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Turkey in Africa: The Search for Grandiloquent Ambitions in Complex Geostrategic Settings?

Prof. Dr. Belkacem Iratni - University of Algiers 3 Email:kiratni54@gmail.com

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Abstract

Many political scientists considered Turkey a newcomer in Africa, particularly since its heavy military engagement in Libya, a civil war that has wrecked this country, following the downfall of its leader Gadhafi in 2011. This assertion omitted the presence of this country in large parts of North Africa during the Ottoman rule over this region that lasted from the beginning of the 15th Century to the early 20th Century when the Italians conquered the Tripoli Regency in 1912.

This rapid and effective intrusion of Turkey in Africa, occurred after the rise to power in 2002 of the Party of Justice and Development (AKP), an Islamic-conservative political movement, led by Tayyip Recep Erdogan. The strategy pursued by AKP relied on a model based on a subtle mixture of economic pragmatism and the exaltation of a symbiosis between traditional and modernist religious precepts.

الملخص

اعتبر العديد من علماء السياسة تركيا وافدًا جديدًا على أفريقيا، لا سيما منذ انخراطها العسكري المكثف في ليبيا، تلك الحرب الأهلية التي دمرت هذا البلد، عقب سقوط زعيمه القذافي عام 2011. أغفل هذا التأكيد وجود هذا البلد في أجزاء كبيرة من شمال أفريقيا خلال الحكم العثماني لهذه المنطقة الذي استمر من بداية القرن الخامس عشر إلى أوائل القرن العشرين عندما غزا الإيطاليون إيالة طرابلس عام 1912

حدث هذا التدخل السريع والفعال لتركيا في أفريقيا، بعد صعود حزب العدالة والتنمية (AKP)، وهو حركة سياسية إسلامية محافظة، بقيادة طيب رجب أردوغان، إلى السلطة عام 2002. اعتمدت الاستراتيجية التي انتهجها حزب العدالة والتنمية على نموذج قائم على مزيج دقيق من البراغماتية الاقتصادية وتمجيد التكافل بين المبادئ الدينية التقليدية والحداثية. تنظر تركيا إلى أفريقيا كوسيلة مهمة في سعيها نحو مكانة مرموقة في الشؤون العالمية، على الرغم من أن القيود الجيوسياسية تبدو وكأنها تدفع هذا البلد إلى توازن قوى تكمن ديناميكياته في موقعه الجغرافي (منطقة القوقاز وآسيا الوسطى والشرق الأوسط). وإذا لم تكن أنقرة تتحدى

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Turkey conceives Africa as an important means in its status-seeking design in world affairs, although the geopolitics constraints seem to drive this country in a power balance whose dynamics lie in its geographic confinement (the Caucus region, central Asia and the Middle East). If Ankara does not seem to challenge the presence of other major powers in Africa, it aims mainly at developing a model of cooperation with this continent with no colonial lay out and with a focus on trade, military assistance and shared commonalities based on mutual trust and benefits.

Keywords: Turkey, Africa, World ambitions, Islamic model, Economic cooperation.

وجود القوى الكبرى الأخرى في أفريقيا، فإنها تهدف أساسًا إلى تطوير نموذج تعاون مع هذه القارة، بعيدًا عن الطابع الاستعماري، مع التركيز على التجارة والمساعدة العسكرية والقواسم المشتركة القائمة على الثقة المتبادلة والمنافع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تركيا، أفريقيا، الطموحات العالمية، النموذج الإسلامي، التعاون الاقتصادي.

*The corresponding author

Introduction:

A French political scientist has once considered that "the survival of the State has been, for a long time, the fundamental concern of the Turkish rulers. The Republic was born with the forceps, after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. It imposed itself on the international community, thanks only to a painful war of independence. This initial trauma, which has never been whipped out from the consciousness of the Turks, still plays an essential role in the determination of the foreign policy of their country"(Bayart, 1981). An expert on Turkey argued that Bayart's postulate of the survival of the Turkish State "appears fundamental to apprehend the foreign policy of Turkey"(Billion, 2021:121) This statement suited the foreign policy pursued by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk since he seized power in 1921. It reflected also the efforts of successive regimes to maintain the secular Republican State and ensure the survival of their country in a context marked by the cold war, until the rise to power in 2002 of the Islamist party of Adalet Kalkinma Parisi (AKP) led by Tayyip Recep Erdogan. Other arguments seemed also subject to debate, such as the postulate put forward by a former Algerian diplomat, stipulating that President Erdogan's foreign policy aimed "to revive the Ottoman past"(Hamai, 2023). Furthermore, another political scientist asserted that the Turkish leader has shaped "a modern vision of Turkey that revives its Ottoman heritage while championing Turkish nationalism"(Pinto, 2024).

These postulates, although partially pertinent, seem quite equivocal, as they neglect the interests exalted by the Erdogan regime as it tried to attenuate the secular features of the Turkish State and its resolutely pro-Western foreign stance, without, however, completely eradicating Ataturk's legacy. Such a transition was possible because the new international mutations have brought politically appeased relations between the world's major powers and permitted Erdogan to incept a great design to make Turkey a powerful State based on a mixture of modernity and Islamic identity in the world's politics. However, this religious pedigree did not intend to revive the loose religious values conveyed by the Ottoman rule, believed traditional and conservative.

