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# Iran-Türkiye Relations in Shadows of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

Ahmet Furkan Ozyakar

The Iranian Studies Unit

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## Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded in 1996 under the auspices of China and Russia and was called the Shanghai Five, with the joining of three Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The establishment of the SCO was motivated, in part, by the objective of facilitating the coordination of diplomatic efforts between Moscow and Beijing, with the aim of fostering a period of harmonious relations. The strategic pursuit of establishing an autonomous platform for economic, political, and military discussions, independent from Western influence, emerged as a crucial element in the endeavours of Russia and China to diminish Western dominance in world events. Additionally, the organization sought to effectively manage the converging interests of these two countries in the Central Asian region. Furthermore, the organization placed significant emphasis on addressing the pressing issues of “extremism,” “separatism,” and “terrorism,” collectively referred to as the “Three Evils.”<sup>1</sup>

During the US War on Terror campaign in the aftermath of 9/11, Shanghai Five transformed into the SCO, with Uzbekistan becoming the sixth member. Throughout the years, the institutional capacity of SCO has developed and “dialogue partners” and “observer states” have been accepted. Türkiye’s application for “dialogue partner” status was granted in 2013. India and Pakistan, two neighbours with continuous border disputes, were bestowed full membership in 2017. As of 4 July 2023, Iran’s long-standing membership process for the SCO was completed at the end of its 23rd Summit of the Council of Heads of States.

It is important to note that the SCO already accounts for approximately half of the world’s population and a quarter of the total global GDP. As a result, it is progressively becoming the umbrella organization of the Global South. Additionally, the SCO is ascribed with different labels such as “anti-Western,” “anti-NATO,” and “anti-US”. One of the most striking examples was “rogue NATO” due to the type of regimes in the organization.<sup>2</sup> In this respect, the diverse array of labels associated with the SCO confers upon it a significant standing, rendering it appealing to both member nations and prospective candidates.

## What does SCO membership mean for Iran?

Enjoying observer status since 2005, Iran was finally confirmed as the ninth member of the SCO. Amidst ongoing struggles with Western-imposed economic sanctions, deadlocked JCPOA negotiations, and growing protests within the country, gaining membership can be considered a worthy political and diplomatic accomplishment for Iran, which often has been isolated internationally since the Islamic Revolution. Kaleji underlines how Iran may regard the SCO as a “club of revisionist states,”

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1 John P Ruehl, “Iranian, Turkish moves to join SCO raise its profile,” *Asia Times*, October 8, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3tiy4if>.

2 Aslı Aydıntaşbaş et al., “Rogue NATO: The new face of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,” *European Council on Foreign Relations*, September 16, 2022, <https://bit.ly/48vkPel>.



an “Eastern Bloc,” a “concert of non-Western great powers,” a “New Warsaw Pact,” or an “Eastern NATO”.<sup>3</sup> Grajewski argues that Iran’s acceptance under the umbrella of an international organization is important for “bolstering regime’s external legitimacy,” “fostering Iran’s security-oriented regionalism,” and “promoting the transition toward the so-called multipolar world order”.<sup>4</sup> One could posit that the absence of membership in an international organization, coupled with Iran’s continuous endeavours to alleviate its international isolation as spearheaded by the US, have led to the significant role played by the SCO in Tehran’s pursuit of fostering relations with neighbouring nations and engaging in non-Western regionalism.<sup>5</sup>

One motive behind Iran’s membership to the SCO is to be a part of an international security and economic cooperation. Since leaving the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1979, Iran has not been a part of any regional organization with a defence and security purpose.<sup>6</sup> In terms of security, in the event of a breakdown in the nuclear negotiations, Iran may encounter an increasing escalation in tensions with Israel and potentially with the United States. However, given the prevailing conditions, it is unlikely that SCO would assume the role of safeguarding Iran. Unlike NATO, the SCO lacks a collective security framework and has predominantly exhibited a passive position in recent wars. This is partly because decisions within the SCO necessitate consensus.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, for the first time since the fall of the Soviet Union, Iran will be able to participate in joint military manoeuvres with Russia and the other Central Asian nations by virtue of Iran’s membership in the SCO. To be more specific, Iran will be authorized to take part in the SCO’s “Peace Mission Exercise,” which is a collection of anti-terrorism drills undertaken annually since 2014.<sup>8</sup> Further, the Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure of the SCO, established in accordance with Article 10 of the SCO’s charter, holds significant institutional significance for Iran’s security and military cooperation. This framework has the potential to offer a wide array of security and military collaboration opportunities for Iran in addressing issues such as terrorism, religious extremism, arms and drug trafficking, and cyber threats.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of Iran’s economic concerns, it is important to note that Iran holds a significant strategic position in the domestic and international transport sector of the member nations of the SCO due to its geo-economic location. Iran could offer multiple transport routes to its Eurasian partners such as “the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC),” “the East-West transit route, which starts from Sarakhs on the border of Turkmenistan and extends to Bazargan and Jolfa on the border of Türkiye and Azerbaijan,” “the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA)” and “the Asia

