

Turkey, Russia and China's ungainly relations

May 2026

Europe's political class has once again found itself in a state of anxious overreaction, this time sparked by comments from European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, that appeared to place Turkey in the same geopolitical category as Russia and China. The diplomatic tremors that followed were revealing not because they exposed some new strategic reality, but because they illuminated an old European fear, that Ankara may no longer be willing to remain permanently tethered to a Western order



whose institutions increasingly appear exhausted, unrepresentative and economically extractive. Turkey's gradual gravitation toward Moscow and Beijing has become alarming to Brussels not simply because of military or diplomatic calculations, but because it suggests the emergence of an alternative political and financial axis beyond the traditional Atlantic system.

This is the deeper source of the panic. The EU understands that Turkey is not merely drifting eastward out of convenience, it is testing whether the post-Cold War order itself is beginning to fracture. The prospect of Turkey co-operating more openly with Russia and China hints at the formation of a Eurasian bloc capable of challenging the entrenched financial architecture long dominated by the City of London and its interconnected global network of banking, regulatory and political influence.

Turkey occupies a uniquely awkward position in the international system. It is simultaneously inside and outside the Western order. It remains a NATO member, participates in the Council of Europe, maintains institutional ties to the IMF and continues to rely heavily on trade with the EU. Yet, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ankara has increasingly argued that the so-called "*rules-based order*" functions less as a neutral framework than as a mechanism through which Western powers preserve economic hierarchy and geopolitical privilege.

Erdoğan's repeated declaration that "*the world is bigger than five*" is not simply rhetoric aimed at the UN Security Council. It is part of a wider critique shared by many states in the Global South, that the institutions created after the Second World War no longer reflect global realities. Turkey's interest in BRICS, the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO) and other non-Western forums reflects an attempt to hedge against a declining Atlantic system, while exploring new centres of gravity in Eurasia.

Where Russia and China become essential to Ankara's calculations

Neither Moscow nor Beijing is an ally of Washington but, more importantly, neither accepts the continuation of an international economic structure historically centred around Anglo-American financial dominance. The City of London, together with Wall Street and their wider institutional ecosystem, has long functioned as the command centre of global capital flows, debt structures, sanctions enforcement and currency management. The extraordinary reach of dollar-clearing systems, London-based financial law, offshore banking networks and Western-controlled ratings agencies has allowed a relatively small cluster of institutions to exert enormous influence over sovereign economies.

Russia and China increasingly seek alternatives to this architecture. Moscow accelerated this effort after the sanctions regime imposed following the Ukraine war, while Beijing has spent years constructing parallel systems through the Belt and Road Initiative, yuan-based trade settlements and institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Turkey's own frustrations with Western financial leverage - particularly through currency pressures, capital flight vulnerabilities and political conditionality tied to investment - make co-operation with these powers increasingly attractive.

What makes the Turkey-Russia-China relationship ungainly is that it is driven less by ideological unity than by converging grievances. These states do not trust one another completely. Turkey and Russia back opposing factions in several regional conflicts. China remains cautious about embracing a NATO member too enthusiastically. Yet, all three share a common suspicion toward a Western economic order they regard as manipulative, coercive and structurally tilted toward London and New York.

This explains why Europe reacts so nervously whenever Ankara signals greater openness toward Eurasian institutions. Turkey's participation in BRICS discussions or the SCO is not merely symbolic diplomacy. It represents a search for economic and strategic flexibility outside Western supervision.

If Turkey can diversify financial partnerships, energy arrangements and trade mechanisms, it reduces the leverage historically exercised over it through Western markets and institutions.

Ankara's regional policies further reinforce this trajectory. Turkey increasingly promotes regional ownership of disputes through mechanisms that deliberately marginalise Western influence. The Astana Format for Syria, involving Russia, Turkey and Iran, bypassed traditional NATO-centred diplomacy. Turkey's use of the Montreux Convention to restrict naval access to the Black Sea similarly demonstrated Ankara's willingness to assert sovereign control even when it frustrates allied objectives.

To Brussels, this ambiguity is intolerable because NATO was designed around strategic alignment, not transactional balancing. Yet, Turkey increasingly behaves like a civilisational pivot state rather than a disciplined alliance member. It seeks to maintain the benefits of Western integration while simultaneously exploring post-Western alternatives.

Critics in Europe often frame this as opportunism or authoritarian revisionism, and certainly Erdoğan's government has embraced anti-Western rhetoric and a "*traditional values*" narrative that mirrors aspects of Putin's Russia. But reducing Turkey's behaviour to ideological posturing misses the larger structural shift underway. Ankara senses what many governments now perceive - the unipolar moment is ending, and that financial power is gradually diffusing away from its historic centres.

The City of London remains immensely powerful, but waning. The emergence of parallel systems - energy trading outside the dollar, regional development banks, local currency settlements and alternative investment corridors - represents a slow erosion of its monopoly position. Turkey's alignment with Russia and China may therefore be less about forming a rigid anti-Western alliance and more about participating in the construction of a multipolar economic order.

This does not mean Ankara is about to abandon NATO or sever ties with Europe. Turkey's economy remains deeply intertwined with Western markets, and its security establishment still relies heavily on alliance structures. But Turkey's leaders appear increasingly unwilling to accept permanent subordination within a system they believe no longer serves their national ambitions.

Conclusion

This is what truly unsettles Brussels. Europe fears not merely a diplomatic realignment, but the possibility that Turkey's balancing act may prove successful and that a major NATO state can simultaneously engage with Russia and China, while helping accelerate the fragmentation of the old Atlantic-centred economic order. If that happens, the authority of institutions historically anchored around the City of London and its global network nodes may gradually weaken, not through dramatic collapse, but through the cumulative effect of states quietly building alternatives.

Turkey's relationship with Russia and China is built on contradictions, competing ambitions and mutual suspicion. Yet, history often moves forward through uneasy coalitions rather than perfect alliances. And in an increasingly multipolar world, awkward partnerships may prove more consequential than formal blocs.

KCS Group International – Strategic Intelligence & Corporate Security

KCS Group International is a leading provider of security and intelligence services, operating in some of the world's most difficult environments on complex cases of fraud, theft, corruption or market dynamics. We gather intelligence through the discreet use of human sources to level the playing field and help our clients identify and deal with any risks, weaknesses and threats which could impact on their business, financially or reputationally.

Our key areas of expertise include: Corporate Intelligence Services – New market or sector entry research – Know your customer screening.

In addition, we offer a unique service in the areas of Cyber Security and Cyber Risk. This covers penetration testing, vulnerability assessments, intelligence gathering and cyber security audits – providing unparalleled analysis, contingency planning and implementation.

To find out more or to arrange a meeting to discuss your business needs, please email the team at info@kcsgroup.com or call (00 44) 20 7245 1191 – www.kcsgroup.com