Erdogan's conceptual design received a supportive echo from moderate segments of Muslims outside Turkey, as it stands as a serious and pacific alternative to *Salafi* ideology and Jihadist inclinations preached by radical religious movements such as Al-Qaida and the Islamic State (ISIS), which came to dominate the political and religious landscape in the Middle East and some parts of Africa. Conversely, Erdogan has not only maintained Turkey in the North Atlantic Alliance NATO), which this country joined in 1952 amid the fears of the expansion of communism,

but also kept knocking at the door of the European Union (EU) to alleviate doubts that his societal model was hostile to Western values model and interests.
Commenting on Erdogan's stance towards the Arab world, Mouloud Hamai, who served as Algeria's Ambassador to Turkey, aptly argued that this country" was considered as a model of Islamic-democratic synthesis incarnating 'moderate Islam,' susceptible to be extended to Arab countries whose populations strongly admired Erdogan, with no contest the idol of the 'Arab streets,' for a while" (Hamai, 2023). It seems however, adequate to transpose this schematic picture to the African case, since Turkey has targeted the Muslim-dominated countries of this continent, such as Libya, the Sahel-Sahara region, Somalia, and the Gulf of Guinea, in addition to the former Ottoman Regencies in North Africa. It is also not coincidental that many of these countries are confronting the Gulf-inspired Salafism, an ideology abhorred by the Sunnite moderate Islam preached by Erdogan.
Beyond President Erdogan's attempts to translate his model to Africa based on a tolerant and moderate Islam in its dealings, lies the determination to emphasize economic cooperation with this continent to enhance Turkey's power status and prestige in the international scene. The Turkish leader came to value the importance of Africa in his world grand design, although the future of his country seems to lie on the Euro-Asian geographic confinement.
These considerations, which are the crux of this paper's content, seem to impregnate President Erdogan's African policy, because his involvement in this continent pertain to the geostrategic interests of Turkey, not only in its regional setting but also at the international level. Therefore, Turkish African policy cannot be dissociated with the global security and geostrategic concerns of Ankara, whether these concerns pertain to ideological and cultural values, economic gains or enhancing the nation's world status. It may be not farfetched to contend that Turkey needs Africa to enhance its power status and enlarge its influence to other parts of the world. To do so, Ankara has developed a strategy based on three important paradigms:

-The first paradigm pertains to idiosyncratic factors incarnated by the charismatic and personality traits of President Erdogan, which contributed to shaping his engagement invigorated in Africa (Slaski, 2023).

-The second paradigm concerns Turkey's need for the mineral resources of Africa and the search for markets in this continent to expand the country's manufacturing sector and boost its foreign earnings.

-The third paradigm refers to the desire to export the Turkish model based on a subtle blend of traditional values and modernist aspirations, which offers an alternative to the cooperation schemes pursued by other world major powers in Africa.

The Turkish presence in Africa, except North Africa (Morocco, apart) has no deep roots as it started to emerge only at the end of the last Century. Ankara envisaged an open door towards Africa in 1988 and its Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ismael Cem incepted an African policy by the late 1990s. However, this project aborted because of the thorny financial crisis that had badly hit Turkey, at that time.

With the rise to power of AKP in 2002, a strategy to develop relations with this continent emerged after the inception of an African policy by the Under-Secretariat for Foreign Trade and the launching of 'the Year of Africa' by the Turkish Government in 2005. However, it was the brotherhood cell of Fethullah Gülen, then the ally of Erdogan, that opened the door to Africa for Turkish investments and cultural influence.

To explain Turkish African policy, a General Director at the Turkish Foreign Ministry asserted that this policy is unique because it derives from the anti-imperialist and non-colonial ideology of this country. He also argued that Turkey does not position itself as a rival to other major powers in Africa, and has no counter strategies to weaken Africa's relations with these world actors. Therefore, according to Turkish political scientists, Turkey's increasing influence in Africa results from its neutral stance towards this continent and a non-interventionist-centred approach to international politics (Parlar, Dipama 2023).

A Turkish official statement asserted that" Turkey shares its own historical experience, social, political and cultural accumulation, as well as its opportunities and resources with African countries under the principle of 'African solutions for African problems' and based on mutual benefit" (MFA.Gov). Moreover, it was argued," Turkey’s autonomous actorship in Africa also strengthens its hand and helps Ankara differentiate itself from the continent’s former colonial powers as a partner without any imperial ideology or colonial baggage"(Parlar Dal, Dipama, 2023). Moreover, Ankara shares with the African continent the desire to reshape the international political and economic configuration considered as working in favour of the Western hegemonic world. Mutual recognition and respect for African sovereignty "have also been essential, resulting in a positive reception and growing partnerships with African nations, according to other Turkish experts on Africa" (Özcan, Kose, 2024).

From the outset, the Eurasian country has placed its cooperation with Africa on a historical retrospective and in a framework of mutual benefits and common objectives. It inserted also this cooperation in line with Africa's search for ownership of peace and security capacity building, thus demarcating itself from the temptations to participate in the scramble over African resources.

This study encompasses two parts: the first reviews the multifarious means used by Ankara in its dealings with Africa, the second part pertains to the eventual impairments it may face in the efforts to play a distinct but useful role in the African continent. It tries also to assess the opportunities Turkey may grab from its partnership with the African continent, providing the maintaining of a balanced policy and the assertion of a model different from the approaches developed by other traditional partners of Africa.

Deciphering a multifaceted engagement

Turkey constitutes a middle-range power in terms of physical attributes (surface and population) power assets (economic capabilities and military might) as well as world status, although its location boasts high geostrategic ingredients, this country seems quite remote from Africa.

The map shows how indeed Turkey seems far from Africa, geographically. In contrast, China and India, as well as the emergent powers like the Gulf States are close to Africa's eastern coast through the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea. France is a next door to Africa through the Mediterranean Sea. Distance, as far as it may be, did not refrain other world's major powers such as USA, Russia or Japan to be present in Africa, because of their military might, economic capabilities technology innovations and hegemonic designs, contrarily to Turkey whose power potential is much limited. However, such a handicap did not prevent the Eurasian power to dare playing in the major power's African courtyards, and this boldness constitutes, precisely, the guts and the real assets of Erdogan's ambition to make of his country an influential actor in the African continent.

