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## Turkey as a Mediator

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## Introduction

Mediation is a method of resolving international conflicts that are complex or appear to be intractable, and where the opposing parties require support to make difficult decisions, often entailing political cost. Not every international actor is suitable to conduct mediation; history, interests, and styles of involvement in international, inter-state and intra-state affairs affect the ability of different international actors to engage in mediation. As Turkey has entered the twenty-first century it has cast itself as an aspiring constructive international mediator, initially locally, and then further afield. Excepting its 1970s intervention in Cyprus, which Turkey controversially deemed a peace operation, before the 1990s the country's only other engagement in peacemaking was its mediation between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s. This was informed by traditional security considerations as both countries share borders with Turkey, and also have significant Kurdish minorities. This limited role was largely due to the introspective character of Turkish foreign policy and the strict association of the country's national security with the protection of its national borders.

In the 1990s Turkish governments developed a more proactive strategy that embraced peacebuilding as a means of enhancing the country's international stature. These initial steps included participating in UN and NATO 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 player on the global scene. As part of this effort, Ankara developed a multidimensional foreign policy framework within which development and peacebuilding policy acquired — at least in theory — importance. This policy shift was solidified by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) that succeeded the Yılmaz and Ecevit coalition governments that had first articulated this new foreign policy dimension. 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, largely through its development and peacebuilding engagement, its cultural and commercial penetration of these regions, and its effort to mediate often complex conflicts.

This report is predicated upon an extensive review of the relevant official documentation from the Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the latest analysis and commentary; media reports; and interviews with policymakers, diplomats, Ministry of Defence officials, foreign policy, peacebuilding, and development experts. It assesses and analyses the understanding of mediation among Turkey's political leadership and policy community, the contexts and main motivations underlying its conceptualisation and implementation, and outlines potential future developments. To stimulate free and candid discussions, and to protect confidentiality at a time of political volatility in Turkey, and in line with the approved ethics protocols of the project, the names of interviewees and their institutions have been withheld.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

This paper's overview of Turkey's experience and engagement in mediation processes suggests that Turkey's ambition to become an international player with the potential to influence and achieve positive outcomes is not matched by the results of Turkey's engagement in this field, especially if one adopts established definitions of mediation as an institutionalised process.

There are many factors in favour of Turkey's aspiration:

- ▶ Ankara casts itself as a custodian of Islamic culture and develops religious networks that enhance Turkey's weight, especially in Libya, the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and the coastal countries of west Africa.
- ▶ Turkey's relative success in Libya, Syria and Somalia has been aided by its lack of "colonial baggage and anticolonial discourse".

There are also obstacles to Ankara's projection of itself as a reliable and/or desirable mediator:

- ▶ The ideological dimension of its foreign policy that also permeates its peacemaking activities – notably the support of like-minded Sunni political partners.
- ▶ Turkey's political imagination is constrained by its own approach to the Kurdish issue and makes it difficult for it to think creatively and flexibly in instances that such attributes might lead to successful mediation.
- ▶ Unlike the Gulf states, Ankara lacks the resources required for facilitating mediation processes and encouraging the parties in such processes to see potential material benefits.

The meagre outcomes of Turkey's attempts to engage successfully in mediation processes are, however, partly a product of the focus of our peace process monitoring tools, and the difficulty in obtaining data on more localised and less public processes of mediation taking place in conflict zones and conducted by military and intelligence personnel.

Refocusing and developing sensitive data collection toolkits is something that will enrich and add nuance to our already sophisticated databases.

## Report Content

This report draws upon nine interviews conducted between 2021 and 2023 with diplomats, staff at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, officials at TİKA, and foreign policy commentators; in addition to a comprehensive review of the available literature and databases such as the PA-X Peace Agreement Database, to trace and analyse the reconfiguration of Turkish engagement in mediation.

Part 1 of the report establishes Turkey's emphasis on mediation as a distinguishing element of its foreign policy in the context of the end of the Cold War, and the move towards a multipolar international system where Turkey enjoys relative autonomy.

Part 2 focuses on Turkey's mediation in the field. After discussing the existing literature on Turkey's mediation work and the databases and datasets available, Ankara's mediation engagement record is analysed and juxtaposed to the available quantitative data.

Part 3 provides a summary of the analysis and offers a series of suggestions for how to understand Turkey's mediation engagement and aspiration and identifies gaps in our existing quantitative data toolkit and ways of addressing these.

