

# The Impact of Syrian Crisis on Iran-Turkey Relations

Hamid Ahmadi\*  
Fahimeh Ghorbani\*\*

## Abstract

What impact has the Syrian crisis had on Iran-Turkey political relations? Some analysts argue that divergence in Iranian and Turkish outlooks and roles played in the Syrian crisis have adversely affected their bilateral relationship. But the authors believe that in spite of the conflict in Iran's interests and Turkish policies towards Syria, their broader relations in other areas –security and economy- have prevented the rupture of political relations. In this regards, after the nature of the Syrian crisis is briefly described, Turkish foreign policy strategy in the Middle East will be explained. Then, Turkish-Syrian relations prior to the outbreak of the crisis will be analyzed followed by a discussion of Iranian and Turkish foreign policies towards the Syrian crisis and their impact on their mutual relations. The authors will conclude that although the Syrian political crisis has given rise to certain tensions and adverse consequences in their political relations, their bilateral ties have persisted as manifested in high-ranking diplomatic meetings between their political authorities and in ongoing deliberations on important regional issues.

**Keywords:** Syrian Crisis, Iran, Turkey, Political Relations, Security, Economy

---

\* Professor of Political Science at the University of Tehran (hahmadi@ut.ac.ir)

\*\* Research Fellow at the Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies (IMESS) in Tehran  
(Received: 12 September 2013 Accepted: 28 January 2014)

## **Introduction**

The political crisis in Syria has concerned major regional and international actors within the past two and half years in such a way that in a short period of time, a new political alignment has taken shape at the regional level as well as in the international arena. Currently, given the outlooks of the actors and their different strategic considerations towards the crisis in question, there are two political axes. As two major regional powers, Iran and Turkey have been placed separately in these two coalitions; Iran, Russia, Lebanese Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas form the anti-Western coalition and Turkey, the United States, European Union and the Persian Gulf countries are in the opposing side.

This article seeks to examine the impacts of the Syrian crisis on Iran-Turkey political relations, given their totally divergent policies towards Syria. From the authors' point of view, however, the Syrian crisis has not prevented their continued political relations despite the fact it has caused tensions in their bilateral relations, interests and broader ties in other spheres. On this basis, first the roots of the current political crisis in Syria are traced at the three domestic, regional and international levels. Then, Turkish foreign policy strategy in the Middle East and Iranian and Turkish foreign policies towards the Syrian crisis will be described. In conclusion, the impact of the Syrian crisis on Iran-Turkey relations will be explored.

### **I. The Nature of the Syrian Crisis**

The Syrian political crisis which broke out in March 2011 gradually

turned into a violent civil war with regional and international dimensions. In this perspective, like the other Arab nations, Syria is entangled in political, social, and economic problems against which people have fought through protests. On the one hand, the majority of the people wish for their rights and freedoms and on the other the military seeks to implement the iron fist policy. In other words, the Syrian crisis may be resolved only with the elimination of one of the parties involved. At the same time, some observers believe that the events in Syria are largely the result of external sources rather than domestic ones as Syrian domestic instability has created fertile ground for exploitation and the rivalry of regional and international actors (Niakoui & Behmanesh, 2012: 99-100). The authors believe that the Syrian conflict has a multi-layered nature, for understanding of which we should combine two levels of analysis, i.e., the domestic and international ones. For this reason, in order to offer a better analysis of the root causes of the developments in Syria, a multi-level analysis should be considered which would lead to a better understanding of the states of actors involved in the crisis and their interconnections. Furthermore, the authors believe that although Syria has gone through the main phase of the crisis so far, regional and international intervention -regional and systemic level of analysis- has resulted in the prolongation and intensification of the crisis and conflict in the country. On this basis, the roots of the current political crisis in Syria are explored at the three domestic, regional and international levels of analysis. At the regional and international levels, strategic role and considerations of the main regional and international players involved in the Syrian crisis will be examined.

The starting point of the Syrian political crisis included certain demonstrations in 2011 mainly in marginalized suburban areas in Syria, where people called for reforms. Overall, Syrian opposition groups can be classified into six major groupings: 1) Kurds: Currently they have withdrawn from the opposition front, waiting for the results of these developments. 2) Muslim Brotherhood: This group

does not include a large segment of the Syrian population. Indeed, unlike Egypt, Syrian social foundations are not dependent on them. 3) Foreign Opposition of Syria: This grouping lacks any significant status inside Syria. 4) National Coordination Committee for the Forces of Democratic Change: This group seems to enjoy some status inside Syria. 5) Salafists: This group resorts to violent methods and lacks any support base inside Syria. 6) Free Syrian Army: This opposition group is supported by the Arab League and the West and has organized armed uprising in a few cities particularly in Homs. They also lack any place inside Syria. Thus, foreign opposition, Salafists and the Free Syrian Army largely lack popular support.

Generally speaking, because of the following reasons, in the Syrian crisis the neutral and observing population is much larger than those found in such countries as Egypt and Tunisia (Ghorbani, 2012). These reasons include:

Syrian society differs from Tunisian and Egyptian societies as it is more tribal-based. For this reason, the demands of the Syrian opposition residing in Europe do not correspond to the demands of the Syrian tribes. The demands of the Syrian tribal communities revolve around the improvement of the subsistence conditions and economic welfare, fighting economic corruption and bribery, undertaking construction projects and removing the security atmosphere governing the society. Apart from the aforementioned demands, the educated strata in Syria also call for the freedom of activity for political parties, abolition of the single-party system and holding free elections. In this regards, the Syrian regime has agreed with these demands by taking steps to implement these reforms. For instance, on February 28, 2012, Bashar Assad endorsed the new constitution of the country which had been approved in the February 26 referendum with an absolute majority. The new constitution has removed Article 8 according to which, the ruling Ba'ath Party was the "leader of government and society." Agreeing to establish a multi-party system in Syria, the new constitution, moreover, has limited the

