

Turkey and China: Unlikely Strategic Partners

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Synopsis: In late September-early October 2010 Turkey and China held a bilateral military exercise in Turkey, the first such exercise that China conducted with a NATO member. This, coupled with the numerous high-level diplomatic and military visits between the two countries since 2009, has led to talk of a new “strategic partnership” between Turkey and China. While it is debatable whether the two countries are really at the level of a strategic partnership, the burgeoning Sino-Turkish relationship, which has remained unconsidered and understudied, is worth examining in order to assess the implications it may have for the U.S. and its defense community. This article analyzes the Turkey-China relationship in light of their strategic interests and discusses why it is unlikely that they will become true strategic partners, given the wide divergence between these interests.

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TURKEY AND CHINA: UNLIKELY STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Introduction

In late September-early October 2010 Turkey and China held a bilateral military exercise in Turkey, the first such exercise that China conducted with a NATO member.¹ This, coupled with the numerous high-level diplomatic and military visits between the two countries since 2009, has led to talk of a new “strategic partnership” between Turkey and China. While it is debatable whether the two countries are really at the level of a strategic partnership, the burgeoning Sino-Turkish relationship, which has remained unconsidered and understudied, is worth examining in order to assess the implications it may have for the U.S. and its defense community.

This relationship between Turkey, a NATO ally and a rising power in the Middle East, and China, a rising power in Asia and the world, has economic, political, military and cultural dimensions. This article analyzes the Turkey-China relationship in light of their strategic interests and discusses why it is unlikely that they will become true strategic partners, given the wide divergence between these interests. While there is planned cooperation on various projects ranging from construction projects to cultural exchanges to tourism, there are also a number of problematic issues between the two countries. Tensions regarding Taiwan, competition in Africa and Central Asia, disagreements on Syria and Iran, a lack of support from China for Turkey in the United Nations (UN) are only a few of these.

In addition to these divergences, there are two other critical points, which are likely to remain problematic in their bilateral relations. First, there is a huge imbalance in the trade relationship, which favors China and worries Turkey due to the disastrous effect this has had on certain sectors of its economy. Second, there is the issue of the roughly 20 million Uyghurs in Xinjiang Province, whom Turkey considers its “ethnic brethren.” In the past Turkey has accused China of committing practically genocide against them.²

In short, China and Turkey lack a common strategic viewpoint that would form the basis of a potential strategic partnership. The much talked of “Silk Road” project that would revive trade and commerce between China and Turkey has yet to be launched. Even if it was, however, it is not clear that this would bridge this strategic gap.

One central factor of the relationship is that it is not an equal one. China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, where Turkey has sought its support on certain policy issues, to no avail. In terms of trade, China is Turkey’s third largest trading partner, while Turkey is China’s thirty-fifth.³ Politically, Turkey has no intention or capacity to contain the rise of China.

Turkey views good relations with China as an opportunity to highlight its multifaceted identity to the world and become a corridor state between the West and China. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu recently said that Turkey and China are “... two emerging powers on the Western and Eastern banks of Asia,” and that “... [Turkey’s]

difference from the West and China is this: We can develop a democracy with European Union (EU) standards, and a production style with Chinese standards.”⁴ His description of Turkey as a meeting point between China and the West can be analyzed as a sign of Turkey’s goal to become a mediator state between China and the West; similar to some other mediatory roles it has tried to play as part of its pro-active foreign policy.⁵

China regards Turkey as a strategically located NATO country with political influence in the Middle East and great economic and political potential. It considers Turkey a gateway to the markets of the EU and the Europe Free Trade Association, which has free trade agreements with Turkey. Militarily, China benefited from being invited to the Anatolian Eagle military exercise in 2010, an air force exercise hosted by the Turkish Air Force and held in Konya, Turkey. This gave China prestige for having conducted a joint military exercise with NATO’s second largest army, along with a chance to show off its air force capabilities to the international community. In addition, the Turkish national airline, Turkish Airlines, currently flies to Beijing, Shanghai, and Guanzhou, with plans to fly to five new destinations in China, opening up the country to more tourism, businessmen and investments, on which China places great importance. A proposed railway project that would connect Turkey’s east and west would create a railway that links China to Spain to London, expanding its reach for trade and influence.

