A NEW EURASIAN EMBRACE
TURKEY PIVOTS EAST WHILE CHINA MARCHES WEST
Christina Lin
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Turkey Pivots East While China Marches West

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Introduction

In 2002, Turkish General Tuncer Kilınç, secretary general of the National Security Council (MGK), Turkey’s top decision-making body, called for Turkey to seek alternatives to EU and NATO and turn toward its old regional foes, Iran and Russia instead. Speaking at a conference “How to Establish a Peace Belt Around Turkey” held by the Military Academies Command, General Kilınç expressed frustrations at the EU’s policies toward Turkey and urged that Ankara needed to start looking eastward for new allies. Although the notion was not taken seriously in the main, “Eurasianism” as a geopolitical discourse caught on with some Turkish intellectuals, with Istanbul University convening a symposium in 2004 entitled “Turkish-Russian-Chinese and Iranian Relationships on the Eurasian Axis.” A decade later, the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is seriously considering abandoning the bid for EU membership to join the China-led and Russia-supported Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). On September 26, 2013, Turkey shocked its NATO allies when it chose a U.S.-sanctioned Chinese firm to co-produce a $3.4 billion long-range air and missile defense system. Turkey, with its increasingly Eurasian geopolitical trajectory, seems to be at a point of choosing whether to remain anchored in the West, or fundamentally shift its axis eastward toward Eurasia.

This paper examines the emerging trend that is unfolding in the Eurasia region. It focuses on the growing China-Turkey relationship and places it within the broader context of increasing Eurasian integration via the “New Silk Road.” It highlights drivers for Turkey’s eastward shift away from Europe and toward Eurasia as well as drivers for China’s westward march. It also examines the role of Xinjiang as a platform for Sino-Turkish cooperation across Eurasia and concludes with implications of Sino-Turkish ties for transatlantic security.

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Eurasianism (Avrasyacılık in Turkish) stands for a political, economic, and cultural alliance with non-western “Eurasian countries” such as Russia, Iran, Turkic countries in Central Asia, Pakistan, India, and China. Russian author Aleksandr Dugin in his work *Foundations of Geopolitics* (1997) first discussed Russian Eurasianism of creating a “supra-national Empire,” in which ethnic Russians will occupy a “privileged position.” A “grand alliance” of Russia and “Turania” should divide imperial spoils with the Islamic Empire in the South composed of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Mongolia, Iranian Empire, and Armenia. After the demise of the Soviet Union, Turks discovered their kinship with this geography and kindled a wave of pan-Turkish sentiment. Turkey’s president at the time, Süleyman Demirel spoke often of a “Turkish World from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China,” referring to almost all territories of Turkic states in the Caucasus and Central Asia, but also former Ottoman territories in the Balkans and possibly the Arabian peninsula. In face of the stalled EU accession process, both the population and the Turkish government are rediscovering Eurasia and turning toward the east for alternative opportunities.

According to İhsan Dağı at Ankara’s Middle East Technical University, both Turkish society and the Turkish economy are drifting away from the EU and “this process is almost irreversible.” There has been a structural transformation in Turkey’s engagement with the EU, with the flow of EU investment funds decreasing in recent years and a declining share of EU countries in Turkish trade. In 2003, more than 55 percent of Turkey’s trade was with EU countries; today only 40 percent is with the EU.

Likewise, Professor Hasan Ünal, a prominent political scientist at Ankara’s Bilkent University, expressed Euroskepticism that Turkey would ever obtain EU membership. “Why should the EU allow a Muslim country to become its largest and most powerful member, and in so doing move its borders to countries like Iran and Iraq? The EU will never admit Turkey.” In this vein, others also argue for Turkey to shift away from Europe and relinquish NATO membership. A week before General Kılıç was detained in 2009 in relation to the Ergenekon coup plot case, he spoke at a panel together with Şüle Perinçek, wife of Doğu Perinçek, the leader of the nationalist-leftist Workers’ Party (*İsci Partisi*) imprisoned as a suspect in the Ergenekon case. There, Kılıç publicly restated that Turkey should leave NATO, which according to Cengiz Çandar from the *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, reflects a sentiment that prevails at the higher ranks of the Turkish Armed Forces.

