

Securitization of Migration in Iran and Türkiye: A Comparative Analysis within the Framework of the Regional Security Complex

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Article Info	Extended Abstract
Article type: Research Article	Objective: Iran and Turkey are among the countries that have been exposed to large-scale migration flows over the past few decades. Iran, especially following the political, military, and social developments in Afghanistan, has faced various waves of Afghan immigrants and asylum seekers. Turkey, after the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011, became one of the most important destinations for population displacement in its vicinity and, alongside Syrian asylum seekers, has also faced flows of migrants and asylum seekers from other countries. Despite the similarity of the two countries in terms of being located near crisis centers, their geographical position, being situated on important population movement routes, and continuous exposure to issues related to border control, their migration experience and the way they confront this phenomenon are not the same. Differences in legal and institutional structures, domestic political conditions, demographic characteristics of migrants, government policies, and host society reactions have created different paths for managing and representing migration in the two countries. The significance of the issue took on new dimensions in 2026 with the intensification of security and military crises around Iran. The military confrontation between the United States and Israel against Iran, in addition to creating widespread security and social pressures, coincided with an increase in the return and deportation of Afghan nationals from Iran. This situation showed that security crises can affect migration policies, border control, and the way the migrant population is defined and managed. However, the article does not seek to establish a definitive and one-way relationship between military crisis and migration policies; rather, it considers this development as an important context for examining the intensification of threat perception and the increased capacity for the securitization of migration. The analytical framework of the research, derived from a conceptual combination of the Copenhagen School and regional security complex theory, rests on four components: migration drivers (war, political instability, and insecurity in origin countries), the securitization process (transforming migration from an ordinary issue into a security problem), the social sector of security (identity, cohesion and social order, and access to resources and services as the locus of threat perception), and the regional context (geography, shared borders, interdependence, and patterns of amity/enmity). On this basis, the research seeks to answer how and through what mechanisms
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migration becomes securitized in Iran and Turkey, and how geographical proximity, security interdependence, and the position of these two countries in the regional security complex affect this process, and comparatively, why despite both countries facing large-scale migration flows, the intensity, arena, and instruments of the securitization of migration are not the same in them.

Methodology: This research was conducted with a qualitative approach using the comparative case study method, and its aim is to explain and compare the process of securitization of migration in Iran and Turkey with a focus on the social dimension of security. Social security was chosen because migration in both countries, in connection with issues such as social cohesion, collective identity, public order, sense of security, relations between the host society and migrants, and access to public resources and services, has found the capacity to become a security issue; therefore, unlike examining all dimensions of security simultaneously, the research limits the scope of analysis to social security. The unit of analysis is the process of securitization of migration, and the cases studied are Iran and Turkey; in Iran, the focus is on the presence and movement of Afghan migrants and asylum seekers, and in Turkey, on Syrian asylum seekers and the way this phenomenon is represented and managed in official and social policies and discourses. Data were collected documentarily and through library sources, including books, scientific articles, laws and official documents, reports of governmental and international institutions, and credible media sources, and were categorized and analyzed within a common framework. Data analysis is conducted based on the securitization concepts of the Copenhagen School and regional security complex theory, examining the representation of migration as a threat, control policies, social reactions, conditions of origin countries, and the role of the surrounding environment.

Findings: Based on the findings of the research, Buzan and Wæver's regional security complex theory provides a suitable framework for explaining this situation, because migration in Iran and Turkey cannot be analyzed merely at the national level. The developments in Afghanistan and Syria have shown that insecurity in one political unit can create direct security consequences for neighboring countries; therefore, migration should be considered one of the manifestations of the spillover of regional crises and part of the shared security dynamics among regional countries. In this framework, migration management is not possible merely through restrictive domestic policies or border security measures; rather, it requires the formation of regional cooperation mechanisms. Migration diplomacy can be one of the important tools in this regard, because through coordination among origin countries, destination countries, and international organizations, it provides grounds such as information exchange, border management, regulation of residency policies, support for voluntary return, reduction of illegal migration, and enhancement of regional cooperation capacities.



Conclusion: This study shows that migration in Iran and Turkey is not an inherent threat, but a multidimensional phenomenon whose consequences are determined by the way it is managed politically, socially, and security-wise. Accordingly, the desirable approach to confronting this issue is a transition from mere securitization toward comprehensive management, regional cooperation, and policies based on regulation, integration, and diplomatic coordination; an approach that, while preserving states' security considerations, can prevent migration from becoming a sustainable source of tension in the regional security complex.

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