

CENTRAL ASIA IN PRESENT-DAY TURKISH-IRANIAN RELATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the special features, trends, and dynamics of Iranian-Turkish relations in Central Asia (CA) in anticipation of removal of the sanctions from Iran and transformation of the entire international relations system. It analyzes the specifics of Turkey's current Central Asian approaches and identifies the key external factors that are influencing the development of its relations with the region's countries from the outside.

The author examines the new aspects of Ankara's Central Asian strategy from this viewpoint, as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) role in it. The author also stresses the importance of what she considers to be the main factors: Euro-Atlantic (the U.S. and EU) and Eurasian (Russia, China).

The article closes by noting that the increasing pragmatism and rationalism in the present approaches of Turkey and Iran is allowing them to establish balanced and re-

strained cooperation with the CA countries, keeping in mind their common historical-cultural and spiritual heritage, as well as the prospects for potentially mutually advantageous partnership within the framework of the planned New Silk Road energy transportation corridors.

In so doing, Iran or Turkey gaining a stronger position in the current system of relations will depend not only on resolving the current Iranian-American and other interstate problems, but also on the efficiency of their regional strategies and the degree to which the CA countries' interests are observed.

KEYWORDS: *Iran, Turkey, Central Asia, international relations, geopolitics, interest, balance.*

Introduction

The interaction between the IRI¹ and Turkey, which essentially implies a struggle between two competing regional development models, is playing an important role in the geopolitical environment of present-day Central Asia. Both states are among the largest representatives of the Islamic world and have much in common with the CA states from the geographic, historical-cultural, and religious viewpoint.

Turkey is a secular state that adheres to Sunnism and considers itself an “ideal model” for Central Asia. However, Shi‘ite theocratic Iran has older and stronger historical ties with the CA region dating back to the time of the Achaemenid Empire.

Turkey and Iran’s awareness of their common historical and civilizational roots, as well as the increase in pragmatism and rationalism in the regional policy of both countries in recent years have led to a decrease in the conflict potential in their relations and, moreover, to a certain rapprochement between them. This trend is demonstrated, for example, by the statements of IRI President Hassan Rouhani regarding the need for Muslims to be a united people, consistently pursue a policy of non-violence, fight terrorists and extremists, and eradicate Islamophobia.

Interest in the trends and main vectors of Iranian-Turkish relations is generated by the transformations going on in the world and the impact of these countries on the main contours forming the new geopolitical order in CA.

Historical Prerequisites

Despite the “correct” statements periodically declared by the IRI and secular Turkey, relations between them are not developing unequivocally.

In the 1990s, they competed intensely for influence in CA. This rivalry was based on the U.S.’s anti-Iranian strategy, which was striving to make Turkey a vehicle of its policy in the region.² As we know, it was implemented through the U.S.-sponsored main Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil export pipeline

¹ Hereafter—Iran, the IRI, or the Islamic Republic.

² For more details, see: G. Yuldasheva, “Irano-amerkanskie otnosheniia na sovremennom etape i ikh vozdeistvie na geopoliticheskuiu situatsiiu v Tsentral’noi Azii,” Fan, Tashkent, 2006, pp. 116-127.

project that takes into account Central Asia's need to diversify its transport-communication possibilities and meet Turkey's energy consumption growth.³

The IRI, which sees itself as a kind of gateway to the world markets and one of the main oil and gas routes to CA, could not help but resist this strategy; this continued until the beginning of the U.S.-led anti-terrorist campaign.

The global anti-terrorist campaign that started in 2001 began revision of Iranian-Turkish relations and gradual rapprochement of Ankara's and Tehran's positions. There were several reasons for this,⁴ among which the following can be singled out:

- the significant difference in the positions of the CA countries and Turkey (particularly the non-acceptance of most CA countries of pan-Turkism and the ideas of Fethullah Gülen);
- Turkey's incapacity to render financial, economic, and political assistance to the CA region;
- Ankara's inefficient Afghan strategy;
- the competition between Turkey and Russia over energy routes and influence in the CA region;
- problems in relations between Ankara and the EU;
- the crisis in American-Turkish relations that came to a head in the second half of the 2000s.

