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An Illustration of Sino-Turkish Relations: The Cyprus Question

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ABSTRACT This article analyzes China's foreign policy within the framework of debates on the rise of China in the international relations literature by focusing on Sino-Turkish relations and the Cyprus question. The main drawback of theoretical arguments about the rise of China is the lack of concrete evidence they provide when examining the implications of China's national power for its foreign policy behavior and diplomatic positions in international crises. Therefore this article proposes concrete evidence regarding Chinese foreign policy toward Turkey by analyzing the Cyprus question.

Introduction

This article analyzes China's foreign policy within the framework of debates on the rise of China in the international relations literature by focusing on Sino-Turkish relations and the Cyprus question. The main drawback of theoretical arguments on the rise of China is the lack of concrete evidence they provide when examining the implications of China's national power for its foreign policy behavior and diplomatic positions in international crises. Therefore this article proposes concrete evidence about Chinese foreign policy toward Turkey, analyzing the Cyprus question in the period 2001-2011.

There are a number of reasons for choosing a contemporary period to explore the topic of this article. First, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 on the United States changed the U.S. national security strategies. The U.S.-led international order, which started after the Cold War, turned chaotic through its unilateral military intervention in Iraq in 2003. It has also led other countries to readjust their regional and global relations a good example being Sino-Turkish relations.

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In fact, due to the end of the Cold War, the 1990s was the real beginning of bilateral relations between the two countries. In addition to diplomatic visits Turkey tried to create a new political atmosphere and increase its role in Central Asia, which was most likely a concern for the PRC

military fields. In the second part, China's political and diplomatic position is analyzed in relation to the Cyprus question with a specific focus on the period 2001-2011. The last part offers a strategic assessment of China's involvement in the Cyprus question and the Eastern Mediterranean.

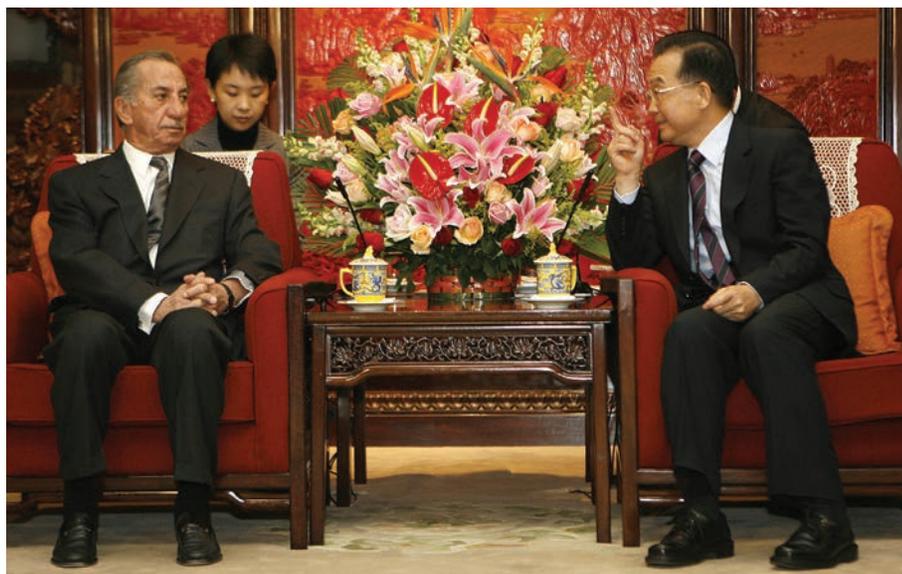
Sino-Turkish relations date back to the first interactions between the Chinese and various ethnic groups along the borders of China proper. Controversially, according to Sinologist Togan basic historical materials relating to the Chinese and ancient Turks date to the seventh century.² However, putting aside the main historical controversies of Sino-Turkish relations may aid in understanding the current relations.³ Historical approaches to Sino-Turkish relations tend to focus on common experiences and positive contributions, especially in recent decades. Before the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1971, historical approaches to Sino-Turkish relations used ideological and religious concepts. The atmosphere of the Cold War and ideological competition between the two superpowers were the primary reason for this. During the Cold War, it was difficult for Turkey and the People's Republic of China (PRC) to find a common ground for improving their diplomatic relations.⁴ As soon as diplomatic relations were established in August 1971, Sino-Turkish relations gradually started to develop and continue to do so today.

