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**BEYOND COLONIALISM:
TÜRKIYE'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO AFRICA**

Gustavo de Carvalho & Daryl Swanepoel



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BEYOND COLONIALISM: TÜRKIYE'S UNIQUE APPROACH TO AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper critically examines Türkiye's growing engagement with Africa over the past two decades, focusing on its potential to contribute to the region's peace, security, and economic development. It seeks to determine whether Türkiye's approach offers a genuine alternative to traditional global powers with historical colonial ties. It also assesses the connection between its peace and security initiatives and sustainable economic growth. The analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of Türkiye's involvement, spanning diplomacy, development cooperation, military engagement, and trade and investment. Through qualitative analysis of case studies, including its summit and educational diplomacy, and the flagship project in Somalia, the paper sheds light on the opportunities and challenges posed by Türkiye's unique approach in Africa. It concludes with recommendations for Ankara's future engagement, emphasising the need to carefully consider the continent's fragility context and potential implications on regional stability.

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Türkiye's engagement with African countries has grown considerably, indicating its intent to bolster its regional presence and contribute to peace, security, and economic development. As a rising global power, Türkiye claims to offer an alternative perspective on cooperation, differentiating itself from traditional global powers with historical colonial ties.

This burgeoning relationship could reshape the continent's geopolitical landscape, fostering a more balanced and inclusive approach to regional development. However, it is essential to critically assess the extent to which Ankara's engagement represents a genuine alternative.

The deepening connection between Türkiye and Africa is exemplified by the increase in embassies, from 12 in 2002 to 44 by 2022 (Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.), and President Erdoğan's 27 visits to African countries since 2003 – more than any other non-African leader (Mitchell, 2021). Rapid growth in trade between Türkiye and Africa, from a volume of 5.5 billion USD in 2003 to around 25 billion USD, underscores the country's diverse relationships with Africa's fastest-growing economies, with investments spanning infrastructure development, mining, and energy sectors (Orakçı, 2022).

Turkish cooperation assistance and conflict engagement, particularly in Somalia, demonstrate the inextricable link between its peace and security initiatives and economic interests. This multifaceted approach reflects a broader strategy to strengthen Türkiye's presence in the continent while promoting regional stability and development.

Türkiye's engagement in Africa brings opportunities and risks for addressing fragility and promoting regional development. To achieve this, it must consider the continent's fragility context, including weak state capacity, poor governance, political instability, and insecurity (Hoeffler, 2019).

This paper aims to critically evaluate Türkiye's role in Africa's peace and security landscape and assess the prospects for future engagement. It explores whether Türkiye's approach offers an alternative to "old colonial" strategies and its potential moderating role in Africa compared to other global powers. Additionally, it will examine the connection between the country's peace and security initiatives and sustainable economic growth, along with the tools employed to achieve these goals. This paper uses qualitative analysis to offer a comprehension of Türkiye's involvement in Africa and its possible influence on the region's stability and development.

Overcoming Fragility and Enhancing Agency: the Role of Emerging Powers in Africa

Africa, home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, has the potential to become a significant global force economically and politically. However, African nations face challenges such as a youth bulge, rapid urbanisation, natural resource management, poverty, exclusion, and socio-economic divisions (African Development Bank, 2019).

African countries experiencing fragility must reconsider their governance, institutional capabilities and develop strategies to boost their resilience. The African Development Bank identifies six factors to tackle fragility: robust leadership and governance, social inclusion and equity, economic opportunities and job creation, access to essential services, environmental sustainability, and regional cooperation (African Development Bank, 2019). These elements can foster inclusive economic growth, alleviate poverty and inequality, enhance human development, and prevent conflict.

Global powers, including China, the United States, and others, are increasingly interested in Africa, intending to expand their influence. Addressing fragility challenges requires collaboration, as these issues are too complex for any single actor to handle alone (African Development Bank, 2019). Partnerships between African nations and external powers can catalyse development and resilience building.

Traditional global powers like Europe and the United States have engaged with Africa for decades through development assistance and economic partnerships. However, maintaining these narratives presents challenges. The US has shifted its strategy to counter the rising influence of China and Russia, prioritising strategic alliances and investments over development aid. China focuses on infrastructure, resource extraction, and trade in Africa, while Russia's involvement centres on arms sales, military cooperation, and energy agreements.



African nations have increasingly acknowledged the necessity of a strategic and cohesive approach towards external actors as the global scenario increasingly becomes multipolar, especially through the African Union (AU). Emerging powers in Africa offer opportunities for resilience and stability but require a nuanced, long-term strategy.

High-level visits from Germany, Russia, France, and the US to 13 African states since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 illustrate the competition for Africa's hearts and minds (de Carvalho and Rubidge, 2022). The increased attention from global powers could benefit Africa, but it also presents challenges regarding the continent's ability to negotiate its position in the international landscape and maintain its agency. One such challenge is the risk of Africa being perceived merely as a theatre for global power competition, where it is utilised as a proxy in geopolitical rivalries.

