



Institute of Islamic Strategic
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Resurgence of Russia and China: Russia, Turkey and the Crimean Tatars – Geopolitics versus Economics



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RESURGENCE OF RUSSIA AND CHINA PROGRAMME: RUSSIA, TURKEY AND THE CRIMEAN TATARS - GEOPOLITICS VERSUS ECONOMICS

Overview: *Turkey may have long-held connections with, and deep interests in, Crimea, but Ankara's response to Russia's recent annexation of the peninsula has remained relatively muted. Economic ties between the two countries, and Turkey's reliance upon Russia for energy supplies, have tempered the Turkish government's reaction to Russia's recent behaviour. For Moscow, this is valuable evidence that economic ties are a valuable foreign policy tool.*

With Russia's recent annexation of Crimea, Turkey is facing some seemingly difficult decisions. Once an Ottoman province, just 173 miles from the Anatolian coast and as the home to the Crimean Tatars - ethnic and linguistic kin to the Anatolian Turks - Ankara has long-held connections with, and deep interests in, Crimea.

Today, there are approximately 300,000 Tatars in Crimea. Many of them have grown concerned by Russia's recent behaviour - memories of their deportations to inner Soviet Union under Stalin remain fresh within the collective conscience, boosting fears of repeated persecution. Large numbers participated in anti-Russia rallies following Yanukvych's ouster in February, and several news agencies reported a movement of Tatars into mainland Ukraine following the March referendum. For Turkey, a country which seeks to defend its ethnic peoples, Russia's recent behaviour does not play easily on its mind.

Turkey has subsequently criticised Russia for its recent actions - no doubt in part a result of pressure from the large Tatar diaspora within Turkey itself.

However, whilst the Turkish government refused to recognise the Crimean referendum as legitimate, and stressed that Ukraine's national sovereignty, territoriality and political unity must be respected by all, it has not gone much further than this in its criticisms. Keeping a low profile, Ankara has so far refused to comment on whether it will be joining Europe in sanctions against Russia - although most doubt that Turkey would ever join these - and Turkish Airlines have already announced the resumption of flights to Simferopol from June 27th onwards. Whilst it is true that Ankara may have threatened to close the Bosphorous to Russian ships back in March should Russia threaten the Crimean Tatars, most saw this for what it was - mere empty rhetoric.

Given Turkey's interests in the Crimean peninsula, one might ask why Turkey's reaction has, so far, been quite so muted and controlled. Some would stress that historical conditioning - in the form of a history of defeats against the Russians - has produced a long-standing fear of Russia, dissuading the Turks from risking any form of military confrontation. Indeed, between 1568 and 1917, there were seventeen conflicts between Russia and Turkey, all of which saw Russia the victor.

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However, the truth of the matter is that Turkey does not want to upset its growing relations with Russia through adopting too aggressive and confrontational a stance. Since the end of the Cold War in particular, both countries have fostered improved relations, placing geopolitical struggles to one side in favour of building economic ties. Moreover, in recent years, Putin and Erdoğan have managed to forge relatively cordial diplomatic relations - both bonding over their anti-imperialist sentiments, and their desires to develop their countries into true global players.

Today, Russia is both a crucial trading partner for Turkey - the second largest after Germany - and a key provider of energy supplies. 55% of Turkey's natural gas supplies are from Russia, as is 12% of its oil supplies, and the Russian state atomic energy corporation, Rosatom, is even involved in Turkey's first nuclear power station. Russian tourists today flock to Turkey's beach resorts on the Aegean bringing vital revenues with them, and Turkish construction companies were actively involved in building the infrastructure for the Sochi Olympics.

Turkey cannot afford to lose its growing ties and supplies of natural gas from Russia. Despite optimism last May when Turkey's economy ['seemed almost on top of the world'](#), the country today is facing economic difficulties. International investors have been discouraged from investing following several high-level corruption scandals within the Justice and Development Party, as well as last summer's protests and the more recent issues surrounding the government's

increasingly autocratic tendencies. Clearly, Turkey's relations with Russia are not something which Erdoğan and the Turkish government are willing to jeopardize in their response to the Crimean crisis.