3 Vali Kaleji, “What Will Iran’s SCO Membership Mean for Security Arrangements in Central Asia?,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 20, No. 112, (July 12, 2023), <https://rb.gy/nws4l>.

4 Nicole Bayat Grajewski, “Iran and the SCO: The Quest for Legitimacy and Regime Preservation,” *Middle East Policy*, (2023), p. 38.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

6 Kaleji, “Iran’s SCO Membership”.

7 Aydıntaşbaş et al., “Rogue NATO”.

8 Kaleji, “What Will Iran’s SCO Membership”.

9 *Ibid.*

Land Transport Infrastructure Development (ALTID) Project”.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, Iran will also be afforded the opportunity to assume a constructive role within China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project. From this viewpoint, Iran’s involvement in the SCO can alleviate Iran’s economic isolation through reaching a larger market to sell its gas and oil reserves and turning its geographical position into an advantage.

Additionally, Umud Shokri draws attention that significant obstacles may impede the actualization of these advantages. Iran’s transit route could not meet the member states’ expectations due to its limitations in contemporary rail and road infrastructure and limited access to ports. Iran also faces challenges in securing adequate funding for extensive development initiatives, and it is unlikely that its membership in the SCO will effectively address these obstacles.<sup>11</sup> Having said that, Shireen Hunter emphasizes that members of the SCO have various economic interests. Both Chinese and Russian perspectives on the region can be described as semi-colonial. China views both Central and South Asia as potential markets for its exports and suppliers of raw materials. India is also interested in expanding its exports to that region and gaining political influence there.<sup>12</sup>

Despite various opinions mentioned above, the Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi, is advocating for the augmentation of unrestricted commerce within SCO, with a focus on enhancing financial transactions and banking activities. This stance reflects Tehran’s perception of SCO membership as a potential avenue to circumvent economic sanctions imposed by the United States. Therefore, the SCO membership could improve Iran’s position by neutralizing Western sanctions without making concessions to the states that imposed them.<sup>13</sup> However, it is quite doubtful that the SCO will be able to solve Iran’s most pressing issues if US sanctions continue and tensions with Washington persist. Despite these problems, Iran gained considerable diplomatic achievement by obtaining membership status in the SCO which also complements Iran’s “Look East” policy.

## What does Iran’s membership to the SCO mean for Türkiye?

Iran’s membership to the SCO would embolden Iranian policymakers against the US and its Western allies with regard to economic sanctions and security concerns. Although Iran’s relations with Russia and China have gradually improved in recent years and neither country has been very strict in imposing sanctions against Iran, it is noteworthy to underline that both countries also supported imposing UNSC sanctions on Iran in the past.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, Iran’s membership in the SCO would not eliminate Chinese and Russian reservations regarding Iranian endeavours. Against this

<sup>10</sup> Mehdi Sanaei and Fatemeh Atri Sangari, “Iran and Regional Convergence in Eurasia,” *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 30, (2023), pp. 57 - 58.

<sup>11</sup> Umud Shokri, “Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, November 16, 2022, <https://rb.gy/5sbut>.

<sup>12</sup> Shireen T. Hunter, “Iran: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Membership Will Not Solve Its Problems,” *Middle East Eye*, September 30, 2021, <https://rb.gy/f8of6>.

<sup>13</sup> Navbahor Imamova, “Uzbekistan, Central Asia Try to Redefine Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” *Voice of America*, September 17, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3tcOqc5>.

