



Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara

Trilateral Cooperation among Turkey, Iran and Pakistan: an Iranian Perspective

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Trilateral Cooperation among Turkey, Iran and Pakistan: an Iranian Perspective

İran'ın Perspektifinden Türkiye, İran ve Pakistan Arasındaki Üçlü İş Birliği

همکاری سه جانبه میان ترکیه، ایران و پاکستان از نگاه ایران

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SUMMARY

- The three countries have cooperated with each other in recent decades in the framework of various mechanisms, especially the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). These three countries belong to different security complexes in South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and also have different strategic priorities.
- Coping with separatism, human security crises, security threats can be regarded as one of the other items on the agenda for dialogs and strategic cooperation between the three countries.
- Iran is the only world's major economy that has not joined WTO yet. This failure to join WTO increases the challenges of facilitating trilateral trade ties between these countries.
- The regional order in the Middle East and South Asia is greatly changing. These changes seriously influence the interests of these three countries and their role-playing.
- It is important to focus on improving the soft and hard infrastructure required for trilateralism.

Keywords: Trilateralism, Strategic Choices, South Asia, Middle East, Security

ÖZET

- Son yıllarda özellikle Ekonomik İş birliği Teşkilatı çerçevesinde İran, Türkiye ve Pakistan birbirleriyle iş birliği içerisinde olmuştur. Bu üç ülke Güney Asya, Orta Doğu ve Avrupa'daki farklı güvenlik yapılarına bağlıdır ve farklı stratejik önceliklere sahiptir.
- Ayrılmakçı hareketlerle mücadele, insan güvenliği krizleri ve güvenlik tehditleri, bu üç ülkenin bir araya gelmesi ve stratejik iş birliğine gitmesi için önemli bir zemindir.
- İran, Dünya Ticaret Örgütü'ne (DTÖ) girmemiş en büyük ekonomiye sahip ülkedir. Bu durum, İran'ın bu ülkelerle üçlü iş birliğine gitmesini zorlaştırmaktadır.
- Orta Doğu ve Güney Asya'daki küresel düzen büyük ölçüde değişmektedir. Bu değişimler üç ülkenin de bölgedeki çıkarlarını ve rollerini etkilemektedir.
- Üç taraflılık için gerekli olan sert ve yumuşak altyapıyı geliştirmeye odaklanmak önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Üçlü Taraflılık, Stratejik Seçimler, Güney Asya, Orta Doğu, Güvenlik

چکیده

- سه کشور در دهه های اخیر در چار چوب مکانیسم های مختلف، به ویژه سازمان همکاری های اقتصادی (ایکو) ، با یکدیگر همکاری کرده اند. این سه کشور متعلق به مجتمع های امنیتی مختلف در جنوب آسیا، خاورمیانه و اروپا هستند و همچنین دارای اولویت های استراتژیک متفاوت هستند.
 - مقابله با جدایی طلبی، بحران های امنیتی انسانی، تهدیدات امنیتی می تواند به عنوان یکی از موارد دیگر در دستور کار گفتگو ها و همکاری های استراتژیک بین سه کشور قرار بگیرد.
 - ایران تنها کشوری به عنوان یکی از اقتصادهای بزرگ جهان که تاکنون به سازمان تجارت جهانی نپیوسته است. این شکست در پیوستن به سازمان تجارت جهانی چالش هایی را برای تسهیل روابط تجاری سه جانبه بین این کشورها به وجود می آورد.
 - نظم منطقه ای در خاورمیانه و جنوب آسیا به طور گسترده در حال تغییر است. این تغییرات به صورت جدی بر منافع این سه کشور و نقش آنها اثر می گذارد.
 - مهم این است که برای بهبود زیر ساخت نرم و سخت مورد نیاز سه جانبه، تمرکز صورت گیرد.
- کلید واژه ها:** سه جانبه، انتخاب استراتژیک ، آسیای جنوبی، خاورمیانه، امنیت.

Introduction

This study focuses on determining the geopolitical and geo-economic contexts for trilateral cooperation between Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. As regional neighboring powers, these three countries have cooperated with each other in recent decades in the framework of various mechanisms, especially the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The key question is what opportunities there are for their trilateral cooperation in the context of the changing international order.