The escalating global competition in Africa presents challenges and opportunities for Türkiye as it expands its engagement on the continent. In the following sections, the analysis will consider Ankara's potential to emerge as a moderating power, bridging the gap between the Global South and Global North. Türkiye's distinct approach could contribute to a more balanced and collaborative environment, fostering partnerships that respect African agency and address the complexities of Africa's relationship with the wider international community.

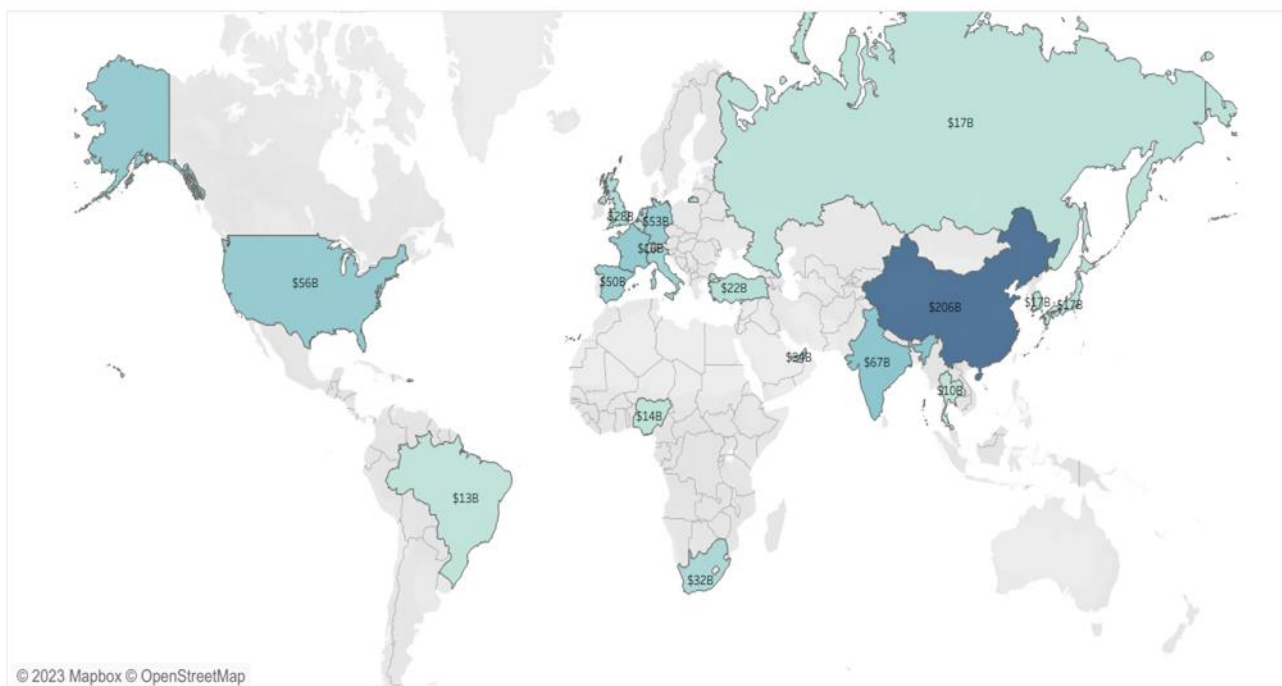
Case Study 1: Summit Diplomacy and Impact on Turkish African Policies

Africa's economic potential, natural resources, and a young population have attracted the attention of emerging countries seeking access to untapped markets (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022). As a result, international summits have been relevant for establishing institutional structures for Africa's relations with other countries and discovering areas of mutual interest (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022).

The Türkiye-Africa summits have played a crucial role in fostering Türkiye's engagement with African nations by creating institutional frameworks, exploring opportunities, and enhancing mutual understanding (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022). Three summits have been held thus far: Istanbul (2008), Malabo (2014), and Istanbul again (in 2021, despite COVID-19 restrictions). They have facilitated increased economic cooperation and investment between Türkiye and African countries, with trade volume growing significantly since the first Summit.

The Türkiye-Africa Partnership mechanism was established as a direct outcome of these summits. These gatherings have provided a platform for African countries to showcase their potential and attract investment from Turkish firms. It creates a framework for cooperation in several areas. It serves as a critical entry point for signing agreements and memoranda of understanding between Türkiye and various African countries, further formalising relations and opening the space for Turkish engagement in the continent (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022).

Africa's Top Trading Partners: 2019 Combined Trade Volume



Trade Value in USD Billions. Source: <http://wits.worldbank.org/> | Map developed by the author on Tableau

The map above shows that Türkiye's presence in Africa has become increasingly significant in recent years, largely a result of the summits and mechanisms developed thereafter. Now, as one of the top trading partners on the continent, Turkey is competing with countries like Brazil, Russia, Thailand, Japan, and Korea for access to Africa's markets and resources.

