

# The Wars for the Silk Roads

Iakovos Alhadeff

# Table of Contents

*Introduction*

*The Wars for the Silk Roads*

*The Roman, Byzantine & Ottoman Empires*

*The Greek-Persian Wars*

*Alexander the Great and the Silk Roads*

*Vasco Da Gama & the Silk Roads*

*The War for the Railways & Highways*

*Who is Responsible for the War*

*Turkey, Russia & China in Central Asia*

*China in Afghanistan*

## **Introduction**

The Silk Roads are the trade routes that connect Asia with Europe and Africa since the ancient times. Due to their importance of the Silk Roads for trade there were many wars for their control over the centuries. The following chapters refer to some of these wars. Each chapter is an independent essay, which was written at a different date, and therefore the booklet's chapters can be written in any order.

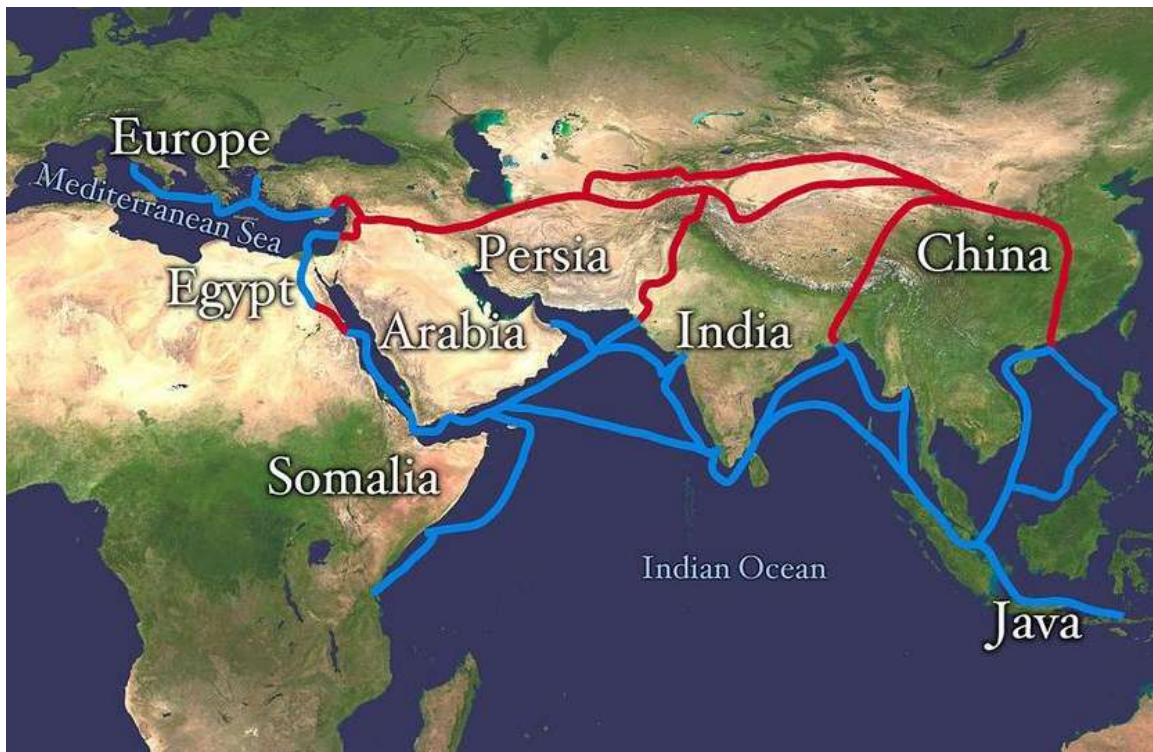
I.A.

17.2.2016

## The Wars for the Silk Roads

The ancient Silk Roads were the sea and land economic corridors which connected Asia to Europe and Africa. Through these economic corridors the silk and the spices of Asia could reach Europe and Africa. According to George Friedman, some spices, like pepper, could sell as high as gold. The two most important points of the silk roads were Cairo (Egypt), as far as the sea lanes were concerned, and Constantinople (Istanbul), as far as the land routes were concerned. See map 1 from wikipedia.

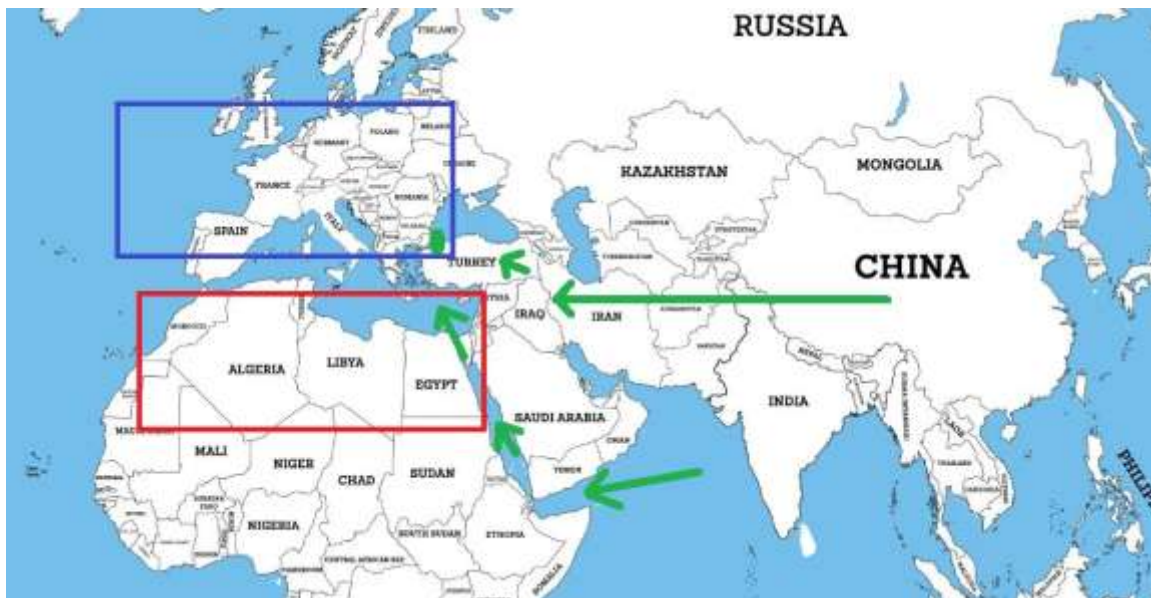
Map 1



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_Road#/media/File:Silk\\_route.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road#/media/File:Silk_route.jpg)

For centuries there was a lot of competition between the Christians and the Muslims about the control of the Silk Roads. Whoever controlled these routes could impose taxes on the merchandise and earn huge amounts of wealth. Most of the time the Muslims were controlling the southern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Africa), and the Christians were controlling the northern part of the Mediterranean Sea (Europe). When the Muslims beat the Greeks in 1453, and took control of Constantinople (Istanbul), they dominated the sea and land lanes of the Silk Roads. See map 2.

Map 2



What is very interesting is that today the situation is very similar, except that the important merchandizes are not spices, silk and wool, but oil and natural gas. Today Erdogan in Turkey, who is already in control of Constantinople (Istanbul), is trying to establish a friendly islamist government in Egypt i.e. Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and at the same time he attacks Israel and Syria, which are the only alternative routes to Europe. Trade and merchandize can change but geography always remains the same.

# The Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman Empires

## [The Roman Empire \(27 B.C. – 476 A.D.\)](#)

The map shows the evolution of the Roman Empire (27 B.C. – 476 A.D.), from her genesis to her fall in 476 A.D. Her eastern part, the Byzantine Empire, survived for another 10 centuries, until Constantinople (Istanbul) fell to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 A.D.

[http://cdn1.vox-cdn.com/assets/4821916/Roman\\_Republic\\_Empire\\_map.gif](http://cdn1.vox-cdn.com/assets/4821916/Roman_Republic_Empire_map.gif)

Map of the Roman Empire



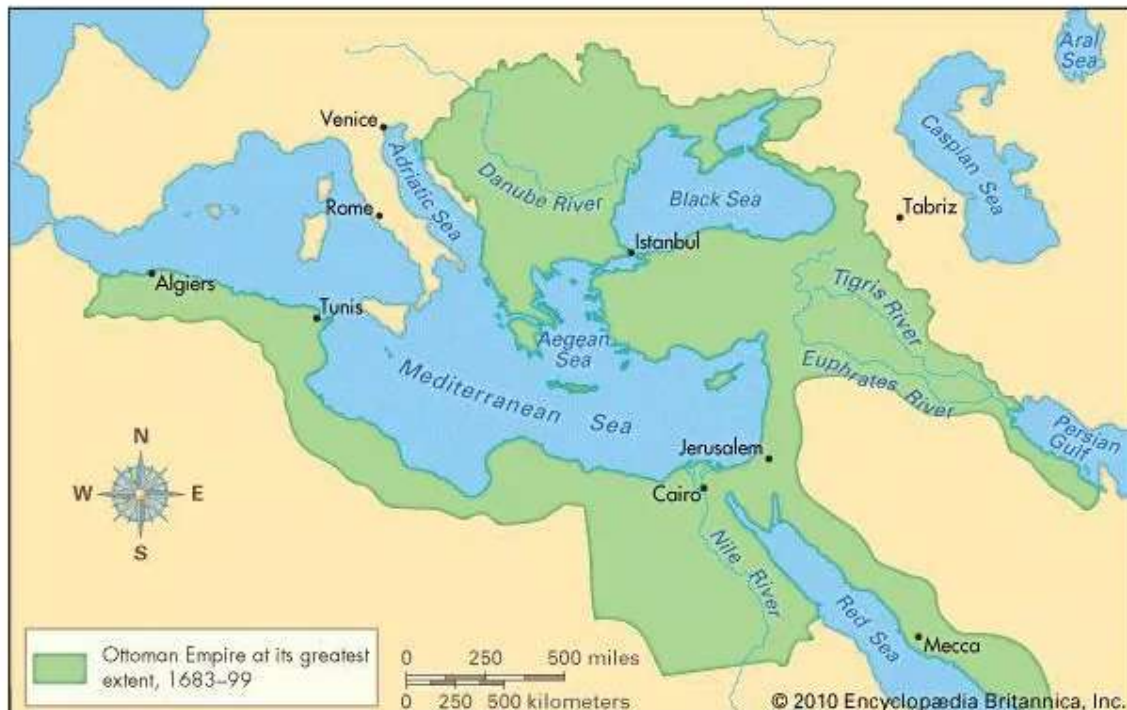


## The Ottoman Empire (1299 B.C. – 1923 A.D.)

The following map shows the evolution of the Ottoman Empire, from its birth in 1300, to the replacement of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 with the conquer of Constantinople (Istanbul), to its peak in the period 1500-1650, to its destruction after World War 1 (1914-1918), and to the creation of the Turkish Republic as we know it today by Kemal Attaturk in 1923.