<sup>14</sup> “Security Council Imposes Additional Sanctions on Iran, Voting 12 in Favour to 2 Against, with 1 Abstention,” *United Nations*, June 9, 2010, <https://rb.gy/s7hxo>.



backdrop, the continuity of Iran's "Look East" foreign policy under the presidency of Ebrahim Raisi, Iran's relationships with the West, particularly with the United States, is still a concern for them. As a result, Iran will not be able to realize its economic goals if it focuses solely on the East and does not first work towards settling its differences with the West and obtaining the easing of sanctions.<sup>15</sup>

Another important point is that Türkiye's efforts to expand its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus have not only strained its relationship with Iran, but have also created tensions with Moscow. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, there is competition among Türkiye, Iran, and Russia, characterized by a complex web of alliances.<sup>16</sup> Iran's contacts with Central Asia face additional obstacles in the form of political, cultural, and ideological restrictions. The Turkic and Sunni republics in the region, along with Azerbaijan, harbour unfavourable sentiments against Iran. Furthermore, distrust of Iran's revolutionary Islam lingers, leading to a greater inclination to engage in economic cooperation with Türkiye. The dynamics in question will likely remain unaffected by Iran's inclusion in the SCO.<sup>17</sup> Yet Iran's membership in the SCO and its elevated role in the security arrangements of Central Asia could position the Islamic Republic as a major rival to Türkiye. In recent years, Türkiye has sold a variety of drones, including Bayraktar TB-2 combat drones and Anka-S drones, to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, amongst other countries.<sup>18</sup> Compared to Türkiye, the inclusion of Iran as a SCO member also presents a favourable prospect for Iran to enhance its arms trade, namely in the domain of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), with the Central Asian nations. The inauguration of the Ababil-2 drone manufacturing facility in Dushanbe, Tajikistan during May 2020 showcased Tehran's capabilities in this domain.<sup>19</sup> This regionalist approach may lead to a new domain with regard to competition and rivalry between Iran and Türkiye in Central Asia.

Tensions in Ankara's relations with the Euro-Atlantic community have gradually increased due to the lack of political support after the failed coup attempt in 2016 and the EU's failed promises on the immigration issue, creating a situation that provides more ground for a narrative about Türkiye's potential alternative, or at least complementary, foreign policy directions. Based on this, Türkiye has remodelled its multidimensional foreign policy and taken steps toward regional integration, especially towards Central Asia, China, and Russia – in other words – Eurasia. However, the tensions that have been building up over the past few years in Türkiye's relations with the West provide an excellent chance to showcase its developing relations with Eastern countries, including with the SCO. Therefore, Türkiye's constructive statements towards the SCO have become more prominent and important in the last decade. Türkiye's recent strategy aims to capitalize on enhanced economic and political ties to establish itself as a prominent energy hub through regional energy initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Hamidreza Azizi, "Iran's "Look East" Strategy: Continuity and Change under Raisi," *Middle East Council*, (2023), p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Iain William MacGillivray, "The Paradox of Turkish–Iranian Relations in the Syrian Crisis," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 6, (2020), p. 1049.

<sup>17</sup> Hunter, "Iran: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation".

<sup>18</sup> Kaleji, "What Will Iran's SCO Membership Mean for Security Arrangements in Central Asia".

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Tamás Kozma, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization on Turkey's Energy Agenda," *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (2019).

Additionally, this approach seeks to foster resolutions to regional issues and actively engage with international actors and institutions to promote regional stability and security.<sup>21</sup>

Even though Iran, as a member of the SCO, is likely to pursue a more active foreign policy in Central Asia, Türkiye will maintain its advantageous position due to its ongoing proactive foreign policy, its stronger ethnic and cultural ties with Central Asian countries,<sup>22</sup> as well as its accelerating relations with China.<sup>23</sup> The Turkish presence in Central Asia could progressively erode Tehran's influence in the region, given that Ankara has strengthened its grasp on all Turkic people in the former Soviet space during the AKP administration, thereby gaining additional leverage.<sup>24</sup> The Organization of Turkic States, in particular, plays a role in Türkiye's integration into the region and allows for the expansion of cooperation between its member states. Moreover, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency, known as TİKA, also maintains its activities in the underdeveloped areas in Central Asia.<sup>25</sup>