To address this question, the present study is divided into two parts. The first one deals with cooperation contexts and capacities between the three countries in the geopolitical domain. The second part focuses on determining the contexts of geo-economic cooperation between them.

1. Geopolitical Contexts and Capacities

At first glance, few contexts and capacities seem to exist for geopolitical trilateralism between Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. These three countries belong to different security complexes in South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe and also have different strategic priorities. Turkey is a NATO member and aligns its strategic and geopolitical policies with those of this complex. Pakistan mainly focuses on its strategic rivalry with India and on playing a leading role in the Afghan crisis. It is also increasingly expanding its relations with China. Iran is also a revisionist regional power focusing on gaining power in the Levant.

In addition, strategic trilateralism between these three countries has not been very successful from the historical perspective either. Their attempts at advancing geopolitical trilateralism in the framework of the Baghdad Pact and at geo-economic multilateralism in the framework of ECO were not very successful. The Baghdad Pact collapsed after the Iranian revolution, and ECO has not achieved considerable progress in regional integration decades after it was founded.

However, despite the differences in the security environments of the three countries and in their strategic choices and concerns¹, the overlapping points among the three security complexes in South Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, the differences between the security dilemmas of the 21st century and of the Cold War era and, most importantly, the trend of power transition in the international system, provide important contexts and capacities for their security and strategic cooperation.

The international order is increasingly distancing itself from the situation of hegemonic stability that always shaped interactions between countries after the Cold War era. The security environments and strategic choices of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey are also changing with the deepening and expansion of the trend of power transition in the international system.

Influenced by the systemic change in international politics, the regional order in the Middle East and South Asia is greatly changing. The chain of security dilemma in these regions is changing at greater speed and intensity compared to the past. These changes seriously influence the interests of these three countries and their role-playing.

Iran's and Turkey's role-playing in the changing Middle East increasingly affects each other. In addition, as a key country in the Muslim World that enjoys geographical proximity to the Middle East and has close ties with the GCC Countries, Pakistan is affected by the trend of evolving balance of power in this region. Furthermore, Pakistan is the key player in the Afghan crisis, which is the most important crisis in South Asia. The other main players in this crisis, Iran and Turkey, are influenced by Pakistan's role-playing, especially in the war/peace process between the Taliban and the Afghan Government.²

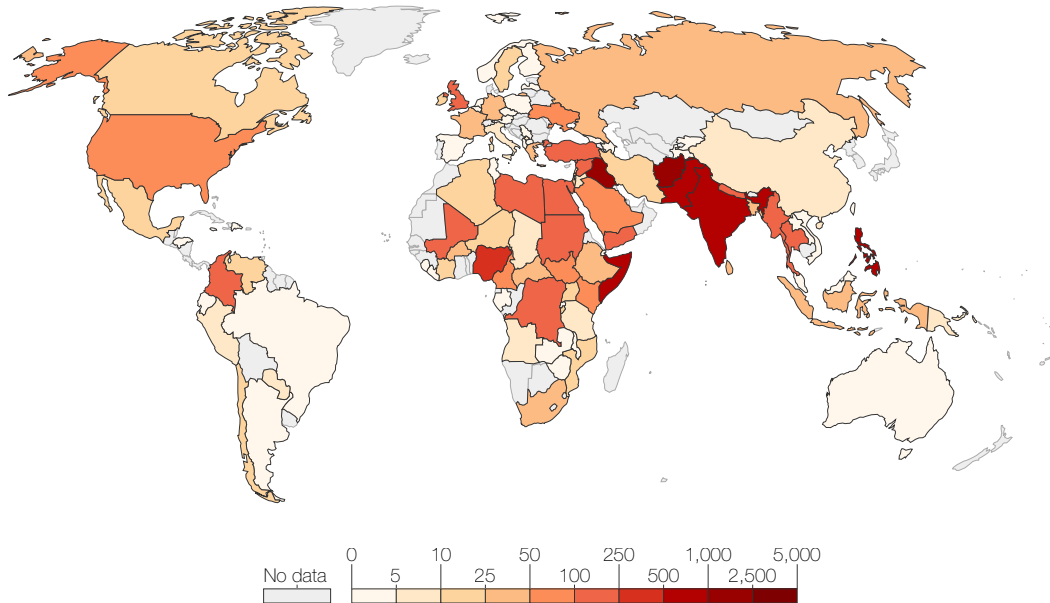
¹ Umer Karim, *Iran - Pakistan Relations: The Current State of Affairs*, Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara, Ankara, October 2017, https://www.iramcenter.org/d_hbanaliz/analysis_Pakistan_-_Iran_Relations_The_Current_State_of_Affairs.pdf

² Tolonews, "ترکیه میزبان نشست سه جانبه در باره صلح افغانستان خواهد بود", <https://bit.ly/2R8k9r3>, (15.01.2019).

