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China-Turkey Security Cooperation Under the Background of the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the security cooperation between China and Turkey and the impact of the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives on bilateral cooperation. The 'Belt and Road' Initiative and Turkey's 'Middle Corridor' Initiative have promoted economic cooperation and enhanced communication and mutual understanding between the two countries. We examine this cooperation from a security perspective; with deep analysis on security cooperation between China and Turkey published by the governments, academia and social media, the impact of the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives on the growing bilateral relationship has been clearly highlighted. Additionally, this article focuses on the challenges of bilateral security and counter-terrorism cooperation, and the positive impact of security cooperation on Sino-Turkish relations in the wake of the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' initiatives. This article shows that economic cooperation has a significant impact on security cooperation and the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives may build closer ties between the two countries.

KEYWORDS

China; Turkey; 'Belt and Road' Initiative; 'Middle Corridor' Initiative; security cooperation; counter-terrorism cooperation

1. Introduction

Since President Xi Jinping's newly proclaimed 'Belt and Road' Initiative in 2013, relations between China and Turkey have seen remarkable development. The two initiatives, China's 'Belt and Road' and Turkey's 'Middle Corridor', will promote the economic development of the two countries and advance social communication and mutual understandings. Given the special relationship between Turkey and other players, including NATO and a variety of countries, China may enjoy new opportunities to develop its political and economic cooperation with Central Asia, the Middle East, the Balkans, the eastern Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea, the Caucasus, and the Islamic world.¹

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¹See I. Fraihat & A. Leber, 'China and the Middle East after the Arab Spring: from status-quo observing to proactive engagement,' *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 13(1), (2019), pp. 3–17.

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However, the stable development of Sino-Turkish relations is in large based on security cooperation. Due to the different geographical locations of the two countries, a common security platform has long been lacking. Apart from military communication, over the past years the two governments have carried out security cooperation, which was accelerated after the state visit of China's then Chief of staff Yang Dezhi to the Turkish armed forces in 1983. In recent years though, the two countries have reached the highest level of security cooperation, just as international terrorism has increasingly become a common threat to both.

With the rapid development of the two economies, China and Turkey's cooperation has been developed in various fields, including security cooperation, in spite of many differences between the two. However, the results of this security cooperation has not yet come into being. Besides economic factors, there are also two incentives for the establishment of the security cooperation between the two: first, long-term and stable political relations could be promoted through this cooperation; second, the security and stability of not only the two countries, but also the whole region, will be enhanced.

This article aims to study the security and counter-terrorism cooperation of these bilateral relations, especially after the announcements of the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives. Since Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit visits to China in 1998, China and Turkey have gradually established closer diplomatic relations. We focus on the challenges of Sino-Turkish security cooperation based on sources from the military, academia, the media, and public opinion, via an analysis of the factors and principles of previous security cooperation and political, economic and cultural exchanges. We will analyze the new background for this security cooperation under the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives, the implementation of security cooperation policies by the two countries, and the hidden problems inherent within. According to this article, the two Initiatives will promote and strengthen Sino-Turkish security cooperation.

Last but not least, this article probes the prospect of the two countries' counter-terrorism cooperation, the future relationship as well as the possibility of the application of the counter-terrorism rules of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on Turkey. The positive impact of the 'Five Connectivity' program (*Wutong*) on the future relations of the two countries will be discussed.²

2. The Background and Dynamics of China-Turkey Security Cooperation

2.1. Previous Security Cooperation and Dialogues

Diplomatic relations between Beijing and Ankara were established in 1971, but did not see much improvement due to their different political views and stance during the Cold War. This situation has rapidly transformed in the post-Cold War era. In recent years, the two countries have conducted nine state visits of the heads of state, and fifteen visits of prime ministers. In addition, the two countries have exchanged ideas on economy, trade, technology, culture, education, media, transportation and natural energy amongst other things frequently over this period.

²W. Xin, 'What is the 'Five Connectivity'?' (18 November 2016), available at: http://www.china.com.cn/news/2016-11/18/content_39735529.htm.

Against such a background, the stable development of the two countries in the future depends largely on their security cooperation. Due to their distant geographical positions, there has been no common security platform until recent years. With the development of political cooperation in the early 1980s, military cooperation has also been carried out in an incremental manner. Since the state visit of the Deputy Chief of the Armed Forces of Turkey in 1983, Sino-Turkish military cooperation began to develop rapidly. Thereafter, Chinese Chief of General Staff Yang Dezhi visited Turkey in October 1985 and in November 1986 the Turkish Chief of General Staff Necdet Ürüg visited the People's Republic of China. In November 1992, China's Defense Minister, General Qin Jiwei led a military delegation to visit Turkey. The two sides had dialogue on defense industry and military training cooperation activities, R&D activities in the field of military electronics, a sales agreement of the Mechanical and Chemical Industry Corporation (MKEK) products in China as well as the cooperation between MKEK and Chinese Defence Company NORINCO.³ In April 1993, Turkish Chief of General Staff General Doğan Güreş and the Minister of National Defense Nevzat Ayaz paid a visit to China and achieved a protocol. In return, Chinese Chief of General Staff Zhang Wannian paid a visit to Turkey in 1995.

The institutionalized security cooperation between China and Turkey was first proposed by the Chinese side in the late 1990s. At the beginning, both countries shared the same goals, namely national unity and territorial integrity. Both countries oppose all forms of international terrorism, ethnic separatism and any activities under religious extremism. As a result of economic development and partnership, the relationship between the two countries became closer and they created specific and effective measures to establish good bilateral and multilateral relations. Since 1996, the Turkish economy had been open to the outside world.