Brief Historical Background

Despite being situated at the opposite ends of the massive Asian continent and the physical distance between them, relations between Turkey and China go back to B.C. 2000 due to the ancient Silk Road, which kept trade and cultural links alive for centuries.

In the mid-20th century, Cold War conditions made it difficult for the two countries to establish diplomatic relations. By the late 1940s China and Turkey had grown apart, with China standing with the communist bloc and Turkey standing with the West. In 1950, as an aspiring NATO member and U.S. ally, Turkey sent 5,000 troops to the Korean War to participate alongside U.S. and UN forces, and kept replacing its brigades throughout the war, for a total of over 25,000 Turkish soldiers fighting there. During this war the Turkish troops fought against the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army -- the first direct confrontation between the two nations in modern times. This interaction left the two nations with negative perceptions of each other. The Chinese viewed Turkey as a “pawn of imperialist America,” while Turks viewed China as the evil Communist enemy.⁶

Modern diplomatic relations between Turkey and the People’s Republic of China began on 4 August 1971. This change in position was tied to the change in the U.S. position towards China. President Nixon and his leadership’s long-running adverse position toward China began to change in the early 1970s, leading many countries, including Turkey, to establish relations with it. However, there was little close cooperation between the two countries in the 1970s and ‘80s. This situation changed after the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002.

The relationship between the two G-20 members has picked up real momentum since 2009. Bilateral relations improved with several reciprocal high-level visits in 2009, 2010 and 2012, along with numerous agreements on a wide range of topics. Nowadays, China and Turkey are discussing cooperation on a variety of issues, from energy cooperation to increasing trade, infrastructure and military cooperation, and are exploring other potential future cooperation areas.

Diplomatic Visits and Talk of a “Strategic Cooperation Relationship”

A look at the dates and frequencies of the bilateral visits demonstrates how the relationship has picked up since 2009. A few bilateral visits and the combined military exercises stand out as particular turning points. On 24-29 June 2009 Turkish President Abdullah Gül became the first Turkish president to visit China in 14 years.⁷ He held talks with his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, and attended a Turkey-China business forum. His delegation, which included many businessmen, also visited Urumchi, the capital of China’s Xinjiang Region, and called on Uyghurs to play the role of a “friendship bridge” between Turkey and China.⁸

Figure 1. Then Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao and Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan during Jiabao’s visit to Turkey in October 2010.



Source: voanews.com

From late September to early October 2010, the Chinese and Turkish air forces held combined exercises in Turkey’s Central Anatolian province of Konya, the high point in military ties between the two countries. The following week, in early October, then-Chinese Prime Minister Wen met with his Turkish counterpart in Turkey, and the two countries signed eight deals in the areas of transportation, energy, banking, finance, culture and trade (Figure 1). These included a \$20 billion agreement for Chinese companies to build a fast-rail system in Turkey. With this visit, the two countries agreed to use their own currencies (the yuan and lira) instead of the dollar in bilateral trade, and set a goal of increasing trade to \$50 billion by 2015 and \$100 billion by 2020 (from \$19 billion at the time). In addition, the leaders signed a declaration regarding the establishment and development of a strategic cooperation relationship, and pledged to work together in the fight against terrorism and cooperate on nuclear energy production. Chinese Prime Minister Jiabao described the relationship as a “strategic partnership,” and said that he “recognized Turkey’s power and influence in the international community and its region.”⁹

In February 2012 then-Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping (the current Chinese leader) visited Turkey and reiterated the goal of increasing bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2020.¹⁰ This was followed by Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan’s visit to Beijing in early April 2012, the first Turkish visit to China on the Prime Minister level in 27 years. Erdoğan was accompanied by Minister of Transportation Binali Yıldırım, signaling the importance of joint construction projects, and 300 businessmen seeking more Chinese

investment in Turkey and an increase in Turkish exports to China. The sides signed further agreements to cooperate in energy, construction, the automotive industry, banking, technology and telecommunications.¹¹