Number of terrorist incidents, 2017



The total number of terrorism-related incidents per year. The source defines a terrorist attack as: "the threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion, or intimidation." The perpetrators of the incidents must be sub-national actors; data does not include acts of state terrorism.



Source: Global Terrorism Database (2018)

OurWorldInData.org/terrorism/ • CC BY-SA

In addition, from the perspective of new security threats like terrorism, separatism, extremism, and immigration, the security environments of the three countries are intertwined and the activism of each one will have important impacts on the interests of the other two.

These three countries have faced different levels of terrorist threats, and these threats are still continuing in the current situation. As the following map and diagram show, these countries are situated in a geographical region that faces substantial terrorist threats.

Based on the statistics presented in the diagram, South Asia and the Middle East are more exposed to terrorist threats than other regions.

Moreover, as regional powers, these three countries are greatly involved in the crises in South Asia and the Middle East, and their interests and actions can have decisive effects on the trend in terrorism events in these regions. Consequently, we can consider fighting terrorism one of the domains of strategic trilateralism between these countries. Clearly, each of

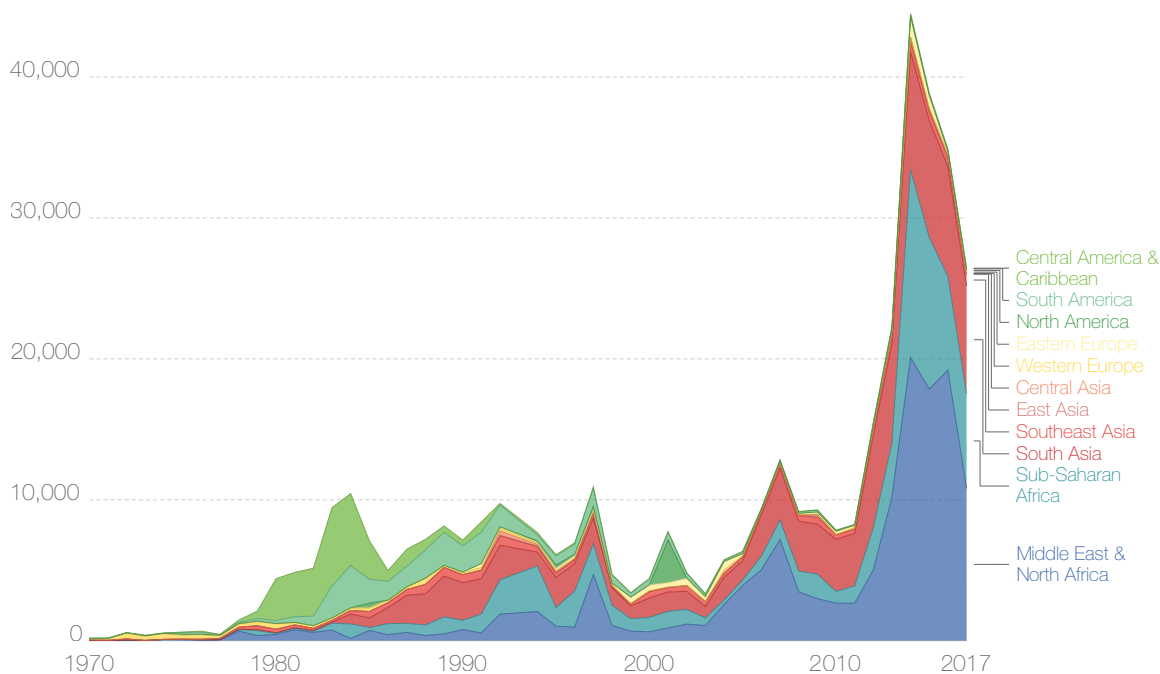
the three countries has a special definition of terrorism and the reasons for its emergence and continuation and has had contacts with various Jihadist groups. Furthermore, they have different and even contradictory interests in some domains. The activism of each of the three countries in fighting terrorism strongly influences the interests of the other two. For example, the wars in Afghanistan and Syria, in which these three countries have been involved to some degree, have affected their interests and security environments.