The last Summit in 2021, was co-organised with the AU, showcasing the increasing importance of continental and regional organisations in shaping Africa's engagement with global powers. Collaborations between the AU, RECs, and emerging powers like Türkiye has the potential to create a more inclusive platform for African nations, allowing them to address global challenges more effectively.

During the Summit, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated that the Summit aimed to "win with Africa and to walk together to the future" ("Africa – Turkey," 2022). Such statements showcase Türkiye's intentions not only to expand its presence in the continent but also to promote its image as a responsible global actor committed to South-South cooperation (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022).

The Summits have also been a space for further collaboration in areas of common interest in global governance. President Erdoğan's call for UN reform, emphasising his belief that "the world is bigger than five," highlights the need for a more inclusive and representative global governance system (Erdoğan, 2017).

The alignment of views between Türkiye and African nations on issues such as UN Security Council reform highlights their shared understanding of the evolving role of global powers in Africa. This strategic convergence has opened opportunities for cooperation between emerging powers and African countries, challenging existing norms and influencing global decision-making. The

discussions in these summits have played a significant role in expanding Türkiye and Africa's claims for a more equitable international order.

While the summits have positively impacted Türkiye-Africa relations, the ambitious goals outlined in the Istanbul and Malabo Declarations have not consistently been fully implemented (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022). This highlights the need for ongoing dialogue and concerted efforts to ensure that commitments are upheld, and that the partnership continues to evolve in a mutually beneficial manner. Indeed, the summits' success should be assessed concerning economic indicators and the context of political, social, and cultural exchanges between Türkiye and African nations. Establishing sustainable partnerships requires addressing various sectors' infrastructure development, regional security, and capacity-building challenges (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022).

Türkiye's historical engagements in Africa

Analysing Türkiye's historical engagements in Africa is essential for understanding the cultural and historical ties that form the foundation of its current involvement in the continent. These ties offer context for the present-day dynamics and motivations behind Türkiye's approach to African nations.

Türkiye's historical engagement with Africa can be divided into three periods, as described by Özkan (2008). The first period of relations between Turks and Africa spanned several centuries until the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923. During this time, the Ottoman State maintained substantial connections with the continent. Some African countries were entirely or partially under Ottoman rule, such as Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Niger and Chad (Özkan, 2010).

In the northern Sub-Sahara region, the Ottomans were part of the balance of powers system, forging friendships and alliances with the Kanem Bornu Empire, which still exists in today's Northern Nigeria, Niger, and Chad (Özkan, 2010). These cultural and historical ties continue to influence Türkiye's engagements in the continent, providing a foundation for its contemporary approach.

From 1923 to 1998, the second period saw Türkiye-Africa relations at their lowest point, almost non-existent due to Türkiye's focus on domestic issues and its orientation towards the West during the Cold War (Donelli, 2021). During this time, Türkiye's relations with Africa were limited to a few countries, such as Egypt and Sudan (Özkan, 2010).

The third period, which began in 1998 with the launch of Türkiye's first "Africa Opening Action Plan", marked a revival of Ankara's interest in Africa. This period represents a significant shift in Türkiye's engagement with Africa. It will be the focus of the following section, as it is most relevant to the objectives of this article.

Ankara's Foreign Policy Diversification and Africa

Despite the deep historical, cultural, and religious ties between Türkiye and the African continent during the Ottoman Empire, it was only in the late 1990s that Türkiye's connection to Africa began to develop (Turhan, 2021). The collapse of the Soviet Union significantly impacted Türkiye's foreign policy, prompting diversification and creating a more independent approach, no longer constrained by the bipolar world order. This systemic change coincided with diversifying societal and political sources influencing Turkish foreign policymaking. New uncertainties and threats emerged, leading to a renewed debate on Türkiye's international role due to ethnic conflicts and instability in neighbouring regions.

These changing geopolitical conditions resulted in differing perspectives on Türkiye's international role (Özkan and Akgün, 2010). Some advocated focusing on traditional Western allies and closer ties with Europe. In contrast, others called for diversifying foreign relations and developing stronger connections with countries in the Middle East, Eurasia, the Balkans, and Africa.

Domestic factors within Türkiye, such as the rise of religious and nationalistic groups, also contributed to the diversification process and encouraged the development of ties outside Europe (Özkan and Akgün, 2010). These groups urged governments to adopt a more independent stance from Western institutions, emphasising the importance of domestic factors in shaping Türkiye's foreign policy during that period.

This change in policy orientation can be viewed as a reassembly of its previous legacy under a different name, with Türkiye utilising its historical, cultural, and religious connections with Africa to shape its foreign policy towards the continent (Turhan, 2021). This shift is a broader trend towards a more proactive and assertive Turkish foreign approach. It aims to increase Türkiye's influence beyond its immediate neighbourhood, including new regions like Africa. Turhan (2021) highlighted the considerable impact of Turkish leaders, including Davutoğlu and Erdoğan, on shaping Türkiye's foreign policy towards Africa by prioritising cultural and historical connections with former Ottoman territories.

