

## "Turkish Economic Presence in Somalia: An Analytical Study in Light of the Theory of Complex Interdependence"

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### **Abstract:**

This study analyzes the Turkish economic presence in Somalia from the perspective of Robert Kuhn and Joseph Nye's complex interdependence theory, drawing on humanitarian aid provided after the 2011 crisis in Somalia. It also examines investment partnerships encompassing diverse sectors within a limited military framework, where force is used as a training tool rather than a means of occupation, thus creating multiple channels between the two countries. Somalia benefits from Turkish funding in logistics, while Turkey, for its part, seeks to solidify its position as a regional player and a key actor in the Horn of Africa, particularly amidst intense regional competition. However, the application of this theory faces challenges in several aspects, as well as the imbalance in interdependence, which poses a challenge to the desired balance.

The study concludes with the need to diversify Somali partnerships, enhance transparency in Turkish investments, and create a regional dialogue.

**Keywords:** Complex Interdependence- Turkey- Somalia.

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## INTRODUCTION

The structure of the international system in the contemporary environment is undergoing numerous transformations. Traditional approaches based solely on military power are no longer sufficient to explain the patterns of interaction among its constituent parts. The formulation of state strategies and the construction of the international actors' standing are now primarily based on the economic dimension. In this context, various emerging regional powers seek to reposition themselves within the international system based on economic and developmental means and mechanisms. Hence, foreign policy takes on more complex and serious forms, as political and economic dimensions intertwine. Turkey, in its new orientation towards regions of geostrategic importance, specifically in Africa (the Horn of Africa), is one of the best examples that can illustrate this idea.

Its position is then defined as crucial in the Horn of Africa, where it exerts control over its objectives despite its limited and weak overall strength. Turkish-Somali relations have witnessed several phases, with 2011 marking a turning point when Turkey began to play an active role. This was manifested on the ground through various tools and mechanisms.

To understand these regional and international changes, we must employ theoretical approaches capable of comprehending, interpreting, and analyzing international economic relations within their current frameworks, given the proven explanatory inadequacy of traditional approaches. In this context, complex interdependence theory, developed by Robert Kuhn and Joseph Nye, offers a suitable framework for analyzing patterns of interaction, overlapping interests, and the multiplicity of actors. This theory is based on the premise that international relations are no longer governed solely by the logic of traditional conflict, but are characterized by varying degrees of interdependence. This interdependence can take asymmetrical forms, particularly between two states, one powerful and the other with a weak structure.

This study aims to analyze the Turkish economic presence in Somalia within the framework of complex interdependence theory. We will attempt to deconstruct its structure and mechanisms, examine the dynamics of

economic interaction between the two parties, and assess the nature of the resulting interdependence.

The research problem revolves around the following central question: **Does Turkish-Somali interaction, according to the interdependence approach, reflect a pattern of equitable interdependence, or does it perpetuate a structural imbalance in the relationship?**

This raises fundamental questions about the nature, limits, and true dimensions of this presence, including:

What economic tools does Turkey employ in Somalia? How does the interdependence between the two parties manifest itself? And what are the limits of this dependence given the structural disparities between the two economies?

In this context, the study begins with a key hypothesis:

**Despite the developmental dimensions inherent in Turkish-Somali economic relations, they perpetuate a structural imbalance in the relationship and contribute to producing a pattern of unequal interdependence.**

To address this issue, the study employs an analytical approach and a case study methodology, utilizing the theoretical framework of complex interdependence as an interpretive framework. This framework aims to reconcile theoretical data with real-world applications, thereby testing its applicability to the case of Somalia, a fragile state.

The significance of this study stems from its dual dimension: theory and application. On the one hand, it allows for the testing of a key model of liberal analysis and its capacity to explain patterns of interaction in unstable environments. On the other hand, it offers a profound and realistic understanding of the Turkish presence in Somalia.

## **1. The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of the Study**

### **1.1 The Emergence and Development of the Complex Interdependence Theory**

The complex interdependence model was developed by Robert O. Kuhn and Joseph S. Nye in the late 1970s. This model posed a significant

challenge to the core tenets of classical and structuralist realism, which focused on military and economic capabilities to explain state behavior. In contrast, the interdependence model emphasized the emergence of transnational actors in opposition to the state, the rise of international systems and institutions that superseded traditional military capabilities, and the new importance of welfare and trade in foreign policy matters, compared to issues of status and security. Interdependence has indeed become a key element of the neoliberal perspective and has been widely used in international policy analyses in an attempt to understand the willingness of states to enter into cooperative alliances with each other under conditions of disorder and dependency<sup>1</sup>.