In 1998, Turkey's Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit commented after he came back from an official visit to China, that "as we know, in Turkey there are some marginalized groups that are unpleasant about Xinjiang. Because of Turkey's national system, the state power cannot control them completely. I said to the Chinese government that they do not have to worry about it, for the people of Turkey and the Turkish government attach great importance to the territorial integrity of China. As far as I know, China is fully prepared for the future development of Xinjiang."⁴ Following the visit to China, the Turkish government took concrete measures on this sensitive issue. The Prime Minister of Turkey announced the 'special circular' of 1998/36 on 23 December 1998: "Ministers and any government officials should avoid participating in the (anti-China) activities, or sending letters of congratulations to the following (separatist) foundations and associations." Whatever activities are held, the 'East Turkistan' flag or any kind of propaganda harming China is not allowed. The incineration of the national separatist flag and other disgraceful acts to China are also prohibited in front of the national representatives of China.⁵

³K. Özden, 'Çin'in Yeniden Yükselişi: 'Jeo-stratejik Önemi, Politik ve Askeri Gücü ve Türkiyeyle Olan İlişkileri,' Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency TİKA, Prime Ministry of Turkey, 2001, p. 114.

⁴'Türkiye'ye Türkistan Uyarısı,' Radikal Gazetesi, (2 May 1998).

⁵H. Bilgin, 'Stratejik Açından Çin'in Dünü ve Bugünü,' Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, 2000, p. 77.

Under the framework of the 'Cyprus Peace Operation', Turkey began to seek support from other countries on the international stage, which was another important reason for developing relations with China.⁶ Shortly after, Turkey and China signed the 'Transfer Criminals and Security Cooperation Agreement', which was the most important achievement of President Jiang Zemin's state visit to Turkey in 2000.⁷ Besides, the two sides signed a cooperation agreement on combating transnational crime. The Turkish government presented the National Medal to then Chinese president Jiang Zemin.

After the two sides established security cooperation, Beijing and Ankara also carried out several reciprocal state visits. On 19 November 2004, Chinese Vice Premier Huang Ju visited Turkey and met with the President of Turkey, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, and the Vice Prime Minister, Abdullah Gul, in Ankara. In addition to economic and trade relations, the two countries also planned for counter-terrorism cooperation in Iraq and the Middle East.⁸

Since the new millennium, defense and security cooperation between the two governments has reached the highest level. Visits from the Turkish side were as follows: Turkish Naval Forces Commander İlhami Erdil, Chief of General Staff Hüseyin Kıvrıkoğlu in 2001; Commander of the Turkish War Academies Halil İbrahim Fırtına in 2002, Commander of the Turkish War Academies Aydoğan Babaoğlu in 2006, Land Forces Commander, Chief of General Staff-to-be in the following year İlker Başbuğ in 2007; Commander of the Turkish War Academies Hasan Aksay in 2009, Deputy Chief of the Turkish General Staff Aslan Güner in 2010; Gendarmerie Commander, Chief of General Staff-to-be in the same year, Necdet Özel in 2011;⁹ Turkish Deputy Chief of General Staff Hulusi Akar in May 2013; Turkish Naval Forces Commander Bülent Bostancıoğlu in July 2014; Deputy Chief of General Staff Yasar Guler in June 2015.

From the Chinese side, important visits include: Commander of the Chinese Air Force, Liu Shun Yao in 2001, Commander of the National Defence University of the People's Liberation Army Wang Maorun in 2001, Deputy Chief of General Staff Qian Shugen in 2001, Chief of General Staff Liang Guanglie in 2005, Deputy President of the Chinese Central Military Commission Xu Caihou in 2005, Commander of the Chinese Air Force, Qiao Qingchen in 2006, Deputy Chief Zhang Li in 2007, Vice President of the Chinese Military Commission Guo Boxiong in 2009;¹⁰ Chief of Chinese General Staff Chen Bingde in 2010¹¹ and Deputy Chief of the Chinese General Staff Ma Xiaotian in 2011; Deputy Chief of the Chinese General Staff Wang Guanzhong in 2014; The Special Envoy of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Secretary of Political and Legal Committee of CPC Meng Jianzhu in 2014. In addition, the Chinese Naval Escort

⁶TBMM, 21. Dönem 11. Birleşim, (6 June 1999), available at: <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/tutanaklar/TUTANAK/TBMM/d21/c001/tbmm21001011.pdf>.

⁷Halkın Cevazı, 'Halk İslamı,' *Aksam Gazetesi*, (11 February 2000).

⁸'China, Turkey agree to enhance economic, trade cooperation', *PLA Daily*, (21 November 2004); 'China hopes to expand economic, trade cooperation with Turkey, says vice premier', *PLA Daily*, (20 November 2004).

⁹E. Ersoy, *Turkish-Chinese Military Relations: Spinning More, Moving Less* (Ankara, USAK Publications, 2008), pp. 105–156.

¹⁰K. Kaya, 'Turkey and China: Unlikely Strategic Partners', *Foreign Military Studies Office*, Fort Leavenworth, p. 7.

¹¹'Travel and appearances for Chen Bingde,' *China Vitae*, (2015), available at: <http://www.chinavitae.com/vip/index.php?mode=events&type=cv&id=1446>.

Formation visited Istanbul in 2012 and 2015, and the Chinese Naval Fleet also made a 5-day friendly visit to Turkey in 2017.

