

## **COOPERATION OR COMPETITION IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD**

### **Turkish-Iranian relations from the Islamic Revolution to the Gulf war and after**

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**O**n 24-26 June 1992, Turkey hosted the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Summit bringing together leaders of eleven nations, including six former Soviet republics. Ratified on 25 June in Istanbul, the pact includes a market of 400 million people and aims for cooperation in energy, transportation, communication, information and ecology as well as the establishment of a joint investment bank. The following day Teheran radio criticized this as a "paper accord" merely agreeing to distribute Western assistance rather than establishing a mutual cooperation pact. Teheran radio's reaction to the signing of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact (and much else besides) will be explored in more depth below.

Historically, Turco-Iranian relations have always been fragile and delicately balanced. Conflicts within ethnically or religiously divided groups in Iran or Turkey have had a reciprocal bilateral impact. Each country closely monitors domestic and international developments affecting the other. Officially Iran and Turkey are careful not to disrupt their more constructive economic relations. However, this has not disguised friction on issues affecting internal state stability and projection of external regional influence. Turkey has sought effective legal resolution of bilateral disputes. They have not so far resorted to non-amicable methods. When a crisis emerged in the spring of 1989, due to Iran's involvement in Turkish Islamic affairs, bilateral ties took a turn for the worse. Ambassadors were recalled, and Teheran publicly condemned Ankara's decision to ban the veil worn by women at universities. The reciprocal withdrawal of ambassadors was a

deliberate, unfriendly but legal act that had a retaliatory purpose. The tension that deteriorated into a public crisis in 1989 reflected a civilian response, which included street demonstrations by Turkish and Iranian Islamists against government interference in daily Islamic matters.

The incident also reveals how Islamic issues have increased in intensity and produce tension between the Turkish and Iranian governments, between citizens of the two countries and within the levels of administrative authority above them.

This paper aims at demonstrating the complexity of Turco-Iranian relations both in the sociological level, as seen in thought and behaviour of the citizens of both countries (that is a sociological analysis), and at the international level, as represented by the governments in their response to bilateral, multilateral relations and new international developments. Our focus is on the most fundamental developments including the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979, the Gulf crisis and post-Gulf war regional arrangements, and the emergence of both Iran and Turkey as key players in Central Asia because of their linguistic, ethnic, religious, cultural and historical ties with the Turkic republics.

The Iranian Islamic revolution has significant sociological implications for the Muslim population of Turkey. The revolution had a dramatic impact on the nascent Turkish Islamist movement: the Iranian Revolution provided it with a comprehensive blueprint, a political theory, and radical Islamist underpinnings. After this sociological analysis, discussion shifts to developments in Turco-Iranian relations in responses to the Gulf crisis and post-Glasnost changes in Central Asia. Although bilateral relations have often been strained, commercial exchanges between the two countries have thrived, particularly during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war. Despite persisting uneasiness in their relations, Iran and Turkey have also sought forms of economic cooperation, which include neighbouring states.

Not long ago, Turco-Iranian relations were strained by the controversy over Turkish interdiction in its waters of a Cypriot registered ship carrying arms en route to Iran from Bulgaria. After the seizure of the freighter while crossing the Bosphorus Strait, an Istanbul Court ordered confiscation of the vessel and her cargo. During months of legal manoeuvring, the Iranian media recurrently attacked Turkey's secular system and its efforts to expand upon existing cultural ties with the Central Asian Turkic republics.

According to an Iranian diplomat interviewed in Istanbul, Iranian citizens used the Friday call to prayer throughout Iran to criticize Turkey for its action against a Muslim neighbour. The Turkish press reciprocated by criticizing Iran's involvement in international terrorism and its support of Turkey's Kurdish separatists. The *Cape Maleas* ship incident raised many of

the broader and enduring issues and tensions, which this paper will examine in religious, economic, and historical context.

#### **TURKEY AND IRAN AS MODERN STATES : THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The modern states of Turkey and Iran, considered together geographically, form a broad band south of the former Soviet Union extending from southeastern Europe to central Asia. Culturally, they share not only a common religion that is Islam but also a similar historical past. Both are heirs of great Islamic empires, indeed, rival empires; both, in turn, suffered encroachment by the British and Russian empires in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; after defeat and real or threatened dismemberment, both emerged as modern nations in the aftermath of World War I<sup>1</sup>. Leaders in both new nations sought to modernize their countries on the basis of western technology, but their personal backgrounds and the particular national conditions under which they operated led them to adopt different strategies to meet the needs and challenges of twentieth century life, differences which still inform Turkish Iranian relations.

Mustafa Kemal (known as Atatürk), a distinguished military officer and intellectual with a substantial knowledge of western democratic ideas and practices, led the battle to liberate Turkey from the expanding Allied powers. Using the unrivalled authority he gained in the war of liberation, Atatürk was able to implement successful structural, political, social and economic reforms on the basis of his well-known principles of republicanism, nationalism, populism, *etatism* and secularism<sup>2</sup>. Atatürk managed to build an alternative Turkish secular culture, to create a well-rooted national party, and to lay the foundations for modern Turkish industry. By secularising the state, Atatürk revolutionized Turkey's traditional Islamic culture.

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<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century, it was imperative for Britain to prevent any hostile power from gaining a strong position in either the Mediterranean or Iran and thus threatening the British lifeline to India and the Far East. Russia, on the other hand, sought to establish a warm water port on the southern seas. In 1907, the Russians and British resolved their differences in Iran by formally dividing the country into their respective spheres of influence, with a small band of no-man's land between. Similarly, Ottoman Turkey was occupied by the Allies after World War I with the intention of parceling it out among the victors. Cf. Lewis V. Thomas and Richard N. Frye, *The U.S., Iran and Turkey*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1951. Turkey Yearbook 1983. Ankara : Prime Minister Directorate General of Press and Information, 1983. Türk Basınında İran İslam Cumhuriyeti ("The Islamic Republic of Iran in the Turkish Press"). Istanbul: Iranian Consulate General, 1985. Türk-İran Dostluğu ("Turkish-Iranian Friendship"). Istanbul: Türk-İran Dostluk Cemiyeti, 1956.

<sup>2</sup> See Kemal H. Karpat, *Turkey's Politics : The Transition to a Multy-Party System*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959 and Lord (Patrick Balfour) Kinross, *Ataturk. The Birth of a Nation*. London : Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964 for further details on Atatürk's revolution.

Reza Shah, on the other hand, who assumed the Iranian throne in 1925, was a soldier, without education or familiarity with western democratic traditions. Moreover, the Iran he inherited did not constitute a unified large minority and nomadic populations compounded other internal divisions. While Reza Shah did introduced economic, social and political changes, they were designed to suit him personally rather than Iran's situation; they were not based on a comprehensive national ideology, nor were they supported by a political organization or popular will. Instead Reza Shah chose to sustain and legitimise his political power by drawing heavily On the authority of Islam and the traditional local power groups, the clergy and the landed aristocracy. Although Reza Shah was able to subordinate the clergy to the power of the State during his reign, the Iranian people remained intensely devoted to their religious leaders.

An admirer of Atatürk and a close student of his reforms, Reza Shah visited him in Ankara in 1934. This visit led to a set of nine diplomatic agreements between the two countries in 1937<sup>3</sup>. More important, perhaps, was the Saadabad Pact, also signed in 1937 between Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan and Turkey.