Turkish Development Cooperation Tools in Africa

Türkiye has been trying to develop its own approach to South-South cooperation based on its experiences from working with Balkans and Central Asia countries. Until recently, Türkiye's donor contributions were not significant in the past due to poor coordination and modest funding, but it is becoming more apparent now. Türkiye's approach to South-South cooperation aims to increase its visibility and engagement in African development projects, which has successfully achieved economic, political, and social gains in the region (Özkan, 2018).

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), an essential instrument for executing Türkiye's strategy, has notably extended its reach into the country's areas of interest in Africa. Türkiye's engagements predominantly focus on its immediate vicinity. As a result, it is no surprise that the country's most substantial contributions in Africa are allocated to Somalia and Sudan, both of which rank among the top 10 recipients of ODA from Türkiye ("Turkish Development

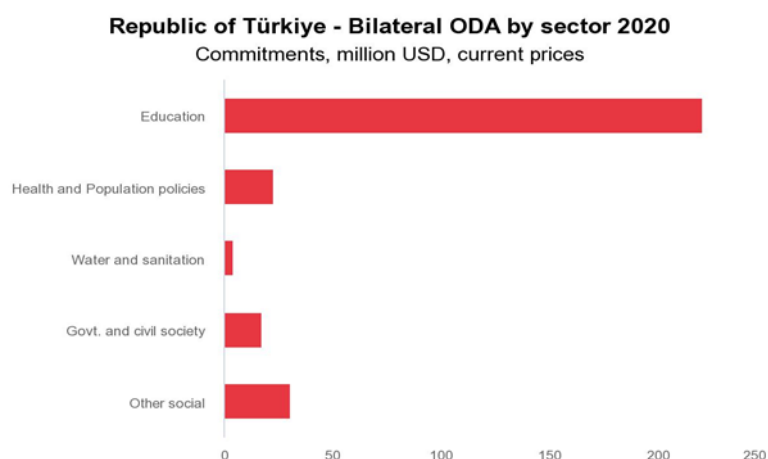
Assistance Reports - TİKA," n.d.). African nations constitute most of Türkiye's contributions to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), with countries like Somalia, Sudan, Niger, Djibouti, Chad, and Guinea ranking among the top beneficiaries ("Turkish Development Assistance Reports - TİKA," n.d.).

Türkiye's development assistance prioritises education and education policy, exceeding other sectors such as administrative and civil infrastructure, health, water, and sanitation ("Turkish Development Assistance Reports - TİKA," n.d.). As an OECD member, Türkiye's engagements align with those of other donor countries, setting it apart from emerging powers like Brazil, India, China, and South Africa. TİKA serves a critical function by facilitating Turkish government projects and directly engaging with Turkish NGOs.

In 2019, Türkiye allocated 8.6 billion USD to official development assistance (ODA), with 90% of its support targeting humanitarian and food aid (OECD, 2021). It is worth noting that only a small portion of Türkiye's aid constitutes programmable aid, subject to multi-year planning at country and regional levels. Most of Türkiye's assistance is developed case-by-case, frequently through project-specific initiatives and humanitarian responses. Among OECD members, Türkiye has one of the lowest rates of programmable aid per ODA, with approximately 7.3% of its support allocated to country programmes, compared to the OECD average of 47.7% (OECD, 2021).

Case Study 2: Türkiye's Educational Diplomacy in Africa

Beyond its humanitarian support, education is critical to Türkiye's foreign policy in Africa. It is pivotal in fostering long-term cultural exchange and strengthening social, political, and economic ties with African states. In 2020, the education sector received the highest multi-sector funding from the Turkish ODA, with 220.5 million USD provided (OECD, 2021).



Source: Graph downloaded from OECD Development Co-operation Profile (2021)

Türkiye's educational diplomacy in Africa involves scholarships, exchange programs, and establishing Turkish schools and universities. These efforts enhance Türkiye's soft power and address challenges such as language barriers, cultural differences, and resource limitations (Enwere, 2014).

Turkish universities have become more popular among African students due to scholarships managed by the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) and the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (TÜBİTAK) (Gunn, 2020). These scholarships have facilitated academic and cultural exchange between the regions.

A prime example of the significance of education in Türkiye's foreign policy was the Gülen movement. As an Islamic transnational religious and social organisation, it shaped Türkiye's engagement with Africa between 2003 and 2014. The Movement played a crucial role in formulating and implementing Türkiye's public diplomacy, primarily through establishing numerous schools throughout the continent and reinforcing cooperation in the education sector.

The Gülen movement was once an ally of Erdoğan and his AKP party; however, their relationship deteriorated post-2013. Subsequently, Türkiye accused the Movement of masterminding the unsuccessful coup attempt in July 2016 (Bishku, 2019). Since, Turkish authorities implemented measures to shut down schools and businesses associated with the Movement and sought the extradition of its members from other countries to Türkiye.

