

Geopolitical Configurations

The Russia–Turkey–Iran Triangle

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Introduction

THE SPATIAL QUALITY of international politics is often overlooked. Analysts focus on ethnic identities in the Balkans, on historical and strategic dimensions of the Indian–Pakistani rivalry, personalities in the Middle East – yet all these conflicts are spatial. They have to do with the geographic placement and the territorial size of the states involved. Spatial approaches may seem simplistic and compromised by straightforward political application. Suffice it to mention the influence of Ratzel's ideas regarding 'Lebensraum' on Nazi Germany's expansionist drive, or Spykman's 'Rimland–Heartland' dichotomy which informed the US containment policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.

The tradition of geopolitical thinking is certainly rich,¹ but it is neither deterministic nor static. Geopolitical realities and perspectives are in constant change. A country's favorable position on the map can enhance its economic health or governmental stability, but this will not automatically translate into power. Conversely, a small, insignificant state may suddenly find itself on a new avenue of historic change and high on the political agendas of 'great powers'.

This article focuses on strategic cooperation and conflict possibilities between Turkey, Russia, and Iran. It concentrates on geopolitical axes in an attempt to understand what shifts in alignment may be expected between the three, and among the smaller states separating them. Primarily due to the vast oil and gas deposits in the Caspian region, the evolution of bilateral relationships inside this triangle involves the strategic interests of the USA and Europe as well. Much of the competition for influence over the newly independent states of Central Asia and the Caucasus is conducted through pipeline projects for Caspian riches. A dynamic framework of geopolitical analysis for this region can help identify some key strategic issues for the next century.

The Triangle

Although several new actors have emerged in Eurasia in the post-Cold War era, the major regional actors in the North-South axis are Russia, Turkey and Iran – a strategic triangle. The dissolution of the USSR reduced the size of the territory under Moscow's control, but Russia still occupies a vast portion of Eurasia. Despite suffering from foreign debt problems, devaluation, paralysis of its banks, shaky democratization, and acute political crises, Russia remains an important actor. Russian territory is contiguous with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, making it strategically important for the transport of Caspian oil and gas. Russia can offer transport to Novorossiisk, but this Black Sea port is not operational in winter, and transporting vast quantities of oil by tanker through the Bosphorus, a difficult channel to navigate, poses grave environmental risks to Istanbul. Other pipeline projects passing through Russia are also subject to Turkish objections.

Kenneth Waltz maintains that Russia is now limited to its own territory for military action and cannot easily project military force into the territories of its neighbors.² The war in Chechnya demonstrated the qualitative deterioration of the Russian Armed Forces. True, Russia is impermeable to direct territorial challenges from outside because its nuclear arsenal constitutes a powerful deterrent – but this 'nuclear umbrella' does not cover the gray zone to the south of Russia's borders, including the Central Asia and the Caucasus, which are open to rivalries concerning territorial influence and control.

Turkey and Iran share several geopolitical characteristics but differ markedly in state ideologies and alliance partnerships. Turkey is a secular country and a NATO ally; Iran is an isolated Islamic state. Both control strategic regional access points such as the Bosphorus and Hormuz Straits, and act as counterweights to Russia in the Caucasus and the Caspian Basin.

Iran, for 20 years treated as an outcast from the world community, clearly intends to make a comeback by utilizing its geopolitical position in the region. Controlling a major part of the international global energy sources, Iran is one of the five Caspian Basin states (the others being Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan) – and the only one with direct access to the Indian Ocean. This gives Iran an advantage over Turkey and Russia for transporting the landlocked Caspian energy resources. Iran is already an important market for Turkmenistan's natural gas; in the future, it could combine its own energy export infrastructure with new strategic pipelines. Iran also acts as a barrier to Russian actions in the Gulf region, where there are important US interests.