Besides pledging friendly relations among the signatories this pact guaranteed that no member nation would manipulate or antagonize ethnic minorities living in other member nations in order to develop conflict between the central governments and the tribal powers. These agreements might have inaugurated an era of close cooperation between Iran and Turkey.

Instead, post-war Turkish-Iranian relations remained formally cordial but practically sterile. In 1952 the two countries founded the Turkish-Iranian Friendship Association to foster mutual understanding. They entered into alliance in the now defunct Baghdad Pact, and they joined CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) in 1959, and RCD (Regional Cooperation for Development) in 1964<sup>4</sup>. But these agreements remained mere military and political marriages of convenience. Under Reza Shah's successor, Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran pursued a course of secularisation and modernization parallel to, but independent of, Turkey's. Mohammad Reza Shah did not only intensify and accelerate the process of secularisation and modernization but also adopted a highly pro-American foreign policy. In the 1950s, Mohammad Reza Shah of Iran and the Turkish prime minister, Adnan Menderes, the leader of the Democrats who held office until 1960, promoted relations with the United States, and both relied on the Western

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<sup>3</sup> Turkey Yearbook 1983, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> RCD was founded in 1964 by Turkey, Iran and Pakistan to promote economic and trade relations among them.

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bloc. The two leaders met in 1956 when Mohammad Reza Shah paid an official visit to Turkey. In the 1960s and 1970s Teheran and Ankara shared similar foreign policies, both gave prime importance to the alliance with the U.S. and Western Europe. When the Shah and the Turkish president Fahri Korutürk met in Ankara in October 1975 they agreed on greater economic and political cooperation between Iran and Turkey fields. Neither expressed the intention to take an anti-Western stance.

Although anti-Western revolutionary religious opposition emerged in 1962 under the leadership of Khomeini in Qum, Reza Shah intensified modernization and cooperation with the U.S. Khomeini, having severely intensified his criticism of the Shah and of his pro American policies, was sent into exile in Turkey, accompanied by agents of the Shah's secret police (November 4, 1964). Khomeini's attacks reached a peak when the Shah granted legal immunity to American personnel for all offences committed on the Iranian soil. He denounced this open violation of Iranian sovereignty and independence. After a brief stay in Ankara, he took up residence in Bursa, where he stayed until October 1965. After leaving Turkey Khomeini proceeded to Najaf, one of the Shi'ite shrines of Iraq, where he spent thirteen years. Radicals under his leadership overthrew the Shah in 1979.

### **THE INTERACTION BETWEEN IRANIAN AND TURKISH ISLAMISTS AND THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION**

#### **The Rise of Radical Islamist Movements in Iran and Turkey in the 1970s.**

Did the Islamic movements in Iran affect the people of Turkey even before the Revolution of 1979 ? According to Khomeini the situation was changing in Turkey (and Iraq), and particularly among the young as a response to political developments in Iran in the late 1970s. When he was interviewed by Hamid Algar on December 29 1978, in Paris, he emphasized the impact of Iran's Islamic movements on the people of Muslim countries including Turkey who were attracted to the Shi'ite tradition of rejecting illegitimate authority. First Khomeini explained why the Islamic movements of Iran reached a climax in 1978 and were transformed into a revolution on the "threshold of victory". He also mentioned the response of Muslims living in neighbouring countries to the uprising in Iran. Khomeini gave a detailed explanation of the events taking place in Iran : "The religious scholars of Qum rose up in protest, and the government sought a confrontation with them. So the Muslim people joined the protest of their leaders and a massacre ensued. These events were followed by commemorative assemblies forty days after the death of the martyrs; these in turn, produced

further martyrs, and further commemorative gatherings"<sup>5</sup>. Later, as a result of this cycle of events, the people gradually lost fear of the police and their inhibitions dissolved, and "they realized they could demonstrate and speak out against the Shah and the government..."<sup>6</sup>. Before finishing his explanation of the events in Iran, Khomeini indicated that the revolutionary uprising would continue until the Shah's regime was destroyed.

Khomeini later discussed the response of Islamic organizations in Arab countries, Pakistan and Turkey to the uprising in Iran. He mentioned the expression of solidarity with the Iranian radicals by individual citizens and groups but the lack support for them from any Muslim government. Khomeini underlined the conflict between the Islamic groups and the people on the one hand, and the public authorities or rulers in the Muslim countries.

On the other hand, while the authorities were afraid of the consequences of the revolutionary uprising in Iran for their own positions, the people were rising up against their non-Islamic systems of government. Khomeini related the rise of Islamic movements in Turkey in the 1970's to the ongoing revolutionary Islamic movements in Iran.

According to Khomeini's words in 1978 : "... Demands for an Islamic State are now being heard in Turkey as well, partly as a result of what is happening in Iran"<sup>7</sup>. In this context, Khomeini's reference was in part general: to the rise of Islamic movements in the 1970's in Turkey - and in part particular - to the clashes between the Shi'ites and the Sunnis in the southern Turkish City of Kahramanmaraş. This antagonism, which was expressed very violently in 1978, resulted from the conflicting political views of these two groups. It is misleading to explain the Kahramanmaraş events in relation to the happenings in Iran though the Turkish Islamic weekly *Tevhid's*<sup>8</sup> analysis provided the background for Khomeini to relate these events to the uprising in Iran. On the other hand it is true that radicals in Turkey, either Islamists or Leftists, were influenced by the ongoing anti-western revolutionary movement in Iran and looked upon it as an exemplary struggle against "Western imperialism" in the late 1970s.

After the Revolution of 1979, Khomeini as a revolutionary and spiritual leader increasingly influenced the Turkish Islamists. Primarily the supporters of the National Salvation Party (led by Necmettin Erbakan) and many Islamic *cemaats* (associations) and *tarikats* (religious orders) hailed the

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<sup>5</sup> Algar Hamid (translator), "Islam and Revolution. The Imam Khomeini" London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, p. 321.

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 321.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 323.

<sup>8</sup> *Tevhid* ("The Unity") (Ankara), N°4, 1978, pp. 13-16.

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Revolution and looked upon it as the victory of Islam over westernisation and secularism. Khomeini inspired and mobilized many Turkish Islamists to undertake political action. His views radicalised their organizations and political discourse.

Muslims in Turkey became aware of the revolutionary function of Islam and developed conviction and self-confidence in their *dava*, the struggle for establishing an Islamic State. A recent survey of 500 Islamist students in Istanbul revealed that Khomeini's religious-political views are taken as a guideline by a significant proportion of them<sup>9</sup>.

The revolutionary stance created by the Iranian Revolution was a watershed in the evolution of the Turkish Islamist movement, which began, in the late 1920s. In its early stages, the Egyptian Islamists including Hasan Al Banna who formed the Muslim Brotherhood Association in 1928, Seyyid Qutb, Muhammed Qutb, Abdulkadir Udah, and Sayyid Havva from Syria and Abu-al-Ala al Mawdudi of Pakistan were the most influential thinkers who provided intellectual inspiration for the Turkish Islamist movement in the early 1950s.