After the attempted military coup of 2016, Türkiye established the Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF) to reclaim its own domain in international education, which was controlled mainly by the Gülen movement (Akgün and Özkan, 2020). The TMF now operates nearly 150 schools and 20 dormitories across 25 African countries (Özkan and Orakçı, 2022). The TMF has become a significant element of Turkish soft power in foreign policy, promoting Turkish education abroad through its initiatives (Akgün and Özkan, 2020).

Military Engagement in Africa: Asymmetric Wars and the Rise of Drone Diplomacy

Understanding Türkiye's role as an alternative partner in Africa requires a closer look at its military engagements. Türkiye interacts with African nations using diverse tactics, encompassing high-level diplomatic visits, military training schemes for African troops in Türkiye or Africa led by Turkish personnel, collaborative military exercises, and involvement in peacekeeping operations under international organisations like the United Nations (Yaşar, 2022).

Many African states are keen to take advantage of Türkiye's experience in counterinsurgency, the modernisation of its security sectors, and the developments in its defence industry (Yaşar, 2022). This experience allows Türkiye to draw on its background while achieving objectives through proxy warfare, supporting local actors, and minimising risks and costs associated with direct military intervention.

In response to Marshall Haftar's 2019 offensive threatening Tripoli, Türkiye increased its support for Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) (Yüksel, 2020). This support included providing GNA-aligned forces with conventional combat enablers, irregular components and deploying Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) to enhance their defensive capabilities. Türkiye also facilitated the participation of thousands of Syrian opposition fighters in the Libyan Civil War.

Türkiye's proxy warfare strategy in Libya is characterised by high centralisation and control (Yüksel, 2020). This tailored approach to commanding proxies in conjunction with Türkiye's military operations allows the country to achieve its objectives while reducing risks and expanding its influence in the Middle East and North Africa.

Türkiye's most prominent effort is its increased arms exports to African nations, providing competitively priced military equipment with minimal restrictions. The growing emphasis on military arrangements in Africa, particularly involving drones, armoured vehicles, naval apparatus, and infantry equipment, has directly influenced Turkish defence and aerospace exports.

As per a report presented to DW, a German media outlet, Turkish exports to Africa recorded a significant surge, increasing more than five times from 2020 to 2021 and reaching 460 million USD (Hairsine, 2022). The report suggests that due to their comparatively affordable nature, Turkish arms have become an attainable resource for numerous nations grappling with conflict on the continent.

Drones have transformed modern warfare by enabling states to project their power while minimising the potential danger to friendly personnel (Lin-Greenberg, 2022). Türkiye's military-industrial complex has experienced significant growth in recent years, especially in developing UAVs. Since the late 2010s, Türkiye has emerged as a leading source of drone technology, with the Bayraktar TB2 becoming a key player in the global market.

In Africa, Türkiye's drones first saw action in Libya, providing tactical and operational advantages in asymmetric warfare. As such conflicts become increasingly common on the continent, Turkish drones have become an attractive choice for African nations.

However, it is crucial to recognise that drones should not be considered a standalone solution but rather a component of a comprehensive strategic framework that includes defence systems, political initiatives, and diplomatic efforts (Kasapoğlu, 2022). Countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, and Nigeria have reportedly purchased drones from Türkiye, demonstrating the growing relevance of Turkish UAVs in the African security landscape and highlighting Türkiye's role as an alternative partner in the region.

Türkiye's military and defence engagement in Africa, though modest compared to global powers such as Russia, the United States, China, and France, is steadily growing. This heightened involvement may carry significant implications for future interactions between Türkiye and African nations. As Türkiye furthers its presence in Africa, it could foster a diversification of influence within the region, potentially shifting the existing balance of power.

Furthermore, the affordability and accessibility of Turkish military equipment might empower African countries to enhance their defence capabilities, ultimately affecting regional security dynamics. However, Türkiye's no-strings-attached approach to governance and human rights in its military engagements raises concerns about potential arms proliferation, which could aggravate existing conflicts or provoke new ones, leading to negative implications for the continent.



Case Study 3: Türkiye's Comprehensive Approach to Peacebuilding in Somalia

Türkiye's engagement in Africa, with a particular emphasis on Somalia, showcases a blend of humanitarian concerns and long-term strategic interests, reflecting the nation's aspiration to establish a prominent role in regional and global politics. Somalia is a flagship project for Türkiye, transforming the country's approach to African engagement and elevating its status as a complex and multifaceted political actor, thereby influencing its broader African agenda (Özkan and Orakci, 2015).

Initially commencing as a humanitarian response to the severe drought that struck Somalia in 2011, Türkiye's involvement has since evolved into a comprehensive policy encompassing political and social dimensions (Sıradağ, 2018). Ankara's engagement is characterised by several critical factors, including timely intervention, risk inclination, the availability of Turkish products and expertise, soft power projection, the lack of historical imperial baggage, and a highly coordinated unilateral approach (Cannon, 2017).