Political and Diplomatic Relations

Although common historical experiences in the nineteenth century such as imperialism, modernization, and Westernization led both societies to political, economic, and social reforms, their responses to those reforms and the implications were not the same. The collapse of the Qing and Ottoman Empires affected both societies in a similar way, causing great political and economic

The year 2011 was chosen because of regional political developments in the Middle East. The Arab Spring affected almost all political, economic, and military discussions in the region while NATO intervention in Libya caused a dramatic turn in the diplomatic positions of Russia and China during the Arab Spring.¹

The article is divided into three parts. In the first part, China's relations with Turkey are analyzed to illustrate China's primary interests in the political, economic, and



Then Chinese Premier, Wen Jiabao, talks with the then President of Greek Cyprus, Tassos Papadopoulos, during their meeting in Beijing, in December 2006.

AFP / GETTY IMAGES
PETER PARKS

turmoil in their successive states. After the collapse of these two ancient dynasties, the Republic of China (ROC) was established in 1912, and the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923.⁵

After Kuomintang politicians, including Chang Kai-shek, fled to Formosa Island (Taiwan), Mao Zedong, the supreme leader of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), promulgated the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a new state in 1949. As a result, the civil war and domestic political struggle between the two Chinese factions became an international issue. The Taiwan issue, which continues today, emerged as the first political problem between China and Turkey since Turkey continued to recognize the ROC as the one legitimate government representing all China. Meanwhile, Turkey's participation in the Korean War in 1950 increased the negative perception of Turkey in the eyes of the PRC.⁶ With the exception of the Chinese Communist Party's ideological discourses, which resonated in Turkey in the 1960s, there were no direct political or diplomatic relations between the two countries.⁷

The Uyghur issue, another political problem between the PRC and Turkey, started to take shape in the beginning of the 1950s with the arrival of the first Uyghur immigrants to Turkey.⁸ Uyghur politicians, intellectuals, and businessmen migrated to Turkey from East Turkistan and communicated directly with politicians and businessmen in Turkey.⁹

Turkey recognized the PRC after the United States and NATO countries began to send warm political messages to the PRC in 1971. The Sino-American rap-

prochement eventually provided a new basis for improving bilateral relations between Turkey and China, something that had already been under discussion in Turkey six years earlier.¹⁰ Turkey declared officially that relations with the PRC would be in accordance with procedures similar to those used for other socialist countries. Beyond official statements, the recognition of the PRC was seriously discussed in the Turkish parliament and in the mainstream media.¹¹ After its recognition, several agreements were signed between Turkey and the PRC, including trade protocols, the establishment of consulates, and cooperation on standardization, medical issues, tourism, and air transportation in 1972.¹²

The ongoing Cold War, as well as political and economic conditions did not provide the opportunity to improve Sino-Turkish relations until the 1980s. The first high-level diplomatic visit was made by Turkish President Kenan Evren in December 1982. Three years later, Chinese President Li Xiannian visited Turkey.¹³ Then Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal and Chinese Prime Minister Zhao Ziyang improved bilateral relations through diplomatic visits in 1985 and 1986, respectively.¹⁴ In fact, due to the end of the Cold War, the 1990s was the real beginning of bilateral relations between the two countries. In addition to diplomatic visits such as those of President Süleyman Demirel in 1995 and Minister of Foreign Affairs İsmail Cem in 1998, Turkey tried to create a new political atmosphere and increase its role in Central Asia, which was most likely a concern for the PRC. The assertive, post-Cold War foreign policy discourse in Turkey did not become a reality during the 1990s due to domestic and regional political crisis such as the Gulf War and unstable coalition governments in Turkey.