In the aftermath of EU’s eurozone crisis and defense austerity measures, some mid-level ranks of the Turkish military are also adopting the Eurasian sentiment, with a Turkish naval officer referring to European armies as “bonsai armies” and how Turkey is looking eastward because “China is on the

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9 Ibid, p.3.

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12 The Economist, “A general speaks his mind.”
U.S. attempts to change Turkish foreign and defense policy had resulted in the creation of ill will in Turkey, and moved forward the notion of Turkey to become an independent security actor.

Way of great power."14 In November 2011, Christian Mölling of the Berlin-based Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) wrote an article assessing how defense budget cuts will produce European bonsai armies over the next five years, with ever shrinking forces and diminishing capabilities. "In Germany, France, and Great Britain there will be miniature versions of armies...these tiny armies will hardly offer serious military power anymore."15

These European "Bonsai armies" thus will not be able to support Turkey's defense policy of becoming a stronger security actor. In 1998, under the leadership of then Chief of the Turkish General Staff (TGS) General Hüseyin Kivrikoğlu, Turkey released a Defense White Paper that represented a major shift in Turkish national security strategy, by articulating a Forward Defense concept to preemptively solve problems and stabilize neighbors before they could have an impact on Turkey.16 His successor, General Hilmi Özkök, was also committed to maintaining the basic tenets of the 1998 White Paper, but in 2003 when Turkey and the United States fell out over the Iraq invasion and the United States was able to conduct a “decapitation” strike without using Turkey's territory, it signaled to the Turks that they were no longer essential to U.S. security.17 U.S. attempts to change Turkish foreign and defense policy had resulted in the creation of ill will in Turkey, and moved forward the notion of Turkey to become an independent security actor.

To this end, Turkey needs to develop a dominant regional military capability with an autonomous military production system capable of supporting unilateral security actions. Ankara is thus looking east to Eurasian and East Asian countries to help develop an internal production system that can free Turkey from the restrictions of Western and NATO arms suppliers. For example, in 2013 Japan and Turkey sought the joint development and production of an engine for the Altay, a planned indigenous Turkish tank. Turkey's traditional engine supplier had been MTU of Germany, which has been reluctant to share critical engine technology.18 Similarly, co-production and technology transfer sweeteners propelled Turkey to select the Chinese missile defense system over those of its NATO allies.

Given Turkey's aspiration to be a rising regional power and the increasing rift in foreign policy with its European allies, it seems Turkey is increasingly identifying itself as a Eurasian country.

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14 Turkish naval officer correspondence with author, January 25, 2014. While the Turkish military largely remain supportive of NATO, there are factions within the military that have an Eurasian orientation. Author discussion with Özgür Unluhisarcıklı, director of the Ankara office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, in Ankara, Turkey on February 18, 2014. However, given the shift in Turkey's defense policy to develop autonomous military production to support unilateral security actions, the Eurasian faction will likely gain additional traction in face of a growing rift between Turkey and NATO over technology transfer issues as well as divergent Middle East interests.