presidential term into two 7-year terms. The other reform efforts made by Syrian President Bashar Assad include the adoption of a new law for the press, political parties, and elections, abolishing the extraordinary situation and high security courts, holding the first local councils elections in all Syrian provinces "without the supervision of the Ba'ath Party after the new elections law was ratified" on December 12, 2011. The parliamentary elections, furthermore, were held on May 7, 2012, which represented the first parliamentary elections in the country according to the new multi-party system in Syria. In other words, the Arab revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were of all-out nature and independent at the domestic level, whereas the current political crisis in Syria lacks native character and all-out nature at the domestic level. This was evident by the Syrian opposition's National Council's call for the intervention of foreign countries in Syria in accordance with the Libyan precedent. It is worth noting that the Arab League, the United States, and more broadly, the West have consistently insisted on Syrian President Bashar Assad's resignation; the breakout point of the protests were located in peripheral areas and border cities rather than large cities such as Aleppo and Damascus, as it would be easier to send in arms and Salafist forces from the border areas; overall, the Syrian Christian minority comprising nearly 13% of the population and secular Sunnis and Druze are not very interested in joining the Sunni opposition, because they are concerned about the possibility of the establishment of an extremist Salafi government in Syria; a development which would lead to their persecution; the consent of the Sunni nationalist has also been obtained through the formation of a kind of Syrian nationalism revolving around the idea of greater Levant. Despite the fact that the Alawites constitute the core of political power in Syria, many Sunnis are included in the power structure leading to the presence of popular Sunni base for Bashar Assad's government; unlike Egypt and Tunisia, there are consensus and shared interests among the army, security forces and politicians which has resulted in the increased internal strength for

Bashar Assad; a large number of Sunnis, including the urban middle class, are seriously concerned about a fundamental upheaval – opting for peaceful change – and moving towards an extremist government; Syria's leadership of the resistance movement against Israeli expansionist policies has consistently boosted the legitimacy of the Ba'ath party and the Syrian government among the Syrian masses. Therefore, what has caused the prolongation of the current political crisis in Syria is the foreign intervention. In fact, two regional and international factors take precedence over the domestic factor in generating the existing political situation in Syria. It is, of course, noteworthy that Syria has so far passed through the main phase of the crisis (Ghorbani, 2012).

Since the early 1990s, the international system has altered the structure of most conflicts as they tended to emerge outside the states. However within the past 20 years, domestic disputes have, in addition to regional repercussions, lead to global consequences, attracting many international actors through international intervention. International intervention can take two forms. Direct intervention involves other states interfering in a domestic conflict of other countries such as overthrow of Gaddafi's regime in Libya; and allows for the intervening powers to resolve the conflict in favor of which ever belligerent faction is most in line with their interests such as the current state of affairs in Syria.

On this basis, two other levels of analysis, the regional and international levels help us better analyze the Syrian crisis. In these two levels, the motives and strategic considerations of major actors including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Russia and the United States will be briefly reviewed. Developments at one level will affect the outcomes at the other level and as such coalitions at one level are parallel to the coalitions at the other. With regard to the regional actors involved in the Syrian crisis, Iran aligned with Russia and China, while Saudi Arabia, Turkey and other Persian Gulf states view themselves as allied with the United States and European Union.

After the Conference of the Group of Friends of the Syrian People was held in Tunisia in February 2012, Saudi Arabia expressed its support for arming the Syrian rebels (Al-Rashid, 2013: 36). Overall, Saudi support for the Syrian opposition is derived from four major concerns. First, this state seeks to deflect international attention from domestic protests inside Saudi Arabia (Karami, 2011: 84). Second, Saudi concerns their own Shia question and their current uprising in Qatif, as well as, historical relations between the Shia and the Syrian regime. Third, the Saudi government presents its religious validity by backing the Sunni Syrians against an Alawite “heretic” regime – as understood by the Saudi government. Fourth, Saudi government wants a pro-Saudi regime in Syria, which would in turn undermine Iran’s influence in Damascus, as well as, in Beirut as Saudi influence has diminished in Lebanon after Saad Hariri was dismissed from the position of Prime Minister (Al-Rashidi, 2013: 37).

The third layer of the multi-layered Syrian crisis includes the international (systemic) layer whose actors will have the final word in light of the power and status they possess in the international system. The United States and Russia represent the major players at this level. The United States seeks more direct involvement, than the other regional and international actors, in the crisis to crush the Assad regime through economic and political sanctions. U.S. interests in Syria as understood in broader American objectives in the Middle East can be summarized as follows: protecting Israel’s security and interests, weakening the axis of resistance (comprising of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Syria, Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Palestinian Hamas), expanding regional influence and hegemony, weakening Iran as a symbol of political Islam in the region as well as to safeguard energy security. The overthrow of Assad’s regime as the geopolitical link between Iran and Hezbollah could significantly enhance Israel’s position and undermine the resistance front, shifting the balance of power to the benefit of the U.S. at Iran’s expense (Niakouei and Behmanesh, 2012: 129-130). Moreover, according to Jamal Wakim’s

viewpoint, war against Iraq gave the United States a chance to deepen its dominance in the Middle East and the next step for the United States would be overthrowing Syrian and Iranian governments to gain full control over the Middle East (Wakim, 2012: 6).

The second major international player in the Syrian crisis is Russia, which has so far vetoed three UN Security Council resolutions that were supported by the Western powers in October 2011, February 2012 and July 2012. The main reasons for Moscow's support for the Assad regime can be classified into military, economic and political factors (Troyansky, 2012: 1). The Tartus Port, as the Russian naval base in the Mediterranean, represents the military reason for Moscow's support for the Syrian regime as a change in Syrian government might lead to the loss of the base which matters greatly to Russia for accessing warm waters. The economic motivations refer to the fact that Syria has always been a major buyer of Russian weapons; for instance, in 2011, Syria was the fifth biggest buyer of Russian weapons with agreements worth between \$3.5-4.8 billion. The other economic reason revolves around the presence of Russian businesses in Syria. In 2009, Russian investment in the country surpassed 19.4 billion. Thus instability in Syria will disrupt production there, jeopardizing the future of those agreements (Troyansky, 2012: 1).

Furthermore, there are political motivations for Russian support for Damascus as well. Emphasizing the principle of non-intervention and the right to sovereignty, Russia opposes the Western military embargo and subsequent invasion of a sovereign state. Russia is surrounded with non-democratic former Soviet republics, which would make Russia concerned about possible military intervention in the 'near abroad.' The other political motive for Russian sponsorship of multilateral and civilian actions with respect to the Syrian crisis involves Russia's thinking and effort aimed at being recognized as a great Eurasian power with particular political objectives. Pointing to the ambiguity of military interventions in international law, Russia

stresses that it plays by its own rules, giving priority to regional mechanisms and multilateral soft power over intervention (Troyansky, 2012: 2; and IISS, 2012: 2).

