
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Iran and Turkey Cooperation in the trans-regional transportation network and its Impact on the Implementation of the Chinese BRI in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the prospects of cooperation between Iran and Turkey in the trans-regional transportation network, particularly the International North-South Corridor and the Middle Corridor, and the impact of such collaboration on implementing the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in the Middle East. The paper concludes the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in the greater Middle Eastern region would undoubtedly be made possible by cooperation between Iran and Turkey in the transregional transportation network, specifically in the International North-South Corridor and the Middle Corridor.

KEYWORDS

International North-South Corridor, Middle Corridor, Belt and Road Initiative, Iran, Turkey, and China.

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Introduction

The role of regional actors has been made possible by the region's profound and rapid developments. Iran and Turkey, the two regional powers in the area, play a major and indisputable role. Iran and Turkey are neighbors with a shared border of about 534 kilometers and a long history of diplomatic ties. Geographical, historical, cultural, and especially political-economic factors have been significant in their bilateral relations over the last few centuries. Although historically Iran and Turkey have worked together and balanced their interests, there have been indications that their rivalry is becoming more important. Yet, these two significant actors in the region have different functions and sometimes complementary boundaries to their efficacy. These two actors' proximity to one another forges a powerful political, security, and economic bloc in the Middle East. After highlighting the shared past and legacy of two massive empires, Iran and Turkey's cooperation offers the best opportunity to make up for historical grievances and achieve stability, peace, and trade cooperation. In particular, Tehran and Ankara's cooperation in transportation would be vital for the region and the world because of their geopolitical positions as bridges between East and West.

At the same time, both countries enjoy good relations with China, the world's second-largest economy. The Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a significant and transparent initiative through which China shares opportunities and seeks common development with the rest of the world. The BRI is a massive infrastructure investment project led by China that aims to improve connectivity, trade, and communication in Eurasia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Latin America, Europe, and Africa. After more than a decade (since 2013), the BRI now includes over 150 countries and 30 international organizations spread across five continents. Iran and Turkey are involved in this mega project. In addition, Iran is a major component of the International North-South Corridor, while Turkey is a major component of the Middle Corridor, both of which could be integrated into the Chinese BRI.

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This paper aims to explore the prospects of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Turkish Republic in the trans-regional transportation network particularly, the International North-South Corridor and the Middle Corridor, and the impact of such cooperation on the implementation of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in the Middle East.

Iran and Turkey relations: An overview

Iran and Turkey are neighbors and have around 534 kilometers of common border and a long history of relations. In the past few centuries, geographical, historical, cultural, and particularly, politico-economic elements have played an important role in their bilateral relations. Turkey and Iran are two regional powers that have historically balanced their interests and cooperated, but there have been signs that rivalry has been taking precedence. Among the areas straining relations between the two are Turkey's support for the Syrian opposition, growing competition over Iraq, and the Kurdish and Palestinian issues.

Iran and Turkey are essentially mirror images of one another. They share geography, culture, religion, and a long history of collaboration and conflict. They both cross multiple geopolitical regions. Iran and Turkey share two continents and border five of the world's most volatile regions: the Middle East, the Caucasus, the Balkans, Central Asia, and the South Asian subcontinent. They are both the offspring of empires with hegemonic histories that occasionally pitted them against one another. Persia converted to Shiite Islam in the 16th century, partly to distinguish itself from the Ottoman Empire's Sunni caliphate (Chen, 2021).

However, Iran and Turkey represent two opposing poles in the Islamic world. Turkey maintained the status quo for the first two decades following the Iranian 1979 Islamic revolution. Its enduring secular Kemalist ideology was named after Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of the modern Turkish Republic, who steered Turkey toward the West. Since the Cold War, Ankara's alliance commitments and political structures have remained relatively stable. In contrast, Iran emerged as a leading advocate for change. It continued to push its ambitious Islamic ideology, both directly and through a new network of surrogates. Tehran also wanted Muslim countries to form a bloc independent of either the East or West.

