



Is Turkey Acting Fairly? — Turkey's Choice in T-LORAMIDS

Xiaoli GUO

To cite this article: Xiaoli GUO (2017) Is Turkey Acting Fairly? — Turkey's Choice in T-LORAMIDS, Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 11:2, 69-89, DOI: [10.1080/25765949.2017.12023302](https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023302)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2017.12023302>



© Shanghai International Studies University
2017



Published online: 17 Jul 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 113



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Is Turkey Acting Fairly? — Turkey's Choice in T-LORAMIDS

GUO Xiaoli^①

(Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, College of Arts and Social Sciences, The Australian National University, Australia)

Abstract: *Since 1952, Turkey has formally committed to the US/NATO alliance and taken part in the collective defense system within the Alliance. However, in September 2013, Turkey made a surprise move and announced its intention to buy China's long-range missile defense system over the competitors' products including from NATO countries. Notably, the maker of the FD-2000 (HQ-9) is a state-owned company-China Precision Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CPMEIC), which is under American sanctions for transferring missile technology to the states opposed to the West and its allies. Due to the risk that China could access NATO's intelligence and military information across the region, Turkey's choice of the Chinese FD-2000 set off a massive controversy, raising NATO's suspicions about Turkey's intentions, which carries serious implications for Turkey's attempts to strengthen ties with China. This study aims to provide insights into Turkey's pursuit of an indigenous Long Range Missile Defense System (T-LORAMIDS), providing an evaluation focusing on three questions: What is Turkey's motivation in acquiring T-LORAMIDS? How does Turkey's realist behavior fit into its decision to purchase T-LORAMIDS? Will Turkey's choice of missile defense system eventually make its current intimate involvement with US/NATO redundant? The article's basic argument is that Turkey remains a staunch ally of the West, and its incongruous behavior may be explained and validated through analyzing its realpolitik approach and desire for strategic balance, which is perceived by Turkey as attempting to retain the advantage in managing strategic relations with its partners.*

Key Words: *Turkish Foreign Policy; Missile Defense System; Turkey-China Relations; Turkey-US Relations; Realpolitik, OBOR Initiative*

I. Introduction

Since 1952, Turkey has formally adhered to the US/NATO alliance and taken part in the collective defense system within the alliance. However, in September 2013, Turkey

^① GUO Xiaoli, PhD candidate of Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, College of Arts and Social Sciences, the Australian National University, Canberra ACT. The author would like to thank Dr. Mustafa Murat Yurtbillir of the Australian National University for his guidance and assistance with this paper.

made a surprise move by announcing its intention to buy China's long-range missile defense system —Space FD-2000 (HQ-9)^① for \$3.4 billion, over the competitors' products including from NATO countries. Notably, the maker of the FD-2000 is a state-owned company — China Precision Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CPMEIC) — which is under American sanctions for transferring missile technology to states opposed to the West. Due to the risk that China could access NATO's intelligence and military information across the region, Turkey's decision to purchase the Chinese FD-2000 set off a massive, twisting controversy, raising NATO's and the United States' suspicions about Turkey's intentions, which carries serious implications for Turkey's ongoing attempts to strengthen ties with China.

However, Turkey brushed off both the US and NATO's serious concerns, with former Prime Minister Erdoğan insisting that Turkey “had a right” to make procurement decisions based on its own national interests without NATO interference.^② Nevertheless, Turkey's decision puzzled its Western allies.

Indeed, Turkey and China have greatly enhanced their close bilateral relationship based on a series of economic and political cooperation since 2009. In 2010, a “strategic partnership” between Turkey and China was forged. The partnership has rapidly deepened through agreements, such as the one signed in 2015 during the G20 summit in Antalya which subsequently made Turkey part of China's “One Belt One Road” (OBOR) initiative.^③ Nevertheless, unlike the bilateral economic cooperation with China, Turkey's procurement of an extensive missile defense system implies a more substantive engagement with China over long-term military-to-military cooperation. This includes military training, maintenance, exchange of intelligence, and Turkey's employment of Chinese experts. Following these developments, a number of scholars have questioned whether Turkey has decided to shift away from its decades-long alliance with the West in favor of a “Turkic-Russian-Chinese” alliance.

Despite varying interpretations and analyses of what the relationship between Turkey and China could bring, on November 15, 2015, Turkey made another surprise move by putting off its deal with China and proclaiming that it will develop its own missile defense system instead.^④ In part, this is due to Turkey's defense industry being deeply involved in the Trans-Atlantic architecture, and it remains heavily dependent upon NATO's extended missile defense as well as its conventional power. Perhaps more important in this regard is to rethink the specifics of Turkey's strategic choice in “realpolitik conditions”.^⑤

^① FD-2000 Is Known as the Export Version of HQ-9 System. See “HQ-9,” http://weapon.huanqiu.com/rf_9_iradms.

^② Thomas Seibert, “US ‘Concerned’ over Turkey's Choice of Chinese Defense System,” *The Nation*, October 24, 2013.

^③ During the G20 summit in the Antalya of Turkey, China and Turkey signed seven agreements including a memorandum of understanding on bilateral cooperation within the framework of the China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. “China's G20 Presidency Aligns with Turkey's Priorities,” *Xinhua*, November 16, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-11/16/c_134822290.htm.

^④ “Turkey's ‘Homemade’ Missile Defense System will be Integrated into NATO,” *Sputnik International - Breaking News & Analysis*, April 25, 2016, <http://sputniknews.com/middleeast/20160425/1038549659/turkey-nato-missile-defense.html>.

^⑤ The former Turkish President Gül states that “‘Peace at Home, Peace in the World’ ...is not appropriate to current realpolitik conditions”. See interview by Mufti, Malik, “Conclusion: A Second Sailing?” in

Realpolitik is prevalent amongst Turkey's decision-making circles, leading Turkey to make decisions based on rationality and realist aims, rather than emotional sentiment towards the West.

As indicated above, this study aims to provide insights into Turkey's pursuit of an indigenous Long Range Missile Defense System (T-LORAMIDS). It provides an evaluation focusing on three questions: What is Turkey's motivation in acquiring T-LORAMIDS? How do Turkey's calculations — which are grounded in realpolitik — fit into its decision to purchase T-LORAMIDS? Will Turkey's choice of missile defense system eventually make its current intimate involvement with NATO redundant? The article's basic argument is that Turkey continues to be a staunch ally of the West, and its conflicting behavior may be explained and validated through analyzing its realpolitik approach and desire for strategic balance, which is perceived by Turkey as retaining the advantage when managing strategic relations with its partners.

With this argument in mind, the article is organized into four sections. The first section of the article will focus on realpolitik and its implications for alliances. The aim is to demonstrate the challenges surrounding Turkey within the asymmetric framework of Turkey-US relations. The second section briefly examines the rapid emergence and subsequent strengthening of the Turkey-China strategic partnership, particularly within the context of China as a newly-emerging global power. The third section introduces the background of Turkey's procurement of a Chinese long-range air and missile defense system, and then expands in more detail on how Turkish decision makers failed to pragmatically advance its national interests in line with the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA). Finally, the fourth section discusses how Turkey has implemented realpolitik strategies in acquiring T-LORAMIDS, and how it selected a Chinese firm as a "bargaining chip" to extract leverage over the West, as well as benefits from China. Although this article emphasizes Turkey's realpolitik in the case of the long-range missile deal with China, Turkey-US and Turkey-China relations are also accorded substantial coverage.