## Part 1: Turkey as an Aspiring Mediator

### 1.1. Mediating: An emerging ambition

The demise of the bipolar nature of the international system and the eventual rise of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) marked a radical departure from Turkey's conservative foreign policy approach. The latter left little room for developing an independent foreign policy (Balta and Özel; 2021) and was geared toward preserving the regional status quo and territorial integrity of the Turkish state, prevailing for most of the twentieth century (Aydın; 2000). The process of change was initiated through the establishment of the Copenhagen Criteria (1993) and culminated in the recognition of Turkey as an EU candidate state (1993). This instilled optimism and ambition in Ankara's approach to its region and beyond.

Turkish engagement in peacebuilding acquired importance in 2003 when the AKP recognised it as a tool for expressing Turkey's emergence as a power with interests and potential beyond its immediate borders. Before the 1990s the country's only engagement in peace-making was its mediation between Iran and Iraq in the 1980s, informed by traditional security considerations due to shared borders with Turkey and significant Kurdish minorities. This limited role was due to the introspective character of Turkey's foreign policy, preoccupation with national security, and protection of its borders. At the close of the century, however, the aspiration of assuming a role in its intersection regions took the form of promoting civilisational dialogue and mediation.<sup>1</sup>

The AKP and its foreign policy author, Ahmet Davutoğlu, acknowledged the potential foreign policy and economic benefits of peacebuilding, recognising it as a tool for expressing Turkey's transformation into an emergent power beyond its borders (Davutoğlu; 2001). Initial steps included convening Iraq's neighbours in Istanbul in 2003 to prevent hostilities after the Second Gulf War, and — breaking with convention — secretly inviting Iraqi Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan to the meeting, presenting him with a "political restructuring" plan for Iraq which was ultimately rejected ([VOA News; 2009](#)).

This lack of success notwithstanding, Turkey's orientation towards peacebuilding was prioritised in its aspiration to bridge the EU and the Islamic world (Öniş and Yılmaz; 2009, Kilinc 2009). Building on its putative "strategic depth", Turkey co-sponsored the "Alliance of Civilisations" with Spain at the fifty-ninth General Assembly of the United Nations (UN) in 2005 (Balçı and Miş; 2008).



Additionally, building on Turkey's role as a bridge and a broker, and the country's active diplomatic engagement in many areas, Ankara and Helsinki agreed to spearhead the establishment of the [Friends of Mediation \(FoM\)](#) a group consisting of states, the UN, regional organisations, and other international organisations and agencies working to develop mediation capacities; increase awareness of the importance of mediation; and to ensure women's equal and full participation in dispute settlement and conflict resolution processes.

In 2008 Ankara adopted a more proactive approach — albeit closer to home — when attempting to facilitate negotiations between the West and Iran on the stalling nuclear issue ([Tehran Times; 2008](#)), while also normalising its relations with Syria and offering to mediate between Damascus and Israel regarding the Golan Heights (Benn and Harel; 2004). It additionally offered to mediate on the latter between Hamas and Israel (*ibid.*), until Israel's attack on Gaza (2008) disrupted Turkey's balanced relationship between the two, leading to the deterioration of the Turkish-Israeli relationship ([Al Jazeera; 2009](#)). During the Arab Spring, Turkey actively worked on mediating to facilitate a smooth transition from the authoritarian regimes to elected governments in Egypt and Tunisia, whilst also campaigning for political forces that shared the Turkish government's ideological orientations. Turkey was one of the first countries to provide humanitarian support at the time to Tunisia, while President Gül, accompanied by Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, held talks in Cairo with the country's political leadership and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in March 2011, a few months before the elections that brought it to power ([Ahrām Online; 2011](#)). Davutoğlu also visited Tunisia in February 2011 to hold talks with caretaker prime minister Mohamed Ghannouchi and other political figures about Tunisia's transition to democratic rule ([World Bulletin; 2011](#)). These visits were followed by a tour by Erdoğan of Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in September 2011 ([France24; 2011](#)) where he promoted Turkey (with the AKP in office) as a model of statehood successfully combining Islam, secularism and democracy for Middle Eastern and North African countries, and stressed his government's intention to play a key role in MENA ([Tol; 2011](#)).

