

## **The Comparative Examination of Iran and Turkey's Foreign Policy in South Caucasus with Emphasis on Azerbaijan and Armenia**

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### **Abstract**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, vacuum of power emerged in the South Caucasus. This matter has sparked trans-regional and regional powers competition. The newly established Republics create challenges and opportunities for Iran and Turkey. The result of this situation is the competition between Tehran and Ankara in the region. This topic is highly important in regional equations because of common border between the two republics with the Iran-Turkey. Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey lost the strategic importance of the cold war period after the 1991. However, in the post-Cold War geopolitical changes, Iran and Turkey configured as the bridge land that link the important regions of the world. However, the perception of Iran and Turkey regional policy can be more understandable with comparative method.

In this article, we have attempted to answer these questions; what is the most important aspect of competition between Iran and Turkey in the South Caucasus? And how is the orientation of Iran and Turkey foreign policy in the region? We discuss the origin of this competition

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in the three dimensions; political-security, economical, and cultural aspects. Iran has regional approach to the South Caucasus. But Turkey performs its policies in the South Caucasus through trans-regional approach and cooperates with the West. We try to examine the above hypothesis by descriptive- analytical method.

On the surface, the competition is going on between Ankara and Tehran. But both of these countries have aspiration in global and regional levels. Although in South Caucasus subsystem they automatically stand at the special alliance and formulate indirect competition. Thus, Turkey stands at the West axis and Iran stand at the Russia axis. This indirect competition analysis is by critical geopolitics framework. Unlike the old geopolitics approach, critical geopolitics believes that international politics has not been created exclusively by Nation-State. This attitude considers geopolitics as a discourse. Critical geopolitics unlike the dreadful geopolitics of the Past Centuries tries to reveal the reality beyond the ideology, fanaticism and capitalism. Critical geopolitics is a starting point to provide a different form of geopolitics. Caucasus issues have security nature for Iran. Along the same vein the Republic of Azerbaijan is the center of dispute between Iran and Turkey in the South Caucasus. Separatist idea and military cooperation with Israel and Turkey lead to more concerns of Iran. On the other hand, Armenia as part of the North-South axis is placed in Russian-Iranian triangle. Russia, Iran and Armenia triangle tries to prevent the Azerbaijan penetration as a west's pressure leverage, and to reduce the Turkey influence on the region and also constrain the West's presence on the Caspian Sea.

Therefore, culture is one of the aspects of South Caucasus issues. But culture has duplex function. In one hand, it can cause integration and on the other hand the divergence. In Iran-Azerbaijan Cultural relations, difference factors are more than cooperative factors. Turkey and Armenia have low level of cultural relations because of ethnic

differences and political conflicts. Statistics show that economic relations in South Caucasus are affected by political and security issues. Despite the existence of shared border between Armenia and Turkey the volume of imports and exports is much lower than Turkey's trade with republic of Azerbaijan. It is important to point out that the economic relations of Iran and Armenia is much more than Iran-Azerbaijan relations. According to the critical approach in the international relations, foreign policy of the states has hidden this dimension. Turkey's regional policy is closer to Iran and west program in the south Caucasus.

Ankara by the influence of America in the region not only benefited from economic advantages, it also performs its cultural policies as a function of economic power. The relations of South Caucasus countries are affected by political and security issues in all aspects. In fulfilling the regional interests, Turkey has been more successful than Iran. Position of Iran and Turkey in the South Caucasus has not been formed on the basis of their real abilities. From the perspective of critical geopolitics, many regional orders have not been formed by the willingness of nations, as it was created by the great powers. But the possibility of changing the status quo, the formation of a relationship based on shared values and enjoyment is more equitable from the economic benefits.

**Keywords:** critical geopolitics, foreign policy, regional competition, south Caucasus, Vacuum of power.