





**Upgrading The
Traditional Dossier
of The Turco-Chinese
Relations: What Steps
Now?**

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It is nothing new to assert that the balance of economic and geostrategic power in the world has been shifting to the Asia-Pacific region, led by China, for a long time. The USA, the UK, the European Union, Japan, and Australia – also collaborating with other middle-weight countries in the region, are trying to build barriers to China's irreversible "peaceful rise" over the next decades, classifying it as a "hostile power" as happened at the NATO's last summit of leaders in Madrid.

The relations between Turkey, located at the most western end of Eurasia, and the "Middle Kingdom" in the far east of Asia, existed for three thousand years, either by war or by co-operation, are at a new turning point today. Ankara is likely to be forced to make a strategic choice by the West on the basis of "you are either with us or with them".

However, Turkey's interests, priorities and geostrategic position necessitate it being able to talk to and do business with all global and regional powers, and even to use its diplomatic muscles as an "honest broker" in the resolution of conflicts – and definitely to be an outpost of any particular party as in the Cold War era.

Much water has flowed under the bridge since I served as a diplomat in Beijing from 1989 to 1992. Since also the time when I established and ran the International Energy Agency and OECD's China programs and paved the way for British Gas's investments in South China Sea and Invensys's rail and nuclear projects. However, I think I still command a good understanding of China, its strategic goals and the Belt and Road project thanks to my effective "guanxi" in the region built based on mutual trust and respect over the decades since 1989 since my first arrival in Beijing.

In the intervening time, the faces have changed on both sides, the numbers have changed, but unfortunately the relations dossier has not changed much. We are still more or less still working on the same file on China. We could have been more creative and progressive. The train has not been missed yet,

though.

A lot has been done so far to improve relations, of course, this should be duly recognised. We should also remember with gratitude those who contributed. However, there is still much to be done to enrich the agenda, to build solid Turkish-Chinese relations beyond rhetoric in the uncertain world of the future.

China is a country that requires a lot of patience and long-term work, it is not a temporary passing phenomenon. Therefore, priority should be given foremost to the goals of greater political rapprochement and strengthening mutual trust in Turkey-China relations. Both capitals still have question marks in their minds about each other. Once these two goals are achieved to mutual satisfaction, it will not be difficult, in my view, to make progress in other areas.

Our vision for China, unfortunately, is that we have a soaring trade deficit of over \$20 billion for a long time and competing trade ambitions, so this country is coined as "either a trade threat or opportunity" It doesn't gain enough weight beyond the controversy. Likewise, we, at the westernmost tip of Asia, are just beginning to appear on Beijing's radar as a serious partner beyond the disturbances in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region, particularly as part of the Belt and Road initiative.

Due to the changing balance of power and the need for a new positioning accordingly, the "strategic partnership" we insisted on at the time of my service in Beijing as a diplomat may no longer be an utopia. The old Silk Road is being revived with China's role as a locomotive in terms of energy, transportation, communications and finance.

The trade deficit between the two countries is in favour of China – \$20 bn versus 4 bn. Direct Chinese investments in Turkey represent an insignificant percentage on a global scale, though there is a surge of interest in energy, port, railway, and similar infrastructure projects. Since both countries want to

leapfrog to a higher level in technology, innovation, branding and design, joint R&D and implementation projects can be developed if they are to result in “win-win” partnerships. So far, no significant opportunity for joint co-operation has been created with this country in the EU, Russia, Central Asia, Africa, and the Middle East/Gulf. Chinese tourists can be lifeline for the sector in crisis. The target in tourism is 1 million Chinese tourists Turkey, hopefully high-income ones. If the number of flights is increased and the infrastructure sought by the Chinese in the destination country can be properly prepared, it is not difficult to achieve this. Likewise, defence co-operation stalled after the air defence system procurement crisis may be revived. In the defence industry, the Chinese are very eager to sell the weapon systems and nuclear energy technology that the West does not want to share. They also want to launch our satellites.

There has not been a serious capital venture from China to Turkey yet. Turkey’s role in China’s annual outflow of foreign capital of approximately 160 billion dollars is very low, just as trade is minimal. It is very difficult to develop trade further given that Turkey does not have much to sell to China. To the contrary, Chinese entrepreneurs and traders are competitors in many areas. So we need to think more creatively, more technology-intensive projects to be worked in third countries.