Turkey's striving to retain a mutually acceptable balance of relations with the Islamic world in the global anti-terrorist struggle and its vulnerability in the face of religious extremism and radicalism are forcing this country's government to reassess its previous political priorities. Positive dynamics in developing its cooperation with the major oil-producing countries of the Middle East, primarily the IRI, which is an influential member of the OIC, are very important for Turkey's economic interests.

Meanwhile, "the battle of models"⁵ is gradually giving way to sober political and economic calculations. Both Turkey and Iran are slowly but surely coming to the understanding that they are not rivals, but rather complementary allies in the Caucasus and CA. Both countries are oriented toward soft Islam, which they see as a way to facilitate cooperation both with the EU and with the secular CA states.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the policy of the then Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, who declared "zero problems" with neighboring countries, including the states of Central Asia, and the initiative put forward by former Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdoğan on creating a political union of Turkic-speaking states.⁶

In approximately 2011, Turkey started becoming more involved in Middle Eastern problems, and in 2012, it openly joined the military conflict in Syria. In addition, despite the disagreements between the U.S. and Turkey, they have retained their partner relations in Central Asia. All of this cannot help but introduce an element of tension into Iranian-Turkish relations.

However, it should be noted that prerequisites are also being created for reducing the level of unspoken Iranian-Turkish competition in CA. One of them was the victory sustained at the presiden-

³ See: Z. Chotoev, "The Turkish Factor in the Evolution of the Central Asian Republics," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (20), 2003, p. 77.

⁴ See: G. Yuldasheva, "Turkey's New Foreign Policy Landmarks and Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (49), 2008, pp. 51-57.

⁵ For more on this, see: Kh. Kasemi, "Turtsiia i Kavkaz: opaseniia za regionalnuiu bezopasnost," *Amu Darya* (Tehran), No. 15, Fall-Winter 2004, pp. 116-131.

⁶ See: B. Yinanç, "Gül to Revive Relations with Central Asia," 19 November, 2007, available at [www.turkishdailynews.com.tr], 19 November, 2007.

tial election held in Turkey on 28 August, 2007 by the candidate from the ruling pro-Islam Party of Justice and Development.

The contours of the new Turkish strategy in CA are coming into ever sharper focus. On the one hand, it is clearly oriented toward further consolidation of partnership with the North Atlantic Alliance and developing multifaceted cooperation with Russia, while on the other, it wishes to strengthen Turkey's status in the Islamic world, which also entails developing relations with the IRI, something the West does not properly understand. For example, Turkey is experiencing significant pressure from the U.S. and EU in issues relating to its energy partnership with the IRI.

Turkey's foreign policy is focused mainly on raising the country's global and regional status by completing its accession to the EU and playing a decisive role in the Euro-Atlantic community as a transit and cultural-civilizational bridge between the East and West.

Turkey's long-term strategy is oriented toward becoming a major player that ensures the energy security of the European countries and diversifying sources of hydrocarbon deliveries to the EU. In this respect, the country is placing particular significance on uniting the entire Caucasus and Central Asia into a single energy transportation system with access to Europe through its territory.

In the context of economic globalization, its unique geographic location could make Turkey a major terminal and energy bridge between the East and West.

New Trends in Turkey's Central Asian Approaches

In recent years, Turkish society has been actively discussing the country's development paths. These discussions are generated by the inefficiency of the country's Middle East strategy, on the one hand, and by the ongoing tension between Russia and Ukraine, on the other. The main disputes revolve around which development path Turkish society will choose—religious, ethnoreligious, nonconformist,⁷ or secular, and how this will influence the country's foreign political preferences. In so doing, influential experts are talking in favor of secular development and believe that the country's priorities should be multidimensional and pragmatic. They should also keep in mind the need to integrate the country into the global management process in the 21st century.⁸

From this viewpoint, Ankara is more focusing its attention on the CA region, which it sees as a means for achieving its long-term geopolitical goals. Thus, it is actively putting forward new initiatives aimed at unifying the Turkic-speaking world, within the framework of which contacts are becoming more frequent at the highest level between the leaders and representatives of the business circles of the CA countries and Turkey. Turkey's geographic proximity and openness to the CA states are helping to strengthen its economic presence in the region.

