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# PEACEBUILDING IN TURBULENT TIMES

## TURKEY IN MENA AND AFRICA

**Spyros A. Sofos**



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# Peacebuilding in Turbulent Times: Turkey in MENA and Africa

Spyros A. Sofos

## About the Author

**Spyros Sofos** is a researcher at the LSE Middle East Centre. He has conducted research on conflict, polarisation, nationalism and populism in south-east Europe and the Middle East. His most recent book is *Turkish Politics and The People: Mass Mobilisation and Populism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022). He has also co-authored *Islam in Europe: Public Spaces and Civic Networks* (Palgrave Macmillan 2013), *Tormented by History: Nationalism in Greece and Turkey* (Oxford UP 2008) and co-edited *Nation and Identity in Contemporary Europe* (Routledge 1996).

## Abstract

Over the past decade, Turkey has become a significant actor in the Middle East, North and sub-Saharan Africa, largely through its development and peacebuilding engagement, and its cultural and commercial penetration within these regions. This involvement has varied in response to both domestic and international developments, allowing Turkey to project itself as a major and ambitious newcomer, among other emerging powers in the development and peacebuilding field. Ankara's new multidimensional foreign policy framework and its development and peacemaking approach has since undergone a significant transformation as international, regional and domestic developments have prompted the Justice and Development Party (AKP) to respond to challenges and opportunities posed in this field.

This report, premised on an extensive review of relevant official documents from the Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİYANET), the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), analysis of media reports, as well as interviews with policymakers, diplomats and foreign policy, peacebuilding, and development experts assesses the Turkish political leadership and policy community's understanding of peacebuilding, the contexts and main motivations underlying its conceptualisation and implementation, while outlining potential future developments.



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About the series: The Global Transitions series looks at fragmentations in the global order and how these impact peace and transition settlements. It explores why and how different third-party actors – state, intergovernmental, and non-governmental – intervene in conflicts, and how they see themselves contributing to reduction of conflict and risks of conflict relapse. The series critically assesses the growth and diversification of global and regional responses to contemporary conflicts. It also asks how local actors are navigating this multiplicity of mediators and peacebuilders and how this is shaping conflict outcomes and post-conflict governance.

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## Key Findings

Turkish engagement in peacebuilding acquired importance in 2003 when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government recognised it as a vehicle for expressing Turkey's emergence as a power with interests and potential impact beyond its borders and immediate vicinity. The aspiration at the time for Turkey to assume a bridging role took the form of initiatives promoting civilisational dialogue and mediation, and an increasing presence in the Middle East, North and sub-Saharan Africa, largely through its development and peacebuilding engagement and its cultural and commercial penetration of these regions. Focusing on Turkey's peacebuilding engagement over the past two decades, the research underlying this paper has uncovered the following findings:

- Turkey's success in building partnerships and engaging in peacebuilding and development projects is facilitated by its lack of 'colonial baggage', which allows it to articulate an anticolonial discourse and extend its hand to other countries, without the often-unwelcome conditionality attached to mainstream, Western peacebuilding and development aid. This echoes Chinese overtures in the African continent.
- Over the past decade, Turkey's peacebuilding efforts and foreign policy radically changed due to a series of global systemic transformations (the United States' reduced intervention in international affairs, the emergence of Russia as a revisionist power, and China as a global development actor); regional realignments (the Arab Spring, Saudi-Arabia and the UAE's alliance versus Turkey and Qatar in terms of their respective attitudes towards the Muslim Brotherhood) and domestic challenges (the Gezi protests of 2013 and the attempted coup of 2016).
- Current state policy is largely driven by *regime insecurity* from 'within'. This has prompted the state to rethink its historical aversion to engagement beyond its national borders, while global and regional changes have opened up new spaces for Turkey to play a role that is not circumscribed by US and EU pressure. Turkey was thus able to project its power in its 'near abroad' but also further afield, in East and West Africa.
- Turkey's peacebuilding aspirations have been increasingly shaped by the personalistic character of the country's new presidential system.
- Turkish development and peacebuilding institutions have not been able to consolidate themselves as part of the country's foreign policy architecture, nor have they been capable of providing a longer-term vision and consistency in development, institution-building and peacemaking.
- Peacebuilding engagements have become more transactional, power-driven, and are often volatile. They are not shaped by a vision to transform conflicts and establish dialogue and trust – features that have traditionally been staple elements of the liberal peacebuilding toolbox.

A closer look at Turkey's presence in Somalia, Libya, and Syria, as well as more broadly across East and West Africa, suggests that:

- Turkey's peacebuilding strategy has drawn on both 'liberal' and 'illiberal' peacebuilding toolkits, as different agencies and state organisations operate without coordinating amongst themselves.
- Turkish involvement in conflicts is increasingly characterised by the use of violent, militarised, and non-inclusive methods, alongside the deployment of soft power.
- Turkey's emphasis is on conflict containment rather than the establishment of lasting peace. In some cases, Turkey demonstrates some interest in upholding grassroots involvement in its peacebuilding model, such as in Somalia and in the territories it administers in northern Syria. However, the predominant model relies more heavily on military and security force training. It also involves the undertaking of major infrastructure work that benefits Turkish entrepreneurs with ties to the state, rather than empowering communities.
- Turkey's involvement in conflict situations is usually partisan and often divisive. Knowledge transfer projects (especially the training of foreign military and security forces) as well as technical aid, results in institutional fragmentation, and cultivates military, political and economic dependence among recipients of Turkish support and know-how.
- In Turkey's 'near abroad', peacebuilding further controls political developments and advances the current leadership's revisionist foreign policy agenda.
- Under specific conditions, Ankara has the proven potential to be a valuable partner in multilateral initiatives that its Western allies support. Moreover, it is not tainted by the history of European colonialism, which may place it at an advantage in potential partnerships.

## Recommendations

Efforts should be directed towards:

- Dialogue with Turkey, in tandem with encouraging the country's democratisation.
- Turkey's progressive reintegration into Western institutions, encouraging it to become involved in multilateral initiatives that can enable shared conceptualisations of peace and security. This in turn can transform the current antagonistic outlook of Turkish policies and may instead encourage complementarity and cooperation.

## Introduction

Over the past decade, Turkey has emerged as a significant actor in the Middle East, and in North and sub-Saharan Africa, largely through its development and peacebuilding engagement, and its cultural and commercial penetration within these regions. This involvement has varied in response to both domestic and international developments, allowing Turkey to project itself as a major and ambitious newcomer among other emerging powers in the development and peacebuilding field.

Before the 1990s, and with the exception of its 1970s intervention in Cyprus, Turkey's only other engagement in peacemaking was through facilitating mediation efforts between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. This limited engagement was informed by traditional security considerations, as both countries share borders with Turkey and all have significant Kurdish minorities, and by the introspective character of Turkish foreign policy and the strict association between its national security and the protection of its national borders.

It was only in the 1990s that Turkish governments developed a more proactive strategy that embraced peacebuilding as a means of enhancing the country's international presence and stature. Turkey's timid initial steps in this field included participating in UN and NATO-sponsored multilateral peacekeeping and operations in Somalia and the Balkans in the 1990s. In tandem with Turkey's aspiration to join the European Union (EU), the Yılmaz government sought to redefine Turkey's international identity, from an important ally within the Euro-Atlantic institutional architecture to that of an emerging, constructive player on the global scene.

As part of this effort, Ankara developed a multidimensional foreign policy framework within which development and peacebuilding policy assumed, at least in theory, importance. This policy shift was solidified by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) that succeeded the Yılmaz coalition in office. The 'Strategy for Improving Economic Relations with African Countries' of 2003 was the prelude to Turkey's emergence as a significant actor in the Middle East, North and sub-Saharan Africa. It is hard to identify a clear blueprint underlying Turkey's peacebuilding and development strategy however, as the country is a relative newcomer in this field, but also because the latter is continually revisited due to the volatility of the domestic, regional, and international environment.