The victory of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2002 marked a significant shift in Turkey's role, with Ankara and Tehran taking on opposite roles. Turkey was able to shed its internal political and economic policies and become a regional power headed by a party that was eager to expand its influence throughout the Middle East and beyond. Turkey has also achieved complete integration into the international economic system, whereas Iran has been left largely alone as a result of international sanctions on its nuclear program. As the July 2015 nuclear agreement is put into effect, Iran may experience a gradual reintegration into the global economy (Habibi and Mahdizadeh, 2014).

Iran and Turkey play significant and undeniable roles as regional powers. Although the proximity of these two players creates a strong political, security, and economic bloc in the Middle East, their roles and effectiveness in the region differ and are sometimes complementary. After emphasizing the ancient history and heritage of two great empires, a collaboration between Iran and Turkey is the best chance to compensate for past tensions and achieve trade cooperation, stability, security, and peace.

The joint statement, issued at the end of Iran's then President Ebrahim Raeisi's visit to Ankara on January 25 of this year (2024) both expressed their determination to expand bilateral political, economic, and cultural relations while explaining their views on important regional and international issues. The major issues which were emphasized included:

- 1- The Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Turkey, in the light of their traditional relations based on mutual respect, common interests, friendship, and deep-rooted cultural and historical ties, emphasize that they will expand relations in all fields through mutual meetings at the highest levels and strengthen contacts between their people.
- 2- The two countries express their determination to jointly fight against all forms of terrorism, which has become one of the biggest challenges of the contemporary era and has caused a lot of damage to the region. They emphasize the fight against smuggling of goods, weapons, drugs, and organized crime along their common borders.
- 3- The two powers emphasized the need for an all-out fight against terrorist groups, drug production and trafficking, human trafficking, and illicit trade. Also, they emphasized the need to make it possible for the safe, voluntary, and honorable return of Afghan refugees to their country (Iran-Turkey Statement, January 25, 2024).

Iran and Turkey Economic Cooperation

Due to their geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic locations Iran and Turkey have created an attractive market in the region. Iranian-Turkish trade and economic cooperation is significant because since 1979 (the Iranian Islamic Revolution) it has been the all-important platform on which otherwise often tense bilateral relations could survive. With trade and economic ties now weakening, Iranian-Turkish geopolitical rivalry could sharply re-intensify. Trade in oil and gas is one factor to watch. The other issue centers on the ability of Tehran and Ankara to compromise, if not collaborate, on planned regional energy and transit infrastructure. Trade relations between Tehran and Ankara have been continuous, and even crises have not stopped bilateral

trade. In addition, a range of domestic developments in Iran and Turkey as well as regional and global developments have resulted in the promotion of bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries (Habibi and Mahdizadeh, 2014).

Regarding Iranian regional policy, in recent years Turkey has been among the priorities of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy. Turkey has also paid great attention to its relations with Iran. Tehran and Ankara have many opportunities to work together in trade, tourism, security, culture, academic exchange, and transportation in particular. Since Turkey and Iran are geographically connected to Europe and Asia, respectively, transportation can play a significant role in their cooperation.

Geographical considerations give both countries a foundation for cooperation in the transportation sector. Iran needs Turkey to improve relations with Europe, and Turkey needs Iran to transit to the Asian region. Furthermore, a greater focus on the transport commission between the two countries is advantageous for boosting trade, in addition to multilateral cooperation models, the signing of a transit agreement between Turkey, Iran, and Qatar, and the UAE-Iran-Turkey corridor via Iran (Shokri, 2024). Natural gas, aluminum, plastic and chemical fertilizers, minerals, fruits, and products from related and chemical industries are Iran's top exports to Turkey. Turkey's major exports to Iran include semi-trailers, road tractors, sunflower seed oil, synthetic fibers, nuclear reactors, steam boilers, and cattle corn.