During the early years of the Republic, the circulation of the publications and ideas of Arab thinkers was limited due to the relations with the Middle Eastern countries and secularist measures in Turkey. With the electoral victory of the Democrats in 1950, who took a liberal stance towards religious causes, a number of Islamic associations and *tarikats* mushroomed. Relations between the Arab and Turkish *ulama* were soon established. Some imams, Muftis went to Cairo and Bagdad to study theology<sup>10</sup>. In the 1960s many were introduced to the ideas of Seyyid Qutb. Qutb's major work, *Ma'alim fi-l tariq* (Indications on the Path, 1964) which was translated into Turkish under the title of *Yoldaki Isaretler* (1967) deeply influenced the Islamic sentiments of many young people and provided the Islamists with a new analysis of political phenomena in which all social, economic and cultural factors were viewed in religious terms. It also opened divisions between the "Islamic" and "secular" cultures, and highlighted contradictions between the Muslim East and the Christian West.

Seyyid Qutb, Hasan Al-Banna and Hasan Al-Hudaybi became the supreme guides of the Turkish Islamists. Their religious-political views provided a theory that gave order and direction to the infant Turkish Islamist movement, which had been unorganised and diffuse in the 1950s.

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<sup>9</sup> Dr. Narli has conducted a survey with 500 Islamist university students (Istanbul) to examine the profile and the dynamics of the radical Islamist movement in Turkey. The research project was financed by the Ford Foundation.

<sup>10</sup> F. Bilici, "Islamistes turcs et egyptiens : recherche d'une nouvelle strategie commune", paper presented to the Conference on Modernization and New Forms of Social Mobilization, 8-10 July 1990, Cairo.

In the 1970s, increased pluralism and a highly liberal political environment, which had been created by the 1960 Constitution, unleashed several new ideologies confronting the centralist secular elite who promoted Kemalist reformist ideas. Together with the authoritarian ultra nationalist right and the left, Islam emerged as a political ideology in the 1970s. Islamic causes were promoted by various Islamic associations and tarikats.

Islamists, however, did not have a distinctive identity; nor did they have a comprehensive ideology or well-defined strategy. Though Islam as a political ideology was overtly expressed with the foundation of the National Order Party (January 26, 1970) under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan, Islamicists did not have complete independence from state apparatus, as they largely have today. They needed to forge alliances with the right-wing parties in order to survive and to protect their interests in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. For example, a merger between the Nurcus (the followers of the Light Movement founded by Said Nursi) and the Democratic Party and its successor the Justice Party took place at different times from 1950s onwards. This often compelled the Islamists to compromise with the ruling party, hence with the principles of a secular democratic state. Tarikats' former alliance with the right-wing parties hampered the development of an identity and political ideology independent of the "ruling circles" (*muktedir çevreler*) for a long time.

Tarikats lacked a political fabric, and their activities were mainly confined to worship. This is why the Young radicals of the 1990s are highly critical of tarikat activities. Neither have Islamic associations enjoyed complete independence vis-a-vis the state and its religious institutions, despite the existence of small clandestine radical groups, many of which conducted anti-regime activities in Turkey in the 1970s.

With the Iranian Islamic Revolution, however, the Islamist movement has undergone a change. It has disassociated itself from the political parties, traditional Islamic associations and taken a radical form.

From the very beginning the Turkish Islamists were excited to see that Islam had a revolutionary character and could guide people in religious and political affairs and alter the regimes based on "man-made" laws. Khomeini's emphasis on the revolutionary character of Islam, the guiding role of ulama in all matters instead of solely in religious affairs, and on ulama's independence from the ruling circles, as well as his call for fighting against all the forces of *kufur*, such as the separation of religion from politics, provided a new revolutionary outlook to the Turkish Islamist movement. Ibis profoundly changed the movement's philosophy and direction.

**THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION FOR TURKISH FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND ITS IMPACT ON ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS IN TURKEY**

When Iranian Muslims with the Imam Khomeini at their head overthrew the Shah and his secular, pro-western government to establish a theocratic Islamic Republic, relations with secular, pro-western Turkey were inevitably disturbed. After the fall of the Shah, Khomeini was reluctant to pursue relations with Turkey<sup>11</sup>. Given Turkey's pro-Western stance, he feared that Turkish territory could serve as a stage for Western intervention against the infant Iranian republic. Even in the Western press, rumours circulated in the early 1980's that the Shah's army was deployed and exercising in Eastern Anatolia, awaiting the opportunity to overthrow Khomeini's regime<sup>12</sup>. Similarly, preoccupation with the threat of U.S. intervention led Iran to oppose Turkey's participation in NATO Rapid Deployment Force in the early 1980s.

By the same token, revolutionary Iran seemed to threaten the stability of Turkey, which was itself undergoing an acute, social and political crisis. Many, in Ankara feared the Islamic Revolution might be "exported" to Turkey. Indeed, the Iranian government openly criticized Atatürk and his reforms, maintaining that the secular regime of Turkey was not legitimate because it had not been adopted or supported by the Muslim populace. Rumours circulated -again in the Western press - that Iran was organizing and mobilizing Armenian terrorists to create turmoil and religious revolt in Turkey<sup>13</sup>. Though these incidents never resulted in a diplomatic break between the two countries, their opposing ideologies clearly made Iran and Turkey uneasy neighbours.

Yet if the Islamic Revolution inspired mistrust and fear in official Ankara, it also raised the hopes of many Muslim activists in Turkey. It gave a new model which revolutionized the concept of Islam. In fact, revolutionary-minded Turks-whether Islamist, leftist or ultra-nationalist praised Iran's defiance of the West, and some leftist and ultra nationalist revolutionaries even defected to the Islamist camp. Ayatollah Khomeini's rise to power inspired particular enthusiasm in the National Salvation Party (NSP), an

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<sup>11</sup> However, the Turkish and Pakistani Ministers of Foreign Affairs were the only foreign dignitaries received by Imam Khomeini in 1979 [C. Çandar, "Turco-Iranian Relations", *Middle East Business and Banking*, (June, 1989) 25-30.].

<sup>12</sup> *Yanki* ("Echo"), March 3, 1982, citing an article by Leslie Gelps in *The New York Times* from early February 1982.

<sup>13</sup> *Türk Basınında İran İslam Cumhuriyeti* ("The Islamic Republic of Iran in the Turkish Press"), Istanbul, 1985, citing an article from *Die Welt*, August 18, 1985. Although such reports aroused deep suspicions in Ankara, most Turkish political scientists dismissed them as attempts to undermine Turkish-Iranian relations. See the comments of Prof. Dr. Türkkaya Ataöv in *Milli Gazete* ("The Newspaper"), May 7, 1984.

Islamist party formed in 1970 (under the name of National Order Party) to advocate Islamicizing Turkey's cultural life and political institutions. The leader of the NSP, Erbakan, was extremely outspoken in his support for the new regime in Teheran in 1979. The party was dissolved after the military coup of 1980. Consequently, Islamists were deprived of a party structure. This deprivation and the impact of Khomeini's radical Islamic ideas inspired many Islamists to seek non-parliamentary strategies. Young Islamists rejected party politics, ballots and democracy. Rather they adopted the principles of a new strategy: Islam by force and Islam by "education". In this context education includes the provision of ilm (Islamic knowledge), training in all matters and appealing directly to the individual conscience.