Bilateral Sino-Turkish relations reached their zenith at the turn of the century. Chinese President Jiang Zemin's diplomatic visit in April 2000 opened new channels for improving not only economic but also political and military relations. Jiang's visit had two main objectives for China at the time. The first was to acquire support from Turkey to become a member of the WTO (World Trade Organization). The second was to accelerate current relations between the two countries. In addition to economic relations, political and diplomatic relations also reached a new level with both sides supporting an action plan signed in 1995. Importantly, however, the PRC's demands and comments on the Uyghur issue and the Uyghur diaspora living in Turkey gradually increased before Jiang's visit. The PRC openly put the Uyghur issue on the agenda of bilateral relations by emphasizing cooperation against international terrorism and separatism in this visit.¹⁵

As developing economies, both countries tried to diversify their foreign policy priorities, energy resources, and market orientation during the period 2001-2011. In this sense, the Middle East became a crucial region for both cooper-

ation and competition between Turkey and China. This was not a zero-sum competition over resources and market orientations but a win-win competition providing new kinds of relations between them. This common perspective in bilateral relations and diplomatic visits contributed to this competition between the two sides. From 2001 until 2011, the PRC has been visited by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (once as the leader of the AK Party and once as prime minister), Abdullah Gül (once as Minister of Foreign Affairs and once as President), and Ahmet Davutoğlu (once as the Minister of Foreign Affairs). On the other hand, there has been no presidential-level diplomatic visit from China since Jiang Zemin's visit in 2000.



The Uyghur issue is the bottleneck for Sino-Turkish relations and has the potential to affect diplomatic and political relations between the two countries

The Uyghur issue is the bottleneck for Sino-Turkish relations and has the potential to affect diplomatic and political relations between the two countries. For example, after the 2009 Urumqi riot, which was the largest clash between the Uyghur people and Chinese security forces to date, the Uyghur issue became a serious political topic between the two countries. Then Prime Minister Erdoğan's remarks on the situation were the first to openly declare controversy between the two countries. However, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao's official three-day visit to Turkey in 2010 demonstrated that the most serious tensions over Xinjiang in the aftermath of the Urumqi incident had settled down.¹⁶

Economic Relations

China transformed its economic policies from a closed economy to a more open one after the opening-up reforms in 1978. These reforms were aimed not only at economic transformation, but also at a new political and social development model, with the latter being implemented by the new political and economic elite at the beginning of the post-Mao era. Thus, the Chinese economy started to diversify its economic model and integrate it with the global economy. It is interesting to note that Turkey was also transforming its previous economic model, Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI), to a more liberal, open-market economy at the same time. Turgut Özal, then Undersecretary of the Prime Minister, prepared an economic reform package emphasizing more liberal economic policies than the planned economy previously under the control of the state. Indeed, Deng Xiaoping's leadership in the opening-up of China and Özal's leadership in the 1980s represent another shared experience of both countries in the economic realm.¹⁷

Then President of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Mehmet Ali Talat, met with the ambassadors of the five permanent members of the UNSC to share the Turkish perspective regarding the Cyprus negotiations in March 2009.

AA PHOTO / HARUN UÇAR



In 1971, Turkey and China did not have intense economic relations except for one trade agreement signed in 1974.¹⁸ In the 1980s, both countries developed new economic orientations under the guidance of the Washington Consensus.¹⁹ Although the political systems of the two countries were completely different, China's economic fate intersected with that of Turkey, a fellow developing country.

Sino-Turkish economic relations started to improve in the middle of the 1990s. In that period, for the Chinese, Turkey was an opportunity to reach alternative markets and resources. Turkey was trying to become a full member of the European Union (EU) but because of its Muslim population also had social and cultural relations with Middle Eastern countries.²⁰ Moreover, Turkey was planning to increase its exports to the Far East, including China which also represented a gateway to future economic relations with other East and Southeast Asian countries. However, the result of the competition between the two export-oriented economic models was a failure for the Turkish economy. The main reason was that the Turkish manufacturing and commodity markets could not compete with their Chinese equivalents. Under the guidance of Özal's new economic orientation, Turkish businessmen who wanted to discover new markets and resources became importers of goods from China during the 1990s.²¹