Türkiye has played an active role in supporting Somalia's humanitarian and reconstruction efforts. Its approach has focused on concrete actions that can have an immediate impact, such as investments in infrastructure projects like roads, hospitals, and schools (Özkan and Orakci, 2015). These projects aimed to improve access to essential services and create job opportunities for local workers.

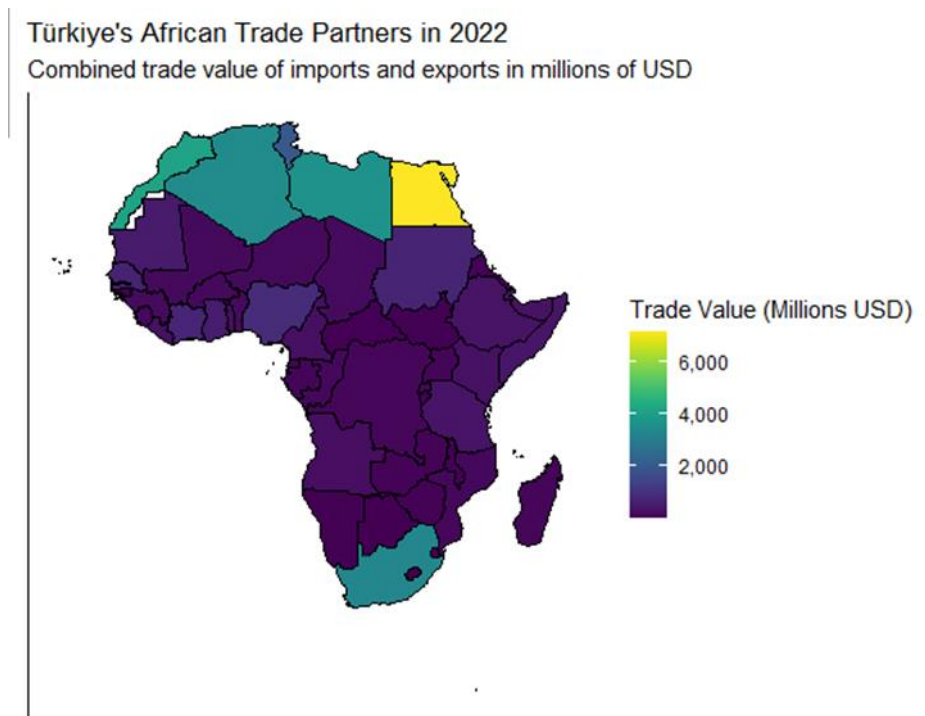
In line with its focus on education as a tool for increasing its soft power, Türkiye has supported education in Somalia through the establishment of partnerships between Turkish and Somali universities, the provision of scholarships for Somali students to study in Türkiye, and investment in human capital within the country (Sıradağ, 2018).

Türkiye has contributed to peacebuilding efforts in Somalia by hosting conferences to bring together various factions to resolve the conflict. Türkiye's peacebuilding in Somalia prioritises establishing a functioning state as crucial for achieving sustainable peace. In 2017, Türkiye opened its largest overseas military base in Somalia, aiming at providing capacity building for Somali soldiers and support for peace support operations in the country (Sıradağ, 2018).

Despite these efforts, Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy in Somalia is not without limitations. Türkiye's approach balances conscience and interest by utilising official, civic, and business channels (Akpinar, 2013). However, the implementation of humanitarian diplomacy encounters challenges due to on-the-ground realities, the interests of other intervening nations, public support, capacity constraints, and the necessity for regional recognition and international collaboration.