[http://cdn3.vox-cdn.com/assets/4224911/ottoman\\_empire\\_gif.gif](http://cdn3.vox-cdn.com/assets/4224911/ottoman_empire_gif.gif)

Map of the Ottoman Empire



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/83/89983-004-C90ACD71.gif>

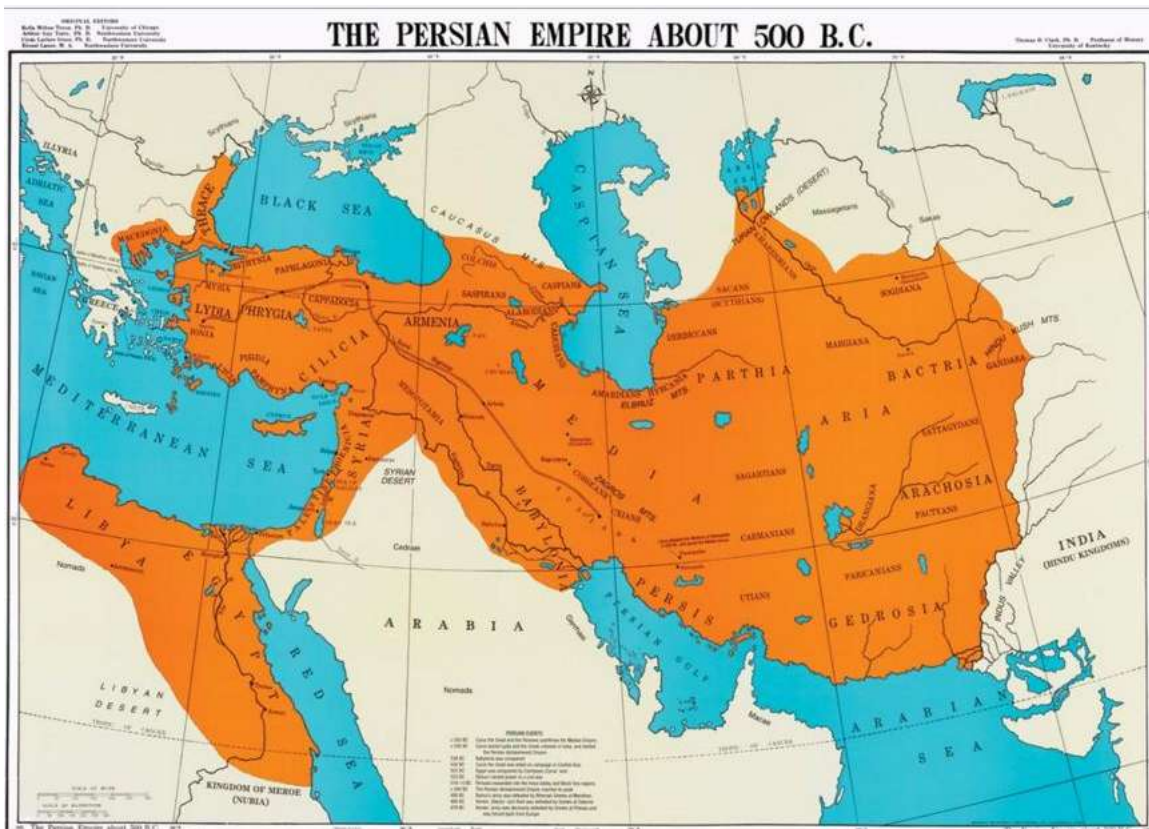


# The Greek-Persian Wars and the Silk Roads

The following map shows the Persian Empire at 500 B.C. It was the time that the Persians (Iranians) were trying to conquer Greece, launching two invasions during the period 500 B.C. – 450 B.C. In the first one they were defeated in Marathon, and in the second one they were defeated in Salamis. See “Greek-Persian Wars”.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Persian\\_Wars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Persian_Wars)

Map 1 Persian Empire



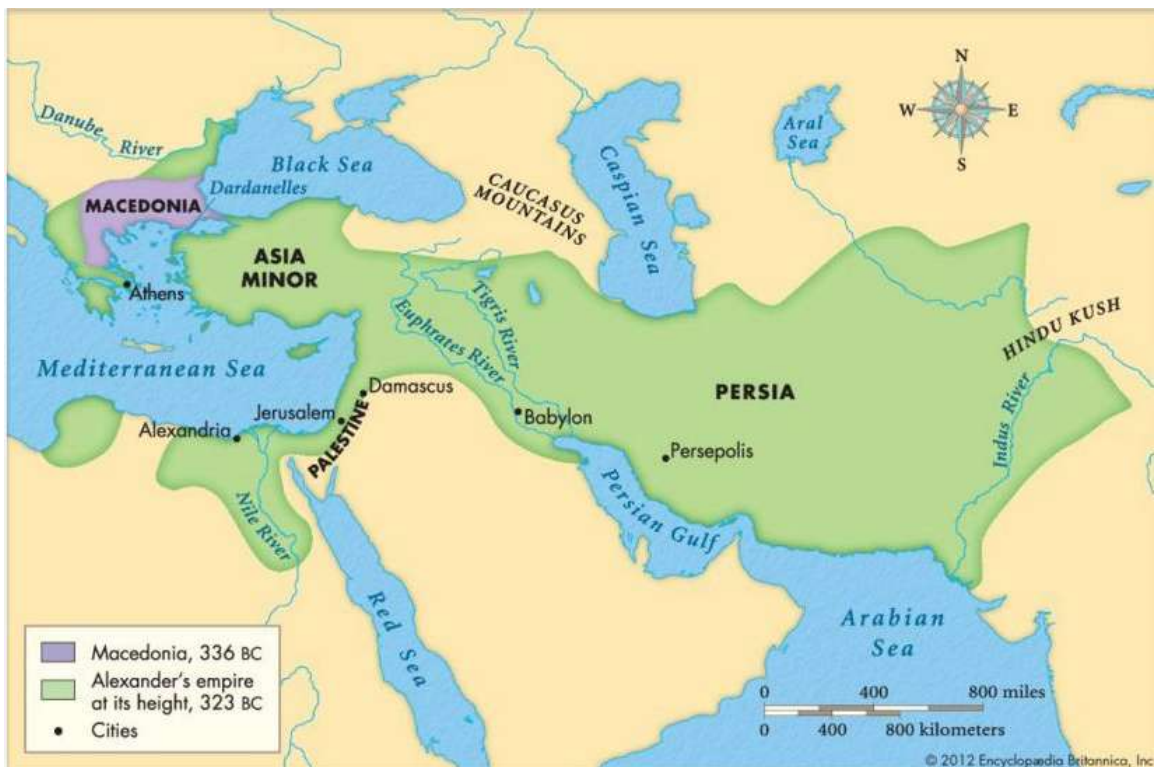
[http://www.worldmapsonline.com/images/Cram/History/persian\\_empire.jpg](http://www.worldmapsonline.com/images/Cram/History/persian_empire.jpg)

During the period of the Persian Empire, the trade routes were safe, and communications were highly developed. It was a great period for the Silk Roads and trade.

About two hundred years later, the Greek King Alexander the Great, invaded Persia from Macedonia. The decisive battle during Alexander's invasion of Persia was the Battle of Gaugamela, near today's city of Erbil in Iraqi Kurdistan. After their defeat at Erbil the Persians were finished, and Alexander became the master of the Silk Roads. See "Battle of Gaugamela".

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Gaugamela](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaugamela)

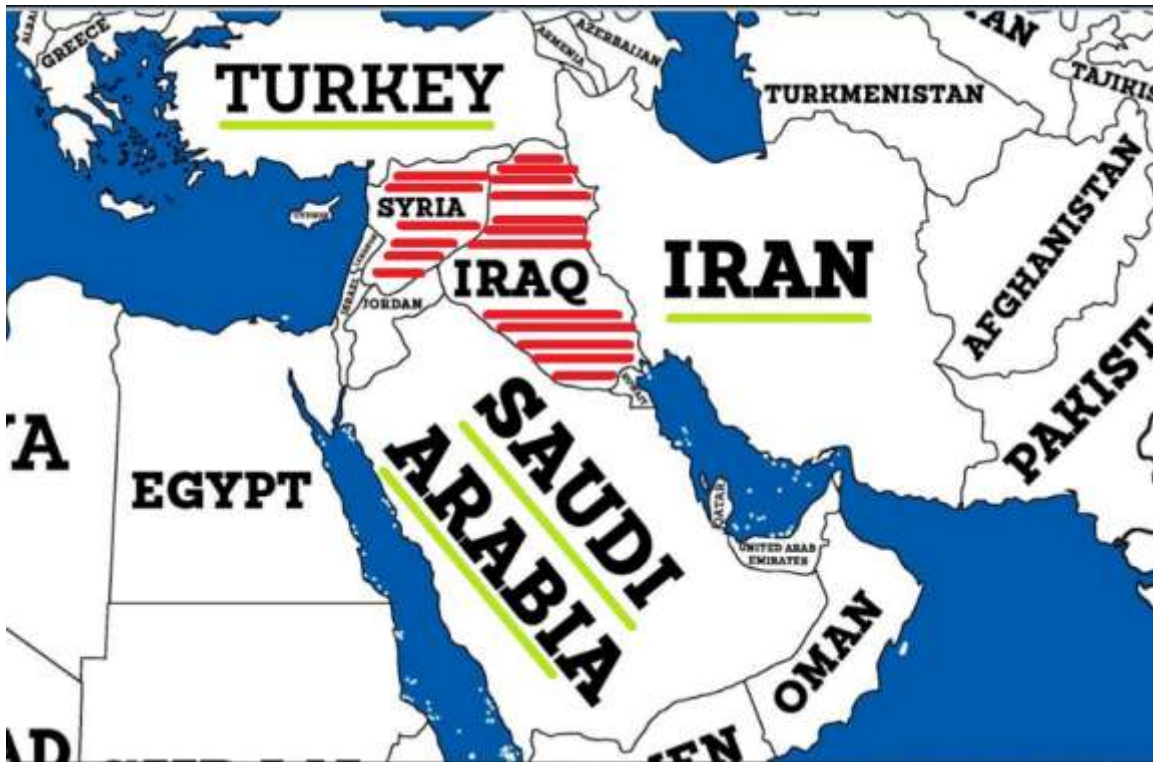
Map 2 Macedonian Empire 323 B.C.



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/49/89949-004-3D198429.gif>

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century the Persians (Iranians) found again their way to the Mediterranean Sea, through their influence in Syria and Iraq. This time it is not the Greeks that will try to stop them, but an unholy alliance between the Arabs and the Turks. The Arabs and the Turks have a common interest to reduce the Persian (Iranian) influence over the Silk Roads, but each one of them wants greater control over the Silk Roads for himself. That's why I call their alliance "unholy".

Map 3 (Arabs+Turks) VS Iranians



## Alexander the Great and the Silk Roads

The following map shows the ancient Silk Roads, which were trade routes that connected East Asia to Europe. With blue you can see the sea routes and with red the land routes.