In our contemporary world, the term "interdependence" is frequently used. All international actors, including states and non-state actors are interdependent. This differs from dependency, which implies a state of being heavily influenced or tied to external powers. Interdependence, simply put, means interdependence. In global politics, interdependence refers to situations characterized by mutual influences between states or between actors in different states<sup>2</sup>.

In this interdependence, the relationship between states and other transnational actors is characterized by both cooperation and competition. Interdependence has costly reciprocal effects. The policies and actions of one actor profoundly influence the policies and actions of other actors, and vice versa. Interdependence extends beyond peace and cooperation among actors; it encompasses a relationship between these actors characterized by cooperation, dependence, and interaction in a number of different areas<sup>3</sup>.

One of the most important aspects of complex interdependence is that it combines two seemingly contradictory ideas: It integrates power politics and economic liberalism. It takes into account both the costs and benefits of interdependence. In a complex world, despite increasing economic cooperation and environmental interdependence, the possibility of international military conflicts cannot be ignored. However, unlike traditional power politics, this may not be the case in interdependence<sup>4</sup>.

According to Robert O'Kehan and Joseph Nye, interdependence should not be defined solely as a state of equilibrium. They emphasize that

asymmetry in dependence is what is likely to provide actors with sources of advantage in their dealings with one another. Less dependent actors can often use interdependence as a source of power in negotiating an issue, and perhaps to influence other issues<sup>5</sup>.

Robert O Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in their book 'Power and Interdependence : World Politics in Transition', described three main characteristics of Complex Interdependence <sup>6</sup>:

- **Multiple Channels** In international politics there are multiple channels connecting the societies, including all the interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational transactions. This is opposed to the unitary state assumption of realism.
- **Absence of Hierarchy among Issues** In the world of Complex interdependence, there is no hierarchy among the issues. The dividing line between domestic and foreign policy becomes blurred and there is no clear agenda in interstate relations.
- **Minor Role of Military Force** : When Complex Interdependence prevails, military force could be irrelevant in resolving disagreements on economic issues among members of an alliance, however simultaneously be very important for the alliance's political and military relations with its rival bloc.

## **1.2 The Realist vs. Neoliberal Debate**

There are many points of convergence and divergence that allow for a comparison between realism and neoliberalism. We will attempt to review some of the key assumptions of both schools and conduct a comparative analysis to explore their prevalence in the contemporary world order<sup>7</sup>. Key concepts under discussion include the state, power, and the balance of power, relative versus absolute gains, and international institutions and systems.

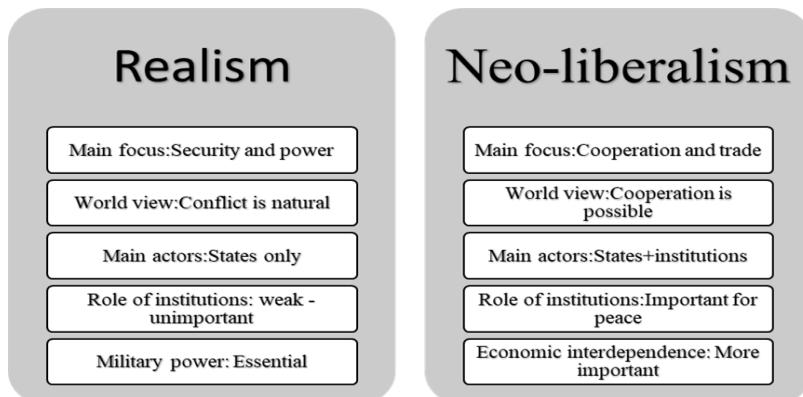
Realism has been the most influential and dominant theory in international relations since World War II. It posits that the primary motivation for states is military and economic power or security, rather than ideals or morality. Realism emphasizes the innate drive of actors toward dominance and power, leading to conflict. States strive to maintain a

balance of power among themselves, which helps preserve peace and ensures their survival<sup>8</sup>. Its security is its most important concern. These states rely primarily on balancing the power of other states and deterrence to maintain the international order as intact and unthreatened as possible. In short, three elements called the "three pillars" form the angles of the real triangle: the state, survival, and self-reliance<sup>9</sup>.