However, in spite of the conflicting objectives of two similar economic models, Sino-Turkish economic relations continued to develop. Several agreements in the 1990s promoted economic and trade relations, including the prevention of double taxation and the promotion of standardization, tourism, health, bi-

lateral investments, technical cooperation, and energy. As described above, these growing relations favored China because of the asymmetrical dimensions of relations between the two countries. China's increasing investment capacity, huge flow of capital, and cheap labor were the primary reasons for this asymmetry. For example, Turkey's exports to China dramatically dropped by 81.1 percent in 1995, while imports from China increased by 109.1 percent. This trend gradually worsened for Turkey following China's WTO membership in 2001.

The year that China joined the WTO was critical not only for the Chinese economy, but also for China's global economic and political engagement

The year that China joined the WTO was critical not only for the Chinese economy, but also for China's global economic and political engagement. Although Turkey was one of the developing countries suffering under China's economic pressure in all sectors, it was also an opportunity for Turkey to take advantage of China's cheap raw materials and its huge market –that is, its population of 1.3 billion people. After 2001, however, Turkey was unable to take advantage of these opportunities due to a lack of knowledge and information about China. A sectoral analysis of the bilateral trade deficit clearly demonstrates, however, that China has been able to take the advantage of the situation.²²

Table 1: Sino-Turkish Trade Balance, 2001-2011 (millions of dollars)²³

Years	Export	Import	Balance	Total
2001	199	926	-726	1.125
2002	268	1.368	-1.100	1.637
2003	505	2.610	-2.106	3.115
2004	392	4.476	-4.084	4.868
2005	550	6.885	-6.336	7.435
2006	693	9.669	-8.976	10.362
2007	1.040	13.234	-12.195	14.274
2008	1.437	15.658	-14.221	17.095
2009	1.599	12.677	-11.077	14.276
2010	2.260	17.180	-14.920	19.440
2011	2.467	21.692	-19.225	24.159

In fact, it was not only Turkey but also the United States and other global economic powers who were greatly concerned about China's double-digit economic growth during the first decade of the twenty-first century. The main

Although there were plenty of bilateral mechanisms to improve economic and trade relations between the two countries, they were unable to achieve the expected results

important to analyze the main challenges and opportunities of Sino-Turkish economic relations during this period.

The first challenge was the increasing trade deficit between the two countries. As seen in Table 1, total trade volume reached approximately 24 billion dollars, of which Turkish exports constituted only 2.4 billion dollars. The trade deficit reached to 19 billion dollars by 2011, up from 726 million in 2001. The second challenge was related to intellectual property rights. Turkey, as a candidate for membership in the European Union, was obliged to comply with EU standardization agreements and property rights regimes, while China, as a third party, had no obligation to adhere to these dictates in its economic activities. Thus, property rights violations became a significant problem in Sino-Turkish trade relations.²⁴ Thirdly, the flow of cheap and poor-quality Chinese goods into Turkish markets negatively affected Turkish manufacturers during this period.

However, there were some opportunities which could prove to be beneficial for future economic relations between China and Turkey. Yılmaz notes that a new Silk Road and Eurasian connection could be an alternative economic network for both countries.

By exploiting the opportunities offered by the flourishing global finance market the two countries positioned at the East-West extremities of Eurasia would be in a prime position to redefine the contours of a renewed Sino-Turkic “Silk Road.” It would be one in which the market power of ancient Rome is replaced by the EU and Xian by the Beijing-Shanghai arc of Chinese political and economic power.²⁵

China’s growing economy represents another crucial opportunity, as it needs to diversify its foreign investment projects all over the world. Chinese investments in Turkey increased from 4.23 million dollars in 2001 to 406.48 million dollars in 2011.²⁶ These projects offer the most realistic prospect of closing the trade deficit with China by providing economic advantages to Chinese companies investing in Turkey. To reach this objective at a diplomatic level, the Ministry of the Economy announced a new strategy to understand the Chinese market, the “Asia-Pacific Strategy.” Under this strategy, a Turkish-Chinese

question concerned the nature of China’s economic development model. At the beginning of 2011, Turkey was still the sixteenth largest economy in the world, but China had become the second, overtaking Japan. This was another asymmetrical dimension of Sino-Turkish economic relations. Therefore, it is