The 2010 “Anatolian Eagle” Combined Military Exercise with China

Anatolian Eagle is an air force exercise hosted by the Turkish Air Force and held in Konya, Turkey. It has been held at least annually since 2001 (sometimes up to four times a year), and is often conducted either within the Turkish national forces or, by invitation, with other friendly foreign nations. The most frequent foreign invitees to this exercise have been the United States and Israel, with occasional participation by other NATO members such as France, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy. Some less frequent participants have been Pakistan, the UAE and Jordan. The 20 Sept-4 October 2010 exercise marked the first time that Turkey invited China; it was also China’s first exercise with a NATO member, bringing China huge prestige. China sent four Sukhoi SU-27 fighter aircraft and pilots to train with Turkey’s F-16 fighters.¹² These warplanes arrived in Turkey via Pakistan and Iran, where they stopped for refueling on the way to and from Turkey.¹³

The United States (and Israel) watched the joint Turkish-Chinese air-force exercise with concern. The United States particularly objected to the inclusion of F-16s in the drills, due to concern about China gaining access to secret critical information regarding Turkish F-16s.¹⁴ Therefore, Turkey used F-4s instead of F-16s in the exercise. The United States also requested detailed information from the Turkish Foreign and Defense Ministries on the exercise.¹⁵

When analyzing Turkey’s decision to invite China to this exercise, it is important to look at the operational environment of Turkey at the time and how it has changed since then. Such a look suggests that the exercise was more a reaction to Turkey’s circumstances at the time (especially as a rebuff to Israel) than a proactive effort to partner with China. The May 2010 flotilla incident, during which nine Turkish citizens were killed during an Israeli raid on a Turkish flotilla carrying aid to the Gaza strip, caused a serious deterioration of relations between Turkey and Israel. The invitation of Chinese military jets to a military exercise in Konya in 2010 was the result of China’s condemnation of Israel’s raid on the Turkish flotilla. The Chinese jets were invited to replace the previously invited Israeli jets.¹⁶

The exercise was also taking place at a time when many in the West were questioning Turkey’s foreign policy over the last decade, which included better relations with Iran and Syria and worsening relations with Israel. This had raised questions about whether Turkey was deliberately distancing itself from the West, and whether it was still a trustworthy NATO ally. Such talks of a shift in Turkey’s orientation from West to East were ignited primarily since Turkey’s initial approach to Iran’s nuclear program was significantly different than that of its Western allies. It focused less on Tehran’s capabilities and more on its intentions, believing that it would never be the target of Iranian nukes. Accordingly, in June 2010 Turkey voted against further sanctions against

Iran at the UN Security Council meeting, causing a serious crisis in its relations with the U.S. and Europe and fueling discussions about the West having lost Turkey. The deterioration in Turkey's relations with Israel following the May 2010 flotilla incident added fuel to the fire.

Since then, many things have changed in the international environment and in Turkey's operational environment. In November 2010 Turkey approved NATO's new Strategic Concept and agreed to host an early-warning radar system as part of NATO's Ballistic Missile Defense Shield program. By doing so it reaffirmed its position within the Alliance. With the eruption of the "Arab Spring," Turkey also changed positions regarding Iran and Syria, and even asked NATO for patriot missiles for protection against potential threats from Syria. With the pending normalization in its relations with Israel in April 2013, it would appear that the circumstances that led to Turkey's combined military exercise with China (at the expense of Israel and the U.S.) are no longer present. In fact, since 2010 Turkey has not re-invited China to these exercises.

From China's perspective, the exercise took place at a time when it was aiming to diversify its bilateral defense ties, project its military might beyond its borders, and participate more in international exercises to test key capabilities and learn new doctrines from foreign militaries.¹⁷ In 2010 Turkey was one of eleven countries with which China conducted combined military exercises, the others being the countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan), Pakistan, Thailand, Singapore, Romania, and Australia.¹⁸ The combined exercises with Romania, which took place a month after those with Turkey, constituted China's second military training with a NATO member. Since then China has held bilateral military exercises with many other neighboring and non-neighboring countries, including Russia, India, Pakistan and Australia.

