

Does Turkey's Stance on Iran's Nuclear Development Program Reflect an Axis-shift in Turkish Foreign Policy?

Nguyen Mai Lan Thanh

Fatih University, İstanbul, Turkey

lan.thanh@fatih.edu.tr

The world is being nourished with tremendous development in technology, which causes the greatest destruction of civilization from the intrinsic civilization itself. It is believed that nuclear weapons states hold a handful of nuclear arsenals, strong enough to eradicate completely life on earth. With the experience of the devastating atomic bombs marking the end of the Second World War, it is not difficult to say that the whole world is shaking when there is any state attempting to develop nuclear armaments.

In the case of Iran recently, different approaches and resolutions have been discussed. Consequently, several of them have been implemented, in order to prevent the Islamic Republic from pursuing nuclear arsenal, despite Tehran's discourses on her intention to have her own nuclear program for peaceful and civilian purposes. Turkey, as an active regional player, reflects her position on the issue via the state's foreign policy. That Turkey has been hesitating at complying with the West's sanctions on Iran poses not only questions but also confusion among the international community. "Does Turkey's stance on Iran's nuclear development program reflect an axis-shift in Turkish Foreign Policy?"

This paper seeks to answer that question, by analyzing the context that endorses the Iranian nuclear program in pursuance of nuclear technology, and by focusing on the discourses offered by the Iranian and Turkish representatives to the international community concerning the ambiguities of the Iranian nuclear development program.

In contrast to much in the literature which perceived Turkey as a moderator, this paper argues that Turkey is more like a facilitator, besides proposing mediation grounds like the previous Baghdad and Moscow sponsored mediations between the US/EU and Iran. From this perspective, Turkey's stance seems clear in supporting the idea that instead of imposing sanctions, the West must think of other effective ways to resolve the nuclear energy. In other words, Ankara believes that diplomatic talks and negotiations shall be continued and attributed to Iranian nuclear debacle.

Overall, this paper concludes that Turkey's decision of no sanctions on Iran does not indicate that Turkish foreign policy is anti-Western. Rather, it

illustrates Turkey's growing independence as a regional power and flexibility in decision-making process with regard to her own interests, such as gaining image in the Middle East with the new foreign policy doctrine, less independence on Russian energy imports by Iran's alternative, and prioritizing domestic solutions, while not upsetting the West's mutual interests.

In addition, this study will contribute to the existing literature on the part of the explanation of Iranian diplomacy with regard to the religious understanding of "taqiyya" (deception) and "qitman" (concealing).

Keywords: Nuclear Program, Iran, Middle East, NPT, Turkish Foreign Policy, Western Orientation, Axis-Shift.