Turkey has always attached great attraction for the expansion of ties with neighboring countries. Since Ankara has long attempted to become one of the top ten economies of the world, it has paid special attention to Iran as an export and consumption market (Vatanka, 2022). With changes emerging in Turkish foreign policy in recent years and Islamists coming to power, as well as stability and security brought up by the Justice and Development Party led by Erdogan, have caused changes, economic growth, inflation reduction, tourism industry, and regional policies that strengthen peace and stability in the region. Yet, in the last two years Turkish economy and currency have faced some difficulties.

Ankara considers Iran as a strategic source for supplying crude oil and natural gas, energy security, and contributing to its role as a regional energy hub. Tehran also considers Turkey as an economic gateway to European energy markets and is likely to participate in future gas centers and gas supply projects to Europe in Turkey.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, Turkey is still the largest importer of natural gas and a significant importer of crude oil, and despite the decline in Iran's share of Turkish gas imports, the current gas contract expires in 2026. In 2022, the two countries emphasized the development of cooperation in energy fields. Iran has announced its readiness to provide sustainable energy to Turkey through gas exports, and in this context, it has been agreed that negotiations to extend Iran's gas export contract to Turkey for the next 25 years and increase the number of gas exports will be on the agenda (Ramezani Bonesh, 2023).

In the statement on January 25 of this year (mentioned above) Iran and Turkey also expressed their determination to expand bilateral economic cooperation:

1- Iran and Turkey agreed to strengthen economic and commercial cooperation by using the existing bilateral mechanisms and agreements and strive to maximize the volume of trade and increase cooperation in the field of energy, and by creating a suitable environment, increase mutual investments, and encourage private sectors of both sides to increase cooperation and investment.

2- Considering the strategic position and the central role of the two countries in the transportation of goods and passengers as each other's gateways to Europe and Asia, they express their willingness and commitment to strengthen cooperation in the field of road, rail and transit corridors and emphasize the need to strengthen border trade and create new border terminals.

3- Bilateral cooperation in the field of environment and fair and sustainable use of water resources had been among the other agenda of talks between the presidents of the two countries.

4- The two sides also emphasized the need for cultural, archive, youth, sports, higher education, and productive media relations (Iran-Turkey Statement, January 25, 2024).

Iran and Turkey's relations with China

Iran and Turkey as two major regional powers, with great economic potential and markets are having good relations with China. Tehran and Ankara have attracted great importance for their ties and relations with Beijing. For both countries, China is a major source of trade.

Iran and China share a common identity of being the home of ancient, and in many ways, continuous civilization, reiterated in their foreign relations. Both countries are great civilizations with deep historical roots and rich cultural traditions. Indeed, these reasons have contributed to the creation of a basis for both nations to share “psychological identifications”. Accordingly, China and Iran are two strategic partners with increasingly significant political and economic relations that have regional and global dimensions. These two nations have had about 2600 years of relations (Yazdani, 2023). Since ancient times, the Iranian Parthians and Sassanids Dynasty had had various contacts with China, and the two lands were further connected via the ancient Silk Road. These early links have set the stage for the ties between the two nations which we see today. The trade route between the two countries, the ancient Silk Road, linked China to Central Asia and the Middle East as well.

In modern times the official diplomatic relations established between the two countries on August 16, 1971, when Iran recognized the People’s Republic of China as ‘the sole legitimate government of China’ and China expressed its support for ‘Iran’s just struggle to defend its national resources’ (Graver, 2006). During their over about 2600 years of history of bilateral relations, Iran and China have both played crucial roles in spreading friendly cooperation along the Silk Road as well as in the facilitation and expansion of global trade. During the last 50 years since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two countries, bilateral relations have witnessed outstanding achievements in various political, economic, cultural, strategic, and defense areas. Currently, the regional and international situation is experiencing deep and complex developments. Under such circumstances, the two sides emphasize the importance of cooperation between the developing countries on international affairs and are committed to joint efforts towards the realization of peace, stability, and development in the region and the world at large.