17 Ibid, p.33.

18 Today's Zaman, "Japan, Turkey considering co-producing engine for Altay tank," (November 18, 2013). However, Japan shares Germany's restrictions on potential future export licenses for the Altay to third parties such as Azerbaijan, so in March 2014 the deal with Japan fell through and Turkey continues to search for new partners to co-produce the Altay engine. P. Lee, “Turkey a battleground for Asia arms exports,” Asia Times, (December 13, 2013); B. E. Bekdil, “Japan Deal Scrapped, Turkey Looking for Tank Engine,” Defense News, (March 5, 2014); “Japan Decides Against Turkish-Azerbaijan Tank Deal,” EurasiaNet, (February 28, 2014); “Turkey & South Korea's Altay Tank Project,” Defense Industry Daily, (March 3, 2014); “Syrian Conflict Could Win Ankara a Saudi Order for Altay Main Battle Tanks,” Defense Updates, (May 31, 2013).
Eurasian Identity
According to Professor Selçuk Çolakoğlu at the Ankara-based International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), Turkey began to identify itself as Eurasian country in the 1990s. In a recent USAK report, “Turkish Perceptions of China’s Rise,” Çolakoğlu observed that the emergence of Turkic republics in the Caucasus and in Central Asia after the demise of the Soviet Union had a strong effect on this shift.19  Leftist nationalist groups in Turkey who believe Turkey should not only turn to the East politically but also develop defensive cooperation with Russia and China to oppose the Western world reinforce this view.20

According to Doğu Perinçek, founding chairman of the Workers’ Party (İşçi Partisi), Turkey is in danger of being divided by a U.S. mandate tied to EU’s door. Some factions in Turkey think the EU scheme is to lure Turkey with promises of membership into making concessions over the Kurds, Cyprus, and territorial disputes with Greece in the Aegean. Thus the goals are to free Turkey from U.S. control and ensure national integrity by befriending China and Russia. Perinçek sees the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes Turkic Central Asian republics, as a Turkic-Russian-Chinese alliance where Turkey belongs, and believes that Turkic republics can only be united in the Eurasian alliance.21  A large cross-section of Turkish society including the business sector and the AKP government share the leftist-nationalist group’s pro-China and Eurasian orientation, signaling a fundamental eastward shift. Turkish businessmen see opportunities in China, the second largest economy in the world, and the governing AKP sees China as a political balancer against NATO and EU.22  To that end, Turkey joined the SCO as a Dialogue Partner in 2012 with a view toward eventual membership.23

SCO holds an additional attraction in that Russia and Iran — Turkey’s top energy suppliers — are also key players in the grouping. Ankara is taking advantage of the recent rapprochement between Iran and the West and seeks to improve ties after disagreements over Syria. In February 2014, Turkey and Iran signed a preferential trade deal to increase annual bilateral trade to $30 billion by 2015, while Ankara expects to increase energy imports from Iran in view of the easing of sanctions.24

Eurasian Military Integration
Following Perinçek’s notion of uniting Turkic republics in Eurasia, in Baku, Azerbaijan, on January 30, 2013, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia agreed to create a joint armed forces of Turkic-language countries called TAKM.

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Post-Soviet countries intending to join TAKM have been given preferential deals for Turkish-made military products, weapons, communication devices, military vehicles, and optical systems.

TAKM is modeled on FIEP — the Association of European and Mediterranean Gendarmeries and Law Enforcement Forces with Military Status — which Turkey joined in 1998, and its symbol is a horse, an important cultural identification with its members’ nomadic past.

The leading power in TAKM is Turkey, which is playing an important role in the military build-up of both the member states and aspirant countries. Post-Soviet countries intending to join TAKM have been given preferential deals for Turkish-made military products, weapons, communication devices, military vehicles, and optical systems.

Currently Turkey is implementing joint programs in the military and military industry spheres with Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Many of these countries are also NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) countries, so Turkey as a NATO member can apply a NATO standard for interoperability.

Eurasian Economic Integration

Turkey is also advancing Eurasian integration on the economic front via the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).

Based in Tehran, ECO was founded in 1985 by Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan to build a free trade zone of non-Arab Muslim nations, and expanded in 1992 to include the five Turkic central Asian republics, Azerbaijan, and Afghanistan. Since many ECO and SCO members overlap, there has been joint cooperation in a series of transport infrastructure projects.