While China has not been re-invited to Anatolian Eagle, there has been other military cooperation between the two countries. The Turkish Air Force has expressed an interest in cooperating with China in developing its space capabilities. China already helps Turkey in its ambitions to become a force in space. On 18 December 2012 the Turkish government successfully launched the Turkish Göktürk-2 ("SkyTurk" in Turkish) satellite aboard a Chinese rocket. The satellite was made mainly in Turkey, but was launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in Gansu Province in China aboard a Chinese Long March 2D vehicle.¹⁹ Chinese companies also compete for Turkish military contracts and there have been many military visits between the two countries. The chart below provides a list of known visits; however, there are likely confidential ones that have taken place in addition to these.

Turkey-China Bilateral Military Visits	
Year	Relations
September 1983	Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff Gen. Necip Toruntay visits China.
November 1986	Turkish Chief of the General Staff Gen. Necdet Üruğ visits China.
March 1995	Turkish Air Force Commander Gen. Halis Burhan visits China and meets with the Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian.
May 1999	Turkish Army Deputy Chief of Staff signs a Sino-Turkish military training and cooperation protocol on May 28, 1999, during his visit to the PRC. This facilitates public security coordination between the two countries, stressing that hard measures would be taken against separatist activities targeting the territorial integrity of both Turkey (i.e. the Kurds and Cyprus) and the PRC (i.e. Xinjiang and Tibet). ²⁰
February 2000	China and Turkey sign an agreement to cooperate against cross-border crimes.
September 2000	Turkey's Defense Minister Sabahattin Çakmakoglu visits China.
June 2001	Turkish Chief of the General Staff Gen. Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu visits China and meets with PRC Chief of General Staff Fu Quanyou and Chinese President Jiang Zemin.
May 2005	Chinese Chief of the General Staff Liang Guanglie visits Turkey; Turkish Air Force Commander Gen. Ibrahim Fırtına visits China and conveys Turkey's desire to cooperate with China on intermediate-range air defense systems and space technologies.
June 2005	The commander of Turkey's Military Academies, General Faruk Cömert, makes his second visit to Beijing, during which both sides agree to further their military-to-military relations through educational exchanges. ²¹
October 2005	Deputy President of the Chinese Central Military Commission Xu Caihou visits Turkey.
October 2006	Chinese Air Force Commander Gen. Cıao Cıngcen visits Turkey and discusses air defense systems and space cooperation.
June 2007	Turkey's then-Army Commander Gen. İlker Başbuğ visits China.
December 2007	China's then-Deputy Chief of General Staff Gen. Zhang Li visits then Turkish Chief of General Staff Gen. Yasar Büyükanıt in Turkey.
April 2008	Turkish Air Force Commander Gen. Aydoğın Babaođlu visits China.
March 2009	Commander of Turkey's Military Academies Gen. Hasan Aksay visits China.
April 2009	Turkish Naval Forces Commander Gen. Metin Ataç attends Chinese Naval Forces' 60th anniversary celebrations in China.
May 2009	Vice President of the Chinese Military Commission Guo Boxiong visits Turkey.
May 2010	Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff Gen. Aslan Güner visits China.
October 2010	Chinese Air Force planes are invited to participate in the 'Anatolian

	Eagle' exercise hosted by the Turkish Air Force
April 2011	Turkey's Deputy Undersecretary of the Minister of Defense Air Marshall Nihat Kökmen and then-Gendarmerie Commander Gen. Necdet Özel visit China. In the same month; Deputy Chief of the Chinese General Staff Gen. Ma Xiaotian visits Turkey.
June 2011	Chinese Air Force Commander Gen. Xu Qiliang visits Turkey.
August 2011	To mark 40 years of bilateral relations, the Turkish Fleet TCG Gemlik (F-492) visits Shanghai and Hong Kong.
September 2012	Chinese Navy Commander Gen. Wu Shengli and Deputy Air Force Commander Gen. Yang Dongming visit Turkey.