During the last 50 years, since 1971, Sino-Iranian diplomatic relations have developed in various fields. However, since the Iranian Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Chinese-Iranian relationship has moved into a new phase, drew to a close, and important changes occurred in both countries. In the present time China–Iran relations normally refer to the economic, trade, energy, political, cultural, military, and social relations between the modern nations of the People’s Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Yazdani, 2023). China is Iran’s leading trade partner and was one of the biggest buyers of Iranian oil before then-US president Donald Trump re-imposed sweeping unilateral sanctions in 2018 after abandoning a multilateral nuclear agreement with Tehran.

Turkey and China, the two pivotal states with global political, economic, and cultural influence, are located at the two ends of West Asia and East Asia, respectively. The relations between Turkey and China also go back to the ancient Silk Road as Turkey could play a role as a gateway to Europe. Although, since ancient times, there were trade agreements between the Chinese Empire and the Turkish states despite ups and downs, relations between China and Turkey have evolved on various levels, of which the economic one is probably one of the most significant (Sandikli 2010: 226-227). This is because, as mentioned, both countries represent realities that are establishing themselves on the global scene.

After the First World War, Turkey and China both put forth efforts to establish bilateral relations, and a treaty of friendship and commerce was signed in 1934. China subsequently sent an ambassador to Ankara in 1935, and a Turkish ambassador was sent to China in 1940. In modern times diplomatic relations between the Republic of Turkey and the People’s Republic of China were established in 1971. Bilateral relations have been progressing steadily since the 1980s with the opening-up of both countries.

The re-election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as president of Turkey, the strategic coordination between Turkey and China’s Belt and Road Initiative, and Turkey’s Middle Corridor project all accelerated and promoted China–Turkey relations. This is a golden opportunity for China and Turkey to build the strategic cooperation relations that began in 2010. If Turkey can accommodate the core interests of and establish political ties with China, further cooperation between the two countries will not only benefit both but also have a great impact on regional stability and global governance (Gnerre, 2023).

In general Iran and Turkey both have attached great importance to their relations with China. In recent years their relations have been associated with becoming a member of China’s important global megaproject; the Belt and Road Initiative.

One can assume that Iran and Turkey:

- both countries have had historical relations with China
- both countries have played a great role in the Chinese ancient Silk Road
- both countries could play an important role as a gateway for China toward Europe
- both countries have a large potential market for Chinese goods and services
- both countries are included in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and due to their geopolitical position both could play a significant role in this global megaproject
- both countries need Chinese investments to develop their national projects and infrastructure.

Iran and North-South Corridor

One of the world’s most geographically central locations is Iran. As a result, Iran serves as a bridge connecting Africa, Europe, and Asia. It also forms the North-South Corridor between India and Russia, the East-West Corridor between Asia and Europe, the TRACECA Corridor between Central Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey, and Western Europe, and the South Asian Corridor between Southeast Asia and Northwest Europe. Additionally, Iran connects Central Asian nations and ECO members to the Persian Gulf and

the open ocean. It serves as a geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geo-transit hub for Southwest Asia, making it one of the most central geographical nodal points in the entire globe.

Iran's geographical location has given special importance to this country in terms of goods movement and the passage of oil and gas pipelines to the global economy.

Moscow is beginning to see greater use of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a planned route that would connect Russia to the Indian Ocean via Iran. The initial agreement to start the INSTC project was signed in 2002 by Iran, India, and Russia. Because it is a more cost-effective means of entering the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf than the maritime route via the Suez Canal, which reduces transportation costs, the INSTC is significant from a strategic standpoint.

Given the International North-South Transport Corridor's strategic importance in the geopolitical chessboard that is Eurasia, Iran has devised a plan to capitalize on this logistical undertaking and advance domestic businesses like the IRISL Group. The INSTC is a multimodal network of road, rail, and ship routes that connects Russia and India via the nations of the Caspian Sea region, especially Iran (Boltuc, 2023).

The corridor is split into three sections: the Eastern route (via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan), the Western section (via Azerbaijan), and the Trans-Caspian section (via Caspian seaports). Iran is a key player in the global connection due to its ports in the Caspian Sea (Astra, Anzali, Caspian, Nowshahr, and Amir Abad) and its strategic location in the Persian Gulf with access to international waters.