## 1.2. Turkey as an "Honest Broker"

This active foreign policy was not confined to the post-Ottoman space but extended beyond it, particularly in Africa. Davutoğlu stressed (2001) that Turkey could no longer overlook a rising Africa that had previously been ignored and exploited by the Western former colonial powers, citing the sixteenth century Ottoman expeditions in East Africa and the empire's relationship to the Horn of Africa to justify Turkey's opening to the continent. The year 2005 — Turkey's "Year of Africa" — initiated a rapid process of establishing commercial, peace, security, and humanitarian partnerships, leading to Turkey's recognition as a strategic partner of the African Union (AU) in 2008. Since 2005, Turkey has established political and economic ties across the continent through aid and trade, in addition to packaging together economic penetration and security promotion, institution building and peace-making. Erdoğan, as prime minister until 2014 and president after, travelled to the region and tirelessly promoted this package, together with activity that cast Turkey as a custodian of Islamic culture and developed religious networks that enhanced Turkey's weight in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and the coastal countries of west Africa.

Turkey's African success has been aided by its lack of "colonial baggage", echoing the Chinese overtures in the continent which stress an alternative to the Western approach to development. Keen to distinguish its African engagement from that of its Western allies, Ankara articulated an anticolonial discourse, reiterated by offers of support without the conditionality attached to mainstream Western policies. Turkey further emphasised its lack of a colonial past and ambition, criticising these traits in its Western partners. As recently as October 2021, President Erdoğan, in an address to the Angolan parliament, 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" (Kızılaslan; 2021). 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", and its anti-terrorist and stabilisation activities "unwelcome and detrimental" to the region (See, for example, *Middle East Eye*; 2020).

Commenting on Turkey's approach to Africa, one Turkish diplomat 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", is supporting "a win-win situation", and that Turkey's success can be explained by "policies that meet Africa's actual needs and demands". Referring to China, he juxtaposed the former's "profit-driven approach" to Ankara's emphasis on a "mutually beneficial partnership" exemplified by its multifaceted engagement in Somalia since 2011 and the numerous peace and security accords Turkey has signed, as well as its longstanding commitment to UN and AU peace and stabilisation missions in the continent.

### 1.3. Conflict Resolution and Mediation as political entrepreneurship

According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mediation is central to Turkey's intention to become an international player with a high potential to influence, first in the area and then globally. As such, Ankara sees itself as a proactive actor in conflict resolution and management, and mediation is therefore one of the main instruments of Turkish foreign policy. Turkey's foreign policy discourse and practices in the twenty-first century, shaped by the tenure of the AKP in government, are described by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as an "enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy".<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs placed the issue of "Resolution of Conflicts and Mediation" first place under the Foreign Policy heading on its website to demonstrate Turkey's priority in this regard (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 2023). According to the statement of the Ministry, Turkey's view of the issue is as follows:

Located in a geography affected by active, frozen and potential conflicts, Türkiye plays a pioneering role at the global level in raising awareness and creating capacity for mediation, a method of peaceful resolution of conflicts, to achieve sustained peace, stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood and beyond. Türkiye carries out this role with a multi-layered and diverse architecture of initiatives including mediation efforts in the field, co-chairmanship of Groups of Friends at the UN, the OSCE, and the OIC, hosting international Mediation Conferences and the "Mediation for Peace" Certificate Program (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 2023).

According to ministry officials, a three-tier structure can be identified in the ministry's Peaceful Resolution of Conflicts and Mediation activities. The first is Turkey's mediation endeavours in the field, as Turkey's direct involvement as a mediator or facilitator between the parties in conflict, and Turkey's contribution to the mediation work of third parties. The second is the activities carried out within international organisations such as the UN, OSCE, and OIC. Lastly, Istanbul Mediation Conferences, OIC Mediation Conferences, Mediation for Peace Certificate Program, and other events such as webinars are carried out as awareness and capacity-building activities for mediation.

Deputy Foreign Minister Burak Akçapar has, however, pointed out that after 2010, Turkey has carried out capacity-building diplomacy in international organisations much more intensely than actual mediation activities in the field (Akçapar; 2021). In this regard, the "Mediation for Peace Initiative" jointly launched by Turkey and Finland in September 2010 in New York at the UN was with "a view to enhance the prominence of mediation in preventive diplomacy in conflict resolution and to ensure the allocation of additional resources for mediation efforts" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 2023).

