Identifying and explaining the key drivers affecting Turkey's relations with Iran in the 2035 horizon

Alireza Sahraie ✹

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Law and Politics Studies, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran.

Article Info	Abstract
	Iran and Turkey are old countries in the West Asian region and influential actors who have a long cultural background. They are the heirs of the powerful historical countries of the region and are distinct from other countries in the region. The main purpose of the present study is to identify and explain the key proposals that influence the relations between the two older countries in the West Asian region and as the influential actors and heirs of the powerful historical countries of the region. The basic questioning of the research is that what are the most important proposals influencing Turkish -Iranian relations in the 2035 horizon? In order to answer the research question, with a future approach, the analysis of cross-effects has been used to investigate the interaction of the network of variables and determine the position of each variable based on the relationship with the variables. The research tool is a questionnaire and the opinions of Turkish experts are research data. Research findings based on the output of Mikmak software from the propellers affecting Iran-Turkey relations indicate that of the twelve variables, two in the group of influential variables, two variables in the group of risky variables, three variables in the group of leverage, three variables in the group. Finally, the regulatory variable (geographical proximity and communication) is the only factor that only has the most impact on other variables.

✹ ✉ sahraie1979@chmail.ir, iD https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1330-0646

Extended Abstract

Background

Iran and Turkey are old countries in the West Asian region and influential players with a deep cultural and long historical background. They are the heirs of the historically powerful countries of the region and are distinguished from other countries in the region in various ways. One of these distinctions is their relative independence from extra-regional countries in choosing foreign policy and the pattern of regional relations. Although many powers in the Middle East have an acquired role, Iran and Turkey are two countries that have a prescriptive role. For this reason, they are able to significantly influence the structure of the region and adopt their own pattern of relations independently of extra-regional powers.

Aim

The research question is formulated as follows: What are the most important drivers and uncertainties affecting Iran-Turkey relations in the next ten years? Also, in order to answer this question, which also has a futures-oriented nature at the heart of the research, the present study is not a hypothesis test, but rather seeks to discover the variables and drivers affecting relations between the two countries over a ten-year time horizon.

Methodology

This research was designed and conducted with a futures research approach, and in terms of methodology, its main core is structural analysis, which uses a variety of methods in its different parts. In futures research, we are not faced with a single future; rather, we are faced with a diverse range of futures that must be considered simultaneously in order to obtain positive and maximum results. The most important tool of futures research is the use of diverse and multiple methods. Therefore, the present research is quantitative in nature and the cross-effect analysis technique has been used to examine the research objectives. Cross-effect analysis is based on the assumption that single-factor analysis does not exist in reality and that there is a network of variables in each phenomenon that describe the state of that phenomenon through their interaction; therefore, cross-effect analysis tries to connect the relationships between events and variables. These relationships are then categorized and prioritized to determine which events have the greatest impact on the occurrence of a particular phenomenon. Accordingly, the principles of cross-impact analysis research methodology have been used to examine Iran-Turkey relations in order to determine, using a prospective method, the impact of each of the variables mentioned on the mutual relations between the two countries in the probable future. To investigate this goal, the MiqMaq software, which is designed for cross-impact analysis, has been used.

Findings

The software output of the variables affecting Iran-Turkey relations indicates that out of the twelve selected variables, two variables are in the group of influential variables, two variables are in the group of risk variables, one variable has been identified as a target, three variables are in the group of leverage variables, and finally three variables are in the group of influenced variables.

Based on the first feature, according to this map and based on the distribution of variables, the variable of great powers and their interventions in the region has been identified as a contextual or very influential variable, which is particularly related to Turkey's membership in NATO and the need to accept its policies. In addition, Turkey's efforts to join the European Union have also imposed requirements that have increased the intervention of other countries in the country's regional policies. Overall, this variable has been identified as one of the most important drivers in Iran-Turkey relations.

In this group, and as a determining variable, the geopolitical importance of Iran-Turkey relations has been identified, which, unlike the great power intervention variable, which is considered a negative factor, emphasizes the importance of bilateral relations as a fundamental factor in the geopolitical developments of the West Asian region.

In the group of bivariate variables, three variables have been identified, which are in two subgroups. The ideological differences variable is one of the risk subgroup variables, meaning that insisting on it and emphasizing this variable in bilateral relations will be dangerous and may lead to the deterioration of bilateral relations. Security preferences are the second variable in the risk variables subgroup, which is very far from the other variables, and for this reason, it has been identified as the most risky variable in the system.

However, in the group of bivariate variables and the subgroup of target variables, a factor that can improve the situation in the short term has also been identified: the confrontation of foreign policy between Iran and Turkey.

In the group of lever variables (secondary), there are three variables: ethnic differences, historical experience of confrontation, and regional structure, which emphasizes that these three variables have had an effect on bilateral relations in the past but are known to have no effect at present.