The dynamism of Erdogan's AKP to invest in the African continent relied on a many-sided approach including the personal role of President Erdogan, the use of a large diplomatic network, soft power initiatives, the search for energy supplies, and markets to sustain the country's geostrategic ambitions, as well as the recourse to military intervention.

- Idiosyncratic Factors, Diplomatic Deployment and Soft Power

President Erdogan's grandiloquent ambitions rest on the political socialization and the religious training of the ruling elites of AKP. Most of the militants of this movement, especially the new capitalist and conservative bourgeoisie were, for a long time, marginalized from political and economic spheres by the Westernized Kemalist upper and middle classes. An expert on Turkish foreign policy captured with pertinent arguments the radical changes brought by AKP in the home polity. He asserted that this movement has succeeded in "incarnating the emergence of the conservative modernization of the traditions of the Turkish Islam integrated into the proper secular process of Turkey that was incarnated by the State Kemalist elites"(Billion, 2021).

Although he received an Islamic background when attending a *madrasa* in his childhood, Erdogan moved from dogmatic religious precepts to an evolutionary vision of Islam by favouring a conservative, rather than an Islamist ideology. This subtle nuance highlights Erdogan‘s awareness to avoid a frontal challenge with the secular and Republican ideological trends that were dominant in Turkish society. The assertion of basic family values won AKP a large popular adhesion. The economic success recorded by AKP encouraged its leader to assert himself as a leading figure in the home party and as the 'saviour' of Turkey, particularly in the eyes of the young militants and followers of his movement.

On the international scene, this approach portraying Turkey as an 'Afro-Eurasian' power has permitted President Erdogan to make his country the advocate of African aspirations and the supporter of a model competing with Asian powers in the African continent. AKP's conservative and modern Islamic pedigree, the rising economic power of Turkey, and the non-colonial past of this country in Africa constituted efficient assets for President Erdogan to involve personally in forging solid multifarious links with the African continent. This engagement is evidenced by the great number of visits he made to Africa (more than 44 trips, averaging two visits annually), which made Erdogan, the foreign leader who has visited Africa, most frequently.

The diplomatic network in Africa increased from 12 Embassies in 2002 to 44 in 2022. In terms of diplomatic representations in Africa, Turkey ranked fourth, behind China (53), the USA (50), and France (47), but well ahead of Japan, another world economic power (Marcou, 2024). Turkey upgraded from an observatory

member of the African Union (AU) to the rank of a strategic partner in 2008. In return, 38 African countries have opened Embassies in Ankara by 2022.

One of the soft power measures taken by Turkey consisted of extending the connections of Turkish Airlines, making it one of the most important companies operating in Africa by covering more than 60 destinations.

Another soft power means consisted in the cultural deployment through the setting up of *Yunus Emré* cultural institutes, as well as religious schools established by *the Maarif Foundation*. These cultural institutions succeeded in replacing the religious institutions installed in Africa by the *Gülen Foundation*, after the violent rift that opposed President Erdogan to his former ally Fethullah Gülen. Over the last decade, Turkey provided also more than 15.000 study grants to young Africans, whose number has exceeded 61.000 students in Turkey by 2023 (MFA).

Concerning the Media and Information sector, Turkey has the means of cultural influence in Africa, through the State *Press Agency Anadolu* and public Television network, TRT, as well as TRT Africa, a digital television channel diffused also in Swahili and Hausa, in addition to French and English languages. Fahrettin Altun, the Responsible for Media and Communication, at the Presidential Office, considered the approach of former colonial powers towards Africa as "artificial," while arguing that Turkey has adopted a more "sincere and humanitarian" approach towards this continent (Gucun, 2023).

The Turkish Media Network also serves as a means for anti-Western propaganda in Africa, while the *Diyanet*, the Direction of Turkish Religious Affairs, participates in propagating Turkish Islam on this continent through the construction of mosques and the training of Imams (Muslim preachers). Such an approach though reminiscing of the policies practiced by other foreign actors involved in Africa appears legitimate about the competition of these powers over the African continent. In its dealings with Africa, Turkey like other rivals pursues national objectives linked to national interest and search for power, with, however, less arrogance and paternalism.

-Economic Cooperation and Trade Exchanges

Turkey has channelled its economic cooperation through summits it held with its African partners since the first encounter which took place in Istanbul in 2008. The

third Turkish-African Forum occurred in December 2021 and the next will take place in Africa in 2026. These meetings followed the "African Strategy" framework announced in March 2010 by Erdogan, then Prime Minister, which aimed to develop the Turkish-African partnership, and implement a comprehensive strategy based on cooperation involving various sectors. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), which opened its first office in Ethiopia in 2005, has increased its representations to 22 across Africa, and implemented 1884 development projects over 2017-2022, in the fields of health, education, and agriculture, particularly in the Sahel-Sahara region (Marcou, 2024). The Council of Foreign Economic Relations (DEIK), the establishment of a joint Business Councils with 45 African countries, as well as the Turkey-Africa Business and Economy Forum, set up in October 2023, will permit the interested Turkish companies to maintain their business in Africa and search for new partners in this continent.