## II. Turkish Middle East Policy

The new Turkey's foreign policy can be explained within two paradigms: 1) Kemalist (West-oriented) pattern and 2) Multilateral policy pattern (adjusted Kemalism, in line of Turkey's geopolitical realities). The Kemalist pattern encompassed the era from the establishment of the Republic of Turkey to the end of the Cold War enshrined in the 1937 Constitution in the following principles: 1) nationalism, 2) secularism, 3) republicanism, 4) populism, 5) statism, and 6) revolutionism. These principles impacted Turkish foreign policy in two ways: First, they distanced Turkey from the Orient, Middle East and Muslim World questions, and second they led Turkish foreign policy further towards the West (Omidi and Rezaei, 2011: 236-237). The second paradigm governing Turkish foreign policy can be called multidimensional foreign policy which seeks to adjust the traditional Western-oriented policies and to increase economic-trade and political-security relations with the regional nations (Banihashemi, 2012: 102).

With the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rise to power in 2002, Turkish foreign policy was formulated by Ahmet Davutoglu in his book, *Stratejik Derinlik* (Strategic Depth). He argues that Turkey's geographical location which has placed it at the intersection of cultures and regions including Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, Central Asia, and Europe would determine the country's foreign policy dynamisms (CIDOB International Yearbook, 2011, Country Profile: Turkey, 2011: 237). On this basis, Turkey has to engage constructively with all these geographical areas. Since Turkey's new foreign policy seeks to increase Turkish influence in surrounding areas which were once part of the Ottoman Empire, it has been labelled as Neo-Ottomanism (Omidi and Rezaei, 2011: 240). Some

features of Neo-Ottomanism include striking a balance between security and freedom, zero problems with its neighbors, active peace diplomacy, multilateral foreign policy, and presenting Turkey's image based on its soft power sources. This new attitude was vividly manifested in a look Eastward policy, reviving relations with the Arab World, mediation in the Arab-Israeli peace process, establishing closer relations with Iran and enhancing relations with Syria before the eruption of the Syrian crisis.

The Arab Spring revolutions, which affected foreign policy and domestic politics of regional nations, also significantly influenced Turkish foreign policy. The most important consequence of the Syrian crisis has been the rapid collapse of the zero problems policy and peace diplomacy. Turkish position towards Syria has led to distrust in its relations with Syria, Russia, Iraq and certain Lebanese parties. The crisis revealed double standards in Turkish foreign policy with regards the popular uprising in Bahrain, Ankara stated that zero problems with neighbors applied to people rather the regimes. At the same time, respecting Egypt and Libya, by supporting popular uprisings and advocating the principle of 'striking a balance between security and freedom', Turkey ignored the policy of zero problems with neighbors (Banihashemi, 2012).

Generally Speaking, regional developments seem to have caused a challenge to Turkey's multilateral foreign policy as evidenced in distrust in its relations with such neighbors as Iran and Iraq and rupture of relations with Syria. The AKP leaders maintain that the new orientation in Turkey's foreign policy indicates an effort at adapting to the regional developments rather a change in the principles (Noureddine, 2013: 6).

In 2002, Turkey invested heavily in Syria both diplomatically and economically, making it the centerpiece of its emerging regional policy. Ankara became the main corridor for Damascus both economically and geopolitically even during Syria's isolation following the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the assassination of former

Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005. In 2009, in a visit to Damascus, Turkish President Abdullah Gul remarked that “Syria is Turkey’s gateway to the Middle East and Turkey is Syria’s portal to Europe” (Walker, 2012: 2).

Extensive bilateral collaborations led to the establishment of the ‘High Level Strategic Cooperation Council’ and a free economic zone, a visa waiver program between the two countries and so on. Bilateral trade tripled between 2006 and 2010, making Turkey Syria’s third biggest trade partner after Saudi Arabia and China in 2010. With Syria turning into a priority in Turkey’s new regional foreign policy, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan visited Syria more frequently than any other neighboring country until the crisis broke out in the country in 2011 (Walker, 2012: 2).

The turning point in Turkey-Syria relations occurred on November 22, 2011 when for the first time Erdogan explicitly called for Assad’s dismissal after he saw his pressures for imposing political reforms in his own benefit as futile. On November 30, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu announced a series of unilateral sanctions against the Syrian government which is much more severe than any other sanctions imposed by Turkey against its neighbors including against Iraq in the 1990s (Aras, 2012: 47).

### III. Different Policies

In the Syrian crisis, the Sunni-Salafist and pro-Western axis are actively trying to change the regime in Syria, whereas the anti-Western axis seeks to maintain the current regime with the implementation of certain reforms (Ghorbani, 2012). Here, Iranian and Turkish foreign policies are examined within the framework of Syria’s geopolitical significance for each of these countries.

With U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, both Iran and Turkey have made efforts at increasing their influence in the region, which in Iraq, occurs along the Sunni-Shia fault lines. In Syria, Turkey also seeks to change Assad’s regime in order to boost its regional role within a

Neo-Ottomanist framework (Kasapoglu, 2012). Generally speaking, Syria is of vital importance for Iran, because, first, it is the main portal of Iran's access to the Levant and Arab-Israeli conflict. Syria has been Iran's regional ally since the Islamic Revolution, acting as a bridge between Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah, which would threaten Israel's security (McDaniel, 2013). Second, from a realistic perspective, the future of Syria's political alignment would greatly matter to Iran for the purpose of preserving regional role, balance of power and enhancing the resistance current (Barzegar, 2011). A Sunni-Salafist coalition or a new pro-Western government would undermine Iran's regional influence which would undermine Iran and the axis of resistance vis-à-vis Israel. Syria's significance for Iran also arises from Syria's connection with the Sunni-Salafist axis as Syria stands opposed to the Salafist ideology represented by Saudi Arabia. For the aforementioned reasons, Iran and its regional allies consider efforts at regime change in Syria as an Israeli and Western conspiracy to undermine the axis of resistance. Iran believes that Turkey and Iran along with the regional countries are able to handle the process of change in Syria instead of intervention by Western powers and Israel (Ertugrul, 2012: 4-5).