China is establishing its own Islamic corridor with ECO transport projects to link China’s Xinjiang with Iran via Afghanistan and Central Asia. In October 2011, ECO established a rail link from the Iran port of Bandar Abbas to Almaty in Kazakhstan that connects with China, and is now planning a China-Afghan (Kashgar-Herat) railway to link China with its growing investments in Afghanistan’s extractive industries. This would enable China to have a stronghold in Afghanistan post-NATO in 2014, as well as use the link to Iran to bypass U.S. and EU energy sanctions over Iran’s nuclear program and facilitate continued trade with Iran and the Middle East.

In 2012, the ECO Istanbul-Tehran-Islamabad train (linking Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan) was constructed to boost trade among member states in

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28 Ibid.
A train that will depart from London would pass through the Marmaray tunnel under the Bosporus and follow the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (linking Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey) through the Caspian Sea to reach Beijing.

Central Asia. This will be part of the longer trans-Eurasian corridor connecting Beijing to London across Eurasia — a train that will depart from London would pass through the Marmaray tunnel under the Bosporus and follow the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (linking Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey) through the Caspian Sea to reach Beijing.

Marmaray, connecting Europe and Asia by an underwater rail tunnel in Istanbul, was inaugurated on October 29, 2013. Completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is scheduled for 2014 and will enter into service in 2015.

During the seventh representatives meeting of the Turkish-Eurasia Business Council diplomatic mission on February 4, 2010 in Ankara, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that “Eurasia is a transit area of great importance between the People’s Republic of China, India, south Asia, and Europe. This region is one of the major points that help develop world politics and economy.” Sinan Oğan, founder and director of the Center of International Relations and Strategic Analysis, agreed that with the revival of the Silk Road, Turkey would act as an interconnector linking the east and the west. Thus on this new Silk Road, as Turkey is pivoting east, China is marching west to meet Turkey across Eurasia.

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31 Stratrisk, “Trans Eurasian Corridor,” (December 16, 2013); New Europe, “Tbilisi, Baku see railway completed in late 2014,” (February 8, 2013); The European, “Railway to link Kars, Tbilisi, Baku in 2015,” (February 24, 2014).

32 The Railway Insider, “Turkey offers to create the Eurasia Union,” (February 24, 2010).

3 China’s March West Across Eurasia

In an 2010 article in *Beijing Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* (Beijing Contemporary International Relations) published by State Council’s Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), deputy director of People’s Liberation Army’s National Defense University Tang Yongsheng wrote a piece expounding China’s Westward Strategy. He argues that China, with its vast land and rising strength, is not only a Pacific nation but also a nation of the Eurasia heartland. As such, Tang stated that China would now place importance on this westward strategy while maintaining vigilance on managing the Asia-Pacific area, in a two-pronged approach to coordinate and strengthen its eastern seaward and western landward strategies.

Tang observed that recent developments have made Europe and Asia geographically closer than ever via economic and technological integration, “and the penetration of different modes of thinking have caused all geographic barriers to become surmountable.” He added that China is interested in advancing the Europe, Russia, and China triangular relations across the Eurasia continent, because the “tendency of the geographical center of Europe to move eastward and the geographical center of the entire Eurasian continent to move inward have shortened the distance between China and EU.”

Tang proposed that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) would be China’s vehicle to enhance regional cooperation especially in transport corridors, as well as to conduct oil diplomacy in the Middle East, Caspian Sea, and Central Asia. Xinjiang is to be the centerpiece of the westward development Silk Road strategy, especially in building transport corridors across Eurasia. Wang Mengshu, member of Chinese Academy of Engineering and professor at Jiaotong University, corroborated this Iron Silk Railway view. “China’s overseas high-speed rail projects serve two purposes. First, we need to develop the western regions. Secondly, we need natural resources.”