Therefore, the focus of realist analysis is the "state." The struggle for power in a chaotic world order necessitates security policies based on the principle of self-reliance. "Power" is the decisive factor in determining which state will prevail in any conflict. Peace is most likely to be achieved through the distribution of power among states. Consequently, with the exception of state security and national security, all other issues are disregarded<sup>10</sup>.

Neorealism focuses on the anarchic structure of global politics rather than human nature. It emphasizes the importance of the structure of the international system in the behavior of its constituent parts<sup>11</sup>. However, liberals and neoliberals, to a moderate extent, seek to integrate elements of power politics and economic liberalism. This involves interdependence, with both costs and benefits existing in a reciprocal relationship<sup>12</sup>.

**Chart1: Key differences between Realism and Neo –liberalism.**



**Source** :Compiled by the author based on theoretical data.

To understand the role of power in interdependence, Kohan and Nye distinguished between two dimensions of interdependence:

- a) Sensitivity
- b) Fragility

Sensitivity refers to how responsive actors are to changes in a particular area of policy—that is, how quickly changes in one country can trigger costly changes in another<sup>13</sup>. Sensitivity interdependence may become the basis for significant political influence only when existing rules and norms can be taken for granted (by stronger actor), or when it would be extremely costly for dissatisfied states to change their policies immediately<sup>14</sup>

Vulnerability refers to the extent to which actors can control their reactions. It can also be defined as the likelihood that an actor will incur costs from external events even after policy adjustments—the price of changing the existing rules of the game. A less vulnerable actor is not necessarily the least sensitive, but rather the one that will incur the lowest costs as a result of changing the situation. In cases of unequal interdependence, weaker states are more susceptible to external changes due to the cost of adapting to them<sup>15</sup>. A problem arises when states have concerns about their relative gains as all the states are always trying to maximize their relative power in order to increase the chances of their survival. The importance of the relative power means that states are hesitant to cooperate if the expected gains may be distributed unevenly among participating states<sup>16</sup>.

The theory of complex interdependence, as developed by Keohane and Nye, offers an accurate explanation of a trajectory that goes beyond the realists' focus on the military tool and transforms the economy into an instrument of power in an interconnected world.

## **2. Means and Mechanisms of Turkish Economic Presence in Somalia**

### **2.1 The Shift from Aid to Investment**

Turkish aid projects in Somalia take various forms. They primarily focus on peacebuilding, specifically facilitating a peace agreement between

factions in the Somali civil war and providing security in Mogadishu and Somalia in general. Accordingly, the Turkish government established a military base in Mogadishu, where the Turkish and Somali armies conduct joint training exercises. The main objective of this base is to train soldiers who will contribute to establishing sustainable peace in Somalia, thereby achieving economic growth and development. Furthermore, Turkish aid in Mogadishu covers vital sectors such as healthcare, education, agriculture, transportation, and youth empowerment. Thus, Turkish aid impacts all aspects of the Somali economy<sup>17</sup>.

Turkey's involvement in Somalia symbolizes its growing influence in Africa, driven by its desire to create new economic opportunities and its ambition to become a prominent regional player, in line with its strategic and humanitarian foreign policy. This is evident in its humanitarian initiatives with the Somali people to combat famine and poverty. Since then, the Turkish state, along with non-governmental actors, has undertaken a wide range of initiatives, including humanitarian projects, development aid, and post-conflict state-building in this war-torn African country<sup>18</sup>.

During his visit to Somalia in 2011, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced that Turkey would establish an embassy in Somalia to assist in distributing aid. It was opened in 2016, becoming the largest Turkish embassy in the world. Given the famine, Turkey's initial intervention was purely humanitarian. At that time, Somalia was experiencing its worst drought in generations, with an estimated 30,000 additional deaths per month, representing approximately 4.6% of the total population, 10% of whom were children under the age of five in southern and central Somalia<sup>19</sup>.