Problematic Issues

Uyghurs and Xinjiang

Turks have close cultural, religious and ethnological links with the Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim people who live in China's far west Xinjiang region. The Uyghurs also view Turkey positively, and the mutual intelligibility of their languages has formed the basis of a long history of links between them. The Xinjiang region was acquired by China during the Qing dynasty in the 18th century. It is of great importance because it accounts for one-sixth of the country's territory and is rich in oil and natural gas. China has viewed the Uyghurs as a separatist domestic problem due to the Uyghurs' quest for an independent "East Turkistan." The Chinese object to the use of the term "East Turkestan" and regard it as tantamount to advocating the partition of China.²² Turkey, on the other hand, has at times inspired Uyghur nationalism, offered sanctuary to Uyghur refugees, and provided moral and material support for East Turkistan movements, organizations and activities.²³

Xinjiang, a region where up to 20 ethnic groups reside, including Uyghur, Han Chinese, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Kazakh, has suffered ethnic tension in recent years. In July 2009, the Uyghur in Xinjiang rioted against Han Chinese residents, leading to a government crackdown against them, which left 197 dead and thousands injured.

Turkey has accused Beijing of committing abuses and atrocities against Uyghur demonstrators. Following the July 2009 crackdown, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan called the Chinese government's actions "almost genocide."²⁴ This caused tension in Chinese-Turkish relations. Turkey sided with the Uyghurs, whom it considers to be its ethnic and linguistic brethren, and spoke out against the Chinese leadership.

Following this tension in relations, both sides worked to smooth things over by issuing statements about the importance of preventing the situation from hurting their burgeoning relationship.²⁵ The Turkish government indicated that it recognizes the "one China" policy and opposes any action that threatens China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It also indicated that Turkey desires a relationship with China based on mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and would like to develop bilateral trade relations

and increase cooperation on international relations in the UN. The Chinese prime minister also highlighted the importance China places on relations with Turkey.

Nevertheless, Xinjiang remains a sensitive topic in bilateral relations, and Turkey's stance on the Xinjiang problem greatly influences its relations with China. Despite Turkey's stated agreement with the one China policy, it is impossible for Turkey to be openly supportive of China's policies in Xinjiang,²⁶ because Turkish public opinion calls for Turkey to do something to stop perceived Chinese persecution of the Muslim and Turkic brethren in "East Turkistan."²⁷

Geopolitical Issues

There are a number of geopolitical issues that cause tension in Turkish-China relations, which make this pair unlikely to become strategic partners. The most recent and important point of divergence between the two countries occurred in 2011 with the so-called Arab Spring, particularly with the developments in Syria, in regard to which the two countries have taken almost opposite positions. Ankara demands that Assad step down and supports the Syrian opposition, while China remains supportive of Assad and rejects foreign military intervention in Syria through the UN or NATO. China considers the Syrian crisis an internal/domestic matter and opposes interference in it.²⁸

Turkey is deeply concerned about the Chinese (and Russian) veto in the UN to intervene in Syria, a crisis in which it views itself left alone to deal with the consequences of refugees, border violations and missile threats. Faced with these threats from Syria, Turkey asked for Patriot missiles from NATO. In addition, Turkey is hosting the early-warning NATO radar system, which has generated threatening rhetoric from Iran, where officials have threatened to make Turkey their first target in the event of an attack on Iran.²⁹ These highlight Turkey's position in, and dependence on NATO. Moreover, in January 2013, when Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan floated the idea of Turkey joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), he received quite a negative reaction from the general public. Author Soli Özel summed up this reaction nicely when he wrote in his column in the mass-daily *Habertürk*, "How, and around what 'common values' can an alliance take place with China and Russia, the main actors responsible for the catastrophe in Syria? This is a proposition that does not even make sense... Particularly at a time when Turkey's need for NATO has reached an all-time high, and at a time when the government has intimate relations with the U.S. despite many problems."³⁰

Taiwan is another area of tension between Turkey and China. Turkey would like to develop economic and trade relations with Taiwan the same way that it has with Hong Kong. However, there are no direct flights between Turkey and Taiwan and the visa requirements between the two countries make trade and tourism difficult. Taiwan has expressed a desire to open up a trade attaché office in Istanbul, but Beijing warns Ankara against such moves, reminding Turkey of its one China policy.