The UN Group of Friends of Mediation met virtually for the first time on February 2, 2022, for its eleventh Ministerial Meeting under the theme of "Mediation as a tool for peaceful settlement and resolution of conflicts: Taking stock after 10 years of the first UN Resolution and looking ahead". Co-chaired by Turkish and Finnish Foreign Ministers, the participants reviewed the progress made since the first UN General Assembly Resolution on mediation and discussed future activities of the Group. The meeting was attended by eight Foreign Ministers, one State Minister and nine Deputy Ministers while, forty-five member states and international organisations were represented at the event.

Following the success of the initiative at the UN, Turkey, Finland, and Switzerland — term president at the time — pioneered the establishment of a similar group within the OSCE. They formed a "Group of Friends of Mediation" (GoF) on March 6, 2014, in Vienna. After the establishment of the UN GoF and OSCE GoF, Turkey pioneered the establishment of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) Friends of Mediation Contact Group in 2018. The first meeting of the group was held at the level of Foreign Ministers in New York on September 24, 2018, at the margin of the seventy-third UN General Assembly. According to the ministry, "the Group is continuing its work to finalise OIC guidelines on culturally and locally sensitive mediation and to create a roster of specialists, mediators, and special representatives of the OIC" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 2023).

In addition to these activities, Turkey also carries out mediation endeavours in the intellectual field, such as the İstanbul Mediation Conferences. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised the first İstanbul Conference on Mediation in February 2012 with the theme of "Enhancing Peace through Mediation: New Actors, Fresh Approaches, Bold Initiatives". The conference was held under the auspices of Ahmet Davutoğlu, then Minister of Foreign Affairs. The eighth İstanbul Mediation Conference was convened on 10 March 2022 with the theme of: "Spotlight on Mediation in a Changing Peace Landscape" under the auspices of. Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 2023](#)).

## Part 2: Ankara's Mediation in the Field

Interviewees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted a number of particular mediation activities in the field which are showcased on the Ministry's [website](#). These comprised of efforts to encourage internal reconciliation in Iraq, Lebanon, and Kyrgyzstan; two separate trilateral cooperation processes launched with the participation of Serbia and Croatia to achieve lasting peace and stability in Bosnia-Herzegovina; a trilateral cooperation mechanism launched with Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has an important role in ensuring peace and security in Afghanistan; efforts for the peaceful resolution of Iran's nuclear program issue through dialogue; good services in talks between Somalia and Somaliland; support to the peace process in the South Philippines; and, more recently, steps to facilitate dialogue between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.

The literature on Turkey's mediation work (Beriker; 2016, Parlar Dal; 2018) adopts a broader definition of mediation that does not merely encompass truces, cessation of hostilities, or treaties as desired or actual outcomes, but additionally, less ambitious objectives such as de-escalation and release of hostages and prisoners (Fig 1). It also involves the Astana process,<sup>3</sup> which, according to the state-owned [Anadolu News Agency](#) has been initiated "under the leadership of Turkey and Russia" to bring the ceasefire and conflict processes under control in Syria, and is a platform where political and humanitarian issues are discussed, even if it does not fit classical definitions of mediation.<sup>4</sup>

The PA-X Peace Agreement Database ([Bell et al; 2023](#)) is a granular tool, allowing the researcher to gain better understanding of Turkey's engagement. It includes detailed information of different events and agreements that involve sub-state actors, such as militias, that are often rendered invisible in the bigger picture of the Libya Peace Process or the Astana process. The PA-X Peace Agreement Database thus sheds light on several local arrangements such as the al-Bab security agreements of June 2017, where Turkey implemented ceasefires in the al-Bab area of the Aleppo governorate – an area of approximately 9000 square-kilometres in the northern areas of the Aleppo, Raqq and Hasakah governorates. Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of National Defence officials suggested, however, that the PA-X database or similar datasets available such as the African Peace Processes Dataset (Duursma and Gamez; 2022) cannot capture the expertise available and actual engagement of Turkey in mediation at the local and regional level.

This is often conducted by military and intelligence officers, rather than diplomats, and has provided some order to the chaos of various conflicting militias. They also do not include practical agreements to professionalise (Haid; 2018), train or unify many of those militias. Finally, one of our Foreign Ministry interviewees stressed that some of the local agreements between militias – within the Astana framework where the Russian Federation is featured as a broker – have benefitted from the input of Turkey or the Turkish and Qatar-supported Syrian Interim Government (SIG). While the latter's headquarters are in Azzaz, the Turkish-controlled territories of Syria, it has links with various communities and militias in territories controlled by the Russian Federation, who also control territories where some Astana framework agreements take place.