The initial tide of enthusiasm for the Iranian Revolution, however, gradually ebbed as the excesses and radicalism of Teheran's policier became apparent. The Iranian model for an Islamic State continued to lose support as old patterns of conflict reasserted themselves between the predominantly Sunni Turkish Muslims and the predominantly Shi'ite Iranians, conflict which had given rise to protracted wars between the Ottoman and Persian empires in the part. Some of the Islamist groups which had overwhelming supported the Iranian revolution at the beginning became more cautious towards it and urged their followers to calm clown and evaluate future developments. The conflict between those radicals who identify with Iran and their more cautious counterparts divided the Turkish Islamists into two main camps in the early 1980s. Pro-Iranian groups which refused to attend Friday Prayer were labelled *cumasızlar* ("anti-Friday") while the Friday congregations were seen to be the creature of the system, collaborators with the secular state and its institutions.

The question of recognizing the revolutionary Iranian ulama as the highest authority (the question of *beyat*) was the source of conflicting debates among the Islamists. A pro-Iranian militant group, the Hizballahi Muslims, was harshly criticized by the conservative Sunni fundamentalisms (who do not aim to replace the secular state with a system of Sharia) on the grounds that they were the instruments of Teheran's attempt to export Shi'ite revolution to Turkey. As Cakir observed, this group was isolated and lost its former influence on the Islamists in the lote 1980's<sup>14</sup>. On the other hand, other pro-Iranian radical groups which disseminate their views through a number of periodicals called *Tevhid* ("Unity"), *Istiklal-Sehadet* ("Independence"), *Söz* ("The Word"), *Dünya ve Islam* ("The World and Islam"), *Yeryüzü* ("The Earth"), and *Davet* ("The Call", published by the pro-Iranian Nurcus) have viewed the moderate Islamists and traditional pious people as passive, compromising thereby Muslims who were manipulated by the state and even

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<sup>14</sup> Rusen Çakir, *Ayet ve Slogan* ("Verse and Slogan"). Istanbul: Metis Yayinlari.

by the western powers. Therefore the radicals called them to wake up, see the "truth" and discover "true Islam".

In general, the sources of antagonism between pro and anti-Khomeini groups lay in three main areas throughout the 1980s: attending the Friday Prayer; whether party politics is *kufur* or justifiable in Islam; and whether Turkey is *dar-ul-harp* or *dar-ul Islam* (a state of war or a state of Islam). The adversarial nature of the conflict and the disunity it caused upset many Islamists who had already begun a search to cure the patient of the mid-1980's.

To end this disunity, a group of young Islamists under the leadership of Mehmet Metiner published a journal, *Girisim* in 1985. The *Girisim*-group called the Islamists to come to term with rival groups and to open to other non-Islamist political groups. In one of his most influential articles, "Genç Ku~ag'In Misyonu" (The Mission of the Young Generation")<sup>15</sup>, Metiner emphasized the unifying function of Islam and the utility of party politics and free elections in Islamicizing public life and legislation. He underlined the futility of meaningless discussions over the issues of the Friday Prayer and *beyat* to Teheran. Later in his book, *Safakta 10 Gün*<sup>16</sup>, Metiner again discussed the "useless" ideological confrontation between anti and pro-Khomeini groups. The call for mutual respect and dialogue, and the efforts toward re-establishing unity among the Islamists produced fruitful results. As a result, antagonistic relations between Islamist factions largely disappeared in the late 1980s. As Metiner explains, after achieving unity at the communal (*cemaat*) level amidst the various sources of potential fragmentation, *taassup* (chauvinism) and *assabiah* (asserting the primacy of the group against the others). Islamists decided to work together to overcome fundamental challenges such as the banning of the veil, the status of Saint-Sofia, etc. As a consequence, the factions collaborated in a number of protests and petitions against the ban on the Turban (head scarf) in 1989.

Along with the consolidating efforts of the young Islamicists, the Welfare Party (the successor of the National Salvation Party) has become more sensitive to the needs of its young followers and has undertaken the role of bringing together the various Islamist movements under one roof. Though the young radicals criticize the "pragmatic" discourse of the Welfare Party, that is, its promises of an improved economic situation, prosperity and social welfare, and its mass-party appeal rather than a well-defined ideology, they still support the party. They donated personal possessions such as watches gold jewellery and were involved in campaigning before the general election in October 1991.

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<sup>15</sup> *Girisim*, June 1989. pp.32-3.

<sup>16</sup> Mehmet Metiner, *Safakta 10 Gün* ("Ten Days in the Dawn"), Istanbul : Birim Publications.

The conflict between pro and anti-Teheran groups remains unresolved. The radical *Ibda* group harshly criticizes Shi'ite radicalism and Islamists who are loyal to Teheran. The *Ibda* aims to organize radical Muslims independent of Iran. In their publication, *Taraf* ("The Side", February 1992), *Ibda* accused the pro-Iranian groups of being instruments of the Shi'ite expansionist aims.

Since the early 1990's, the mainstream Islamic forces in Turkey have been supporting Sunni fundamentalism promoted by Saudi Arabia as a mean of offsetting Shi'ite radicalism. Increasing numbers of small, clandestine, radical Islamist groups – a small minority within the whole Islamic movement – maintained their support for the Iranian revolution and advocated a revolutionary strategy in order to replace the secular regime with an Islamic state.

Though a revolution along Iranian lines is highly unlikely in Turkey, Teheran continues to influence Islamist movements there both through the West and Islam are broadcast in Turkey continuously through two major Turkish language programmes on the state-controlled Iranian radio. In addition, the Iranian government broadcasts several other programmes on Islam, politics and society, which can be received in Eastern Turkey. Iranian radio even increased its criticism of Turkey in 1990, and the issue of anti-Turkish programmes on Iranian radio was discussed by the former Turkish Foreign Minister, Ali Bozer, on his official visit to Teheran in July 1990<sup>17</sup>.

Neither has Iran hesitated to use its diplomatic presence in Turkey to support Islamic causes. The Iranian ambassador participated in an anti-Israeli rally (1980), and other Iranian diplomats encouraged Turkish imams to protest against Salman Rushdie (1989). Iranian Cultural Centres in several Turkish cities are notorious as centers of Islamic activity, and Iranian officials working there as well as in the Iranian consulates in Istanbul, Trabzon and Erzurum have distributed a tremendous number of Khomeini's works translated into Turkish, along with tapes of fundamentalist sermons by Turkish mullahs being trained in Iran<sup>18</sup>. Through this propaganda Iran

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<sup>17</sup> *Hürriyet* ("Republic"), June 25, 1990.

<sup>18</sup> A. Taheri, *Holy war : Inside the World of Islamic Terrorism*. Bethesda, Maryland: Adler and Adler, 1987, p. 202. Besides training a number of Turkish *imams* in Iran, Teheran sent many agents and missionaries in the disguise of political refugees to spread revolutionary ideas in Turkey (Zengin Ismail, *Iran Devrini ve Ortadoguya Etkileri*, (The Iranian Revolution and its Impact on the Middle East). Istanbul: Milliyet Publications, p. 157). Moreover many young Turkish males were trained in Qum not only to provide them with Islamic knowledge but also military skills, as *Hürriyet* reported (May 30, 1989). A significant number of Iranian agents operated in Turkey in the late 1980s according to the press reports. *As Gunaydin* ["Goodmorning"], February 6, 1989] reported, many of them were militants of Islami Cihat organization. Also see *Tercüman* (August 27, 1987) on the agents of Khomeini operating in Turkey. Today there are 500,000 Iranians including students, political refugees and others in

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casts doubts on the Muslim nature of Turkey as a whole and has created grave strain in their diplomatic relations.