China sees Turkey as a competitor in Africa and in Central Asia, where Turks have historical, religious and cultural links. China competes with Turkish influence and

initiatives in Central Asia over the routes of regional oil and natural gas reserves and their transport to international markets. Turkey has invested in large universities there that offer scholarships for local students and an education focused on improving Turkic links. China has taken a more modest approach, offering language classes through Confucius Institutes, which provides a labor force that can work in management for Chinese firms investing in the region.³¹

There are still other geopolitically divergent stances between the two countries. Turkey has sought China's support in the UN Security Council for Turkey's positions on resolutions concerning Cyprus, but has not received it; China recognizes the Republic of Cyprus as the sole legitimate state entity on the island. The two countries have also taken opposite views on many international problems, such as Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Nagorno-Karabakh, a landlocked region in the South Caucasus.

Trade Imbalance

There is an increasing trade gap between Turkey and China that is heavily weighted in China's favor.³² Chinese products have bombarded Turkish markets, while Turkish exports to China (primarily from Turkey's mining sector) are rather modest. In 2011 China exported \$21.6 billion of goods to Turkey, while Turkey sent about \$2.5 billion worth of goods to China. Similarly, in 2012 China exported \$21.3 billion of goods to Turkey, while Turkey sent \$2.8 billion of goods there. The foreign trade gap with China is thus \$18.5 billion, which is equivalent to almost 40 percent of Turkey's \$46.9 billion current account deficit.³³ The imbalance is in part due to the cheapness of Chinese goods relative to other countries.

Another aspect of the trade imbalance has to do with the nature of items being traded. Turkey's trade with China is different than its trade with Russia and Iran, which is based on energy. China sells to Turkey various industrial goods, such as construction materials, machinery and day-to-day items such as toys, while Turkey can supply China only with natural resources such as borate and chromium. Thus, the imbalance has to do with not only numbers, but also the variety of the items, giving China a huge advantage.³⁴

This has had a disastrous effect on certain sectors of the Turkish economy, including the textile sector, which is a flagship of the Turkish economy. A poll conducted by the Ankara chamber of commerce revealed that 25 sectors were overflowing with Chinese products and had been "conquered" by China.³⁵ In addition, around 80 percent of ready-made garments and toys were dominated by Chinese goods, while 100 percent of leather goods manufacturing were under Chinese control.³⁶

One of the largest buyers of Chinese products, Turkey has long complained about an imbalance in bilateral trade, seeking ways to attract as much foreign direct investment from China as possible. During a Chinese visit to Turkey in February 2012, Turkish Economy Minister Zafer Çağlayan said the government was not happy with the current trade imbalance with China, adding that new Chinese investments in Turkey would help alleviate the situation.³⁷

Cooperation / Joint Projects

Silk Road

To offset the trade imbalance with China, Turkey has sought to revive the Silk Road, which would entail new transport infrastructure and energy corridors and spur trade flows across Eurasia. Overall trade -- especially if Turkey can convince other countries on the Silk Road (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, India, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Russia, Syria, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) to simplify customs and border crossings -- could reduce Turkey's trade deficit with China and serve Beijing's goal of development in landlocked territories like Xinjiang.

