

## Turkey's and Iran's Policy towards Central Asian Countries

Diana Chiş-Manolache  
"Carol I" National Defence University, Romania  
[dianamanolache88@yahoo.com](mailto:dianamanolache88@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

*Due to its geographical location, Central Asia is a "gateway" strategically important to the Eurasian continent. Tendency of maintaining an intraregional collaboration is an important asset in neutralizing the negative effects of events in Central Asia, especially on the danger of including the states in the region in the sphere of influence of great powers, which have regional or global ambitions. Overcoming the isolation geography and the attempt to turn the region into a transit corridor for interstate and intercivilizational communication should become the main priority of all states in Central Asia.*

*The aim of the paper is to present, in a concise manner, some of the main elements that have created instability in the Central Asian area, focusing on two very strong countries: Turkey and Iran. In fact, the present work presents the policies of Iran and Turkey towards countries of Central Asia, fact which inevitably has led to conflicts between them, sometimes hidden other times for all to see, the more so as they are part of alliances that are directly opposite.*

**Key words:** economic security, geopolitics, resources.

**J.E.L. classification:** F02

### 1. Introduction

Security in Central Asia represents a subject upon which many analysts have covered, it is territory where external powers can engage in political games for power. The events following September 11 have created a new reality, as the importance of that region grew. The picture drawn up back then has changed the ways in which political games were played, while, the decisions of those games remained mostly the same.

The instability in that region is emphasized by the existence of two very powerful neighboring countries, Turkey and Iran. The two, hold cultural, economic and religious interests in the region, while at the same time being two relatively vulnerable states as concerns interior and geopolitical elements.

Throughout time, Turkey and Iran have represented political pilons that were extremely important in the region, strategic players that were highly influential in the region.

### 2. Theoretical background

The research and the presentation of the events were carried out on the basis of an extensive documentation that includes official documents (agreements, conventions, treaties and diplomatic correspondence, studies and articles), regardless of where they were published (Romania, Russia, Turkey), which highlight the various aspects of the political-diplomatic and economic relations of the Central Asian states.

### 3. Research methodology

The approach to some aspects about the economic policy of Turkey and Iran towards countries of Central Asia is the result of an empirical documentary analysis conducted by studying and analyzing existing documents in the current period, regarding the economic security, the economic position of Iran and Turkey regarding Central Asia.

The analysis of events was completed by reports, statements and memoirs of Azerbaijani and foreign politicians who had leadership positions, thus influencing the conduct of events, or even simple information of various officials or specialists, taken from official websites of the European Union; the TRACECA project; Government of Turkey; the Global Security Organization; Energy Information Management Organization; International Monetary Fund; The Government of Uzbekistan; the Azeri diaspora in the USA.

### 4. Findings

#### 4.1. Iran and Central Asia

Ever since the existence of the Soviet Union, the Russians hungered for the southern part of Iran, and after the dissolution of the Soviet Union the attention shifted towards the north of the country. And thus, a new conflict had begun for those lands. At the same time Iran wanted to transmit to the North a piece of its energy. Now, however, they want to transport some of their energy to southern Iran and from there direct it to world's consumer markets. During the existence of the Soviet Union, Iran was always concerned about the ideological intervention and destructive influence of the communists. In those days, ideology was a main lever for action, and now this role has been passed on to the economy. During the Soviet era, Iran opposed its old and powerful neighbor. But now this old and strong neighbor has turned into some new neighbors. And finally, during the Soviet Union, Iran was considered a solid base for enemies of the U.R.S.S., that is, America and Israel. But now, some of the newly created republics have become the basis of these two countries and pursue a strategy opposed to the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Kullai, 1999, p. 10).

In other words, a new situation has arisen, which of course contains many favorable moments and serious threats. Due to the favorable geopolitical situation, Iran has an exceptional place for the creation of large roles in the region in different domains and themes. In order to turn this potential advantage into reality, fair political decisions must be made. It seems, however, that so far these privileges have encountered great obstacles and problems. The recently signed Baku-Tbilisi-Djeihan contract between Azerbaijan, Turkey and the United States is an eloquent example of this. This contract weakens Iran's basic principle, which is to guarantee peace and development of trade in the region. As a result, Iran loses its historical role, and the region becomes a sphere of rivalry between different forces, and even Iran itself.