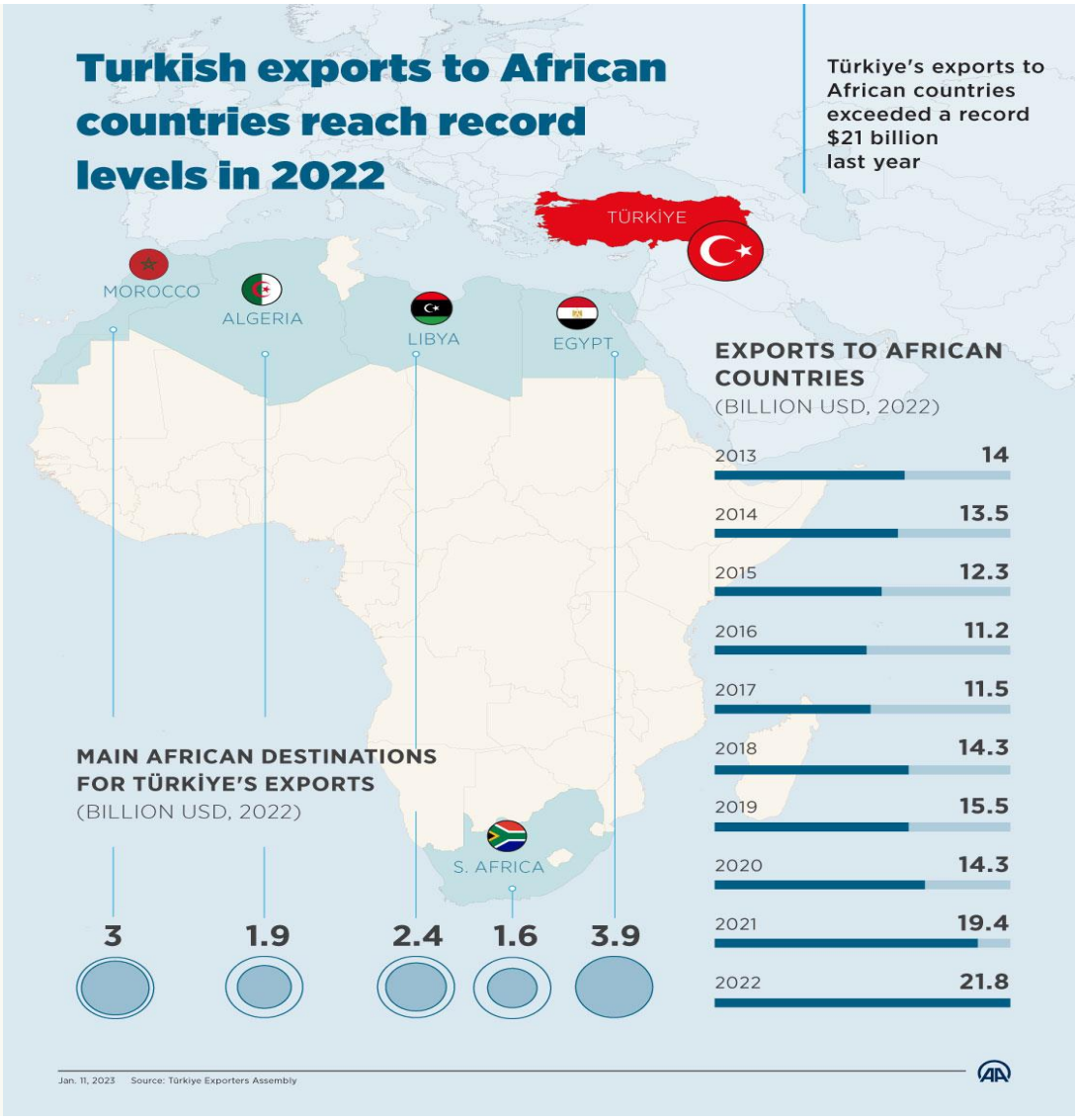
To pursue this economic cooperation on a dynamic basis, Turkey signed a framework agreement with the newly created African Continental Free Trade Area to increase trade exchanges and investment opportunities between the two partners. The volume of projects undertaken by Turkish contracting companies rapidly expanded in Africa, reaching $77.8 billion $(MFA Gov).

Turkish trade with Africa increased from $ 5.4 billion in 2003 to $34.5 billion in 2021 (MFA.Gov). If this volume seems far behind the value of exchanges between China and Africa, it remains that its evolution has been steady and quite substantial over the years.

The map shows a record high attained by Turkish exports to Africa, which amounted to $21.8 billion in 2022. The four main African markets for Turkish goods are all located in North Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Libya, and Algeria), accounting for nearly $13 billion and representing almost 60 % of Turkey's global exports to Africa. The total trade volume of Turkey with the North African countries reached a little more than $16 billion in 2021, representing nearly 47% of the total trade exchanges recorded between the Eurasian power and the African continent.

Turkiye's exports to Africa consisted mainly of ready-made garments, household appliances, automobiles, and petrochemical products, while it imports natural gas and oil, phosphates, agricultural products, and fisheries. Turkish imports of energy products, mainly Liquefied Natural gas (LNG) have steadily increased in recent years. Nigeria covers 90% of the Eurasian power's needs for Liquefied Natural Gas, while Algeria has become its fourth supplier of this product. Other countries such as Chad and Somalia have signed deals with Turkish energy companies to extract oil.

Turkey proved also a good donor to African countries in the domains of health and education, particularly Somalia, the largest receiver of this humanitarian assistance in the continent. Globally, Ankara disbursed more than $3.4 billion in 2014, placing Turkey in the third rank of foreign donors of humanitarian aid to Africa in the same year (MFA.Gov). These attributes rewarded Turkey, as it volunteered for and obtained the honour of holding the first world Summit on humanitarian assistance, which it hosted in Istanbul in 2016.



Source : Anadolu Ajansi, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/info/infographic/31699.

Strategic Designs and Security Concerns

A statement released by the Turkish Foreign Ministry asserted that Turkey pays "particular attention to ensure peace and stability in Africa and contributes to the United Nations missions deployed in the continent. This country provides currently personnel and contributes financially to six to eight United Nations missions in Africa.

Emulating other foreign actors in Africa, Turkey bears geostrategic designs and security concerns, and attempts to make Africa a pedestal for its ambitions, by not only intervening military in the civil war-torn countries, but also by selling arms, looking for markets, securing energy and mineral supplies and propagating its cultural and religious model. The pursuit of these interests in Africa serves the empowerment of Ankara's international Status, just like any other foreign power in Africa.