There are four domestic terrorist organizations identified by the Ministry of Public Security in China, one of which is the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement – ETIM, which has the greatest impact among the four.¹² The Kurdistan Workers' Party – PKK is the most influential among the domestic terrorist organizations identified by the Ministry of Public Security in Turkey, but is not officially recognized as a terrorist organization by Chinese officials. However, in the recent state visits between Turkey and China, China has expressed respect for Turkey's territorial integrity and shown its strong support to Turkey's fight against the PKK.¹³

The influential terrorist organizations commonly identified by the two Ministries of Public Security on the global scale are the Eastern Turkistan Islamic movement, the ISIS- DAESH, Al-Nusra, and Al-Qaeda. Many countries along the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' are turbulent and war-torn because of active terrorist organizations. Thus, it is advisable for China and Turkey to foster security and counter-terrorism cooperation. Through the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives, two countries are attempting to seize every opportunity to promote bilateral relations, and start a new chapter in Sino-Turkish relations.

2.1.1. The Principles of Turkey

Turkey is pursuing its goal of becoming one of the ten largest economies in the world by 2023, advancing further economic development, and developing a multi-dimensional foreign policy, pushing Turkey to improve its cooperation with other countries. Zan Tao, associate professor of history at Peking University believes that Turkey has made great progress in its attitude towards its neighbors and China, and he hopes to see more cooperation in the near future.¹⁴ There are many reasons why Turkey wants to establish good relations with China.

First of all, China is among Turkey's largest foreign trade partners. Turkey's total amount of import from China is large, while Turkish products face many bureaucratic formalities in China which has led to an extremely low export quantity. China had \$18.1 billion exports and \$3.7 billion imports in its trade with Turkey in 2017.¹⁵ In the first nine months of 2018, China exported \$16.6 billion (a huge quantity of products went to Europe via Turkey) and imported just \$2.2 billion from Turkey.¹⁶ China has become Turkey's second largest trading partner and the largest source of imports.

There is a great trade deficit for Turkey in bilateral trade with China. The annual trade volume of China's goods into Turkey is of the value of hundreds of billions of dollars, but the number is only billions of dollars in the other direction, the former is more than ten times the latter. Therefore, Turkey is aiming to improve the situation

¹²Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Estonia, 'The Ministry of Public Security promulgated the list of identified 'East Turkistan' members,' 17 May 2014.

¹³'Çin'den PKK açıklaması,' CNN Turk, (29 July 2015), available at: <https://www.cnnturk.com/haber/dunya/cinden-pkk-aciklamasi>.

¹⁴T. Zan, 'Turkey dream and the China-Turkish cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative,' *Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies (in Asia)* 10(3), (2016), pp. 50–72.

¹⁵Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Trade, 'Foreign Trade-The People's Republic of China', (2018), available at: <https://www.ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/dogu-asya/cin-halk-cumhuriyeti/ulke-profilii/dis-ti-care>.

¹⁶Ibid.

through tourism and investment from China. Turkey hopes to see more Chinese tourists and Chinese enterprises investing in Turkey.

Secondly, from the perspective of the economy, the two countries can maximize their potential of trade and optimize their commercial ties through security cooperation. The economic and political relations between Turkey and Central Asian countries are very important. At present, the Eurasian Economic Union, which is influenced by Russia, is Turkey's major trade channel to Central Asia. In addition, because of the complexity of the recent Middle East situation, terrorism directly affected the Eurasian economy, as well as Turkey's economy. That's among the reasons why Turkey is establishing a 'Middle Corridor' for the sake of cooperation with China.

From the political perspective, Turkey wants to pursue a multi-dimensional foreign policy in the twenty-first century. Since China is one of the most powerful countries in the world as well as a member of the UN Security Council, Ankara wishes to strengthen its political ties with Beijing. Turkey is seeking support from different forces in the international community.¹⁷ Recently, as a result of the civil war in Syria, Turkey has received five million refugees from Syria. In order to safeguard national security, the Turkish armed forces carried out the 'Olive Branch Operation' in Afrin, Syria. Since Turkey and other related countries have different ways to engage in the Syrian civil war, the relationship between Turkey and the Western world has become increasingly unstable and strained. For this reason, Ankara seeks to draw closer relationships with Asian powers, including China, to create a soft balance against the West. What's more, Turkey experienced an attempted military coup on 15 July 2016. In the past few years, the 'Islamic State' carried out many terrorist attacks against Turkey, compelling Turkey to actively participate in the 'Belt and Road' Initiative to protect its current foreign investments.

Moreover, the Uyghur minority issue is very sensitive, not only in China but also in Turkey. The problem had previously been covered up, which makes the problem even more sensitive, affecting the mutual trust between the two sides. Additionally, during the Cold War, the two countries were on different political sides, which aggravated mutual distrust. In order to fight the separatist and extremist movements after '9/11' China has more common interests with Turkey with regard to fighting against ethnic minority separatist and terrorist movements. However, Turkey believes that the Chinese Uyghur immigrants are one of the most important communication bridges between China and Turkey.

Some political parties, social foundations and people in Turkey are particularly concerned about China's policies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region because of the lack of communication and fake or misleading news from Turkey's major media and social media platforms. Some pious Turkish Islamists and nationalists understanding toward the Uyghurs separatists was one-sided, they even did not realize that some of them had participated in the 'Islamic State' or fought in Iraq and Syria as 'jihadists'. In addition, the Turkish government believes that the Islamic world is facing the potential risk of radical Wahhabism and Salafism. Turkey and China should

¹⁷K. Temiz, 'Türkiye-Çin İlişkileri,' SETA Vakfı, 2017, Sayı: 196, p. 10.

cooperate in order to prevent radical thoughts from penetrating into their Muslim societies. Ultimately Beijing and Ankara share a common feature of being secular states.

