

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF IRAN-TÜRKİYE RELATIONS DURING REZA SHAH'S ERA BASED ON PERSIAN SOURCES (1925-1941)

Zarghona BADAQSH

Master Student, Yazd University

e-posta: zarghonabadakhsh8@gmail.com

ORCID 0009-0002-0157-6784

Mustafa MÜJDECİ

Prof. Dr., Kırıkkale University

e-posta: mmujdeci@hotmail.com

ORCID 0000-0001-8262-2310

Rahmatullah ARIANPOR

PhD Candidate, Kırıkkale University

e-posta: arianpor.arianpor@gmail.com

ORCID 0000-0003-3324-9120

ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the development of relations between Iran under Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-1941) and early Republican Türkiye under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Both countries experienced profound political and social transformations between the First and Second World Wars, centered on modernization, nationalism, and a state structure based on strong central authority. This study, written using a descriptive-analytical method, examines the institutionalization process of bilateral relations through diplomatic documents such as the 1926 Treaty of Friendship, the 1932 Border Agreement, and the 1937 Saadabad Pact. The study reveals that, despite structural differences between the monarchy in Iran and the republican regime in Türkiye, both leaders pursued similar strategies in foreign policy based on respect for sovereignty, regional stability, and the principle of non-intervention. Common threats such as Soviet expansionism, Kurdish uprisings, and tribal movements in border regions encouraged the development of security cooperation and cultural diplomacy. Reza Shah's official visit to Türkiye in 1934 became one of the most significant turning points in the relations, both symbolically and practically. During this period, when domestic reforms were directly reflected in foreign policy, a diplomatic approach based on mutual respect and the peaceful resolution of problems emerged between Iran and Türkiye. Despite border tensions, both parties avoided military confrontation and sought solutions through diplomatic mechanisms. In this context, the period in question can be considered a successful example of the transition from historical hostility to constructive cooperation in the Middle East.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Iran, Türkiye, Treaties, Modernization.

FARŞÇA KAYNAKLARA GÖRE REZA ŞAH DÖNEMİNDE İRAN-TÜRKİYE İLİŞKİLERİNİN ANALİZİ (1925-1941)

ÖZ

Bu makale, Reza Şah Pehlavi (1925-1941) dönemindeki İran ile Mustafa Kemal Atatürk liderliğindeki erken Cumhuriyet dönemi Türkiye'si arasındaki ilişkilerin gelişimini analiz etmektedir. Her iki ülke, Birinci ve İkinci Dünya Savaşları arasındaki dönemde, modernleşme, milliyetçilik ve güçlü merkezî otoriteye dayalı bir devlet yapısı ekseninde köklü siyasal ve toplumsal dönüşümler yaşamıştır. Betimleyici-analitik yöntemle kaleme alınan bu çalışmada, 1926 Dostluk Antlaşması, 1932 Sınır Antlaşması ve 1937 Sadabat Paketi gibi diplomatik belgeler üzerinden ikili ilişkilerin kurumsallaşma süreci incelenmiştir. Çalışma, İran'daki monarşi ile Türkiye'deki cumhuriyet rejiminin yapısal farklılıklarına rağmen, her iki liderin de dış politikada egemenliğe saygı, bölgesel istikrar ve müdahalesizlik ilkesine dayalı ilişkiler kurma yönünde benzer stratejiler izlediğini ortaya koymaktadır. Sovyet yayılmacılığı, sınır bölgelerinde Kürt isyanları ve aşiret hareketleri gibi ortak tehditler, güvenlik iş birliği ve kültürel diplomasi gelişmesini teşvik etmiştir. Reza Şah'ın 1934 yılında Türkiye'ye yaptığı resmî ziyaret, ilişkilerin sembolik ve pratik açıdan en önemli dönüm noktalarından biri olmuştur. İç reformların dış politikaya doğrudan yansıdığı bu dönemde, İran ve Türkiye arasında karşılıklı saygıya dayalı ve sorunları barışçıl yollarla çözmeyi esas alan bir diplomasi anlayışı gelişmiştir. Sınır gerilimlerine rağmen taraflar askeri çatışmadan kaçınmış, diplomatik mekanizmalarla çözüm arayışına gitmişlerdir. Bu bağlamda, söz konusu dönem, Orta Doğu'da tarihsel düşmanlıktan yapıcı iş birliğine geçişin başarılı bir örneği olarak değerlendirilebilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dış Politika, İran, Türkiye, Antlaşmalar, Modernleşme.