Another important point is that while Türkiye and Iran have not engaged in any direct military confrontation, they have taken opposing sides in various conflicts, leading to frictions. Türkiye and Iran have taken opposing positions in the Syrian Civil War since 2011, during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The ongoing UAV rivalry between Iran and Türkiye in the Russia-Ukraine war showcases their investments in their respective defence industries and reveals their understanding of security concerns. Despite their rivalry over Iran's and Türkiye's regional power projection in Syria, the two countries have worked together to find a peaceful resolution to the crisis in the Astana talks since 2017.<sup>26</sup> MacGillivray underscores that the coexistence of competition, cooperation, and confrontation offers an overview of a relationship that is contradictory and fraught with paradoxes in the Syrian Crisis.<sup>27</sup> Iran and Türkiye have utilized identity-based rhetoric in their conflict. The current ideological conflict is conceptualized not in the context of sectarianism, but rather in terms of divergent 'civilizational' perspectives – a discourse centred around an ideological competition between Turkish 'Neo-Ottomanism' and Iranian 'Expansionism'. Both parties level accusations against each other over their imperial goals in the region and their desire for power.<sup>28</sup> There may be further meetings involving all four parties (Iran, Türkiye, Russia, and Syria) during the period ahead. Even if Iran's consistent policy towards Syria since 2011 has caused significant damage to the country's economy, the prospect of Iran's influence in Syria's policy-making may compensate for this damage in the long run. Simultaneously, the ongoing competition between Türkiye and Iran

21 Bülent Aras and Hakan Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia: Frontier of a New Geographic Imagination," *New Perspectives on Turkey*, Vol. 40, (2019), p. 198.

22 Genevieve Donnellon-May, "Turkey's Growing Influence in Central Asia," *The Diplomat*, October 13, 2022, <https://rb.gy/rtuql>.

23 Fuat Kabakci, "50 Years On, Turkish-Chinese Ties Grow Stronger," *Anadolu Agency*, March 25, 2021, <https://rb.gy/4labz>.

24 Fuad Shahbazov, "Turkey's Rise and Iran's Decline in the South Caucasus," *The New Arab*, December 30, 2020, <https://rb.gy/ifatw>.

25 Erman Akıllı and Bengü Çelenk, "TİKA's Soft Power: Nation Branding in Turkish Foreign Policy," *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (2019), pp. 141–144.

26 Faysal Abbas Mohamad, "The Astana Process Six Years On: Peace or Deadlock in Syria?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 1, 2023, <https://rb.gy/qtqzj>.

27 MacGillivray, "Turkish-Iranian Relations," p. 1047.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 1052.

is expected to intensify in the context of the Syrian crisis. In order to transform the existing rivalry between Türkiye and Iran into a cooperative relationship, the strained relations between the two countries need to be ameliorated.

## Is SCO membership the ultimate goal for Türkiye?

Important aspects of Türkiye's foreign policy include its membership in the NATO bloc, having the second largest military there following the US, and maintaining its proactive relations with the SCO. While Türkiye's continuous standoff with the EU could be head-scratching, the ongoing problems may also drive a genuine wedge between Türkiye and the EU. In the recent report of the European Parliament for Türkiye, Erdoğan underlined that "The EU is trying to break away from Turkey [...] we will make our evaluations against these developments and if necessary, we can part ways with the EU."<sup>29</sup>

Undoubtedly, Erdoğan's participation in the 2022 SCO meeting in Samarkand was noteworthy as he was the only representative from NATO member states present. The intended message was crystal clear: Türkiye is not dependent on one side of the multipolar world, and the balanced foreign policy may facilitate collaborations with different partners when necessary. However, Erdoğan's presence at the summit also served a strategic function in Türkiye's diplomatic relations with Western countries, indicating that it possesses alternative avenues for engagement. Ankara's establishment of a "dialogue partnership" with the SCO effectively communicates its shift away from a steadfast commitment to the transatlantic alliance, indicating its desire for a foreign policy that is non-aligned and maintains a presence in both spheres of influence. The administration led by Erdoğan views this as an opportunity for Türkiye to enhance its regional influence and pursue its geopolitical objectives.<sup>30</sup>