Under such circumstances, shaping a trilateral strategic dialogue based on fighting terrorism to achieve a common understanding of it or at least to minimize the differences between the three countries in this domain can be put forward as an idea.

Separatism is another new security threat that these three countries face. Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey have to contend with separatist tendencies in some of their border regions so that secession can be considered one of the impor-

Number of terrorism fatalities by region

Total number of fatalities from terrorism-related attacks by region. This represents the number of total confirmed fatalities, and includes all victims and attackers who died as a direct result of the incident.



Source: Global Terrorism Database (2018)

OurWorldInData.org/terrorism/ • CC BY-SA

tant and long-standing threats to their national security.

Decreased or increased separatist activities inside these countries are directly related to the degrees of stability or instability in the regions surrounding them. These regions are strongly intertwined and each one is influenced by developments taking place in the others. Therefore, coping with separatism can be regarded as one of the other items on the agenda for dialogs and strategic cooperation between the three countries. Shaping such a dialog and cooperation can lead to increased capabilities of these countries in confronting separatism.

Given the geographical proximity of these three countries and their involvement in the foci of crises like Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq, human security is another domain that can have decisive impacts on their national security. When Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in the 1980s, Iran and Pakistan turned into the most important immigrant-receiving countries in the world. Turkey was confronted with a flood of

refugees with the occurrence of the civil war in Syria.³ Therefore, we can say that they have been strongly affected by human security crises of the recent decades in the Middle East and South Asia and are still contending with their consequences.

In other words, human crises have turned into one of the new threats to the security of these three countries. Consequently, regular dialogs on coping with human security crises, and especially immigration, can be considered another context for their cooperation in the domain of strategic issues.

2. Geo-Economic Context and Capacities

Although there are remarkable contexts and capacities for cooperation and convergence among the three countries in the geo-economic domain, actual economic interactions between them are negligible. These are neighboring

³ "Countries With The Largest Refugee Populations", <https://www.worldatlas.com/articles/countries-hosting-the-largest-number-of-refugees-in-the-world.html>, (15.01.2019).

countries with a market of 350 million people and with the gross domestic product of about one trillion dollars.

However, none of them is considered the key trading partner of the other two, although Iran and Turkey have considerable trade relations. Based on the 2017 statistics, Iran was the seventh country exporting goods to Turkey, accounting for 3.2% of total Turkey's imports, and the 11th country importing Turkish goods, accounting for 2.1% of the total Turkish exports.⁴

However, these two countries have limited trade relations with Pakistan. In 2017, the volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and Pakistan was about 610 million dollars⁵. In the same year, the volume of trade between Iran and Pakistan reached about 900 million dollars.⁶ In 2017, Iran accounted for 1.6% of the total imports by Pakistan and for 1.7% of the total non-oil imports by Turkey.⁷

From the perspective of regional integration and economic multilateralism, the relations and interactions between the three countries are in their early stages. Although Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey initiated the first regional integration body in Asia in 1964 in the framework of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD), trade and economic relations between them have not been considerably facilitated after more than half a century. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), in which these three countries play the pivotal role, has not had considerable success in deepening economic convergence in West Asia. The goals of this organization included upgrading sustainable economic development, expanding intra-regional trade, removing barriers to trade between member countries, enhancing transportation infrastructure, and developing convergence between the public and private sectors in the economies

of the member countries.

The important question is why ECO has not succeeded in promoting convergence in West Asia despite the determination of logical and accurate goals by Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan for advancing regional convergence in the framework of this organization.

This organization was the first regional integration initiative in Asia. ASEAN was formed in 1968, four years after ECO with similar goals. More than half a century after their formation, ASEAN has been much more successful in promoting regional integration than ECO. ASEAN is considered the most important regional integration institution after the European Union, whereas ECO is still facing trivial problems in the process of regional integration.