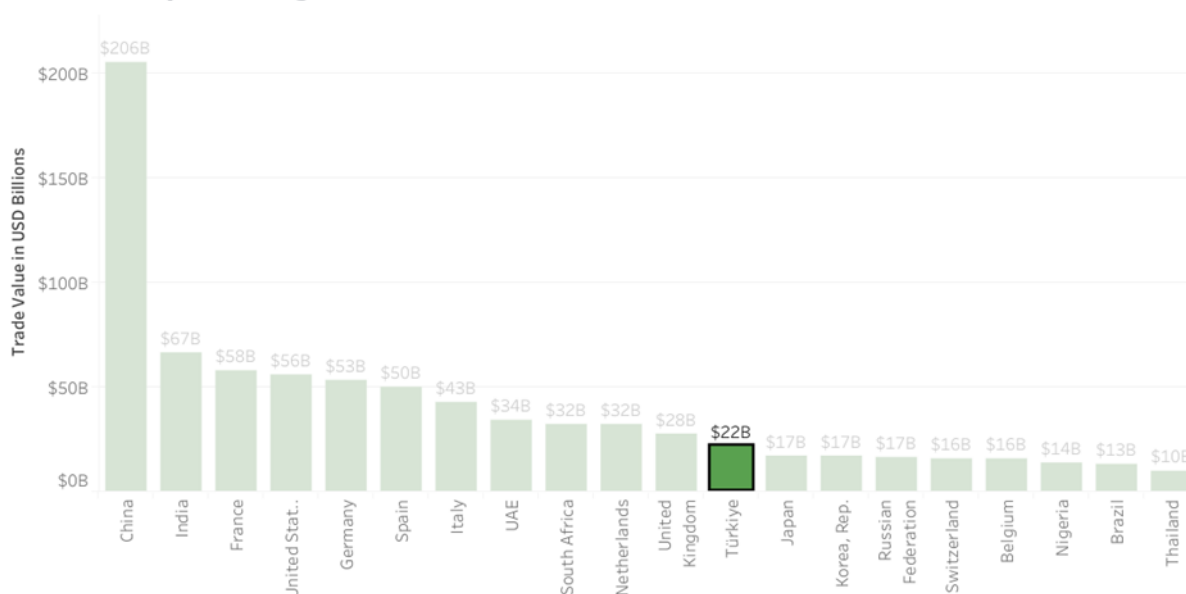
Expanding Türkiye's Trade and Investment Horizons in Africa

Türkiye's diversification strategy has led to a growing reliance on Africa to expand its export markets and sustain economic growth, focusing on sectors such as agriculture, construction, and textiles. Key African trading partners include Egypt, Ethiopia, Morocco, Nigeria, and South Africa, chosen for their geographic proximity, cultural similarities, and economic growth rates (Aman et al., 2017; Mohamud and Köksal, 2021). By 2022, Africa became Türkiye's third most significant trade source, surpassed only by Europe and Asia ("Turkey trade balance, exports, imports by region 2020 | WITS Data," n.d.).



Source: <http://wits.worldbank.org/>, <https://www.trademap.org/> | Map developed by the author in R

Africa's Top Trading Partners: 2019 Combined Trade Volume



Source: <http://wits.worldbank.org/> | Graph developed by the author on Tableau

This increasing engagement has been supported by Türkiye's improvements in the corruption perception index, rising ODA donations, and the opening of commercial consulates in various African countries (Aman et al., 2017). Türkiye has also signed Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreements with 38 African nations to establish a solid contractual foundation for mutual economic relations ("Turkey | African Development Bank - Building today, a better Africa tomorrow," n.d.).

Türkiye's African investments, which have increased tenfold since 2004 to an estimated \$5-\$8 billion (Ofodile, 2019), are part of a broader strategy to extend its economic influence and promote sustainable development and South-South cooperation. Turkish contractors have executed over 1,150 projects involving airport and highway construction, renewable energy initiatives, and joint ventures with African enterprises (Ofodile, 2019). Ethiopia remains the top destination for Turkish FDI, receiving over \$2.5 billion of the \$6 billion allocated to Africa (Ofodile, 2019). In Addition, Egypt is Türkiye's largest bilateral trading partner in Africa.

Türkiye's Unique Approach in Africa: Opportunities and Challenges

Türkiye's focus on diversification in its engagement with Africa demonstrates a mutual need for both parties to explore new opportunities and expand their respective economic and political horizons. This shared interest in diversification is driven by a desire to reduce over-reliance on traditional markets and partners, fostering more sustainable and resilient economies.

For Türkiye, diversification is essential to maintain its economic growth and extend its influence beyond its immediate neighbourhood. By engaging with Africa, Türkiye can access new markets, resources, and investment opportunities while establishing itself as a significant regional actor.

This diversification strategy is crucial for Türkiye, given its current geopolitical challenges and need to reduce its dependence on traditional markets in Europe and the Middle East.

For African countries, diversification is equally critical for sustainable economic development. Engaging with partners like Türkiye, which offers different perspectives and approaches compared to traditional powers, allows African nations to broaden their economic base, access new technologies and investments, and foster more balanced relationships. This diversification can contribute to greater resilience in the face of global economic fluctuations and promote a more inclusive development trajectory.

As a potential moderating power in Africa, Türkiye can navigate the complexities of regional conflicts and power dynamics while fostering dialogue and cooperation. Its unique position, devoid of historical colonial baggage, may allow it to mediate disputes and promote stability more effectively than traditional powers.

Ankara's coordinated effort, exemplified by the Türkiye-Africa summits, state visits, and institutional frameworks, has significantly contributed to the country's growing influence in Africa. These top-down initiatives have facilitated increased economic cooperation, investment, and mutual understanding between Türkiye and African nations. While ambitious goals outlined in summit declarations require ongoing dialogue and commitment, the success of these efforts extends beyond economic indicators to encompass political, social, and cultural exchanges.

However, Türkiye faces challenges in balancing its interests, navigating geopolitical rivalries, and adapting its foreign policy apparatus to the growing demands of African engagement. By addressing these challenges, Türkiye can strengthen its position as a key player in Africa's peace, security, and development landscape.