However, while NATO is a comprehensive security organization, the SCO is closer to a regional and economic cooperation organization. Unlike NATO, which Article 5 of its founding treaty defines an armed strike on one or more of its members as "an attack against all", the SCO is not recognized as a viable alternative to NATO for collective defence.<sup>31</sup> While Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two founding members of the SCO, saw border conflict in September 2022, leading to more than 90 civilian deaths from both sides,<sup>32</sup> the SCO could not propose any 'peaceful settlement' of the dispute to moderate, contrary to what was underlined in the "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security".<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, border disputes between Pakistan and India over Kashmir are also another regional crisis to which the SCO could not find a solution. The SCO

<sup>29</sup> "Turkey Could Part Ways with EU If Necessary, Erdogan Says," *Reuters*, September 16, 2023, <https://bit.ly/3ry1atm>.

<sup>30</sup> Aydıntaşbaş et al., "Rogue NATO".

<sup>31</sup> Umur Uras, "Can the SCO be Turkey's alternative to the West?," *Aljazeera*, September 21, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3EXGgXK>.

<sup>32</sup> Alijan Sharshenova, "More than a 'Border Skirmish' Between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *The Diplomat*, September 19, 2022, <https://bit.ly/3LJldeb>.

<sup>33</sup> Rashid Alimov, "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security," *UN Chronicle*, Vol. 3, No. LIV, (2017), <https://bit.ly/45jO2ro>.

does not have a collective security mechanism like that of NATO, and it has been mainly ineffective in recent conflicts. One reason for this is that SCO actions require consent from all members of the body. Since Türkiye is already a member of NATO and is applying to join the European Union, it seems unlikely that it would ever become a member of the SCO.

Although Türkiye is criticized for its close relations with the SCO, there are multiple reasons why the SCO is important for Türkiye. In general, Türkiye's multidimensional foreign policy requires collaboration with different actors in Eurasia.<sup>34</sup> Turkish policymakers have demonstrated a clear anticipation of the evolving significance of Eurasia in the realm of global politics. The political and economic connections of the country with other Eurasian nations, like as Russia, China, and India, have experienced significant improvement, particularly in recent years.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Türkiye's approach towards the SCO could not be detached from its eagerness to strengthen its sphere of influence in Central Asia, with which it has cultural and ethnic affinity. Moreover, the world's economic and financial centre is gradually shifting to the East and the China-led SCO presents a way for Türkiye to maintain its centrality in world affairs.

However, although Erdoğan has hardened his rhetoric towards both the US and the EU in recent years, as a part of the Western bloc, Türkiye cannot be expected to completely turn its back from the Western to the Eastern bloc. For this reason, Türkiye's negotiations and cooperation with international organizations should not be seen as seeking an alternative, but rather as its multifaceted, proactive foreign policy.

## Conclusion

Regardless of the status of Iran and Türkiye in the SCO, both countries will remain competitive rivals in Central Asia and seek to extend their commercial relations with regard to their capabilities. Türkiye ostensibly positions itself in a relatively better position by virtue of its more balanced foreign policy between the West and East. On the other hand, Iran's domestic struggles and its deadlock 2015 nuclear deal negotiations limit its manoeuvrability.

Iran and Türkiye will also compete on energy sources. Türkiye wants to become an energy centre by being the primary conduit for the region's numerous energy sources to reach global markets. The new Turkish policy is meant to ensure the safety and diversity of oil and gas supplies to Europe. As a crucial player, Türkiye is instrumental in establishing the "East-West Energy Corridor."<sup>36</sup> In the foreseeable future, Türkiye and Iran are likely to face off against the opening of the Zangezur Corridor, which has the potential to increase Türkiye's sphere of influence for the transportation of energy reserves to the West.

<sup>34</sup> Emre Ermen, "Rise of New Centres of Power in Eurasia: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy," *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 5, (2014), p. 185.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

<sup>36</sup> Aras and Fidan, "Turkey and Eurasia," p. 201.