This paper is premised on an extensive review of relevant official documents from the Republic of Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DİYANET), and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), analysis of media reports, as well as interviews with policymakers, diplomats (most of whom spoke on condition of anonymity) and foreign policy, peacebuilding, and development experts. It assesses the Turkish political leadership and policy community's understanding of peacebuilding, the contexts and main motivations underlying its conceptualisation and implementation, while outlining potential future developments.



## Content and Structure

In this paper, I draw upon twelve interviews conducted in 2021. My interlocutors included two retired diplomats, two current diplomats, two Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials, one TİKA official, one DİYANET and one former Turkish Maarif Foundation staff member and three academic foreign policy commentators.

In Part 1, I address the emergence of Turkey as an ambitious regional and global actor, focusing on its first steps into peacebuilding. After examining the factors that prompted Turkey to embrace peacebuilding and humanitarian diplomacy as an important part of its international engagement, I map the incremental shifts in its international orientation, from its original emphasis on joining the EU to the development of a multifaceted foreign policy that includes peacebuilding engagement, with an emphasis on regions other than Europe.

In Part 2, I turn my attention to Turkey's peacebuilding activities over the past decade. I identify the new international and domestic environment in which the Turkish leadership's understanding and methodologies of peacebuilding is transformed in line with Turkey's foreign policy reorientation. After an outline of Turkey's engagement in MENA and sub-Saharan Africa, I provide an overview of the underlying trends and characteristics of the second phase of peacebuilding engagement. The latter is characterised by the ways in which the transformed AKP operates in competition with Turkey's European allies, as well as with its Middle Eastern rivals, a revisionist Russia, and an assertive China.

Part 3 focuses on how Turkey's peacebuilding strategy and activities over the past decade impact the country's place in the regional and global system, namely its alliances and partnerships, and the effectiveness of its interventions. Building upon this, I offer suggestions for further consideration.

## Part 1: Turkey's Engagement in Peacebuilding – First Steps

### Background and Methodology

Peacebuilding is a flexible and expansive term that can encompass different combinations of interventions dealing with physical and institutional instability, responding to human insecurity, poverty, lack of trust and social justice, combatting nationalism or sectarianism, tackling economic stagnation and environmental challenges, building infrastructures, transferring know-how, and empowering communities. It can involve the exercise of hard (military) power, and soft power (through persuasion and dialogue). It can be understood as top-down or grassroots in its approach, either remaining limited to analysing masculine interactions, namely confrontations or negotiations, or paying attention to the gendering of conflict and the differential inputs men and women can play in transforming conflict-affected societies. Depending on the breadth and ambition of peacebuilding initiatives, experts have distinguished among at least four generations or paradigms of engagement (see for example Carey, 2020). Until recently, the debates surrounding peacebuilding have revolved around ways to improve or challenge and radically deepen liberal peacebuilding – generally understood as the promotion of democracy, the rule of law and good governance, human rights, as well as economic reform (and often privatisation). The blurring and convergence of development and security priorities is at the root of liberal peace, bringing together two previously distinct policy areas, and a different set of actors and agencies. This dynamic transforms societies to fit liberal norms and Western expectations.

Due to international systemic changes, a space has emerged for new powers that do not share the normative assumptions of liberalism and liberal peacebuilding, which in turn provided fertile ground for instability, regional conflicts and competition. In this context, emerging powers such as Russia, China, Turkey, or the affluent Gulf states, have become increasingly active in fuelling regional instability. They have also been more active in their role as peacebuilders who test and promote visions of peacemaking that are premised on principles, methodologies and outcomes that are markedly different from the ones associated with liberal peace.

### Turkey in the Aftermath of the Cold War

Turkey's engagement in peacemaking is a relatively new development. Before the 1990s, and with the exception of the Turkish intervention in Cyprus in the 1970s (presented as a peacebuilding and eventually a state-building operation that to some extent served as a model for Turkey's presence in northern Syria), the country's only other engagement in peacemaking was its mediation efforts between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. This initiative was limited, as it lacked ambition beyond the goal of de-escalation. Turkey was prompted by traditional security and stability concerns, as it shares borders with both Iran and Iraq, and all three have significant Kurdish minorities. Turkey's caution was largely due to the introspective character of its foreign policy and the state's strong association of national security with the delimitation and protection of its borders. Until the 1990s, Turkey's foreign policy prioritised a form of stability that was focused on national interests, namely the sanctity of the state's borders and the maintenance of a predominantly

Western foreign policy orientation (Aydin, 2000). Indeed, foreign policies of small and middle-sized countries reflected the bipolar nature of the international system, which left them with little room for developing their respective foreign policies independently (Balta & Özel, 2021, p. 539). In this context, Turkey considered participating in key multilateral Western organisations as the best way to enhance its security and international status (Aydin, 2000).

In 1985, Turkey took a step that was unprecedented for a developing country, by providing food aid to the tune of \$10 million, mainly to Muslim countries of the Sahel. Apart from Turkey's military and civilian participation in UNOSOM II (the UN mission in Somalia) in 1993, the provision of aid to the Sahel was largely exceptional, insofar as it did not signal a durable, deeper engagement with the African continent, at least until the turn of the century.

The country's foreign and peacebuilding policy next focused on the post-Soviet space. The breakup of the Soviet Union had the potential to undermine Turkey's geostrategic importance vis-à-vis its Euro-Atlantic partners. However, the six newly independent Turkic republics that emerged in the Caucasus and the Eurasian hinterland presented opportunities. The latter were in search of a place in the reconfigured international system. Turkish President Turgut Özal, along with part of the country's political and economic leadership, tried to refashion Turkey as an outward-looking 'trading nation', taking advantage of ethnic and cultural kinship ties with the new post-Soviet states, to develop close military and economic relations with them. Turkey also offered technical assistance in state-building and economic restructuring. Despite the country's limited financial resources, Russia's caution, as well as the hesitation of autocratic central Asian leaders to follow the Turkish blueprint (with its modest yet promising economic success and tutelary democratic system), Turkey did not abandon its aspiration to act as a model and assume the role of an 'honest broker' in the region (Oniş, 2001). After the 1999 OSCE Istanbul summit, Ankara proposed the establishment of a Caucasus Stability Pact to settle the region's territorial disputes and ensure peace and stability. The initiative was received positively by Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. However, it did not go ahead, as Azerbaijan insisted on the return of Armenian-occupied territories as a precondition. Instead of developing an even-handed approach towards the two parties, Turkish diplomacy remained constrained by the dynamics of its identity-based peacebuilding engagement (Torbakov, 2005). The latter has been a recurrent element that informs Turkey's peacebuilding and development aid strategy until today, though it takes on different shapes and forms. In the mid-1990s, identity and history played an important role on Turkey's following foray into peacebuilding; due to conflict in the Balkans, Turkey reoriented its efforts towards the provision of humanitarian aid to support the reconstruction of Muslim-inhabited countries in the region. Ankara participated in multinational peacekeeping and military forces under the NATO umbrella. It engaged in the reconstruction of Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania. From a Turkish perspective, the conflicts were closer to home and fit the established model of identity-driven peacemaking, as the wars targeted Balkan Muslim populations who had deep ties to the country. Indeed, many Turkish citizens hailed from these areas and had not only abstract religious connections but also active kinship ties. It is this affinity that also prompted an unprecedented civil society mobilisation for the provision of humanitarian assistance. This set the foundations for the development of non-state forms of peacebuilding and humanitarian infrastructure.