II. Turkey's Realpolitik and Alliance Relationship

Focusing on realpolitik in policy making, Kegley and Raymond argue that realpolitik thought is underpinned by realism rather than nihilism.^① In contemporary usage, realpolitik and realism have been used interchangeably in influencing the policy-making process across the national capitals of the world.^② In the international arena, realists claim policy-makers face challenges; in the absence of a higher authority above the state to enforce rules, states are inevitably forced to operate in an anarchical international system

Daring and Caution in Turkish Strategic Culture: Republic at Sea, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p.175.

^① Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and Gregory A. Raymond, "Networks of Intrigue? Realpolitik, Alliances, and International Security," in Frank W. Wayman, Paul F. Diehl, eds., *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994, p.186, pp.185-203.

^② Frank W. Wayman, Paul F. Diehl, "Realism Reconsidered: The Realpolitik Framework and Its Basic Propositions," in Frank W. Wayman, Paul F. Diehl, eds., *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994. p.3, pp.3-26.

where they must rely on no-one but themselves for security.^① Under this condition of instability and mistrust between states, they must form alliances with other states with which they share mutual interests to create a balance of power in order to oppose stronger adversaries. If a state lacks viable allies, a state may bandwagon with the predominant power in order to pursue the ultimate goal of survival.^② Realism, therefore, puts a heavy emphasis on alliances.^③ Snyder, a realist, defines alliances as security commitments between states intended for either the security or aggrandizement of their members against specific external threats by the use or non-use of their combined military force and capabilities.^④ If alliance formation has been commonly understood to motivate closer security collaboration, then realpolitik within an alliance appears to be a strategy to avoid over-dependence on alliance partners, thereby alleviating the security dilemma of entrapment and abandonment inherent in alliances.

Additionally, putting the realpolitik rationale for alliance formation into perspective, Kegley and Gregory argue that although realpolitik increases maneuverability through the building of alliances, a state that binds itself to another will also see its freedom to maneuver restricted, since it is now required to conform to certain contractual stipulations.^⑤ In this sense, alliances can be said to reduce states' flexibility, making them dependent on their allies' compliance.^⑥ This is especially evident when a power disparity exists between allies. The risks of alliance are perceived to be particularly high when said alliance is asymmetrical. The challenges of the security dilemma for the weaker allies will be exacerbated, as the weaker allies may have doubts regarding the powerful state's ability to commit to its alliance obligations, since it may act in its own best interest at the expense of its weaker partners.

Turkey has, in this case, fit the theoretical explanations and rationales for these alliances. In fact, Turkey has enjoyed a long practice of realpolitik over the past centuries. As Karaosmanoglu observes, Turkey has displayed a relatively consistent strategic culture of realpolitik, seeking security through alliances in order to fulfil its long-term strategic goals.^⑦ By way of example, during the Turkish War of Independence, the founder of Republic of Turkey — Mustafa Kemal Atatürk — contacted the Soviets for arms supplies for aid against the Entente. This request was made despite the long history of hostility between Turks and Russians. In reflecting Turkey's realist sentiment, Atatürk strictly abjured a nationalistic idea — pan-Turkism. He promised to limit its growing influence in

^① Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979, pp.88-93.

^② Ibid., p.126. See also: Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987, p.30.

^③ Frank W. Wayman, "Alliances and War," in Charles S. Gochman, Alan Ned Sabrosky, eds., *Prisoners of War? Nation-states in the Modern Era*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1990, p.113.

^④ Glenn H. Snyder, "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut," *Journal of International Affairs*, 1990, pp.103-123, p.104.

^⑤ Charles W. Kegley, Jr., and Gregory A. Raymond, "Networks of Intrigue? Realpolitik, Alliances, and International Security," in Frank W. Wayman, Paul F. Diehl, eds., *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, University of Michigan Press, 1994., p.191, pp.185-203.

^⑥ Ibid.

^⑦ Ali L. Karaosmanoğlu, "The Evolution of the National Security Culture and the Military in Turkey," *Journal of International Affairs*, 2000, pp.199-216, pp.201-203.

Russia, and he also promised to support the Bolsheviks' campaign in Azerbaijan.^① However, during the Cold War, Stalin's intimidating behavior towards Turkey seriously jeopardized Turkey-Soviet relations. As Hale observed in a hypothetical scenario, there was a possibility that Stalin hoped to isolate Turkey and eventually take control of the Turkish straits, and possibly even the Turkish government as a whole.^② These explicit threats heavily disturbed Turkey's vital security interests. In response, Turkey joined the US-led NATO alliance in 1952, countering the Soviet Union's military power, and securing Turkey's territorial integrity from encroachment by the USSR.

Turkey's accession to NATO, according to Fuller, can be explained neither as Turkey's profound belief in Western values, nor a desire to be "like" Western states.^③ To some degree, he believes Turkey's decision to align with NATO was guided by the calculus of Turkish "realpolitik", where it expected to become as powerful as the Western states by acquiring the West's power through the alliance. Eventually, Turkey would have increasingly less need for the West until it could depend upon only itself for its defense.^④ Hence, there is no doubt that Turkey's increasing independent posture towards NATO suggests a fracture in the alliance's political consensus is inevitable in the near future.

Yet, it is also the case that relations between Turkey and the US reflect the asymmetric nature of their alliance.^⑤ To the US, Turkey was only essential for its support of the US overall Cold War strategy and providing it with military bases inside Turkish territory. On the other hand, Turkey was remarkably dependent upon the United States' extended missile deterrent and obtaining security guarantees from the US to prevent the emergence of regional crises which could directly threaten Turkey. The Cuban Missile Crisis was an illustrative example of this form of alliance.^⑥ In 1959-1960, to support NATO defenses against the Soviet Union, the US had placed Jupiter nuclear-tipped missiles in Turkey. From Turkey's perspective, this decision was a "symbol" of the cohesiveness of its alliance with the US, as well as American determination and commitment to the security of Turkey against the Soviets.^⑦ However, having discovered the Soviet's ballistic missile deployment in Cuba, the Kennedy administration removed the Jupiter missiles from Turkey without the approval of the Turkish government.^⑧ As Aliriza and Aras have argued, the US felt no obligation to seriously consult or even inform Ankara of the Jupiter missiles' withdrawal, regardless of Turkey's national interests to have atomic weapons on its territory as a

^① W. M. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774-2000*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, p.50

^② Ibid., p.113

^③ G. E. Fuller, *The New Turkish Republic: Turkey as A Pivotal State in the Muslim World*, Washington, DC: United States Institution of Peace Press, 2008, p.15.

^④ Ibid.

^⑤ O. Faruk Loğoğlu, "The State of US-Turkey Relations: A Turkish Perspective," in Frances G. Burwell, ed., *The Evolution of US-Turkish Relations in A Transatlantic Context*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: The Strategic Studies Institute, 2008, pp.29-42.

^⑥ Bulent Aliriza, Bulent Aras, "US-Turkish Relations: A Review at the Beginning of the Third Decade of the Post-Cold War Era," Washington, DC: Center for Strategic & International Research, 2012., p.3.

^⑦ Thomas Risse, *Domestic Politics and Norm Diffusion in International Relations: Ideas Do Not Float Freely*, London: Routledge Ltd, 2016.

^⑧ Frank Costigliola, "Kennedy, the European Allies, and the Failure to Consult," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.110, No.1, 1995, pp.105-123, p.115.

safeguard against a potential Russian attack.^① Likewise, regarding American ambassador Hare's comments accusing the Turks of having a "psycho-political" attitude in the negotiations^②, Costigliola argues that the Turks were unfairly viewed by the Kennedy administration "not as fit partners but as emotional or obtuse clients to be manipulated into accepting the US's wiser judgement."^③

Ankara was indeed angered by the lack of faith demonstrated by the US towards joint decision-making and Turkey's lower priority in US strategic interests. According to former Turkish diplomat Ülgen, this incident led to suspicions from the Turkish security establishment that the US "would sell out its allies" in order to protect itself from the threats of adversaries.^④ Thus, Turkey faced the deep-seated fear of abandonment. As a result, it was not surprising that Turkey would be ready to initiate realpolitik, and compromise with the Soviets in order to counter its fears.

