.

However, because the United States and United Kingdom started the war in Iraq in 2003, Turkey and Iran improved their relations again. For Iran, although the United States defeated its enemies the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in the Iraq war, the United States itself became a more serious threat to the region. For Turkey, the Iraq war gave a serious setback between Turkey and the United States. The Turkish Parliament voted against the US decision to open a second front in Iraq in March 2003, which marked the break of the military alliance between Turkey and the United States (Özdamar & Taydas, 2010). In addition, the Iraq war contributed to Turkey and Iran reaching a consensus concerning the threat of the

United States. There were strong public voices in Turkey and Iran to oppose the US invasion of Iraq. In particular, they worried that the US invasion would divide Iraq which would set an example for Kurdish separations in the two countries. From the ideological point of view, the Islamists also played an important role to form an opposition to the US invasion in the two countries (Altunisik, 2009: 169-192).

After 2005, Turkey was disappointed with the EU accession negotiation process and began to promote the development of its relations with the Middle East and neighboring countries. Because of the block of Cyprus, as well as France and Germany, Turkey's EU accession negotiation process has failed to make any progress since 2005. With Turkey's more conservative Islamic forces playing growing influence on foreign affairs, especially when former adviser to the Prime Minister, Professor Ahmet Davutoglu was appointed the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Turkish foreign policy has finally started to turn and concentrate on developing relations with Islamic countries in the Middle East. Under the influence of this trend, Turkey has not only improved relations with Iran and Syria in various fields, but also firmly opposed Israel taking military action in Lebanon and Gaza. In particular, Turkey has supported Iran's nuclear program since 2007, but stressed that it was only for peaceful purposes. Meanwhile, Turkey's and Iran's trade has reached unprecedented levels. They not only signed a new energy transport protocol, but also agreed to military cooperation against the PKK. Other aspects of the friendly relations have been also constantly developing.

As two countries with a long hostile history, it is surprising for the international community that the relations between Turkey and Iran have improved dramatically in recent years. However, it should be noted that there has been a remarkable improvement of economic cooperation and trade relations mainly because the penetration of the superpowers into this region after "9/11". Under the external pressure, the two countries only had to cooperate against this

penetration. The US forces have expanded through the war in Iraq and Afghanistan; there is also post-war reconstruction of Iraq and the Kurdish separatist problem, so Turkey and Iran must coordinate their positions, and at the same time unite to maintain a balance with the forces of the United States. Turkey and Iran have made it clear that they firmly oppose the dismemberment of Iraq and establishment of an independent Kurdish state. They also have close positions on the most sensitive Palestinian issue. Iran actively supports Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine and Turkey tries to mediate between Syria and Israel and between Hamas and Israel. After "Operation Cast Lead" in 2008, the Turkish criticism of Israel reached an unprecedented level. In addition, Turkey has repeatedly criticized Israel for the establishment of nuclear plants and the acquiescence of the United States to Israel. In the spring of 2010, Turkey voted against the UN Security Council sanctions against Iran. After the outbreak of the crisis in the Turkish rescue fleet for Gaza, there have been many contradictory statements between Turkey and Iran as one voice, and the United States and Israel as the other.

III The Driving Force Provided by Changes in Domestic Political and Economic Factors

When the external environmental pressure eased tensions between Turkey and Iran, the changes of two domestic political, economic and ideological factors also have provided the impetus for an improvement of bilateral relations. Specifically, the improvement of Turkey's and Iran's relations has begun from the Islamic politician Necmettin Erbakan, the first representative of the revival of Islamic forces in Turkey's modern history. As a Muslim country, Turkey has been influenced by the secular doctrine advocated by Ataturk and military intervention in politics since the establishment of the Republic in 1923. Therefore, Turkey has tended to alienate the surrounding Muslim

countries in most of the 20th century and has made efforts to present itself as a secular European country. After the 1970s, Turkey began to raise the "political Islam" movement. The emergence of this trend has made many political parties in Turkey realize that the influence of Islam has not been fully eradicated from Turkish society over the past few decades. The fact shows that the Islamic political forces still represent great social forces in Turkey. The leader of the Islamic revival power is the Refah Partisi (RP) with strong Islamic thoughts. They appeared in the political arena after 1980, and soon won the hearts and minds of many in Turkey. The Refah Partisi won the election in 1996 and formed a coalition government with the Doğru Yol Partisi, and Erbakan became the Prime Minister. The new government expressed its dissatisfaction with the status of Turkey in NATO, so they called for social reform and a comprehensive revival of Islamic civilization, as well as clenzed the European colonial culture to build the regional power of Turkey. On the diplomatic side, the Turkish government has immediately improved relations with Iran, whose mark was Prime Minister Erbakan's visit to Iran. In this visit, the two sides signed a series of economic cooperation agreements, including Turkey purchasing 2.3 billion of natural gas from Iran. Since then, both sides have further expanded economic cooperation and signed five new agreements related to the economy. At that time, the Erbakan government even tried to expand the military and defense cooperation, but failed because of the strongly held opposition of the Turkish army.