Such an objective seems legitimate in the realist approach school, magnifying the search of the State to maximize its power. If Turkey has no substantial means to confront other world major powers in Africa, it has tried, nevertheless, to counter the interests of Russia in Libya, and the Sahel, and compete with China in the fight against piracy and terrorism in the Horn of Africa, thanks to its increasing economic capabilities and military might.

Like other foreign powers interventions, Turkish military involvement in Africa did not succeed in contributing to put an end to violent conflicts and civil wars, nor eradicating the terrorist threats. In a nutshell, Turkey pursues policies, like any other foreign player in Africa, regardless of political rhetoric linked to making Africa a powerhouse, ideological references related to Islamic solidarity, or the Neo-Third-World doctrine, as preached by the Turkish leaders.

In defence of Turkish policy in Africa, it may be worth stating that the Eurasian power has shown a less arrogant and paternalistic attitude towards its African partners. It also bears no responsibility for the causes and ferments of the security threats and economic backwardness in Africa, most of which derived from the colonial legacy and cultural atavisms. Similarly, Turkey does not boast the ambition to solve African crises, as it encouraged the option consisting of 'African solutions

to African problems' and the increase of African Union's peace-building capabilities.

Geostrategic designs and security concerns marking Turkish involvement in Africa consist of the necessity to secure energy and minerals supplies from North Africa, the Sahel region, and the Horn of Africa. The priority concerned securing a maritime exclusive zone in the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, through the control of naval routes to protect shipments of oil and gas and getting access to the energy sources in the oil-rich Libyan country. Thus, Turkish authorities signed in 2019 an important deal with the United Nations-recognized National Libyan Government (GNA) located in Tripoli. This authority does not enjoy the support of a political entity based in Benghazi (the Libyan House of Representatives), which received a strong backing from the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by the dissent Marshall Khalifa Haftar.

To maintain the GNA in power in the name of international legality, and secure its energy assets in Libya, Turkey moved to support its ally military, by providing security forces, and sophisticated armaments. The objective consisted of preventing the downfall of GNA against the Libyan National Army incursions to control Tripoli airport and energy assets under the authority of GNA and its militia allies. Therefore, Haftar-led forces did not succeed in invading Tripoli in July 2020, thanks to the military intervention of Turkiye. The contribution of this country in the Libyan conflict proved decisive, not only in maintaining GNA in power but also in refraining LNA's troops from invading the western parts of Libya. In doing so, Turkey has proved its resilience against Russia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates, which provided military, logistic, and financial support to the Benghazi-led government.

Turkish geostrategic and security concerns do not concern only Libya, but extend to the Sahel region in the name of a junction of interests, through military support, the Eurasian power accorded to the military-backed regimes in Niger and Mali. Ankara aims to secure its access to mineral resources, despite an aversion to military regimes, due to the weight of the Turkish army in the home polity and the experience of the aborted coup against President Erdogan in 2016. In addition, Turkey intervention in the Sahel aims to prevent a domino effect that may result from the widespread terrorism and separatist temptations to large Southern swathes of the Libyan territory, because of geographical contiguity, and the links, terrorist groups and some secessionist Tuareg movements located in Niger, may entertain

with some tribes in Southern Libya. These ties rely on tribal affinities linking, vertically Tuareg and Toubou populations, overlapping the Niger-Libyan porous frontier, in addition to their common hostility to the central authorities in Tripoli, and their implication in trans-border smuggling activities.

The remarkable achievement made by Turkey in Africa consisted of its heavy engagement in Somalia, which goes well beyond geostrategic designs and security concerns. Such an achievement seemed linked, rather, to prestige and self-assertiveness in a complex continent, which has been the subject of a scramble led by the world's major powers. According to a political scientist, Somalia presented Turkey with several opportunities to establish a footprint in a region of high geostrategic value and to enhance its image in Africa (Donnelly, 2024). Turkey hurried to help a failed State and a country wrecked by civil wars, terrorism, famine, and tensions with its neighbours. It started by helping this country to defend its waters (by modernizing its navy, and patrolling Somalia's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Indian Ocean), and explore its offshore energy assets. By signing a Defence Agreement in October 2024, Ankara strengthened its military cooperation with Somalia, through providing drones, building a missile and rocket testing site, and setting up training facilities in Mogadishu.

Somalia has evolved into a testing ground for Turkey's ambitious foreign policy of expanding its influence in Africa. While military relations have added strategic depth to the bilateral relationship, Ankara's engagement with Mogadishu transcends a simple security transaction. Turkish investment in Somalia proved eminently strategic about the importance taken by the Gulf of Aden in the extension of security threats generated by the aggressions of 'Israel' against Gaza, Lebanon, and the implication of the Yemeni rebels and *Shabab* groups. Such a geostrategic space and security threats, stretching from the civil war-torn Syria to the unstable and violent Horn of Africa may enhance the bargaining power of Ankara and its emergence as a key actor in regional security arrangements and invigorate its brokerage empowerment. Thus, the recent attempts to mediate between Somalia and Ethiopia highlight the credibility Turkey may enjoy in the Horn of Africa, for example.

Another marker paradigm that characterizes Turkish involvement in Africa consists of its participation in peacekeeping missions incepted by the United Nations in Sudan, South Sudan, the Republic Democratic of Congo, and Mali and in the UN-AU Hybrid operation conducted in the Sudanese region of Darfur. Turkey also contributed to financing the Joint Force incepted by the G5 Sahel to combat terrorism (TRENDS, 2024).