In the group of affected variables, there are three variables: economic and trade dependence, cultural commonalities, and the dynamics of diplomatic relations. Based on the conceptual definition, this group of variables is known as dependent variables of the system and for this reason they are not the source of the effect and change in the system.

The most important part in the analysis of cross-effects, which is

considered to be the regulating variables, also has a variable in this system: geographical proximity; Based on the analysis, the neighborhood of two countries is a regulating factor that causes the focus on it to improve relations between the two countries, because any insecurity or security issues in neighboring countries quickly spread to neighboring countries based on the domino principle of insecurity, and for this reason, this neighborhood has a regulating effect.

Conclusion

The ten percent most important variables among the twelve variables affecting Iran-Turkey relations indicate that neighborhood conditions (geographical proximity) are the only factor that solely has an impact on other variables. Also, the two variables security preferences and geopolitical importance of the region have the most impact and influence. At the same time, the three variables ethnic differences, ideological differences and cultural commonalities have no effect on the most important relations between the two countries.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the author on reasonable request.

References

Akbarzadeh Sh, Barry J. (2016). "Iran and turkey: not quite enemies but less than friends". *Third World Quarterly*. 38(4): 980-995. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26156155.

Akif Kumral M. (2020). "Introduction: Historical psychology of Turkey-Iran neighborhood relations". In book: *Exploring Emotions in Turkey-Iran Relations*.1-67. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-39029-7_1

Alamdar E. (2021). *Representing an optimum pattern for bilateral relations based on geopolitical interests and concerns. Case: Iran-Turkey relations*. PhD Thesis in Political Geography. Faculty of Humanities, Taebiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran. [in Persian]

Aras B. (2009). "The Davutoğlu era in Turkish foreign policyl". *Insight Turkey*. 11(3): 127-142. https://www.jstor.org/stable/26331107.

Azimzadeh M, Masoudnia H, Imamjomezadeh J. (2017). "The structuralism of Turkey's new foreign policy and competition with the Iran". *Studies of International Relations Journal*. 38(2): 95-128. https://journals.iau.ir/article_532876.html. [in Persian]

Bell W. (2003). "What do mean by future studies?". Slaughter R. (Ed.). *New Thinking for*

a New Millennium. London: Rutledge. 3-25. https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep05909.8.pdf.

Çetinsaya G. (2003). "Essential friends and natural enemies: The historic roots of Turkish Iranian relations". *Middle East Review of International Affairs*.7(3): 116-132. https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/meria/meria03_ceg01.pdf.

Charounatki M. (2018). *Iran and Turkey, International and Regional Engagement in the MiddleEast*. New York: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd.

Chiu D. (2003). "International alliance in the power cycle theory of state of behavior". *International Political Science Reviw*. 24(1): 123-136. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1601334.

Doran ChF. (2012). "Power cycle theory and the ascendance of China". *SAIS Review of International Affairs*. 32(1): 73-87. https://www.jstor.org/stable/27000877.

--------------. (2003). "Economics, philosophy of history, and the 'single dynamics' of power cycle theory: Expectation, competition and statcraft". *International Political Science Reviw*. 24(1): 13-49. https://www.jstor.org/stable/1601328.

Golmohammadi V. (2018). *Perspectives on Iran-Türkiye Relations Towards 2025*. Tehran: National Defense University and Research Institute. [in Persian]

Hosseinzadeh V, Nasiri Lotum B. (2025). "Iran and Türkiye's competition in the corridors of the Caucasus". *Journal of Central Eurasia Studies*. 17(2): 93-123. doi: 10.22059/jcep.2025.381166.450249. [in Persian]

Hulser S. (2013). "Power cycle theory reconsidered; Is China going to destabilize the global order?". *NFG Working Paper Series*. 6: 1-25. https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/handle/fub188/18819.

Jansiz A, Salehiyan T. (2016). "A new look to the competition of Iran and Turkey towards". *International Relations Research Quarterly*. 19(1): 143-176. https://www.iisajournals.ir/article_45831.html. [in Persian]

Kheyri A. (2021). *The Outlook of Political Development Process in Iran and Turkey*. PhD Thesis in Political Sciences. Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, University of Mazandaran, Sari, Iran. [in Persian]

Kolaei E, Nabavi SM. (2020)."Cultural factors affecting the futures of Iran-Turkey relations". *Journal of Fundamental and Applied Studies in the Islamic World*. 2(4): 160-184. https://journal.iiwfs.com/article_113112.html. [in Persian]

Lindensteauss G. (2018). "Turkey and Iran: Two regional powers and the relations pendulum". *JSTOR*. 53-62. https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17021.8.