Consequently, the prerequisite for architect new projects in this domain is to explain the reasons why the most important trilateral attempt by Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan failed to move forward regional integration and expand economic and trade interactions among these countries in the framework of this organization. As in the case of ECO, new attempts may also fail to accomplish considerable successes if the reasons for the failure of the first and most important attempt by the three countries to push forward regional integration are not scientifically and accurately explained.

In addition, Turkey and Pakistan are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and comply with its rules in expanding their economic interactions. However, Iran, which is the geographical link between these two countries, is the only world's major economy that has not joined WTO yet. This failure to join WTO increases the challenges of facilitating trilateral trade ties between these countries.

In addition to the analyzing of the attempts made by the three countries to advance regional integration, it is important to focus on improving the soft and hard infrastructure required for trilateralism. Hard infrastructure refers to physical facilities like roads and railways and

4 Tuik, http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046, (14.01.2019).

5 "Turkey-Pakistan Economic and Trade Relations", http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-pakistan.en.mfa, (13.01.2019).

6 http://www.irica.ir/index.php?module=cdk&func=loadmodule&system=cdk&sismodule=user/content_view.php&sisOp=view&ctp_id=29&content_id=1065319&id=558, (12.01.2019).

7 "سهیم ایران از واردات همسایگان", <https://bit.ly/2CjfGYj>, (11.01.2019).

Map 1: The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul rail corridor



soft infrastructure denotes rules and procedures that facilitate cooperation among the three countries.⁸

Trilateral cooperation to develop the hard infrastructure for integration is still in its early stages. The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul rail corridor project, which has always been discussed by the three countries in recent years, has not completely put into operation yet.⁹ Execution of this 6,500-kilometer long corridor project will be complicated, time-consuming, and difficult¹⁰. Therefore, it will require strong political will of the three countries. One of the important challenges of this project is the low volume of freight transport, especially from Istanbul to Islamabad.¹¹

In addition, this corridor faces technical problems.¹² Consequently, the economic justifi-

cation for this corridor and the technical problems in executing this project are among the key challenges of developing the hard infrastructure for Integration between the three countries.

As for the soft infrastructure, concentration on the trilateral agreement for free trade between Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan (TIP) can be considered an option for expanding economic and trade interactions. Negotiations for signing the agreement for free trade between Turkey and Pakistan,¹³ on the one hand, and between Iran and Turkey, on the other hand, are in progress. Moreover, Iran and Pakistan have signed a preferential trade agreement.¹⁴ Furthermore, the three countries are members of the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Group and agreement for free trade among members of this group has also been signed.¹⁵

These negotiations can take place in a larger framework under the title of trilateral free trade agreement between Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan so that they gradually form a free-trade bloc.

8 Kobena T. Hanson, Francis Y. Owusu, Korbla P. Pupilampu, "Infrastructure and Capacity Development as a Catalyst for Regionalism and Economic Integration in Africa" Contemporary Regional Development in Africa, Chapter 7, 2015. https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=communityplanning_pubs, (15.01.2019).

9 ISNA, "راهاندازی قطار کانتینری اسلامآباد-تهران - استانبول* مدیرعامل راه آهن: "، <https://bit.ly/2SN2fqA>, (14.01.2019).

10 IRNA, "محور جلسه کارگروه مشترک ایران-پاکستان-ترکیه در اسلام آباد"، <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/82597154>, (12.01.2019).

11 "اعلام جزئیات قطار کانتینری اسلامآباد-تهران-استانبول"، <https://bit.ly/2H9CiA6>, (15.01.2018).

12 "پایان یافت (ITI) اجلاس قطار کانتینری اسلام آباد-تهران - استانبول"، <https://bit.ly/2TKg8G9>, (12.01.2019).

13 "Pakistan, Turkey to sign free trade agreement 'soon'", <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-turkey-to-sign-free-trade-agreement-son/1302224>, (13.01.2019)

14 "قانون موافقتنامه تجارت ترجیحی بین دولت جمهوری اسلامی ایران و دولت جمهوری "، <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/97846>, (10.01.2019).

15 "قانون موافقتنامه تجارت ترجیحی بین کشورهای عضو دی-هشت"، <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/98000>, (09.01.2019).