Turkey is cultivating a benevolent image for itself. It has chosen a carefully crafted engagement strategy, unlike the diplomacy of mere payroll, and has shown a stark contrast to previous Western interventions. Its proactive and humanitarian approach is gaining acceptance from the Somali side due to its pragmatism<sup>20</sup>.

Turkey went beyond simply providing emergency aid to famine survivors in Somalia. It hosted international and regional conferences, mediated

between various parties, established diplomatic missions in Mogadishu and Hargeisa, provided technical support for bilateral capacity-building efforts, and participated in development assistance. All of this was accomplished through a wide range of actors: government institutions and agencies, religious organizations, NGOs, private sector companies, security and military officials, and local municipalities<sup>21</sup>.

Domestically, the involvement in Somalia clearly demonstrates the Justice and Development Party's intention to break away from traditional policies, forge a new image for Turkey, and engage with others beyond its geographical borders and traditional Western allies<sup>22</sup>. The analysis of official statements by various Turkish ministries and agencies indicates five distinct objectives for engagement : meeting emergency needs; delivering development assistance, strengthening institutions and building capacities; supporting political processes; and improving bilateral trade<sup>23</sup>. However, this does not negate the existence of other reasons for Turkey's involvement inhi Somalia, including political, economic, and security aspects. Turkish exports to Somalia have increased more than tenfold since 2011, and Turkish companies have been able to secure strategic deals in the infrastructure sector<sup>24</sup>.

## **2.2 Dynamics of Interdependence between Turkey and Somalia**

From the outset, the Turkish presence in Somalia has encompassed numerous aspects as part of the "Turkish model," which combines political, developmental, humanitarian, and economic support<sup>25</sup>.

During Erdoğan's second and third visits to Somalia in 2015 and 2016, respectively, numerous bilateral agr<sup>26</sup>reements were signed, particularly concerning infrastructure and services, and new projects were inaugurated, including Turkey's largest diplomatic mission in Mogadishu and a large research and training hospital. Contracts were also signed for the management and maintenance of the Somali government's two largest sources of revenue: Mogadishu's airport and port. In 2017, Turkey opened its largest overseas military base, at a cost of \$50 million, in the Somali capital, to support the rebuilding of the Somali security forces<sup>27</sup>. Since 2013, Turkey has assumed a facilitating role in the talks between the Federal

Government of Somalia and Somaliland Administration. This process has been carried out by Ambassador Olgan Bekar, Special Envoy of Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey for the Somali-Somaliland Talks.

Our bilateral trade volume with Somalia was 187,3 million US Dollars in 2018 and 250,850 million USD in 2019. The total value of Turkish investments in Somalia has reached 100 million US Dollars. Mogadishu International Airport and Mogadishu Sea Port are run by Turkish companies in Somalia<sup>28</sup>.

It also followed a well-known model used in many other African countries—generally characterized by opening diplomatic missions, frequent visits by high-level delegations, establishing an office for the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), launching new Turkish Airlines routes, offering scholarships, and allowing construction companies to enter the market—rather than being tailored specifically to Somalia's political and security dynamics<sup>29</sup>.

Turkey has prioritised security assistance in its Somalia policy, highlighting that Turkish officials believe security is essential to the post-conflict Somali state-building process. Since 2011, Turkey has been training Somali security forces both in Turkey and in Somalia. In 2017, Turkey opened its largest overseas military facility that trains thousands of Somali soldiers annually<sup>30</sup>.

Turkey chose Somalia, despite the significant risks, because it is well aware of the potential gains in terms of international recognition, growing diplomatic standing, and economic benefits. Although it is a hotbed of tension, the returns could be substantial. The rules of the game in politics and business are often disregarded in an unstable environment, and Türkiye has exploited this to its advantage<sup>31</sup>.

Turkey's presence in Somalia is remarkable in terms of its apparent success despite its short duration. Although Turkey only officially became involved in Somalia in 2011, it can point to a series of declared achievements and a prominent presence in a country often described as a failed state<sup>32</sup>.

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Turkey's interest in Somalia does not stem from shared heritage, ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, or any other such factors. Rather, Turkey's primary objective in engaging in Somalia is to gain political and diplomatic influence beyond its borders, as well as to secure another market for Turkish goods. In short, Turkish diplomatic pragmatism has not only garnered international praise but has also resulted in substantial profits for Turkish companies, many of which have close ties to the ruling Justice and Development Party<sup>33</sup>.