Malici A, Walker SG. (2017). *Role Theory and Role Conflict in U.S.-Iran Relations*. Taylor & Francis. New York: Routledge.

Mokhtari B, Montazeri H. (2012). "A study of patterns of conflict and cooperation in Iran-Turkey relations". *Quarterly Journal of the History of Foreign Relations*. 52-53 (3-4): 169-218. https://www.hfrjournal.ir/article_83039.html. [in Persian]

Mosavi S. (2020)."Investigating Iran's foreign relations with the Erdogan government in the framework of structuralism". *Quarterly Journal of Political Research in Islamic World*. 10(4): 179-209. doi: 20.1001.1.23222980.1399.10.4.8.5. [in Persian]

Nabavi M, Safavi H, Koushki M. (2019). "Developing scenarios for Iran-Türkiye relations in the horizon of 2030. *Defense Futures Studies*. 5(18): 7-36. https://doi.org/10.22034/dfsr.2021.141522.1441. [in Persian]

Niakoee SA, Rezapoor D, Fazeli S. (2018). "The role theory and Iran and Turkey's competion in the Middle East during the rule of the justice and development party". *Quarterly Journal of Political Research in Islamic World*. 8(2): 23-48. https://priw.ir/article-1-479-fa.html. [in Persian]

Özcan NA, Özdamar O. (2010). "Uneasy neighbors: Turkish-Iranian relations since the 1979 Islamic revolution". *Middle East Policy*. 17(3): 101-117. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2010.00454.x.

Pourdast Z. (2019). *Designing the Model of Iran-Turkey Relation*. PhD Thesis in International Relations. Department of Humanities, International Relations Section, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran. [in Persian]

Pourdast Z, Ahmadipour Z, Mousavi Shafae M. (2025). "Designing the model of

cooperation Iran-Turkey Relation". *Iranian Journal of Asian Studies*. doi: 10.22099/ijas.2025.52574.1030. [in Persian]

Ranjbar Heydari V, Ghorbani A, Simbar R, Hajiani E. (2016). "Identifying and explaining the factors and drivers affecting Iran-GCC relations in a ten-year period using the Miq-Maq method". *Quarterly Journal of Defense Futures Studies*. 1(2): 7-37. https://doi.org/10.22054/qpss.2019.27026.1805. [in Persian]

Saei Z. (2019). *Explaining the Relations between Iran and Turkey during the Justice and Development Party from a Geopolitical Perspective*. PhD Thesis in Political Geography. Faculty of Geographical Sciences, Department of Geopolitics, Kharazmi University, Tehran, Iran. [in Persian]

Saei A, Mohammadzadeh M. (2013). "Relations of Iran -Turkey from 2002 to 2012: Remembering the revival of historical competition". *Political Studies*. 5(19): 1-24. https://sanad.iau.ir/Journal/jourm/Article/960326. [in Persian]

Sahraie A. (2025). "Identifying and explaining the main drivers affecting the Yemeni crisis". *Journal of Countries Studies*, 3(3): 613-644. https://doi.org/10.22059/jcountst.2025.388919.1227. [in Persian]

Thies C. (2001). "A social psychological approach to enduring rivalries". *Political Phycology*. 22(4): 693-725. https://www.jstor.org/stable/3792483.

Tomaj ASh. (2021). *Discourse Analysis of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey after the Establishment of the Justice Justice Party*. PhD Thesis for Ph.D. Orientation: Political Science. Faculty of Humanities, Department of Politica, Islamic Azad University Shahrood Branch, Iran. [in Persian]

Towhidian A, Jafari Zad AR, Parazhang AA, Hosnavi R. (2023). "Compilation of future scenarios of Iran-Turkey security relations with scenario wizard method". *Future Studies of the Islamic Revolution*. 3(3): 83-113. https://dorl.net/dor/20.1001.1.27173674.1401.3.3.3.5. [in Persian]

Tugal Ch. (2002). "Islamism in Turkey: Beyond instrument and meaning". *Economy and Society*. 31(1): 85-111. https://sociology.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/faculty/tugal/Islamism_in_Turkey.pdf.

Walker M. (2013). "The revenge of the Shia". *The Wilson Quarterly*. 30(4): 16-20. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40261420.

Yarmohammadian H, Omidi A, Ebrahimi S. (2017). "Scope and horizon of Iran-Turkey relations (2011-2021)". *Quarterly Journal of Political and International Research*. 31(2): 57-86. https://journals.iau.ir/article_594799.html. [in Persian]

Yazdani H, Safavi SY, Motaghi E, Hatahi H, Moradiyan M. (2020). "The factors of divergence and economic convergence affecting the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey". *Strategic Defence Studies*. 18(79): 5-28. doi: 20.1001.1.20084897.1399.18.79.1.7. [in Persian]