To sustain its military presence in Africa, Turkey has signed agreements related to military cooperation with more than 30 countries in Africa. It has also become one of the largest suppliers of arms to Africa, thanks to its technological achievements in the sector of combat and surveillance drones such as the BayraktarTB-2, a medium-altitude long-endurance, unmanned combat aerial vehicle, and remotely controlled flight operations. The use of these drones witnessed sound success in the crises in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, the Azeri-Armenian conflict, and Niger, more recently. The advantages presented by these drones consist of their efficiency, low costs, and capacity to fire missiles, bombs, and guided rockets (Crisis Group, 2023). For these reasons, they constituted a high demand from many African countries, in addition to wheeled-type armoured personnel carriers.

Shortcomings and Alternate Opportunities

In the conduct of foreign policy objectives, any State may gain advantages and may face setbacks. Turkish-African partnership has certainly proved mutually for both parties , but the obstacles the development of this partnership may be impaired by factors inherent to Turkey's objectives and geostrategic interests in its Euro-Asian confinement much more than to the reasons peculiar to African context, dynamics or incapacities.

-Turkish Complexities and Foreign Policy Ambiguities

Rare are the countries in the world that are located in the crux of geopolitical and security turmoil as Turkey. Such a cauldron encompasses a mosaic of diverse peoples, races, cultures, and economic assets, mainly energy. Moreover, this geographic configuration includes countries, which had fought each other for decades, if not for centuries. The location overriding two markedly contrasted continents, Europe and Asia, and the geographic contiguity with the highly unstable and war-torn Middle East, have put Turkey in a highly specific place.

The glorious past under the Ottoman Empire which extended through centuries its control over large swathes of central Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa except Morocco, heavily contrasted with the humiliating defeats during the Navarino battleship in 1827, the Arab revolt in 1916-1818, and the World War I which had completely wrecked the Ottoman great Empire. Memories of the presumed cleansing of Armenian Christians in the Ottoman-dominated Anatolian region in 1915-1916, remain a bottleneck for Turkish successive regimes and a

shadow over the Azeri-Armenian unsettled conflict, in which Ankara is still mixing the brushes. Internally, the Kurdish issue remains a Damocles sword pending over the Turkish rulers, as depicted by Western Media, and more recently, the entanglements in NATO's polemics with Russia over the war in Ukraine, constituted another puzzling challenge for Turkey, because of its membership in the North Atlantic Alliance.

More equivocal was the stance taken by the Erdogan leadership towards the violent aggressions of the 'Zionist entity' against Gaza and Lebanon, being torn between posing as the champion of the Palestinian question and as a close economic partner of 'Israel.' In April 2024, President Erdogan declared, "We will continue our support to our Palestinian brothers and sisters until the bloodshed in Gaza stops and they live in a free Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on the 1967 borders" (Daily Sabah, 2024). In a reaction to the aggression carried out by the 'Zionist entity' in the Gaza district, Turkey decided to recall its Ambassador from Tel Aviv, but its diplomats still operated in their Embassy. It restricted exports of 54 products, but "Turkish-'Israeli" trade has continued via loopholes, while Turkish ports have given a safe passage to foreign ships heading to 'Israel'(Balboni, 2024). Resisting the US pressures, and probably conceding to mounting pressures from the Turkish 'street,' Erdogan's leadership announced that his country would sever all diplomatic ties with the 'Zionist entity' and block top jets with the officials of the 'Zionist entity' from entering its airspace. It will also lobby the UN for a global arms embargo on this entity (Middle East Monitor, 2024).

The sudden collapse of Bashar Al Assad' regime asserted Turkey's abilities to participate effectively in imposing a solution to major conflicts, although by using military means which consist of providing the *Hayat Tahrir Al Sham* (THS), with arms, rear bases and logistics. The fall of Bashar Al Assad highlighted the success of the bargaining power used by Ankara with the US and Russia to shape the future of Syria, and control the Kurdish nationalist temptations in the region. It expressed also a Turkish performance in posing as the mentor of an Islamist movement, which has announced its opposition to the Jihadist organizations of Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS). By empowering and backing THS until the final victory, Turkey has demonstrated that it constitutes, in final analysis, the pivot State in the region, an efficient challenger to other foreign actors, namely the US, Russia, Iran, and 'Israel,' when it comes to facing security threats and ensure its domestic stability.

With a marked triumphalism, President Erdogan declared in December 2024 "the events in Syria remind us that Turkey is bigger than Turkey itself …we cannot limit our horizon to 782,000 square kilometres…Just as a person cannot escape its

destiny, Turkey and the Turkish people cannot run from or hide from their predestined role in history"(Balboni, 2024). This affirmation may stand as the watermark of President Erdogan's world ambitions. A Turkish political scientist aptly captured President's Erdogan's optimism by asserting that" Erdogan sees opportunity in a post-Assad future. His optimism is well founded: out of all the region's major players, Ankara has the strongest channels of communication and history of working with the Islamist group now in charge of Damascus, positioning it to reap the benefits of the Assad's regime demise"(Tol, 2024).

In the past, sets of ambiguities did not fail to stir up doubts on the abilities of Ankara to ensure domestic stability and security in Turkish 'near abroad,' as well as the adjacent Middle East. However, Erdogan's leadership has managed to keep a balance between contending forces, and emerged as a contributor in handling regional crises, whether those pertaining to the civil wars in Syria and Libya, or the stalemate in the Horn of Africa.

These syndromes and security concerns may explain the uncertainties felt by Turkey under the leadership of President Erdogan. They may portend, also, bad omens. Post-Erdogan Turkey may remain not only a curiosity but also a mystery. Still, this country has emerged as a trade power, and a potential military contender, able to defend its national sovereignty, and territorial integrity against regional rivals. Moreover, it has shown a real potential in intervening in war-torn countries and contributing to fighting terrorism in the Middle East, the Sahel-Sahara region, and the Horn of Africa, through its increasing military arsenal, mainly the Bayraktar Akinci drones, equipped with a large autonomy, payload capacity, and advanced electronic systems, including precision-guided missiles.

