

Turkey Deepens Strategic Relationship with China

By [Global Intelligence Report](#)

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The visit by Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu to Beijing a week ago, follows by a scant three weeks the visit by China's Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Ankara on 78 October as part of the latter's European diplomatic tour also including Belgium, Germany, Greece, and Italy in the margin of his participation in an EU-China summit.

The reciprocal visits become, in context, a sign not just of increasing economic ties between the two countries but moreover their foreign policy and strategic cooperation.

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS:

The modern Turkish and Chinese states established diplomatic relations only in 1971 but these remained unimportant to both sides side during most of the Cold War. By the turn of the millennium, however, the Kurdish insurgency had sensitized Ankara to Chinese concerns about Uyghur separatism, notwithstanding the latter's cultural community with Anatolian Turks. The Turkish government progressively narrowed the margin of maneuver open to Uyghurs and Uyghur sympathizers in Turkey.

In April 2000, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Turkey to lay the groundwork for possible further amelioration of interstate relations, but Turkish-Chinese relations turned for the worse in mid-2009. Following Turkish President Abdullah Gül's triumphant visit to China in June 2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had criticized Chinese repression in Xinjiang following violent clashes that July. Nevertheless, bilateral relations soon regained a more even keel, even to the point that the two governments began an explicit program of anti-terrorist cooperation, much to the dismay of the Uyghur diaspora in Turkey.

Gül's visit to Beijing was the first by a Turkish president in a decade and a half and resulted in the extension of an \$800 million line of credit to Turkish banks in order to underwrite bilateral trade. Even at the October meeting just last month, while the two countries' prime ministers signed eight accords in the fields of anti-terrorism, commercial cooperation, and transportation, they also endorsed what each called a "strategic partnership".

BOTTOM LINE:

Increased economic relations. Turkey signed with China an agreement similar to those signed earlier with Russia and Iran, to switch away from dollars in bilateral trade accounts, in favor of the local currencies. It is unclear how this might have any significant impact beyond bilateral clearing mechanisms and promoting an increase in what would effectively be barter. While Turkey imported almost eight times as much from China as it exported there, the symbolic weight of the gesture in the context of the present international

economic disorder is hard to discount. The more real potential of the symbol is revealed in the fact that Turkey's economy expanded nearly 12% in the first quarter of this year and over 10% in the second, its economic performance coming second only to China's. Joint ventures in the fields of energy and transportation were announced. China's profile in infrastructure projects in Turkey is rising.

Heightened strategic cooperation. The most recent meetings represent Turkey's continuing shift away from NATO as signaled for example by Ankara's recent explicit advocacy of Iran's interests on nuclear and other questions. Thus the Chinese news agency Xinhua reported that Turkey was insisting to NATO that the missile shield planned for Europe should not identify Syria or Iran as the source of potential threats. (It is to be recalled that last year, Turkey invited Syria to participate in joint bilateral military exercises the day after it disinvited Israel from participation in long-standing NATO exercises, which were as a consequence cancelled.) While Turkey's withdrawal from NATO is unlikely, it is moving ominously in the direction of an anti-Atlantic Trojan horse. Turkish public opinion is increasingly anti-American, and even approval ratings of President Barack Obama personally have plummeted. Outside the professional interests of the Turkish military, it is increasingly difficult to identify common US-Turkish interests in the region.

Strategic reorientation and energy geo-economics. Ankara delayed the Nabucco pipeline to Europe with exceptional demands on the EU and an unnecessarily tough negotiating stance towards Azerbaijan. Turkey has been inching towards a geo-economic energy condominium ("joint rule") with Russia in the South Caucasus context. The first move in this direction came with the construction of the Blue Stream pipeline between the two countries under the Black Sea a decade ago: a blocking move by Moscow against prospects for the trans-Caspian gas pipeline from Turkmenistan then sponsored by US firms. Erdogan has so far hesitated to give the go-ahead for Russia's South Stream project, which would compete with Nabucco. However, any aims held in common between the Atlantic powers and new Turkish doctrine regarding Caspian Sea basin energy development are based less on agreed strategic interests than on parallel tactical interests that proceed along different tracks for different reasons. In this Turkey has the full support of China.

Please find a geopolitical report from our Global intelligence team for publication. It takes a look at the heightened strategic co-operation between Turkey and China. By Global Intelligence Report Analysts

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