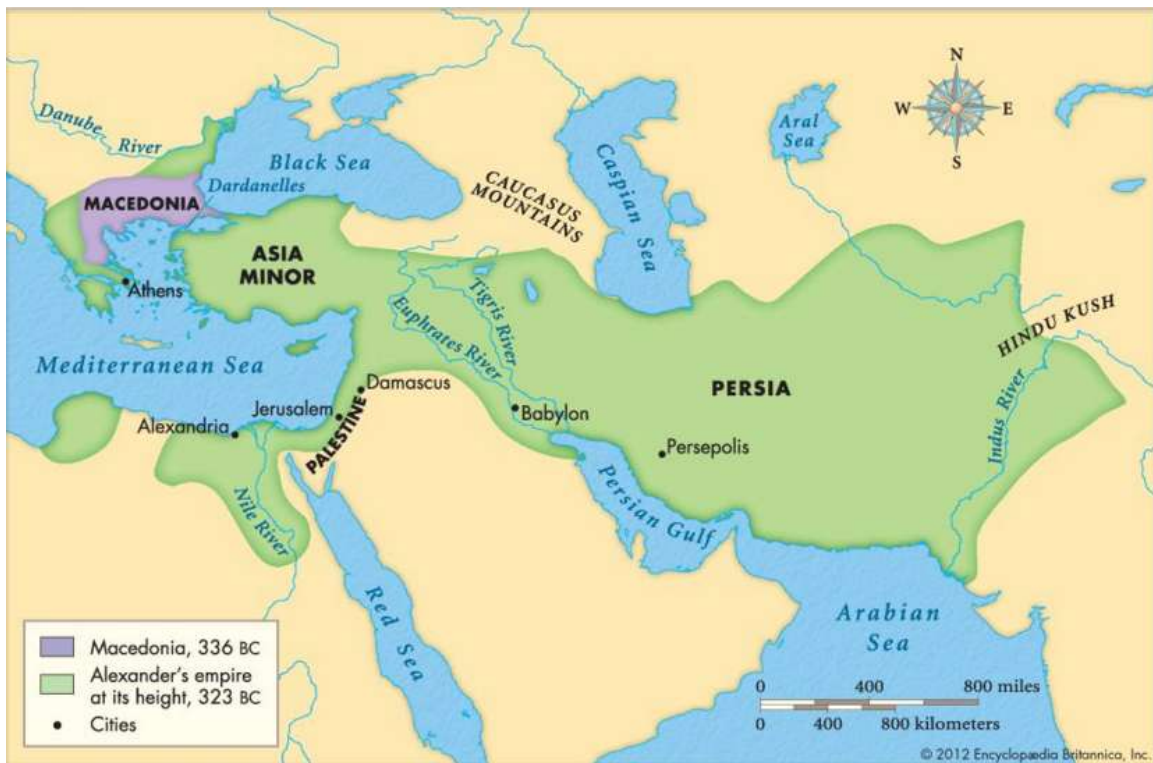
Map 1 : The Silk Roads



[https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%94%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%82%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%8D#/media/File:Silk\\_route.jpg](https://el.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CE%94%CF%81%CF%8C%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%82%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%B5%CF%84%CE%B1%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%8D#/media/File:Silk_route.jpg)

A large part of the wars in history were due to the effort of controlling the Silk Roads, in order to secure the trade routes, to cut out parties that were charging commissions and taxes, and to block competing trading routes. The Greek King Alexander the Great conquered Persia (Iran) and Egypt, and he had the Silk Roads under his control, as you can see at the following map.

Map 2 Empire of Alexander the Great 323 B.C.



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/49/89949-004-3D198429.gif>

I must say that the Silk Roads did not include any 100% sea route until the Suez Canal was opened by the British in 1869, when the Red Sea was finally connected to the Mediterranean Sea. Until then the sea routes of the Silk Roads would reach Egypt through the Red Sea, then they would become land routes, and in the Mediterranean Sea they would become sea routes again.

There was of course Vasco Da Gama and the Portuguese, who discovered the sea route around Africa in 1497-1499. The Portuguese wanted to avoid the Mediterranean Sea and the taxes charged by the Ottomans, and when they defeated the Ottomans at the sea-fight of Diu (India) in 1509, they managed to keep a small portion of the trade around Africa. But Da Gama's new trade route was not a replacement for the traditional Silk Roads, which are the most efficient connection between Europe and Asia. Inhospitable and costlier Siberia could not be a substitute for the Silk Roads either.

Map 3 The New Trade Route Opened by Vasco Da Gama in 1499

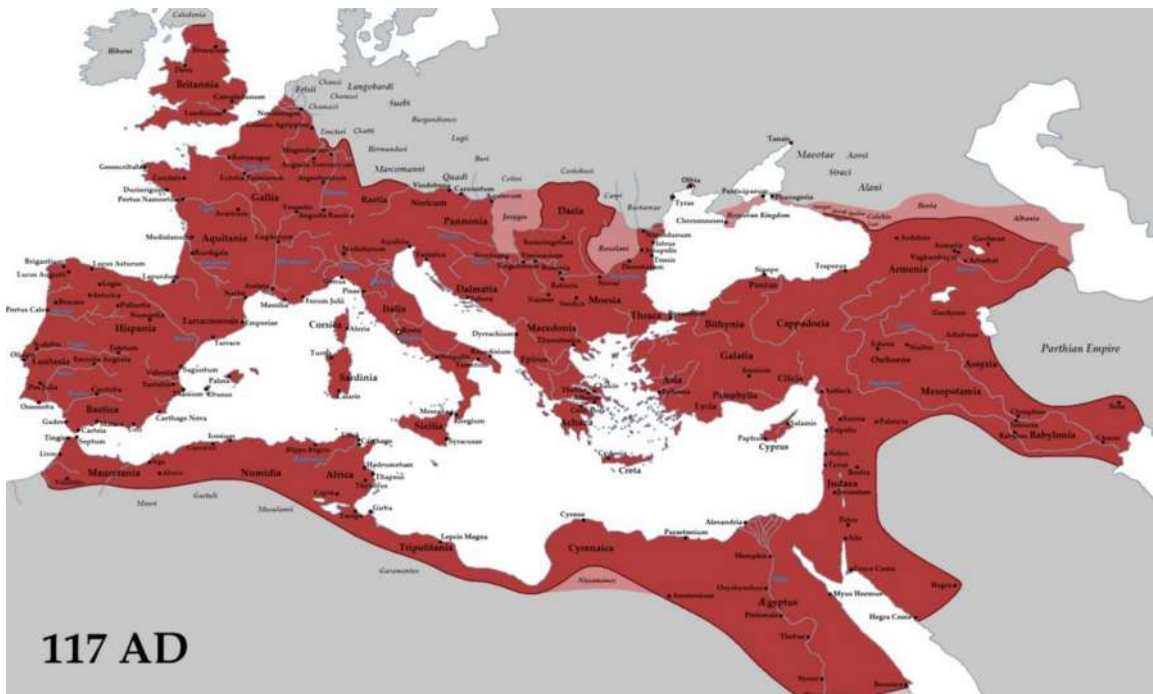


See also Vasco Da Gama and the Silk Roads

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/09/06/vasco-da-gama-and-the-silk-roads/>

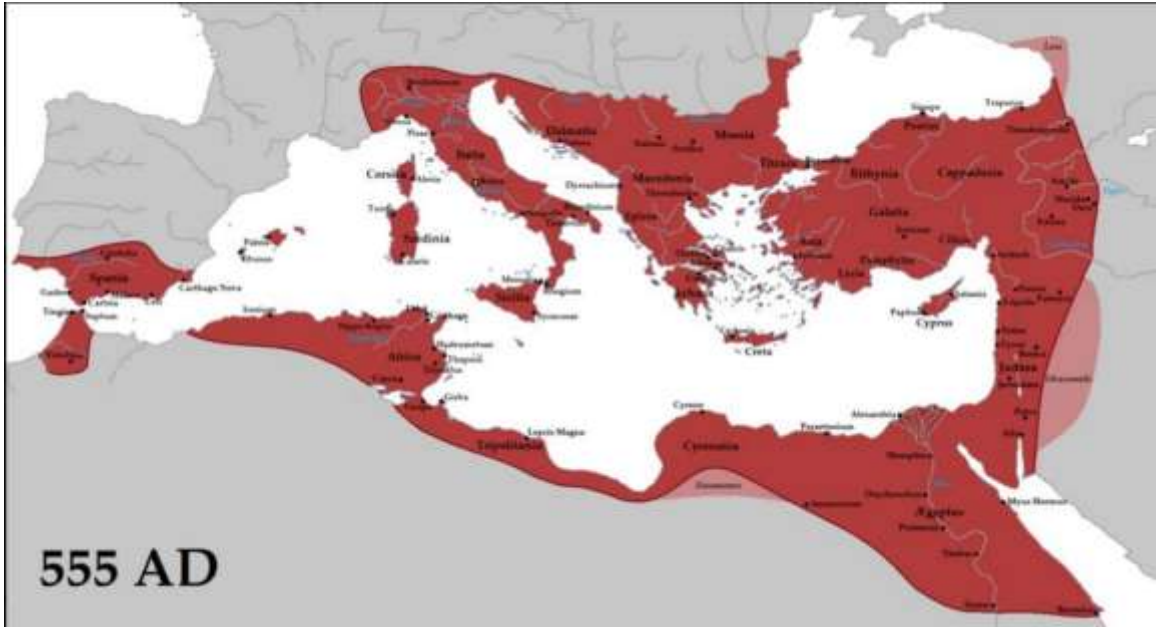
You can see on the map how important Egypt, Turkey and East Mediterranean Sea (Israel+Lebanon+Syria) are for the Silk Roads. That's the reason the Greek King Alexander the Great was among those who conquered these lands. Many other did the same, with the Romans, the Byzantines and the Ottomans among them.

Map 4 Roman Empire 117 A.D.



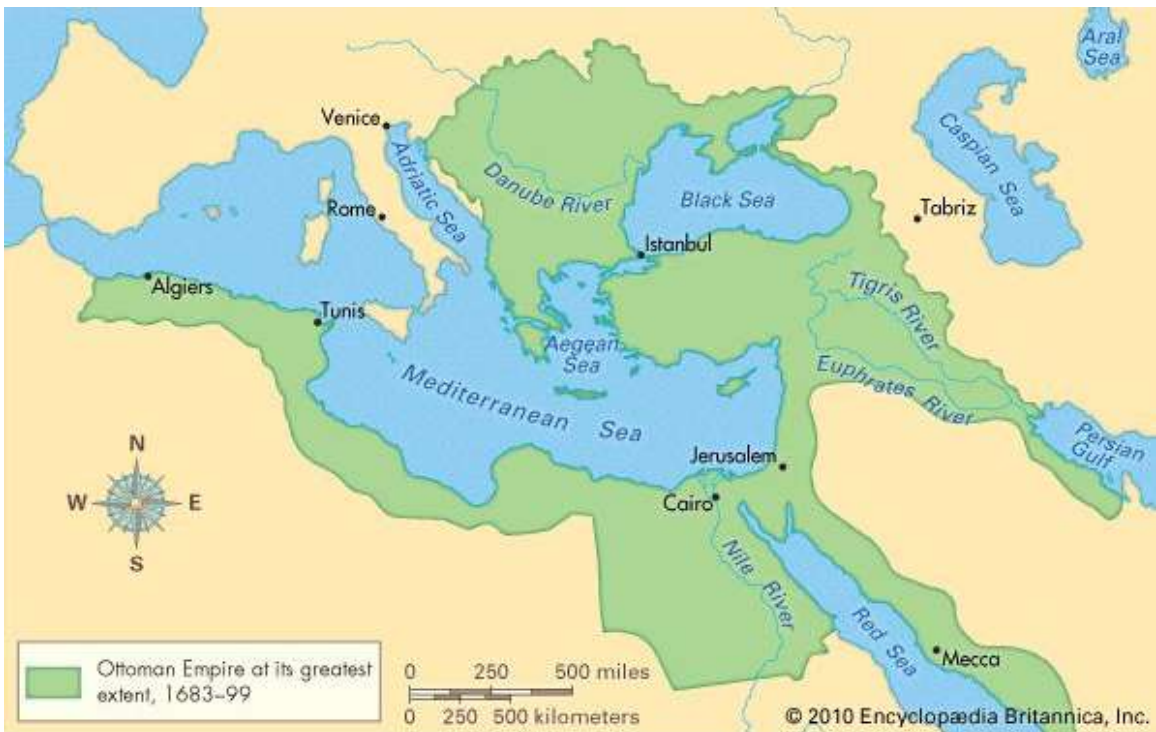
[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Roman\\_Empire\\_Trajan\\_117AD.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Roman_Empire_Trajan_117AD.png)

Map 5 Byzantine Empire 555 A.D.