Business Council was established as early as 1992 to promote cooperation with Chinese businessmen. It was an initiative started by the Foreign Economic Relations Board and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT).²⁷ Although there were plenty of bilateral mechanisms to improve economic and trade relations between the two countries, they were unable to achieve the expected results. For example, according to figures from the Turkish Ministry of Economy, there were 36,300 firms in 2013 with foreign investments in Turkey, including 540 Chinese firms. On the other hand, according to Chinese statistics, the total amount of Chinese investments in Turkey was approximately 406 million dollars in 2011, while according to the Turkish Treasury, all Turkish capital stock was approximately 111.4 million dollars. These investments were obviously not enough to fill the huge gap in the trade deficit.

Military and Security Relations

The Korean War was the first confrontation between the Chinese and Turkish militaries in the second part of the twentieth century, though not only Turkey but also the United States and UN alliances took part in the military conflict. From the end of the Korean War until today, there have been no conflicts or clashes between the two countries, nor common security threats or security-related problems in bilateral military relations. However, especially in the 1990s, China's high-speed economic growth made it more concerned about security issues such as energy security as well as social and political instabilities in the Middle East and its immediate neighbors.

Turkey and China gradually started to have common security concerns in the 1990s. For example, international terrorist networks that expanded their operations from Afghanistan to Libya became a common security concern for both countries. In addition, China increasingly started to feel the burden of the instability of the energy resources on which it relied in the Middle East. Due to new security threats such as the First Gulf War (1990-1991), the Bosnian War (1992-1995), and the Afghan Civil War (1992-1996), China and Turkey began to improve their military and security relations, especially after the 1990s.

Sino-Turkish military relations were strengthened through increasing bilateral visits, military agreements, hardware cooperation, and joint exercises from 1996 until 2011.²⁸ After the first bilateral visits of Air Force Chief Yu Zhenwu and his Turkish counterpart İsmail Hakkı Karadayı in 1996, China and Turkey signed an arms deal for twenty-four WS-1 rockets.²⁹ Since this first arms purchase, Turkey has continued to purchase several types of military hardware including Kasirga Rockets, B611/Yıldırım Missiles, and medium and short-range missile technologies.³⁰

The PRC did not espouse a full-fledged diplomatic or political position on the Cyprus question until the 1980s since China had tried to remain neutral regarding controversial issues on which the ROC had taken an earlier position

Although it was officially declared that Sino-Turkish bilateral relations reached to strategic partnership in 2010, military relations between China and Turkey did not demonstrate this strategic partnership. Their military relations were a matter of necessity rather than one of rational, strategic choice. For example, the PRC is a marginal military supplier to Turkey. The value of China's arms transfers to Turkey between 2001 and 2011 is estimated at 25 million dollars, while Turkey's total arms acquisitions in that period are valued at approximately 6.8 billion dollars.³¹

With respect to joint exercises, China and Turkey reached a new level in military relations in October 2010 with the Anatolian Eagle joint air exercises. Indeed, it was a rejoinder to Israel's stance on Turkey in the Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis, China and Turkey conducted a joint military exercise for the first time in their bilateral military relations.³² One month later, China and Turkey conducted joint commando training exercises in the Turkish Commando School and Training Center in Eğirdir, Isparta.³³

China's Political and Diplomatic Position on the Cyprus Question

The bilateral relations between Cyprus and China reveal that neither country has any disagreement about current political and diplomatic affairs. While Cyprus officially supports China's claims on important controversial issues such as Taiwan and the EU arms embargo, China supports Greek Cypriots on the Cyprus question. The PRC did not espouse a full-fledged diplomatic or political position on the Cyprus question until the 1980s since China had tried to remain neutral regarding controversial issues on which the ROC had taken an earlier position.