Clearly, the signing of a free trade agreement between them will be complicated, time-consuming, and difficult. However, the beginning of this process can gradually institutionalize trilateral economic interactions between them and to some extent lead to the realization of trade facilitation as one component of the key trilateral soft infrastructure for these three countries.

If the suitable hard and soft infrastructures are constructed and economic and trade interactions are facilitated between these three countries, there will be the capacity to shape the regional value chain centered on these infrastructures. The value chain is defined as the set of activities each stage of which results in value creation. This chain includes stages and activities like design, production, marketing, distribution, and after-sales service.¹⁶

Activities that take shape in a value chain can take place in a company or a set of companies in a limited geographical area, in a geographical region, or globally. If many companies in a very wide geographical area are involved, a global value chain (GVC) is formed.

A study conducted jointly by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the WTO shows that the global value chain has turned into the dominant and defining feature of world trade, encompassing and bringing together the developed, emerging, and developing countries.¹⁷ The most important effect of the ever-increasing importance the value chain has in today's global economy is the role played by intermediate goods in world trade.¹⁸

Globalization of value chain also has a strong regional identity; i.e., the key regions of the global economy have shaped their value chains so that we can speak of the Asian value chain, the European value chain, and the North

American value chain. Regionalization of the value chain has redefined the geo-economic positions of the countries; that is, countries can no longer consider their comparative advantages alone but must also pay attention to the comparative advantages of their neighboring environments in the process of their economic and trade policymaking. For example, Cambodia is located in the center of the Asian value chain. Therefore, it can combine its geography and cheap workforce as a comparative advantage with the dynamic and growing Asian industrial structure and develop in this way. A country like Kenya does not enjoy this position. It is very far from the main foci of the European, Asian, and North American value chains and located in the center of one of the regions of the world with the lowest stability and economic development levels. Therefore, it cannot create industrial and trade policies as easily as Cambodia.

In other words, geography still enjoys special importance in industrial policymaking and, with the regionalization of supply chains, countries must consider their comparative advantage and also the comparative advantages of their neighbors in their industrial policymaking.¹⁹

In a world where regional value chains are gaining increasing importance, shaping a regional value chain between Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan and, in a wider area between member countries of ECO, can be considered an option. The three countries are neighbors and, therefore, enjoy the geographical advantage for forming a regional value chain. In addition, Turkey's economy (because it enjoys advanced technology and is intertwined with European economy), Iran's economy (due to its huge energy resources, large consumer market and skilled and educated workforce), and Pakistan's economy (given its cheap and large labor force and potentially large consumer market) in a way complement each other. Shaping such a value chain requires, first of all, specialized dialogs between think tanks and economic-trade bureaucracies in the three countries.

16 Harvard Business School, "The Competitive Advantage: Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance", <https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=193>, (12.01.2019).

17 World Bank Group, "Inclusive Global Value Chains", <https://www.oecd.org/trade/OECD-WBG-g20-gvc-report-2015.pdf>, (12.01.2019).

18 World Trade Organization, "World Trade Statistical Review 2018", https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statistics_e/wts2018_e/wts2018_e.pdf, (15.01.2019).

19 World Trade Statistical Review 2018, http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GAC_GlobalTradeSystem_Report_2012.pdf, (15.01.2019).

3. Conclusion

As regional powers, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan have taken various initiatives in recent decades for shaping regional multilateralism. Trilateral cooperation between these three countries is considered not only a choice but also a necessity in the changing global order. In the process of change in the international order, the regional countries are increasingly influenced by the forces resulting from this change and are forced to play a greater role in the international arena, especially in their neighborhood environments.

Moreover, the power redistribution in the global system provide new contexts for role-playing by the regional powers. Multilateralism can be considered an effective strategy for managing threats resulting from the trend of systemic changes in the international order and for utilizing the opportunities these trends provide.

Coping with new security threats can be considered the basis for geopolitical trilateralism between these Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan. These countries are faced with nontraditional threats like terrorism, separatism, extremism, and immigration. Successful management of these dilemmas can only be achieved through multilateralism.

In the geo-economic domain, although the situation regarding the hard and soft infrastructure for trilateralism between these countries is not very desirable yet, their vast potentials and the complementary nature of their economies have created the capacity for forming a regional value chain that is centered on them. Signing an agreement for free trade between Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan is the prerequisite for shaping this value chain.

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