[http://iakovosal.blogspot.gr/2015/12/blog-post\\_33.html](http://iakovosal.blogspot.gr/2015/12/blog-post_33.html)

Map 6 Ottoman Empire 1683A.D. – 1699A.D.

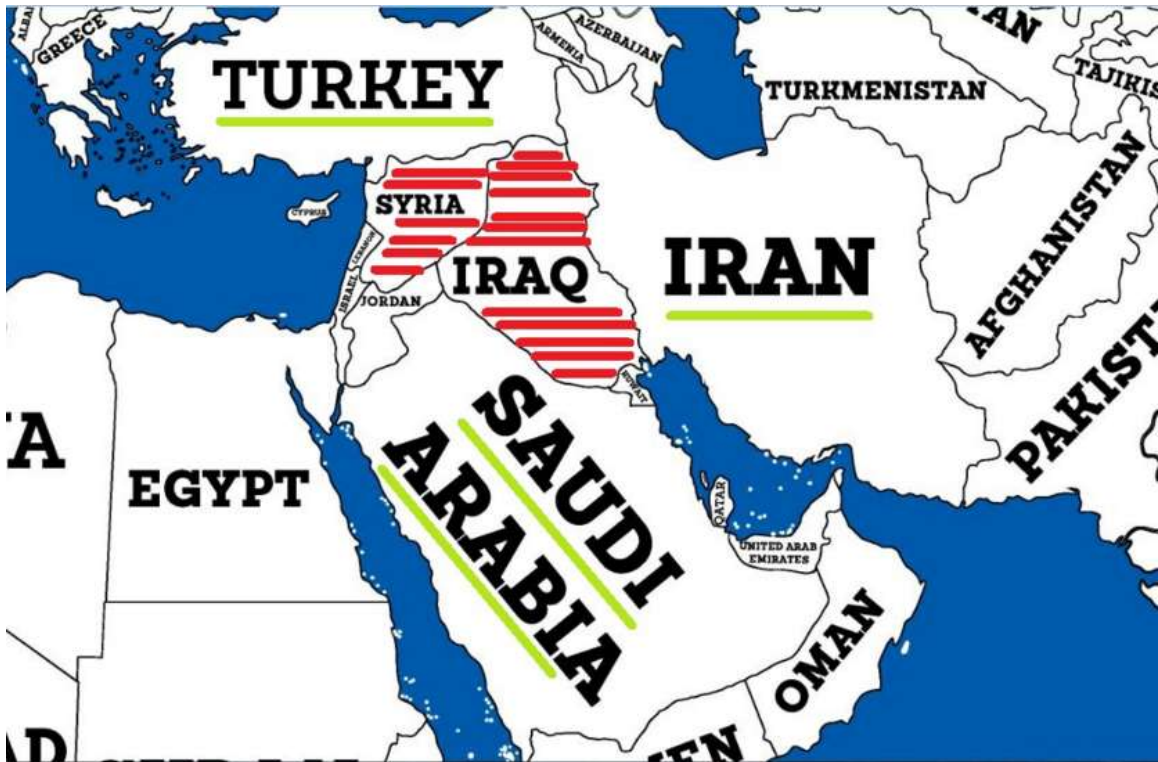


<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/83/89983-004-C90ACD71.gif>

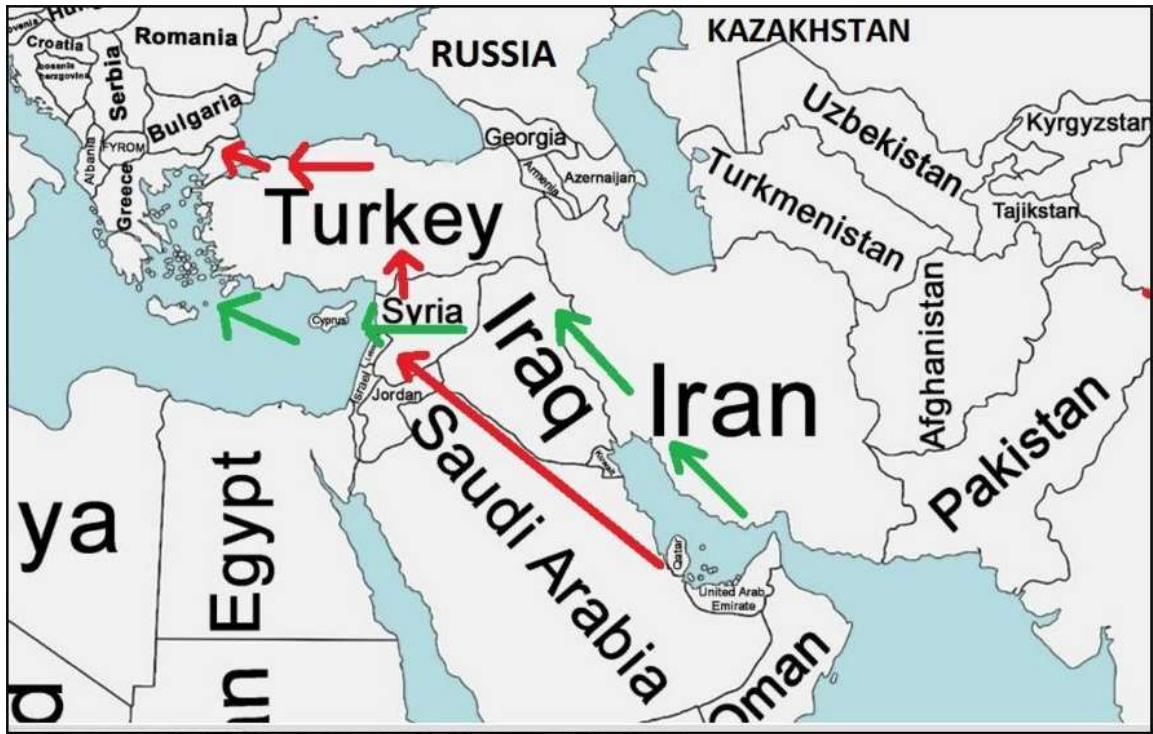


What is very important is that things are still the same, with the main trading products being oil and natural gas, instead of silk and spice. There is still a war for the Silk Roads, with the Persians (Iranians) trying to reach the Mediterranean Sea (Iran-Syria pipeline), and the Turks and the Arabs trying to stop them (Qatar-Turkey pipeline). In the meantime the Turks and the Arabs are fighting each other for influence too. Actually there are Arabs that are today supporting the Persians i.e. the Alawites of Syria and the Shiites of Iraq.

Map 7 The War for the New Silk Roads in Syria and Iraq



Map 8 The Sunni VS the Shiite Pipelines



Moreover China is trying to use the New Silk Roads in order to import raw materials from the rest of the world, and to export her manufactured goods to the rest of the world. The New Silk Roads promoted by China include ports, railways, highways, natural gas and oil pipelines etc. China has worked things out with Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, who are very happy to be part of the New Silk Roads promoted by China. But then there are the Turks and the Russians, who not only want a share of the profit, but they also want a share of the political influence over the New Silk Roads, as for example is the case with Central Asia (Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan etc). See “Turkey, Russia and China in Central Asia”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/08/19/turkey-russia-and-china-in-central-asia/>

and “The War for the Railways and the Motorways of the New Silk Roads”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/09/22/the-war-for-the-railways-and-the-motorways-of-the-new-silk-roads/>

and

“China’s Silk Road project gets port in Turkey”, September 2015

<http://atimes.com/2015/09/chinas-silk-road-project-gets-port-in-turkey/>

“China all aboard Turkish high-speed rail effort”, June 2015

<http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/China-all-aboard-Turkish-high-speed-rail-effort>

There is also India, which is China’s economic rival, and wants to have influence in the New Silk Roads too.

You can see that it is geography and not history repeating itself. History is limited by geography and therefore history always follows geography. The phrase “history is repeating itself” is not accurate. By saying “geography is repeating itself”, “geography does not change”, “the revenge of geography”, or something like that, one can be a great deal more accurate. Things are a lot simpler when the focus is put on geography. When the emphasis is on geography one simply needs to find which were the main powers of the time, what they were trading, and through which routes they were trading it.

I must also say that Turkey’s neo-Ottoman policy, as envisioned by Erdogan and Davutoglu today, aims in putting under Turkish control the new Silk Roads. The map of the Caliphate that ISIS gave to the media puts the New

Silk Roads under Turkish control. By doing so, ISIS will also operate as a cartel of oil and natural gas. See “ISIS: The Oil and Natural Gas Cartel”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/12/29/isis-an-oil-and-natural-gas-cartel/>

Map 8 : ISIS Map



<http://www.breitbart.com/national-security/2014/07/01/isis-releases-map-of-5-year-plan-to-spread-from-spain-to-china/>

## Vasco Da Gama and the Silk Roads

In the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1450 AD) the spices and silk of Asia were reaching Europe through the Red Sea and North Africa. That was the sea part of the Silk Roads. I must add that at the time the British had not yet constructed the Suez Canal which later connected the Red and the Mediterranean Seas.



The commerce of spices and silk was controlled by Arab merchants at the East Mediterranean Sea, and from there by the merchants of Venice (see red dot on Italy at the following map). Therefore the Western Europeans had to pay the profits of the merchants from Venice and Egypt, and whatever duties and taxes had to be paid on top of these profits.

At the calm sea of the Mediterranean Sea the Portuguese ships could not confront the ships of the Venetians and the Ottomans which were larger and had more powerful cannons, but the Portuguese had an advantage at the oceans, because the Portuguese had more skills and their ships were easier to maneuver. The Portuguese started using the Atlantic Ocean and West Africa in order to open trade corridors, but their biggest success was when Vasco da Gama managed sail around Africa and reach India in 1499. In 1509 the Portuguese defeated the Ottoman navy near Diu of India (see red X on the map).

Therefore the Portuguese managed to keep a part of the trade of spices and silk around Africa and towards Western Europe, creating various strongholds on this corridor.

## **The War for the Railways and the Highways**

I always write about the oil and energy wars, because energy is the main cause of war and the main determinant of the geopolitical landscape. However there are other factors, of minor importance of course, which affect the geopolitical landscape i.e. arms sales, disputes about the waters of shared rivers etc. The railways and highways of the New Silk Roads, which are promoted by China, are one such factor. It is true of course that railway and highway networks are related to energy, because they make easier the transportation of energy resources. Remember that the Baghdad Railway, which would connect Germany with the oil fields of Iraq, which at the time was under Ottoman control, was one of the major causes of the First World War.