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INTRODUCTION

Iran and Türkiye relations in the early decades of the twentieth century were shaped amid profound political, social, and ideological transformations, marking a distinct departure from the traditional relations previously maintained between Iran and the Ottoman Empire. With the collapse of the Qajar dynasty and the establishment of a centralized Pahlavi monarchy in Iran in 1925, and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire followed by the founding of the modern Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, both nations embarked on a new era characterized by substantial domestic reforms and a redefinition of their foreign policies. These transformations laid the groundwork for a novel model of bilateral relations, which, in contrast to the historically hostile dynamics, was grounded in cooperation, mutual respect, and pragmatic regionalism (Çelep & Karamipour, 2024: 210-211).

A long history of religious conflicts, territorial disputes, and political rivalries had previously hindered the development of stable and constructive relations between Iran and the Ottoman Empire, as each side sought to legitimize its rule through sectarian opposition (Shi'a vs. Sunni), repeatedly clashed over border provinces such as Iraq and the Caucasus, and viewed the other as a direct threat to its regional hegemony. However, the rise of Reza Shah and Atatürk, coupled with the convergence of their political discourses — centered around modernization, state-building, nationalism, and centralization — paved the way for a new phase of engagement. This was reflected in bilateral agreements such as the 1926 Treaty of Friendship, the 1932 border agreement, and multilateral initiatives like the 1937 Saadabad Pact (Amouei, 2012: 198-199).

The primary objective of this article is to provide a comprehensive analysis of Iran-Türkiye relations during the reign of Reza Shah, exploring historical antecedents, domestic reforms, diplomatic engagements, border challenges, regional cooperation, and a comparative assessment of the foreign policies of both nations. The study illustrates how, despite a tumultuous past, the two states succeeded in forging a pragmatic cooperative model in a Middle Eastern region characterized by insecurity and crisis during the interwar period.

The central research question addressed in this study is: What domestic and regional factors contributed to the formation and consolidation of Iran- Türkiye relations during the Reza Shah-Atatürk era, and how did these relations influence the geopolitical structure of the region?

Through a descriptive-analytical methodology and based on historical documents, academic literature, and diplomatic reports, this article seeks to evaluate the processes, challenges, and opportunities involved in the development of bilateral ties, as well as their effectiveness in fostering regional stability. From a historical and strategic perspective, the study aims to shed light on the Iran-Türkiye relationship during the modernization era as a noteworthy model for regional interaction.

Despite a growing body of literature on Iran-Türkiye relations, existing studies have predominantly relied on English and Turkish sources, often overlooking Persian archival materials. This study contributes to the historiography by incorporating Persian-language sources that provide unique insights into Iran's diplomatic perceptions, internal policy considerations, and strategic calculations. By doing so, the article fills a significant gap in the literature and offers a more balanced and multi-perspective understanding of bilateral relations during the interwar period.

1. The Historical Background of Iran-Ottoman Relations up to the Pahlavi Era

The historical relationship between Iran and the Ottoman Empire was consistently marked by political rivalries, sectarian conflicts, and competition for regional dominance. From the emergence of the Ottoman Empire until the end of the Qajar dynasty, the two powers' shared borders frequently fueled military confrontations. However, the establishment of new states in Iran and Türkiye following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire created a favorable opportunity for diplomatic relations between the neighboring countries (Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 10; Mokhtari & Montazeri, 2012: 182).

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, three fundamental issues-sectarian divisions (Shi'a vs. Sunni), competition over influence in the Caucasus and Iraq, and persistent border disputes-drove repeated military conflicts between Iran and the Ottomans. Battles such as Chaldiran in 1514 and various Safavid-Ottoman wars are evidence of this historical reality (Pourshalchi, 2005: 6). Although treaties such as the Treaty of Zuhab in 1639 aimed to stabilize the borders, the lack of mutual commitment and divergent interests prevented the establishment of lasting peace (Bahman, 2020: 18).