2.1.2. The Principles of China

In China, the East Turkistan Islamic Movement threatens national security, solidarity and unity, mainly because this extremist and terrorist organization has carried out different levels of anti-Chinese activities abroad and organized violent terrorist activities against Chinese policies. Such plots harmed the national image of China in the international community and also provided a pretext for fake news regarding social problems in China. In order to curb this terrorist group, the Chinese government hopes to obtain support from Turkey and has thus attempted to enhance close diplomatic relations, because Turkey is one of the key countries that have a major impact on ethnic separatists and terrorism in Central Asia and China's Xinjiang region.

Moreover, Turkey has a rich experience in counter-terrorism due to its experience in dealing with its own internal separation movements and its geographical proximity to the Middle East. Turkey is also a victim of terrorism, and it has proposed a broad counter-terrorism policy. The Turkish government has taken counter-terrorism measures on numerous occasions at home and abroad. What's more, Turkey is one of the most significant contributors to global counter-terrorism campaigns. Turkey recently signed the 'Anti-Foreign Terrorist Fighters' Agreement with the European Council, which was proposed by the UN Security Council in 2014 and officially opened by the European Council in 2015. It was proposed in the context of a series of terrorist attacks, including those in Syria and Iraq. According to the agreement, overseas activities, subsidized projects and any related actions aiming at terrorist activities are illegal.¹⁸ Turkey has made important contributions to countering global terrorism. It strongly supports the established legal systems under the UN. In the Global Counter-Terrorism Summit, Turkey and the United States were co-chairs from 2011 to 2016. In the Global Counter-Terrorism Summit, Turkey and the European Union were co-chairs for the Horn of Africa Working Group in 2017. Under the guidance of Turkey, the Global Counter-Terrorism Summit proposed the 'Prevention of Extremism' initiative in 2016. In 2017, the conference on 'Preventing Terrorist Attacks in Public Places' was held in Antalya, Turkey. China is willing to cooperate with such a country rich in counter-terrorism experience to maintain a stable environment for the 'Belt and Road' Initiative and domestic security.

On the other hand, in the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' convergence, China and Turkey have established mutual trust to overcome the uncertainties of geopolitics. This is a specific foundation for long-term and sustainable cooperation for both of them. China needs to cooperate with pivotal countries such as Turkey which boasts an important geographical location as the Center of Eurasia and the Middle East. Turkey is one of the key pivotal countries along the "Belt and Road" with the greatest economic strength and potential for cooperation. Turkey is a regional power with unique geographical features and wide influence, and it is the largest economy in the

¹⁸K. Karaca, 'Ankara'dan 'yabancı terörist' protokolüne onay', Deutsche Welle, (19 February 2018), available at: <http://www.dw.com/tr/ankaradan-yabanci-terorist-protokolüne-onay/a-42646712>.

Middle East, a member of the OECD and the G20, and a dialogue partner of the SCO. In addition, Turkey is a member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). In this sense, Turkey's position is of utmost importance for China to implement the 'Belt and Road' Initiative.

2.2. The New Background of Security Cooperation

In the twenty-first century, international cooperation has once again shown its importance in the face of growing terrorist threats, the severity of which was unprecedented through more numerous globalized terrorism organizations and more frequent attacks. The development of social media has contributed to the spread of terrorist thoughts and increasingly youth have been targeted to become 'foreign terrorist fighters'.

With increasingly close economic and political relations between the two countries, security cooperation has also developed positively. Turkey has carried out several 'proactive' operations to maintain a good economic and political relationship with China. From the late 1990s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, Turkey has purchased a lot of Chinese weapons and equipment such as artillery and missiles, with a total transaction volume of more than 40 million US dollars. Despite the opposition of most NATO countries, Turkey invited the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force to participate in the NATO Air Force rehearsals held in Turkey in 2010, a first ever joint military exercise named Anatolian Eagle; the two sides' Special Forces received joint trainings in Turkish special military schools. It was the first time that the PLA developed military cooperation with a NATO member. After the military exercise, the Chinese People's Liberation Army was highly praised by the international community. This indicates that economic relations between China and Turkey have promoted political and military cooperation.

During Chinese premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Turkey in 2010, the relationship of the two countries was developed into the level of 'strategic cooperation', the bilateral security cooperation was promoted to a higher level too. In the same year, China and Turkey established a high-level dialogue on military cooperation, which was co-chaired by the two countries' deputy Chiefs of General Staff and held regularly almost every year since the first meeting in May 2010. In the following years, Turkey actively looked to China for talking with the China Precision Machinery Export-Import Corporation (CPMIEC) on a long-range air and missile defense system (T-LORAMIDS), FD-2000 (an export variant of the HQ-9), worth \$3.44 billion. However, this military cooperation has not been fully realised because of a variety of reasons. Turkey became a "dialogue partner" of SCO in 2012.

China-Turkey relations have become more and more dynamic in the new period. Since 2013, security cooperation under the 'Belt and Road' Initiative has played the role of accelerator toward mutual economic cooperation. China and Turkey have more clearly examined the relationship from a strategic perspective, and the state visits and interaction between leaders of the two countries have become more frequent, security cooperation is one of the key issues of bilateral talks. Among them, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited China in July 2015, September 2016 and April 2017. In

the meantime, the differences between Turkey and the US and its Western allies have accumulated, in particular, Turkey's relations with the West are at an all-time low after the failed military coup of July 2016. In 2017, President Erdoğan appointed Chief Advisor Abdülkadir Emin Önen as Ambassador to China. It is obvious that Turkey and China are interested in intensifying their multidimensional cooperation through the creation of multiples channels of dialogue.¹⁹

After the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's visit to China in 2017, counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries passed through substantial changes. Mevlut Cavusoglu highlighted that 'We will never allow any activities against China in Turkey.' This shows that the Turkish government will actively suppress all kinds of Anti-China movements in Turkey and contribute to the long-term and friendly relations between Beijing and Ankara. With regard to the fake news, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said, 'We will take measures to eliminate any media coverage against China.' Although Turkey had already recognized the 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement' as a terrorist organization, it was the first time that the government declared it publicly, promising that Ankara would stand with China in combating the 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement'. However, while many international media outlets simply portrayed the meeting as the Turkish government recognizing the 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement' as a terrorist organization, the media in Turkey and China depicted it as the start of a 'new era' between China and Turkey. It is very likely that the two countries' future relations will develop substantially in the security and economy fields.