As such, China is engaged in frenzied construction of rail links, highways, and energy pipelines westwards across Eurasia. Indeed, today high-speed rail, gas and oil pipelines, highways, and fiber optic cables (information superhighways) have replaced camel caravans on the Silk Road. Rather than trading silk, porcelain and collecting tributes such as exotic giraffes, pearls, and spices, China is trading in rail technology, Huawei telecommunications technology, automobiles, and in return collecting tributes of equities in infrastructure projects such as seaports, airports, railways, roads, oil and gas fields, strategic minerals, and mines.

Energy Security and Xinjiang Linkage

Energy security primarily drives China’s “March West” strategy. Domestically, the Chinese Communist Party’s legitimacy and regime survival rests on continued access to energy to fuel China’s economic growth, while hedging against U.S. naval interdiction of energy supplies over potential conflicts across the Taiwan straits, East China Sea, or South China Sea. This is the “Malacca Dilemma” whereby 80 percent of China’s oil imports pass through the choke point of the Strait of Malacca, so China is worried about the security of its energy supply line.

This leads to Beijing’s concern about the territorial integrity of Xinjiang — it is one-sixth the size of China, three times the size of France, borders eight countries, is a site of strategic mineral resources, and a key geographic bridge for China’s overland

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35 Ibid.

36 Global Times, “China to build Asia-Europe high-speed railway network,” (March 8, 2010); Fu Jing, “Re-building the ancient Silk Road,” *China Daily*, (September 1, 2004).
pipelines and transport corridors for its energy supplies from Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and potentially Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. In short, Xinjiang is a key to China’s hedging strategy of having an overland energy supply line in the event the U.S. Navy cuts off its maritime supply line over conflicts in the Western Pacific. Uyghur separatists in Xinjiang that want to establish an independent “East Turkestan” thus directly threaten China’s energy security, and Beijing will try to garner support from the Muslim world for the “One China Policy.”

The 2009 Xinjiang uprising underscored to China that Xinjiang’s stability hinges on the support of the global Muslim community. When Turkey’s Prime Minister Erdoğan labeled China’s crackdown on Turkic Uyghurs as “near genocide,” this further fueled Beijing’s concerns that the global Muslim community may increasingly support the Uyghur separatist cause to the detriment of Chinese interests. As such, since 2009, China has beefed up its domestic security, with its internal security budget surpassing the defense budget every year since then,\(^{37}\) while internationally it is proactive in courting the Muslim world to garner support for China’s policies. It is especially courting Turkey’s cooperation on Xinjiang with a series of bilateral trade and investment agreements since 2010, including a Turkish industrial zone for Turkish companies to operate.\(^ {38}\) According to Professor Selçuk Çolakoğlu at the International Strategic Research Organization (USAK), the Chinese ambassador in Ankara is also very proactive in ensuring Turkey does not encourage the Uyghur separatist term “East Turkestan” in reference to “Xinjiang,” given there are about 30,000 to 50,000

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\(^ {37}\) Mu Chunshan, “China and the Middle East,” *The Diplomat*, (November 9, 2010). In 2010, its security budget was $87 billion while defense was $84.6 billion; in 2011, security was $99 billion while defense was $95.6 billion; in 2012, security was $111.4 billion while defense was $106.4 billion. *Reuters*, “China boosts domestic security spending by 11.5 pct,” (March 5, 2012); L. Hook, “Beijing raises spending on internal security,” *Financial Times*, (March 6, 2011).

Uyghurs living in the diaspora in Turkey who support the term “East Turkestan.”

The geostrategic significance of Xinjiang is seen on the map below — looking at Kashgar in Xinjiang, two-thirds of the distance between Beijing and the Persian Gulf lies within China, with only one-third of the distance left between Kashgar and the Strait of Hormuz. Thus China is building pipelines from Xinjiang to the energy-rich Caspian Sea region and Persian Gulf to diversify its energy supply routes.

Syrian Terrorism and Xinjiang Linkage
Related to Xinjiang is China’s interest in counter-terrorism and preventing the internationalization of the Uyghur separatist cause, which is increasingly tied to China’s support of Assad in Syria.