A major example of Iran's influence on and support of Islamic movements in Turkey was the so-called Turban issue, which upset Turkish-Iranian relations in March 1989. When Turkey's Constitutional Court decided to revoke a parliamentary bill, which permitted female students to wear the Turban at university, thousands of young women in Iranian style black chadors marched in protest in Istanbul, Ankara and several other cities. In Teheran Iranian women demonstrated in support of their Turkish sisters, and Iranian leaders not only criticized the Turkish court's decision but also asked that the ban on the turban be lifted<sup>19</sup>. Tension between the two countries reached such a point that Ankara recalled its ambassador in Teheran for consultation. Iran retaliated immediately, and the Iranian Ambassador left Turkey. After a short period of suspense, however, relations were normalized again, and in December 1989 the new Iranian ambassador submitted his credential to President Ozal.

Although the Turkish government considers Iran's support for Islamic movements in Turkey interference in its domestic affairs, Iran is acting in accordance with its constitution. Article 3 of the Iranian constitution stipulates that the government of Iran must adopt "a foreign policy based upon Islamic criteria, brotherly commitments to all Muslims and unsparing protection for the Under-privileged and deprived peoples of the world". In legal theory and in the opinion of Iranian people, the Turkish female students protesting against the ban on the turban were persecuted Muslims, deprived of the right to observe Islamic customs. In so far as the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken upon itself the protection of all Muslims, the Iranian people had a religious duty to interfere in the Turban issue and to rescue their Muslim sisters from "oppression".

By its example and its support, the Iranian Islamic Republic has injected militancy into Islamic movements in Turkey. Iran is seen as the best model for revolutionary social and political change and the creation of an Islamic state in Turkey. Besides serving as a model for radical strategies, the Iranian regime has provided moral support, training and propaganda to promote radicalism among the more extreme Islamist groups in Turkey. The Iranian revolution, has therefore given Islamic movements in Turkey far greater force than they had during the preceding three decades. The radical teachings of Imam Khomeini shaped the fundamental modus operandi of the political revolution desired by the Turkish Islamists.

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Turkey. Most of them live in Istanbul and deal with commerce and trade. Aksaray, Lâleli and Ataköy are the most favored residential areas in Istanbul.

<sup>19</sup> *Milliyet*, March 14-21, 1989.

## THE PARADOXICAL BLOSSOMING OF TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND TURKEY

Given Iran's active interference in the sensitive area of Islamic politics in the secular Turkish state, one might have expected Turkey to discourage other contacts with Iran. Instead, the Islamic Revolution in Iran marks a watershed in the development of Turkish-Iranian relations. Despite the ideological tension between them, the two countries have vastly increased their economic and political co-operation since the fall of the Shah. The underlying reason for this apparent paradox lies in the relative political isolation of both Iran and Turkey in the early 1980s.

Under the Shah, Iran had maintained good relations with Western Europe, Israel and several Arab nations. Confident in its oil revenues and certain of its strategic importance to the United States, Iran did not need to cultivate economic or political ties with Turkey<sup>20</sup>. But following the Islamic Revolution, Iran severed its relations with the United States, Western Europe and other Muslim nations. Iran had so few economic outlets left that during the Iran-Iraq war its trade with Turkey became indispensable. As for Turkey, the 1980 military takeover had strained its relations with the West. Thus, while Turkey followed the Iran-Iraq war with the utmost interest and exercised great care to preserve its neutrality, it too was forced to look towards Iran as a trading partner. Their mutual isolation became the basis of a not always untroubled partnership<sup>21</sup>.

The Turkish-Iranian economic rapprochement began with a joint trade protocol signed in 1981, which led to a series of other economic initiatives. In February 1982 the then deputy prime minister, Turgut Özal, led a delegation of 40 Turkish businessmen to Teheran in search of better bilateral trade relations. In March both countries signed a \$1.8 billion barter agreement under which Turkey could exchange food for 60,000-100,000 barrels per day of Iranian oil. By 1983 Turkey had become Iran's largest trading partner<sup>22</sup>. Finally, in January 1985, they concluded another trade protocol, which would increase the volume of trade to 3 billion dollars. Turkish exports to Iran increased from less than 88 million dollars in 1979

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<sup>20</sup> In particular, the Shah had rejected Turkey's proposal for the construction of natural gas pipe-lines; instead he signed an agreement with the U.S.S.R., which was not honored after the Revolution [Türk Basınında İran İslam Cumhuriyeti ("The Islamic Republic of Iran in the Turkish Press"), pp. 91 and 125].

<sup>21</sup> See Yalçın Doğan, "Siyasal İzolasyon Ekonomik Bağ Yaratıyor" ("Political Isolation Creates Political Ties"), *Cumhuriyet*, April 23, 1983.

<sup>22</sup> A.F. Borovali, "Turkey and the Persian Gulf. A Regional Power in Strategic Perspective", *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, 2/1 (Spring 1990) 49-58.

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to more than 446 million dollars in the first three quarters of 1989 and now account for a third of Turkey's total exports to the Middle East<sup>23</sup>.

In addition to improving their trade relations, Iran and Turkey also began other programmes to reinforce mutual confidence and promote understanding and cooperation between them. Along with the trade protocol of 1985, they initiated a cultural exchange program. The Iranian government revived the idea of the old RCD (Regional Cooperation for Development), and in 1985 Turkey, Iran and Pakistan founded the ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) to promote joint projects in industry, commerce, telecommunications, banking, tourism, and the development of oil and natural gas, resources. These efforts bore fruit in the form of the 1986 draft agreement for the construction of an oil pipeline between Khuzestan and Iskenderun and a trade protocol to regulate import-export activities between the Iranian province of Azerbaijan and the Turkish province of Agri<sup>24</sup>.

Though their trade has declined since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, Iran continues to look to Turkey as an important economic partner. In March 1990 Turkish Prime Minister Akbulut led a delegation of forty government officials and sixty-two businessmen to Teheran to discuss Iran's post-war reconstruction efforts. During this visit, he promised Iran 300 million dollars in trade credits, plus 400 million dollars for Turkish contractors, to aid Iranian reconstruction. Then, in June 1990, at a meeting of the Council of Ministers of ECO, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayeti proposed the joint construction of a pipeline network that would carry natural gas through Pakistan and Turkey<sup>25</sup>. All three-member countries of ECO have also considered setting up a joint investment bank.

Iran may need up to 400 billion dollars to repair its war damaged economy and to improve living conditions for its people<sup>26</sup>. Iran cannot relieve its acute economic depression without foreign help, yet potential creditors from Western Europe (except France and Germany in 1991-2) and Japan are withholding any extension of credits as they wait to see what sort of policies the country will eventually follow. In this context, Turkish economic aid and cooperation remains and will remain vital for postKhomeini Iran.

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<sup>23</sup> In the first three quarters of 1989 Turkey's exports to the Middle East totaled 1.49 billion dollars [Monthly Economic Figures : November 1989. Istanbul : The Istanbul Chamber of Commerce, 1989, p. 36, Table 3].

<sup>24</sup> Borovali, 1990.