I have mentioned in the past the disagreement between China and Turkey over the Muslims (Uyghurs) of Xin Jiang, which is the western province of China, and where the terrorist organization of East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) operates. Turkish nationalists call the Xin Jiang province East Turkestan. The ETIM terrorist organization is influenced by ISIS, and it is not a secret that Turkey has quite some influence over ISIS. See “Turkey VS China”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/07/21/turkey-vs-china/>

See also “Turkey, Russia and China in Central Asia”.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/08/19/turkey-russia-and-china-in-central-asia/>

Map 1 Rough map of Xin Jiang



Through pipeline networks Xin Jiang connects China with the oil of Kazakhstan and the natural gas of Turkmenistan. Moreover the Russo-Chinese Altai pipeline will cross Xin Jiang if ever constructed. The Altai and the Power of Siberia pipelines are two natural gas pipelines that China and Russia agreed to build in the summer of 2014. The New Silk Roads promoted by China will also have to cross Xin Jiang. The New Silk Roads are a network of railways, highways and ports, which will bring to China resources from around the globe, and which will allow China to export her products to the rest of the world much faster. There is not an exact map of the New Silk Roads, because some projects are planned but cancelled, and some new ones are brought forward.



You can see the following Financial Times map, but this map might look different after a couple of years. But this is the main idea.

## Map 2 The New Silk Roads



<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/3/e9dcd674-15d8-11e5-be54-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3mRrD0c21>

Kazakhstan wants to play a major role in the New Silk Roads, and Kazakhstan is already important in that respect, since the Turkmen and Kazakh gas and oil travel to China through Kazakhstan. However as you can read at the following article from the Astana Times of Kazakhstan, titled “Major Transport Corridor to Connect Kazakhstan, Russia, China by 2015”, February 2015, China and Kazakhstan have agreed to the construction of the Western Europe-Western China Transport Corridor, which will connect China to Western Europe through Kazakhstan and Russia. The project is also supported by the European Union, and it definitely involves a road network. I am not sure if it also involves a railway network.

“Major Transport Corridor to Connect Kazakhstan, Russia, China by 2015”,  
February 2015

1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraphs

*Russia, China and the European Union have signed new agreements with Kazakhstan giving the go-ahead to complete the Western Europe-Western China international transport corridor by 2015.*

*The new transportation corridor is the largest project of its kind ever undertaken in the history of Central Asia.*

4<sup>th</sup> Paragraph

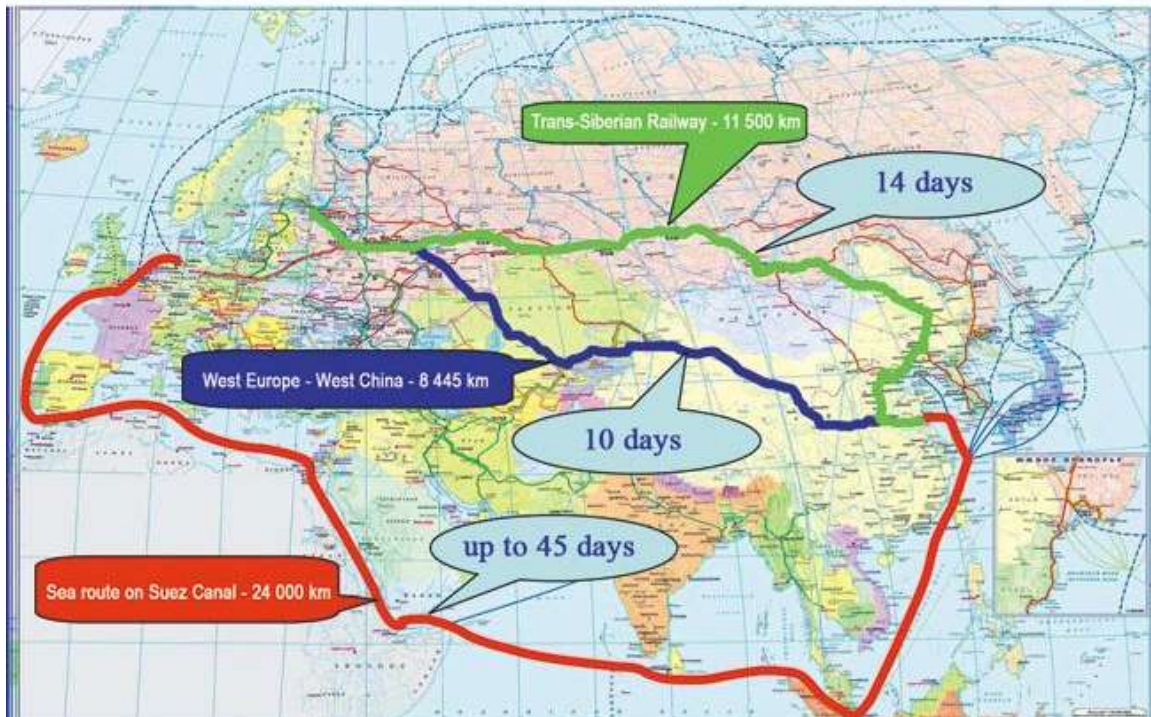
*Some 2,452 kilometres (1,523.6 miles) of the new roads will be constructed in Kazakhstan. That programme will cost 825.1 billion tenge (\$5.47 billion) and involve 1,390 kilometres (863.7 miles) of the Kyzylorda – Turkestan – Shymkent – Taraz – Almaty – Khorgos highway to Category I standards with four-lane highways and 1,062 kilometres (659.9 miles) of the route from the Russian border through Martuk, Aktobe, Karabutak, and Kyzylorda) to Category II standards. Conditions for turns, visibility and angles on inclines and descents will be substantially improved.*

<http://astanatimes.com/2013/02/major-transport-corridor-to-connect-kazakhstan-russia-china-by-2015-2/>

The Astana Times article also includes a map of the Western Europe-Western China transport corridor, and it claims that this is the fastest connection between China and Western Europe, at least when compared to the Trans-Siberian railway and the sea routes of the New Silk Roads. For the article’s map see the following map.

Map 3 Western Europe-Western China Transport Corridor

## Eurasian Transport Corridors



However in 2010 China had also promised Turkey that she would construct a super fast railway network connecting China and Turkey, which would be funded by China. However until recently China had done nothing about it, as you can read at the following Asia Nikkei Review article, titled “China all aboard Turkish high-speed rail effort”, July 2015. The Asia Nikkei Review belongs to one of the Japan’s largest news group. China promises infrastructure projects to all countries, and it is not always easy to go ahead with all these projects in order to keep everyone happy.

“China all aboard Turkish high-speed rail effort”, July 2015

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Paragraphs

*Chinese President Xi Jinping and his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, agreed here Wednesday to pursue greater economic cooperation between their countries, with China seeking to move forward on rail exports.*

*Erdogan is making his first visit to China since becoming Turkey's president after a lengthy stint as prime minister. His country lies at the junction of Europe and Asia, which Xi envisions linking with his "One Belt, One Road" vision -- a 21st-century take on the ancient Silk Road. Turkey also counts itself among the founding members of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. A delegation of more than 100 Turkish business representatives is accompanying Erdogan in China.*

*The two countries agreed back in 2010 to plans for a major Turkish railway buildup with Chinese money and technology. But nothing has come of that deal. Last July, Erdogan, then prime minister, said Turkey aims to lay roughly 3,500km of high-speed rail. That month saw the opening of a fast connection between Istanbul and Ankara.*

*Xi and Erdogan may have discussed Turkish plans to build a third nuclear power plant, the subject of negotiations involving China Nuclear Power Engineering and U.S. plant builder Westinghouse, a unit of Japan's Toshiba.*

*Turning to matters of security, the two leaders agreed to coordinate their countries' efforts against terrorism. China fears that members of its Muslim population are heading off to join the Islamic State -- and that they will return home radicalized. Xi and Erdogan are thought to have discussed Turkish protests over Chinese religious policy toward Uighurs, a Turkic ethnic group who practice Islam and live mostly in China's far west.*

*The leaders also appear to have discussed a missile defense system that China is trying to sell to the Turks. Asked whether this issue came up in the summit, a senior Chinese Foreign Ministry official said that the two countries would increase cooperation on this front, suggesting it had. The U.S. and NATO, to which Turkey belongs, oppose the sale.*

<http://asia.nikkei.com/Politics-Economy/International-Relations/China-all-aboard-Turkish-high-speed-rail-effort>

Map 4



The lines on my map are rough representations and not actual representations of the transport networks.

The Turks were not happy with China's procrastination on the promised project, and the Turks might even have felt that China paid more attention to the Western Europe-Western China transport corridor which would run through Kazakhstan. However the transport corridor through Kazakhstan has not been finished either, because even though Kazakhstan has been very active on the Kazakh part, the Russians were not very active on their part of the project, as you can read at the following Asia Times article, titled "Kazakhstan breaks ground on China's New Silk Road", May 2015.

"Kazakhstan breaks ground on China's New Silk Road", May 2015

1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Paragraphs

*Kazakhstan authorities are pledging to speed up implementation of China's New Silk Road project. Their efforts will focus on the Western Europe-Western China road system, as well as other transit routes spanning Central Asia.*

*Russia, meanwhile, despite its "Ostpolitik" eastward policy shift, remains slow to develop its section of the Western Europe-Western China road system. Major showcase projects, such as the Western Europe-Western China road system, are suffering as a result.*

*For Kazakhstan, efforts to become a major transit route between Asia and Europe are a priority. On May 22, President Nursultan Nazarbayev mooted plans to finish Kazakhstan's section of the Western Europe-Western China road system by the end of 2015.*

<http://atimes.com/2015/05/kazakhstan-breaks-ground-on-chinas-new-silk-road/>

However it seems that China has now decided to bring Turkey big time into the New Silk Roads. As you can read at the article of the Nikkei Asian Review that I mentioned above, China gave the green light to the construction of the Turkish railway, and China and Turkey will also develop a nuclear plant. The article also mentions that China and Turkey have decided to work together on the issue of terrorism in Xin Jiang, which greatly worries China, because as the article mentions many Chinese Muslims join ISIS, and then they return to China as terrorists.

Moreover, as you can read at the following Asia Times Article, titled "China's Silk Road project gets port in Turkey", September 2015, China bought a part of the Turkish port of Ambarli at the European part of Constantinople (Istanbul). The article mentions also the disagreements between Turkey and China over the Muslims (Uyghurs) of Xin Jiang, and it

reckons that Turkey's inclusion in the New Silk Roads will help China and Turkey to overcome their differences.