Turkey has diversified its foreign policy goals and options in the post-Cold War era, consolidating its role as a major actor in Eurasia. Its economy, now ranked as no. 16 in the world,³ grows and is quietly surviving both the Russian and Far Eastern economic crises. Its army is NATO's second largest and is

the best trained in the region. With the safe transport of Eurasian gas and oil a major issue for the Turkish government and the business community alike, forging geopolitical cooperation has become crucial. Current Turkish foreign policy is formulated on the concept that the country's strategic significance, derived from its territorial location, is not static, but dynamic. Old metaphors describing Turkey as a 'bridge' or 'barrier', 'NATO's southernmost bulwark' and 'staunch ally' have paled. According to Özdem Sanberk, former undersecretary in the Foreign Ministry, 'the new global political fault line in the post-Cold War period is not along the East-West divide but along the North-South divide.'⁴ Being located on this faultline is rife with challenges as well as opportunities.

Interactions in the Triangle

Cooperation between Russia, Turkey and Iran employs such institutional frameworks as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (OBSEC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and the Turkish-Russian Businessmen's Association. Competition for influence has been less structured, but since the mid-1990s, it has become increasingly institutionalized and even begun to take highly explosive turns. The formation of new regional blocs involving Russia, Iran, Syria, Greece, Armenia, and the Republic of Cyprus on the one hand, and Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Israel, on the other, is hardly a realistic set of alignments, but the mutual perceptions of encirclement are real.

In Russia, the concept of *cordon sanitaire* reflects a deep-seated fear, and the term 'Turkish expansionism' is still frequently used.⁵ Moscow is disturbed by Turkey's presence in the Caucasus and Central Asia when its own 'near abroad' policy is disorganized and the very meaning of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is being questioned. Global interest in the petroleum-rich Caspian region is a factor here, and Turkey's Baku-Ceyhan pipeline project and objections to increased oil tanker traffic through the Bosphorus are perceived as directed against Russia's interests. Turkey's naval maneuvers in the Black Sea along with Ukraine and the USA, and building enhanced strategic ties with Georgia and Azerbaijan – not only on energy, but also on defense and security matters, as reported following Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yılmaz's visit to Georgia – further exacerbate Russian fears.⁶ Official statements that this strategic partnership (which also involves Israel) is not geared against a third country did not reassure Moscow. The Russian leadership suspects that Turkey, already a major factor in managing the conflict in Abkhazia, might extend its influence in Chechnya and Daghestan.

Nevertheless, Russia does not have purely hostile perceptions of Turkey. It has refrained from threatening to back Kurdish separatists if Turkey continues to step up its involvement in the Caucasus. Russia's attitude with respect to extraditing PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan from its territory signals that Moscow does not wish to alienate Turkey. Russia's foreign policy on Kurdish separatism sharply differs from that of many European countries, especially Italy and Germany.

Russia and Iran, well aware of their isolation, have sought to intensify their interactions in conflict management in Tajikistan and Nagorno-Karabakh. Cooperation in the former case is driven by concerns in Moscow and Tehran about Taliban excesses in Afghanistan. In Nagorno-Karabakh the key is the resentment Russia and Iran feel towards Turkey and its influence in Azerbaijan. However, Iran has to restrain its involvement in this conflict due to the pressure from its large Azeri population (which might become a tool for Turkey or Russia), and its influential Armenian minority. Both Russia and Iran try to use conflict management in the region so as to divide the big cake of the Caspian Sea oil revenues. Russian assistance to Iran's nuclear program is aimed not only at earning cash but also at empowering the country, poised against US interests in the region. Missiles have become an important policy tool, and Russia has assisted Iran in developing 1,300- and 2,000-km range missiles. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, in spring 1998 Russia agreed to sell \$400 million worth of air defense systems to Syria, including SA-10 anti-aircraft missiles.⁷ In addition, the sale of SA-10s to South Cyprus and reportedly to Armenia will encircle Turkey with Russian missiles. The benefits to be derived from these sales are not solely economic.

So far, the blocs (Russia-Armenia-Iran versus Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia with the USA and Israel lurking behind) appear fluid due to the strength of cooperative ties, particularly involving Russia. Extra-regional relations also play a crucial role in these alignments. Turkey constitutes a center of attraction for Azerbaijan and Georgia, not least because of its US backing. An increase in US support for Azerbaijan would bring US foreign policy closer to Turkish policy in Nagorno-Karabakh. This would cause Iranian concern over the pro-Azerbaijan orientation of its own Azeri population and perhaps greater Russian and Iranian backing of Kurdish separatism in Turkey. Conversely, a loosening of the US-Turkish alignment would calm Russian and Iranian fears.