When meeting his Turkish counterpart in June 2018, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China and Turkey are to carry out cooperation in safeguarding strategic stability, including supporting each other in safeguarding national stability and security, jointly safeguarding the stable development of emerging economies and maintaining the stability of the regional situation.²⁰ In September 2018, the Chinese Government Representative and Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng visited Turkey and Expressed Three Points of Firm Support to Turkey, one of which firmly supports Turkey in safeguarding national security and its legitimate rights and interests.²¹ When meeting at the 2018 G20 Summit in Buenos Aires, President Xi Jinping called on China and Turkey to strengthen cooperation and share development opportunities, President Erdogan said the Turkish side looks forward to carrying out closer high-level exchanges with China, and is ready to strengthen communication and cooperation with China in international and regional affairs.²²

¹⁹Turkey-China Relations: From 'Strategic Cooperation' to 'Strategic Partnership?' Middle East Institute, (20 March 2018), available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-china-relations-strategic-cooperation-strategic-partnership>

²⁰Wang Yi: China and Turkey to Carry Out Cooperation in Safeguarding the Strategic Stability,' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, (15 June 2018), available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2898_663796/2900_663800/t1570109.shtml

²¹Vice Foreign Minister Le Yucheng Expresses Three Points of Firm Support to Turkey,' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, (14 September 2018), available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2898_663796/2900_663800/t1596242.shtml

²²Xi calls on China, Turkey to share development opportunities,' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, (1 December 2018), available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzg_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2898_663796/2900_663800/t1618218.shtml

2.3. The Challenges of Security Cooperation

Although Turkey and China have signed many agreements and taken various measures, there are still some foreseeable difficulties with regards to security cooperation. Turkey-China relations have had their ups and downs in the past years, mainly because of differences and conflict on strategy and security affairs.

Firstly, strategic mutual trust and confidence between China and Turkey is still insufficient. In addition, 'although both countries pay more attention to each other, there is a certain difference and dislocation between the two. China pays more attention to the strategic value of Turkey in security, while Turkey pays more attention to the economic role of China, and it is also true that they still cannot trust each other.'²³ Some Turkish and Chinese nationalists have no objective attitudes toward the other side. In particular, some Turkish scholars' subjective attitude towards Xinjiang, has fueled a negative response in the Chinese media and academia. Some Turkish scholars use the term 'East Turkestan' as a regional name, some have even identified it as a 'state', which has caused discomfort and even anger in China. Ankara seems to have no clear strategy in crafting its relations with Beijing. Ankara's China policy lies somewhere between seeking to diversify its relations with the major powers and making a sharp break from the past by shifting its strategic orientation from the West to the East.²⁴ Additionally, because of the Turkish government's vague attitude on related issues, China has to be suspicious about Turkey's sincerity on security and counter-terrorism cooperation.

Secondly, China-Turkish security cooperation are significantly affected by third-party factors, especially the U.S. and NATO. Due to the US and NATO's great influence on the Turkish government, China is suspicious of Ankara. Turkey has been a member of NATO and a US ally for more than half a century, its security policy has been subject to institutional constraints from the US and NATO, although Turkey is pursuing a more balanced foreign policy in recent years. For example, after several years of negotiations, Turkey withdrew its promise to buy China's HQ-9 missiles in 2015, which was largely influenced by the US. Therefore, China-Turkey relations are inevitably influenced or even shaped by other great powers, and to some extent it is Turkey's relations with major powers that largely determine the difficulties of China-Turkey security cooperation.

Thirdly, differences over the Xinjiang Uyghur issue have also bedeviled Turkey-China relations.²⁵ China has long been dissatisfied with the anti-China activities of the Uyghur diaspora and nationalist circles in Turkey. The Chinese government believes that the Xinjiang issue is a domestic one and that every country has a legal right to take necessary measures to protect national security. China and Turkey also hold divergent attitudes towards Uyghur immigrants from China. China is particularly concerned about the future of Xinjiang Uyghurs who leave China via various ways. However,

²³Z. Zou, 'New opportunities and challenges: cultural exchanges between China and Turkey under the background of 'the Belt and Road'', *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, (8 February 2018).

²⁴Turkey-China Relations: From 'Strategic Cooperation' to 'Strategic Partnership?' Middle East Institute, (20 March 2018), available at: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-china-relations-strategic-cooperation-strategic-partnership>

²⁵Ibid.

Turkey holds different opinions: Turkey has classified these Uyghurs as immigrants and viewed them as its humanitarian responsibility, and some of the Uyghurs have changed their nationality. In the case of Uyghur emigrants to Turkey, Europe, Syria and other countries, China basically sees Turkey as playing a negative role.