Moreover, after the Cold War, Turkey's alliance with the US has weathered a situation of immense strategic change. Turkey's doubts regarding American commitment have been even more overt. The common interests between Turkey and the US and its allies were reduced to a minimal level with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and as a result, the US discontinued most of its military aid to Turkey. For example, the military aid given by the US to Turkey between 1982 and 1992 totaled approximately \$3.3 billion in grants and \$2.8 billion in loans (figure 1). Comparatively, between 1993 and 2001, American military aid to Turkey was reduced to a total of \$222 million in grants and \$1.7 billion in loans.^⑤ The traditional ways of receiving aid from the US gradually disappeared, and aid takes the form of commercial arms trade.^⑥ This was evident from the Americans' aid package of \$450 million in 1993, which as Uslu has remarked, was a complete interest bearing Foreign Military Sale (FMS) since there was "no different than taking credits from a commercial bank", given "the debt payments (to the US) even reached to 10% of Turkey's total expenditures."^⑦ This led to a considerable amount of hostile commentary from Turkey, as Turkey believed that the US lacked respect for it; in turn, Turkey realized that over-reliance on the US may not be in its long-term interests.^⑧

Figure 1: US Military and Security Assistance to Turkey^⑨
(historical \$ in millions)

^① Bulent Aliriza, Bulent Aras, p.3

^② Quoted in Frank Costigliola, pp.105-123, p.116.

^③ Ibid., p.115

^④ Sinan Ülgen, "Turkey and the Bomb," *The Carnegie Papers* 6, 2012, p.17.

^⑤ Jim Zanotti, "Turkey-US Defense Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges," Library of Congress Washington DC Congressional Research Service, 2011, p.4.

^⑥ Nasuh Uslu, *Turkish Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Period*, New York: Nova Publishers, 2004, p.52.

^⑦ Ibid.

^⑧ Stephen J. Blank, Stephen C. Pelletiere, William T. Johnsen, *Turkey's Strategic Position at the Crossroads of World Affairs*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1993.

^⑨ Jim Zanotti, p.4; See also: US Agency for International Development, US State Department.

Fiscal Year(s)	Foreign Military Fin.	Excess Defense Articles	Int'l Military Education and Training	NADR	INCLE	Other Grants	Total Grants	Loans
1948-1975	0	869	111.8	0	0	3406	4386.8	185
1976-1981	0	0	3.4	0	1	10.5	14.9	952.9
1982-1992	1884	0	36.4	0	6.7	1362.1	3289.2	2769.1
1993-2001	0	205.1	14	0.1	3.2	0	222.4	1678.1
2002-2008	170	21.1	23.7	8.6	0.1	0	223.5	0
2009	1	0	3.2	1.9	0.5	0	6.6	0
2010	0	0	5	3	0	0	8	0
2011 Request	0	0	4	1.4	0.5	0	5.9	0
2012 Request	0	0	4	0	0.5	0	4.5	0
TOTAL	2055	1095.2	205.5	15	12.5	4778.6	8161.8	5585.1

Notes:

NADR: Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs;

INCLE: International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement.

At the same time, Turkey's alliance with the European NATO members was also riddled with suspicion over the prioritization of Turkey's security interests. From Turkey's perspective, the nature of the alliance is becoming increasingly subject to cultural and identity aspects. According to Oğuzlu, after the Cold War, in spite of the ongoing bilateral military coordination with European allies in NATO, most of the European members considered Turkey as part of the Middle Eastern security architecture, rather than part of NATO's affairs.^① Both the 1991 and 2003 wars in Iraq are perhaps the most notable instances of Turkey's security dilemma. As it happened, European members of the alliance distanced themselves from Turkey's contingencies, hesitating and declining to respond to Turkey's appeals for NATO to deploy early warning systems and Patriot missiles to Turkey's territory, which would be used to guard against any possible Iraqi attack.^② This therefore fueled Turkey's distrust of NATO and its perception that it could not rely on the alliance for security guarantees. The situation added impetus for Turkey to strengthen its own independent national military capabilities, and to build a self-reliant defense.

Given these contexts, the asymmetry of power between Turkey and the US/NATO could substantially shape Turkey's commitment to its allies. Rather than openly declare itself hostile to the West, Turkey has been searching for a way to avoid over-dependence and its associated risks. To continue its realpolitik approach, it has sustained an alliance

^① Tank Oğuzlu, "Turkey's Eroding Commitment to NATO: From Identity to Interests," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2012, pp.153-164, p.155.

^② Ibid.

relationship with the West, while diversifying its avenues of security cooperation, and looking for broader and more informal alignments with non-NATO states. Particularly, in the absence of an alternative balancer in the post-Cold War era, Turkey would inevitably diversify its security interests through pursuing a “leverage” strategy to “balance” towards China, the newly-emerging power.

III. The New Silk Road and Turkey’s Engagement with China

The international order has been undergoing a fundamental transformation at the end of the Cold War. Most notably, China’s rise and its economic growth have changed the strategic dynamics that many states are facing. The old alliances of the Cold War era have been transforming into newly-emerging strategic partnerships at an unprecedented and growing rate. By 2014, 47 countries and three international organizations, including the European Union (EU), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the African Union (AU) have established strategic partnerships with China.^① Given the greater engagement and connectivity with the rest of the world, China’s “One Belt and One Road” (OBOR) initiative and its associated institutions- like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) — have covered almost its entire geographic periphery, including Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. China is seen as having a clear desire for comprehensive cooperation and partnership relationships with all regional states.^②

However, according to Professor Wang of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the character of China’s cooperation and partnership have been driven by equality, mutual trust, and mutual benefit, which is not as evident in the traditional asymmetrical relationships present throughout the region.^③ Likewise, Professor Yan Xuetong of Tsinghua University argues that China is keen to differentiate its initiatives from American initiatives, as American initiatives are characterized by unilateralism and hierarchical thinking.^④ He also claims that China’s bilateral relations with other states are in accordance with China’s cultural and historical tradition of moral and humane authority, where it takes a leadership role to attract willing followers, rather than dominate other states through hegemony.^⑤

Indeed, China’s posture, and its emphasis on side-by-side development, is particularly prized by Turkey. Turkey has endorsed China’s OBOR initiative, and explored the opportunity of partnerships and quasi-alliances with China to lessen its over-dependence on Western allies. Nevertheless, Turkey-China relations have been perceived with some skepticism by some scholars. A study published by the US Foreign Military Studies Office reports that Turkey and China are unlikely to be true strategic partners mainly due to their trade imbalance, the Uyghur issue, and the absence of converging strategic interests.^⑥ A

^① Feng Zhongping, Huang Jing, “China’s Strategic Partnership Diplomacy,” 2014, p.8.

^② Yunling Zhang, Shiping Tang, “China’s Regional Strategy,” in David L. Shambaugh, ed., *Power Shift: China and Asia’s New Dynamics*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005, p.52, pp.48-70.

^③ Wang Qiaorong, “China’s Partnership Diplomacy in the 1990s of the 20th Century,” *Leading Journal of Ideological & Theoretical Education*, No.2, 2006, pp.53-61, p.57.

^④ Yan Xuetong, et al., *Ancient Chinese Thought, Modern Chinese Power*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011, pp.65-66.