Besides, the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) LOTUS in Russia, located in the Astrakhan region, and the Free Economic Zone (FEZ) established by Tehran in Bandar-e Anzali, north of Iran, have the strategic potential to enhance trade and investment cooperation between the two countries as part of the joint connection project. Anzali FEZ, Chabahar Free Trade-Industrial Zone, and LOTUS SEZ are indeed in favor of economic, trade, industrial, transit, and port services exchanges under an existing tripartite agreement. While LOTUS SEZ is situated at the intersection of two international transportation corridors—the North-South and Northern sections of the Great Silk Road—Anzali FEZ is connected to the Bandar Abbas port and Qeshm FEZ in the Persian Gulf. The International North-South Transport Corridor (is a 7,200 km multi-purpose corridor that connects Mumbai in India with St. Petersburg in Russia via Iran and then Azerbaijan. In addition to the four main countries on the International Corridor/Highway, seven other countries such as Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Syria, Azerbaijan, Oman, and Bulgaria as observers joined the agreement on the ITC inauguration (Rawandi-Fadai, 2023).

Goods are transported via this corridor from Central Asia and Russia to Europe, as well as from the west coast of India to Bandar Abbas and Chabahar Port in Iran. The North-South route's primary benefit is that it expedites the time it takes to transport goods (Nowruzi and Taghizadeh, 2015). The INSTC is thought to be 30% less expensive and 40% shorter than the current route, which travels through the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal. (Singh Roy and Roy, 2017: 104). The North-South corridor, a significant part of which passes through Iran, is currently one of the shortest, cheapest, and fastest transit routes between Asia and Europe. Iran offers a more direct, short, and secure route, even though China is pushing Central Asian governments to use the Af-Pak corridor and Karachi port for maritime access. This route avoids both the challenge of Indian goods transiting through Pakistan, a historically problematic route, and the turbulent Af-Pak region. Situated 72 kilometers east of Chabahar, Pakistan's Gwadar deep seaport is funded by China and is a component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Yet, the Chinese government has also made investments in these infrastructures due to the strategic benefit and allure of Iranian ports.

Turkey and Middle-Corridor

Turkey's plan to establish a connection with its Central Asian civilizational roots is known as the Middle Corridor. Thus, it is considered a "win-win" situation for Turkey to establish a new trade route across the center of Eurasia and integrate the Middle Corridor with the Belt and Road initiative. The purpose of these projects is to increase connectivity between Europe and Asia. In addition, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway was officially opened in October 2017 as a crucial element of the MCI (Mammadov, 2020). Similar to other BRI corridors, the BTK aims to facilitate market connectivity between Europe and Asia. The BTK has the potential to stimulate transregional trade and economic cooperation, especially between Ankara and Beijing, because of its similarities to the Eurasian Landbridge and the China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor of the BRI.

Moreover, Turkey as a member country of the Middle Corridor, intended to enhance the connectivity outreach of the initiative by establishing institutional and commercial connections with, for example, South Asian and Central Asian countries. In this sense, the Lapis Lazuli Agreement (2017), also known as the Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Transit Corridor Agreement, can be very helpful in guaranteeing not only reciprocal economic cooperation but also stabilizing war-torn Afghanistan, which would have easy access to the Central Asian and Caspian markets. (Rahim, 2017). Additionally, the MCI has designated a distinct development model that is centered on rail and road connectivity, sharing some features with the BRI thanks to its network of interconnected nodal points. More room for collaboration is provided by the MCI, especially between China and Turkey, two of the largest Asian economies. However, it is unclear if these independent, parallel, and occasionally overlapping

initiatives foster economic cooperation and market connectivity amongst them or if they ultimately spark strategic and market competition (Hussain, 2022).