Turkey could have expanded its presence and influence in Somaliland. However, it is precisely this kind of political and economic stability that has led Turkey to avoid dealing with a country like Somaliland. Instead, Turkey's leaders have chosen to engage with troubled countries like Somalia<sup>34</sup>.

**Table 1. Dynamics of interdependence between Turkey and Somalia**

| Sector                                   | Year                   | Statistics/Development                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Humanitarian and institutional entry     | 2011-2013              | Start of strong Turkish presence in Somalia                                                                       |
| Infrastructure control                   | 2013-2014              | Turkey began managing Aden Adde International Airport (2013) and Mogadishu Port (2014)                            |
| Trade expansion                          | 2015-2018              | Consolidation of economic relations : bilateral trade reached about US\$187 million                               |
| Development and agricultural cooperation | 2019-2021              | Expansion of Tika projects in agriculture, health and education                                                   |
| Institutional deepening                  | 2022-2023              | Expansion of Tika programs : long term socio-economic engagement                                                  |
| Strategic economic growth                | 2024                   | Signature of energy exploration and maritime defence agreements: trade exceeded US\$380 million                   |
| Overall presence                         | 2011-2025 (cumulative) | Consolidation of Turkey as a partner in Somalia (investment surpassed US\$1 billion, more than 500 Tika projects) |

**Source:** Compiled by the author based on Tika reports, Anadolu Agency and trading economic data.

### **3. Evaluating Turkey's role in Somalia and limits of applying theory**

#### **3.1 Challenges faced in the implementation of Turkish projects in somalia**

Regardless of how one tries to understand the logic behind the Turkish presence in Somalia, the fact remains that they are operating in areas of the Somali capital that Westerners consider extremely dangerous. Turkish construction sites have proliferated in the Hodan district of central Mogadishu, which was the epicenter of a long battle between Islamist insurgents and African Union forces deployed in the coastal city to support the UN-backed government<sup>35</sup>.

Although Turkey's presence in Somalia has yielded some positive results, it must recognize that it cannot single-handedly resolve the country's numerous challenges. Instead, it must secure Somali support to capitalize on its development of government networks and its commercial opportunities in Somalia. To date, Turkey has achieved greater success than other actors<sup>36</sup>.

Among the challenges, facing the Turkish presence in Somalia is that the contracts and agreements signed by the current Somali government are not necessarily subject to parliamentary scrutiny or approval as stipulated by the constitution. Therefore, oil and gas tenders, along with other contracts marred by irregularities, are considered provisional<sup>37</sup>.

The security situation is one of the most significant challenges facing Turkey in Somalia. The presence of extremist groups and ongoing conflicts make it difficult to ensure the safety of Turkish personnel and the continuity of projects. Furthermore, cultural and administrative obstacles sometimes slow down the implementation of initiatives<sup>38</sup>. Also, Achieving stability in Somalia is hampered by ongoing conflicts. Aligning Turkey's stabilization efforts with the broader Turkish strategy and those of its international partners requires careful coordination, which is often impeded by these complexities. Furthermore, there is a need for increased capacity building within local institutions to effectively manage and sustain stabilization projects<sup>39</sup>. So one of the major initial challenges for aid agencies from

Turkey was their limited knowledge and experience of Somalia's conflict dynamics.

Financial constraints and the risk of misallocation of funds pose significant challenges. Ensuring that financial aid and investments are used effectively and transparently requires robust financial management systems, and broader economic instability and infrastructure deficiencies pose challenges to the effectiveness of stabilization efforts<sup>40</sup>.

The ongoing threat from insurgent groups remains one of the greatest challenges, requiring constant vigilance and resources. Integrating the new training and equipment provided by Turkey into existing systems also presents a challenge. Building effective governance structures in a post-conflict environment is inherently challenging. Despite Turkey's significant efforts, current capacity constraints make it difficult to fully capitalize on these initiatives. Furthermore, there is a continued need to focus on addressing corruption and shortcomings within the government to ensure the long-term success of stabilization efforts<sup>41</sup>.