^⑤ Ibid.

^⑥ Karen Kaya, “Turkey and China: Unlikely Strategic Partners,” *Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort*

similar argument was made by Selçuk Çolakoğlu, a professor at Yıldırım Beyazıt University (YBU) and an advisor for the Centre for Strategic Research (SAM) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkey. Professor Çolakoğlu claims that China's and Turkey's divergent policies regarding regional issues, such as China's handling of religious freedom in the Xinjiang region, and Turkey's attempt at seeking increasing economic relations with Taiwan, may impact the possibilities of a potential cooperation between China and Turkey.^① Added to this, Yitzhak Shichor, a professor of Political Science and Asian Studies at the University of Haifa, claims that the impact of the Uyghur issue on China-Turkey relations is "surprisingly large".^② Particularly, he presumes that China's suspicion about Turkey being the shelter for the terrorism-related Uyghurs may lead to negativity and difficult relations between Turkey and China.^③ Erkin Ekrem, a specialist in the Institute of Strategic Thinking (SDE), and an academic at Hacettepe University, affirms that conflicting opinions between Turkey and China on the Uyghur issue would weaken long-term bilateral relations.^④

Doubts are prevalent as to whether scholars focus too much on imbalanced trade and ethno-nationalism when discussing Turkey-China relations. These issues are narrow to provide insights into the complex issue of why Turkey has pursued a strategic partnership with China in recent years. In this sense, the reasons for enhancing China-Turkey cooperation deserve more attention, and therefore they are detailed here to reveal more insights into the present status of relations between the two states.

First, China is a powerful partner for Turkey to work with. As the world's largest exporter and second-largest economy, China's cooperation with Turkey is mainly focused on economic matters. China serves as a central platform of Turkey's economic goals. Currently, China is Turkey's third-largest trading partner worldwide, as well as its largest trade partner in the Far East^⑤, supporting Turkey's efforts to develop manufacturing industries, and forms a vital segment of Turkey's infrastructure through funding assistance. For instance, as Atli observes, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railroad, coupled with the high-speed railway link between Kars and Edirne, stimulated progress Turkey's twofold aims: first, the proposed high-speed rail lines fulfil Turkey's modernization of its domestic rail network, and second, the railways improve transit routes, enabling Turkey to reach export markets in Central Asia and beyond, thereby supporting Turkey's geopolitical objectives.^⑥ Simultaneously, China's new Silk Road initiative allows Turkey to play a role as a 'niche' player, in which Turkey took a joint lead role and worked synergistically with China to achieve its agenda of comprehensive economic growth in the Middle East.

Leavenworth, Kansas, 2013, p.2.

^① Selçuk Çolakoğlu, "Turkey-China Relations: Rising Partnership," *Ortadoğu Analiz*, Vol.5, No.52, 2013, pp. 32-43.

^② Yitzhak Shichor, "Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations," *Policy Studies*, No.53, 2009, p.I, p.4.

^③ Ibid., pp.50-53.

^④ Erkin Ekrem, "Türk-Çin İlişkilerinde Uyghur Sorunu," Institute of Strategic Thinking (SDE), March 9, 2015, <http://www.sde.org.tr/tr/newsdetail/turk-cin-iliskilerinde-uyghur-sorunu/4219>.

^⑤ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkey-People's Republic of China Economic and Trade Relations," http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey_s-commercial-and-economic-relations-with-china.en.mfa.

^⑥ Altay Atli, "Turkey to Get Railroads from China, Not Missiles," *Asia Times*, November 19, 2015.

Secondly, practical military cooperation with China has potential benefits for Turkey. China's global economic engagement has been accompanied by significant improvement in the Chinese defense industries. Along with China's growing affluence, China's defense budget has continued to grow, reaching over \$214 billion in 2015.^① In addition, China is currently acquiring new and increasingly sophisticated military technologies. Turkey is certainly in favor of China's military power build-up in order to shore up Turkey's military and defense network by extension, particularly when Turkey's military capabilities and mission have remained exclusively under the political and military influence of the US/NATO. An example of this initiative began in the 1990s, when the US rejected Turkey's request to purchase the M-270 Multiple Launch Rocket System with technology transfer and the production license, accusing Turkey of using US-made weapons for human rights abuses.^② In response, and despite the absence of formal bilateral defense ties, Turkey eventually licensed the production rights from China, and successfully produced the short-range "Kasirga" missile system in 1997, as well as the middle-range missile "Yıldırım" system in Turkey in 1998.^③

Thirdly, collaborating with China has alleviated Turkey's insecurity within the asymmetric NATO alliance, allowing Turkey to pursue more independent diplomacy. As Fuller acknowledged, "in its new, more independent mode, Turkey is no longer perceived regionally as a mere Western 'wannabe'."^④ China offers "alternative political and economic options to the country... this particular shift as a long-term geopolitical one that will irrevocably change Ankara's links to Washington."^⑤ Indeed, Turkey's dialogue partner status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) — co-founded by China, Russia and several Central Asian states — was partially motivated by the need to cooperate more effectively in future security relationships with Asia.^⑥ The strategic partnership with China has therefore been critical to successfully achieving Turkey's political aspirations for further engagement with Asia.

Related to this purpose, Turkey has cooperated closely with China, trying particularly hard to reconcile their divergent views of China's national security issues. The most illustrative example of Turkey's strategic approach toward China is displayed in its handling of Xinjiang — which has often been used to represent "a provocation" to the sovereignty of China, due to Turkey's ethnic ties with the Turkic-speaking Uyghur population. Since 1998, beginning with the Yılmaz-Ecevit coalition government, Turkey has clearly shifted its Uyghur policy. In December 1998, a secret circular was issued, citing the government's desire to stay out of the fray in Xinjiang, and its commitment to pursuing

① "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database Data for All Countries from 1988–2015 (excel Spreadsheet)," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

② Yitzhak Shichor, "Ethno-Diplomacy: The Uyghur Hitch in Sino-Turkish Relations," *Policy Studies*, No. 53, 2009, p.I, p.40; Aaron Stein, "Türkiye'nin Füze Programı," *EDAM*, December 2, 2016, pp.5-6.

③ *Ibid.*, p.41.

④ G. E. Fuller, p.6.

⑤ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⑥ Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "From Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs," <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/shanghai-cooperation-organization.en.mfa>. Furthermore, in December 2016, Turkey has been selected to chair the Energy Club of the SCO in 2017, becoming the first non-SCO state to hold its term presidency. See: "Turkey's Status in SCO May be Upgraded: Analysts," *China Daily*, December 6, 2016.

support for China's territorial unity and sovereignty.^① According to Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet*, the circular emphasized the prohibition of ministers and government officials from participating in any political activities organized by the Uyghur organizations based in Turkey.^② As a result of such a policy shift, many Uyghur separatist organizations have moved out of Turkey, and resumed their separatist activities against China elsewhere.^③

In the following decade, the credibility of Turkey's "One-China policy" commitment enabled swift growth in China-Turkey relations. In 2009, the former Turkish President Abdullah Gül was invited to visit China, where he became the first Turkish president in a decade to Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang. Yet violent riots in Urumqi broke out coincidentally just after Gül left China. In contrast to the conciliatory spirit of Gül's visit, not only did former Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan condemn China's handling of the Xinjiang riot as "violence" and "almost like genocide", but Turkish Trade Industry Minister Nihat Ergun also called for a boycott of Chinese goods.^④ These incidents led to questions about the stability of the China-Turkey relations from many scholars, particularly those who considered the Turkish government's support for the rioters were sending a strong signal of Turkey's "instinctive feelings against China".^⑤

However, for Turkey, it was never too late to turn things around. A month after the disturbance in Xinjiang, on August 31, 2009, Turkish State Minister Zafer Caglayan conveyed Erdoğan's message in his meeting with former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in which Turkey reaffirmed Erdogan government's consistent attitude on firmly holding out the "One China" policy as well as China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.^⑥ As a result, relations between Ankara and Beijing were restored within a month. This marks a neat contradiction of the arguments that Turkey's ethnic ties with the Uyghurs are an obstacle to better China-Turkey relations. Rather, Turkey's prolonged realpolitik approach toward China needs to be acknowledged.