It is also presumed that Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan occupy a special place in Turkey's Central Asian plans.

For example, Ankara is interested in Turkmenistan in terms of advancing the New Silk Road, the southern route of which is to pass through the territory of the Caspian Sea. To this end, Turkish companies are participating in building infrastructure at the port of Turkmenbashi (\$2 billion).⁹ Over

⁷ That is, belonging to a certain faith.

⁸ See: O. Sanberk, "The Need to Redefine Strategic Priorities," available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3900/the-need-to-redefine-strategic-priorities.html>], 10 August, 2014.

⁹ See: N. Contessi, "Is Turkmenistan the Next Central Asian Tiger?" 15 July, 2014, available at [<http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/is-turkmenistan-the-next-central-asian-tiger/>], 10 August, 2014.

the past three years, goods turnover between these countries has increased 1.5-fold and in 2013 reached \$3.6 billion.¹⁰

Kazakhstan's importance is determined by Turkey's potential integration with the Eurasian region. The bilateral trade volume between Turkey and Kazakhstan has reached \$3 billion and is expected to rise to \$10 billion in the future.¹¹

As for Uzbekistan, which is the largest post-Soviet CA state in terms of population, the success of Ankara's entire regional strategy essentially depends of fortuitous cooperation with it.

On 10 and 12 July, 2014, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu paid an official visit to Uzbekistan. This was the most significant event in the last decade in terms of consolidating relations between the countries. Despite several problems, Turkey is one of Uzbekistan's five largest foreign trade partners. In 2013, goods turnover between the two countries reached \$1.3 billion, showing an increase of 10.5% compared to the previous year.¹²

In addition to its economic partnership, Turkey continues to develop military-technical cooperation (including via NATO) and interaction regarding issues of security and the peaceful reconstruction of Afghanistan with the CA countries.

At the same time, Turkey is encountering serious risks and challenges in CA that are complicating a further increase in its influence in the region. This is primarily related to Iran's geopolitical strivings.

- First, Iran is located much closer to CA than Turkey and shares common historical, ethno-cultural, and linguistic roots with the region's countries, which has a significant impact on their foreign policy preferences. For example, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are not inclined to support any pan-Turkic formations.
- Second, Uzbekistan is extremely wary of Turkey's activation in the CA region. The reason for this is the negative cooperation experience of the two countries in the education sphere and Turkey's previous image of a refuge for the Uzbek opposition. This wariness increased even more when the Party of Justice and Development and Gülen Movement broke off relations at the end of 2013.
- Third, Turkey does not have enough economic and military potential to render significant aid to the CA countries in order to implement and protect large vitally important projects aimed at building a transport-transit system capable of giving them access to the world markets.
- And finally, fourth, Turkey must "comprehensively analyze the new Great Game and define its strategic goals in correspondence with it"¹³ in CA.

On 9-10 June, 2014, IRI President Hassan Rouhani visited Turkey. This can be regarded as a significant event in the relations between the two countries. On the whole, Turkey's relations with Iran are entering a new phase generated by a whole series of international events—deterioration of the Middle East situation (Syria, Iraq, and Palestine), the beginning of talks on Iran's nuclear file, the

¹⁰ See: V. Mirzekhanov, "Vospriiatie Rossiei politiki Turtsii v Tsentral'noi Azii i perspektivy rossiisko-turetskogo sotrudnichestva v regione," 30 April, 2014, available at [<http://histrf.ru/ru/uchenim/blogi/post-310>], 10 August, 2014.

¹¹ See: "Recep Erdoğan: Tsentral'naia Azia iavliaetsia strategicheskoi osiu turetskoi vneshnei politiki," Bnews. kz, available at [<http://www.azan.kz/article/show/id/216.html>], 10 August, 2014.