Turkish policy to become a central player in the Middle East encountered a roadblock in Syria, in spite of supporting the Syrian opposition groups politically and militarily. This failure seems to resemble the era of decline of the Ottoman Empire when it realized the natural limitations of its power (Ertugrul, 2012: 8). Overall, the reasons for Turkey's incorrect prediction on the Syrian crisis, i.e. Assad's overthrow within a few months, can be summarized as follows: 1) resistance of Assad's regime, 2) structure of the opposition groups (inconsistency and lack of unity), and 3) efficiency of and the role played by regional actors (Ertugrul, 2012: 2). Through the regime change in Syria, Turkey sought to become the paramount regional actor, undermining Iraqi government and Iran's regional role as evidenced by Davutoglu's speech at the Turkish parliament on April

27, 2012 indicating Ankara's willingness to monopolize power in the region at the expense of all its Arab partners. It also intended to pave the way for its enlarged influence within the framework of Neo-Ottomanism (Noureddine, 2013: 4).

However, after the Syria conflict continued for some months, it became clear that Turkish diplomacy towards the crisis and their efforts at overthrowing Assad have reached a stalemate. Generally speaking, the five following factors have caused Turkey to change its outlook on the Syrian crisis as compared to the one it had a few months ago, in such a way that the intensity of initial tensions between Iran and Turkey regarding the crisis has declined significantly. It has also encouraged the Turkish government to take part in regional collaborations for resolving the crisis rather than the Western solutions. The factors that made Turkey revise its previous policy towards Syria that was based on support for military intervention for overthrowing Assad's government are as follows:

The extremist Salafist groups' activities and their many inhumane atrocities in Syria lead to domestic and international criticisms of Turkey for its support for such extremist groups. This made Ankara distance itself from the crisis to some extent in order to avoid such implication, seeking instead a regional solution to the Syrian crisis. At the domestic level in Turkey, protests such as the one in the Iskenderun province to Turkey's interference in Syrian domestic affairs and particularly its sponsorship of the extremist groups attacking Latakia's northern suburban area on March 21, 2014 can be mentioned (Fars News Agency, March 21, 2014). Some of Turkey's opposition parties including the People's Republican Party and the Communist Party condemned Erdogan's support for the extremist groups and Turkey's attack on Syria (Central News Agency, March 25, 2014). Turkey has also been faced with world criticism due to its sponsorship of extremist Syrian groups. For example, Human Rights Watch has vigorously criticized Turkey for its sponsorship of Syrian insurgents. According to Human Rights Watch, the insurgents

receive money, arms and other needed supplies from Turkey and most of the foreign insurgents stationed in north Syria have infiltrated the country via Turkey (Rast Khabar, October 11, 2013). On this ground, the Turkish government has been further encouraged to participate in regional collaborations for the resolution of the Syrian crisis. For example, Speaker of the Turkish Parliament Cemil Cicek visited Iran in order to dispel rumors about Turkey's collaboration with the terrorists in Syria. He remarked in Tehran that all regional problems including the Syrian crisis had to be resolved in peaceful ways through negotiations. He also described the terrorist activities in Syria as contradicting Islam and humanity (IRIB News and Commentary, September 22, 2013).

U.S. refusal to take military action against Syria as a result of Iran-Russia cooperation in disarming Syrian chemical weapons: Turkey was very hopeful that through U.S. military intervention in Syria, Assad would be overthrown at little cost to Turkey. But after this did not take place, Turkey never intended to pay the costs of a military attack by itself; thus it renounced its previous policy of military intervention (Fars News Agency, November 29, 2011);

One of the reasons accounting for protests in Gezi Park in Taksim Square on May 31, 2013, which spread to the entire country was developments in Syria and objection to Ankara's Syria policy. Indeed, Turkey disregarded the domestic and regional constraints. At the domestic level, Syrian Alawites and Kurds on the one hand and nationalists and secular forces on the other constitute major opponents of Ankara's Syria policy, objecting Erdogan's government. In Turkey, nationalist and secular currents oppose Ankara's involvement in the Syrian crisis more than other political parties do. The Nationalist Movement Party and the People's Republican Party, particularly the latter's leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, have criticized the government's policies, calling Erdogan an agent of U.S. policies without any regard for Turkey's national interests and security. These parties encouraged people to protest Erdogan's Syria policies, which

have resulted in heightened political, ethnic, and religious tensions in the country including the Gezi Park protests. Within the past months, Turkey has sought to amend its policies towards the developments in Syria with regard for public opinion and the degree of objections in order to prevent the rise of other protest waves (Hajimineh, 2013);

Enhancement of Iran's regional status following the Geneva Agreement: Rapprochement between Iran and the United States has led to the undermining of the traditional U.S. strategy regarding the creation of blocs between regional powers (such as putting Iraq against Iran in the past, putting Saudi Arabia against Iran or putting Turkey against Iran after the Arab Spring developments). On these grounds, this agreement made Turkey become closer to Iran's front and positions towards the Syrian crisis. For instance, Erdogan and Davutoglu in their visits to Tehran, in January 2014 and November 2013, respectively, gave Iran some credit for its stance towards Syria (Barzegar, 2014).

#### **IV. The Political Impact**

In spite of deep differences between Iran and Turkey over the nature of the Syrian crisis, solutions, and resultant tensions, their political relations still continue. In this section, first structural contradictions between Iran and Turkey will be explained, then the major foundations and the impact of the Syrian crisis on bilateral political ties will be examined.

Since the 16th century, there have been a few structural contradictions between Iran and Turkey, the most important of which include: geographical location of the two countries, minorities, religious differences and different political systems. Located in eastern part of the Middle East, both countries connect Central Asia and the Caucasus, providing a portal for Europe to reach these two regions. Iran's particular geographical location arises from its control over the energy resources of the Persian Gulf. It also enjoys religious influence on the Shia Muslims in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Turkey's

geographical location, however, has more international strategic value, since not only it connects Asia and Europe, but also occupies the five sea passages including the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, Marmara, Aegean and the Mediterranean, all closely connected with trade and energy. The characteristic of this geographical composition is the root of conflict between Turkey and Iran, which has been caused by the competition for control and influence on this region (Bo, 2011: 2-3).