However, a series of Islamization policies implemented by Erbakan has been strongly opposed by the military and secular political parties and forces. The Parliament passed a no-confidence vote of the Refah Partisi and Doğru Yol Partisi Government in May 1997, so Necmettin Erbakan was forced to resign as the Prime Minister. The improved relations between Turkey and Iran had been also at a standstill. Soon, the bilateral relations had been even worsened because of Kurdish and Islamic problem. After the Refah Partisi

government, Mesut Yılmaz and Bulent Ecevit took place as the leaders of the government, but the military had still controlled and influenced a large degree of Turkey's defense and foreign policy. For the military in Turkey, the Kurdish issue and Islamic problem were the most serious security challenges, which are related to the Iran policy concerning Turkey (Olson, 2000: 877). Thus, Turkey's secular government strongly criticized Iran for its intervention into Kurdish affairs, and the Turkish mainstream media also attacked Iran which supported Turkey's Islamist Hezbollah movement and the activities of Kurds in Turkey. In the meantime, an important case that Iran involved in Turkey's domestic political conflict was a political crisis triggered by the remarks of the Iranian ambassador in Turkey Mohammed Bagheri who not only actively promoted the establishment of the Islamic regime in Turkey, but also publicly criticized its secularism. In 1997, Bagheri supported the Islamic movement in Turkey in a speech, so he had been asked to leave Turkey. In retaliation, Iran expelled the Turkish ambassador in the same year (*PLA Daily*, 1997: September 24).

The other case of Iran involving itself in Turkey's domestic political problems was the "headscarf disturbance" of the Muslim women members of Turkish Parliament Merve Kavakçı in 1999. Kavik Sarkozy wore an Islamic headscarf in Parliament which caused an uproar among the secularists. However, there has been also strong indignation in the Islamic world. This event lasted for several months in Turkey and became the focus of the international community including Iran. In Iran, not only did the media severely criticize the secularists' condemnation of Kavik, but also Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi publicly criticized them. Iranian students also held demonstrations in Tehran calling for the freedom of Muslim women wearing the hijab. The two countries began a "rhetorical war" in the media, and Turkish Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit accused Iran of trying to export the Islamic revolution and support the PKK. In

response, the Turkish government suppressed an Islamic extremist group called the Kurdish Hezbollah, which made relations worse. In the suppression of the operation, Turkish officials accused Kurdish leaders of accepting political and military training from the Iranian security and intelligence agency, and the Iranian government spies had been involved in assassinations in Turkey in 1990s.

After the 1997 and 2000 conflicts, the relations between Turkey and Iran moved to reconciliation again. The first reason is that Turkey' secretly arrested the PKK leader Ocalan in Kenya in 1999 which aroused protests and unrest of the Kurdish region. Therefore, the Iran decision-makers were aware that the PKK also had wide implications for the Kurdish region in Iran. Iran's decision eliminated Iran's traditional attitude towards the Turkish military. The next reason is that Turkey further strengthened cooperation with Israel and the US after the "9/11" incident (Olson, 2002: June). Faced with this situation, Iran felt that if they would not cooperate with Turkey, Turkey would take the opportunity to expand its control of Iraqi northern region and weaken Iran's influence in regional politics. Iran might be adverse. To the strengthening of Turkey and Israel military cooperation and the Israeli military presence in Turkey, Iran decided to cooperate on security with Turkey. The security cooperation committee held a joint security meeting on October 2001. At the meeting, Iran promised that they would not allow PPT to launch attacks against Turkey from its territory. Turkey also pledged to stop political support for the South Azerbaijan National Liberation Movement in Azerbaijan. In addition, reformers led by Iran's Mohammad Khatami and conservatives had political struggles, and also prompted Iran to improve its strained relations with Turkey.

Under the situation of improved bilateral relations, Turkey's Justice and Development Party won the general election in November, 2002 and formed a new government. As the successor of the Islamic Refah Partisi, the Justice and Development Party government not only

worked to improve and strengthen relations with the European Union and the United States, but also achieved international recognition at home and abroad and consolidated its position in the first three years in power. At the same time, they further strengthened the relationship with Iran, especially the bilateral economic and trade links. For the Justice and Development Party government, it was the traditional friendship of the Islamic world to strengthen the relationship between Iran and also the need for prosperity of Turkey's own economic development. For both Turkey and Iran, the strengthening of economic cooperation and political relations is conducive to improving their own interests. For Turkey, the diplomatic strategy contains extending its economic power to influence political objectives through the development of the "trading power" (Kirsiei, 2009: 29-56). Iran not only has a huge domestic market, but also can offer energy to meet Turkey's need for economic development. Iran also sees Turkey playing a "black knight" role in the United States and the United Nations Security Council which impose economic sanctions to break its economic and political isolation. In particular, Iran got support from Turkey which is the NATO and EU candidate country that has great value for it to achieve its foreign policy goals.