IV. The Bid: Turkey's Decision on T-LORAMIDS

The above discussions have demonstrated Turkey's difficulties in carrying out its national interests, given the asymmetrical nature of Turkey's US/ NATO alliance. In the meantime, China's rise and its growing political influence established an available space for Turkey to maneuver over its Western allies to avoid entrapment.

The following section will look at the implications of the Turkey-China strategic partnership on broader defense cooperation in order to understand both the challenges

^① "Başbakanlık'tan Gizli Doğu Türkistan Genelgesi," *Hürriyet*, February 3, 1999; Mert İnan, "Mesut Yılmaz Hükümeti Çin Genelgesi Çıkarmış," *Gazete Vatan*, July 10, 2009. The number of circular is 1998/36.

^② Ibid.

^③ Y.W. Chen. *The Uyghur Lobby: Global Networks, Coalitions and Strategies of the World Uyghur Congress*, London: Taylor & Francis, 2013, p.19.

^④ "Turkey, China and the Uyghur Connection," October 28, 2010, <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/turkey-china-and-uyghur-connection>.

^⑤ Yitzhak Shichor, "Turkey and China in the Post Cold War World: Great Expectation," in Bruce Gilley, Andrew O'Neil, eds., *Middle Powers and the Rise of China*, Washington, DC: Georgetown University, 2014, p.197, pp.192-212.

^⑥ "Turkish Prime Minister Says Firmly Adhere One-China Policy," *Xinhua*, August 31, 2009.

Turkish decision-makers face when strengthening independent defense capabilities, as well as Turkey's realpolitik approach, especially in light of Turkey's attempts to manage the alliance with the West while retaining China's bid.

Turkey's interest in missile defense systems stretches back to 2007, when the Erdoğan administration was planning to defend a possible attack on Turkey's homeland in the light of Iran's ambition to develop nuclear weapons.^① In March 2007, the Turkish Defense Industries Under-secretariat (SSM) issued a series of Requests for Information (RFI) for the acquisition of four batteries of Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) systems, known as Turkish Long-Range Air and Missile Defense Systems (T-LORAMIDS).^② Turkey had originally arranged for a procurement option upon the T-LORAMIDS by pursuing at least two key criteria: firstly, to ensure that the system could deter both conventional and ballistic missile threats at a cost of around \$1.2 billion^③; and, secondly, to ensure that the system could operate effectively in low, medium, and high altitudes, as well as at long ranges.^④ However, the acquisition of T-LORAMIDS was originally constructed as an off-the-shelf scheme.^⑤ This would only allow Turkey to build an anti-missile system with the supplier's existing systems and allied assets, instead of the technology transfer (know-how) or intellectual property which would enable Turkey to perform its own upgrades on the system to meet its own unique requirements.

Nevertheless, this proposal was acknowledged by thirteen companies on April 17, 2007, in which foreign-owned companies declared their intention to respond. These included three US aerospace giants (Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Raytheon), which teamed up to sell the Patriot PAC-3s, China's CPMIEC, which offered the FD-2000 (HQ-9), and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), developers of the Arrow missile defense system.^⑥

At the same time, it is worth noting that while the tender of T-LORAMIDS was in the bidding process on September 17, 2009, the US government proposed a "European Phased Adaptive Approach" (EPAA), designing a missile shield that would protect American military assets, personnel, and allies in Europe from Iranian missiles.^⑦ As a member of NATO, particularly one that shares a border with Iran, Turkey was expected by NATO to

^① "Turkey Cancels T-LORAMIDS Program After Eight Years," *Forecast International*, November 15, 2015, <http://www.forecastinternational.com/news/index.cfm?recno=236728>.

^② Ibid.

^③ Note: Turkish government initially set up the budget of \$1.2 billion before proceeding the bid. See: "Turkey Boosting Its Defense Systems," *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, April 24, 2007. See also: "8 Milyar Dolarlık Değil 1.2 Milyar Dolarlık Füze İhaleyle Alınacak," *Radikal*, September 15, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/ekonomi/8-milyar-dolarlik-degil-1-2-milyar-dolarlik-fuze-ihaleyle-alinacak-954484/>.

^④ Ibid.

^⑤ Christian F. Anrig, "Turkish Air Power: Toward Full-Spectrum Aerospace Forces," in John Andreas Olsen, ed., *European Air Power: Challenges and Opportunities*, Dulles, VA: Potomac Books, 2014, pp.96-97, pp.64-104.

^⑥ "Turkey Boosting Its Defense Systems," *Turkish Weekly*, April 24, 2007. See also: "Announcement Relating to the Companies Who Received the Request for Information (RFI) Document for the Turkish Long Range Air and Missile Defense System (T-LORAMIDS) and Declared Their Intention to Respond to the RFI (17.4.2007)," Savunma Sanayii Müsteşarlığı (SSM), http://www.ssm.gov.tr/home/quick/announcements/project/archive/Sayfalar/07_RFI_T-LORAMIDS.aspx.

^⑦ "The European Phased Adaptive Approach at a Glance Fact Sheets & Briefs," Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Phasedadaptiveapproach>.

be “the location of choice” for collaboration in the development of EPAA.^① Thus, Turkey was faced with the United States’ request to host the early warning radar — a key element in the first phase of EPAA - for their bilateral security interests.

Despite sharing interests with NATO in deterring the threat posed by Iranian missiles, the Turkish administration did not immediately respond to NATO’s request to participate in the US-designed missile shield. One obvious explanation for Turkey’s hesitation to host the anti-missile system in its territory was Turkey’s reluctance in binding itself to US-led anti-Iran bloc, based on the doctrine of “strategic depth” in Turkish foreign policy, a concept proposed by the former Prime Minister and Professor of International Relations, Davutoğlu. As Davutoğlu argues, Turkey has neglected its region by assigning too much attention to linking with the West.^② For this reason, he urged that Turkey seek an active engagement with regional economies and closer political relations with other states in Turkey’s neighborhood, while justifying Turkey’s new foreign policy agenda in light of reengagement with the Middle East.^③

Given this context for Turkey’s decision-makers, if Turkey and the NATO-US alliance agreed to build the “defense-oriented” system, such a missile defense system not only would pose an obvious threat to Iran but, more importantly, provoke Iran’s suspicions about Turkey playing an exacerbating role in the US-Iran conflict. Hence, the presence of the NATO shield would have certainly threatened Turkey’s national interests.

Furthermore, the technological nature of the EPAA project also presents an intense and qualitative challenge to Turkey’s decision-makers. As Goren notes, due to the trajectory of ballistic missiles and Turkey’s geographical proximity to the region, NATO’s attempts to set up the early-warning radars in the city of Malatya in Turkey, and its reliance on the sea-based interceptors provided by the US do not secure Turkey’s Eastern territories.^④ In this case, it is important to remember that the presence of the NATO shield would have severe ramifications for Turkey; it risks a potential Iranian attack against Turkey. Iran was increasingly sensitive to Turkey’s security cooperation with NATO. As Amir Ali Hajizadeh, an Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Commander Brigadier General has warned, Iran has prepared to target NATO’s missile shield in Turkey if any threat is staged against Iran.^⑤ In this sense, if the NATO shield did not cover the entirety of Turkish territory, the explicit promises made by NATO to protect

^① Marc Champion, “Turkey in Dilemma over NATO Shield,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 27, 2010.

