

INTERVIEW

Turkey sees 'strong potential' for drone development with Japan

Foreign Minister Fidan says US-Iran deal 'closer than ever,' urges middle-power cooperation



Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan speaks about the prospects for cooperation between Turkey, Japan and other "middle power" countries in an exclusive interview with Nikkei Asia. (Turkish Foreign Ministry)

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ISTANBUL -- Turkey is eager to cooperate with Japan on unmanned aerial systems, including joint development and co-production of drones, Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan told Nikkei Asia in an exclusive interview.

Highlighting Turkey's emergence as a major drone producer, Fidan said Ankara is eager to deepen defense-industrial ties with Tokyo.

"Turkiye and Japan have complementary capabilities, and we believe there is strong potential for mutually beneficial collaboration," the minister said, using his country's official name.

Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle or drone technologies, for example, "have proven themselves in different operational environments and could offer valuable opportunities for joint development and co-production with Japan," he said, "particularly in areas such as coastal and border security."

Fidan added that "in aviation, particularly in unmanned aerial systems and anti-drone technologies, Turkey has developed advanced and field-tested capabilities that could provide a strong basis for collaboration."

Turkey has a thriving drone industry known for models like the Bayraktar TB2 from Baykar Technology, which Ukraine has successfully used against Russia. Another player is state-owned Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI), which makes models like the Anka, which was exported to countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia. Both companies have higher-end models as well, and according to defense industry insiders, are in competition with U.S. and Israeli defense companies for the Japanese market.

Japan, for its part, is pushing to expand its defense capabilities as a counterweight to a major [arms buildup by China](#) and global tensions. Japanese companies have shown interest in working with Turkish counterparts, with more than 10 participating in a [matchmaking event](#) in Istanbul earlier in May.

Fidan, who sat down for the interview in Ankara on May 25, called for closer cooperation among middle powers to cope with geopolitical uncertainty and the U.S. shift toward "America First" policies.

"Middle powers like Turkey, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Germany, France, [and the] United Kingdom need to cooperate even more closely," he said.

Japan is Turkey's third-largest Asian trading partner after China and South Korea, with bilateral trade reaching \$5.7 billion last year. More than \$5 billion of that consisted of Japanese exports to Turkey.

The two countries have been negotiating both an economic partnership agreement and a social security agreement for over a decade. The absence of the latter has left Japanese expatriates paying premiums in both countries.

Fidan signaled that those talks are advancing. "We are making progress on the social security agreement and the latest round of talks produced meaningful results. We hope to reach an agreement in the coming period."



Turkey has a thriving drone industry known for models like the Bayraktar TB2. (Baykar Technology)

Beyond defense, Fidan emphasized broader areas where cooperation remains underdeveloped.

"There is still enormous, untapped potential for cooperation between our countries in energy, digital transformation, aviation and space technologies, robotics and resilient supply chains," he said.

Turkey is also seeking to position itself as a key player in critical minerals. It says it has discovered substantial [rare-earth reserves](#) in Beylikova, in the northwestern province of Eskisehir.

Fidan outlined Ankara's longer-term industrial ambitions: "Strategic objective is not simply extraction, but producing high-value-added intermediate and end products. In that sense, cooperation with Japanese technology and investment could create a true win-win partnership, and we are ready to work closely with Japan in this field as well."

The minister, who led Turkey's National Intelligence Agency (MIT) for more than a decade before taking his current role in 2023, is a close confidant of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and seen as a key architect of Ankara's foreign policy. As the top diplomat, he is at the forefront of regional diplomacy regarding several conflicts -- in Ukraine, Gaza and Iran.

Turkey is supporting Pakistan's efforts to mediate between the U.S. and Iran, alongside other regional countries such as Qatar. On the Iran-U.S. negotiations, Fidan said that "both sides want to reach a positive conclusion. An agreement is closer than ever."

He said that with a ceasefire in place between Iran, the U.S. and Israel, discussions are focusing on the Strait of Hormuz -- the crucial waterway for oil trade that has been disrupted since the end of February. The parties have outlined a plan stating that if a final agreement on reopening the strait is reached, they will "move on to nuclear talks."

The de facto blockade of Hormuz is "putting too much pressure on both" the U.S. and Iran, while "the international impact -- including on energy security, food security, and rising prices -- is immense," he said. "This has become a situation that takes priority over the nuclear files."

Fidan believes that if the U.S. and Iran agree to end hostilities, discussions on a peace plan for the Gaza Strip can accelerate.

During a late-May call with Middle Eastern leaders, U.S. President Donald Trump urged Turkey to join the Abraham Accords, a set of agreements that normalized relations between Israel and a handful of Arab states during Trump's first presidency.

Asked about the proposal, Fidan pointed to Ankara's long-standing ties with Israel.

"Turkey and Israel have had diplomatic relations since 1949," he said, emphasizing that before Israel's war in Gaza, "we were enjoying \$10 billion trade."

He added that Turkey "made it very clear when we stopped the trade, Israel must stop killing Palestinians and must stop preventing Gazans from having access to basic human needs such as food, shelter, medicine, water. If these are met, we can go back to normal life, no problem. We want to achieve a two-state solution."

Fidan brushed off remarks by Israeli politicians portraying Turkey as a potential future strategic threat.

"In Israeli domestic politics, unfortunately, they need an enemy to make politics all the time to conduct their regional ambitions. But everybody knows Israel is not after its security, but after more land," he argued, pointing to current Israeli "occupations in Gaza, West Bank, Syria, Lebanon." The international community should "prevent Israel to further destabilize not only the regional order but the global order as well."



U.S. President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shake hands at a world leaders' summit on ending the Gaza war, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on Oct. 13, 2025. © Reuters

The foreign minister outlined a broader vision for stability based on a cooperative "regional platform."

"All the countries in the region should be committing to each other's territorial integrity, sovereignty and security," he said, describing a "golden opportunity" for states to learn from recent history and "really start having some cooperation."

This framework, he suggested, could include Pakistan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the Persian Gulf countries, and "when things come normal, maybe Iran should also be part of it."

Israel, he said, could eventually join as well if it recognizes a Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, underlining, "If that problem is solved, I think the security of Israel will be very much assisted by the regional countries, too."

Turkey will be hosting a pivotal NATO summit in July in Ankara. Fidan said Turkey would like to host leaders and defense ministers from the bloc's Indo-Pacific partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, if all allies agree. The Turkish government is working with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte to "accommodate the program," he said, hinting that [invitations are likely](#).

Asked about the chances of NATO skeptic Trump attending, Fidan struck an optimistic note, saying that President Erdogan has spoken with the U.S. president multiple times in the last month. In none of their calls did Trump say that he would not attend, according to the minister.

"So far, all our preparations," he said, "are in a way to accommodate President Trump."

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