The dilemma between the Euro-Atlantic trend dictated by security concerns and the Asian-African linkage, required by identity purposes and commonalities, remains a real concern for the Turkish leaders, whatever their ideological alignments. President Erdogan and his AKP party may measure the acuity of the challenge posed by either option. A subtle solution resides in trying to reconcile security concerns with identity layout, as President Erdogan seems to practice with some success, amidst many concrete problems and unpredictable events. He tried restlessly to keep the balance between these two imperatives, which proved arduous, as was the case with the Turkish reaction to the aggressions perpetrated by 'Israeli' forces against Gaza.

In Africa, Turkey's challenges are not that easy, as the Turkish leadership tries to match its security and geo-strategic concerns with cultural identity. This dualism relies on military intervention and the sale of arms, on the one hand, and supporting regimes threatened by Jihadist groups, on the other. The option related to bullets, drones, ammunition military hardware, opposed soft measures linked to the export of the Turkish societal model based on tolerant Islam, particularly in a context marked by the widespread threat of radical Islam incarnated by the Salafi ideology and terrorist groups.

-Disturbing Military Entanglements

Two distinct orientations describe Turkish military involvement in Africa:

- One pertaining to the contribution in the fight of African countries against terrorism by granting $5 million in 2018 to G (Hurriyet Daily News, 2018). a collective security mechanism set up by the Sahel countries, and participating with military personnel in the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa.

-The second concerns military engagement in Africa for purposes related to the grand design of the Eurasian power. Turkey's military involvement in Libya is a typical case of an intervention of a foreign power for geostrategic purposes and economic advantages. However, such an incursion has contributed to deepening the civil war in this country and fading away the possibility of reconciliation between the local belligerent parties. The Libyan crisis indeed originated from the leader Gadhafi's refusal to yield power to opposition movements that irrupted, thanks to the so-called Arab Spring revolutions, and to the tribal confrontation that emerged over the control of the country's abundant energy resources. However, by taking a side with the Tripoli government (GNA), Ankara has privileged imminent economic gains at the expense of its long-term objectives in this country. The reality perhaps, is that Turkey seems not able to protect its GNA ally against the powerful authorities located in Benghazi, which benefit from the support of the strong Libyan National Army, as well as the logistics, arms, and financial assistance provided by Egypt, Russia, and the United Arab Emirates. In Libya also, siding with the Tripoli-based National Government appeared quite ambiguous since this political institution has received the support of Islamist militias, most of them, affiliated with the Jihadist movements of Al-Qaida or the Islamic States (ISIS), hostile to Turkish moderate Islam and regional leadership. It may be not farfetched to postulate that Erdogan's regime has a little sympathy for Marshall's Haftar army, but composing with Salafi militias remains a puzzling question.

In the Horn of Africa, Turkey seems to support Somalia, at the expense of Ethiopia, although reports have indicated that the Eurasian power has provided the Ethiopian security forces with drones, in their combat against the People's Liberation Front (TPLF) in the Tigre province. Ankara also seems to compete with China in the Horn of Africa, in the attempts to fight terrorism, and piracy to protect naval routes and the supplies of energy products. The Eurasian power may not stand the competition with the Asian giant in the long term, because of its limited naval capabilities, security forces, and military technology. China has troops, a military base in Djibouti, and naval facilities for its rapidly increasing naval fleet, in addition to sophisticated long-range missiles and a substantial nuclear potential.

In the Sahel-Sahara region, Turkish military intervention did not prove neutral. Providing arms to the military regimes that rose to power in Mali and Niger may run against Turkey's support to civilian regimes and politics of moderation. Not long ago, Ankara entertained close relations with Niger's elected President Mohamed Bazoum, now out of power, because of a military coup in July 2023. Turkish military engagement in Mali may have also not helped to tame down separatist temptations in the Northern parts of Mali. In November 2024, some Tuareg factions have unified their forces in the Front for the liberation of Azawad (FLA), which no longer claims autonomy and decentralization, but independence for the Northern parts of Mali, thus voicing out their hostility to any foreign military support provided to Bamako.

Elsewhere in Africa, Turkish military success did not fail to encounter serious discrepancies as the use of drones has caused blunders such as the killings of civilians in operations conducted by the Ethiopian army against the restive Amhara region (Anyadike, 2024). In Northern Mali, Media reports indicated that a drone used to attack Tuareg rebel groups had killed eight people and injured 20 others in October 2024 (Gumrukcu, 2024).

-A specific African Policy amid Turkish Geostrategic Complexities

Overlapping East (Asia) and West (Europe) and blessed with a mosaic of cultures and civilizations, Turkey finds itself entangled in, apparently, contradictory trends and forced to play a balanced approach in its dealings with its near abroad, as well as in the conduct of its global foreign policy. The challenges are not easy, but Turkey, despite intrinsic economic weakness, enjoys some capabilities that make this country a viable partner and an efficient broker, thanks to the politics of

pragmatism and moderation, President Erdogan has attempted to pursue, sometimes with harsh difficulties, amid uncertainties and unpredictable contexts.

In Africa, Turkish policy stems from the determination of President Erdogan to impose his imprint through the dedication of his team, and the links forged with many African leaders. It appears that Turkish African policy responds more to the ambitions of the current Turkish leaders than to a global strategy involving State's dynamics and societal paradigms, as was the case of Turkiye's stance towards the Western world in general and the European Union in particular. In the latter case, the impetus and driving engine remain linked to the firm desire to become an integrative part of the European unification, a consensual project sustained by the Turkish elites, whether moderate Islamists or secular Republicans, as well as by the business and entrepreneurial classes.