“China's Silk Road project gets port in Turkey”, September 2015

<http://atimes.com/2015/09/chinas-silk-road-project-gets-port-in-turkey/>

Map 5



One has to remember that there are three main powers which support Islamist terrorists i.e. the Arabs of the Gulf, Iran and Turkey. Pakistan, Sudan and other countries run by Islamic regimes also support Islamist terrorists, but the three main powers are the ones I mentioned. China buys tons of oil and natural gas from the Arabs and the Iranians, and she can ask them to be good boys and behave themselves. Moreover, with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), China will invest billions in Pakistan, and Pakistan will have to be a good boy too. If China wants Turkey to behave, she must be careful not to exclude Turkey from the Chinese

investments. By including Turkey in the New Silk Roads, China not only will have Turkey's support when dealing with the Islamists of Xin Jiang, but she will be able to send her products to Europe through Turkey and Constantinople (Istanbul). Constantinople (Istanbul) has been for centuries the most important point of both the terrestrial and the sea routes of the Silk Roads.

The problem for China is that the oil and gas of Iran will go to China through Xin Jiang, and that will make the Arabs of the Gulf very unhappy. And if the Russo-Chinese Altai pipeline comes to life, the Russian gas will also go to China through Xin Jiang, which will make both the Arabs and the Iranians unhappy. But as long as China remembers to buy oil and gas from everybody, everybody will try to stay calm. Actually Russia is always proposing to the Arabs and the Iranians not to mess with the European market in order for Russia not to mess with the Asian markets.

Before closing I must also say that Turkey already has a very close cooperation with Russia on the energy sector, since Turkey is the second largest importer of Russian natural gas, second only to Germany, and Turkey's inclusion in the New Silk Roads will affect the Turkish foreign policy in the same way that the Russian natural gas does. That will make the American-Turkish relations even more problematic.



## **Who is Responsible for the War and the Immigrants**

Who is responsible for the war in Iraq and Syria, and for the hundreds of dead, wounded and dislocated people? The socialist propaganda says that it is the Americans who have caused these wars. But this is a terrible lie. It is true that the United States attacked Saddam Hussein in 2003. Saddam Hussein was a Russian ally and the socialist dictator of Iraq. The Americans could have overturned Saddam in 1991, when they again attacked Iraq, when Saddam invaded Kuwait and set its oilfields on fire. They did not do it at the time, even though they destroyed his army and reached Baghdad.

However they did overturn him in 2003. Was that something wrong? Saddam Hussein was oppressing the Iraqi Kurds, and he was a Sunni Muslim, who was governing a country with a majority of Shiite Muslims. The Sunni minority of Saddam Hussein was not only oppressing the Iraqi Kurds, but it was also oppressing the majority of the Iraqi Shiite Muslims. After Saddam's overturn in 2003, the Iraqi Shiites, who were the majority, took control of the country, and the Iraqi Kurds could finally leave without fear.

It was not the overturn of Saddam Hussein that caused the war of 2011, which in turn caused thousands of immigrants. It was something very different. In 2009 Turkey and Qatar asked the Arabs of Syria to agree on the construction of the Qatar-Turkey Pipeline (red line), which would send Arab natural gas to Turkey and Europe. The Syrians refused, even though this pipeline would be to Syria's interest too, because this pipeline would harm

the economic interests of Gazprom in Europe, and Russia is a Syrian ally. Then, the Russians proposed to construct the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline (green line), in order to block for good the Qatar-Turkey pipeline.

Picture 1



The Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline would still compete with Gazprom in Europe, but it would be harmless when compared to a Turkish-Arab pipeline that would run through Turkey. Moreover the Iran-Syria pipeline would be controlled by Gazprom. The Iraqis and the Syrians agreed to the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipeline, and that infuriated the Turks and the Arabs, who attacked Syria and Iraq. That's the cause of the war. What could have the Americans done? Ask the Syrians to allow the Qatar-Turkey pipeline? Or ask the Russians not to push the Iran-Syria pipeline in order not to infuriate the Turks and the Arabs? What could they have done?

Gazprom did not need the natural gas of the region. Russia is the richest country in the world in terms of natural gas reserves. The only reason the Russians decided to promote the Iran-Syria pipeline was to block the Qatar-Turkey one. For the Americans it would be better if both the Qatar-Turkey and the Iran-Syria pipeline were constructed, because that would mean lower prices. The war in Syria and Iraq was very good for Russia but very bad for the Americans.

Moreover, the Russians supply with arms the Kurds of the PKK in Eastern Turkey (purple X), in order to prevent the construction of the Southern Energy Corridor (TANAP-TAP pipelines), which will transfer natural gas from the Caspian Sea and the Middle East to Europe through Turkey, hurting Gazprom. How can the Americans stop the Kurds of the PKK from attacking the Turks? The war between the PKK and Turkey is good only for Russia. The Americans want peace in Eastern Turkey in order for the Southern Energy Corridor to go ahead.

Moreover, is it a US fault that the Saudis and the Iranians are two of the richest in oil countries in the world, and they kill each other over their oil exports? What can the Americans do about that? The war is not good for the Americans. The Americans are oil importers and they want low prices. The oil wars lead to higher oil prices. This is good for Russians who are oil exporters. It is not the Americans who are responsible for the war in Syria and Iraq and for all these immigrants.

For more details see

“USA, Russia & China in the Middle East”

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/01/12/usa-russia-china-in-the-middle-east-alliances-conflicts/>

Picture 2



## Turkey, Russia and China in Central Asia

At the following Wikipedia map, from the article “List of Turkic dynasties and countries”, you can see the Turkic countries. The term “Turkic” refers to the countries that are either of Turkic origin or they are Turkic speaking.

Picture 1



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_Turkic\\_dynasties\\_and\\_countries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Turkic_dynasties_and_countries)

The list of Turkic countries includes Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. Tajikistan has ethnic and linguistic ties with Iran and not Turkey, and that’s why Tajikistan does not appear with red on the map. There is even a Turkic Council, which has its base in Constantinople (Istanbul), and its members are Turkey, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have decided not to join the council, but they are welcome to join in the future if they decide so.

I have mentioned many times the great importance of the countries of Central Asia i.e. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, since two of them are very rich in oil (Kazakhstan) and gas (Turkmenistan). I have also mentioned many times Turkey's efforts to send the oil and natural gas of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to Europe, in order to keep a part of it, in order to earn huge transit fees, and finally in order to increase her geopolitical significance. But Turkey is not only interested in making some energy deals with the countries of Central Asia. As you can see at the following map, the countries of Central Asia are ex-members of the Soviet Union, and they are weak and unstable countries, encircled by Russia, China, Turkey and Iran. The countries of Central Asia are at the epicenter of the energy policies of these four countries.

Picture 2

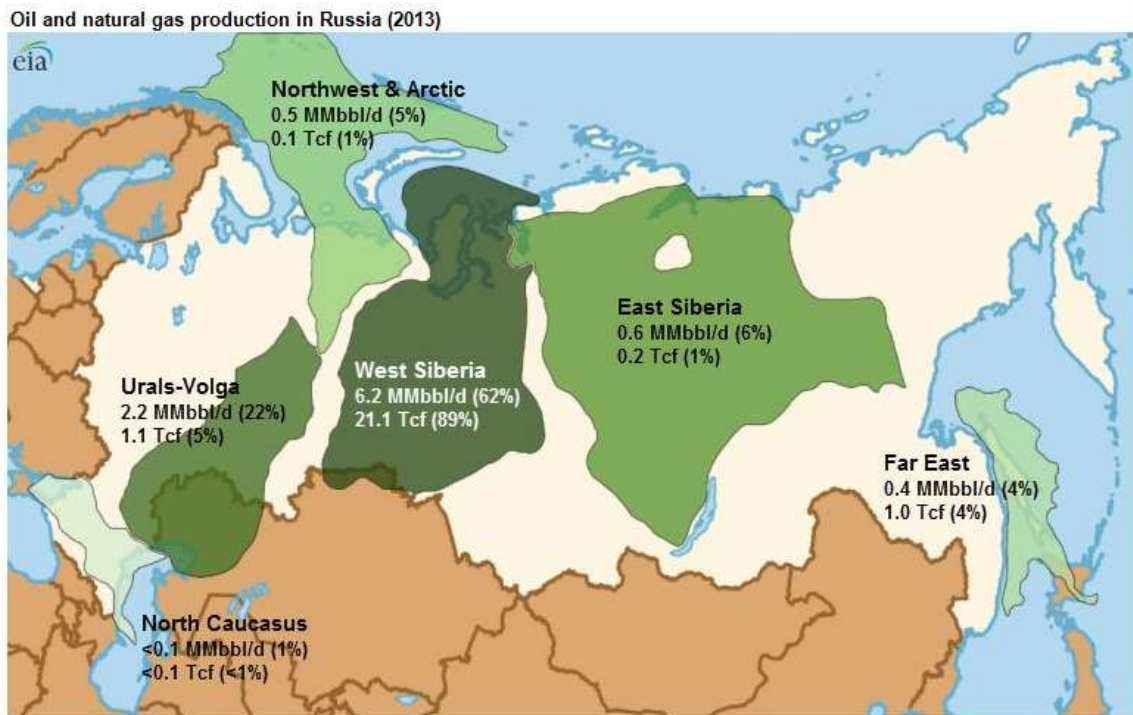


Turkey wants to send their natural gas and oil to Europe in order to reduce her dependence on Russia, but also to earn transit fees and increase her geopolitical significance. Turkey's advantage is that it offers an alternative to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, two countries which are surrounded by two competitors, Iran and Russia, and only one buyer i.e. China. These countries want to reduce their dependence on China, and get rid of Russia's pressures.

China wants to absorb the oil and gas of the region, in order to avoid the sea lanes, where the American Navy is dominant, but also because the oil and gas of Central Asia is a cheap source of energy for China, due to China's geographical proximity with Central Asia.

Russia wants to prevent the oil and gas of Central Asia from reaching the European markets, where Russia is the dominant player. Russia is annoyed by the increased Chinese influence in Central Asia, but Russia puts up with the Chinese influence, because by absorbing the resources of the region, the Chinese make it harder for the oil and gas of the region to reach to Europe. However it must be noted that the increased cooperation between China and Central Asia will at some point bring military cooperation too, and that's a problem for Russia, because Central Asia is located under West Siberia, and most of the Russian oil (62%) and natural gas (89%) production comes from West Siberia, as you can see at the following Energy Information Administration map. You can see that West Siberia is located above Kazakhstan, and it lies after the Ural Mountains, which are Russia's natural shield at her eastern flank.

Picture 3



<http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=18051>

Therefore in the past Central Asia also worked as a security buffer for Russia, which will not be the case in the future since there will be growing Chinese presence in the area. At some point the growing economic cooperation between China and the countries of Central Asia will also develop to a military cooperation. And maybe Russia and China are currently allies, but nobody knows what will happen in the next decades, or even in the next years. In any case it is a sure thing that Russia is not glad to see China dominating a region that was traditionally influenced by Russia, and which is located under the oil and natural gas fields of West Siberia.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the countries of Central Asia were members of the Soviet Union, and they were under Russian influence. In a sense these



countries, together with the countries of Eastern Europe were Russian colonies. These countries were for Russia what the African countries were for the Europeans. But when the Soviet Union collapsed, the other three players i.e. China, Turkey and Iran, increased their influence over Central Asia. Each country has its advantages in this battle for influence.

Russia still has strong political and military ties with the region, and most of the countries are run by communist dictators who are ex members of the Soviet communist party. It is true of course that old friendships can not always prove to be as strong as economic interests. That's the reason Vladimir Putin said in 2014 that there was never a country called Kazakhstan, and that this region has always been under Russian influence, and that's how things should stay in the future, as you can read at the following Guardian article, titled "Kazakhstan is latest Russian neighbour to feel Putin's chilly nationalist rhetoric", September 2014. Putin wanted to remind to the President of Kazakhstan that he should be very careful with his relations with NATO and the West.