## Rediscovering the Middle East and North Africa

This experience may have not catapulted Turkey to the status of a 'regional power' or even yielded the originally anticipated outcomes. Nevertheless, it advanced its political and economic interests, as it made forays in the Balkans and in the Turkic hinterland of Asia, in terms of trade and political alliances. This afforded Turkey added status (Barnett, 2011) among the countries it engaged with, but also with its allies. Having noted the foreign policy and economic benefits, the Yilmaz coalition government decided to design a more proactive strategy that embraced peacebuilding as a means of enhancing Turkey's international presence and stature. It did so by projecting an image of Turkish investment in peacebuilding alongside its major NATO and EU allies who, until then, had monopolised the field. İsmail Cem, Turkey's foreign minister, oversaw the development of a multidimensional foreign policy framework which, at least in theory, foregrounded development and peacebuilding. The 1998 'Opening to Africa Action Plan' was a key policy initiative expressing this ambition. It was during the AKP's first term in office that Ahmet Davutoğlu, then foreign policy advisor to the Prime Minister, reformulated Turkish foreign policy recognising peacebuilding as a vehicle for Turkey's transformation into an emerging power with interests and potential impact, beyond its borders and immediate vicinity. Davutoğlu, in his *Stratejik Derinlik: Türkiye'nin Uluslararası Konumu* (2001) translated the nostalgic discourse of the Yeni Osmanlılar (the neo-Ottomanist movement of the time) into a geopolitical doctrine. He argued that Turkey's geography and history gave it a 'strategic depth' that necessitated a multidimensional foreign policy. Accordingly, Turkey's 'near abroad' was, in the first instance, coextensive to the regions that the Ottoman Empire was straddling during its heyday.

Davutoğlu justified this reorientation by linking it with the country's EU accession process, seeing Turkey's foray in Asia as the only way to promote its chances with the EU (Öniş and Yılmaz, 2009, p. 9). Turkey's new foreign and peacebuilding policy orientation would enable the country to present itself as a bridge connecting the EU and the Islamic world (Kilinc, 2009). Building on its putative 'strategic depth', Turkey co-sponsored with Spain the 'Alliance of Civilizations' at the 59th UN General Assembly in 2005 (Balci and Miş, 2008). Furthermore, building on the image of Turkey as a broker, and the country's active diplomatic engagement in a multitude of geographic areas, Ankara and Helsinki agreed to spearhead the establishment of the Friends of Mediation (FoM) – a group consisting of states, the UN, regional and international organisations and agencies working to develop mediation capacities.

In terms of more concrete steps towards peacemaking, Turkey convened Iraq's neighbours in Istanbul in 2003, in an attempt to prevent hostilities in the wake of the Second Gulf War. Breaking with convention (Murinson, 2007), the government secretly brought Iraqi Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan to the meeting, presenting him with a 'political restructuring' plan for Iraq, which he subsequently rejected. In 2008, Ankara attempted to facilitate negotiations (Tehran Times, 2008) between the West and Iran on the stalling nuclear issue, while, after normalising its relations with Syria, it offered to mediate between Damascus and Israel over the Golan Heights (Benn and Harel, 2004). Turkey also did so between Hamas and Israel, until the Israeli attack on Gaza in December 2008 put an end to this equidistant approach vis-à-vis both Palestinian and Israeli parties (Al-Jazeera, 2009). In fact, Turkish-Israeli relations subsequently deteriorated.

When the Arab Spring shook Egypt and Tunisia, Turkey actively worked to facilitate a smooth political transition by urging their respective presidents, Hosni Mubarak and Zine El Abidine



Ben Ali, to resign. At the time, Turkey was one of the first countries to provide humanitarian support to Tunisia. In March 2011, President Gül, accompanied by Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, held talks in Cairo (Ahram Online, 2011) with the country's political leadership and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – a few months before the elections that brought the latter to power. Davutoğlu also visited Tunisia (Imai, 2017, p. 117) in February 2011 to hold talks with the caretaker prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi, along with other political figures, regarding Tunisia's transition to democratic rule. Following these visits, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan went on a tour to Egypt, Tunisia and Libya (Tol, 2011) in September 2011, where he promoted the AKP rule in Turkey as a model of statehood (France24, 2011) that successfully combined Islam, secularism and democracy for other Middle Eastern and North African countries. Erdoğan stressed that his government's intention was to play a key role in the MENA region. Alongside this form of branding, he and his foreign policy cadres significantly valued trade, which was reflected in the fact that, throughout Erdoğan's tour, he was accompanied by representatives of 280 businesses (Tol, 2022).

## Turkey's African Forays

This active foreign policy was not confined to the post-Ottoman space, but extended beyond it, particularly focusing on Africa. Davutoğlu himself stressed that Turkey could no longer overlook a rising Africa, hitherto ignored and exploited by former Western colonial powers (Davutoğlu, 2001, p. 206). He used the 16th century Ottoman expeditions in East Africa and the empire's relationship to the Horn of Africa to justify Turkey's opening to the continent. Indeed, 2005 was Turkey's 'Year of Africa', during which it kickstarted a rapid process of establishing political and economic ties across the continent, primarily through aid and trade, but also through humanitarian, peacemaking and security-focused partnerships. As a result, Turkey was recognised as a strategic partner of the African Union (AU) in 2008. During his time as prime minister until 2014, and as president afterwards, Erdoğan travelled to the region, tirelessly promoting such partnerships while casting Turkey as a custodian of Islamic culture. He developed religious networks that enhanced Turkey's foothold in the region, especially in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and across the coastal countries of West Africa.

Turkey's African success was facilitated by its lack of 'colonial baggage', which echoed Chinese overtures in the continent. In particular, it offered a presumable alternative to the Western development approach; Turkey was keen to distinguish itself from its Western allies, adopted an anticolonial discourse, and did not attach aid conditionalities to its development programmes – a feature otherwise prominent in mainstream Western practice and often unwelcome by African leaders. As Turkish foreign and peacebuilding policies were recalibrated in the middle of the past decade, state discourse became antagonistic and highly critical of Turkey's key Western allies. In October 2021, President Erdoğan, in an address to the Angolan parliament (Kizilaslan, 2021), adopted a language that resonated in a country that emerged through a devastating decolonisation war: '...we reject Western-centred orientalist approaches to the African continent. We embrace the peoples of the African continent without discrimination.' Erdoğan has also dubbed the policies of the current French government (which maintains a considerable presence in its former West African colonies) as neo-colonial and orientalist. He claimed its anti-terrorist and stabilisation activities were unwelcome and detrimental to the region.

Commenting on Turkey's approach in Africa, a Turkish diplomat interviewed in December 2021 replicated the official discourse suggesting that, unlike the US and western European

countries, Turkey ‘had never colonised Africa’, ‘shares with the continent the memory of anti-imperialist struggle’, and is supporting ‘a win-win situation.’ He stated that Turkey’s success had to do with ‘policies that meet Africa’s actual needs and demands,’ juxtaposing China’s ‘profit-driven approach’ to Ankara’s emphasis on a ‘mutually beneficial partnership’. He exemplified this through Turkey’s multifaceted engagement in Somalia since 2011, the numerous peace and security accords that it has signed, as well as its longstanding commitment to UN and AU peace and stabilisation missions across the continent (see Figure 1).

Ankara has tried to capitalise on its putative interest in ‘listening’ and ‘meeting Africa’s needs,’ by organising three Turkey-Africa Partnership Summits to date (in 2008, 2014 and 2021), ministerial review conferences, as well as meetings between senior officials. Institutions such as TİKA, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), DİYANET, and the Turkish Maarif Foundation (which replaced Gülen movement-affiliated foundations that had undertaken Turkey’s cultural and educational activities in the continent before the rift between Gülen and the government) were mobilised in this effort (Turkey MFA, 2021). At the same time, Turkish charities and NGOs created during the Balkan wars, or more recently, also stepped in to help communities access water, as well as general and religious education.

Figure 1: Turkey’s Military ‘Peace Operation’ Participation in MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa



Source: Compiled by the author from UN and Turkish MFA data'

In the first decade of the 21st century, Turkey emerged as an ambitious and active peacebuilding actor. It was inspired by principles of liberal peacebuilding, which were crucial to enhancing its international image, as well as the government’s reputation domestically. At the time, Ankara was embracing EU-inspired reforms and engaging in a peace process with the Kurdish movement in Turkey.