Syria is what some Chinese scholars call a new “Afghanistan,” a witch’s brew of international jihadists groups exporting terrorism. In Syria, China faces a new threat: the internationalization of the Uyghurs’ separatist cause forming in the crucible of the Syrian war. The first signs of an increasing linkage between localized separatist movements with global terrorist network appeared in July 2011. Chinese authorities noticed that in bombings in Xinjiang then, for the first time Uyghur separatists planted a Salafist flag (black with Arabic writing) rather than their usual East Turkestan flag (blue with a star and crescent similar to Turkey’s flag). Uyghurs also began proclaiming aspirations to join the Middle East jihadi movement, stoking China’s fears that Uyghurs would garner global jihadist support from al Qaeda and its affiliates such as al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which attacked Chinese interests in Algeria in 2009, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and the al Nusra Front in Syria, among others.

Beijing notes that Chinese Uyghurs from Xinjiang as well as those residing in Turkey have crossed over to Syria to join jihadi fighters, with the goal of returning to Xinjiang to launch attacks. It is also worried that through linking with international jihadist groups, Chinese Uyghurs and their terrorist cohorts would spawn a homegrown radicalization of China’s 20 million Muslims. In fact, a December 2013 article in Global Times, a Chinese Communist Party mouthpiece, described how the Uyghur terrorist group ETIM is collaborating with al Qaeda and its affiliates, naming the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, the Islamic Jihad Union, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus and the al Nusra Front in Syria.

Conflating this fear is the increasing homegrown radicalization of Islam across Central Asia, which undermines the stability that China has hitherto enjoyed with the region’s secular dictators.

Finally, the territorial integrity of Muslim Xinjiang itself is a core interest for Beijing. One key aspect of Xinjiang that is sorely neglected in press coverage regarding terrorism is China’s nuclear arsenal. Xinjiang hosts China’s nuclear test site Lop Nur and elements of the Second Artillery Corps (“2nd

39 Author interview with Selçuk Çolakoğlu, vice president of International Strategic Research Organization, USAK House, Ankara, Turkey, on February 17, 2014.

Arty”), China’s strategic missile force. Some of the Second Artillery’s vaunted tunnels — the so-called “underground great wall” for hiding missiles and nuclear warheads — also surround Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang and site of the July 2009 riots that killed 200 people and injured almost 2,000 others. Persistent unrest on a national scale has left China’s Xinjiang-based nuclear warheads vulnerable at least, similar to that experienced during the unrest during the Cultural Revolution.41

Should such instability occur again — probably on a scale even more substantial than the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 — these weapons might become vulnerable to seizure by Uyghur militant groups. As such, any instability of Xinjiang and potential jihadist access to China’s nuclear arsenal is a red line for Beijing.

Beijing and Ankara thus find mutual interest in launching Xinjiang as a “Friendship Bridge” for cooperation across the Eurasian Silk Road. “Uyghurs are playing the role of a friendship bridge between China and us. The role will make a contribution to carrying our relations to much higher levels,” said Turkish President Abdullah Gül while visiting Xinjiang in 2009. Likewise, during an October 2010 visit to Xinjiang, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu stressed that better relations between Turkey and China will help Turkey increase its aid to Turkic Muslim Uyghurs living in the province.

Moreover, since the Central Asian republics declared independence when the Soviet Union collapsed, China also feared that Xinjiang would follow suit and declare independence from China. For many years, the Turkic Uyghurs in Xinjiang also enjoyed protection and sympathetic support of their separatist movement in Turkey. As such, China is now seeking Turkey’s cooperation and reciprocity in respecting Xinjiang as China’s territory in exchange for supporting Turkey’s stance on the Kurds in Turkey. To that end, the SCO is an effective vehicle through which both could cooperate and expand their influence in Central Asia. As Doğu Perinçek assessed, friendship between Turkey, China, and Russia benefits their Turkic inhabitants, and Uyghurs and others would thrive as equal and free citizens of their countries in the Greater Eurasia Union — consisting of the Turkic-Russian-Chinese Alliance that also includes Turkic states such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. As such, it appears Sino-Turkey ties are poised to expand.

