

# Emerging “New Cold War” Between China and the USA Where Should Turkey Stand? - Mehmet Öğütçü



This is not a light matter. It is not confined only to Trump, calling the corona scourge as the ‘Chinese virus’ and threatening to demand compensation from Beijing. And it is not only Trump using the ‘yellow threat’ China as a winning card in the run-up to presidential elections in November 2020, intensifying the trade and technology war between the countries along the way. It is much deeper than all these.

A substantial strategic re-assessment has been done in Washington on how to reverse the global power shift tilting in favor of China today. It is becoming

increasingly obvious that China poses a 'systemic threat' to the West's global superiority and values, and should be duly countered. China is no longer a cost-effective, low-priced global manufacturing center. It has outperformed the U.S. and the EU by a wide margin, and Japan too is lagging behind in artificial intelligence, telecom, renewable energy revolution, including wind power and photovoltaics, electric vehicles, space technology.

If you take into account not only the People's Republic of China, but also countries and regions such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, whose population is mostly Chinese or whose economic and political power is determined by the Chinese-origin elites, the 'Great China Economic Area' is clearly the largest economy by any criteria.

Xi Jinping's brain child, the [Belt and Road Initiative](#), has a budget of 1.5 trillion dollars for investment and connects 85 countries through strategic land and sea routes, touching the lives of 3 billion people. It is regarded as the most visionary project of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although there are already various complaints and troubles about the 'hidden agenda' and its performance.

It is precisely in the face of this [Peaceful Rise to 2049 strategy](#) that Washington and Beijing are expected to create their own blocs, not so dissimilar to the two poles which clustered around the US and USSR in the Cold War era. Yet, given the multipolarity, divergent interests and absence of hegemony today's world, these will most likely be relatively loose camps, with its allies shifting sides or staying neutral as their interests so require.

## **Positions of Secondary Powers**

The rift between the EU and the U.S. during the Trump era is likely to expand and China's privileged relationship with Brussels will further complicate this relationship. Nevertheless, if the Europeans are compelled to make a choice at

the end of the day, the majority of the EU countries may not hesitate to stand by Washington under the NATO umbrella.

In such a scenario the countries of the considerable power such as India, Russia, Brazil, Indonesia, Korea, Iran and Turkey will also be of great importance in terms of whose side they prefer to connect. Russia's preference is more or less clear: Putin has already sealed a 'marriage of convenience' with China at an early stage.

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However, unless there is a golden reward for siding with China, it may not be in the overall long-term interest of Russia to be in China's lap. The Kremlin is also not happy with the fact that the Moscow-Beijing partnership is not based on equality in any way. Yet, the transformation of the present China-Russia strategic partnership into an iron-clad bloc may be a nightmare for the West.

In this critical period of history, there is a greater need for global leadership that everyone can accept, because various crises no longer recognize boundaries, no single country can solve them alone. Unfortunately, there is no such leadership in sight. Trump does not inspire much hope. He thinks that the current liberal economic order has served the interests of China for a long time rather than American interests. Thus, he will most certainly continue China-bashing to win the November elections and will not be much interested in anything else.

The EU is also stuck in its own state of affairs, and has long been experiencing leadership difficulties. Putin's Russia does not have enough reputation and capacity for such a role. Xi Jinping seems to be the most visionary, competent and charismatic leader, but it is too early for China's global leadership as he will not be internationally accepted, particularly after the coronavirus debacle.

It will be wonderful to establish a new, environmentally sound, healthy, conflict-free, equitable order in global finance, energy, trade, geo-politics that we all aspire to. But it is not as easy as it seems. The current musketeers of the established order will not, by their own will, allow space for new emerging powers to engineer a compromise for a world order reflective of the new realities on the ground.

## **What about Turkey?**

Developments in this direction have come yet again at an unfortunate turning point in Turkey. The economic fragility has increased with the current crisis, tensions with and security risks from its neighbors have deepened, domestic polarization has widened, relations with the West are not aligned and not on the basis of mutual respect, equality, and common interests. That is to say, unless there is a fundamental recalibration of its internal structures and foreign policy management, Turkey will face more, not less, challenges in its outreach in the near future.

There is a window of opportunity for a country of Turkey's size, location and heritage. Yet, it is not realistic for Ankara to assume an important place and role in the new global order without the necessary adjustment. Especially when relations with a superpower like the U.S., which continues to dominate the global order, are so distorted and the crises of confidence with the EU, Russia and China have not been overcome.

When it comes to a strategic point of real choices, especially in the face of current economic vulnerability requiring fresh funds, foreign policy loneliness and security risks, it can be predicted that Ankara will either remain neutral or walk in the direction of Washington in a possible Sino-American encounter. Of course, Beijing's opening its purse strings within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative and Washington's continued tough stance vis-a-vis Ankara on S-400 missiles purchase may also draw [Turkey into a mercantilist line with China](#).

Without waiting for such an eventuality, it is critical that Ankara forges its own road map in the light of Turkey's long-term interests, and avoids a strategic miscalculation that can by no means be undone later. It also needs to support efforts in this direction and provide informed early pointers to all sides.

Is there a hope doing so? Most signals at the moment suggest otherwise. But, there is still a room to maneuver; Turkey should better use it, lest it loses another century.



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