## Part 2: Rethinking Foreign Policy; Transforming Peacebuilding

### Peacebuilding in Turbulent Times

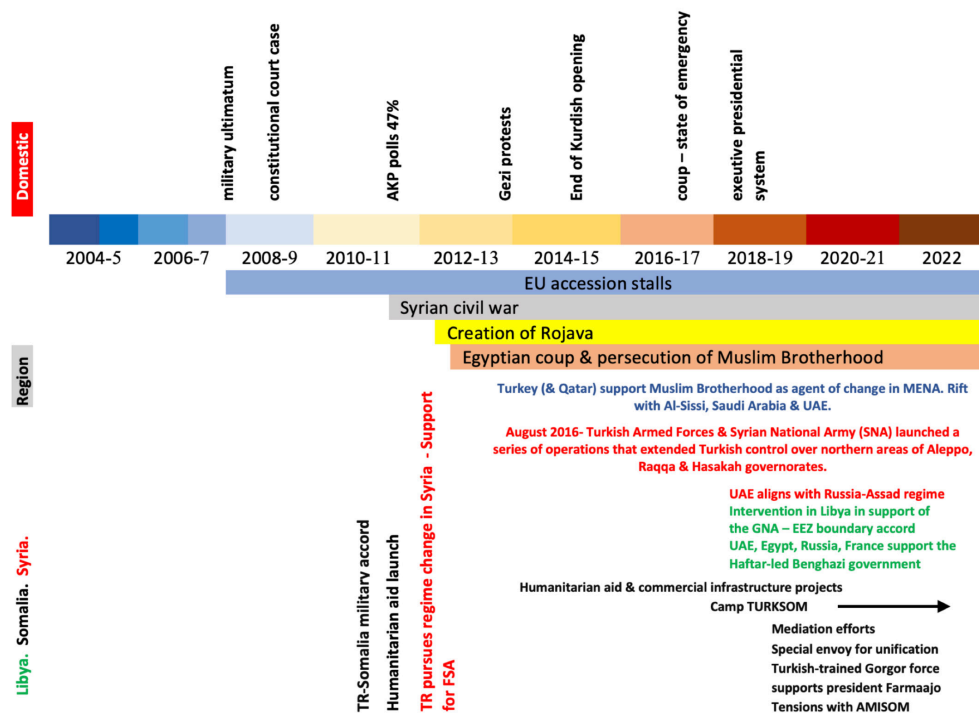
Over the past decade, a constellation of systemic transformations at the global and regional levels, along with the presence of domestic challenges, have had a profound impact on Turkey's foreign policy, and consequently on its engagement in peacebuilding efforts (see Figure 2).

Five years after the AKP rose to power, Turkey's EU accession bid was not showing any signs of progress, the country's democratisation drive slowed down, and the economy stalled. The armed forces attempted to renew their influence in the political realm and threatened the governing party in April 2007, while in 2008 the Constitutional Court attempted to shut the latter down. Prime Minister Erdoğan consolidated his political power, with his party gaining 47% of the electorate's votes in 2011 (Sofos, 2022). In May 2013, the Gezi protests represented the first extensive challenge to the AKP and its policies. Regime insecurity resulted in the abandonment of the AKP's relatively cautious approach to politics during their first phase in office, towards a more authoritarian and revisionist domestic and international strategic orientation (Duran, 2013, p. 98; Öniş, 2015; Sofos, 2022; Tziarras, 2022).

Turkey's foreign policy was reappraised due to the changing balance of power in the regional and global system. The abrupt end of the liberalising impetus set in motion by the Arab Spring undermined the fundamentals of Turkey's regional policy. The restoration of the Egyptian *ancien régime*, without the ousted former president Hosni Mubarak, along with the persecution of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 and the violent crackdown on Syrian demonstrators by the Assad regime, are developments that undermined the pillars of Turkey's regional policy. Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood as an agent of change in the MENA region (a stance shared by Qatar) was fiercely opposed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which caused a rift within the region; Turkey and Qatar developed different visions of regional peace from those envisaged and pursued by Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

On the global scene, a more introspective EU, affected by Brexit and the banking and fiscal crises that hit its weaker economies, and an equally introspective US, emboldened Russia's international revisionism and China's inroads to western Asia and Africa. Considering this context, Turkey, whose EU bid showed no signs of progress, turned its attention to other regions. Foreign policy, including peacebuilding successes, acquired a novel meaning; they were intended to strengthen the AKP's hold on power but also took place in a context of multiple antagonisms and Turkey's increasing revisionism (Tziarras, 2022).

Figure 2: Domestic and Regional Context: Turkey's Engagement in Libya, Somalia and Syria



## The (not so) New Geography of Turkey's Peacebuilding Engagement

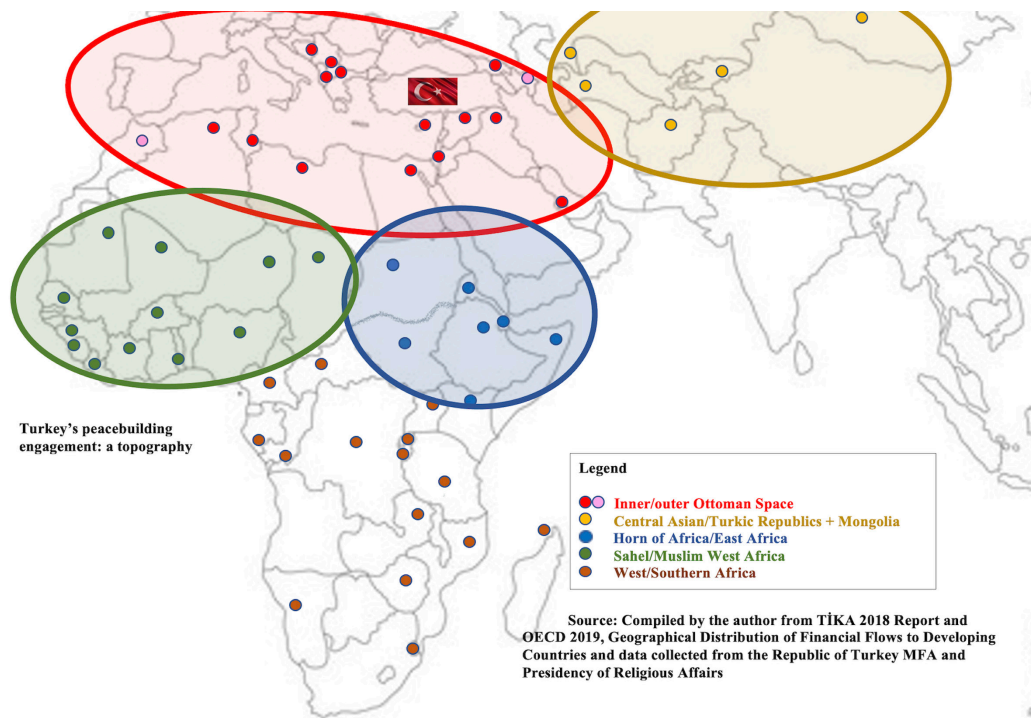
Although Turkey continued to engage with African countries, it used peacebuilding and development policy – occasionally coupled with military intervention or assistance – towards its ‘near abroad,’ such as in Syria and Libya. Some Turkish foreign policy analysts also detect an apparent ideological orientation in Turkish peacebuilding and development activities, implying an ‘Islamisation’ or Sunni emphasis in the countries targeted. This feature was already evident in the 1990s, as noted above with regards to Turkey’s engagement with the Muslim Balkan and Turkic countries. However, evidence collected through interviews and archival work suggest that these policies are more motivated by instrumentalism than principles. As the AKP’s hold on power weakens, it seeks to use the country’s international engagement in ways that enhance its prestige.

