By Yusuf Yerkel,

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed the fourth round of sanctions on Iran on June 9, 2010. Since then there has been no indication that Iran has become more cooperative and willing to open up its nuclear facility. In fact, economic sanctions against Iran have not prevented the pursuit of uranium enrichment activities at all. Nowadays the propaganda of waging war against Iran as a resolution has been speculated around various administrations, in particular in the US and Israel. Whether such speculations will materialize remains to be seen. However "appealing" waging war against Iran is for some neo-cons, Turkey's paradigm stands as a potential conciliatory approach for conflict resolution not only in the case of Iran but also in other regional crisis.

The security culture of 'zero problems' with its neighbours is the primary reference point within which Turkey's stance on Iran should be analyzed. Rather than implementing hard power policy, the soft power approach has become the fundamental instrument in resolving regional problems. As the Turkish foreign minster Davutoglu pronounced, Turkey has adopted a new language in regional and international politics that prioritises civil-economic power.

Turkey's new security culture puts more emphasis on economic integration, cultural and political dialogue and room for diplomacy in conflict resolutions. According to Turkey, pursuing merely political engagement among regional actors would render the relationship very fragile in the light of crisis, whereas deepening ties by various non-political mechanisms offers the opportunity to overcome crises. In fact, Turkish President Abdullah Gul in his recent speech at Chatham House raised this point by arguing that boosting economic cooperation, which will in turn translate into prosperity, has the potential to prevent political problems from arising in zones of conflict in various regions.

In fact, throughout the Cold War, the nature of relationship among Middle Eastern actors was largely shaped by military concern and the so-called zero-sum game. Even in the post Cold War era the same pattern of relationship has to a large extent prevailed as the predominant feature in the region. What Turkey is trying to set out is a new regional equation based on mutual economic cooperation and understanding that could potentially alter the conventional zero-sum

game into a win-win situation. Turkey believes that the path towards an effective and fair global order goes through local building blocs constructed on mutual economic benefits. This is why Turkey has signed free trade agreements with its neighbors. By establishing such political and economic mechanisms, Turkey is willing to nullify the appeal of acquiring nuclear weapons as a safeguard for security.

The further isolation of Iran by international sanctions is therefore conceived by Turkey as a potential danger and risk given Iran's destabilising options in the region, in particular in Iraq and Lebanon where its sphere of influence has expanded. The further marginalization of Iran and policies which could potentially undermine dialogue mayl in the end have a costly effect not only in terms of economy but also for the security of the region.

In this sense, Turkey has constantly been trying to convince its Western allies (mainly US) the significance o its agreement with Iran. As a confidence building measure, according to Turkey, the agreement has been viewed as a crucial step forward to resolving the crisis through diplomacy. In fact, foreign ministry officially proclaimed that by the declaration of Tehran agreement Turkey's aim was to keep Iran on the diplomatic track. This attempt was as a result of Turkey's "proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy", which aims to take measures before crises emerge and escalate to a critical level.

Rather than building up a security system by military means, Turkey is inserting more civilian components such as economic integration and political and cultural dialogue into the notion of security in order to produce more fertile ground for peace, stability and prosperity. Turkey's overall policy regarding Iran and the willingness to resolve the nuclear crisis by diplomatic means should be understood within this context. Instead of reducing Turkey's political positioning towards Iran to its so-called Islamic root, it is fundamental to see Turkey's attempt as a stabilising force that is in the interest of the security of international system.

Evidently, Turkey is more willing to take lessons from the elevation of soft power over hard power after the Second World War, paving the way for the existing security structure of the EU. Given the historical relationship among European countries at the beginning of 20th century resulted in two devastating World Wars, it should not come as a surprise as to what Turkey is trying to achieve in her immediate region. After all, we know how fundamental the first initiative of forming the European Coal and Steel Community was in opening further areas of cooperation that eventually enabled opportunities to overcome aggressive tendencies among European countries.

Hence, Turkey perceives economic sanctions as ineffective and, on the contrary, more likely to push Iran to take a hard-line approach. In order to have a long lasting framework of resolution, Turkey, by exhausting diplomatic options, is more eager to capitalize on her zero-problems policy that facilitate engagement with Iran. For engagement to materialise Turkey felt it necessary to vote against further sanctions at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and give more room for diplomacy. Implementing economic sanctions on Iran is equivalent to the failure of Turkey's newly adopted foreign policy paradigm in the region.

More importantly, Turkey's new approach advocates the necessity to take an impartial stance and address issues from all sides in the management of conflict resolution. In this sense, the nuclear weapons held by Israel should be a part of the debate. According to Turkey, without the inclusion of the nuclear weapons of Israel, the potential for proliferation is likely to continue in the region. In fact, Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan has pronounced at various stages the hypocritical stance about not considering Israel's nuclear weapons that is causing mistrust and constructing threat perceptions in the region, in particular for Iran. In the same vein, Hans Blix, the former director of IAEA and now the head of Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, stated recently that as long as Israel has nuclear weapons it is likely that Iran will try to acquire them as a deterrent.

Last but not least, the tone of political discourse used against Iran is also another crucial aspect that needs to be considered. We know that language is significant in constructing and affecting the politico-psychology of decision makers. Using a sense of superior and threatening discourse in dealing with a crisis is unlikely to produce a positive atmosphere for fruitful engagement. It should not be forgotten that the psychological aspect in the process of negotiation is one that might be more imperative than the political leverage you have on the table.

Thus, Turkey advocates the necessity of constructing a new regional language of diplomacy and policy. Given Turkey's cultural and historical ties with the region, it is able to draw upon its cross-cultural skills, soft power and influence to acting as a facilitator for dialogue among parties. Taking that as a reference point Turkey was able to talk in a way that could deliver the sense of being equal actors based on mutual understanding, ultimately paving the way for the Tehran agreement. However, mainstream international discourse is formulated in a way that regards Iran as the "pariah", "irrational". This in turn prevents opportunities for successful negotiations to begin. In this sense, the reformulation of political discourse is the other significant feature that deserves consideration and Turkey's new approach not only stands as an example but also as a crucial conflict resolution mediator able to speak the regional political language.

Turkey's familiarity with the fallout from past sanctions, which in fact led to military confrontation as in Iraq, is a strong indication of a different comprehensive strategic approach to the Iranian nuclear programme. What the Turkish paradigm offers is not only a viable option in resolving and reducing regional tension but also a new security framework based on non-military elements making actors more favorable to full integration that could potentially build trust and decrease aggressive tendencies and nuclear arms race.

Last of all, in order to construct a new security culture in the region that is not only beneficial to Turkey per se but also crucial for both international economic and energy security, Turkey's paradigm has the potential to contribute to a well-functioning international order in the post Cold War era.