^② Ersel Aydınli, Julie Mathews, “Periphery Theorising for a Truly Internationalised Discipline: Spinning Ir Theory out of Anatolia,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2008, pp. 693-671, 704-705.

^③ Alexander Murinson, “The Strategic Depth Doctrine of Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 6, 2006, pp. 945-946, p.953.

^④ Nilsu Goren, “Turkey’s Air and Missile Defense Acquisition Journey Continues,” *EDAM (Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies), Discussion Paper Series* 13, 2013. p.3; See also: M. K. Kaya, “How Much Security Will NATO’s Missile Defense Shield Provide for Turkey?” *The Turkey Analyst*, January 23, 2012, <https://www.turkeyanalyst.org/publications/turkey-analyst-articles/item/292-how-much-security-will-natos-missile-defense-shield-provide-for-turkey?.html>.

^⑤ Amir Ali Hajizadeh, an Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Commander Brigadier General, has said “We have prepared ourselves, if any threat is staged against Iran, we will target NATO’s missile shield in Turkey and will then attack other targets”. See: “IRGC Commander: Iran to Target NATO Missile Shield if Attacked,” *Iran English Radio*, November 26, 2011, <http://english.trib.ir/component/k2/item/83343-irgc-commander-iran-to-target-nato-missile-shield-if-attacked>.

Turkey through the EPAA were weakened.

Notwithstanding, ironically, under the NATO missile defense umbrella, there is no doubt that Turkey was designed to operate as a subordinate element of the US/NATO forces. It is hard for Turkey to envisage a credible scenario where it is able to take an independent decision to deploy missiles in a crisis situation, without being subject to the consent of NATO.

For these reasons, during the NATO-Lisbon summit in 2010, Turkey requested for the EPAA to cover all of Turkey's territory, and that NATO allow Turkey to play a role in the EPAA defense command. However, NATO took a tougher stance and rejected Turkey's requests.^①

NATO's actions certainly appear not to fulfil Turkey's national interests or assist Turkey's freedom to make independent decisions in security matters. Without knowing "exactly how this system (EPAA) will be formed, what will be the command and control structure, (and what are) the threat perception and other issues"^②, once again confronted Turkey with the security dilemma: whether the EPAA truly operates to protect its own regions, or whether US-led NATO only regards Turkey as an expeditionary force to fight alongside its allies.

However, in 2012, Turkey eventually agreed to move ahead and host an early-warning radar system in Kürecik, near the eastern town of Malatya in Turkey, but with only one condition; in complying with Turkey's general interests of defense, NATO could not explicitly name Iran as a threat.

The overall impression of Turkey's subsequent participation in the EPAA program is that Turkey and the West appear to be a more military-based alliance rather than a close political partnership, and it suggests that Turkey attempts to reserve independent political choice, seeking leverage to counterbalance the West to support its own national interests.

Turkey's T-LORAMIDS project would seem to provide confirmatory evidence of this trend. Following the failure of negotiation on Turkey's role in the EPAA defense command, on January 3, 2013, Turkish former Prime Minister Erdoğan cancelled the T-LORAMIDS off-the-shelf tender, in favor of "co-development" of the T-LORAMIDS in cooperation with one of the bidding companies in the "new" T-LORAMIDS program.^③ Technically, the "co-development" presents a fundamentally different scheme to the "off-the-shelf" purchase. Turkey's "co-development" of T-LORAMIDS, as some commentators have noted, makes Turkey's air defense architecture interoperable with the third state's assets, and this allows a non-NATO co-producer to share vital intelligence information with NATO through the Identify Friend or Foe (IFF) system.^④ Hence, the decision of shifting from the "off-the-shelf" purchase to the "co-development" appears to demonstrate a dissatisfaction of the Erdoğan's government with NATO in relation to the EPAA.

^① Mehmet Ali Birand, "Ankara Stops on the Edge of the Cliff," *Hürriyet Daily News*, November 22, 2010.

^② Marc Champion, "Turkey in Dilemma over NATO Shield," *Wall Street Journal*, October 26, 2010.

^③ Cengizhan Çatal, "Uzun Menzilli Savunma Sistemleri İhalesi Çin'in," *Hürriyet Daily*, September 27, 2013.

^④ "Turkey to Go Ahead with Non-NATO-Integrated Missile Defense," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 19, 2015.

Echoing Erdoğan's decision, to ensure that Turkey's priorities in selecting T-LORAMIDS program was consistent with Turkey's national interests, Defense Minister İsmet Yılmaz outlined the priorities clearly through a ranking system. The most fundamental priority was 'technology transfer', followed by co-production, quick delivery of the defense system, and a reasonable price.^① According to Turkey's stated preference, in 2013, four successful bidders were deemed acceptable and shortlisted in the following order: China's CPMIEC, offering its FD-2000 (HQ-9); Italian-French Eurosam, offering the SAMP/T Aster 30; the United States' Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, offering the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3); and Russia's Rosoboronexport, offering the S-400. (Figure 2)^②

Figure 2: Bids for Turkey's Long-Range Air Defense System, in Order of Turkey's Stated Preference^③

Order of Turkey's Preference	Country	Company	Missile System	Operational Range	Proposed Cost (\$)
1	China	CPMIEC	FD-2000 (HQ-9 Export Variant)	200 km up to an altitude of 30 km	\$3.44 Billion
2	Italy/France	Eurosam	SAMP/T Aster 30	>100 km up to an altitude of 20 km	\$4.4 Billion
3	United States	Raytheon/Lockheed Martin	PAC-3	45 km up to an altitude of 15 km	\$4.6 Billion
4	Russia	Rosoboronexport	S-400	400 km up to an altitude of 50 km	\$8.4 Billion

Nevertheless, the idea that the order in Figure 2 truly reflected Turkey's preferences is somewhat doubtful, given its realpolitik methods of conducting international affairs. Obviously, by ranking "technology transfer" as its first priority, Turkey clearly signaled that it never intended to consider the Patriot PAC-3 system, as Raytheon and Lockheed Martin are not open to the idea of technology transfer.^④ Even though Eurosam of the Italy-France partnership tried hard to win the tender by not only providing a lower-cost solution, but also supporting Turkey's full membership in the Organization for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR), Turkey's fraught relationship with France eventually prevented the French-Italian company from winning the bid.^⑤ Hence, it is no surprise to see

^① "Turkey Seeks New Extension in Air Defense Contract," *Defense News*, December 22, 2014.

^② Ethan Meick, "China's Potential Air Defense System Sale to Turkey and Implications for the United States," *US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Report*, December 18, 2013, pp.1-11, p.2.

^③ Ibid.

^④ "Defense Giants Compete in Turkish Tender for Long-range Missiles," *Zaman*, January 2, 2011.