Although the objectives and conduct of Turkey’s peacebuilding engagements have changed, its underlying geography is marked by continuity. Indeed, the neo-Ottoman narrative is still largely shaping Turkey’s perception of its immediate and broader neighbourhood, its interests and the ‘legitimacy’ of its interventions. Officials and diplomats often discuss Turkey’s regional activities in terms of their location in the former Ottoman space. Turkey’s earlier focus on the Balkans was often seen by my interlocutors as justified, even necessitated by the country’s Ottoman past and its historical links with the Empire’s European territories and Muslim populations, while Ankara’s interest in ‘putting an end to the Libyan civil war’ and its recent flirtations with Algiers and Tunis were discussed as engagements with the Garp Ocakları (the lost western Ottoman provinces) – see Figure 3. Interestingly, discuss-



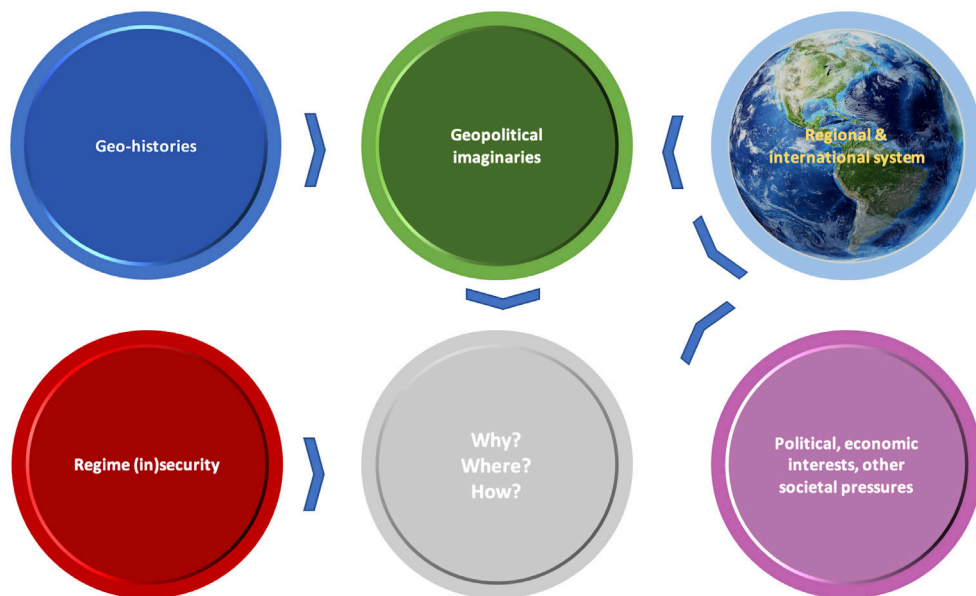
ing Turkey's activities further afield – in Somalia and the Sahel – several of my interviewees referred to failed Ottoman expeditions, diplomatic relations between the Porte and African Kingdoms to justify the inclusion of these regions to the periphery of an Ottoman space and, concurrently, rationalise and legitimise Ankara's interest in them. A similar narrative is present in the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs' documents detailing Ankara's relationships with the regions and countries this report focuses on. A second, not insignificant, narrative discernible in the discourse of the ministry as well as of TİKA emphasises Turkey's interest in becoming a key humanitarian, development and peace actor in the Muslim world, thus providing a religious dimension in the rationalisation of Ankara's forays in mainly, though not exclusively, Muslim countries.

Figure 3: The Topography of Turkey's Peacebuilding Engagement



Without overlooking the strategic or economic importance of Syria, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Niger or Mali, I suggest that the Turkish leadership has come to see and represent its engagements in these regions as legitimate, due to both historical connections and strategic interests. It is a combination of this geo-history, and the geopolitical imaginary shaped by it, that have shaped Turkey's conceptualisation of its interests and the extent to which it engages in humanitarianism and altruism (as seen in Figure 4).

Figure 4: Key Factors Informing Turkey's Foray in Peacemaking



Turkey's approach is also characterised by specific models of engagement that encompass a host of tools and methodologies. These prioritise diplomatic support, state-building, peacemaking, infrastructure projects and technical assistance, education programmes, cultural and religious activities, and other forms of development work, though increasingly coupled with military training. Turkish officials point out that their priorities are in tune with liberal peacebuilding agendas in the West. They stress that good governance, strong responsive institutions, and the rule of law are important for building an effective state and central to Turkey's infrastructure projects, technical assistance, and capacity-building programmes abroad. However, the picture on the ground is much more complex.

### Turkey's Peacebuilding in Northern Syria

After the rift between Turkey and Syria shortly following the conflict's eruption in 2011, the Turkish leadership pursued regime change as a means of ending the conflict – a prospect that became increasingly unlikely as Russian and Iranian backing allowed the Assad regime to extend its grip on territories it had lost to militias and foreign proxies. Ankara decided to play a more active role, hinging on the creation of a territorially and administratively demarcated zone of control in the north of Syria. This was motivated by the fear of being excluded from having a say in post-conflict Syria, as well as by the emergence of the Kurdish-administered region of Rojava and its military success in the fight against the Islamic State forces. The process was set in motion in August 2016, when the Turkish Armed Forces and pro-Turkish militias, that were eventually absorbed by the Turkish-trained Syrian National Army (Haid, 2018), launched a series of operations which extended Turkish control over an area of just under 9,000 square kilometres, including the towns of Afrin, al-Bab, Jarabulus, Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ayn in the northern areas of

the Aleppo, Raqqa and Hasakah governorates. The Turkish and Qatari-backed (Tastekin, 2014) Syrian Interim Government (SIG) established its headquarters in Azzaz and took over the administration of 12 provincial councils, and more than 400 local ones.

Alongside SIG, Turkey is present through its military administration, which cooperates directly with local councils and an array of agencies and organisations, to provide security and essential services. Turkish officials have been appointed by the Turkish military administration to coordinate the construction of essential infrastructure, including hospitals, educational and correctional facilities, courts, as well as support for the police force (El Deeb, 2018; Enab Baladi, 2018). Turkey pays the salaries of civil servants and teachers (Enab Baladi, 2018), while telecommunications companies such as PTT (Koparan and Tok, 2018) and Türk Telekom (France24, 2018) as well as energy (Karam, 2021) and construction companies remain active there. Turkey's presence in northern Syria has been presented as a successful peacebuilding intervention. It has brought a degree of order among the various conflicting militias, through its efforts to train and professionalise them (Haid, 2018) and place them under a unified command. It also provided much needed services and infrastructure such as dams, electricity and roads (Yüksel & Veen, 2019). *Pax Turcica* supplanted the tense peace, institutions and services provided under the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD)-led administration of northern Syria which, just like the Turkish presence in the region was coupled with a range of human rights abuses in these PYD-controlled areas (see Human Rights Watch, 2014).

Ankara's approach to Syria shifted from its earlier commitment to the Geneva process, favoured by Western states, to participating in the Astana platform, which brought together Russia, Iran and Turkey – three powers invested in a military solution for Syria. Although, their visions for a post-conflict Syria diverge; Turkey pushes for, at the very least, a quasi-federal solution that will allow it to control the territories that are contiguous with its borders. Meanwhile, Russia supports the expansion of the Assad regime's control across the Syrian territory. Indeed, Ankara and Moscow have devised a *modus vivendi* in this situation, allowing them to engage in a carefully choreographed competition (even in the battlefield) as long they, and to a lesser extent Iran, maintain exclusive control over developments in Syria.