The financial crisis that hit Russia in August 1998 is beginning to change the distribution of power in the region. Moscow has been trying to regain credibility in the eyes of foreign investors and governments; one signal here was the agreement about a pipeline connecting the Kazakh Tengiz oil field to Novorossiisk.⁸ Russia had to delay repayment of all foreign debts, including several hundred million dollars to Turkish businesses. This financial shock has been absorbed by Turkey relatively easily, because 'frozen' payments to the Turkish construction businesses are to be paid in dollars. Furthermore,

wealthier Russian tourists continue to visit Turkey, and the 'suitcase trade' sector in Turkey is recovering, with East and Central European buyers filling the Russian gap. Turkey is now planning to extend new credits to Russia. Even the controversial SA-10 missiles have been re-routed from South Cyprus and are deployed on Crete.

The crisis as such cannot fundamentally change perceptions of the disparity in power, but the forthcoming change in Russian leadership could make a difference, particularly if the new ruling elite reduces its pretensions to being a global power. Whether Russia will end up with a more authoritarian government is anybody's guess. But even the Russian opposition – to judge from Communist Party leader Gennadi Zyuganov's recent overtures to Turkey, invoking Bolshevik-Turkish Nationalist solidarity of the 1920s, and his criticism of the Yeltsin government policies of provoking a crisis between Greece and Turkey by selling SA-10 missiles to the Republic of Cyprus – might be willing to redress the *status quo ante* balance of power.⁹

Iran may lose Russian support as the latter falls into further turmoil. However, Iran stands a good chance of recovering international support through the EU and Turkey. Turkey and Iran do have some converging interests, including historical interests in reducing Russian influence in Central Asia and the Caspian Basin. It is also highly probable that US-Iran relations will be restored as the latter slowly sheds its revolutionary zeal.

Thus, the seeming disparity of power distribution between the three countries is shrinking, and Russia is facing an unclear future. The expected benefits from competition between Russia, Turkey and Iran have clearly diminished, making conflict between them less likely. Encouraging the countries of the region towards geopolitical cooperation and neutralizing Russian sensitivities may prove among the most difficult challenges facing post-Cold War diplomacy in this part of the globe.

Alignment Evaluations

To explore possible coalition dynamics and major challenges in the triangle from a security perspective, we can use a framework of cost-benefit calculus. Are benefits to be derived from sharp competition commensurate with the disparity of power among Russia, Turkey and Iran? If the distribution of benefits does not reflect the distribution of power among them, how far would one country go to change the status quo, and which alliances could be expected? Implicit in the second question is the assumption that risk-taking is minimized, so armed conflict could occur through proxies (such as terrorists or 'rogue states'), and not directly among the three.¹⁰

While the USSR existed, it overwhelmed both Turkey and Iran. Balance-of-power theory asserts the non-existence of a hegemonic country as a requirement for balancing alliances to occur. If the two countries combined could not at least match the might of the third, why would they form an alliance? Now we should expect alignments within the triangle, with one country backing the foreign policy of another when faced with a likely threat from the third.

Turkey's affinity with Azerbaijan is well established: the two share historical ties and have a common border. Of the Turkic-speaking post-Soviet nations, Azerbaijani Turkish is the closest to the language spoken in Anatolia. As Turkey's influence in Azerbaijan increased, Russian-Iranian alignment became a reality. This coalition dynamics shows the typical balancing pattern of alliance formation: countries pool their resources and coordinate their foreign policies when faced with a common threat.

With a strong and populous Azerbaijani minority, Iran could be worried about a rich and economically attractive Azerbaijan; this worry could turn into a nightmare if Azerbaijan were closely linked to secular Turkey. For Russia, according to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'Azerbaijan has to be a priority target'.¹¹ With their large oil reserves, Iran and Russia could enter into tactical cooperation on dividing and transporting the Caspian Sea oil in order to put pressure on Baku. Thus, Turkish influence over Azerbaijan enhances the value of Russian-Iranian cooperation and the strategic importance of each country's geographic location for the other. But is this the only alignment possibility?