¹² See: Z.S. Saipov, "Strained Thaw between Tashkent and Ankara," The Jamestown Foundation, 6 August, 2014, available at [http://www.jamestown.org/regions/centralasia/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=42720&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=53&cHash=47a013974bc0120a28d9eb4c29ee10ad#.U-MhbeN_sbA], 10 August, 2014.

¹³ Ç. Erhan, "Turtsiia v igre za Tsentral'niuu Aziiu," available at [<http://www.turkishnews.com/ru/content/2013/05/29>], 10 August, 2014.

upcoming withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, and the Ukrainian crisis, bringing with it opposition between Russia and the West.

In this respect, Turkey is beginning to increasingly recognize Iran's importance both in overcoming the differences in CA and in regulating security and economic development issues in the vast region of Central and South Asia and the Middle East.

Some experts are pointing to the incompatibility of pan-Turkic ideology and Iranian-Turkish partnership in CA, as well as the potentially mutually advantageous cooperation between the two countries within the framework of the Great Silk Road routes being planned.

Thus, the current stage in Iranian-Turkish relations is based on rational and pragmatic considerations that take into account the dialectics of the existing competition and cooperation on the international arena. Experts think that both countries need to build a model of relations under which cooperation would be superior to competition, while taking into account national interests would guarantee Turkey's status as a "central country."¹⁴

Attempts to build such a model were reflected in the increase in goods turnover between Iran and Turkey; in 2013, it topped \$8 billion (in the energy sphere alone).¹⁵ Tehran and Ankara are planning to bring the volume of reciprocal trade up to \$30 billion by 2015 and create free economic zones in the future.

The Euro-Atlantic Factor

The depth and level of Iranian-Turkish partnership in CA largely depend on the global strategies of the U.S. and EU. Therefore, Turkey needs to focus attention on ensuring efficient interaction between the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian vectors of its foreign policy. For the above-mentioned long-term geostrategic and economic reasons, both of these vectors are vitally important for the country's successful development. However, at this stage, a rather difficult situation is developing in the Euro-Atlantic vector that could have an indirect impact on Iranian-Turkish relations in CA.

Possible removal of the sanctions from Iran means it is highly likely that American policy will abruptly turn its attention toward this country, causing a potential decrease in Turkey's role in the CA region in the long term.

In spite of the resistance from the domestic opposition, the U.S. is resolved not to back down in this question. Evidence of this is the secret meeting at the highest level between U.S. and Iranian representatives¹⁶ held on 8 August, 2014 in Geneva.

In addition to gradual unfreezing of blocked Iranian assets, some other sanctions are being temporarily removed from Tehran,¹⁷ and it is understandable why—the dynamically and confidently developing Middle Eastern actor means far too much to Washington. It is crystal clear that Turkey's lack of necessary resources as it struggles with its domestic political and economic crisis and the

¹⁴ E. Ersoy, "Turkey-Iran Relations: What Should Turkey Do?" 24 July, 2014, available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3897/turkey-iran-relations-what-should-turkey-do.html>], 10 August, 2014.

¹⁵ See: O. Gafarli, "Pervye prezidentskie vybory v istorii Turtsii i usloviia pobedy Erdogana," 6 August, 2014, available at [<http://www.foreignpolicy.ru/analyses/pervye-prezidentskie-vybory-v-istorii-turtsii-i-usloviya-pobedy-erdogana/>], 10 August, 2014.

¹⁶ See: "Peregovory mezhdru SShA i Iranom po iadernoi programme Tegerana startovali v Zheneve," ITAR-TASS, 7 August, 2014, available at [<http://itar-tass.com/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1366243>], 8 August, 2014.

¹⁷ See: "SShA priostanovili deistvie riada sanktsii v otnoshenii Irana," 2 August, 2014, available at [<http://itar-tass.com/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1356939>], 8 August, 2014.

weakness of its levers of influence on CA could shift the U.S.'s preferences toward Iran. If this happens, the main task would be to "launch Iran onto the European market as the main oil and gas supplier."¹⁸

On the other hand, keeping in mind the ambiguous nature of Iranian-American relations, it is very appropriate to presume that the U.S.-EU could "upstage" everything and place the stakes on secular Turkey.