During the Qajar era, internal developments such as Iran's weak central authority, interventions by Russia and Britain, and Ottoman military reforms gradually reshaped the nature of bilateral relations. While the Ottomans pursued modernization through the Tanzimat reforms, the Qajar dynasty was largely preoccupied with preserving its existence in the face of foreign threats (Atabaki, 2006: 112; Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 11).

From the mid-19th century, reformist ideologies gained traction, and figures such as Sayyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi advocated for Islamic unity as a means of countering Western influence in the Muslim world. However, despite efforts by thinkers like al-Kawakibi and Na'ini, religious divisions and territorial rivalries hindered the practical realization of such unity (Pourshalchi, 2005: 64).

On the eve of the First World War, Pan-Turkism ideologies, promoted by the Committee of Union and Progress in Türkiye-gained prominence, advocating the unification of Turkic-speaking peoples across Central Asia and parts of Iran. This expansionist vision was strongly opposed by Iranian intellectuals and generated new tensions. Iranian newspapers such as *Habl al-Matin* and *Majles-e Showra-ye Melli* expressed concern over Ottoman interference in Azerbaijan and western regions of the country (Azghandi, 2000: 87).

The incursion of Ottoman forces into Iranian territory during the First World War — particularly in areas such as Azerbaijan and Urmia— left bitter memories in the historical consciousness of Iranians. Some sources have even characterized Ottoman conduct in these regions as “occupational” (Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 12).

However, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of the Republic of Türkiye in 1923 marked a decisive shift. Atatürk, adopting a new foreign policy based on non-intervention and peaceful coexistence, opened the path for a redefinition of relations with Iran. This change coincided with Reza Shah's consolidation of power in Iran, who similarly embraced a nationalist and modernist approach to foreign affairs (Tağızadeh, 1956: 51-52).

In effect, the painful legacy of centuries of rivalry led both nations toward a new mode of engagement. Rather than focusing on historical conflicts, the modernist governments of Atatürk in Türkiye and Reza Shah in Iran moved toward political, security, and cultural convergence.

This paradigm shift paved the way for a new era of friendly relations between the two countries during the 1920s and 1930s (Pourshalchi, 2005: 68).

2. Domestic Reforms and Foreign Policy in the Two States

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Iran and Türkiye simultaneously embarked on profound political and social transformations. Following the First World War, the traditional monarchical structures in both countries were dismantled, and modernist leaders came to power who prioritized state reconstruction, nation-building, and the redefinition of national identity. In Türkiye, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk assumed leadership of the independence movement after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and, in 1923, established the Republic, formally abolishing the caliphate. He implemented sweeping reforms in Türkiye's educational, judicial, cultural, and political systems, including replacing the Arabic script with Latin, abolishing religious schools, establishing modern universities, creating a secular legal system, and granting women the right to vote, all aimed at fostering secularism and nationalism (Azghandi, 2000: 78).

In Iran, Reza Shah Pahlavi, who had gained military power following the 1921 coup d'état, deposed Ahmad Shah Qajar in 1925 and founded the Pahlavi monarchy, maintaining political power until 1941. Reza Shah directed the country toward modernization through the formation of a unified national army, judicial reforms, educational restructuring, the development of transportation infrastructure, and the restriction of clerical power. Although these reforms were carried out within a centralized and authoritarian monarchical framework, they bore significant similarities in objective to those of Atatürk (Bahman, 2020: 25; Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 13).

In both countries, the modern state — grounded in nationalism — replaced traditional religious, tribal, and sectarian identities. In Türkiye, the Republican People's Party served as the primary vehicle for implementing Atatürk's reforms and maintained strict control over the political sphere. Although Iran lacked a structured party system, Reza Shah exercised centralized control through state institutions and security apparatuses, enforcing a new order based on modernist principles.