### **3.2 Prospects for the Turkish-Somali Relationship**

Two main scenarios can be discussed :

- Continuity.
- Shifting Towards Partnership or Dependence.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud held a joint press conference following their bilateral meeting and the meeting of their delegations in Istanbul. During the conference, the Turkish President stated that he would continue to support Somalia's security and stability. He noted that 2026 would mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Somalia, emphasizing Turkey's continued support for Somalia's stability. He added that the significant achievements recently made by the Somali National Army in its fight against terrorism were due to the training and logistical support provided by Turkey at the Turkish Military Training Center (TURKSOM). He further stated that the improved security situation has also led to reforms in Somali political life<sup>42</sup>.

Turkish president's statements clearly indicate the continuation of the Turkish-Somali partnership, and the strategic context highlights three characteristics of the interdependence theory<sup>43</sup>:

Multiple channels: military, economic, and political (supporting sovereignty).

Lack of hierarchy: security and the economy are integrated.

Reduced role of force: focus on training rather than warfare.

As for the scenario Shifting Towards Partnership or Dependence. Somali-Turkish relations appear promising in the long term, but they face obstacles that require well-considered solutions. Recent trends reflect a growing commitment from both sides to strengthen cooperation through strategic agreements that bolster security and economic ties. This, points to an imminent move toward stronger economic cooperation that will benefit both countries<sup>44</sup>.

Somalia aims to strengthen its control over its territorial waters, building on Turkish cooperation in maritime security. This agreement could attract further foreign investment to Somalia's energy sector, as companies seek to develop untapped oil and gas resources. The goal is to protect Somali waterways from illegal fishing and piracy<sup>45</sup>. This relationship could also create opportunities for joint oil exploration projects, enabling both parties to exploit Somalia's natural resources. In addition to the agreement signed between the two countries in March 2024 for cooperation in the oil and gas sector, which stipulates the need to exploit up to 30 billion barrels of untapped oil reserves, this agreement will be beneficial for growth. Turkish companies will play a pivotal role in exploring these resources and will increase the Somali government's revenues<sup>46</sup>.

The data indicates that Somali-Turkish relations are poised for further deepening, especially given the convergence of security and economic interests, and Somalia's need for partners who respect its sovereignty. Ultimately, the current political landscape in Somalia cannot be understood without considering Turkey's growing role, nor can this role be separated from the broader challenge of rebuilding the Somali state, protecting its unity, and preventing the region from becoming an arena for open conflict<sup>47</sup>.

## **CONCLUSION**

Turkish foreign policy in Somalia has been based on the principle of "proactive and humanitarianism," the latter designed to protect national interests while promoting normative values and developing influence in the Global South. Drawing on a historical legacy and a pragmatic approach, this path provides Turkey with a flexible framework for achieving its strategic objectives in both the short and long term. The Somali case exemplifies this. Through a multi-dimensional strategy encompassing defense cooperation, energy development, humanitarian aid, and infrastructure investment, Turkey has established itself as a key player in the Somali state-building process. The Turkish presence in Somalia is more than just a partnership; it is a reshaping of international perceptions of its power, presenting itself as a protector. In addition to tangible achievements in the fields of security and development, Turkey seeks to enhance its image as an actor capable of providing practical solutions.

Turkey's primary motivation for intervening in Somalia was to gain international recognition as a rising power. Turkish funds and direct, unilateral aid to key stakeholders in the Somali Federal Government contributed to this process. This, in turn, led to Turkey gaining control and managing key assets in Somalia, particularly the airport and port. Amidst this, Turkey unilaterally undertook reconstruction efforts, offered scholarships, and renovated hospitals, among other initiatives. To this end, Turkey employed a range of tools, including diplomacy, economic engagement, defense exports, and institutional partnerships, to bolster its growing presence. Despite regional and international competition, Turkey fostered and maintained a climate of cooperation. This underscores the region's importance in Turkey's geopolitical calculations.

Turkey is focused on security and economic growth, but issues of political instability and external competition must be addressed, as a well-founded partnership yields significant benefits. Both Turkey and Somalia will need to maintain open channels of communication and build trust between their peoples to move forward independently. By focusing on local engagement

alongside long-term partnerships, they can pursue shared goals of stability and mutual respect, providing a solid foundation for their future relations.

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