It is obvious that despite Turkey's revision of ways to implement its strategy in CA, the country's geopolitical plans and tasks remain largely the same, which is helping to retain its friendly relations with the global superpower.

The U.S., in turn, has essentially stopped putting pressure on Ankara's Iranian initiatives. This is explained by the compatibility between Iranian-Turkish partnership and the Washington-sponsored New Silk Road project.

Turkey's greater significance for the U.S. is also related to the increase in Islamic extremism in the Middle East (Iraq and Syria), where Washington's cooperation with Tehran has thus far been unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, it is becoming ever clearer that the EU is tending toward revising its policy in favor of Iran and Russia.

The American expert community¹⁹ believes that cautious management of the Turkey-EU-Russia-Iran axis might help the U.S. to achieve its goals in the Middle East and Eurasia. However, there is no doubt that Russia will find this type of partnership unacceptable (since the current differences between the U.S. and Iran have still not been settled), but it might well interest all the other sides, including the CA countries. Much also depends on the progress made during the international talks to settle the Ukrainian crisis.

Ankara, in turn, thinks it necessary to increase partnership along the EU-Turkey-Russia axis. As early as 2013, goods turnover among the EU countries, Turkey, and Russia amounted to more than \$470 billion.²⁰ In all likelihood, the U.S. will also be included in this axis in the future.

It is no accident that Turkey has been asking the following question during the current discussions: "Is it right to exert efforts on the Eurasian Union with its very vague future when Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is eclipsing the future foreign trade policy of so many states?"

On the other hand, "the Eurasian Union is developing as an alternative to the TTIP and Trans-Pacific Partnership. It is precisely such forms of partnership among states that will now determine the balance of power in the world."²¹

In other words, the matter concerns a possible combination in Turkey's policy of the Eurasian and Euro-Atlantic vectors. This model places the emphasis on Turkey's fundamental role in extensive European partnership with Russia's participation. In so doing, experts are clearly ignoring the Iranian factor, which, in our opinion, makes the formation of the above-mentioned axis impossible.

¹⁸ E. Satanovskiy, "Na gazovom rynke nas zhdet 'priiatnyy' siurpriz," *Vesti FM*, 28 August, 2014, available at [http://radiovesti.ru/episode/show/episode_id/28734], 28 August, 2014.

¹⁹ See: St.J. Flanagan, "Turkey-Russia-Iran Nexus: Eurasian Power Dynamics," Center for Strategic and International Studies, *The Washington Quarterly*, Winter 2013, pp. 163-178, available at [<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2013.751656>], 13 August, 2014.

²⁰ See: H.S. Ozertem, "Visions for Greater Cooperative Europe amid the Crisis in Ukraine: Economic Cooperation and Energy Politics," available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/article/413/visions-for-greater-cooperative-europe-amid-the-crisis-in-ukraine-economic-cooperation-and-energy-politics.html>], 10 August, 2014.

²¹ T. Biuyiukshakhin, "ES ili Evaziisky soiuz?" 9 August, 2014, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1407557340>], 9 August, 2014.

At present, Russian-Western rapprochement depends on the final settlement of the Iranian and Ukrainian problems.

This means that Iranian-Turkish partnership will be retained no matter how events pan out, and after the sanctions are removed from the IRI, its level will naturally rise. Iran's economic and military-political potential, with its territorial proximity to the CA region, will ensure it more advantages than Turkey, which is experiencing rather serious domestic development problems.

Despite this, Turkey can nevertheless become an influential factor in CA, primarily by inculcating Western educational and technological standards in the region.

The Eurasian Area: Russia and China

Russia and China are the main actors in the Eurasian area that have an impact on the development of Turkish-Iranian relations in CA.