Iran and Turkey's position in the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative

Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed in the fall of 2013 to construct the "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB), which would connect China to Central and South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Additionally, he suggested building the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" (MSR), which would connect China to major sea lanes that connect Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. These collectively make up the Belt and Road Initiative. More than 30 international organizations and about 150 countries have signed the BRI cooperation documents since the initiative's inception in 2013. As a result, in the era of globalization, one can presume that BRI is now a genuinely global undertaking: The program has been enrolled by 34 nations from Europe and Central Asia, 25 from East Asia and the Pacific, 39 from sub-Saharan Africa, 18 from Latin America and the Caribbean, 17 from the Middle East and North Africa, and 6 from South Asia. The combined GDP of these 139 BRI members—China included—is greater than 40% of the world's GDP. Furthermore, the borders of the BRI countries are home to 63% of the world's population. (Hossein Babaei Mamaghani and Asadikhomami, 2021). The countries involved in the BRI have received US\$90 billion in Chinese FDI and exchanged US\$6 trillion in trade with China. The main goal of the Chinese BRI was to achieve a ruling role in the global order and the international trade system. In other words, China planned to shift its position in the production process, becoming a distributor and a manager of the supply chain, rather than a manufacturer (Ly, 2020), by transferring some of its production capacity to the countries located throughout the economic corridors of the BRI (Rolland, 2017), which would upgrade its position in the supply chain solve the problem of excess liquidity in China (Rolland, 2017), and lead to the development of partner countries in the BRI project. The other goal for creating this system for China was to free the country from its debt trap (Johnston, 2018), which implies that China is willing to invest in countries that are in the BRI project and shift the production process in these countries. Through this plan, China will also reduce its dependency on the sea routes and the Strait of Malacca by developing the BRI (Johnston, 2018).

In January 2016, during President Xi's visit to Tehran, the Chinese leader stressed the fact that China and Iran were natural partners as far as the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative was concerned. He also called on both sides to boost cooperation in infrastructure, interconnectivity, production capacity, and energy in the framework of the BRI (Chinese President, 2016). In response, Iranian Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei said that Iran would push the bilateral practical cooperation to a new high. Soon after that Xi met President Rouhani and signed 17 multi-billion-dollar agreements.

Iran has been an important transport hub and distribution center on the Silk Road since ancient times and remains a key partner of cooperation in the construction of BRI today. In 2016, President Xi Jinping made a successful visit to Iran. During the visit, both sides signed a memorandum of understanding on the "Belt and Road" cooperation. Under the framework of the BRI, bilateral cooperation has been steadily advancing and yielding fruitful results. In February 2023, before he visited China, then-Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said in his signed article that China proposed the "Belt and Road" initiative to revive the ancient Silk Road, which closely linked the fate of the two peoples. During his visit to China, the two heads of state agreed on jointly building the "Belt and Road", promoting connectivity and expanding people-to-people and cultural exchanges.

Secondly, while further investment is needed, Iran already has a relatively well-developed transportation network, including railways and roads, which can be further improved through BRI projects. Of course, this does not mean that Iran will forget Russia. In addition to China's East-West corridor, Iran is also pursuing the north-south corridor that would connect Russia to Iran's southern ports in Chabahar via rail. It seems that Iran intends to become a central hub for connecting these two corridors. Iran's role in the Belt and Road corridors is crucial, particularly with the Iranian important port, Chabahar (Hossein Babaei Mamaghani and Asadi Khomami, 2021).

The port of Chabahar has access to a variety of areas, including Europe, Russia, the Mediterranean region, and Central Asia. As a result, traders will have access to a variety of destinations and routes through Iran that can be utilized to establish connections between various countries and regions. Conversely, each competing route can only reach a single one of the numerous locations reached by the Iranian Routes.

The following opportunities exist for Iran and its corridors to develop the Chabahar Port through cooperative projects with other China:

1. Turning into the primary route of access between Europe, the Middle East, and Eastern Asia: Iran has the potential to become the primary route for China and India to expand their trade relations with the aforementioned destinations due to its advantageous geopolitical position, more developed infrastructure, and access to most trade destinations in Central Asia, the Middle East, and Europe. Being Iran's only oceanic port and one of the primary entry points to the country's transit corridors, Chabahar can be very important to this process. This is a chance for China and India to leverage their shared interest in Chabahar to deepen their relationship.