For example, at a press conference in 2000, Turkish Vice Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit said, 'The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is a friendship bridge between Turkey and China'; Chinese premier Zhu Rongji stressed that 'some extremists from Xinjiang are receiving military trainings in Afghanistan and some other countries including Turkey, to commit crimes.'²⁶ In response to this, the Turkish Vice Prime Minister responded that 'there are no terrorist groups from Xinjiang.' The Justice and Development Party's leader Bulent Arınç said in the Turkish Parliament that people in Xinjiang are living under cruel conditions. The former Turkish Prime Minister and current President Erdoğan even selected the word 'massacre' to refer to the 'Urumqi 7/5 Incident' of 2009.²⁷ Another example, according to the Chinese media on 1 July 2013 and a report by the Chinese Ministry of Public Security, is that some Chinese have gone to Syria via Turkey to join extremist organizations through illegal means.²⁸ According to the Chinese state media, in November 2014, the Shanghai Municipal Bureau of Public Security, detected a case of a Turk who organized people from Xinjiang to use fake Turkish passports to illegitimately leave the country.²⁹ In addition, another news report on 15 December 2014, claimed that the 'Turkish embassy provided Xinjiang people with Turkish passports', and the Turkish embassy responded to the accusations as an 'absurdity', stating that "we only provide passports for Turkish people."³⁰ In 2015, in Thailand, 109 Uyghurs were arrested by Thai police. When they were repatriated, it sparked several days' protest in Turkey that took place in front of the Thai consulate in Istanbul, although the protest was called a 'provocation' by the Turkish president.

The media is one important reason for this situation. Due to the lack of proper communication and misunderstandings between China and Turkey, there are suspicions and rumors spread in academia and the media in both countries. For example, due to the spread of fake news on Turkish social media, specifically related to the occurrence of the '7/5 Incident' of 2009, several anti-China protests took place in Turkey. The same situation also existed in Chinese social media. The most popular Chinese 'micro-blog' with negative content and fake news spread subjective opinions about Turkey. Sometimes the reports by the two countries' media is far from reality. Speculative information from third countries also exerts negative influences on the relations between Turkey and China. Because of their inherent ideas and reference to third country data, some Turkish scholars and reporters hold a biased attitude towards both the security condition in Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. With regard to Turkey, China

²⁶H. Bilgin, 'Stratejik Açıdan Çin'in Dünü ve Bugünü,' Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi, 2000, p. 87.

²⁷Arınç'tan Ecevit'e Doğu Türkistan çağrısı', *Hürriyet Gazetesi*, (16 April 2002), available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/arinctan-ecevite-dogu-turkistan-cagrisi-65986>.

²⁸M.e Lin, 'Xinjiang terrorists finding training, support in Syria, Turkey', *Global Times*, (1 July 2013), available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/792959.shtml>.

²⁹C. Liu, '10 Turks detained for helping terror suspects fleeing China', *Global Times*, (14 January 2015), available at: <http://world.huanqiu.com/exclusive/2015-01/5402248.html>.

³⁰Y. Qiu, 'Turkey's ambiguous policies help terrorists join IS jihadist group: analyst', *Global Times*, (15 December 2014), available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/896765.shtml>.

is also using third country sources, and especially sensitive to every national movement or activity in Turkey.

In spite of these unpleasant events, Turkey is trying to solve the problem with China, and Beijing is also eager to cooperate with Ankara. In 2016, in Ataturk International Airport, 98 Chinese citizens were arrested by Turkish police for holding counterfeit Kyrgyzstan passports and repatriated to China after handling formalities in the entry and exit administration of Turkey.³¹ Zhu Weilie, an expert at the Middle East Studies Institute of Shanghai International Studies University, China, believes that Turkey has double standards in counter-terrorism. "Turkey is against the 'Islamic State' but at the same time, it is critical of China's counter-terrorism policy over Xinjiang. It (Ankara) also shows sympathies with the Uyghur terrorists,' 'strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation should be the most important part of the Sino-Turkish Relations."³²

3. Bilateral Cooperation Against Terrorism Under the Background of the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives

3.1 The 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives

The 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' are two initiatives proposed by China and Turkey respectively. The ancient Silk Road is a bridge that linked the Chinese and Turkish civilizations; the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives are the centerpieces in their current bilateral relations and the main contents of the Sino-Turkish strategic cooperation partnership. Turkey is one of the most important countries along the 'Belt and Road', which provides a variety of opportunities for economic and political cooperation between Turkey and China. With the 'Belt and Road' initiative, significant progress has been made in the economic domain. The two countries will gradually promote mutual trust in political and cultural exchanges. Recently, as a result of congenial relations, the two countries started to cooperate in the security sectors as well.

The routes of 'The Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' are basically overlapping, going through the same areas and countries. The 'Middle Corridor' begins in Turkey and moves through Georgia and Azerbaijan, through the Caspian Sea to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, and then to China along a railway route. When the line starts to be put into use completely, it's going to bring many opportunities to various countries. The current trade volume between China and Europe is approximately 600 billion dollars. Under the 'Middle Corridor' Initiative, the Marmara railway which passes under the Bosphorus Sea, the third bridge, the world's largest airport in Istanbul and new ports around Turkey will become parts of the Middle Corridor. In addition, Turkey is now building two nuclear power centers, and planning to build a third nuclear power plant in cooperation with China, which means Turkey is full of hope for its own future and plans to maintain and develop a strategic partnership with China.

³¹'Sahte pasaportla umreye gitmek isteyen 98 Uygur yakalandı', TRT Haber, (17 May 2016), available at: <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/turkiye/sahte-pasaportla-umreye-gitmek-isteyen-98-Uyghur-yakalandi-251147.html>.

³²J. Shan, 'Turkey's failed coup might affect Xinjiang', Global Times, (18 July 2016), available at: <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/994845.shtml>.