Russia. This country, which has an enormous Muslim diaspora, is very closely tied to post-Soviet (primarily Muslim) CA. Turkish-Iranian partnership in no way contradicts Moscow's interests, which is interested, among other things, in strengthening the secular form of Islam on its southern frontiers.

Ankara, in turn, is trying not to complicate relations with this key Caspian player and its economic partner. Russia occupies second place after the EU among Turkey's economic partners; in 2013, the level of their goods turnover reached \$32.7 billion.²²

During the past few decades, Turkey has been increasingly striving for cooperation with Eurasian states (including Russia) in order to reduce the potential instability in CA. This striving is becoming increasingly urgent on the eve of troop withdrawal from Afghanistan and the upcoming change in power in the republics of the region.

On the whole, relations between Russia and Turkey are developing quite propitiously in trade, investments, tourism, security (primarily in the Black Sea region), and so on. However, there are still several challenges and risks regarding further intensification of the interaction between these countries in CA, which, correspondingly, influences the level and nature of Iranian-Turkish relations.

- In the context of the West's sanction policy toward Iran, Russia and Turkey are the main contenders for influence in CA with respect to Eurasianism-pan-Turkism. Turkey's growing influence in CA means there are still challenges relating to the differences in the positions of the region's countries regarding their Turkic unity. Under these circumstances, Iran will, in all likelihood, prefer to be in closer contact with Russia and other Eurasian partners.
- Bilateral competition continues in raw hydrocarbon transportation. This is shown in particular by Ankara's striving to reduce the dependence of the Turkish economy on Russian gas (around 60% of gas deliveries to Turkey come from Russia).²³ In this respect, Turkey is examining energy cooperation with Iran as the most optimal alternative corresponding to

²² See: I. Nikolaev, "Chego nam zhdet ot Erdogana?" 12 August, 2014, available at [http://www.stoletie.ru/fakty_i_komentarii/chego_nam_zhdet_ot_erdogana_191.htm], 12 August, 2014.

²³ See: H.S. Ozertem, "Is Turkey Back in the Game?: New Deal with Iran and Nabucco!" 16 July, 2007, available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/energy/>], 10 August, 2014.

its Middle Eastern plans; one of its vectors will likely be manifested in attempts to revive the Nabucco route.

- Russia and Turkey do not see eye to eye on Ukraine. For example, Turkey is in favor of Ukraine's integrity and independence and has no intention of recognizing the results of the Crimean referendum held on 16 March, 2014. There are also significant differences between the two countries regarding the Black Sea Basin, Cyprus, Syria, and other Middle Eastern problems,²⁴ which might force Turkey to prefer having the Euro-Atlantic community as its ally than Russia and Iran. So partnership between Russia and Turkey is not sufficiently deep and reliable.
- It stands to reason that Turkey's balancing tactics, which is the result of increased tension between Russia and the West, do not imbibe Moscow and Tehran with confidence. This is compelling them to take certain steps toward each other and demonstrate caution in their relations with Ankara. Lack of progress in the negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program is adding fuel to the fire. As for Turkey, it negatively assesses the EU's current policy and is not confident that Russian policy will undergo any specific changes.²⁵

Nevertheless, the economic and energy dependence of Turkey and the EU on Russia could lead to a decrease in the disagreements between Moscow and Ankara in the CA region and balance out their interaction in the Iranian vector.

China. In the past few years, China has been moving closer to Turkey, whose foreign political activity in CA is declining due to a slowing in its economic growth rates. The two countries see eye to eye on the resolution of several international problems, particularly those relating to the spread of extremism and terrorism.

China is among the most important actors in CA, whose growing global and regional influence Ankara just cannot ignore. However, CA's stronger partnership with the IRI should not be ignored either. These factors are becoming particularly important in light of the New Silk Road project (costing \$150 billion) put forward by Beijing and Washington and called upon to join Xinjiang with Europe. Chinese investment and military-technical resources are playing the main role in its implementation.

It appears that building transportation corridors (within the indicated project) will help to intensify economic cooperation between the countries under review. In this context, cooperation between Turkey and China in modernizing the Turkmen port in Turkmenbashi is becoming increasingly important.