In this vein, the current Turkish policy towards Africa seems to respond more to particular interests than to a structured foreign policy. There is no evidence that the future leadership in Turkey will bear the same interest in Africa or will benefit from the same support from Turkish financial and industrial sectors to invest in this continent. Such a pessimistic approach may become acute because of the economic problems Turkey may witness in the future, with increasing inflation, rising social demands, and declining exports. In addition, insecurity in Turkey remains of a high concern for the leadership and the population, because of the threat posed by the Kurdish Labour Party (PKK), as highlighted by the deadly attacks in October 2023 and November 2024. These threats may persist, although the PKK's nuisance capacities have diminished these last years. However, it is likely that the victory of the jihadist-led *Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham* and the downfall of the Syrian regime will open new perspectives for Kurdish nationalist demands, especially as the Kurdish community overlapping the Syrian-Turkish border seems to benefit from American protection, despite the control of a buffer zone by the Turkish forces in the northern parts of Syria.

Currently, Turkey seems overloaded with constraints linked to some economic hardships and involvement in many harassing issues, such as the crisis in Ukraine, the implication in the Syrian and Libyan wars, tensions with Armenia, the military deployment in the Horn of Africa, the drone-led operations in the Sahel, as well as the serious tensions with 'Israel' over Palestine and Lebanon. Moreover, the attempt of Ankara to extend its Exclusive Economic Zone and the desire to control the maritime routes in the Eastern Mediterranean has raised fears from Greece and Malta, notably.

Amid this turmoil and array of complexities, Africa may still provide Turkey with good opportunities to transpose its model of economic and religious tolerance. Similarly, African countries may also benefit from low-cost Turkish-manufactured products, mainly textiles, and cheap drones to fight terrorism. The question that remains pending consists of whether Turkiye can fill the security vacuum left by the withdrawal of France and the US from the Sahel region. Probably not, if we compare the modest armaments (except drones), displayed by Ankara in Africa, to the great military arsenal, the Western powers have deployed in this continent. Still, neither France with its huge military operations, nor the US, with the titanic outreach of Africom, as well as, the Flintlock and Pan-Sahara Counter-terrorism Initiative (PSCI), were able to eradicate terrorism from the Sahel-Sahara region. Therefore, Turkey would be, hardly blamed, if it followed suit.

As an emerging power, Turkey may remain present in Africa, but it may not be able to match the huge economic weight of China or France's influence, despite the French withdrawal from certain parts of the former colonies of West Africa, or the US military engagement, though conjuncture 'punch' operations. Moreover, African countries, especially those confronting civil wars or terrorism, need capable partners to rely on, and which can provide political support, economic assistance, and not relatively limited military operations.

To counter such a handicap, Ankara seems to follow gradually a smooth stance in its partnership with the African continent. By trying to mediate between Somalia and Ethiopia in September 2024, Turkiye attempted to maintain a balance against the potential disruption of its geostrategic interests, and the risks of allowing non-state armed actors and terrorist organizations to get involved in this process (Mohamed Ali, 2024). At the same time, Ankara tried to mend fences between the belligerent military factions in Sudan. These efforts of mediation may seem quite dour as Ankara entertains substantial economic links with both Somalia and Ethiopia and has supplied the rival countries weapons to fight rebel movements and terrorist groups, which, not only shift alliances, but rely also on other foreign powers. A reconciliation between Mogadishu and Addis Ababa would serve the geostrategic interests and economic assets of Turkey, as stability in the Horn of Africa would dissipate the fears of Turkish investors to engage further in the economic development of this region..

In the case of the brokerage between the Sudanese President Abdul Fatah Burhan and his rival, Hamdan Dogolo, the Commander of the Rapid Support Forces (SRF),

Turkey seems to privilege a pragmatic approach by probably hesitating to sell drones to the Sudanese central authorities, despite the visit paid by General Burhan to Istanbul in September 2023.

The same pragmatic approach seems to guide the Turkish posture towards the Libyan crisis and the situation in the Sahel region. Indeed, unconfirmed reports have indicated that Ankara has attempted a rapprochement with both the United Arab Emirates and Russia over the Libyan and Sahel issues. Similarly, the security situation in the Sahel-Sahara remains so complex with the proliferation of terrorist groups that have turned into armies and extended their military operations to the adjacent countries of the Sahel region, despite foreign military assistance.

Conclusion

The merits of Turkey's presence in Africa consist of not only empowering its international status and influence, but also shoving the involvement of other major powers in this continent, regarded as arrogant and exploiting the continent’s natural resources.

The incursions of Ankara in Africa rely on the personal determination of President Erdogan and his party to play a substantial role in this continent for geostrategic concerns and economic benefits, and not for securing the survival of the Turkish State or the revival of its Ottoman glory, as argued by some political scientists.

Turkey's advantages in dealing with Africa consist of an economic and societal model based on a subtle symbiosis between moderate Islamic precepts and democratic principles, as well as on the encouragement of a market economy and liberal values. Turkish assets rely also on trade capabilities and military might, which consist of the sale of low-cost and easily manipulated drones that have proved their efficiency in many violent theatres in Africa.

Still, the military engagement practiced by Turkey in Africa did not fail to attract naysayers, since this country was criticized for emulating the behaviour of other foreign powers in Africa, although with less arrogance and exposure. Like its rivals, Ankara seems to pursue grandiloquent geostrategic designs in Africa that may go beyond its economic capabilities and economic strength. It remains to see whether Turkey can surmount its apparent economic weaknesses and limited military potential and face the challenges linked to a highly unstable regional context.

No doubt, Turkey has, by virtue of its geographic location and the glorious past of the Ottoman Empire, the assets to keep a civilization firmly standing up in the face

of the current regional and international mutations, as well as uncertainties and unpredictable events.

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