In the final analysis, in overcoming the Great Wall of China, what is needed is not greater state intervention – it is the private sector taking the leadership and relying on when necessary the state’s support through economic diplomacy. If Turkish private sector entrepreneurs want to do business that will serve mutual benefits in the Middle Kingdom, they should engrave on their minds that they have no choice but to have a permanent presence in China instead of a “hit-and-run” tactics.

A new understanding of cooperation with China against terrorism and extremism must be developed. In this regard, Turkey needs to have a very sincere, transparent, and open dialogue with China, and adopt a constructive and resolving approach to the ethnic and religious turbulence in that region, rather than creating new problems. If this dossier regarding Uyghurs is not managed well, it risks creating tensions to the extent of severing relations between Ankara and Beijing.

The “Belt and Road” project, developed by Xi Jinping and even included now in the Chinese constitution to show that it is a permanent goal, is one of the most important visionary instruments of China’s “2049 Peaceful Rise” strategy. This initiative, which aims to shape the next half century in a way that will place China at the centre of the global order, affects more than 3 billion population in 65 countries with an investment of \$1 trillion up to now.

It aims to connect the east of Asia with the European shores of the Atlantic Ocean. If the “Belt and Road” project really aims to bring a Chinese alternative to the “established world order”, if the US-China will inevitably be engaged in the new Cold War, where should Turkey be positioned in this visionary initiative?

Undoubtedly, we are one of the important route countries of the “Belt and Road” initiative. Turkey, which used to be of secondary importance in the eyes of Chinese strategists until early 2000 but is now on Beijing’s radar as a key regional power to reckon with. While Ankara focused on economic relations with China, Beijing placed Turkey in a realistic position in its global strategic equation with a long-term perspective.

Turkey’s gradual alienation from the West and its sudden interest in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization without giving much thought to its implications with the West are also observed in Beijing with interest. Ankara enjoys a dialogue partner position.

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2022-yil 15-16 sentabr, Samarqand

ЗАСЕДАНИЕ СОВЕТА ГЛАВ ГОСУДАРСТВ-ЧЛЕНОВ
ШАНХАЙСКОЙ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА
15-16 сентября 2022 года, Самарканд



上海合作组织
(2022)

MEETING
OF THE SHANGHAI COO
15-16



To understand and know China better, to perceive or learn about its social, political and economic structure, to absorb the change, migration, aging, internal dynamics, industrialization, modernization and political sensitivities that have been experienced in China for more than 30 years, Turkey needs to invest more intellectual, business and political capital. It is important to use direct interaction, resources, not glasses provided by the West.

It is critical that Ankara redefines its long-term strategic interests, draws out a realistic and zigzag-free roadmap, and above all, does not deviate into an “opportunistic” channel that will satisfy short-term interests, and does not make a strategic mistake that cannot be compensated in the future.

We have to closely and directly monitor the direction in which China will evolve in the next quarter century, the development of its relations with the West and Russia and diversify

our areas of common interest to the mutual benefit.

Turkey, in terms of its geostrategic location, must aim to be a reliable, respected, balanced and strong partner that will maximize its own interests, balanced with both the West, Russia, China, Central Asia and the Middle East/Gulf. As a country that changes direction according to the wind and acts opportunistically, it neither gains international prestige nor can it achieve its national goals.

We have to develop a viable strategy that is grounded, based on the priorities and practical conditions of China and Turkey. A strategy with political champions in each capital city that will encompass not only economic relations but also political, military, technological, energy and cultural/promotional dimensions and will monitor its implementation step by step.

组织成员国元首理事会会议

2022年9月15-16日, 撒马尔罕)

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL OF HEADS
OF COOPERATION ORGANIZATION MEMBER STATES
September 2022, Samarkand



China can be an extremely important partner and support for Turkey in the coming new “Great Game” equation, if we process the areas of interest like lace, create trust, and take initiative in a proactive way starting from today. Presidential level talks are good, but ensuing traffic of official visits cannot be considered a measure of success on its own. We need success stories and tangible results. To this goal, we need to strengthen our human capital that knows Chinese, understands China, understands the mindset and can do business together and form our respective “Guanxi”s.

For years, I have always recommended the creation of a wise-persons group consisting of Chinese and Turks, including soldiers, diplomats, businessmen, thinktanks, should gather and clearly demonstrate what can be done for the next five to ten years, and its vigorous execution should be followed at political and business leadership levels in both countries.