At present, China is Turkey's third largest trading partner. Goods turnover between Turkey and China is over \$28 billion.²⁶ Western experts think that the recent visits by R. Erdoğan to Beijing and Xi Jinping to Turkey show the blossoming of relations between the two countries in CA. Beijing and Ankara are holding talks on cooperation in different spheres (nuclear energy, trade, infrastructure projects, and the military) that prescribe, among other things, Turkey's assistance in the development of Xinjiang.

Streamlining relations between these states gives the U.S. the opportunity to make use of their potential in stabilizing the region after the Western forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan.²⁷

²⁴ See: O. Sanberk, "The Ukrainian Crisis and Contradiction Management," 9 April, 2014, available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3868/the-ukrainian-crisis-and-contradiction-management.html>], 9 August, 2014.

²⁵ See: O. Sanberk, "The Ukraine Crisis: A View from Turkey," 11 March, 2014, available at [<http://www.turkishweekly.net/columnist/3857/the-ukraine-crisis-a-view-from-turkey.html>], 10 August, 2014.

²⁶ [http://polpred.com/?ns=1&ns_id=1067000, russian.china.org.cn], 30 April, 2014.

²⁷ See: A. Petersen, R. Pantucci, "China and Turkey Revive Silk Road," 10 August, 2014, available at [http://www.thecommentator.com/article/1230/china_and_turkey_revive_silk_road], 10 August, 2014.

The development of Chinese-Turkish relations will help to include Iran in the Central Asian projects and create a favorable environment for relative stabilization of the entire CA region and its adjacent territories.

Along with this, factors of instability generated by the unofficial rivalry between Russia and China, and to a lesser extent between Russia and Turkey, continue to operate in the region.

Conclusion

Turkey and Iran's foreign policy is focused on rationalism, pragmatism, and an understanding of their common historical-cultural and religious heritage, destinies and interests with the peoples living in CA. Therefore, partnership between these countries will be retained no matter how events pan out; the matter can only concern separate elements of regional competition or rivalry.

It is obvious that successful development of partnership between Ankara and Tehran will be determined by how well the economic interests and foreign political preferences of the CA states themselves are observed, as well as by the outcome of the domestic political events in Turkey and the efficiency of their regional strategies as a whole.

It stands to reason that each of the sides will try to "stake out" its presence in the region, whereby the advantage is clearly on the Turkish side, which is causing Iran, still caught in the throes of its disagreements with the U.S., serious concern.

However, in the long term, in anticipation of the removal of sanctions from the IRI and establishment of cooperation between the West and Russia (if their relations are regulated), we can expect a significant drop in Turkey's influence in the CA region.

As for Iran, the Sunni-Shi'ite factor does not play a significant role in its relations with CA. A stronger Iranian position in the CA region will largely be promoted by the ruling regime in Tehran rejecting violent methods for promulgating religious ideas and applying a soft form of Islam with a prevalence of secular trends.

Nevertheless, we cannot underestimate the potential of secular Turkey either; acquiring the role it claims in CA will depend on the results of the domestic political discussions going on in the country and the efficiency of the regional strategy it chooses. In all likelihood, Turkey will make its choice in favor of a balanced form of interstate partnership within the Eurasian and Euro-Atlantic structures; in the present-day world, such a trend is more or less stable. In so doing, Ankara's attempts to play a central role will be balanced out by the presence of Iran, China, and other adjacent powers in CA.

If Iranian-American and Western-Russian relations are regulated, Iran and Turkey might become complimentary factors in CA development. Moreover, these countries will be able to accelerate modernization and integration of the entire region by unifying the entire Caucasus and CA into a single energy-transportation system with access to Europe.

As current international life shows, the opposition of some unions of states to others in the context of a globally interdependent world is extremely unproductive and fraught with an increase in militarization and military conflicts. Therefore, in the long term, the most preferable model, keeping in mind the current reality and historical past of the region, would be balanced partnership of all the leading CA players within the framework of a revived Great Silk Road of the 21st century.