

# The Complex Dynamics of Turkish-Iranian Relations in the Changing Middle East: A Closer Look

Turkish-Iranian relations have always been a significant component of Middle Eastern affairs. The geopolitical landscape in the region has witnessed significant changes over the years, with shifting alliances and rivalries. As the Middle East continues to evolve, it is essential to delve into the complexities surrounding the relationship between Turkey and Iran.

## The Historical Background of Turkish-Iranian Relations

The historical ties between Turkey and Iran can be traced back centuries. The two nations have shared cultural, economic, and political interactions that have shaped their current relationship. The legacy of the Ottoman and Safavid empires plays a crucial role in understanding the dynamics between the two countries.

Throughout history, Turkey and Iran have faced both cooperation and conflict, often resulting from differing regional aspirations and ideological differences. The commonality of being major regional powers in the heart of the Middle East, however, has always ensured that their relationship remains significant.



Turkish-Iranian Relations  
in a Changing Middle East

F. Stephen Larrabee, Aliреза Nader



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**East** by F. Stephen Larrabee (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4 out of 5

Language : English

File size : 586 KB

Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled

Print length : 58 pages

Lending : Enabled



## **Turkish and Iranian Foreign Policies: A Divergence**

In recent decades, Turkish and Iranian foreign policies have diverged due to their individual strategic objectives and differing regional perspectives. Turkey, under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, has sought to establish itself as a regional power and a mediator between conflicting parties. The Turkish government has often pursued an independent foreign policy, which has sometimes put it at odds with Iran.

On the other hand, Iran, under the regime of the Islamic Republic, has focused on projecting its influence in the region by supporting proxy groups and pursuing an assertive foreign policy. Iran's support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, its involvement in the Syrian civil war, and its relations with various factions in Iraq have often created tensions between Iran and Turkey.

## **Economic Interdependencies: A Balancing Act**

Despite their political differences, Turkey and Iran maintain important economic ties that help alleviate potential conflicts and foster cooperation. Both countries have significant trade relations, and due to their close geographical proximity, their economies are intertwined in various sectors such as energy, transportation, and construction.

These economic interdependencies highlight the need for a delicate balancing act between cooperation and competition. For example, while both countries aim to utilize their natural gas resources to gain a competitive edge in the region, they also understand the importance of maintaining stable energy flows, as disruptions could negatively impact their economies.

## **The Kurdish Question: A Thorn in Turkish-Iranian Relations**

The Kurdish issue has long been a source of contention between Turkey and Iran. Both countries have sizable Kurdish populations that have historical and cultural ties that transcend national borders. The Kurdish struggle for self-determination and the fear of separatism pose challenges to the stability and territorial integrity of both Turkey and Iran.

Despite this common concern, however, Turkey and Iran pursue different approaches to dealing with their respective Kurdish populations. Turkey has historically been engaged in a conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) while Iran has sought to suppress separatist Kurdish movements. These differences often strain the relationship between the two countries, as they accuse each other of harboring Kurdish armed groups.

## **Syria: A Test of Turkish-Iranian Relations**

The Syrian civil war has been a significant test for Turkish-Iranian relations. While both countries initially supported the removal of Bashar al-Assad, they have taken opposing sides during the conflict. Turkey has been a key backer of rebel groups seeking to overthrow the Assad regime, while Iran has remained one of Assad's staunchest allies.

This divergence has led to several incidents of indirect confrontation and proxy battles. The competition for influence over the future of Syria has strained Turkish-Iranian relations, as each country strives to secure its interests and shape the outcome of the conflict according to its own preferences.

The complexities surrounding Turkish-Iranian relations in the changing Middle East are evident. As the region continues to experience significant shifts and

transformations, understanding the dynamics between these two pivotal states becomes increasingly crucial.

Despite their differences, both Turkey and Iran recognize the importance of engaging with each other and maintaining a level of cooperation in various areas. Managing their conflicts and effectively navigating the challenges in the region will require a delicate balancing act and an understanding of the multifaceted issues that define their relationship.

Ultimately, the future of Turkish-Iranian relations will depend on their ability to adapt to the evolving geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and find sustainable solutions to their differences while preserving their shared interests.



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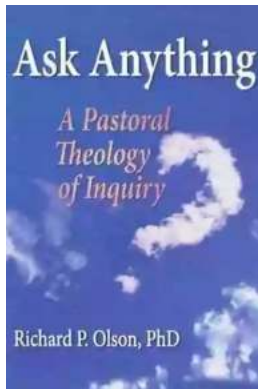
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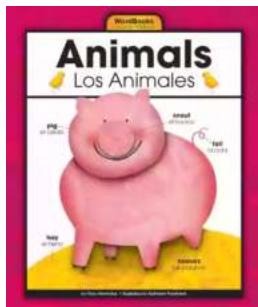
Turkey and Iran tend to be rivals rather than close partners, despite sharing certain economic and security interests. For instance, Turkey supports the opposition in Syria, while Iran supports the regime. Turkey is further concerned about a possible nuclear arms race in the Middle East. U.S. and Turkish interests

in the region closely overlap, but the United States should not expect Turkey to follow its policy toward Iran unconditionally.



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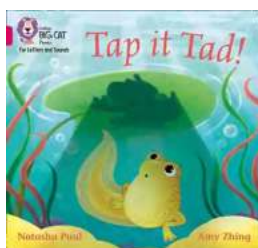
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