During the opening ceremony of the first 'Belt and Road International Cooperation Forum' in Beijing in 2017, Turkish President Erdogan delivered a keynote speech following President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Erdogan was the only head of state from the Middle East that attended the Forum, indicating that Turkey has established all-weather cooperation with the 'Belt and Road' Initiative.³³ In his speech, Erdogan stressed that 'The Belt and Road Initiative will shatter the proliferation of terrorism; we are ready to support counter-terrorism campaigns for the Belt and Road success.' Xi Jinping spoke highly of Turkey's support for and active participation in the Belt and Road development, and noted that the two sides should respect and accommodate with each other's core concerns and deepen security and counter-terrorism cooperation.³⁴ During this visit, the two presidents witnessed the signing of document on judicial cooperation.

3.2 Rising Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

With the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' construction developing rapidly, the relationship between China and Turkey will be cemented by their political and economic ties. At the same time, there will be more risks of terrorist attacks. Any terrorist action along the route will directly harass the economy of the countries along the line. In September 2017, there were 123 terrorist attacks, 89 of which happened in the countries along the Belt and Road. 'Most of the countries (40) along the Belt and Road are in peace and stability, but still the other 15 countries are at risk; 11 countries are suffering from domestic turbulence and five countries are in red zone (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Syria).³⁵ There are three forces in these countries (terrorism, religious extremism, and ethnic separatism).

Turkey is one of the most active members of the global coalition against the 'Islamic State'. Under the authorization of the UN Security Council No. 2178 in 2014, Turkey has stepped up security measures to prevent foreign terrorist infiltration. On this point, Turkey does not allow suspects to enter the country, or the State Security Department will send them back to their countries of origin. Turkey established a 'Crisis Analysis Department' to locate suspects of illegal immigration via airports, bus terminals, and railway stations. Turkey is a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to counter global money laundering, tax evasion, and terrorist financing; Turkey has contributed to these efforts through domestic financial intelligence agencies, national courts, and armed forces. Since the geographical location of Turkey is on the crossroads of criminal traffic, it is necessary to establish an international cooperation platform to solve this problem. 'From 1997 to 2017, the Ministry of National Security trained 32,597 policemen from a total of 77 countries of Africa, the Middle East, the Central Asia and the Turkish neighbors. At present, Turkey has signed 170 agreements with 93 countries and signed 957 legal documents with 144 countries. New

³³'Teröre karşı ekonomi yolu,' *Hurriyet*, (14 May 2017), available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/terore-karsi-ekonomi-yolu-40457922>.

³⁴'China, Turkey to strengthen cooperation under Belt and Road Initiative,' *Xinhua News*, (13 May 2017), available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/13/c_136279883.htm

³⁵M. Zhao, et al, 'Assessment of countries' security situation along the Belt and Road and countermeasures', *Bulletin of Chinese Academy of Sciences*, 31(6), (2016), pp. 689–696.

negotiations are also in process.³⁶ The Turkish army dispatched peacekeeping troops to different parts of the world.

The security problem will not only affect the area, but also impact all countries along 'the 'Belt and Road' and the 'Middle Corridor'. The establishment of security cooperation is necessary for the realization of stable free trade movement and for the matching of the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor'. Economic development cannot solve terrorist problems alone, but it is one of the important tools. The 'Belt and Road' and Middle Corridor' Initiatives will not only promote economic integration, but also solve some social problems which may provide a hotbed for terrorism. Economic integration and development will drain terrorist swamp and social unrest.

The current counter-terrorism cooperation between China and Turkey aims to prevent potential radical thoughts and terrorist attacks in the areas along the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor'. Due to the vulnerability along the two routes, Beijing and Ankara need to strengthen their security cooperation in the future. If the two end-points of the route are unstable, the route through the Middle East will face greater hurdles. The counter-terrorism cooperation of the two countries will not only bring a stable route but also promote regional peace.

In addition, both Turkey and China have their respective dream of 'national rejuvenation'. Turkey is focusing on its 2023 vision, which will be the 100th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Turkey, which is related to Turkey's long-term goals set for 2053 and 2071. The 'China Dream' is related to the economic and political development of the country. China is the second largest economy of the world, and Turkey has the goal of becoming one of the world's top ten economies by 2023. Therefore, the security cooperation between the two countries will surely continue. In 2017, Turkey's Foreign Minister, Cavuşoğlu stressed that 'China's security is the security of Turkey' at a press conference, which means that Turkey has gradually recognized the concept of 'shared destiny', proposed by President Xi, on counter-terrorism.³⁷ It is impossible to develop the economy at home and abroad without security, so two civilizations with a long history are bound to maintain cooperation that has been carried out slowly but surely.

3.3 How Counter-Terrorism Cooperation Would Affect Future Bilateral Relations

With the development of globalization, the relationship between China and Turkey has also made remarkable progress. China and Turkey are developing countries and emerging powers, they share some common interests on a variety of global affairs: globalization, a free and open world trade system, foreign investment, economic liberalism, global governance and regional peace, to name a few.

The examples of Pakistan and Turkey emphasized the importance of counter-terrorism cooperation from different angles. In terms of security, Pakistan is in the red zone, but the economic cooperation with China brings a positive impact on security. Even though Turkey is not in the same security level as Pakistan, but bilateral relations

³⁶'Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Toplumun Terörle Mücadele Çabalarına Katkıları', Dışişleri Bakanlığı, available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye_nin-uluslararasi-toplumun-terorle-mucadele-cabalarina-katkilar-ri.tr.mfa.