To this end, Turkey launched the Silk Road Forum in 2008, with a goal of tapping into the huge trade potential among countries located along the Silk Road, stretching from Central Asia to Europe and accounting for 22 percent of the world's trade volume (approximately \$30 billion). The initiative also entails simplifying customs procedures to move goods faster along this path. Predicting that the countries on the Silk Road are on the brink of a transformation, Turkish Trade Minister Hayati Yazıcı said in 2012, "The Silk Road will become one of the main economic routes of the world economy, moving large amounts of goods and products from Central Asia to Europe and vice versa. This transformation consists of efforts to revive the Silk Road via an extensive railway network, transportation lines, customs gates, energy corridors and natural gas pipelines, making this area a major player in the world economy."³⁸

In addition to the Silk Road Forum, Turkey has initiated other projects with the same goal, including the Kervansaray Project and the Silk Road Customs Cooperation Initiative, which seek to help simplify border crossings and customs procedures on the Silk Road. While numerous meetings have been held on these issues, there have not been any concrete developments thus far.

Joint Projects

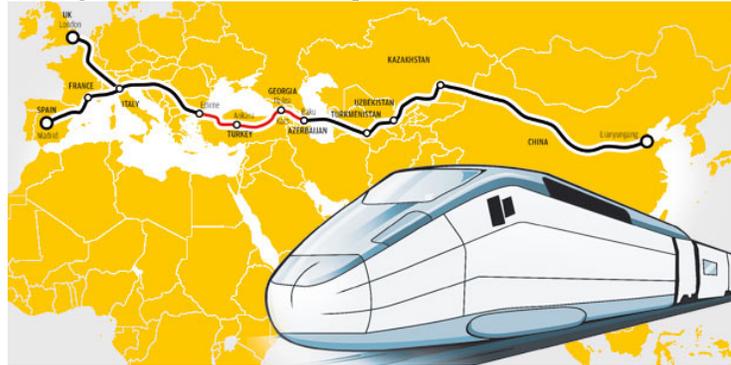
As a result of the agreements to increase cultural exchanges and in hopes of increasing tourism between the two countries, Turkey declared 2012 as "The Year of Chinese Culture in Turkey." Turkey hosted a number of events throughout the year across the country to showcase Chinese culture, including the Peking Opera, acrobatic shows, puppet shows, shows highlighting folk songs and traditional Chinese musical instruments, and Chinese films, as well as promoting Chinese literature. China reciprocated on 21 March 2013 by declaring this the "Year of Turkish Culture in China." Twelve Chinese provinces are featuring cultural activities, exhibitions, programs and show groups displaying Turkish culture, including an important exhibition on Anatolian Civilizations, Turkish films featured in the International Beijing Film Festival, and a concert tour across China by the Turkish Presidential Symphony Orchestra.³⁹

China's state-owned China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation is building a high-speed railway linking Ankara and Istanbul. Discussions of another railway

connecting eastern and western Turkey (the Edirne-Kars project, valued at \$35 billion) are also underway. With separate plans to connect China and Turkey by rail, a line running across Turkey would give China swift connections throughout Europe, all the way to London.⁴⁰

Chinese companies are particularly interested in infrastructure and transportation projects in Turkey. In addition to the railway projects, the multibillion dollar Kanal Istanbul project, a canal linking the Black Sea and the Marmara Sea, and a third bridge project over the Bosphorus are some projects that attract the interest of Chinese investors.⁴¹

Figure 2. The Edirne-Kars line through Turkey would complete a missing link from China to Europe.



Source: Today's Zaman

In another interesting area of bilateral cooperation, in 2012 the two countries signed a protocol that foresees the Turkish Ministry of Religious Affairs training Chinese Muslim religious leaders. Given Turkey's tolerant and peaceful interpretation of Islam, its training of Uyghur, Hui and other Muslim groups in China is seen as an important step in the successful integration of Chinese Muslims into Muslim society, particularly those in Xinjiang Province.⁴²

Summary and Analysis

The following is a list of issues for consideration for the U.S. and its defense community when analyzing the Turkey-China relationship, particularly the 2010 Anatolian Eagle exercises.