Türkiye's involvement in Somalia has emphasised the significance of a coherent multi-sectoral approach to African participation. The Somalia project showcases Türkiye's ability to combine humanitarian concerns with strategic interests, demonstrating the need for a comprehensive policy to address state fragility. This approach encompasses timely intervention, soft power projection, and coordinated efforts, reflecting broader aspirations for promoting stability and development across the continent.

Türkiye's development cooperation in Africa reflects its commitment to long-term partnerships and capacity-building, crucial to its broader strategy for the continent. As an OECD member, Türkiye aligns with traditional donors while demonstrating adaptability through case-by-case initiatives. Through prioritising sectors like education and leveraging TİKA's expanded reach, Türkiye establishes itself as a multifaceted and influential actor in Africa, promoting mutual growth and development.

Türkiye's military engagements in Africa, while modest compared to traditional powers, contribute to its goal of offering an alternative partnership to the continent. By providing competitively priced military equipment, including drone technology, with minimal restrictions, Türkiye enables African nations to enhance their defence capabilities. This diversification of influence has the potential to shift the balance of power. Still, concerns about arms proliferation and implications for regional security dynamics must be considered as Türkiye expands its presence in Africa.



Conclusion and recommendations

While the debate continues over whether Türkiye truly offers a genuine alternative to traditional powers in Africa, its emphasis on diversification, cultural connections, and long-term cooperation is undeniably reshaping the dynamics of engagement on the continent. Despite having a smaller reach than other global powers, Türkiye's consistently increasing role in the continent indicates that the country is indeed moving towards becoming an alternative. The future success of this diversification strategy will depend on the ability of both Türkiye and African nations to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and continue fostering mutually beneficial relationships that contribute to regional stability and development.

Ankara's efforts in diplomacy, development cooperation, and military engagements contribute to its growing influence on the continent. Türkiye's experience in Somalia exemplifies its comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to addressing state fragility, reflecting broader aspirations for promoting stability and development across Africa.

However, challenges remain in balancing interests, addressing geopolitical rivalries, and preventing arms proliferation. Türkiye must navigate these complexities while fostering dialogue and cooperation, leveraging its unique position devoid of historical colonial baggage to mediate disputes and promote stability more effectively than traditional powers.

The future success of Türkiye's engagement will hinge on its ability to address these challenges and adapt its foreign policy apparatus to the growing demands of engagement in Africa. Türkiye and Africa are expected to deepen their cooperation and further diversify their relationships across multiple sectors. This includes expanding trade, investments, and development assistance, collaborating on shared security interests, and addressing global challenges like climate change and pandemics.

To solidify its position as a key player in Africa's peace, security, and development landscape, Türkiye should maintain mutually beneficial relationships promoting regional stability and development. As Türkiye and Africa strengthen their ties, ensuring that the diversification strategy promotes mutual benefits, sustainable development, and long-term partnerships is crucial.

This article presents five recommendations for positively enhancing the Turkish presence in Africa.

1. **Enhance transparency in military agreements:** Türkiye and African countries should collaborate to improve transparency and accountability, ensuring compliance with international norms and human rights standards. In this process, involving AU organs, particularly the Peace and Security Council, can bolster these efforts. By incorporating third-party monitoring mechanisms and engaging regional organisations, the potential negative implications of arms proliferation and increased militarisation can be mitigated, further strengthening the cooperative relationship between Türkiye and African nations.
2. **Increase long-term programmatic funding:** Türkiye should consider expanding its long-term programmatic financing for African nations, transitioning from a predominantly project-based approach to a more structured, strategic investment in development programmes. This will give African countries greater predictability and resources to address complex, systemic educational, healthcare, and infrastructure challenges.

3. **Bolster commitment to development and social responsibility within trade and investment:** Türkiye and African nations should emphasise sustainable development, human rights, and social accountability as central pillars of their trade and investment activities. By jointly focusing on environmental conservation, social inclusion, gender equality, and ethical business practices, both parties can create a solid foundation for expanding and deepening their trade and investment relationships.
4. **Foster regional integration and cooperation:** Türkiye should consider supporting regional integration efforts in Africa, working closely with organisations such as the African Union (AU) and regional economic communities (RECs) to promote economic growth, intra-regional trade, and political stability. The country should consider the potential of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) as a key avenue for trade and investment in Africa. This could include technical assistance, capacity-building programs, and investment in regional infrastructure projects.
5. **Bolster political dialogue and cooperation:** African nations should actively work to establish clearer objectives for their engagement with Türkiye. Alongside Türkiye, they ought to continue investing in high-level diplomatic interactions, including Türkiye-Africa summits, state visits, and institutional structures, to nurture mutual understanding and tackle common challenges. Such collaboration can involve addressing global issues like climate change, pandemics, and peace and security and promoting democratic governance, transparency, and adherence to the rule of law.

About the authors

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