The main impediment to a real improvement in Turkish-Russian relations was that Turkish diplomacy acted as if the world were still bipolar and Turkey had to oppose Russia. Nor has Russian discourse on Turkey changed much since the demise of the USSR. Recent changes in the Turkish stance have generally tended toward treating Russia as yet another newly independent post-Soviet state. Russia – seeing itself as the leader of the CIS and the first among equals – does not appreciate this. During his December 1997 visit to Turkey, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin declared that others should not decide how Turkish-Russian relations evolve.¹² We may expect genuine Russo-Turkish cooperation or rapprochement only if perceptions of insidious Russo-Turkish rivalry in the Caucasus and Central Asia cease, and if Russian perceptions of Turkey as an extension of US hostility toward Russia can be overcome.

Russia prefers Iran to Turkey, because it cannot allow a US ally to gain power in its neighborhood. The preference for Iran is clear in its nuclear technology transfer policy – a policy that would have been risky in the bipolar Cold War context. Nuclear assistance to Iran still could have adverse effects upon Russian interests. Russia's preference for Iran could be seen as the choice of the lesser of two evils, the one assumed to be more manageable, whereas Turkey has openly stated its preference in alliance relationships.

Pakistan's nuclear potential may not affect Turkey much, because Pakistan belongs to a different geopolitical constellation. By contrast, Iran's going nu-

clear could strengthen the hand of political Islamists in Turkey, who are known to envy the Tehran regime. If Iran joins the nuclear club, this could boost its popularity in the eyes of fundamentalists – in Turkey, as well as in Central Asia. However, political Islamists, ousted from power in Turkey, are isolated from the government. The April 1999 elections yielded a coalition government of three centrist parties, while the Virtue Party, which favors political Islam, not only lost voter support but faces the prospect of closure.

Turkish–Iranian cooperation would never attain a strategic dimension, but tactical developments and warming are possible. Seeking to diversify its energy supplies, in August 1996 Turkey signed an agreement to purchase Iranian gas in the next 23 years, making Iran the second largest supplier of gas to Turkey after Russia. A pipeline to transport gas from Iran to Turkey is scheduled to be constructed this year, to be connected later to a new pipeline stretching from Turkmenistan to Iran.¹³

Such a *modus vivendi* in Turkish–Iranian relations may leave Russia uneasy and uncertain about the consequences in the Caucasus and Caspian Sea region. Russia should not worry too much, because Turkey and Iran are historical competitors, not genuine friends. Russian uncertainty can be dissipated further. Even if a gas pipeline connects Iran to Turkey, it would be easy for Russia to play Iran against Turkey, and vice versa, by inviting one or the other to join possible lucrative joint energy ventures. A case in point is the ‘Blue Stream’ pipeline project (Italy, Germany, and Japan are participants in this Russian–Turkish joint venture) crossing the Black Sea to transport energy from Russia to Turkey.¹⁴

Turkish influence in the Caucasus and the US backing of Turkey contribute to Russo–Iranian alignment. Turco–Russian alignment is subject to constraints like Turkey’s NATO membership and its historical interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus. And as noted, genuine Turco–Iranian cooperation will be hard to achieve as the two countries are historical competitors.

Geopolitics of Pipelines

The intensity of interactions inside the triangle increased in late 1990s, but depressed oil prices in 1998–99 devalued many political interests. Another negative factor is the possibility that Caspian oil and gas reserves may have been exaggerated. Oil and gas deals underlie triangular rivalries today, and the competition for influence over the newly independent Central Asian and Caucasian states is conducted through pipeline projects, where investor firms’ calculations of benefits do not necessarily match governmental interests.

The USA wants a strong hand in the Caspian energy resources, siding with Turkey, entering into direct competition with Russia, and isolating Iran. The

pipelines are the main object of this competition, so US support for the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline is an indicator of Turkish power in the region. The project is estimated to cost \$4 billion, slightly more than the Tengiz–Novorossiisk pipeline (\$3.7 billion) and far more than the expansion of the Baku–Supsa pipeline, or the Baku–Novorossiisk one – which crosses the territory of Chechnya.¹⁵ The sharp drop in global oil prices since March 1998 has made it difficult to justify construction of such an expensive pipeline as Baku–Ceyhan, despite strong support from Washington. Major international oil companies (such as Chevron) in the Caspian Pipeline Consortium are calculating primarily financial and not political costs and benefits; they also have to take into account the possibility of overestimation of the Caspian reserves. So the Azerbaijan International Oil Company, while not saying explicitly no to the Baku–Ceyhan project, may get conditional approval on paper only.¹⁶