2. The development of Chabahar will benefit the entire southeast and eastern regions of Iran, and Iran can leverage Chinese investments and funds to achieve this goal.
3. Becoming a regional power, relying on transportation corridors and collaborating with trade global powers like China and India.
4. Acquiring surplus value via trade and transportation: Iran can generate additional revenue through the Chabahar port and transit corridors.

Moreover, the strength of Iranian transport, trade, and economic corridors in Chabahar is crucial to the Belt and Road Initiative since:

- 1-Iran provides shorter corridors
- 2-Iran provides access to different regions of Central Asia, the Mediterranean region, Russia and Europe,
- 3-The safety of corridors in Iran is higher than other corridors in the region
- 4- Iran's transport infrastructure is currently more developed than some of the rival countries
- 5-The Chabahar port is an oceanic port, with direct access to deep and open waters and the Indian Ocean
- 6-More importantly, the Chabahar Port is excluded from the US sanctions against Iran (Hossein Babaei Mamaghani and Asadikhomami, 2021).

The Chabahar port has the potential to be an international port that hosts a variety of partners, including China and India, and it can be crucial to the BRI. Pakistani officials have also welcomed cooperation with Iran and China, and Iranian officials have indicated a strong interest in inviting other countries, including China and India, to operate the Chabahar port. This indicates that China, India, and Iran are all interested in the development of the port of Chabahar, and that fact has the potential to make Chabahar a non-state actor, which is important for state actors in the region to cooperate. Mutual agreements and pacts around Chabahar can form an international organization. These organizations, in the view of the international order theory, can serve as a vehicle for resolving conflicts in anarchistic societies by ensuring cooperation and maximizing the interests of all parties, especially China.

John W. Garver claims that Iran, along with Pakistan, would play an increasingly important role in providing Western China access to the oceanic highway of the global economy. Economic and strategic factors converge here (Garver, 2016). Because of this, it is difficult to see the Belt and Road Initiative succeeding without Iran's active involvement, particularly in light of geopolitics. China would lose the only land route for the BRI's so-called Southern Corridor and the link between Central Asian states and the Middle East generally and the Persian Gulf region specifically due to the unstable situation in Afghanistan.

Regarding the severe economic sanctions imposed on Iran and their ramifications, one may assume that while Beijing's foreign policy revolves around its relations with the United States, "the evidence does not suggest that China's support for the Islamic Republic of Iran would necessarily seriously jeopardize Sino-American cooperation." More significantly, the importance of ties between China and Iran has prompted Beijing and Tehran to establish the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Iran's first long-term arrangement with a global power.

The 25-year agreement between Iran and China intends to strengthen ties and cooperation in a variety of areas between the two nations. This partnership is viewed as a foundation for Iran and China's involvement in infrastructure development and basic projects, such as the expansive "Belt and Road" initiative, as well as a chance to draw investment in several economic sectors, such as industry, tourism, information technology, and communication (Yazdani, 2023). Additionally, the agreement seeks to strengthen mutual recognition by fostering interpersonal exchanges, travel, the media, non-governmental organizations, friendship associations, and academic collaborations.

Turkey's involvement in the BRI began with the country's proactive policy, which was later dubbed the "Middle Corridor Initiative," which aimed to establish a transportation route connecting Anatolia to Central Asia and China (Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 24, 2018). Turkey has successfully connected its national railways to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), which is a crucial component of the China-Turkey-Europe transit corridor and stretches from the Caspian Sea to Central Asia and China, with the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (BTK) railway link (Yilmaz, 2022).

China, currently the second-largest economy in the world, and Turkey, a G20 member, now have more opportunities and potential to expand their bilateral trade and investment ties and further their respective regional and global goals thanks to the establishment of the BRI and the Middle Corridor.