While recognising the benefits of Turkey's institution and infrastructure-building, one cannot overlook the objective of neutralising the Kurdish movement in the north of Syria and the ways in which Turkey alters demographics of the territories it controls, namely by relocating Syrian refugees there (Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, 2021), while committing human rights abuses in the process (Amnesty International, 2018). Moreover, Turkey's reconstruction efforts considerably resemble the assistance and state-building work following the country's invasion of Cyprus in the 1970s – i.e. its efforts to build infrastructure similar to that of Turkey's, as well as ways in which it ties these territories to it, both economically and politically. This prompted critics to point out that the creation of a quasi-state (Cafiero, 2021) or even annexation, is on the cards (Al-Tamimi, 2018).

## Turkey in Libya

In Libya, Turkey's alleged stabilisation intervention was markedly different. Ankara's involvement in the early years of the civil war did not reflect a systematic policy until a constellation of developments prompted it to devise a military strategy and an entry point to the conflict. Turkey's concern over Israeli, Cypriot and Greek attempts to secure a delimitation of their maritime Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) (that would effectively deprive Turkey of access to natural gas reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean) prompted Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar to approach the UN-recognised Government of National Accord (Ekathimerini, 2018) to propose a coordinated response. Although Tripoli hesitated to act in any way that might alienate Greece or the EU, the advance of the Libyan National Army (LNA) towards Tripoli, under General Haftar in April 2019, and the UAE barrage of air strikes (Harchaoui, 2020) in support of the advancing forces, created an opening for Ankara to enter the conflict. Ankara's military support secured the Libyan Government's commitment to support Turkey in its bid to frustrate Greece's EEZ demarcation plans. Ankara and Tripoli signed two memoranda of understanding on military cooperation and on the maritime boundaries between the two countries, while the Grand National Assembly of Turkey authorised the deployment of Turkish forces (Wintour, 2020) in Libya in January 2020. A few days later Turkey entered the conflict with troops and hardware, including mercenary Syrian rebel forces (France24, 2020). Turkey's determination to use military power to support the Libyan government and prevent a partition of the country is less linked with its interest in peacemaking or international legality, and more with the aim to sign and ratify the contentious Libya–Turkey maritime deal. The agreement disrupts the efforts of Cyprus, Greece and Israel to demarcate their EEZ in line with the International Law of the Sea Treaty provisions. Turkish objectives also include safeguarding Turkey's economic interests in Libya, which dates back to its involvement in lucrative construction contracts prior to the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. Keeping in check the influence of the UAE in a future post-conflict Libya is also important, as the two countries compete (France24, 2019) for regional hegemony (Fehim, 2020). Finally, Ankara's involvement in the Libyan civil war extends further afield to securing access to the Sahel hinterland (Kayaoglu, 2020) as I discuss further below. Although TİKA has a presence in Libya and provides humanitarian aid and infrastructure work, Turkey's current involvement in the conflict is primarily military. Despite the formation of an interim Government of National Unity (GNU) in March 2021, and its calls for foreign troops to leave the country, Ankara seems determined to remain in the country to protect its interests. During his visit to Tripoli in May 2021, Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu characteristically brushed aside calls from his Libyan counterpart, Najla Mangoush, to contribute to the removal of foreign forces from Libya stressing that Turkish forces in Libya were to remain to support stability. The message that Turkey was to retain its military footprint in Libya was reinforced by the inclusion in Çavuşoğlu's team of Defence Minister Akar, Director of the National Intelligence Organisation (MIT) Fidan and Chief of General Staff Gen. Güler. Just as in the case of Syria, whereby Ankara and Moscow support opposing sides in the conflict, they complement each other in Libya as well, insofar as they reduce Western actors' abilities to impose a Western-devised solution to the conflict.



## Turkey in Somalia and the Horn of Africa

Turkey's involvement in Somalia is more complex than the two previously examined cases. After a protracted and devastating civil war, in August 2011, the Somali government and AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) forces managed to expel the Islamist Al-Shabaab movement from Mogadishu. This opened the way for recapturing Al-Shabaab-held territories. Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan used the relative return of safety as an opportunity to pay a visit to the capital (the first visit of a senior European politician in several years) and reinitiate relations with Somalia. In the same year, Turkey's AFAD contributed a record \$201 million to humanitarian relief efforts in the drought-affected parts of the country, after a fundraising campaign that raised public sympathy. This marked the start of Turkey's systematic humanitarian and peacebuilding involvement in Somalia. Since 2011, TİKA has launched close to 160 projects including education, health, infrastructure and community development (data provided by TİKA and compiled by the author). Over the same period, the Turkish government signed a series of deals for the construction, renovation, and management of infrastructure, including the Port of Mogadishu and the city's international airport. Meanwhile, private companies associated with Turkey's government have established a strong presence in Somalia in securing infrastructure development contracts.

In 2014, Ankara also offered its services in the reconciliation talks initiated between the central government in Mogadishu and regional authorities. It is credited with facilitating a cooperation agreement between the federal government and the breakaway Somaliland region but its implementation encountered obstacles. In 2018 Turkey appointed Dr. Olgan Bekar as a special envoy to spearhead the efforts to make progress.

Turkish and Somali governments signed a military training agreement in 2010 before Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy offensive got off the ground. The agreement paved the way for further military and security cooperation that prompted Turkey to open a military training base – Camp TURKSOM – in Mogadishu. This was done to provide training to the Somali National Army (SNA) and security forces. Turkey's ambition, according to a diplomat I talked to, is to become 'Somalia's main partner in terms of security provision', especially as international funding for AMISOM has seen substantial reductions over the years.

Apart from the unrealistic aspiration to overshadow AMISOM's importance in creating the conditions for a continued peace process, evidence indicates that Turkey's involvement in the training of Somalia's National Army has not been conducive to the integration of the trained soldiers/police personnel and their units to a national framework. Turkish-made weaponry, communication, and other equipment supplied to trainees and their units in Somalia are incompatible with those of the Somali National Army (Ahmed, 2021) trained by AMISOM. Moreover, command structures remain separate to the extent that the Turkish-trained 'Gorgor' force was at the brink of clashing (The Horn Podcast, 2021) with other SNA units in Mogadishu in April 2021. Indeed, in an already fractious security environment, the Turkish-trained unit has acted in partisan fashion, supporting particular factions within the government (Robinson, 2021) that favour closer ties with the Turkish government, such as President Farmaajo, while its brigade commander's name has featured among those the opposition wants to see replaced. An interviewee with specialised

knowledge of Turkey's presence in Somalia, has noted that AMISOM has expressed concerns at the way in which Turkey's military training programme, and presence in the country, is undermining its own training programme, as well as efforts to unify Somalia's fractious armed forces.

Turkey's opening to the MENA region and to Africa included enhancing its relationship with Sudan. TİKA has been present in Sudan since 2006, and has been carrying out development and humanitarian projects, including the construction of the Nyala Turkish-Sudanese Research and Training Hospital in the capital of South Darfur, which opened its doors in 2014. Despite its humanitarian effort in Darfur, Turkey refrained from criticising the Sudanese government for its role in the province or from using the term 'genocide'. Perhaps, it has done so as it itself is sensitive to such criticisms, or more plausibly, it could have done so in an effort not to alienate Sudan's former strongman Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, whom Erdoğan had repeatedly praised. In December 2012, Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali Ahmed Karti said that Turkey offered proposals to resolve outstanding issues between Sudan and South Sudan, while Foreign Minister Davutoğlu told the press that Juba and Khartoum had agreed to Turkey's role as a mediator between them. However, the process of bringing the two parties together ended without success. The ousting of the Muslim Brotherhood from power in Egypt in 2013 intensified Turkey's interest in Sudan as a potentially important regional ally. In 2017, the two countries concluded a host of cooperation agreements, including the declaration on the establishment of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation mechanism and the controversial (Amin, 2018) 99-year lease of Suakin Island in the Red Sea to Turkey. Ankara claimed it wanted to develop the latter into a tourist destination, whereas Egypt and Saudi Arabia expressed fears that Turkey was intending to create military facilities there. President Bashir's overthrow in April 2019 affected Turkish-Sudanese relations, while the transitional government that took over annulled the Suakin lease agreement. After a freeze in Turkish-Sudanese relations, in August 2021, President Erdoğan met with Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (Daily Sabah with AA, 2021), Chairperson of Sudan's Sovereign Council, to sign an array of agreements and resume cooperation.