It could be argued that the SCO membership brings a certain degree of prestige to Iran. But it is highly unlikely to result in alleviating Iran's economic and security obstacles. Iranian-Russian relations are likely to continue to remain close, especially in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Iran has also shown support to Armenia and wants to prevent the opening of the Zangezur Corridor and hinder the connection of Türkiye and Central Asian countries through Azerbaijan. Additionally, Iranian policymakers are also concerned that the Zangezur Corridor's growth may diminish Iran's geo-economic worth for four main reasons. First, Tehran will not serve as the principal link between Azerbaijan proper and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with the opening of the Zangezur Corridor. Second, Iran will no longer be able to serve as a unifying force between Türkiye and Central Asia. Third, the country will no longer be able to join the Eurasian Economic Union. Finally, as the Middle Corridor grows in strategic relevance after the Russian-Ukrainian war, the Zangezur Corridor will further detract from Iran's position as the primary route connecting East and West.<sup>37</sup>

The border dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia is also reported in the IRNA and the Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian emphasized that "Iran will not permit the blockage of its connection route with Armenia, and in order to secure that objective the Islamic Republic of Iran also launched a wargame in that region."<sup>38</sup> Nasser Kanani, a spokesman for the foreign ministry, expressed support for Azerbaijan's retaking of the rebel province of Nagorno-Karabakh last month: "Tehran is against making geopolitical changes in the region and this is our clear position."<sup>39</sup> As the proposed route of the Zanzegur Corridor project goes along the entirety of Iran's border with Armenia, the Iranian government is understandably concerned that Azerbaijan may intend for the project to be used to block Iran's border with Armenia.<sup>40</sup> From this viewpoint, the government of Tehran has expressed opposition towards the Zangezur corridor projects, citing concerns that such initiatives could potentially impede Tehran's access to land routes connecting it with Russia through Armenia and Georgia.

In *The Clash of Civilizations, and the Remaking of the World Order*, Samuel Huntington describes Türkiye as a "torn country" whose "leaders typically wish to pursue a bandwagon strategy and to make their country a member of the West, but the country's history, culture, and traditions are non-western."<sup>41</sup> From this viewpoint, it is anticipated that Türkiye will continue its proactive foreign policy towards Central Asia and the SCO, which would enhance its regional integration and bring it closer to Russia and China by adopting an ambitious approach.<sup>42</sup> Türkiye, as one of Iran's regional competitors, has effectively preserved balance in its diplomatic relations with both Eastern and Western powers,

37 Cavid Veliyev, "Iran's Frustrations With the Zangezur Corridor," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 19, No. 140, (September 23, 2022), <https://rb.gy/a1utg>.

38 "FM: Comprehensive Iran-Russia Agreement to Be Signed by Late March," *Islamic Republic News Agency*, October 19, 2022, <https://rb.gy/fhhty>.

39 "Iran Says It Opposes 'Geopolitical Changes' in Caucasus," *Voice of America*, October 2, 2023, <https://rb.gy/b9yg7>.

40 Umud Shokri, "Why Iran Opposes Azerbaijan's Zangezur Corridor Project," *Gulf International Forum*, September 28, 2022, <https://rb.gy/8en8j>.

41 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of the Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

42 Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 11, 2023, <https://rb.gy/kk70j>.

skillfully manoeuvring through the intricate dynamics of the geopolitical sphere. In the meantime, the relations with the West may fluctuate, but this does not mean that Türkiye will embrace the SCO in earnest and cultivate its relations to become a full member.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that Iran will rely on its SCO membership as leverage in regional competition with Türkiye. Türkiye's integration into Central Asia would be facilitated by its relations with the SCO, the EU, and NATO, as well as the fact that it is not subject to severe sanctions. There is a growing trend among West Asian nations to express their aspirations of becoming members of organizations that are led by Beijing and Moscow, namely the BRICS and the SCO. The stated aims encompass promoting deeper economic ties with Asian nations, strengthening defence partnerships, and building an alternative to Western institutions<sup>43</sup> and Türkiye would not like to be out of this trend. To transform this competition into a win-win situation for both sides, Ankara and Tehran should work on their differences by increasing their diplomatic contacts and collaborating on certain issues such as Syria's war, and the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict.

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<sup>43</sup> Mohamad Hasan Sweidan, "Iran in the SCO: Gateway or Gatekeeper to West Asia?," *The Cradle*, July 18, 2023, <https://rb.gy/ca9wk>.