- The 2010 Anatolian Eagle exercise took place in the context of Turkey's deteriorating relations with Israel; and following a period when Turkey was working to establish good relations with Iran. Since then, Turkey's operational environment has changed; and the environment that led to this exercise between Turkey and China no longer exists. With the pending normalization of relations with Israel and Turkey's deteriorating relations with Iran and Syria, along with NATO support, Turkey no longer has the incentive to conduct such exercises with China. This is particularly true, given that it is not clear what, if anything, it receives in return from China for such a move. It is clear that such exercises with China are not worth jeopardizing Turkey's relations with the United States and NATO, particularly at a time when its dependence on NATO has been highlighted with the deployment of Patriot missiles to protect against threats from Syria.

- Turkey's desire to have closer relations with China is based on political and economic prospects, which have so far not met Turkey's expectations.
- Politically, Ankara would have liked to receive support from China on issues of significance to it, given China's permanent seat at the UN Security Council. However, since the 1980s, China has not supported Turkey's positions in the UN. Furthermore, Turkey and China have also ended up on opposing sides of the Arab Spring, particularly regarding Syria. China has continued to support the Assad regime, whereas Turkey supports the opposition.
- Economically, the expectation that Turkey could gain a piece of the Chinese market was not fulfilled. There is a huge trade imbalance in the relationship, which favors China. The strategy that is being discussed to deal with this is for Chinese companies to invest more in projects such as railways, nuclear plants and construction in Turkey, but the level of this investment is far from being sufficient to close the gap.
- Turkey's China policy can be interpreted as part of an effort to become a bridge between East and West and as part of Turkey's desire to play the role of mediator on contentious issues between China and the international community (similar to its efforts to mediate between the United States and Iran in 2008; Syria and Israel in 2008; and its efforts to bring Afghanistan and Pakistan together).
- The potential revival of a Silk Road, which includes Iran, would make it difficult for the U.S. to isolate Iran economically.
- Despite some developments in Xinjiang, Turkey still views the situation as needing improvement. Ankara is likely to continue supporting Uyghurs, potentially aggravating China.
- There is an imbalance of power in relations. Both political and economic relations are being driven by China, and Turkey is concerned about maintaining equality in the relationship.⁴³ As one of the five permanent Security Council members, China does not need Turkey's support, whereas Turkey has asked for Chinese support on international issues of importance to it.

Despite the mutual desire to expand economic relations, the trade imbalance, the Uyghur issue and a lack of common strategic interests make it unlikely that Turkey and China will become strategic partners.

NOTES

¹ In November 2010 China followed this up with joint military training with another NATO member, Romania. The Sino-Romanian army mountain troops conducted a joint training, named “Friendship Action 2010.”

² “Başbakan: ‘Çin’de olanlar adeta soykırım’ (The Prime Minister: ‘What’s happening in China is practically genocide’),” Hurriyet.com.tr, 10 June 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/12046635.asp>

³ “Çin ile ticarete garip rakamlar (Odd numbers in trade with China),” Ekonomi.haber7.com, 30 November 2012, <http://ekonomi.haber7.com/ekonomi/haber/958708-cin-ile-dis-ticarete-garip-rakamlar>

⁴ Gökhan Bacık, “Envisioning the Asia-Pacific Century: Turkey between the United States and China,” Today’s Zaman, 9 December 2011, http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=265222

⁵ Examples of this policy are evident in Turkey’s involvement in conflict resolution issues around the world in places like Somalia and Sudan, as well as its past attempts to moderate between the U.S. and Iran and Israel and Syria, and to improve relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

⁶ Tao Zan, “Uncertainty and Ambiguity: Turkey’s Perception on the Rise of China,” Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia), Vol.3, No.1, 2009

⁷ In 1995, Turkish President Süleyman Demirel had visited China.

⁸ This was an important visit, but relations were then locked due to strong public reactions in Turkey against the Urumchi riots on 5 July 2009. Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan reacted fiercely to China, calling its actions “practically genocide” against the Uyghurs and urged China to stop the assimilation of its Uyghur minority. Both China and Turkey worked to smooth over this issue and prevent it from hurting the burgeoning relationship by issuing statements on the importance they attached to the relationship.

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