After the split of the Soviet Union, a security vacuum formed in the Central Asian and Caucasus region, which could be filled with the influence of three main rivals of the USA, namely China, Russia and Iran; Encouraging competition and clashes in northern Iran may weaken Iran's strategic location and the geographical, economic concentration of US rivals in the Persian Gulf. Given that in the next century the forces of states will consist of the economy, information and communication, domination of Central Asian resources and markets may become an effect factor; Due to economic weakness and fear against these military forces, the countries of the Central Asian and Caucasus regions do not agree to create and develop their independent and well-armed armies. They chose the policy of "alliance" with the big non-regional forces to save their defense expenses. Tajikistan, which is a long way from Europe, is a member of the European Cooperation, while Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have signed contracts with the United States. (Elahi Kullai, 1999, p. 10). US leaders maintain that under current conditions, NATO's move to the east will fill the region's security vacuum and leave Iran, China and Russia to trade with America. The republics mentioned will surely and voluntarily want such cooperation, for example, Azerbaijan, invited America to move its military base Ingerlik to the island of Apsheron. These situations contributed to America taking the first step in taming the Islamic Republic of Iran. With all its strategic privileges, Russia maintains the closest relations with Iran. Russia, like Iran, considers the Caspian Sea to be a closed sea, where the laws of free trade by sea are unacceptable.

In addition, Russia is very concerned that some republics, such as Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, are aiming for the United States. Russia believes that the evolution of NATO and US activity is causing damage to it. From a historical point of view, the policy of the Russians towards Iran has never been close until now, they remember the contents of the "Holestai", "Turkmenchai" and "Tilisi" agreements, as well as the 1907 contract, the 1915 contract and the creation of disorder in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan after World War II. Apart from this not at all solid reputation, in the present material world, national interests and relative advantages are the main determining factors. (Xuşang, 1999, p. 7)

Iran is in a political and geographical position that is very favorable, because this country sits in a region where over 70% of the world's strategic energy is. The climatic diversity, the large amount of high and mean quality work force, means of communication, policies of collaboration, avoiding mixings, high and powerful diplomacy and many others, surely make the balance of power tilt in Iran's favor. All these potential possibilities can be efficient only when they are turned into a factor of national power. Turning potential possibilities into efficient elements of acting, requires political wisdom and exceptional technology. But sadly, in Iran, the state is the main power driving basic economic decisions and is the main investor in the country. And the private sector remains a weak and authority segment. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Iran's state economy was occupied mostly with rebuilding after destruction caused by the imposed war. For such a needy economy, only the sums gained from selling oil could be enough. The five-year plan is to attract \$ 28 billion in foreign capital. The unstable and oscillating income obtained from the sale of crude oil represents 80% of the foreign exchange income of the state. (Bahgat, 1998, p. 22). These high potential risks are very dangerous for foreign investment in the region. On the one hand, in the Iranian economy the main source of income is the sale of cheap crude oil, and on the other hand, it is necessary that the income obtained from the sale of crude oil in the south be spent on investments of a similar position in the north of the country. These difficulties hinder Iran's qualitative growth in Central Asia. For example, the state's foreign exchange earnings from crude oil exports fell by about \$ 11 billion in 1998. Despite these fluctuations, the state is obliged to repay the loans received. In addition, the emergence of large-scale problems, such as: the employment crisis (jobs) (800 thousand new professions are needed for a year), unemployment and inefficient employment and, in general, the increase in the requirements of young generation (65% of the entire population of the country) make the country face great difficulties in terms of security. Of course, in these awkward and unstable situations, there are serious restrictions on participating in major world auctions. Despite the uncomfortable conditions, Iran's economic efforts continue to move very slowly in the region.

#### **4.2. Turkey and Central Asia**

In the Central Asian regional policy, the Turkish factor is a phenomenon that made headlines in the early 1990s. The breakdown of the USSR has produced considerable changes in global and regional geopolitics. Ambitions affect the most important regions of Eurasia: the Balkans, the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Far and Near East, the Caucasus, Crimea, the Volga Region, part of the Urals, southern Siberia, Central Asia and Sinitian. Now, however, the Turkish ambitions in the 1990s do not seem so justified. However, this factor has not disappeared, the respective direction in Turkish foreign policy is not closed and this factor must be taken seriously.

The initial premise for pursuing such a policy became the assumption of the Turkish leadership that with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the weakening of Russia came a unique chance to restore in new forms its political, economic, cultural influence within the borders of the former Osman Empire, and to create a strategic inter-Turkish unification. There are six sovereign states in the world (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), where the Turkish ethnic groups are the bearers of the state organization, eight national republics and autonomies in Russia (Bashkoostan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Saha-Yarutia, Ciuvasia), Tatarstan, Chuvashia), Ukraine (Crimea) and China (Sinitian-Uyghur Autonomous Region), as well as an unrecognized Turkish republic - Northern Cyprus. Originally, close to the Turkish peoples, the representatives of the Altai language family have a sovereign state