These internal transformations had a direct impact on both countries' foreign policies. In the post-republican period, Türkiye adopted the principle of "Peace at home, peace in the world," and sought to avoid entanglements in international conflicts. Likewise, Iran, learning from the bitter legacy of foreign intervention—especially by Russia and Britain—pursued a cautious foreign policy focused on border stabilization and the development of neighborly relations (Atabaki, 2006: 119).

The political and diplomatic convergence between the two countries was further reinforced by ideological and security commonalities. Both governments faced shared threats, including Soviet expansionism, Kurdish separatist agitation, and the rise of religious fundamentalism. These shared security concerns laid the foundation for Tehran-Ankara cooperation in political, intelligence, and security spheres, culminating in bilateral agreements and joint meetings (Azghandi, 2000: 88).

Indeed, the experience of modernization and nation-building in Iran and Türkiye—particularly in the decades following the First World War, produced a new model of regional cooperation. Unlike the hegemonic ambitions of past empires, this cooperation emerged from the perspective of newly established national states in pursuit of internal stability. Both Reza Shah and Atatürk understood that domestic development could not be achieved without a balanced and regionally anchored foreign policy. As a result, the stage was set for the closest bilateral relations in the modern history of the two nations, relations that will be examined in the following section

through the lens of formal agreements and diplomatic interactions. This strategic convergence is all the more noteworthy given the fundamental structural differences between the two states. In Iran, Reza Shah concentrated all foreign policy decision-making in his own hands, ruling through a centralized military-bureaucratic apparatus without any meaningful party or parliamentary mechanism (Atabaki, 2006: 67; Bahman, 2020, p. 37). In Türkiye, by contrast, Atatürk's foreign policy was formulated and implemented through the Republican People's Party and institutionalized diplomatic bodies, providing a degree of continuity and collective deliberation (Azghandi, 2000: 86; Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 15-16).

Despite this difference, both Reza Shah and Atatürk understood that domestic development could not be achieved without a balanced and regionally anchored foreign policy. As a result, the stage was set for the closest bilateral relations in the modern history of the two nations' relations that will be examined in the following section through the lens of formal agreements and diplomatic interactions.

3. Diplomatic Engagements and Formal Agreements

During the 1920s and 1930s, as political authority stabilized in both Iran and Türkiye, the two nations entered a new phase of formal relations and purposeful cooperation, markedly distinct in substance and structure from previous centuries of interaction. The first concrete manifestation of this shift was the signing of the Treaty of Friendship in 1926, in which both countries pledged to respect each other's territorial integrity, resolve disputes through dialogue, and refrain from interference in one another's internal affairs (Bayat, 1995: 202). This treaty, composed of seven articles, outlined key principles such as non-aggression, the promotion of cultural and economic ties, and mutual recognition of international borders.

Following this agreement, longstanding border disputes became a central focus of bilateral political negotiations. After prolonged discussions, in 1932, Iran and Türkiye signed a new border demarcation treaty that resolved contentions over several key regions, including Qotur, Chaldiran, and Haj Omran. This treaty, comprising seventeen articles, not only specified geographic boundaries but also included provisions prohibiting military deployment near borders, establishing joint border inspection posts, and regulating the cross-border movements of tribal groups (Pourshalchi, 2005: 74).

Within this framework, Reza Shah's historic visit to Türkiye in 1934 was seen as both symbolic and practical in reinforcing this trend. Reza Shah was officially invited by Atatürk, visited various Turkish governmental, educational, and military institutions, and expressed admiration for many of Türkiye's reform models. Reports by his delegation indicate that upon returning to Iran, Reza Shah ordered reforms in the army, Tehran University, and urban development, inspired by the Turkish example (Amlashi et, 2015: 6-7).

The apex of formal relations between Iran and Türkiye was reached with the signing of the Saadabad Pact on July 8, 1937, in Tehran. Signed by senior representatives of Iran, Türkiye, Iraq, and Afghanistan, the pact consisted of eight key articles. Its provisions included commitments to non-intervention in internal affairs, non-support for insurgent movements, cooperation against external threats, intelligence sharing, and mutual respect for borders (Azghandi, 2000: 91; Bayat, 1995: 204). Article III explicitly stated that "none of the signatories shall permit their territory to be used for operations against any of the other member states" — a clause clearly designed in response to common threats posed by Soviet expansionism and armed Kurdish separatist movements (Houshang-Mahdavi, 1996: 117).