<sup>25</sup> *Turkish Daily News*, June 21, 1990. Iran ranks second after the Soviet Union in terms of natural gas reserves, and the construction of a natural gas pipeline from Iran through Turkish territory has long been a desideratum of Turkish development policy. Rejected by the Shah, the proposal was revived in 1982 during a visit to Teheran by Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Turgut Özal.

<sup>26</sup> *The International Herald Tribune*, January 11, 1989.

## **THE GULF CRISIS**

In the months following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Turkey played an active, almost leading role in the international campaign against Iraq. But in so doing Turkey abandoned a long-standing policy of neutrality and non-intervention in the complex quarrels of the Middle East. Turkey's eastern neighbours including Syria, Iraq and Iran suspect that it secretly covets the oil resources of northern Iraq, and all the states of the region, including Turkey, fear that agitation among the ethnic minorities of the border areas could pose a threat to their internal stability.

Turkey has long sought to cultivate good relations with all its eastern neighbours in the Middle East and to avoid being drawn into their disputes. During the Iran-Iraq war, for example, Ankara attempted to apply a policy of active neutrality between the disputants. Despite some pressure from Teheran, Turkey maintained good relations with Iraq throughout the war. In fact, Turkey's trade relations with Iraq in the 1980s followed a trajectory similar to that of its relations with Iran<sup>27</sup>. If, after the war, Iraq's attitude towards Turkey changed and Saddam Hussein led a chorus of Arab protest against the Turkish plan to divert water from the Euphrates to the Southeast Anatolian Project (G.A.P), Turkey still hoped to improve relations with the Arab states and to defuse their opposition by wide-ranging cooperation projects such as the "peace pipeline" to carry water from the Seyhan and Ceyhan rivers to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

But in the case of Iraq's use of force against Kuwait, Turkey took a firm pro-western stance. In a major foreign policy shift, Turkey abandoned its neutrality, enforced the UN sanctions against Iraq, and allowed the Americans to use the Incirlik Air Base outside of Adana. In justifying this decision, Ankara referred to the United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, which called on all countries to provide an "appropriate" support to the countries using force against Iraq in order to liberate Kuwait. By allowing the Americans to use its bases "more comprehensively" Turkey was merely

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<sup>27</sup> Less than a year into the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq and Turkey signed an economic cooperation protocol. In October 1983, they agreed to build a pipeline to carry liquid petroleum gas from Iraq to Mediterranean [*Washington Post*, October 21, 1983]. In August 1984, the two countries signed a protocol for the construction of a second crude oil pipeline through Turkey [Middle East Economic Survey, August 13, 1984]. By mid-1987 the second crude pipeline had been put into operation, and Iraq was able to export oil regularly through the Kirkuk-Iskenderun pipeline. In 1987 and 1988 Turkey was also able to open a 2.5 million dollar credit line for Iraq [E. Manisali, "Turkey and the Gulf War: New Developments in Iraq and the Middle East and Turkey in the Aftermath of the War", *Middle East Business and Banking*, (March 1991)].

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upholding the Security Council's resolution. Ankara also attempted to play down its involvement in the war, emphasizing that Turkey had not sent troops to the Gulf itself.

Nevertheless, Turkey's active role in the Gulf war provoked fear and distrust in Iran, Iraq and Syria and strained its relations with Syria and Iran. Their dissatisfaction and suspicion emerged in the columns of newspapers published in Iran and the Arab countries, which expressed fears of Turkey's "II expansionist" designs on the territories of Mosul and Kirkuk in northern Iraq, with their oilfields and their Turkish ethnic minority<sup>28</sup>. Both Syria and Iran were concerned that Turkey would lay claim to these areas and upset the balance of power in the region.

Allied Turkey and neutral Iran monitored one another intently, but politely, during the Gulf Crisis. In December 1990, President Turgut Özal met his Iranian counterpart, Hashemi Rafsanjani to discuss the issue. Both leaders agreed that Saddam Hussein should be left with no option but to relinquish Kuwait<sup>29</sup>. In January, after a presidential level telephone conversation between Ankara and Teheran, President Rafsanjani sent his special envoy Ali Reza Moayyeri to Ankara to voice Iranian concern over the Mosul and Kirkuk issue. Ankara and Teheran agreed in talks that the boundaries of Iraq must remain intact and that there should be no independent Kurdistan<sup>30</sup>. Then again in early February, Ankara sent Foreign Minister Ahmet Kurtcepe Alptemoçin to Teheran to allay Iranian fears about Turkey's long-term ambitions on Mosul and Kirkuk and to explain Turkey's decision to allow the U.S to use Incirlik airbase to launch attacks on Iraq<sup>31</sup>. But Iran was clearly still worried over a possible Turkish move into Iraq. In order to reassure its neighbours, Ankara could only repeat that it did not covet any other country's territory.

At the same time, Iran was criticizing Ankara's pro-western stance in the crisis. Most dramatically, a member of the Iranian Parliament, Ayatollah Sadik Halhani, called on the Turkish people and other Muslims to join in a *jihād* (holy war) against the United States and its allies on the grounds that

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<sup>28</sup> For information on Iranian concern over Turkey's involvement in the U. S. offensive air operation from the Incirlik airbase, see "Incirlik Base Fully Involved in Attacks," *Kayhan International*, January 21, 1991; "US launches fresh raids on Iraq from Turkish base," *Tehran Times*, January 21, 1991; and "Another Air Raid vs. Iraq Launched From Turkey," *Kayhan International*, January 22, 1991.

<sup>29</sup> *Turkey Confidential*, December 1990, p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> As early as mid-December, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati had said at the end of a two-day official visit to Turkey that "Iran and Turkey shared common views on the territorial integrity of Iraq, favored a peaceful solution to the crisis and demanded restoration of Kuwait's independence" [*Kayhan International*, December 15, 1990].

<sup>31</sup> See "Turkish Foreign Minister in Teheran," *Kayhan International*, February 7, 1991.

the Gulf war was directed against Islam<sup>32</sup>. However, when the Iranian president Rafsanjani announced his peace initiative in early February and offered to mediate between Iraq and the United States, the Turkish president Turgut Özal pledged support for the Iranian proposal so long as it remained within the framework of the U.N Security Council resolutions calling for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait<sup>33</sup>.

Since the liberation of Kuwait, Iran and Turkey have sought closer political ties with one another. Each sees the other as a major political ally against the new Arabocentric power structure and security system emerging in the Gulf region. When, in early March 1992, Egypt, Syria and six Gulf countries met in Damascus to set up a new security system in the region, they excluded Iran even though it had openly expressed its willingness to be included. Following this meeting, Iranian Deputy President Hasan Habibi visited Ankara to discuss the implications of the new security system in the region.

During his three-day visit, Hasan Habibi and his delegation showed an enthusiastic willingness to realize joint economic projects (particularly the natural gas and oil pipeline project), which had long been on the agenda but ignored by Iranian officialdom. In the talks Teheran and Ankara agreed to speed up these projects and to forge closer ties with each other<sup>34</sup>.

Thus Turkey and Iran find themselves allies of necessity and neither country fully trusts the other. The principal source of friction between them lies in the fact that each of them has manipulated the ethnic minorities (e.g. Kurds) of the border regions against the central government of the others. In the wake of the Gulf war, these ethnic minorities posed a threat to state internal stability. Turkish President Turgut Özal has adopted a fresh and welcome, unconventional approach to the Kurdish issue, but his exchanges with Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Iraq based Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, only aggravated Iran's insecurity about the Kurdish activist operating in the north.