By contrast, the year 2014 seemed to be a pivotal year to punctuate Turkey’s orientation away from the EU. After months of increasingly authoritarian rule by Erdoğan, a recent *New York Times* article observed that the door to the EU club is closing on Turkey. Andreas Scheuer, a prominent German politician, and EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle have both expressed concern over Turkey’s ban on social media and tilt away from European values. Turkish and Western press equally criticize Erdoğan’s increasing autocratic rule — e.g., clamp down on judges, prosecutors, the media, and banning social media — as moving away from democratic principles.

Other scholars observed Erdoğan got what he needed out of the EU process. Hugh Pope of the International Crisis Group argues that Erdoğan’s initial pro-EU posture brought foreign capital to Turkey to fuel economic growth that underpinned his political popularity, and EU membership conditions further allowed his government to sideline the military. However, in Pope’s view, after Erdoğan consolidated his power, he no longer wanted more EU because this meant a dilution of his own power.

Thus Erdoğan’s Turkey is shifting toward the SCO, where upholding democracy and civil liberties are not conditions for membership. This shift culminated in 2013 when Turkey defied NATO allied concerns to pursue a missile defense deal...
Given Turkey’s frustrations with NATO allies over Syria and Egypt, and the rift in the relationship with the United States over the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and increasing authoritarian policies of Erdoğan’s government, Turkey is embarking on a more independent foreign policy course.

Security Driver for Eurasian Shift — China Missile Defense Deal
As stated earlier, in September 2013 Turkey shocked its NATO allies when it chose a U.S.-sanctioned Chinese firm CPMIEC to co-produce a $3.4 billion long-range air and missile defense system. Despite NATO’s repeated warnings that such a system would compromise NATO intelligence and therefore not be interoperable with its early warning assets, Erdoğan chose to make the deal.

Professor Serhat Güvenç from Kadir Has University in Istanbul observes that Turkey’s selection of the Chinese firm for NATO missile defense would not go through, unless the AKP decides it wants to fundamentally shift Turkey away from the West. Güvenç said that the core of NATO missile defense is about interoperability. Turkey can have parts, systems, and hardware from other countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, etc. as stand-alones, but missile defense has always been the “flagship of interoperability” within NATO. Insistence on the Chinese system would send a strong political signal to Western allies of Turkey’s shift, and Güvenç dismisses the rationale for technology transfer and price as mere excuses for the AKP’s orientation.

Given Turkey’s frustrations with NATO allies over Syria and Egypt, and the rift in the relationship with the United States over the Gezi Park protests in 2013 and increasing authoritarian policies of Erdoğan’s government, Turkey is embarking on a more independent foreign policy course and enlarging its room to maneuver by exploring non-Western alternatives. Güvenç said that “in ten years we are back to the Eurasia option; remember [then-National Security Council Secretary-General] Tuncer Kılınç’s statement in 2002, asking to give up on EU and forging alliances with Iran and Russia.” He observed that ten years ago, the Eurasian alternative was Russia-focused; now it is China-focused.

His view differs from that of Dr. Mesut Özcan, chairman of the Center for Strategic Research (SAM) in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dr. Özcan said that China offered the best deal in terms of price and technology transfer, and it was important for Turkey to develop indigenous capability and not be completely dependent on other countries for its defense needs. Indeed, the Chinese offer was some $1 billion less than the others, including technology transfer, and a faster delivery timeframe.