This muted response is very much in line with the Turkish attitude to previous events concerning Russia. In the case of the Georgian war in 2008, for instance, Ankara openly criticised Moscow's actions, but remained reluctant to be dragged into any form of confrontation. Perhaps more relevant however has been Turkey's reaction to Russia's role in Syria. Turkey, a country which has long experienced strained relations with Assad and which is now a key supporter of the Syrian opposition, certainly opposes Russian support for the Assad regime, but Erdoğan has been working to ensure it is 'business as usual' when it comes to Russia-Turkey relations. In other words, Russia and Turkey are not allowing deadlock in Syria to translate through to a deadlock in their increasing bilateral ties.

For now, at least, we should not expect to see any aggressive challenges towards Moscow from Ankara. Turkey's reliance upon Russian energy supplies leaves Turkey extremely vulnerable, and for a country currently facing economic difficulties, the government will not want to see the growing economic ties compromised. For Russia, this is yet more evidence that economic ties can serve as a valuable foreign policy tool.

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ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

As the US starts to scale down its 'heavy footprint' from the Islamic-world; the resurgence of new powers becomes crucial to evaluate. The rise of today's regional and tomorrow's global power and their internal and external policies will determine future discourses. Among the rising economies and military powers; Russia and China stand out the most.

Russia has become a key global actor in the aftermath of Syrian revolution. It is the first time since the end of the cold war that Russia is not only directly involved in managing global affairs but has even managed to dictate them in Syria as well as in Georgia Taking further advantage from its new role of an emerging global power; Russia is now seeking new relations in different regions of the Islamic-world i.e. Middle East (Egypt, Syria), Central and South Asia etc.

Chinese foreign policy in the different regions of the Islamic-world can be seen a combination of foreign policy approaches. The over-riding themes of Chinese foreign policy however remains limited to the projection of 'soft power' mixed with economic interaction and developmental strategies. This paradigm may not be sustainable in the near-future as the global system seems to shift towards multi-polarity. Chinese inter-relations with the US hard power and their economic interdependency may empower its soft foreign policy approaches. If however, these trends continue to change as the current geo-strategic trends demonstrate, Chinese foreign policy may have to radically change in terms of projecting its economic and military power in order to cater for its huge energy demands, resources and raw material etc.

Furthermore; although China and Russia may have different geopolitical interests; they have also found common grounds and convergences of interests on different global issues. As the US tries to 'rebalance' Asia Pacific and Eastern Europe: the convergences of interests are likely to steadily grow in the near to mid-term future. Finally; as the internal unrest grows in many parts of the Islamic-world; the role of emerging power such as China and Russia will be hugely important to monitor.

KEY FEATURES OF THE PROGRAMME

- Analysis of China and Russia's historic development in the last few decades
- Analysis of contemporary socio-political trends within China and Russia
- Analysis and evaluation of current Chinese and Russian foreign policy models and paradigms, particularly in the regions of the Islamic-world
- Exploration and evaluation of China and Russia's military and defence strategies
- Exploration and evaluation of Chinese cyber-warfare capabilities
- Analysis of fragility or sustainability of western power and Pax-Americana

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- Analysis of the inter-relation of the emerging powers i.e. India, Brazil, Vietnam, Indonesia, Myanmar etc. with China and Russia
- Analysis of new blocs particularly Shanghai cooperation organisation (SCO) or ASEAN and Chinese influence and Russian led 'custom' and 'trade' Unions
- Establishment and anticipation of different Chinese and Russian foreign policy models, using 'futurology' studies and by the above mentioned analyses of current and emerging trends etc.

ABOUT US

IISA is a think-tank and an intellectual forum for addressing the current and future dynamics of the Islamic-world and its interaction with Western civilisation. Based in London, IISA will create trans-Islamic and global reach. IISA seeks to establish a platform where Islamic-world's dynamics, trends, issue, problems or crises are analysed within the Islamic-world and by working on local models and realities and not against any external standards or perceptions. We will be one of the leading think-tank on the Islamic-world and its role in the contemporary global system. In a short span of time we have attracted great academic support and a reputation for both open and track-II dialogues. IISA is the only think tank initiative that goes beyond national and regional inclinations and addresses strategic and socio-political issues/crises of the Islamic-world in its totality. For more information i.e. our mission statement, current programmes and our academic and regional expertise please visit the following links:

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