The second factor is the minority issues with which both countries have been faced. In Iran, the largest minority group are the Azerbaijanis, accounting for 25% of the population. While Turkey has been trying, unsuccessfully, to instigate a pan-Turkist trend in Iran, the widespread Kurdish ethnic movement in Turkey has raised a great challenge for Turkish identity and national unity. The third factor is the religious differences. Between the 16th and 20th centuries, the Ottomans had competed for the leadership of the Muslim World with the Shia Safavid and Qajars, which has also become a decisive factor in the conflict. Therefore, competition for Islamic leadership is still embedded in the cultural traditions of the two nations.

The fourth factor is the two distinct political models of Turkey and Iran in the late 20th century. The two different choices of governmental structure have become the major source of ideological differences. Following the advent of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the Islamic Republic replaced the monarchy, leading to the rupture of Iran's relations with the Western world and NATO. Turkey's secular government worried that Iran would spread the revolutionary movement into the entire Middle East and Iran accused Turkey of sheltering the Iranian refugees in Turkey (Ahmadi, 2010: 180-181). Finally, the fifth factor involves the border disputes, which are also a historical root of the conflicts. The boundary of the two countries was mainly determined by the 1639 Treaty of Qasr-e Shirin. Over the past centuries, there has been no major war because of border disputes, but some armed hostilities have remained unsolved. For instance, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) has frequently used

the disputed border areas to launch attacks against Turkey, causing occasional tensions between the two states (Bo, 2011: 5).

While there are structural contradictions between Iran and Turkey, three factors have contributed to enhanced cooperation between the two nations, i.e., preservation of regional stability, security cooperation and economic collaboration. In other words, despite contradictory and different outlooks on Iraq, Syria, and relations with the United States, European Union and other international organizations, the two parties have certain overlapping interests, which give way to a degree of cooperation and diminish tensions (Stein and Bleek, 2012: 148). At the same time, a few factors including the rise of Islamist Refah Party to power, détente period under Iranian President Khatami and AKP's coming to office helped improve bilateral relations. Mutual interests in preserving regional stability, facing common threats, shared commitment to contain Kurdish separatism in the Middle East (security cooperation) and growing trade between the two sides constitute the most important elements that have facilitated the continued political relations.

Historically speaking, change in the external environment has had similar repercussions for bilateral relations, despite fundamental contradictions between them. In recent years, the external setting has largely reduced tensions between Iran and Turkey. In the Cold War era, as regional actors, Iran and Turkey joined the U.S.-led Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in order to fight the common threat of communism (Bo, 2011: 6). After the Islamic Revolution until the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1979-1988), the two states maintained their lukewarm political relations. Between 1988 and 2000, the two sides experienced a period of hostility as a result of U.S. dual containment policy. Iran distanced itself from Turkey and expanded relations with Russia, and they were engaged in a rivalry to spread their spheres of influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus (Calabrese, 1998: 93). From 2000 onwards, Iran-Turkey relations improved particularly as a result of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. The question of the

reconstruction of Iraq and Iraqi Kurdish separatism led Iran and Turkey to coordinate their stances, and unite for the maintenance of regional stability and striking a balance vis-à-vis American forces.

The common threat of Kurdish separatism and Iran-Turkey collaborations in this regard, has been one of the reasons for their continued political relations. Although the 1990s was an exceptional decade when Turkey accused Iran of providing logistical and financial assistance to the PKK in an effort to destabilize Turkey's political regime, as Iran allegedly deemed the PKK a useful tool in its rivalry with Turkey over northern Iraq (Demiryol, 2013, 121). Indeed, Turkey recognized Iranian post-revolutionary government three days after the advent of the Revolution on February 14, 1979, because it was concerned about a civil war in Iran which could provoke Turkey's Kurdish separatism along with the country's eastern borders (Bo, 2011: 7).

Since the late 1990s, with PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan's detention, security collaboration between Iran and Turkey expanded. During Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem's visit to Tehran, Iran emphasized that it considered the PKK a terrorist organization. Then high-ranking strategic contacts continued through meetings of the Turkey-Iran High Security Commission and Joint Security Committee. As a result of the creation of Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) as an offshoot of PKK, Iran and Turkey signed a security cooperation agreement in 2004, stressing shared commitment to regional security. During the 12th meeting of the Turkey-Iran High Security Commission in April 2008, an Iranian official indicated that Iran regarded the PKK and PJAK as a single terrorist organization under two titles (McCurdy, 2008: 8-10).

With regard to the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, both Iran and Turkey oppose an independent state for the Kurds, while defending Iraq's territorial integrity. At the same time, some analysts like Nathalie Tocci believe that Turkish policies towards KRG would strengthen its de facto independence; these

policies and actions include Erdogan's visit to Erbil in 2011 and Turkey's economic activities in the region such as the 2012 agreement for constructing gas and oil pipelines from northern Iraq to Turkey (Tocci, 2013: 2-3).

In an interview, Turkey's advisor in Tehran Baris Saygin indicated that no change had taken place in Turkey's foreign policy towards Iraq since 2003 as Turkey still believes that, regarding both Iraq and Syria, all religious-ethnic groups should live within their territories with a democratic attitude (Turkey's Embassy in Tehran, 2013). Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, growing economic relations between Iran and Turkey have facilitated continued political relations between the two sides. Here the role and place of the economy in Turkey's foreign policy is explored before we examine their bilateral economic relations.

Turkish diplomacy in the recent century shows that its foreign policy positions have been largely affected by economic considerations. From the onset, leaders of the Turkish republic desired industrialization, modernization and development as strategic targets leading them to pursue Westernism and avoidance of tension and conflict in foreign policy, which would bar progress and development. They have also pursued two imports substitution and exports expansion strategies in order to attain economic development. They have mainly relied, in two stages, on an exports expansion strategy within the past three decades which required a pacifist foreign policy and enlarged regional and international relations and cooperation. The first stage started in the 1980s under then Prime Minister Turgut Ozal, which changed Turkey from a security state into a trading state leading to the expansion of trade and investment becoming the country's main foreign policy goal. The second stage was initiated in 2002 with the AKP's coming to office, which still continues (See Ghanbarloo, 2012). Indeed, industrial-commercial interests with exports orientation gained more momentum with AKP's victory in a way that AKP government seeks

to reduce tensions and expand economic relations in the Middle East, the Balkans and Russia (Kirisci and Kaptanoglu, 2011, 715). On this ground, Turkey is now referred to as a trading state according to Richard Rosecrance's characterization as the main goal of the state in foreign policy is to find foreign markets for the goods produced by the country (Ghanbarloo, 2012: 191).