In August 2021, Ankara also offered to help facilitate negotiations between Ethiopia and Sudan to reach a peaceful settlement over the disputed al-Fashaga region. Sudan has signalled its willingness to accept Turkey's mediation indicating that it considers it a trustworthy partner. Yet, no concrete steps have been taken by any of the parties to resolve the conflict to date.

Meanwhile, in 2017 TİKA launched programmes to support South Sudanese refugees fleeing famine and drought. It provided them with humanitarian aid, including wells, and resources for women living in refugee camps in Darfur to become self-sufficient in producing garments.

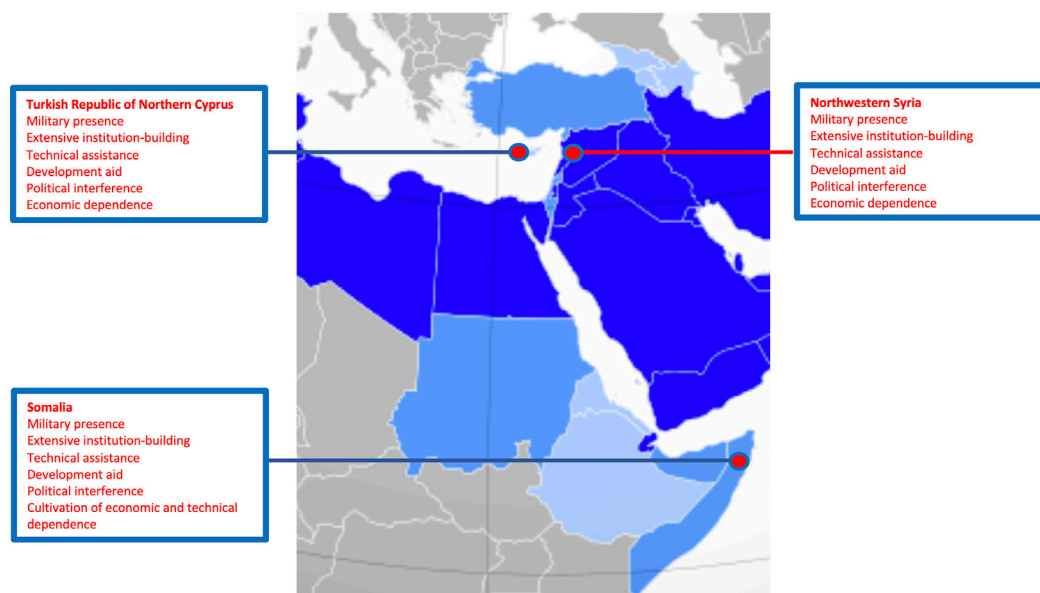
Across the border in South Sudan, Turkey agreed in 2021 to support the unification of South Sudanese forces (Anadolu Agency, 2021) in line with the provisions of the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS)

after years of conflict. Meanwhile, TİKA, which had been active in South Sudan before its independence, launched a modest project to support the work of South Sudan's Ministry of Peacebuilding by providing computers and printers to its communications department.

The tensions among Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile provided Turkey an opportunity to deepen its relationship with Ethiopia, a country with which Turkey has longstanding trade relations (Al-Jazeera, 2020). In August 2021, during an Erdoğan-Abiy meeting where the two countries signed a military agreement (Al-Jazeera, 2021) without disclosing its terms, President Erdoğan offered to mediate (The Independent, 2021) in Ethiopia's conflict with Tigray (which has displaced close to 500,000 people). Despite this support in favour of peaceful conflict resolution, Ethiopia is reported to have taken possession of at least six Bayraktar TB2 combat drones which it has reportedly deployed against Tigrayan forces (Bearak, Kelly & Lee, 2022) and civilians.

Turkey's forays in the Horn of Africa reflect a combination of status-oriented diplomacy, and the strategic importance of the region in general. Furthermore, Ankara's antagonistic relationship with the UAE (which maintain a base in Djibouti), and Egypt, has rendered the region an arena of competition where each of these actors vies for gaining relative advantage over their competitors.

Figure 5: Turkey: Statebuilding Engagement



## Turkey in the Sahel and Beyond

Ankara's presence in sub-Saharan Africa has grown rapidly since 2002. The volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and Africa rose from \$5.4bn in 2003 to \$25.3bn in 2020. Foreign direct investment grew from \$100m to \$6.5bn (Turkey MFA, 2021). Turkey adopted an

anticolonial discourse to distinguish itself from the African states' Western partners. To deepen partnerships in the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and the Maghreb, it also sought to invoke its Ottoman past and Islam as a shared heritage. Ankara's initial trade outreach has evolved into a more complex Africa policy that also encompassed humanitarian and development aid, diplomacy, cultural cooperation and peace and security support.

A key example of Turkey's strategy is evident in its engagement with the three central Sahel states – Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger – which have been facing uprisings and incursions by jihadist militants who have been drawing on local grievances to legitimise themselves. While the Sahel states have been struggling to assert state authority over parts of their territories, Western governments have focused more on security than development and other economic aid. They have been ignoring the grievances of local populations, which in turn provides fertile ground for insurgents (Schmauder, Soto-Mayor & Goxho, 2020). The ineffectiveness of the long-standing French military presence (Durmaz, 2022), with its former colonial undertones, has given rise to popular mobilisations against it (Reuters Staff, 2021). In November 2020, French President Macron accused Russia and Turkey (France24, 2020) of undermining France's West African ties by fuelling resentment in the Sahel. Moreover, the August 2020 coup in Mali invited the forces of the pro-Kremlin Wagner Group to replace the French forces stationed there.

As early as 2012, Turkey had been actively criticising French counterterrorism interventions in the region, advocating and supporting African-led stability promotion initiatives, such as those led by the G5 Sahel bloc (Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso and Chad) which it co-funds (France24, 2018). Turkey initiated a number of bilateral security cooperation agreements with Sahel countries such as the security cooperation agreements concluded by Ankara with Mauritania, Gambia, Côte d'Ivoire, Chad, Sudan, Guinea, Nigeria and Benin. The most recent of such agreements was concluded in July 2020 with Niger (Middle East Monitor, 2020), committing Ankara to support Niamey against a possible spillover of instability from Libya. The agreement integrated Niger into Turkey's Libyan strategy and Libya to its Sahel access aspirations. However, just as in the case of Somalia, Turkey's stabilisation strategies are based on the concept of packaging security, peace and stability together with humanitarian and development aid and trade. Indeed, Ankara has been active on the humanitarian front through a series of TİKA projects in the region, including the building of hospitals in Mali and Niger in 2018 and 2019 (Armstrong, 2021) and the provision of medical aid (Ağlarç, 2020). Ankara has furthermore sought to create religious networks that can serve to advocate for deepening relations with Turkey, by establishing religious education projects through the Maarif Foundation, building mosques through the DİYANET, and the establishment of religious İmam Hatip schools throughout Muslim African countries.

It should be noted that despite Turkey's claims to the contrary, there is an inbuilt element of conditionality to these initiatives. For example, in the regions where Turkey negotiates aid and security deals, the Maarif Foundation has been lobbying (SCF, 2018) for the transfer of control of Gülen Horizon schools (see also Angey, 2018).



## Part 3: Rethinking Turkey's Peacebuilding Record and Suggestions for Further Consideration

Initially, Turkey aspired to play a role in development and peacebuilding, just like the OECD, NATO and EU member states. It sought to become a powerful regional and global actor.