Russia has strong political and military power over Central Asia, but China has the economic power, because China is the largest investor in Central Asia, and it is the country that buys most of the regions oil and gas.

Iran would like to see the oil and gas of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan passing through Iran before reaching Europe and the Indian Ocean. For Iran these countries are natural competitors, but if their oil and gas was to pass through Iran before reaching the West and the South, Iran would obtain leverage over these countries. Moreover Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan

would stop pushing for solutions like the Trans-Caspian Pipeline and the TAPI Pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), which would bypass Iran, reducing the Iranian geopolitical and economic influence. See map 4.

Picture 4



As I said Russia has military and political influence over Central Asia, China has economic influence, but Turkey has cultural influence over the region, and it can also prove to be an alternative for these countries. Religion was almost banned as long as these countries were members of the Soviet Union, but things changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now Turkey can use Islam to increase her influence over Central Asia, and she can also employ Islamist fighters in order to increase her influence.

As you can read at the following Foreign Policy article, titled “IMU Members Pledge Support to ISIS”, March 2015, the Sunni Islamists of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) declared their support for ISIS i.e. the Islamic State, which is influenced by Turkey. The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan wants to overthrow the communist dictator Islam Karimov, who is an ex member of the Soviet communist party, and has been Uzbekistan’s president since the country’s independence in 1991.

If you take a look at the map, you will see that it is Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan that have a motive to cooperate with Turkey, in order to avoid their competitors Iran and Russia, and in order to reduce their economic dependence on China. Uzbekistan on the other hand is poor in energy reserves country, and it wants the oil and natural gas of the region to move eastwards, in order to pass through Uzbekistan, generating transit fees and investments for Uzbekistan.

That’s the reason relations between Turkey and Uzbekistan have been problematic as you can read at the following Hurriyet article, titled “Turkish FM in Uzbekistan to reignite relations”, July 2014. On the contrary Turkey’s relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have been great, as you can read at the following article of Daily Sabah, titled “Turkey and Kazakhstan: A relationship to cherish”, April 2015, and at Today’s Zaman article titled “Turkey, Turkmenistan seal new energy deals”, March 2015. Daily Sabah and Today’s Zaman are the English editions of the Sabah and the Zaman, two of the largest Turkish newspapers.

Turkey wants to play a dominant role in Central Asia, a region where the Muslim and Turkic element is dominant, and that's why Turkey and China have problems over the Chinese province of Xinjiang in East China, which borders Kazakhstan. In Xinjiang the Muslim element is dominant, and the Islamist organization "East Turkestan Islamic Movement" is very active. For the conflict between Turkey and China over Xinjiang also see also "Turkey VS China" at the following link.

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/07/21/turkey-vs-china/>

Picture 5



I must also say that the United States, together with India, support the TAPI pipeline (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India), because they do not want the countries of Central Asia to be dependent only on China for their exports, and they do not want India to depend on Iran for energy supplies. Moreover if the Turkmen natural gas, and later maybe the Kazakh oil, were

to reach the Indian Ocean, they could be an alternative for the oil and natural gas of the Persian Gulf. The TAPI pipeline is not a problem for Russia, but it is a great problem for the Arabs and the Iranians, who count on Asia for their oil and natural gas exports. Therefore the Arabs and the Iranians try to block TAPI in Afghanistan. For more details for the war in Afghanistan see “Pakistan VS Taliban”

<https://iakal.wordpress.com/2015/07/23/pakistan-vs-taliban/>

For the oil and natural gas fields of the region see the following map from Columbia University.

Picture 6



For the Guardian article see

“Kazakhstan is latest Russian neighbour to feel Putin's chilly nationalist rhetoric”, September 2014

6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Paragraphs

*But it is in the south, not in the north-west, that the chilly blast of Putin's rhetoric is being felt, far away from Europe and from Nato.*

*In little-noticed remarks last week, he called into question the legitimacy of the post-Soviet state of Kazakhstan while ordering the Kazakhs to be on their best behaviour when it came to serving Russian interests.*

*The remarks, to an audience of young people in Russia on Friday, sent shock waves through the central Asian republic, which also hosts a large ethnic Russian minority centred in the north on the Russian border.*

*Putin said there had never been a country called Kazakhstan, that the republic was purely the product of the current president, Nursultan Nazarbayev.*

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/01/kazakhstan-russian-neighbour-putin-chilly-nationalist-rhetoric>

For the Foreign Policy article see

“IMU Members Pledge Support to ISIS”, March 2015

<http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/03/31/imu-members-pledge-support-to-isis-pakistani-delegation-heads-to-saudi-arabia-gujarat-passes-contentious-anti-terror-bill/>

For the Hurriyet article see

“Turkish FM in Uzbekistan to reignite relations”, July 2014

3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Paragraphs

*Turkey was the first country to recognize Uzbekistan's independence in 1991. But relations with Uzbekistan began to deteriorate when Uzbek troops killed hundreds of demonstrators in the town of Andijan on 13 May, 2005, provoking an international outcry.*

*Turkey backed a U.N. resolution condemning Uzbekistan over its human rights violations in Andijan, provoking the ire of strongman Uzbek President Islam Karimov. "We are all upset that relations have not been at the desired level in recent years. We hope the current political environment will pave the way for us to enhance our relationship,"*

*Davutoğlu* *said.*

*Prior to his visit, Davutoğlu referred to the halt in Turkish and Uzbek relations since 2006 as a "misunderstanding."*

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-fm-in-uzbekistan-to-reignite-relations.aspx?pageID=238&nID=68947&NewsCatID=510>

For the Daily Sabah article see

"Turkey and Kazakhstan: A relationship to cherish", April 2015

1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Paragraph

*t year, Kazakhstan will celebrate the 25th year of its independence. With a population of over 17 million and a large landmass, it is one of the pivotal states of Central Asia. It is also strategically situated between two major powers: Russia and China. Kazakhstan has extensive economic and political relations with Europe and the U.S. This makes Kazakhstan a country of 'balance-politics,' where the Kazakh leadership seeks a foreign policy based on regional cooperation and global engagement. President Erdogan visited Kazakhstan on April 16-17 to hold the second meeting of the High Level Strategic Council between the two countries. Turkey was the first country to recognize Kazakhstan's independence in 1991. Nursultan Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's President, still recounts with gratitude how Turgut Ozal, President of Turkey at the time, called him only two hours after Kazakhstan declared independence. Since then, the two countries developed close relations at political, economic and cultural levels. Turkish*



*companies have completed projects worth \$20 billion. The 2014 trade volume was over \$3 billion. The goal is to reach \$10 billion over the next five years.*

## 6<sup>th</sup> Paragraph

*Many elements unite Turkey and Kazakhstan. Economic relations, as mentioned before, are gaining strength, although there is more work to be done to reach the \$10 billion trade goal. The two countries see each other as political allies, and they cooperate on numerous regional and global issues from the group of Central Asian Turkish republics to the U.N.*

<http://www.dailysabah.com/columns/ibrahim-kalin/2015/04/18/turkey-and-kazakhstan-a-relationship-to-cherish>

For the Today's Zaman article see

“Turkey, Turkmenistan seal new energy deals”, March 2015

## 1<sup>st</sup> Paragraph

*Following a meeting with Turkmen President Gurbanguli Berdimuhamedov in Ankara, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has announced that Turkey, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan will establish a trilateral mechanism on energy issues, with the first leaders' meeting to take place in Turkmenistan.*

## 6<sup>th</sup> Paragraph

*In November last year, Turkmenistan and Turkey came to a framework agreement according to which Turkmenistan will supply gas for a new pipeline project -- called the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) -- that could help Europe reduce its dependence on Russian gas imports. When Erdoğan visited Ashgabat in November he underscored that Turkey attaches great importance to the delivery of Turkmenistan's natural gas to Europe via Turkey. “Europe's energy security is important for us,” Erdoğan said at the time.*

[http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa\\_turkey-turkmenistan-seal-new-energy-deals\\_374197.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_turkey-turkmenistan-seal-new-energy-deals_374197.html)

A great article for the antagonism between Turkey, Russia and China in Central Asia is Stratfor's "Turkey's Growing Involvement in Central Asia", April 2012.

<https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/turkeys-growing-involvement-central-asia>

## China in Afghanistan

A very nice article by the German state-owned news agency Deutsche Welle, about China's role in Afghanistan. According to Deutsche Welle China did not attack the Taliban in Afghanistan on the side of the United States, but she has made great efforts in order for a truce to be reached between the Taliban and the Afghan government. The main reason China is interested in Afghanistan is because she does not want ISIS to get a foothold in Afghanistan, because that would allow ISIS to support the separatists Uyghurs in China's XinJiang province. As you can see at the following map China and Afghanistan have common borders. Actually the borders of the other Central Asian counties with China are not very secure, and ISIS could also use these countries to enter China.

Map 1 China-Afghanistan



Also note that the Sunni Islamist organization East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) is operating in XinJiang, and it is mainly supported by Turkey. As you can read at the following BBC article there is tension between Turkey and China over the very large Muslim population of XinJiang. See “China-Turkey relationship strained over Uyghurs”, July 2015.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-33440998>

I have already said that what Turkey really wants is that China heavily invests in Turkey, so that in return Turkey will use her influence over the Uyghurs and ETIM to keep things calm in XinJiang. According to Deutsche Welle many Uyghurs use fake Turkish passports to enter Pakistan and Afghanistan in order to receive military training in the Islamic military camps that operate in these countries, and which are mainly funded with Saudi money according to Deutsche Welle.