In order to create country-pressure, Iran opened its border to let the Iranian Kurds join their Iraqi counterparts fighting against Saddam. Now Turkey feared that Iran's support for the anti-Baghdad Shi'ite revolt would jeopardize Iraqi territorial integrity and perhaps create long term problems with its own Shi'ite population<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> See "Iran'in Cihat Ça'grisi" ("Iran's call for a Jihad"), *Milliyet* ("Nationality"), January 21, 1991.

<sup>33</sup> See "Özal Pledges Support for Rafsanjani's Peace Initiative," *Kayhan International*, February 7, 1991.

<sup>34</sup> See "Iran ile zorunlu işbirliği" ("Compulsory cooperation with Iran"), *Güneş* ("The Sun"), March 11, 1991 ; and "Iran rahatsız" (Iran is restless), *Güneş* ("The Sun"), March 12, 1991.

<sup>35</sup> J. Brown, *Delicately Poised Allies*. London: Brassey's Defense Publishers Limited, 1990.

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While these important post-war developments were taking place, including the displacement of Iraqi Kurdish and Shi'ites who fled their villages and sought refuge in Turkey and Iran, President Rafsanjani visited Turkey on April 29-May 2 (1991), as the official guest of President Özal. The two presidents discussed regional security and the status of displaced Iraqis, and bilateral relations. They also exchanged views on economic subjects covering oil, natural gas, communications and trade. The Iranian and Turkish delegations reached a consensus that continuous and determined cooperation at the ECO level would produce concrete and mutual benefits. The meeting took place in a spirit of friendship and cooperation in Ankara. This visit of Iranian President Rafsanjani, the first at this level from Iran to Turkey in the last 16 years, has presented the opportunity for new and strengthened cooperation and consequently is a major step in Turco-Iranian relations.

### **IRAN AND TURKEY AS COMPETING MODELS IN CENTRAL ASIA**

Though the visit of Rafsanjani heralded a new and active era in Turco-Iranian relations, there was no lessening of competition between Iran and Turkey to increase their influence over the people of the Turkic republics. Iran, a new model of the Islamic state and Turkey, of the representative secular state with a market economy, are the two principal neighbouring actors in post-Glasnot Central Asia. Both countries carry on an intensive rivalry in the Commonwealth of Independent States and Azerbaijan. Teheran and Ankara have geared their foreign policy to playing a regional role.

For Iran it is important to increase its regional effectiveness with non-Arabic but Muslim neighbours. In recent years this has been precluded by the cooperation and security arrangements uniting the anti-Iraq Coalition. For Turkey, popular opinion has overwhelmingly supported state action to strengthen ties with the Asian republics, which share a common Turkic heritage. Turkey has taken steps to revitalise these cultural ties and expand its economic cooperation with these republics. This had led to included the establishment of an investment and bank, extension of Turkish TV broadcast into Central Asia, and promotion of the Latin alphabet. Moreover, Turkey has participated in the Western relief effort to the Turkic republics and sponsored their membership in the United Nations, CSCE, and the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (Haktanir, 1992). Iran has made a late start in developing its relations with Soviet Union. To compensate, Iran launched diplomatic initiatives, including recognition of the new 11 republics in late December 1991. First Azerbaijan with a Turkish but Shi'ite population and Tadjikistan, with Sunnis speaking various Persian dialects were accorded special attention by Teheran. Iran offered Tadjikistan textbooks printed in Persian and sent linguistic experts there. With Turkmenistan, adjacent to

Iran, a number of agreements were concluded for establishing transportation and telecommunication links and for cooperation in economic fields (Haktanir, 1992). Iran also offered to mediate in the dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia on the Nagorno-Karabagh issue (see below). Secondly, Teheran introduced the idea of cooperation among the five Caspian Sea littoral states (Haktanir, 1992). The proposal served to counter the expansion of Turkey's effectiveness in the Central Asia and the Balkans through the Black Sea Cooperation Agreement which excluded Iran and were finalized at the Istanbul Summit of June 25, 1992.

As well as its involvement in diplomatic exchanges and conventions with the Turkic republics, Iran has, according to a not unbiased anti-regime critic, actively exported radical Islamist ideas and supported pro-Iranian groups in the republics. Speaking to the press in February 1992 in Washington, Muhammed Mukaddessin from *Mujaheed-i Khalq* said that Iran had sent 1300 imams to the Turkic republics including Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizistan, and Tajikistan and spent US \$ 500m to launch an intensive campaign to spread revolutionary Islamism. Teheran even created a new ministry to deal with affairs of special importance in the Turkic republic. Mukaddessin claimed Iran's ultimate aim may be to establish satellite Islamic governments in these republics and thereby emerge as the leading regional power. Iran is likely to intensify its efforts to exert its influence over the Islamic groups and the youth of the Turkic republics in order to overshadow the influence of Turkish secularism in the Caucasus. Turkey's linguistic and cultural ties and enhanced relations with the Turkic republics reduce the probability of theocratic regimes being established there under the influence of Iran.

Teheran and Ankara have each sought to minimize and even eliminate the other's influence and function in the region. Both have sought rules in mediating the Karabagh issue through bilateral diplomatic channels. This issue has been disputed between the two neighbouring republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia for four years. This has led to friction. For instance, the Turkish press reported that Iran supplied arms to Armenia and supported it against Azerbaijan. Similarly, the Iranian press accused Turkey of being expansionist in Azerbaijan. Mr. Karimi from the *Tehran Times* (May 28, 1992) stated that Turkey is promoting a new wave of nationalistic aspirations to "realize the legend of pan-Turkism rather than trying to establish peace in the region". Though Ankara officially denies that pan-Turkism is part of its policy, Teheran is unconvinced. Iran itself is cautious about promotion of nationalism not only because nationalism contradicts the pan-Islamist approach Iran represents but due to its anxiety that nationalist

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sentiments aroused among its Azeri and Turkmen population could instigate instability along Iran's Northern border.

Iran's meddling in Turkish internal affairs reportedly includes provision of camps and house, logistic and material support, and access across the Turkish-Iranian borders to the guerrilla PKK, the outlawed Kurdish Worker's Party in Turkey. A Turkish journalist, Mr. Ugur Mumcu, published the location and names of PKK camps in Iran: Ziveh, Kazhan, Selvanat, Dizah, Kasyan, Seklebat, Khalaj, Esmehav, Seykhan, and Sino. Iranian officials deny this and have criticized the Turkish government, particularly the Prime Minister Demirel for his statements that Iran supports "Kurdish terrorists" operating in Turkey. The Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati even invited Turkey to send a team to tour the Iranian side of the border to confirm that there are no PKK camps there. But the Turkish authorities did not receive any firm invitation after Velayati's offer in February 1992. Teheran denies any connection with the PKK. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Muhammed Besharati said during a meeting with his Turkish counterpart Özdem Sanberk in Teheran "we consider Turkey's security as if it were our security", reported in the *Turkish Daily News* (April 24, 1992). According to an Iranian diplomat interviewed in Istanbul (1992), Iran does not support the PKK and opposes the establishment of a separate Kurdish state. Iran recognizes that a wider conflict arising from the Kurdish issue in the area could have repercussion on its own stability and security.