Turkey aligned its Middle Corridor Initiative with China's Belt and Road Initiative in an attempt to draw Chinese capital, given the swift expansion of bilateral trade. Beijing and Ankara signed a memorandum of understanding in November 2016 to coordinate important projects by combining their Belt and Road and Middle Corridor initiatives. Turkey's position as a hub and a critical point of convergence for the Belt and Road is demonstrated by the Middle Corridor Initiative and the bilateral agreements that Turkey and China have reached (Turkey's Ambassador to China, May 15, 2017).

Ankara and Beijing have set high goals for investment and trade. Erdogan stressed Turkey's adequate participation in the Modern Silk Road in a speech given in 2015 to the Turkey-China Business Forum. This included the construction of the Marmaray rail line, a submerged tunnel connecting the BTK railway, which provides an uninterrupted rail link between Asia and Europe. In response, Xi promised China would assist Turkey with its pertinent railway construction projects and emphasized Turkey and China's close cooperation in the energy, aerospace, and financial sectors (Guo and Fidan, 2018). Yet, some analysts believe that Turkey needs to enact significant changes in its political and economic systems if it hopes to advance as the BRI's "center of industrial and transnational hub" for trade and production. First and foremost, the establishment of a robust infrastructure network, a globally integrated and flawless banking and finance system, long-term political and economic stability, and an efficient multilateral framework founded on accountability, openness, and transparency. Ankara needs to implement a drastic and comprehensive educational reform to build a strong human capital base, top-notch educational institutions, and well-equipped research centers before it can produce cutting-edge technological goods (Yilnaz, 2022).

To sum up, Turkey and China are still actively pursuing improved economic ties. The Middle Corridor Initiative and China's Belt and Road Initiative are closely intertwined. Given their legitimate and interest-based worries that Turkey's geopolitical position and the increasingly prominent Chinese market and influence are essential components for both to achieve the further intensification of cooperation, it is reasonable to assume that China-Turkey relations will remain strong. (Guo and Fidan, 2018). However, given that both states' confidence is growing, it is unclear how effectively and well they will collaborate in the upcoming years.

Discussion and Conclusion

Expanding trade and transportation cooperation between Tehran and Ankara, combined with their good relations with China and membership in the Chinese BRI, would lead Iran and Turkey to play a more active role in the future development of the BRI. Furthermore, this would benefit Iran, Turkey, and China while also creating more opportunities for Chinese companies. Iran and Turkey both have committed to strengthening strategic cooperation with China, particularly in the framework of the BRI. To this, the role of Iran in the International North-South Corridor and Turkey's position in the Middle Corridor would help to increase the effectiveness and importance of the Chinese Belt and Road project.

China has contemporaneously focused on enhancing strategic and economic ties with Tehran and Ankara. In this respect, the Belt and Road Initiative has been projected as win-win cooperation between the three countries that conventionally adopted a very complicated foreign policy discourse.

Although the BRI is China's idea, it is expected the world will gain from its opportunities and results. China would keep collaborating on high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with other nations, such as Iran and Turkey, in order to forge closer ties in the areas of infrastructure development, trade, health cooperation, connectivity, green development, openness, and inclusivity. If Beijing is going to make a better future for the Middle East region it has to join hands with these two major regional powers and Saudi Arabia as well. With the establishment of the BRI, the Middle Corridor, and the North-South Corridor, Iran, Turkey, and China there may be more opportunity to expand bilateral trade and investment ties and further advance their respective regional and global ambitions.

In sum, Iran, Turkey, and China are actively working together under the BRI framework to strengthen their economic cooperation. The Chinese BRI could be extensively integrated with the Middle Corridor Initiative and the International North-South Corridor. Since their rational and interest-based concerns that the rising prominence of China's market and influence and Turkey's and Iran's geopolitical positions are essential factors for both to achieve the further intensification of collaboration, it is certainly reasonable to expect that China-Iran, China-Turkey, and China-Iran-Turkey cooperation will remain robust. It remains to be seen, however, how effectively and well these three states will collaborate in the upcoming years, even though their mutual confidence is increasing.

The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in the greater Middle Eastern region would undoubtedly be made possible by cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Turkish Republic in the transregional transportation network, specifically in the International North-South Corridor and the Middle Corridor.

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