³⁷'Dışişleri Bakanı Sayın Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu'nun Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanı Wang Yi ile Ortak Basın Toplantısı', Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Dışişleri Bakanlığı, (2017), available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/disisleri-bakani-sayin-mevlut-cavusoglu_nun-cin-halk-cumhuriyeti-disisleri-bakani-wang-yi-ile-ortak-basin-toplantisi_-3-agustos.tr.mfa.

between China and Pakistan prove the applicability. Beijing would perceive Turkey as a strategic legacy: its counter-terrorism capacity, its status in NATO, security cooperation with the European Union, and its influence on the Middle East and Central Asia. All these factors indicate that the cooperation between the two countries will yield positive results. Turkey and China's experiences with security and their influence on the region will bring more sustainability to both East and West Asia. Counter-terrorism cooperation is a diplomatic tool and a friendship bridge based on mutual trust between the two countries. Their security cooperation directly impacts the stability of the route, and indirectly shapes future of the 'Five Connectivity' program, which are Policy Coordination, Connectivity of Infrastructure, Unimpeded Trade, Financial Integration and Closer People to People Ties. With the 'Five Connectivity Program', Turkey and China could enjoy ever more fruitful relations.

Firstly, Ankara and Beijing can share their different experiences by strengthening policy coordination. Policy coordination could provide additional trust for the establishment of a security platform for both sides. Turkey and China should enhance political mutual trust and boost policy communication, which will lead the two countries to develop closer cooperation and mutual understanding. Both sides should comprehensively implement the important consensus reached before, and consolidate political mutual trust, so as to promote bilateral strategic cooperative relations for sustained and in-depth development. Additionally, people-to-people and cultural exchanges in many aspects will help maintain long-term sustainable relations. For instance, TIKA (Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency) can also be used to achieve active cooperation and exchanges between the two countries. TIKA and its Chinese counterpart can cooperate to carry out cooperative projects in China and Turkey, which could become the basis of the other connectivity programs.

Secondly, China and Turkey should attach more attention to promote security cooperation by fruitful economic projects and people-to-people exchanges. No one wants to invest in places lacking security and stability, so unimpeded trade and security cooperation will benefit the both. In recent years, economic cooperation between the two countries has been expanding. The goal of the two countries is to reach 100 billion US dollars in trade by 2020.³⁸ Thus unimpeded trade is the biggest incentive mechanism for both sides. Turkey has made great efforts to attract Chinese investment; AIIB is financing the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project (TANAP) that pipes Azerbaijani gas through Georgia and Turkey into Europe. Tourism has become an important cooperation field too, with more than 200,000 and 300,000 Chinese tourists visiting Turkey in 2017 and 2018. However, it needs to be clearer how Turkey's Middle Corridor will be integrated into China's Belt and Road in the future.

Thirdly, only the two sides respect and accommodation of each other's core concerns and interests can security and counter-terrorism cooperation be promoted deeply in the future. In particular, Turkey needs to change its vague and volatile attitude toward the Xinjiang issue and show its positive sincerity on counter-terrorism cooperation with China, clearly supporting China's stance against ethnic separatism and terrorism. It is a good beginning that Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said, in Beijing in

³⁸A. Yıldız, 'ICBC Turkey' in *kazan-kazan stratejisi*, Fortune, (12 May 2017), available at: <http://www.fortuneturkey.com/icbc-turkeyin-kazan-kazan-stratejisi-45349>.

August 2017, that China's security is the security of Turkey's own, and Turkey's government will not allow "any activities targeting or opposing China" in Turkey.³⁹ When meeting President Erdogan in July 2018, President Xi Jinping urged both sides to transform the consensus reached by him and Erdogan into concrete results, and stressed again the two sides should take care of each other's core interests and major concerns, and strive for breakthroughs in security and counter-terrorism cooperation.⁴⁰ Of course, China also needs have a more positive response to Turkey's security concerns.

4. Conclusion

Since the beginning of security cooperation between Turkey and China, the two sides have focused on political and economic interests and tried to find solutions to urgent international issues. Beijing and Ankara, as pivotal countries in East and West Asia with the joint legacy of the ancient Silk Road, should 'seek common ground and shelving differences' in the future. According to this article, long-term security cooperation cannot be established without mutual trust between the two sides. Turkey and China need to carefully address the key challenges such as insufficient mutual trust, the influence of other countries and organizations and the Xinjiang issue. Although the relationship between Beijing and Ankara is still facing some hurdles, these difficulties and challenges have been decreasing due to their common commercial interests and concern over US hegemonism. Under the current circumstances, the two sides have been promoting strategic relations through multi-dimensional cooperation. Especially since the beginning of 2013, the bilateral relationship has improved strategically under the background of the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives.

With the positive influence of the 'Belt and Road' and 'Middle Corridor' Initiatives, China and Turkey should promote their mutual understanding in implementing their respective strategies and visions. With the development of bilateral relations, the two powers, standing in East Asia and West Asia respectively, can set up a direct communication platform, such as 'the consultation mechanism of the Foreign Ministers of China and Turkey', which will not only serve their respective agendas of national rejuvenation, but will also establish a model for 'South-South cooperation'. Given that security relations between China and Turkey are of great importance, it is likely that we will see a continuation of the progress of security and counter-terrorism cooperation between the two countries in the future.

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³⁹Wang Yi: Promote the development of China-Turkey strategic cooperation to a higher level,' Xinhua News, (3 August 2017), http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2017-08/03/c_1121428282.htm.

⁴⁰Xi, Erdogan agree to enhance China-Turkey cooperation,' Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, (27 July 2018), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zjzj_663340/xybfs_663590/gjlb_663594/2898_663796/2900_663800/t1580857.shtml.