In addition to its security dimensions, the pact laid the groundwork for cultural and economic cooperation. According to its implementation protocols, the signatories committed to facilitating consular relations, transportation, education, and trade. During these years, several memoranda of understanding were signed between Iran and Türkiye concerning the exchange of professors and students, translation of cultural texts, and issuance of border customs permits, marking a transition toward multilayered diplomacy (Haqdār, 2019: 52, 74, 78).

The roles of key figures such as Mohammad Ali Foroughi from Iran and Reshid Aras from Türkiye were particularly significant in shaping these relations. Foroughi, with a deep understanding of both Western and Eastern cultures, viewed relations with Türkiye not merely as a political matter but also as a cultural and civilizational endeavor (Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 17). Reshid Aras, the Turkish foreign minister, repeatedly emphasized the "shared civilizational destiny" of Iran and Türkiye in his speeches before the Grand National Assembly (Bayat, 1995: 207).

In sum, the diplomatic interactions between Iran and Türkiye during the Reza Shah era, from security agreements to cultural treaties, signaled a transition from imperial antagonism to nationalist and modern collaboration. These relations were grounded in a framework of "regional realism" and served as a model for broader regional cooperation across the Middle East.

4. Border Challenges and Crises

Despite political proximity and ideological alignment between the governments of Reza Shah and Atatürk, Iranian-Turkish relations during this period were not immune to border tensions and local disputes. These tensions primarily stemmed from geographical complexity, tribal structures, and ethnic movements in the frontier zones. Although both governments made considerable efforts to resolve such challenges peacefully, realities on the ground at times led to crises that risked derailing bilateral relations.

One of the most sensitive issues involved the uprisings of Kurdish groups along the border regions of Hakkâri, Van, and Qotur. In the early 1930s, certain disaffected Kurdish factions in Türkiye, following suppression by Turkish military forces, sought refuge across the Iranian border and occasionally used Iranian territory to launch guerrilla operations against Turkish forces. Conversely, tribal groups in western Iran who opposed Reza Shah's disarmament campaigns sometimes allied with Kurdish tribes in Türkiye, causing unrest in the Khoy-Qotur corridor (Nassāj, 2013: 115-122).

In response, Türkiye occasionally dispatched border troops into Iranian territory, prompting official protests from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In a formal note addressed to Türkiye in 1932, Iran asserted that "any unauthorized incursion of Turkish military forces into Iranian territory constitutes a violation of Iran's sovereignty" (Bayat, 1995: 203).

Another source of tension involved nomadic migration patterns and access to traditional pastures. Tribes such as the Shakak, Mamash, Hersini, and Zerza had long practiced seasonal transboundary migration. The new border arrangements formalized by the 1932 treaty disrupted these patterns, resulting in occasional clashes between border guards and tribal communities. Archived consular reports indicate incidents of sporadic gunfire and livestock confiscations by both sides (Maki, 1983: 154; Atabaki, 2006: 25).

Nevertheless, a key strength of bilateral relations during this era was the mutual commitment to resolving disputes through diplomacy. Joint border commissions met multiple times between

1933 and 1936 in cities such as Tabriz, Urmia, and Van. These sessions often produced technical, non-political solutions to boundary disagreements. One such resolution stipulated that both countries' military outposts must remain at least five kilometers from the demarcation line.

Cross-border activities by extremist and dissident groups also contributed to tensions. Foreign Ministry reports indicate that some anti-Turkish elements used Iranian territory as a transit corridor to re-enter Türkiye and carry out subversive activities. Although the Iranian government denied official knowledge of such actions, Türkiye urged stricter Iranian border control (Bayat, 1995: 204).