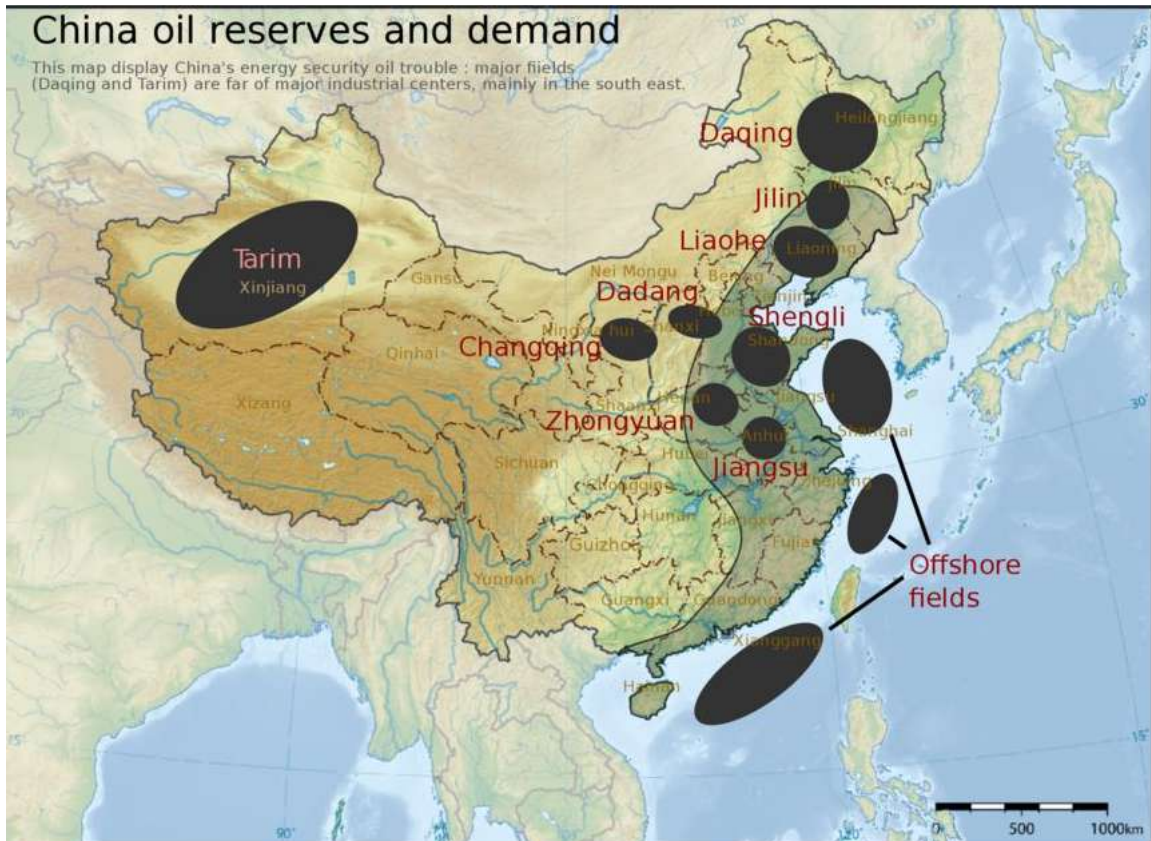
I have many times referred to the Arab and Iranian effort to block the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) Pipeline, promoted by Turkmenistan and India and supported by the United States. TAPI is for Central Asia what the Trans-Saharan Pipeline is for North Africa, and what the Qatar-Turkey and the Iran-Iraq-Syria pipelines are for the Middle East.

Map 2 TAPI



Deutsche Welle also mentions that the Uyghours believe that China is undermine their religion and culture, and that she also exploits their natural resources. As you can see at the following Wikipedia map XinJiang is among the richest, if not the richest in oil region of China.

Map 3 China's Oil Reserves



[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bb/China-Today\\_oil\\_reserves\\_and\\_demand-en.svg/2000px-China-Today\\_oil\\_reserves\\_and\\_demand-en.svg.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bb/China-Today_oil_reserves_and_demand-en.svg/2000px-China-Today_oil_reserves_and_demand-en.svg.png)

The article also mentions that China is promoting peace in Afghanistan due to the 46 billion dollar agreements she has signed with Pakistan for the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), but also due to the 10 billion dollar agreement between China and the Afghan government for the extraction of Afghan copper, which has not materialized until now due to security concerns.

I must also say that Xin Jiang is very important for China because she borders 8 countries, as you can see at the following Britannica map. Since

the ancient years and the ancient Silk Roads XinJiang was very important for China, because underneath XinJiang lie the inaccessible and hostile Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau, which are the natural borders between China and India.

Map 4 XinJiang



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/88/64288-004-91040875.gif>

Map 5 Himalayas-Tibet



[http://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/20120703-norbu\\_figure\\_1\\_tibet\\_the\\_third\\_pole.jpg](http://tibet.net/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/20120703-norbu_figure_1_tibet_the_third_pole.jpg)

Map 6 Tibet-XinJiang

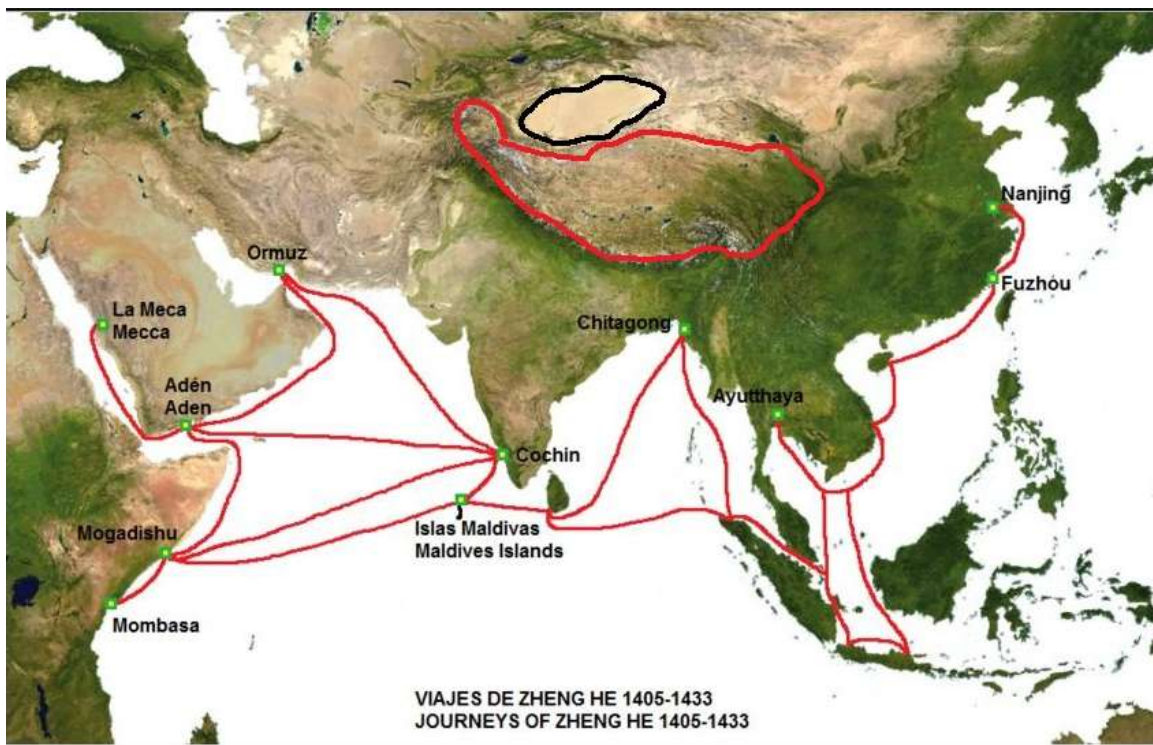




<http://www.tibettravelplanner.com/assets/images/Maps/tibet-location-map.jpg>

At the southern part of XinJiang lies the Taklamakan Desert. At the following map I have marked with red the Tibetan Plateau and with black the Taklamakan Desert.

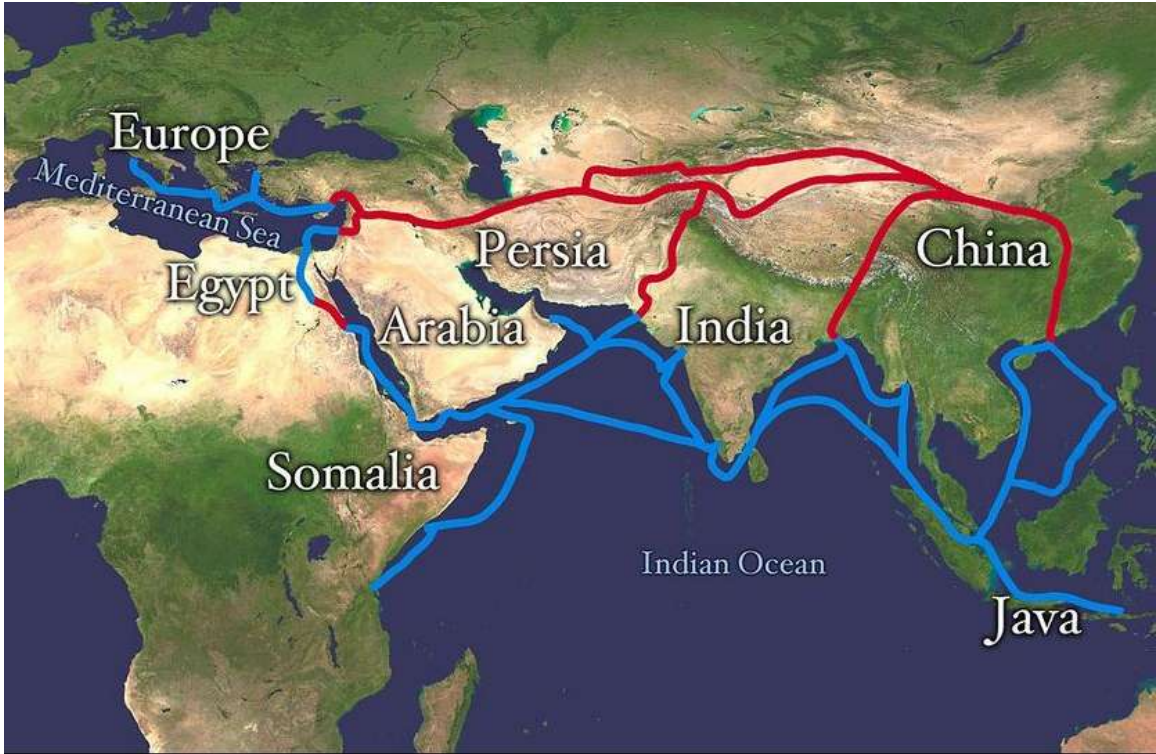
Map 6 Tibet-Taklamakan Desert



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_Road#/media/File:Zheng\\_He.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road#/media/File:Zheng_He.png)

At the following Wikipedia map you can see the ancient Silk Roads, and as you can see they pass above the Himalayas and Tibet. The Silk Roads were passing both underneath and above the Taklamakan Desert.

Map 7 Ancient Silk Roads



<http://iakovosal.blogspot.gr/2016/01/taklamakan.html>

Map 8 Taklamakan Desert



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taklamakan\\_Desert#/media/File:Tarimrivermap.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taklamakan_Desert#/media/File:Tarimrivermap.png)

For the Deutsche Welle article see:

“What does China want from the Afghan peace process”?, January 2016

8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> Paragraph

*Siegfried O. Wolf, director of research at the Brussels-based South Asia Democratic Forum (SADF), said the claims by some Chinese sources that Uighur militants use fake Turkish passports to enter Afghanistan and Pakistan to join extremist groups makes Beijing increasingly concerned about the long war in Afghanistan.*

*"In the Afghan and Pakistani camps, which are heavily funded by Saudi Arabia, Uighurs receive ideological indoctrination as well as military training," said the analyst.*

12<sup>th</sup> Paragraph

*China has also signed multibillion dollar deals with Afghanistan, some of which involve the extraction of copper from the Mes Aynak mine in Logar Province - believed to be worth \$10 billion. State-owned company China Metallurgical Group Corporation acquired the extraction rights of the mine in 2007 for \$3.5 billion (2.6 billion euros), but the project has never actually kicked off given the deteriorating security situation and poor infrastructure in Afghanistan.*

[http://www.dw.com/en/what-does-china-want-from-the-afghan-peace-process/a-19011501?maca=en-newsletter\\_asia\\_taeglich-5132-html-newsletter](http://www.dw.com/en/what-does-china-want-from-the-afghan-peace-process/a-19011501?maca=en-newsletter_asia_taeglich-5132-html-newsletter)