As an example of the PRC's neutral position, China did not participate in any of the eighteen votes on the Cyprus question in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) between 1971 and 1981. This was not only related to the Cyprus question since China did not participate in fifty-five other votes, including ones on Middle Eastern and South African issues. China's main motivation for not participating was related to the ROC government that had previously occupied China's seat in the UNSC. Since the PRC did not inherit the ROC



after 1949, it also did not want to take direct responsibility for decisions that had been taken by the ROC. After 1981, China altered this strategy and began to participate in all votes, but did not vote differently from other UNSC members on the Cyprus question.³⁴

China's rising economic and political integration with the world led it to become more involved in international conflicts. China greatly increased its involvement in regional conflicts during the 2000s. For example, for the first time in the history of bilateral relations between China and Cyprus, Cyprus' Minister of Defense Socrates Hasikos visited China and met with his counterpart Chi Haotian in January 2002. During the same visit, Li Peng, the Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee (NPCSC), explained China's diplomatic position on the Cyprus issue, emphasizing the role of the UN and international law.³⁵ Four months later, China's Prime Minister Zhu Rongji and his delegation, including Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan, held a five-day visit to Turkey. After a special meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister İsmail Cem, Tang Jiaxuan stated that "the Chinese government was pleased to see the beginning of direct talks between the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots, hoping that the two sides would find an early solution based on the relevant UN resolutions through peaceful negotiations."³⁶

During an official visit in 2003, Guanzheng, a member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China, also conveyed

Chinese and Turkish Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, shake hands during their meeting in Beijing on August 3, 2017.

GETTY IMAGES
ROMAN PILPEY-
POOL

From 1971 until the present, Turkey has not seriously considered using its political or economic leverage against China on the Cyprus question

China's support for Cyprus President Tassos Papadopoulos on the Cyprus question. In October 2003, before the Annan Plan vote, one of China's NPCSC members (the name was censored in *Xinhua*), again explained China's official position during a Cyprus visit. According to the statement, China would align with the international community for a reasonable solution to the Cyprus issue.³⁷ In another *Xinhua* analysis, published just before the vote on the Annan Plan in April 2004, the phrase "Turkish invasion of Cyprus" was used.³⁸ However, just four days before the Annan Plan, Russia vetoed a draft resolution submitted to the UNSC. In this critical vote in the UNSC in April 2004, China favored the resolution backing Cypriot unity and UN security arrangements. In response to the Russian veto, China's Ambassador to the UN Wang Guangya said that the result was something no one had wished for. According to this statement, the Chinese side was unhappy about friction among UNSC members ahead of the serious reunification referendum.³⁹ After the Annan Plan vote, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Kong Quan made the first official statement. He said that "China respects the choice of the Cypriots and will continue to make its efforts with the international community for a proper solution to the Cyprus issue." In the same statement, China revealed its official position once again, emphasizing the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus, comprehensive dialogue and negotiations, and regional peace, development, and stability. Kong Quan also repeated that "China will continue to join with the international community and exert its efforts for a proper solution to the Cyprus issue."⁴⁰

Although China tried to remain neutral, at least in official statements, Sino-Cyprus relations began to improve after the Annan Plan vote. For example, in a presidential visit to China in December 2005, President Tassos Papadopoulos of Cyprus openly criticized the EU's ban on arms sales to China for the first time. According to his statement, "it is unreasonable and unacceptable for the bloc to seek to expand economic and trade links with China on one hand while maintaining the ban on the other."⁴¹ In January 2006, similar statements were issued from Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis during a visit to China.⁴² It is thus clear that China brought its own agenda to the table in return for support on the Cyprus question. Sino-Greek Cypriot relations were improving, but China had no contact with Turkish Cypriot officials.