There is interdependence in Iran-Turkey economic relationships, meaning that both sides benefit from mutual economic collaborations. During the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, Iran established economic relations with Turkey in order to import strategic commodities, which improved Turkey's bankrupt economy. After the Refah Party came to office in 1996, the two parties signed a series of economic cooperation agreements including Turkey's procurement of \$2.3 billion natural gas from Iran. With AKP's rise to power in 2002, bilateral trade and economic relations have increased (Bo, 2011:7, 11) in such a way that bilateral trade rose from \$1.2 billion in 2002 to more than \$16 billion in 2011. The two sides, moreover, have committed to increase their bilateral trade to \$30 billion per annum by 2015 (Khajehpour, 2012: 19).

Turkey's overall foreign policy strategy is focused on expanding its commercial strength; thus it needs Iran's vast domestic market as well as its energy. In return, Iran sees Turkey as a country with which it can undermine its economic isolation (Bo, 2011: 14). After financial sanctions were imposed on Iranian banks in 2011, Turkish financial institutions particularly Halkbank – with 75% of its shares belonging to the Turkish government – helped the Indian oil company to pay for the oil it purchased from Iran. The Turkish financial institutions have so far avoided implementing the U.S. and EU unilateral sanctions against Iran despite U.S. warnings that Turkish institutions would lose their access to the American market. While Turkey has expressed its willingness to cooperate with sanctions adopted by the United Nations, it continues to expand its trade relations with Iran in areas not targeted by the UN sanctions (Habib, 2012: 6).

Energy trade and the interdependence between Iran and Turkey should also be mentioned as natural gas and oil comprise more than 80% of Iran's exports to Turkey. It is beneficial for both sides, because Turkey is faced with rising energy needs, while Iran sees a growing foreign energy market in Turkey and a suitable corridor through which to reach European buyers (Demiryol, 2013: 127).

Since the Islamic Revolution, the three factors of the economy, security and preservation of regional stability have consistently facilitated continued collaborations between Iran and Turkey. For instance, before the Syrian crisis, Turkey continued to support Iranian peaceful nuclear program and there were high-ranking diplomatic visits. Turkey and Brazil mediated for an exchange of nuclear fuel deal in 2010. After the deal failed due to U.S. objection, Turkey opposed the adoption of UN Security Council resolution for more severe economic sanctions against Iran on June 9, 2010 (Chappell, 2010: 13-14). On high-ranking diplomatic visits, in the time period between July 2002 and January 2012, Iranian presidents or speakers of the parliament paid six visits to Turkey and three visits were paid by the Turkish prime minister or president to Iran (Habib, 2012: 2).

An analysis of the impact of the Syrian crisis on Iran-Turkey political relations would demonstrate that this crisis, in spite of tensions arising from deep disagreement and divergent strategic considerations, not only has not led to the rupture of their political relations, but also that their relations still continues to evolve. The reason can be understood in the foundations of their political relations as mentioned above, in the way that the Syrian crisis and their opposing alignment have not shaken those foundations. On this basis, certain tensions and adverse repercussions arising from the crisis in question on bilateral relations will be described.

After the Syrian crisis broke out, political authorities in both countries began criticizing each other's policies and occasionally condemned them. For instance, a member of Iranian parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Seyed Hossein

Hosseini Naghavi stated: “The Turkish government bears the main responsibility regarding these bombings, because it explicitly speaks of arming and sponsoring paramilitary groups acting in Syria” (Resalat Newspaper, May 14, 2012). Brigadier General Seyed Hassan Firouzabadi, Chairperson of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also stated that “The House of Saud, Qatar and Turkey are to blame for bloods shed on Syrian soil. ... After Syria, it will be Turkey and other countries’ turn. ... Lest Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar fall victim to al-Qaeda’s expanded terrorism. For this reason we warn our friends.” After NATO’s Patriot missiles were deployed to Turkey, the head of the Iranian parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Aladdin Borujerdi observed that “These missiles would not bring Turkey security, because all Turkey’s neighbors are unsatisfied with the missiles” (Shargh Newspapers, August 8, 2012). Advisor to the Leader’s Representative at the Revolutionary Guard Corps General Yadollah Javani remarked: “The Islamic Republic does not see the deployment of NATO’s Patriot defense system along the Iran-Turkey border as benefiting the regional nations. Iran believes that the deployment of these missiles will be counterproductive even for Turkey itself” (Ettelaat Newspaper, December 24, 2012). In reactions, Turkish President Abdullah Gul issued a statement saying that “We asked Iranians not to support Bashar Assad’s government as he is no longer able to run the country” (Vatan Emrouz Newspaper, January 10, 2013). Also another Turkish newspaper had claimed that Iran was training Syrian military forces (Siasat Rouz Newspaper, May 28, 2012).

Critical reactions and occasional condemnation by Iran and Turkey towards each other, nonetheless, have brought about practical consequences as well including cancellation of Iranian President Ahmadinejad’s visit to Turkey in protest to the deployment of Patriot missiles on Turkish soil in December 2012 (Ettelaat Newspaper, December 24, 2012) and suspension of the visa waiver program by Iran on August 9, 2012 in response to Turkish foreign minister’s

official statement on August 8, 2012 in condemnation of Iranian authorities' remarks regarding Turkey's support for Syrian Kurdish opposition and participation in the U.S.-led coalition for overthrowing the Syrian government (Bavand, 2012).

But as mentioned above, bilateral political relations have continued as dictated by important issues of security, economy, and regional stability. In this regard, the authors' argument is based upon three objective reasons. First, "Although there has been an exchange of rhetoric by political authorities – particularly Iranian military commanders – in Iran and Turkey, culminating in psychological warfare promoted by the media, both sides immediately have made more conciliatory statements; this would indicate the existence of a will to continue and improve the relations" (Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2013). For instance, Turkey's Ambassador to Iran Umit Yardim stated in response to Firouzabadi's remarks: "Turkey has never considered Iran as a threat and the claims made in this regard are absolutely baseless. Turkey and Iran have long had good relations and there is no reason for Iran to be concerned about the deployment of the missile system on Turkish soil" (Abrar Newspaper, September 25, 2011). Furthermore, certain actions following relatively harsh reactions can be mentioned; for example a few days after Ahmadinejad's visit was cancelled in December 2012, the spokesperson of Iranian Foreign Ministry headed a delegation to Turkey (Bavand, 2012).