Importantly, unlike the conflict-ridden history of Iran-Ottoman relations, none of these border crises during the Reza Shah-Atatürk era escalated into open military conflict. This restraint reflects the new paradigm adopted by both governments, prioritizing border stability and peaceful engagement. Notably, following the signing of the Saadabad Pact, multilateral security mechanisms involving Iran, Türkiye, Iraq, and Afghanistan played a crucial role in de-escalating transnational threats and resolving disputes via joint committees (Azghandi, 2000: 92).

In sum, while tensions persisted, the crisis management capacity, technical approach to border issues, and growing mutual trust between the two states exemplified a mature diplomatic posture and political will to sustain peaceful neighborhood relations.

5. Regional and International Cooperation Between Iran and Türkiye

In the turbulent geopolitical landscape of the Middle East between the two World Wars, Iran and Türkiye, both newly modernized states, sought to safeguard internal stability while simultaneously asserting a more active role in the regional order. Their regional cooperation was not merely a product of geographic proximity but also stemmed from shared security concerns, synchronized structural reforms, and a mutual understanding of regional threats.

Foreign policy in both countries during this era was geared toward reducing dependency on global powers and establishing an autonomous regional order. A major step in this direction was the Saadabad Pact. More than a mere security accord, the pact was a political statement of regional independence signed by Iran, Türkiye, Iraq, and Afghanistan, positioning themselves against the encroachment of colonial powers (Azghandi, 2000: 91).

The treaty underscored principles such as non-aggression, mutual respect, intelligence exchange, and preservation of existing borders. Crucially, it stipulated that no signatory would allow its territory to be used for hostile acts against another, a foundational clause for the development of a new culture of cooperation in the Middle East (Bayat, 1995: 204; Houshang-Mahdavi, 1996: 117).

Beyond the pact, Iran and Türkiye spearheaded numerous initiatives in cultural, educational, and economic cooperation. Documents from Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicate signed agreements on faculty and student exchanges, cultural exhibitions, joint publication of academic texts, and collaborative language and history programs. Students from both nations received scholarships to study at Kabul University, where Turkish professors also taught. Kabul University was founded in 1932, followed by Tehran University in 1934. Between 1935 and 1939, Iranian academic and artistic delegations visited Türkiye, and Turkish missions reciprocated by studying Iran's educational system. These engagements aimed to foster a non-antagonistic cultural nationalism and promote a new civilizational identity.

On the international stage, Iran and Türkiye occasionally adopted parallel or coordinated positions. Both were members of the League of Nations and adopted cautious, sometimes

aligned stances in response to the rise of fascism and Nazism in Europe. Iran under Reza Shah refrained from overt anti-German positions, just as Türkiye maintained a policy of active neutrality until entering the Second World War in 1945 (Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 15-16).

One notable outcome of this alignment was their shared pursuit of economic independence from colonial powers. Economic archives from both countries reflect efforts to expand bilateral trade, build regional railways, establish joint banks, and harmonize customs policies. Though many of these plans were never fully realized, they reflected a shared ethos of "indigenous development" (Madani, 2001: 315).

Overall, the regional and international cooperation between Iran and Türkiye in this era reflected a common vision of national sovereignty, regional independence, and defense of secular reform against external threats. This cooperative model stood out in a region largely dominated by colonial entanglements or bloc-aligned dependencies. The Iran-Türkiye partnership demonstrated that domestic modernization, paired with independent foreign policy and regional collaboration, could form a constructive nexus. However, one persistent flaw in these modernization efforts, especially in Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, was the tendency to emulate Western civilization at the expense of their own Eastern heritage. In contrast, Türkiye's geographical proximity to Europe and its shared historical legacy with the Byzantine East enabled it to navigate this transition more successfully.

6. A Comparative Analysis of Reza Shah and Atatürk's Foreign Policies

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, as two reformist and state-building leaders, shaped their foreign policies in response to internal national needs, external threats, and the imperatives of modernization. Despite differences in governmental structure, the monarchy in Iran versus republicanism in Türkiye, their diplomatic approaches bore fundamental similarities that facilitated closer bilateral relations.