At the end of 2006, during a visit by Cyprus President Tassos Papadopoulos, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao reiterated China's position on the Cyprus issue. In the statement, Wen Jiabao stressed that China took the UN resolutions seriously and considered interests of both the Turkish and Greek com-

munities in Cyprus. However, he insisted that the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Cyprus were the most important issues and that these should not be violated. China saw Turkey's intervention as an occupation, like other permanent UNSC members.⁴³

Assessment of China's Diplomatic Position on the Cyprus Question

Although the Cyprus question is a serious historical and political controversy between Greek and Turkish Cypriots, it is not a serious concern for China in terms of its primary national interests. Therefore, China is unwilling to confront regional and international powers with respect to the Cyprus conflict. Instead, China sees the Cyprus question as an opportunity to enhance its collaboration in the UNSC with the European Union, the United States, and Russia. As is clear from China's statements regarding UN resolutions on the Cyprus question, China supported the decisions which were unanimously taken.⁴⁴ Improving Sino-Cyprus relations in both the political and economic realms indicate that China wants to take advantage of Cyprus's EU membership. Turkey –the only country that does not recognize the Republic of Cyprus– is the one obstacle impeding China from improving its relations with Cyprus. In this way, China has risked Turkey's political and economic responses. However, from 1971 until the present, Turkey has not seriously considered using its political or economic leverage against China on the Cyprus question. Turkey's position on the "One China policy" with respect to Taiwan issue and rising Sino-Turkish trade relations could be bargaining chips to influence China's position on the Cyprus question. But for now, China's pro-Greek Cypriot position in the conflict has not been directly challenged by Turkey or Turkish Cypriots.

Although the Cyprus and Taiwan questions are not identical, China worries about the possible consequences of the Cyprus question for the Taiwan issue. The Greek Cypriot leadership's special attention to "One China" statements in official visits to Beijing is apparent.⁴⁵ The main dilemma or controversy is about whether Taiwan is an independent political, economic, and social entity or part of China. For China, the current status of Taiwan is not among the issues which would be discussed with other countries. In other words, for China, Taiwan is not a foreign policy issue but a domestic one. Thus, accepting the "One China" principle is the most important choice for any country hoping to improve its relations with China.

With regard to Taiwan, there are two crucial and strategic reasons China supports Greek Cypriot arguments on the Cyprus question. First, although China has been criticized as a revisionist state with respect to disputes in the South China Sea, it strongly criticizes any kind of separatist movement for pro-independence political discourse on the Taiwan issue. Similarly, on the Cyprus

question, China accepts the current situation as the “status-quo” and opposes revisionist tendencies such as Turkish claims of Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) independence. For China, although Turkish and Greek Cypriot’s claims and demands are negotiable, all sides should refrain from anti-status quo diplomatic behaviors.⁴⁶

Second, according to official Chinese foreign policy on the Taiwan issue, if there are to be any changes to the current situation, it should favor China –that is, Taiwan should reunify with the mainland.⁴⁷ According to this argument, the people of Taiwan can easily become citizens of the PRC regardless of their political, social, and economic differences since 1949. In a similar way, since China sees the political and economic benefits, it would not be rational to support a separate state for the TRNC in Cyprus. Instead of it, Turkish Cypriot should accept the Greek Cypriot’s authority in the island regardless of their political, economic and social differences since 1963. For this reason, if there are to be any changes to the status quo, they should favor Greek Cypriots. Although this argument has not been expressly declared by Chinese officials, it is easy to infer it from Chinese political and diplomatic statements on the Cyprus question. For example, as Sino-Cypriot relations were rapidly increasing after the EU membership of Cyprus in 2004, China gave little support to Turkish Cypriots to end their current isolation.

As described in previous parts, there are multiple consequences of the Cyprus questions in regard to geographical features of Cyprus. As an island that is physically closer to Turkey than Greece, Cyprus is not immune from disputes among regional powers about territorial waters and exclusive economic zones. Therefore, even today, Turkey opposes any violations of its maritime activities and natural resources in exclusive economic zones around Turkey and the TRNC.

In China’s Middle East policy, economic priorities and energy security trump other issues. As soon as the first natural gas exploration efforts started off the shores of Cyprus in 2007, China focused on Cyprus and energy resources around the southern parts of the island.⁴⁸ From China’s perspective, there are three crucial reasons to become involved in Eastern Mediterranean power relations.