Moreover, according to Yoram Evron and Gallia Lindenstrauss at the Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), both China and Turkey share complementary interests given current circumstances. Both nations view the U.S. and European refusal to transfer manufacturing technology connected to missile defense systems to Turkey as a way to perpetuate the superiority of the developed nations over the developing nations and leave the latter in a state of dependency. As such, the Chinese offer suits Turkey’s desire to develop an independent technologically advanced

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47 Author interview at Kadir Has University, Istanbul, Turkey on February 20, 2014.
48 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Author interview at Center for Strategic Research (SAM) in Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ankara, Turkey on February 18, 2014.
According to Güvenç, a good indicator of whether Turkey will remain tied to EU and NATO is whether it will be allowed to join the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) currently being negotiated between the EU and United States. Güvenç argues that Turkey is tied to the West based on two pillars. The first is the security pillar tied to NATO and U.S. relations, and the second is the trade/economic pillar tied to EU, including the Customs Union and now TTIP. If Turkey is not allowed to join TTIP, Güvenç warned this would undermine overall Turkey-EU trade relations.

According to Kemal Kirişci of the Brookings Institution, a study by the German IFO Institute lists Turkey among countries that will experience a net loss of welfare from TTIP, aggravating existing grievances and create additional pressures on Turkey to break away from the EU and the broader Western liberal order. As Thomas Straubhaar analyzed in the 2013-14 Transatlantic Academy report *Liberal Order in a Post-Western World*, one consequence of regional agreements is trade diversion from non-members to members. He assessed that in the short run, countries that are geographically close to or have free trade agreement with the United States or the EU as well as other countries that have a high trade volume with either economy would experience trade diversion and loss. Turkey, a close EU neighbor, would lose about 2.5 percent of its real per capita income — or about $20 billion loss of income based on Turkey’s 2012 GDP. This is an amount roughly equivalent to current Turkish trade with the United States.

Straubhaar cautioned that trade diversion would lead to discrimination against third countries, eliciting feelings of unfair treatment in third countries that may culminate in anti-liberal tendencies or even an aversion to the Western economic order. Indeed, Öznur Keleş from the International Research Organization argues that TTIP is a struggle to protect the supremacy of the Western bloc against new emerging powers. This, along with other grievances, helps to explain Erdoğan’s desire to join the SCO. Erdoğan’s economy minister Zafer Çağlayan further criticized the EU Customs Union as “an agreement of servitude,” with Turkey facing greater competition in the EU and its own domestic market, without enjoying preferential access to other markets with whom EU signs FTAs.

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57 A. Paul and S. Yenilyurt, “Between a rock and a hard place: What is Turkey’s place in the transatlantic market?” *European Policy Centre*, (July 9, 2013).
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CONCLUSION: TURKEY AT A CROSSROADS

Turkey thus appears to be at a crossroads. Already, Erdoğan is tilting Turkey toward the SCO and away from EU and NATO. Güvenç aptly warns that if Turkey is not admitted into TTIP, then the economic pillar of Turkey’s anchor to the West will collapse and Turkey would shift its axis further away from Europe. Nonetheless, the prospects of Turkey joining TTIP in the near term are not encouraging. Asked whether Turkey would receive preferential treatment under TTIP, EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht responded that there would be no policy change. He stated that Turkey under the EU-Turkey Customs Union enters into negotiations with EU’s FTA partners separately from the EU, while others point out Turkey’s failure to fully comply with previous Customs Union Agreement, whereby it would normalize relations and open its ports and airports to Cyprus, as an indicator of its inability to fulfill TTIP standards.

As for the security pillar of Turkey’s anchor via NATO, Suat Kiniklioglu, a former AKP member of parliament at the Ankara-based think tank STRATIM, believes the Chinese missile defense deal will not be finalized at this particular juncture, when relations with the United States are hanging in a delicate balance. As such, at this juncture the jury is still out whether Turkey will remain anchored in the West via the military NATO, or the economic NATO of TTIP.

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60 Author interview in Ankara, Turkey, on February 18, 2014.