After 2002, trade between Turkey and Iran has begun to increase substantially. On one hand, because Iran suspended its assistance to the PKK and Turkey terminated support of the Mujahedin el-Khalq, the political and security issues have been solved. On the other hand, Turkey suffered the most severe economic crisis in early 2001 which led to the collapse of Turkey's economy. It also prompted Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer determination to strengthen economic ties with Iran, and visited Iran in 2002. The bilateral trade in 2002 reached 1.2 billion US dollars. When the Justice and Development Party government took office, the trade volume between the two countries had a substantial increase year by year, which has been more than 100 billion US dollars by 2009 (*Turkey: The sanction of ban on*

Iranian banking transactions is a wrong decision). Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understandings on further development of land, sea and air transportation in March 2009 and planned to increase its annual trade volume to 200 billion US dollars annually (*Turkey Daily News*, 2009: March 2). In early 2010, Iranian First Vice President Mohammed-Reza Rahimi announced that the annual trade volume with Turkey had reached 110 billion US dollars, and Iran was willing to reach 300 billion US dollars during the next five years (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2009: October 27).

In recent years, the strengthening of economic ties with neighboring countries and a substantial increase in foreign trade have become the basis of Turkey's Justice and Development Party's foreign policy. Compared with the surrounding countries, Turkey has a higher level of industrialization, so the Justice and Development Party government hopes to turn this advantage into a favorable factor for foreign economic cooperation. Oil and natural gas cooperation are the result of this policy. For Iran, there is important political significance to develop its economic relations with Turkey. In order to develop economic cooperation with Iran, Turkey did not only ignore the United Nations' sanctions against Iran, but also rejected the US warning of stopping natural gas transportation project with Iran. This is also an active political support for Iran. At present, Iran has become Turkey's second largest gas supplier and the supply of domestic consumption accounted for 15% of Turkey. In 2008, the two countries began to discuss a pipeline project from Iran to European markets Nabucco. Although the United States and some EU countries opposed this for political reasons, the Turkish Justice and Development Party government made it clear that on this issue would side with Iran.

IV The Future of the Bilateral Relations

For Turkey and Iran, the future development of bilateral relations

will depend on a series of domestic and international political factors. From external factors, although there are significant common interests on the post-war reconstruction in Iraq, it also contains obvious potential differences. First of all, Turkey and Iran have the exact same opinion in opposition to the issue of the US invasion of Iraq. The two sides will also work together to counter Iraq's Kurdish separatist forces and maintain Iraq's territorial integrity, as it relates to the sovereignty interests of both countries. But for Iran, the Kurdish question is its secondary interest; the main concern is Iran's and the United States' relations. If there were a further deterioration of relations between Iran and the United States, Iran would have a greater involvement in Iraq, particularly strengthening ties with the Shiites in Iraq to prevent the United States from becoming Iran's security threats. However, if the contradictions between the Shiites and Sunnis cannot be reconciled in Iraq, it will lead to sharp differences between Turkey and Iran. If Turkey and Iran support the Sunni and Shiite respectively, it will be bound to harm the two sides' current reconciliation and cooperation.

In addition, the Iranian nuclear program and Turkey's attitude towards it will be a major test for the future development of bilateral relations. Now, it seems that Iran's nuclear program has made great progress and may even produce nuclear weapons in the near future. Over the years, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and other leaders of the Justice and Development Party have maintained Iran's right to improve peaceful nuclear technology, and Iran has mediations with Western countries. But the Turkish Prime Minister also repeated a statement against nuclear proliferation in the region and stressed that Iran's nuclear program "is only for peaceful purposes (*BBC News*, 2010: March 16)." Meanwhile, the Turkish government has severely criticized Israel's nuclear development program, and stressed the need to establish a nuclear-free Middle East. These views of Erdogan have expressed clearly the Justice and Development Party's

position, concerns and interests on nuclear policy (Oguzlu, 2008: March/May) although as a non-permanent UN Security Council member, Turkey voted against sanctions on Iran, it does not mean that Turkey has changed the position of maintaining a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. Therefore, the further development of Iran's nuclear program could damage relations between Iran and Turkey.

Finally, for the current Turkish government, as a NATO member and EU candidate, Turkey has great pressure for its support of the nuclear issue and the crisis with Israel. There has even been debate on the future development of Turkish foreign policy in the Justice and Development Party. With elections approaching in 2011, Erdogan's government must explain the criticism of the government's foreign policy and relations with Iran. If he takes a more pragmatic policy for continuing his political survival, Turkey's policy on Iran and Middle East may change. If the Justice and Development Party fail in the election in the future, the new government seems unlikely to continue the pro-Iranian policy. For Iran, the political turmoil and public domestic protests after June 2009 general election urge the Government to turn its attention to itself and reduce concerns on the foreign relations. Under the impact of internal and external factors, only time could prove the development of the traditional structural conflicts between Turkey and Iran and the current conciliatory relationship.

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