Second, certain statements made by the two countries' political authorities have both emphasized their difference in outlooks on Syria and also that these differences would not impair bilateral relations. For instance, Umit Yardim said "There are some differences on the question of Syria, but at the same time we are engaged in numerous negotiations with Iran on this. Anyway, the Syrian problem will be finished within a year or two, but in any case, Iran and Turkey are destined to live next to each other for hundreds of years. It shows the value Turkey attaches to Iran" (Shargh Newspaper, May 12, 2013). In

a news conference in Tehran, in reply to a journalist who believed the Syrian question has undermined Tehran-Ankara relations, Spokesperson of Turkish Foreign Ministry Levent Gumrukcu rejected such a claim, speaking of the long bilateral ties between the two countries (Shargh Newspaper, May 12, 2013).

Third, meetings between high-ranking Iranian and Turkish political authorities and regular phone conversations signify both parties' will to continue and expand bilateral political relations. Umit Yardim commented on these meetings saying "In 2012, the Turkish Prime Minister visited Iran and Speaker of the Iranian Parliament visited Turkey. There have also been several visits by foreign ministers and their deputies" (Shargh Newspaper, May 12, 2013). Erodgan's visit to Tehran on January 29, 2014 and Davutoglu's visit on November 26, 2013, as well as their emphasis upon friendship signified that the Syrian crisis had failed to significantly damage Iran-Turkey bilateral ties.

Finally, with respect to the Syrian crisis and political relations between Iran and Turkey, it should be mentioned that the Turkish officials are of the belief that "although the Syrian crisis has not fully disrupted Iran-Turkey relations, its symptoms and adverse effects can be seen in Iran-Turkey relations. In spite of differences on the Syrian crisis, talks can continue and bilateral relations will expand in political spheres, apart from the Syrian question, as well as on cultural and economic issues. In the international organizations wherever Iran is portrayed as an international threat, Turkey has always objected to it. Hence, Turkey acts in good will in its political relations with Iran" (Turkey's Embassy in Tehran, 2013). The depth of bilateral political and economic relations will overshadow the Syrian crisis. Finally the crisis will disappear and what will remain are the mutual relations that the two nations will not lose (Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2013).

## Conclusion

From the view point of the authors, intervention of major regional and international players has led to the prolongation and exacerbation of the crisis in Syria. The most important regional and international actors of the Syrian crisis can be placed in two distinct coalitions; Iran and Russia in one side and Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey and the United States are in another coalition. Of the major players involved in the crisis, this article has dealt with the foreign policies of Iran and Turkey and their distinct motivations and strategic considerations towards the Syrian crisis. From an Iranian perspective, efforts made by the pro-Western actors at overthrowing Assad's regime and arming the opposition would shift the alignment of regional coalitions, disrupt the balance of power at Iran's expense, undermine the resistance front and at last lead to U.S. dominance in the Middle East. In contrast, Turkey, in the first months of the rise of the Syrian crisis, sought to replace Assad's regime with a one consistent with its national interest – like Iraq for Iran - in order to expand its influence in the region. This Turkish mentality took shape within Turkey's Neo-Ottomanist thinking on increased regional power and turning into a pivotal player. It is worth noting that after Turkey failed to topple Assad's government, it has adopted a new outlook in such a way that the intensity of initial tensions between Iran and Turkey have declined significantly. It has also encouraged the Turkish government to take part in regional collaborations for resolving the crisis rather than the Western solutions to the crisis.

Some analysts maintain that the different place of and roles played by Iran and Turkey in the Syrian crisis have jeopardized their bilateral political relations. Nonetheless, their differences on the Syrian political crisis have not resulted in the rupture of their political relations, particularly because as time passed, their outlooks on how to resolve the Syrian crisis have grown closer to each other. The two states continue to have subject-specific relations rather than relations

rooted in their shared values or consistent outlooks on regional issues. Essential issues of security (common threat of Kurdish separatism), economy (with priority given to energy) and preservation of regional stability have always facilitated continued political relations, and political and economic cooperation. By the same token, although the mSyrian political crisis has given rise to certain tensions and adverse consequences in their political relations, their political relations have persisted as manifested in high-ranking diplomatic meetings between their political authorities and in ongoing deliberations on important regional issues.

## References

- Abrar Newspaper. 2011. "Turkish Ambassador to Iran: There is no Reason for Concern about NATO's Missile System," September 25.
- Ahmadi, Hamid. 2010. **Cultural Relations between Iran and Its Neighbors; A Case Study on Turkey**, Tehran: Research Institute of Culture, Arts and Communications.
- Al-Rasheed, Madawi. 2013. "Saudi Arabia: Local and Regional Challenges," **Contemporary Arab Affairs**, Vol. 6, No. 1.
- Aras, Damla. 2012. "Turkish-Syrian Relations Go Downhill," **Middle East Quarterly**, Vol. 19, No. 2.
- Banihashemi, Mirghasem. 2012. "Understanding the AKP's Regional Policy: An Iranian Perspective," **Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly**, Vol. 10, Nos. 3-4.
- Barzegar, Kayhan. 2014. "Geneva Nuclear Agreement and Iran's Regional Role," **Tabnak**, February 21, Available at: <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news>.
- Barzegar, Kayhan. 2011. "Iran's and Turkey's Role in Resolving the Syrian Crisis," **Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies**, November 29.
- Bavand, Davoud Hermidas. 2012. "Iran-Turkey Relations beyond the Patriot Missiles," **Arman Newspaper**, December 24.
- Bo, Wang. 2011. "Turkey-Iran Reconciliatory Relations: Internal and External Factors," **Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)**, Vol. 5, No. 1.
- Calabrese, John. 1998. "Turkey and Iran: Limits of a Stable Relationship," **British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies**, Vol. 25, No. 1.
- Central News Agency. 2013. "Turkish People Protest Erdogan's Foreign Policy towards Syria," March 25, Available at: <http://www.iribnews.ir/NewsBody.aspx?ID=46989>.
- Chappell, Gareth. 2010. "Turkey, Russia and Iran: Common Interests, Common Positions?" **Center for International Relations, Reports and Analyses**.
- CIDOB International Yearbook 2011. Country Profile: Turkey, 2011. "Foreign Policy of the Turkish Republic," Available at: [http://www.cidob.org/en/content/download/30263/359446/file/237-240\\_ANEXO\\_POLITICA+EXTERIOR+DE+TURQUIA\\_ANG.pdf](http://www.cidob.org/en/content/download/30263/359446/file/237-240_ANEXO_POLITICA+EXTERIOR+DE+TURQUIA_ANG.pdf).
- Demiryol, Tolga. 2013. "The Limits to Cooperation between Rivals: Turkish-Iranian Relations since 2002," **Ortadoğu Etütleri**, Vol. 4, No. 2.
- Ertuğrul, Doğan. 2012. "A Test for Turkey's Foreign Policy: The Syria Crisis,"