^⑤ Ibid.

that Eurosam was also prevented by Turkey's government from winning this tender. Added to this, Russia was unwilling to promise joint production, and hence, on September 26, 2013, Turkey finally decided upon China's CPMIEC — a company listed under the US sanctions for transferring missile technology to the states that opposed the Western alliances - over the three rival bidders.^①

The selection of China's bid has been perceived as having considerable implications for Turkey's continued efforts to exercise independent strategic choice as it attempts to avoid operating merely as a subordinate element of NATO. NATO and the US have demonstrated their concerns regarding Turkey's ambition for co-development as well as its strategic independence. There was a robust debate on Turkey's choice of T-LORAMIDS between the US/NATO and Turkey. As the US ambassador in Ankara, Francis Ricciardone expressed, "we are seriously concerned about what this means for allied missile air defense."^②In a more intense fashion, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen highlighted NATO's expectations that all NATO member countries should understand they "work and operate with the NATO systems... (and) Turkey will also comply with that".^③Regardless of these statements urging Turkey's commitment to the security of its alliances, Erdoğan has not exhibited reticence. In response, he set out clearly that NATO should respect Turkey's independent choice and "no one has the right to throw a shadow over our (Turkey's) understanding of independence."^④

Such elucidation combined with substantial political concerns by Erdoğan contrast with Turkey's overall careful preservation of its ties to the US for the previous 65 years. This has resulted in a number of scholars concluding that Turkey has shown an increasing tendency to switch the direction of its commitments away from the Western alliance. Meanwhile, and more importantly, Turkey's strategic choice in choosing a non-NATO member might be interpreted that it is likely Turkey will apply independent political decision-making in searching for China as an "alternative ally". By contrast, Zan Tao, a professor of Peking University, has reminded us that Turkey is pursuing a "balance" strategy and this does not mean that it will "leave the West for the East".^⑤This vital point suggests that Turkey's alliance with the US is a clear reflection of a predominately realpolitik approach, which indicates that it is unlikely that Turkey will further slide into a downward spiral in its relations with the West.

V. Tackling A Tough Strategic Choice

Turkey's alliance with NATO in many ways underpins its status as a major regional

^① Hasan Oktay, "T-LORAMIDS Decision Points to Turkey's Strengthening Bonds within NATO," February 25, 2016, <http://www.kafkassam.com/t-loramids-decision-points-to-turkeys-strengthening-bond-s-within-nato.html>.

^② "US 'Seriously Concerned' about Turkey's Chinese Missile Choice," October 24, 2013, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/517189-us-seriously-concerned-about-Turkeys-chinese-missile-choice>.

^③ "NATO Head Expresses Concern about Turkey's Chinese Missile Deal," *Reuters*, October 7, 2013.

^④ Thomas Seibert, "US 'Concerned' over Turkey's Choice of Chinese Defense System," *The National*, October 24, 2013.

^⑤ Zan Tao, "An Alternative Partner to the West?: Turkey's Growing Relations with China," *Middle East Institute*, Vol. 25, 2013, p.20.

power. According to a defense analyst, approximately half of Turkey's network based air defense radars have been paid for by NATO, and these radars are an integral part of the NATO Air Defense Ground Environment.^① Turkey's closer ties with NATO allow Turkey to punch above its weight and became a powerful military power in the region. However, selecting a Chinese contender for the construction of the Turkey's first long-range air defense system may force Turkey into ending up with a "standalone" system with "little or no integration" with NATO assets.^② As Turkish defense officials argued, a "standalone" system would result in Turkey losing half of its radar capabilities, since half of the air defense architecture is facilitated by NATO, who would not allow it to be interoperated with China.^③

With these aspects, Turkey's choice to co-develop T-LORAMIDS has generated potential security dilemmas; plunging the relationship into a crisis of confidence with its Western allies entails an increased risk of abandonment in the near future. Taking Turkey's relatively weak indigenous missile defense production capabilities into calculation, Turkey's engagement with China and its decision to purchase a Chinese missile system as its final option appear fairly expensive compared to the preservation of the alliance with NATO. Turkey was therefore unable to refuse interoperability with NATO but could exercise strategic leverage by sustaining its bid with China, while continuing discussions with the three other bidders.

In October 2013, soon after announcing the victory of China's bid, two statements by Turkish government officials - former Turkish Defense Minister Ismet Yılmaz, and former head of Turkish Undersecretary of Defense Industries, Murad Bayar - left a different impression, although they do not directly contradict the fact of China's victory. Bayar explained that CPMIEC's bid was "perfectly in compliance with (Turkey's) terms and conditions" in terms of technology transfer, co-producing the FD-2000 (HQ-9), and the lowest price at \$3.4 billion.^④ However, he revealed some important information: that there was a possibility Turkey could reopen the negotiations with Eurosam and the US bidder for Patriots in the event that contract negotiations with CPMIEC failed.^⑤ Meanwhile, Yılmaz made it even clearer that the deal with CPMIEC was "not finalized".^⑥ Taken together, these raised concerns that Turkey was not seriously considering China's bid. Turkey's pragmatism was intended to be a display of tokenistic support to China's offer and made no guarantees to go through the deal with China.

In fact, such pragmatic considerations were also visible in Turkey's attempts to gain leverage throughout the bidding process. Since September 2013, Turkey extended the deadline for all three bidders in renewing their proposal for the fifth time.^⑦ More critically, in early September 2014, whilst simultaneously continuing claims of the official proceeds

^① Ibid.

^② "Turkey to Go Ahead with Non-NATO-integrated Missile Defense," *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 19, 2015.

^③ Ibid.

^④ Burak Ege Bekdil, "Turkey Won't Link Air Defense System to NATO," *Defense News*, February 19, 2015.

^⑤ Ibid.

^⑥ Ibid.

^⑦ Ibid.

of the bid with the CPMIEC of China, President Erdoğan stated that Turkey is keeping “parallel talks” with Eurosam.^① Echoing Erdoğan’s statement, on December 21, 2014, former Turkish Defense Minister İsmet Yılmaz urged bidders to agree on a “sixth extension” of the deadline to renew offers, which required negotiations at the meeting of the Defense Industry Executive Committee in the January 2015.^②

By adopting such a “leverage-seeking strategy”, Turkey has continued to work on furthering its own political advantage, capitalizing on the T-LORAMIDS project that each potential winner competed for. With regards to the “final decision”, Hacaoğlu, a commentator from Bloomberg, observed that the Turkish government had no intention to make a decision before April 24, 2015, when the 100th anniversary of the alleged Armenian Genocide was commemorated.^③ Likewise, Nihat Ali Özcan, an analyst at the Economic Policy Research Foundation in Ankara, has also claimed that it is not surprising to see that Turkey would use the lucrative missile deal as a “political leverage” on the Armenian issue ahead of April 24.^④ These remarks have revealed Turkey’s traditional preference for realpolitik and once again brought Turkey’s “leverage” strategy onto the table. In fact, the Turkish government used missile the defense system deal as a political leverage to influence over the US Congress not to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. As a Turkish senior diplomat claimed, “a decision before 24 April (2015) is out of the question.”^⑤ Ankara first tends to observe the US and French tendencies to embrace compromise positions in the “genocide claims” before awarding a sizeable contract.^⑥

Yet negotiations over the “Armenian genocide bill”^⑦ between Turkey and the West may be a never-ending battle, but there is of a particular importance that Turkey brought a state of non-recognition of the Armenian genocide like China as a leverage in the negotiations. By demonstrating its choice of a Chinese company with the missile deal, the Turkish government was able to offset pressure from the West on the sensitive issue of the Armenian genocide. The Turkish government was therefore pursuing a deal “not only commercially but also politically”.^⑧

As expected, the deal was still effective after April 24, 2015, and no final decision was made at that time. On July 28, 2015, Erdoğan visited China. It was suggested that the missile deal was part of Erdoğan’s agenda.^⑨ Nevertheless, on November 15, 2015, Turkey

^① “Turkey May Restart Missile Defense Program,” *Defense News*, November 23, 2014.

^② Burak Ege Bekdil, “Turkey Seeks New Extension in Air Defense Contract,” *Defense News*, December 22, 2014.