This ambition and, more broadly Turkey's foreign policy orientation, radically transformed over the past decade:

- a series of global systemic transformations unfolded, including the less active role of the US globally, the EU's introspection, as well as the emergence of Russia as a revisionist power, and of China as a global development actor.
- regional realignments developed, namely the Arab Spring, regional polarisations between Saudi Arabia and the UAE that view the Muslim Brotherhood as a threat on one hand, and Turkey and Qatar that support it on the other.
- domestic challenges took place, including the 2013 Gezi protests, the attempted coup in 2016, as well as Turkey's persistent exclusion from the EU.

These factors contributed to Turkey's authoritarian turn and regime insecurity, which has also contributed to the transformation of its notions of security and stability. The latter guide the country's strategic considerations and attitudes towards cooperation, competition and conflict.

This new international and domestic climate has enabled Turkey's leadership to become more assertive internationally, and has prompted it to see foreign policy and peacemaking successes as fungible in domestic politics.

Turkey's success in building partnerships, and engaging in peacebuilding and development projects, is enabled by its lack of 'colonial baggage'. This allowed it to articulate an anticolonial discourse and offer aid packages that did not come with the conditionalities that are often attached to mainstream, Western ones. Ankara has been convincingly representing itself as an alternative actor that embraces South-South cooperation, and has promoted the idea of fostering 'African solutions for African problems' (Donelli, 2018, p. 65). Furthermore, Turkey has been cultivating Islamic networks that can lobby for Turkish interests in Muslim regions and societies.

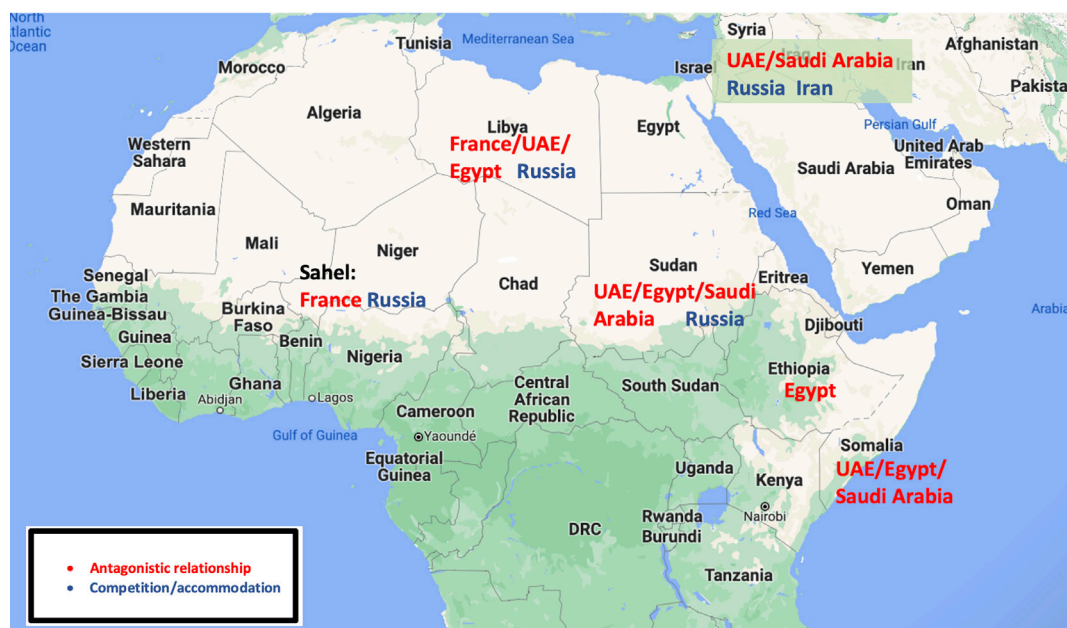
Turkey's peacebuilding has been increasingly shaped by the personalistic character of the country's new presidential system, as well as by the interconnected political and economic interests of the country's ruling elite. In this context, peacebuilding has become more transactional, power-driven, and often volatile. It is not shaped by a vision to transform conflict, through establishing avenues for dialogue and trust-building.

A closer look at Somalia, Libya, Syria and Turkey's presence in the rest of East and West Africa, especially in the past decade suggests:

- Turkey's peacebuilding strategy has drawn on both 'liberal' and 'illiberal' peacebuilding toolkits as different agencies and state organisations operate without coordination. This strategy is increasingly characterised by the use of violent, militarised, and non-inclusive methods, with an overall emphasis on conflict containment rather than establishing lasting peace.
- Turkey's preferred mode of engagement in the MENA region and Africa is through bilateral agreements or even unilateral interventions, as the case of Syria suggests. This involves a package of humanitarian and development aid, trade, security enhancement and stabilisation engagement and, occasionally promoting dialogue and peacemaking. The package itself, as well as the understanding of peace inherent in it, is different from that of Turkey's Western allies. The balance between violence and constructive engagement depends on Ankara's security and regional concerns regarding competition but, overall, peace is often understood as conflict containment and is systematically decoupled from the pursuit of democratisation and human rights protection inherent to Western narratives (although not always in the actual practices) of peacemaking and peacebuilding.
- Some interest in local grassroots involvement remains, especially in Turkey's humanitarian projects in Somalia and Libya, but the predominant model involves military and security force training and cooperation, as well as the undertaking of major infrastructure work that benefits Turkish entrepreneurs with ties to the state.
- Turkey has offered its mediation services in three fragile states in the Horn of Africa – Somalia, Sudan and Ethiopia, with mixed outcomes. Further efforts to mediate between Sudan and South Sudan never took off. Nevertheless, Ankara's connection with regional Islamic movements and its trade, investment, and military cooperation packages are a promising form of leverage in a region of fragile states. This might prompt Turkey to engage in mediation again in the Horn and the Sahel.
- Turkey's involvement in conflicts is usually partisan and divisive. Turkish support and aid have been used to intervene in politics and support local political actors who are more willing to support Turkish military, political and economic interests.
- The current reconfiguration of the Turkish peacemaking strategy has had 'distorting' effects in the countries that Turkey has engaged with. Knowledge transfer projects (especially the training of military and security forces) as well as technical aid, can lead to institutional fragmentation, as well as the cultivation of military, political and economic dependence.

- In its attempts to gain influence in the MENA region, including the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa, Ankara has developed antagonistic relationships with some Western and Arab states (see Figure 6), due to their different conceptualisations of peace and security that have resulted in destabilising proxy conflicts. Turkey and Qatar have been competing with Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while Ankara has also sought to extend its influence at the expense of France in Libya and the Sahel. Turkey's forays further south in Africa, in the Sahel and Western Africa (where many states are fragile and face jihadist insurgencies and incursions) have also alarmed Turkey's NATO and EU allies, due to the antagonistic posture and anticolonial discourse that challenge Western security and development strategies and their colonial underpinnings. Turkey's competitive posture towards France, for example, has weakened the latter's position in and the legitimacy of its presence in the Sahel and benefited both Turkey and Russia who have moved swiftly to replace the former colonial power there. Meanwhile, Ankara has been engaged in what I call 'managed competition' with Moscow as their often competing objectives have not undermined their common resolve to devise pathways to conflict containment, which exclude other states with competing interests or peacemaking visions (see Figure 6).
- Ankara has the proven potential to contribute to infrastructure and development projects, as well as the multilateral initiatives that its Western allies support. It is also not hampered by the history of European colonialism, which can make it a valuable partner in European peacebuilding and peacemaking projects under specific conditions.
- Efforts of Western policymakers should be directed towards dialogue with Turkey, in tandem with encouraging democratisation, progressively reintegrating Turkey into Western institutions, and persuading it to be involved in multilateral initiatives that can stimulate shared visions of peace and security, as well as transform current tensions into cooperation.

Figure 6: Turkey's Main Competitors per Engagement



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## Cover Image

The opening ceremony of a Turkish military base in Mogadishu, Somalia, 30 September 2017.

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