- TESEV Foreign Policy Programme. Available at: [http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Publication/fb7a88bd-36be-4ae8-b5c1-0efe22a3a9b6/Dogan%20Ertugrul\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.tesev.org.tr/Upload/Publication/fb7a88bd-36be-4ae8-b5c1-0efe22a3a9b6/Dogan%20Ertugrul_ENG.pdf).
- Ettelaat Newspaper. 2012. "Minister of Defense: Deployment of Patriot Missiles Will be Counterproductive for Turkey," December 24.
- Fars News Agency. 2014. "Continued Protest to Turkey," March 27, Available at: <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13930107000652>.
- Fars News Agency. 2012. "U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Stresses on Military Non-Intervention in Syria," January 29, Available at: <http://www.khabarfarsi.com/ext/1952750>.
- Foreign Ministry of Islamic Republic of Iran. 2013, "Interview with Hossein Ghasemi," Political Expert.
- Ghanbarloo, Abdollah. 2012. "The Role of the Economic Development Considerations in Turkey's Foreign Policy," **Discourse: An Iranian Quarterly**, Vol. 10, Nos. 3-4.
- Ghorbani, Fahimeh. 2012. "Current Political Crisis in Syria: Solutions," Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies. Available at: <http://www.fa.merc.ir/View/tabid/127/ArticleId/1654/.aspx>.**
- Habib, Nader. 2012. "Turkey and Iran: Growing Economic Relations despite Western Sanctions," Crown Center for Middle East Studies, **Middle East Brief**, No. 62.
- Hajimineh Rahmat. 2013. "Domestic and Foreign Implications of the Recent Social Movement in Turkey," Institute for Middle East Strategic Studies, July 7, Available at: <http://www.fa.merc.ir/View/tabid/127/ArticleId/2109/.aspx>.
- IRIB News and Commentary. 2013. "Cemil Cicek's Visit to Tehran and Turkey's Participation in Iranian Diplomacy for Resolving the Syrian Crisis," Available at: <http://www.77.36.153.24/NewsPage.aspx?newsid=36842>.
- Karami, Kamran. 2011. "Arab Spring and Saudi Arabia: Effects and Responses," **Middle East Studies Quarterly**, Vol. 18, No. 66.
- Kasapoglu, Can. 2012. "The Cold War between Turkey and Iran," **Foreign Policy Research Institute**. Available at: <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2012/06/cold-war-between-turkey-and-iran>.
- Khajehpour, Bijan. March 29, 2012. "The Role of Economic & Energy Relations with Turkey and Russia in Iran's National Strategy," **Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS)**.
- Kirişci, Kemal and Kaptanoğlu, Neslihan. 2011. "The Politics of Trade and Turkish Foreign Policy," **Middle Eastern Studies**, Vol. 47, No. 5.
- McCurdy, Daphne. 2008. "Turkish-Iranian Relations: When Opposites Attract," **Turkish Policy Quarterly**, Vol. 7, No. 2.
- McDaniel, Harvey. 2013. "Turkey and Iran's Cold War," March 12. Available at: <http://www.examiner.com/article/turkey-and-iran-s-cold-war>.
- Niakouei, Seyed Amir and Behmanesh, Hossein. 2012. "Conflicting Actors in Syrian Crisis: Goals and Attitudes," **Journal of Foreign Relations**, Vol. 4, No. 4.
- Noureddine, Mohammad. 2013. "Turkey 'Losing' even if the Syrian Regime Fell," *As-Safir*

- (Lebanon).
- Omidi, Ali and Rezaei, Fatemeh. 2011. "Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey's Foreign Policy: Its Indicators and Implications in the Middle East," *Journal of Foreign Relations*, Vol. 3, No. 3.
- Rast Khabar. 2013 October 11. "World Criticism of Turkey for Sponsoring Syrian Terrorists," Available at: <http://www.farsi.rasthaber.com>.
- Resalat Newspaper. 2012 May 14. "Seyed Hossein Hosseini Naghavi in Interview with Resalat: Turkey Bears Main Responsibility in Recent Bombing in Syria".
- Shargh Newspaper. 2013 May 12. "Tehran-Ankara Engagement on the Syrian Crisis in an Interview with Turkish Ambassador to Iran".
- Shargh Newspaper. 2013 May 2. "Spokesperson of Turkish Foreign Ministry Declared in Tehran: Priority Is Given to Peaceful Solution to the Syrian Crisis".
- Shargh Newspaper. 2012 August 8. "Brigadier General Firouzabadi's Warning to Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar".
- Siasat Rouz Newspaper. 2012 May 28. "Turkish Authorities Repeated Irresponsible Claims".
- Stein, Aaron and Bleek, Philipp C. 2012. "Turkish-Iranian Relations: From "Friends with Benefits" to "It's Complicated"," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 14, No. 4.
- The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Strategic Comments. 2012. "Russia's Syrian Stance: Principled Self-Interest," Vol. 18, No. 7.
- Tocci, Nathalie. 2013 April 2. "Turkey's Kurdish Gamble," *IAI Working Papers 1310*.
- Troyansky, Vladimir. 2012. "Russia Support for al-Assad's Syria: Reasons old and New," Vol. 17, No. 1. Available at: <http://www.ojcs.siue.edu/ojs/index.php/ssa/article/view/2710>.
- Turkey's Embassy in Tehran, Interview with Turkish Advisor Bsariz Saygin, 2013 June 25.
- Vatan Emruz Newspaper. 2013 January 10. "General Javani in an Interview with Vatan Emruz: People Back Assad".
- Walker, Joshua W. 2012. "Turkey's Time in Syria: Future Scenarios," *Crown Cente*