The foremost shared feature of their foreign policy was pragmatic realism. Both leaders, having risen to power in the chaotic aftermath of the First World War and amid an unstable international order, prioritized border consolidation, avoidance of foreign entanglements, and internal reconstruction over idealistic ambitions. Atatürk's foreign policy was encapsulated in the motto "Peace at home, peace in the world." Likewise, Reza Shah, influenced by the painful legacy of Qajar-era foreign interventions, pursued a cautious and nationalist-oriented foreign policy (Azghandi, 2000: 86).

Driven by concern over Soviet expansionism, both states emphasized active neutrality and balancing relations with global powers. Atatürk maintained ties with the Soviet Union while simultaneously cultivating balanced relations with Western powers, particularly Britain and France. Reza Shah likewise attempted to navigate between Soviet and British spheres of influence, although Iran's semi-colonial status, in contrast to Türkiye's relatively greater autonomy, hindered the full realization of this strategy (Bahman, 2020: 37; Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 15-16).

One notable divergence lies in the institutionalization of foreign policy. In Türkiye, the Republican People's Party and organized diplomatic bodies facilitated the formulation of long-term foreign policy strategies. In contrast, Iran's foreign policy remained heavily personalized and centralized, with major decisions made by Reza Shah himself in the absence of robust party institutions (Atabaki, 2006: 67). This divergence manifested in practices such as ambassadorial appointments and treaty negotiations: while Türkiye dispatched specialized diplomatic delegations, Iran relied largely on the personal initiatives of the monarch and selected ministers.

Another key comparative element is the role of ideology. Atatürk, emphasizing secularism and pan-Turkism, sought to sever Türkiye from the religious and imperial legacies of the Ottoman Caliphate. This ideological shift enabled Türkiye to establish more balanced ties with Western societies. Although Reza Shah also embraced de facto secularism, his foreign policy was more deeply grounded in national authority and pan-Iranianism (Bayat, 1995: 93).

A critical achievement of both leaders was the resolution of longstanding border disputes and the initiation of a new model of regional cooperation. The signing of treaties of amity, border agreements, and the Saadabad Pact signified a transition from historical antagonism to geopolitical partnership, a development rarely seen elsewhere in the Middle East at that time. Both leaders recognized that economic development, internal stability, and social reform were unattainable without a secure regional environment (Solh-Mirzā'i, 2003: 17).

Ultimately, the foreign policies of Reza Shah and Atatürk exemplify models of modernizing and independent diplomacy pursued by semi-peripheral states within the interwar international system. Despite internal limitations and external threats, both countries achieved enhanced regional standing and projected an image of rational, cooperation-oriented statecraft.

CONCLUSION

The bilateral relations between Iran and Türkiye during the reigns of Reza Shah Pahlavi and Mustafa Kemal Atatürk present a successful example of historical transition from imperial hostility to constructive interaction between modernizing states in the Middle East. These relations were not merely a product of domestic political and social transformations, but also a reflection of shared security, economic, and identity-based imperatives.

State modernization, centralization of power, the decline of clerical authority, and the emphasis on secular nationalism in both countries created a favorable context for policy convergence. Official engagements-such as the Treaty of Friendship (1926), the Border Treaty (1932), and the Saadabad Pact (1937)-demonstrated a deliberate effort by both governments to institutionalize peaceful dispute resolution and construct a new model of regional cooperation grounded in neutrality and mutual respect.

Challenges such as border crises, nomadic migrations, and ethnic movements did not escalate into outright hostility but instead became opportunities to develop joint mechanisms for conflict resolution. The comparative analysis of their foreign policies reveals that, despite differences in government structure and ideological orientation, both leaders pursued internal stability, external sovereignty, and national empowerment through regional convergence.

In essence, the Iran-Türkiye relationship of this period played a vital role in stabilizing the political borders and security architecture of the Middle East. It also served as a historical model of coexistence and cooperation between modern, secular, and independent states transitioning from imperial legacy to nation-state formation. This experience holds continued relevance as a source of inspiration for contemporary regional policymaking.

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Sorumlu Yazar <i>Responsible/Corresponding Author</i>	Rahmatullah ARIANPOR			
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3	Rahmatullah ARIANPOR	%33	-	-