Another possible alternative is a pipeline from the Caspian region to the Gulf through Iran, which could impair Turkey's strategic importance. US support for such a project is currently out of the question, since the 1996 Iran–Libya Sanctions Act prevents investments of more than \$40 million in these two countries, which are accused of supporting international terrorism. Nevertheless, in May 1998, the USA declared that it was not against Russian, French, and Malaysian investments in developing Iranian gas fields. There have been some signs of normalization in bilateral relations, despite tensions related to Iran's nuclear program. US oil companies view Iran from different angles; some, like Amoco, do not want to be involved, while others, like Mobil, are willing to explore the advantages of cheap transportation for Caspian energy.¹⁷ An indication of this trend is the \$400 million oil-swap deal by which oil companies would pump Caspian oil to northern Iran for domestic use, while an equal amount would be released in the south from Iranian ports on the Gulf. European countries like Germany and France have already expressed an interest in deeper economic cooperation with Iran. Unlike the USA, France and Germany are basically concerned with the immediate economic returns rather than the politico-religious character of the Iranian regime. Thus, if market forces are to be served, international and US isolation of Iran must subside.

The Islamic regime in Tehran is unlikely to change its foreign-policy posture overnight, including support for terrorist groups; it is also set to continue nuclearization. Tehran cannot commit itself to a genuine warming in bilateral relations, and the US Administration is unlikely to perceive any overtures as credible unless major changes take place in Iran. Limited cooperation could be reached, but a fundamental change in relations cannot be expected soon.

The competition over oil would be almost worthless if recent energy estimates prove exaggerated. The prospect of 'no big deal' in Caspian oil and gas could also weaken the triangular rivalry between Iran, Russia, and Turkey. Other local issues would then tip the balance, such as filling the power vacuum left by the Soviet Union in the region.

Currently, in the context of this particular 'Great Game', it could appear that the USA is setting a barrier against Iran and Russia to prevent them from gaining the biggest share in the Caspian resources. Turkey is a key part of this barrier and a trump card against Iran – why should the USA not encourage it to penetrate into the region? A secular Turkey could set a precedent for the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan to follow. In contrast, the prospect of 'no big deal' would lead the USA to de-emphasize the fact of Turkey as a secular regime, and not to count on Turkish assets such as historical and cultural ties across the region. Were oil not an issue, Russian weakness would also not seem so important to the USA. Russian threats to counter NATO enlargement with southward expansion are hardly serious.¹⁸ In fact, no additional action should be necessary to contain Russia, unless the US aims are more predatory than defensive. In that case, the secular quality of Turkey would not be important to the USA; it might prefer a combined Turkey–Iran Muslim thrust in dealing with Asian Russia and its backyard.

Europe and China

It is still unclear what role Turkey might assume in the new European security architecture. European countries have rejected Turkish EU membership: it seems difficult to admit a populous Muslim country. Yet, Islamic Turkey might be preferable to a secular Turkey at the doors of the EU. The customs union between Turkey and the EU works to the advantage of the latter, with Turkey giving unilateral concessions, while its membership chances remain uncertain.

The Western European Union (WEU) is not yet integrated into the EU; and an attempt to do so by revising the Maastricht Treaty in 1997 'met with strong resistance from the EU's neutral member states.'¹⁹ With the war in Kosovo, this resistance subsided, but should the WEU become integrated into the EU, there would still be the question of how the three NATO states who are associate members of the WEU but not members of the EU (Turkey, Norway, and Iceland), will fare. Threat perceptions related to Turkey – such as terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, Greek–Turkish disputes, and even the transboundary water courses in the Middle East – are seen as major problems by the EU.

Turkey and Russia, continuously rebuffed by the European countries, could take note of their common interests, particularly if the USA were to become indifferent to a secular Turkey versus an Islamic one. The rejectionist EU policy with respect to Russia and Turkey has remained a constant, so special attention should be paid to variations in US policy towards Turkey and Iran.