(Mongolia), four autonomies in Russia (Altai, Buritia, Táva, Hakasia) and one in China (Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region). (Hidayatov, 2007, p. 15)

Turkey's policy is aimed at creating the institutional basis for global Turkish integration, the formation of a Turkish economic and general cultural space, capable of providing a new market for the Turkish economy, and becoming a basis for a geopolitical blow to Greece, Russia, Iran and China. To such initiatives of Turkey, we can also add ideas of creating regional micro-blocs such as "Caucasian House", "Islamic Confederation of the Caucasus", "Chechen-Dagestan Islamic Confederation", "General Eurasian Caucasian Market"; Georgia-Ukraine-Azerbaijan-Moldova Regional Economic Union (GUAM); Black Sea Economic Collaboration (BSEC); Central Asian Union (ACU) of the Central Asian Republics and Kazakhstan. Turkey feels a strong support from the US strategic ally. Turkish analysts believe that all Euro-Asian regional and continental security circles (including Southeast Europe, the Balkans, the Black Sea, the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, Middle Asia, the Caucasus and Central Asia) overlap and intersect in the place where Turkey is located.

In a very near future, the "Western and Eastern" opposition will have a tendency to worsen in the Balkans, in the Middle East and in the Caucasus – taking into consideration NATO's plan to further into east, the great political games being played around the Caspian Sea, the communications war for control of the former socialist and soviet space and the geostrategic modifications in southern countries of the former USSR and Eastern Europe.

Washington has shown its concern not that much with the routes of oil and gas from the shores of the Caspian Sea, that is with the idea of strategic communication in the region, of the elimination from the Caspian projects of Iran and Russia, and the weakening of its role in the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The USA as world leader, is moving its sights towards the Orient and working hard to advance into Eurasia. And in this endeavor, they will need an ally such as Turkey, because the geopolitical strategy of the capital Ankara, an Ankara that is pro-west – the Balkans and the Orient, are most part of Eurasia.

Washington is trying to use the Balkan war and the ambitions of Turkey and Eurasia as a counterbalance to a united and strong Europe, as an attempt to preserve and strengthen NATO not only as a simple military-political bloc, but also as a single reformed security structure, called upon to ensure that the United States has the opportunity to exert political and military influence over Europe. The Balkans have become an original training ground for international political action for problem solving, similar to those in both Russia and the CIS.

Ankara assesses the current economic situation in Russia from positions of short- and long-term interests. In the short-term plan, Ankara is interested in obtaining from Russia certain financial aid expressed in the purchase of real estate, shares of companies known to be profitable, the granting loans to companies and firms trading with Turkey, to obtain from Moscow some tangible concessions in regional policy and, above all, in terms of presence in the Crimea, Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as in terms of geo-economic projects of trans-communications. (Dosimov, 2007, p. 26)

In the long run, Turkey sees Russia as more of an economically developed country - a source of raw materials and a market for its production. Turkey would like to reach some political agreements, which would ensure a more favorable regime in Russia and throughout the post-Soviet space.

For now, Turkey's resources - even with US support - are not enough to lead games of this magnitude. It would seem that this was only possible in the early 1990s, when the situation in Central Asian countries after the crash of the U.R.S.S. was particularly difficult and attracting their leaders to its side could only be achieved through promises of very modest loans and investments. Now the situation has changed. Which, however, does not eliminate the need to oppose Turkey's activity in the region, which seems undesirable for Russia.

## 5. Conclusions

The heightened fragmentation of Central Asia, amplified by the intervention of the great powers, led Zbigniew Brzezinski, an American specialist in international relations and national security adviser, to call it the "Eurasian Balkans" (an area, therefore, marked by a power vacuum,

ethnic mosaic, instability and the intervention of neighboring great powers. Brzezinski includes in this description and the Caucasus). The importance of the region is given by its natural resources, mainly oil, natural gas and mineral resources, along with its strategic position, being at the intersection of powers with interests in the area - Russia, China, Iran, Turkey. Another important aspect is the inaccessibility of Central Asia from the sea, which makes difficult the intervention or presence of the USA, the state that dominates the seas and oceans, but which is extremely difficult to counterbalance, in the Eurasian zone, Moscow's or China's power.

More recent events seem to indicate a growing interest in Central Asia from two former empires with a historical presence in this region: Turkey and Iran. The first one is during a reorientation in foreign policy towards Asia following the failed coup attempt in Ankara and the repression that followed. Iran will become increasingly influential in the area amid the collapse of its neighbors Afghanistan and Iraq following US intervention, on the other hand, following the recent lifting of international sanctions on Tehran - following the nuclear deal with the major powers. Also, India, could be a major player in the future, but strained relations with Pakistan are blocking its route to Central Asia.

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