^③ Selcan Hacaoğlu, “Turkey to Keep Missile System Outside NATO as China Deal Looms,” February 19, 2015, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-19/turkey-to-keep-missile-system-outside-nato-as-china-deal-looms>.

^④ Burak Ege Bekdil, “Turkey Seeks New Extension in Air Defense Contract,” *Defense News*, December 22, 2014.

^⑤ “Turkey to Go Ahead with Non-NATO-Integrated Missile Defense,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 19, 2015.

^⑥ Ibid.

^⑦ Agence France-Presse, “Turkey Drives Hard Bargain Crucial Missile Deal,” *Defense News*, February 25, 2015.

^⑧ “Turkey is trying to secure a better deal not only commercially but also politically,” said Ozcan, security expert at the Ankara-based TEPAV think tank. Quoted in Agence France-Presse, “Turkey Drives Hard Bargain Crucial Missile Deal,” *Defense News*, February 25, 2015.

^⑨ Joshua Kucera, “Turkey Finally Abandons Controversial Chinese Missile Deal,” November 15, 2015,

presented a fundamentally different result, cancelling its \$3.4 billion deal with China's CPMIEC, and stating not only that Turkey would develop the system "domestically", but that it would also be integrated into NATO.^① As Turkey's Undersecretary for Defense Industries (SSM), Ismail Demir stated: "We have cancelled the results of the tender, not the project itself. Soon we will enter a new phase, where domestic companies, including Roketsan and Havelsan, will participate. We continue the development of short-, medium- and long-range systems, gradually increasing the range. We will not make any direct purchases, but at the same time the missile defense system we are developing, will be integrated in the NATO system. We consider that joint work with NATO will speed up the process (of the development)."^②

A Turkish observer and former navy officer had criticized Ankara's inconsistency in revising the deal several times. His criticism of Turkish decision makers' attempt to use the missile deal as a "bargaining chip"^③ summarizes the inconsistency plaguing overall Turkey's missile deal.

In sum, in the acquisition of T-LORAMIDS, Turkey's decisions were strategically calculated. Turkey has followed a "leverage-seeking strategy" in seeking to obtain the Chinese missile system. This simultaneously signals that Turkey intends to move closer to China instead of being over-dependent on Western allies. On the one hand, by stressing its desire to see an "improvement of its indigenous capability" while "continuing discussions with all the bidders", the Turkish government was able to display its commitment to the NATO and the US, moderating the friction in the alliance. On the other hand, Turkey would also retain China's bid, encouraging China to believe that Turkey might not go with the other bidders, and therefore maximize room for maneuver in expectation of maintaining its long-term cooperation with China for the foreseeable future. The incident left a cloud of suspicion in the mind of the US as regards to whether Turkey would shift itself towards the Eurasian pillar, away from NATO irreversibly.

Nevertheless, until recently, Turkey seems to have reversed its previous decision on developing T-LORAMIDS "domestically", and agreed to purchase Russia's S-400 long-range air defense missile systems in November 2016.^④ In April 2017, Turkish defense minister Fikri Isik proclaimed that the S-400 surface-to-air missile system has reached its "final stage". The reason the Turkish government would favor Russia's deal is relatively simple: from Turkey's perspective, the US was standing on the 2016 coup plotters' side; and the US continues to support the Kurdish group YPG in Syria. For these reasons, Turkey believes that the US has become less willing to rely on Turkey for support in the Middle East when Turkey pursues its domestic and regional interests at the expense of the

<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/76106>.

^① "Turkey's 'Homemade' Missile Defense System will be Integrated into NATO," *Sputnik News*, April 25, 2016. See also: "Update 1-G20-Turkey Cancels \$3.4 bln Missile Defense System Tender," *Reuters*, November 15, 2015.

^② "Turkey's 'Homemade' Missile Defense System will be Integrated into NATO," *Sputnik News*, April 25, 2016.

^③ Sean Gallagher, "Turkey to Spend \$3.4B on Air Defenses that Won't Work with NATO Network," February 20, 2015, <http://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2015/02/Turkey-to-spend-3-4b-on-air-defenses-that-wont-work-with-nato-network/>.

^④ "Turkey 'in Talks to Buy Russian S-400 Anti-Missile System' after Snubbing China Deal," *RT International*, November 18, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/385583-turkey-russia-s-400/>.

United States' Middle Eastern interests. As a result, Turkey's need for "leverage-seeking", which seems deeply embedded in Turkey's foreign policy, reinforced Turkey's desire to alleviate its dependence on the US. Ironically, in regard to Russia's S-400, Fikri Isik has not forgotten to emphasize that "the final stage does not mean 'let's sign a deal tomorrow morning.'"^①In this respect, Turkey's wavering on the decision to procure S-400 missiles has led to recall the snubbed \$3.4 billion Chinese deal, and sparked concerns that the history may be repeating itself.

Last but not least, the Turkish missile deal is an example of Turkey pursuing an independent foreign policy. Given Turkey's rising economic capabilities, Turkish policymakers have become more confident in prioritizing its national interests.^②The Turkish government encourages reduced dependence on a single market for its military modernization. Simultaneously, the government is seeking a diversification of security cooperation with non-NATO countries in order to diffuse the influence of the West in Turkish affairs. However, whether Turkey would adopt a comprehensive, total independence is debatable, but Turkey's growing economic capability and its increasing propensity to enhance its strategic independence suggest a specific focus on realpolitik behavior in its participation in a multipolar system.

Conclusion

In sum, this article has sought to clarify what Turkey's motivations are in acquiring T-LORAMIDS, to outline how its partnership with China has developed in the context of China's rise, and to demonstrate Turkey's realpolitik approach in decision-making.

The inherent problems in Turkey-US/NATO relations are due to the alliance's asymmetric nature. The past events indicate that Turkey largely distrusts its allies' security guarantees. In particular, in the absence of an alternative balancer in the post-Cold War era, Turkey has reconsidered a new framework for strategic cooperation to serve a number of security interests. China's rise particularly reinforces Turkey's strategic position, and provides space for Turkey to maneuver around its Western allies and pursue more independent foreign policy choices in both its political and military agendas.

However, taking Turkey's realpolitik rationale into account, Turkey's decision-making has been a combination of strategic opportunism and realist political vision. In the case of the T-LORAMIDS procurement, political fallout from its handling of the T-LORAMIDS bid has carried serious consequences for Turkey's effort to avoid exacerbating its asymmetrical disadvantaged situation vis-à-vis the West. Nevertheless, Turkey was entirely aware of its fully-integrated position with the US and NATO allies. Hence, it is unsurprising that Turkish decision makers would follow a "leverage-seeking" strategy, retaining China's bid, whilst pushing ahead with further negotiations with NATO allies.

Undoubtedly, Turkey was pursuing a complicated and controversial security posture, with its allies on the one hand and an emerging power in Asia on the other, in trying to

^① "Turkey 'in Talks to Buy Russian S-400 Anti-Missile System' after Snubbing China Deal," *RT International*, November 18, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/385583-turkey-russia-s-400/>.

^② Jim Zanotti, Thomas Clayton, "Turkey: Background and US Relations," Congressional Research Service, 2016, p.26.

diversify its security interests. Turkish decision-makers certainly need to perceive the risk of exercising strategic leverage, as it could likely impair its bilateral relations with either the US or China. Particularly when pursuing its own national interests, Turkey is far more likely to seek to balance rather than serve as an ally. But to what extent Turkey's balancing act will enable it to both enjoy the full benefits of its bilateral security alliance with the West, as well as its strategic relations with China, will largely be based on Turkish decision-makers' realpolitik approach to foreign policy.