An unlikely USA–Iran rapprochement and a pipeline linking the Caspian Sea resources to the Gulf would transform Iran and could hurt Turkey. Such

USA–Iran cooperation would also make Russia and Turkey odd men out, creating a perceived distribution of benefits as not reflecting the true power distribution in the region. This would again present the possibility of a balancing pattern of alignment, two countries allying against a common threat. Thus, like the EU policy towards Russia and Turkey, USA–Iran rapprochement too could make Turkey and Russia more aware of their common interests. US insistence that the EU should admit Turkey would be understandable in a context where the USA attempted to re-establish normal relations with Iran.

Otherwise, Russia and Turkey may contemplate cooperation with Kazakhstan over a pipeline connecting China to the Caspian reserves.²⁰ Russo–Turkish cooperation along these lines would form a powerful attraction force from which Iran could not easily isolate itself. With the Europeans unlikely to invite Turkey or Russia into their union, a primarily predatory US policy towards Russia (given the waning of energy politics), or strict isolation of Turkey through USA–Iranian rapprochement, could lead to the formation of a large Eurasian bloc.

Such a prospect would be globally disequilibrating. Turco–Russian–Iranian cooperation could eliminate triangular rivalry, and the inclusion of China into that grouping could create a very powerful worldwide bloc – indeed, putting Washington in a situation of peer competition. Russia and China are both aware of the US domination and seek to counter it with a strategic, albeit limited, cooperation. The limitations to Sino–Russian cooperation related to long-standing territorial disputes, which led to armed skirmishes in 1969, are now essentially eliminated. Today, Russia supplies China with modern weapons, and both countries have a common stance against US plans for an Asian theater missile defense network.²¹

Other configurations would derive from the varying degrees of cooperation among these Eurasian powers. Turkey, Russia, Iran, and China would not need to become full military allies or close partners in trying to shape global politics. A *modus vivendi* among them involving the elimination of conflict sources would also indicate a global reversal in the international distribution of power. Turkish–Russian–Chinese strategic cooperation would mean the emergence of a combination of forces over a portion of Eurasia vaster than the ‘Heartland’ that Mackinder so many years ago assumed to be the key to world domination.²² It would require a total revision of US military doctrine, since the USA would be unable to deal simultaneously with two explosive conflict areas – one over the Caspian oil resources and another with China as the principal actor.²³

Such a future constellation of forces would be subject to a multiplicity of constraints, ranging from territorial disputes to historical grievances. Its prevention depends on lessening the isolation that Russia and Iran feel, and on not excluding Turkey from the EU. Currently, NATO intervention against Russia’s ‘brother in Europe’ – Serbia – surely does not contribute to any less-

ening of Russian assessments of encirclement. As to Iran, its isolation seems to be prolonged into the future due to its position regarding the Middle East peace process, terrorism, and technology for weapons of mass destruction. We cannot exclude the prospect of closer Russo–Iranian cooperation. What we can hope for is an improvement in EU–Turkey relations or a non-predatory US policy towards Russia.

Conclusions

The Russia–Turkey–Iran triangle is critical for the coming century. The three countries are currently interacting to get the largest share possible in the distributional conflict over the energy-rich Caspian region. In this conflict, Russia and Iran align their foreign policies with respect to Turkey. Alignment reversals in this triangle, or a three-country alignment, are possible if the EU continues to isolate Turkey and Russia. Such changes could also come about if US policy with respect to Russia becomes predatory, if energy politics in the Caspian Basin lose importance, or if the US foreign policy posture towards Iran becomes cooperative while energy politics retain their importance. A Russo–Turkish alignment would attract Iran; and the inclusion of China into this cooperative move could create a powerful front in Eurasia.

As yet the geographic and strategic importance of Iran remains untapped, but any Caspian pipeline through its territory could activate it. If Turkey does not see a Baku–Ceyhan pipeline come into existence and has no major role in sharing the big cake of Caspian energy resources, or if energy loses priority as a strategic issue, the geopolitical importance of Turkey would be reduced to that of the USSR in the old days of containment.

The future is still uncertain, as the European Union countries are currently leaving both Russia and Turkey out of their schemes. In such a context, changing US policies could push Russia, Turkey, and Iran to find a way of living together with each other. The formation of such a large Eurasian bloc, perhaps including China, would create adverse effects for global stability.

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