Officially, each country regards its ethnic Kurdish population as an integral part of its united, indivisible state. In reality, however, Kurdish agitation for increased recognition of ethnic cultural identity and even some degree of political autonomy has proved a source of anxiety to authorities in Ankara and Teheran. The ethnic separatism has been fuelling rampant nationalist sentiments in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and Central Asia together with the early June 1992 Kurdish elections in Northern Iraq are examples which are not lost on the Kurds residing in Turkey and Iran. Although each country has attempted to present the development of separatist tendencies within its own borders, Iranian and Turkish competition in international matters has encouraged Iran to meddle in Turkey's Kurdish affairs and prevented collaboration on matters of internal state security. The competition and rivalry between Iran and Turkey was further complicated because of the seizure of the ship *Cape Maleas* (a Greek-Cypriot ship) and its cargo by the Turkish authorities in the Bosphorus Strait on October 22, 1991. The Istanbul State Security Court ruled to confiscate the vessel and its cargo of firearms and ammunition, and sentenced its captain to five years in prison. Teheran launched a number of diplomatic initiatives to secure the release of the ship. An envoy, Ali Reza Moayeri, was sent to Ankara to

urge President Turgut Özal to "use his personal influence for the release of the ship". Iran demanded the "immediate release of the cargo together with material and related damages (IRNA - Iranian National Agency - reported on March 15, 1992). Though Mr. Özal was quoted as having said to Iranians in February that he supported the release of the ship, the President and Turkish officials told Teheran that the issue was in the hands of independent courts and left no room for government intervention. The ship crisis soured fragile ties with Iran and led to the postponement of Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel's visit to Teheran in February 1992. To lessen the strain between Teheran and Ankara, Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Sanberk visited Teheran for two days in late March 1992. Before leaving Teheran, Mr. Sanberk emphasized that "two friendly countries" should not allow minor disputes to damage their relations<sup>36</sup>.

Where diplomatic means and high level contacts failed, Iran's legal efforts succeeded: the Turkish Court of Appeals reversed the decision of the State Security Court and released the ship on June 3, 1992, *Milliyet* (June 4, 1992) reported.

#### **TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS : WHERE WILL THEY GO FROM HERE?**

What is the future of Turkish-Iranian relations? Despite ideological differences, conflicting worries over the ethnic minorities of the border regions and the recent competition for increased influence in the Turkic republics, both countries have an interest in improving their trade relations. In the midst of the Gulf war, the Turco-Iranian Joint Economic Committee (JEC) met in Ankara to study how to improve relations and how to increase the volume of trade between Iran and Turkey, which had dropped by 50 per cent over the previous few years<sup>37</sup>. In early February 1992 ECO foreign ministers met in Ankara. Besides discussing broadening links between member states (Iran, Turkey and Pakistan), ECO foreign ministers welcomed membership of the Muslim-populated republics of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Tajikistan and Christian Armenia have also asked to join the economic organization according to the IRNA's (Iranian National Agency)

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<sup>36</sup> *Milliyet*, February 27, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> In a memorandum, Turkish State Minister Mehmet Keçeciler and Iranian Heavy Industry Minister Mohammad Hadi Nejad Hosseinian agreed to carry out joint feasibility studies on the possibility of pumping Iranian natural gas to Europe across Turkish territory. The memorandum also called for a passenger train line between Ankara and Teheran, wider cooperation in energy transmission, and accelerated negotiations on encouraging mutual investment and preventing double taxation. The two countries hope to raise their volume of trade from 848 million dollars in January-October 1990 to two billion dollars a year. See "Trade relations with Iran develop," *Turkish Daily News*, February 21, 1991.

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report in the *Kayhan International* (February 13, 1992). Teheran ECO summit was to follow this ECO meeting. The summit was held on February 16-17, 1992. President Özal and delegations from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were present. The aim of Teheran, as explained by Alaeddin Boroujerdi (Iran's deputy foreign minister for Asia and the Pacific), is to increase ECO's economic and humanitarian assistance to the new states and consolidate mutual ties. Ankara attached great importance to the first ECO summit, a major step in economic cooperation. For Ankara, cooperation with Iran in commerce, transportation, natural gas and oil, tourism and in other sectors is vital to Turkey's economic growth. For Teheran, Turkish economic assistance may also be helpful in rebuilding Iran's war-damaged economy.

In the political realm, too, there are good reasons for Turkey and Iran to continue their cooperation. Middle East expert C. Çandar has pointed out that "having smooth relations with Iran would give Turkey a necessary breathing space and area to manoeuvre on the diplomatic field"<sup>38</sup>. And though Iran questions Turkey's pro-western foreign policy and its commitment to NATO, it still] needs Turkey as a diplomatic partner. In October 1989, Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Mohammad Besharati suggested that new bridges could be built with the Bush administration, and broad segments of the Iranian people seem to support President Rafsanjani's view that the time has come for Iran to normalize its ties with the rest of the world<sup>39</sup>. In the rapprochement of Iran with the West, Turkey is obviously in a position to play an important intermediary role.

Turkey maintains an enduring, unshakable interest in a strong bilateral relationship with Iran. This relationship is rooted in history, geopolitical complementarity, shared cultural values, and the ability to work together for long term interests. Strong Turkish-Iranian relations promote stability in the region. After the Islamic Revolution, cooperation even with an unreliable Iran seemed better than none at all; in the wake of the Gulf war and post-war developments, it seems more important than ever. Yet if Iran and Turkey's relationship is not to founder on the problem of ethnic and religious minorities, they must abandon old confrontations and respond to geopolitical realities in a spirit of alliance. The underlying philosophy of Turkish foreign policy is the establishment of a partnership based on equality and mutual benefit and enhancing stability and moderation in the region. Further developments in ECO will have positive and stabilising effects not only on the future of the Middle East, but also of Asia, which

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<sup>38</sup> C. Çandar, "Turco-Iranian Relations", *Middle East Business and Banking*, (June, 1989) 25-30.

<sup>39</sup> See *The International Herald Tribune*, October 11, 1989.

includes the troublesome Caucasia region. If the ideological tension and the competition between Iran and Turkey is minimized, ECO will be more successful in enhancing peace and cooperation in the region.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The Iranian reaction to Turkey's role in sponsoring and organizing new regional initiatives typifies decades of competition and rivalry between these two prominent regional powers and previous empires. Secularist, pluralist, and Muslim Turkey has taken a Western-oriented path abandoned by Iran following its Islamic revolution of 1979-80. Where Iran rejected the United States and sponsored a proliferation of radical Islamic groups beyond its borders, Turkey has remained committed to participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Although no account can fail to emphasize the developmental divergence of these two countries, there have also been elemental convergences based on historical, religious, and regional imperatives. Both countries experienced political crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and both continue to experience ethnic-based internal cultural challenge and regional political instabilities. The foreign policies of Ankara and Teheran were both forged in an historic mould of defensive anti-sovietism, both countries have resisted Iraqi territorial thrusts, and both governments have to cope with urban and rural terrorist insurgents. There are, moreover, important reciprocities in the complex relationship between Turkey and Iran. Turkey's own Islamists have adopted Iran as their model for imposing social and political reform on the Turkish state. While Teheran and Ankara have mutual economic interest in increasing bilateral trade relations, officials in both capitals make little effort to conceal that rivalry rather than accord will characterize the search for trade and influence in the emergent Caucasian and Central Asian republics.