First, the Eastern Mediterranean is a significant geopolitical region. It lies at the center of Europe, Northern Africa, and the Middle East. It hosts a large military presence from regional and global powers such as the U.S., France, the UK, Russia, and Turkey. The security and stability of the Eastern Mediterranean are also important for trade and economic activities. All these factors combine to make the region strategically important. Therefore, for China, it is crucial to become involved in power relations in the Eastern Mediterranean. The main problem for China –and one that plagues its entire Middle Eastern

policy— is the perception of China as a “latecomer” to the region and to the ongoing power struggles among other actors there.

The Cyprus question provided a new opportunity for China to become a more responsible, effective actor in the Eastern Mediterranean. To be successful in this effort, China conducted closer relations with the Cyprus government, especially after Cyprus became a member of the EU in 2004. But as of 2011, China had no military capability in the Eastern Mediterranean, unlike the U.S. and Russia. However, given its rising economic relations and more specific trade agreements with Cyprus, China may increase its military capability in the region in the future.

Second, China’s primary objective has been to implement more specific trade and economic agreements with Cyprus. The Suez Canal and Syrian and Northern African ports could provide more secure routes for Chinese goods and services destined for Europe. Although China has several different alternatives for reaching the European market, such as through Russia and Turkey, an Eastern Mediterranean route would help China diversify its options.

Last, conflicts over energy resources in the region draw a great deal of China’s attention. Since 2007, not only Cyprus but Turkey, Israel, and Egypt have become involved in the Eastern Mediterranean energy controversy.⁴⁹ Israel explored its Tamar natural gas fields in 2009 and its Leviathan gas field in 2010. According to estimations, the Tamar fields have 250 billion cubic meters (bcm) of gas reserves, and Leviathan has 476 bcm.⁵⁰ In addition to these new gas fields in Israel, the Aphrodite gas field was discovered in Cyprus in 2011. Even though its gas reserves of 140 bcm will have but a limited effect on the global gas market, they may have an important impact on the regional order and regional power dynamics. The Aphrodite field may exacerbate controversies over natural resources of the Eastern Mediterranean for countries like Turkey and Cyprus.⁵¹

Conclusion

China’s foreign policies on the Cyprus question mostly concerned its economic priorities. During the period 2001-2011, China neither became involved in the conflict nor offered concrete proposals for a solution. It also did not intend to be a part of the negotiations as it had done in other conflicts in the region such as the Iranian nuclear crisis. Contrary to China’s passive stance in the political



Contrary to China’s passive stance in the political and military fields with respect to the Cyprus question, China used it as a tool to improve economic relations with both Cyprus and the EU

Although China is a latecomer and lacks a military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, its economic priorities and energy-oriented policies have led it to play a larger role in solving controversies among the actors involved in the Cyprus conflict

and military fields with respect to the Cyprus question, China used it as a tool to improve economic relations with both Cyprus and the EU. For example, after Cyprus became a member of the EU in 2004, then president of Cyprus Papadopoulos openly supported China's demands to lift EU arms embargoes. Bilateral trade relations between China and Cyprus increased from 117 million dollars in 2001 to 1.1 billion in

2011. Furthermore, Eastern Mediterranean energy resources created an opportunity for China, which has become engaged in the search for alternative energy resources and routes.

Eastern Mediterranean energy resources have increased the chance of resolving the Cyprus question, as well. However, if not managed well, they could create unexpected outcomes for all actors involved in the conflict. The new conditions have also created an opportunity for China, which is engaged in a search for alternative energy resources and routes to supply its highly dependent need for energy. Apart from the volume of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean fields, the distribution of gas to the European market is another important controversy among regional actors. According to China, the diversification of energy resources and energy routes could provide for more secure and cheaper energy. Therefore, although China is a latecomer and lacks a military presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, its economic priorities and energy-oriented policies have led it to play a larger role in solving controversies among the actors involved in the Cyprus conflict. ■

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