Similar comments were made about the reflection of Turkey's mediating capacity in Libya. The PA-X Peace Agreement Database provides detailed data on the various multilateral agreements and conference communiqués related to the peace process as well as information on agreements between the main warring parties. However, one of our interviewees with experience in Libya noted how Turkey's importance in providing coordination to ensure that various forces and militias work together and maintain a continuously updated and exhaustive list of militias and tribal forces, among which it often mediates. As this work is conducted by intelligence officials, it is barely known, but it is crucial in maintaining some sort of peace and cooperation in the fractious environment of Libya.

In the extensive list compiled drawing on data from Beriker (2016) and Parlar Dal (2018) in Figure 1, Turkey's mediation activity related to the Horn of Africa took place when Ankara made its entrance in Somalia in August 2011, just after Somali government and AU Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) forces expelled the Islamist Al-Shabaab movement from Mogadishu. Turkey's Prime Minister Erdoğan took the opportunity of relative safety in the city to visit the war-ravaged capital (the first of a senior European politician in several years), and initiated Turkey's longstanding partnership with Somalia's Federal Government. In the same year, Turkey's AFAD had 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 and marked the start of Turkey's systematic humanitarian and peacebuilding involvement in Somalia (Sucuoglu and Stearns; 2016). Turkey was entering East Africa as a bold and committed partner, which did not carry the colonial baggage of European powers and promoted its Muslim identity as a key element in its international interactions.

Concerned about the de facto statehood of Somaliland and similar aspirations in Puntland, Turkey encouraged the dialogue between the internationally recognised Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the six Federal States of the country, acting as a mediator, or supporting mediation processes run by other parties. This second type of engagement is often missed in studies and datasets relevant to the complex and multifaceted Somalian peace process. The PA-X Peace Agreement Database is an exception, as it provides data related to processes such as the 2016 successful conclusion of the mediation process in the dispute between Puntland and Somalia in which the Intergovernmental Authority of Development (IGAD) – the regional organisation in the broader area of the Horn of Africa – led mediation, with the UN, the African Union, the EU, Ethiopia, the UAE, Turkey, Sweden, Italy and Djibouti supporting the process.

Turkey's own engagement as a mediator started with the hosting (in collaboration with the UN) of the Istanbul Conference on Somalia in May 2010, and the adoption of a declaration "to establish a roadmap for reconciliation" (Beriker; 2016). Somaliland's policy of non-negotiation with Somalia was rescinded as talks began in London in 2012 and continued briefly in Dubai. Turkey then hosted negotiations in Istanbul and president-level talks in Ankara in 2013 and Istanbul in 2014, with a view to further talks in Istanbul in 2015 which did not materialise. Ankara persevered in 2016 by hosting meetings of civil society and intellectuals hoping to reinvigorate the negotiations. During this process, Turkey sought to establish its credentials as mediator by establishing a consulate in Somaliland's capital Hargeisa. Additionally, it sought to circumnavigate the most challenging issues and encourage a series of confidence-building measures, including agreements on collaboration in the sharing and distribution of humanitarian aid; air space control; establishing a joint regulatory and monitoring body in Hargeisa and a formula of sharing the revenues accruing from overflights by the two parties; security sector cooperation; and combating illegal fishing. Somaliland remained cautious, however, and eventually withdrew from the process.

After the breakdown of talks, the implementation of the agreements that had been concluded eventually stalled as the Federal government declared them void. Somaliland saw Turkey's silence regarding the abrogation of the agreements as a sign of support of the SFG. Indeed, one Turkish diplomat pointed out that although the intention of the Turkish mediators was to bring the two parties together, the underlying assumption that Somaliland was a breakaway region and not a de facto state with legitimate claims to solidarity made the Somaliland representatives weary of a process they saw as biased from the outset.



He added that this concern was not unfounded, as Turkey's position was informed and circumscribed by its approach to its own Kurdish issue, and emphasised a unitary state solution. Turkey's inability to engage creatively and impartially in the mediation process meant that it was Ethiopian, U.S. and EU involvement that paved the way for resumed contact, rather than Ankara's.

A significant factor in the breakdown of the negotiations was the competition associated with "regional congestion" of external actors in the Horn, as multiple states perceive the region as an arena for the pursuit of their interests. Whereas Turkey and its ally Qatar, had been cultivating a close relationship with Mogadishu, and even supporting factions in the political arena, the United Arab Emirates, one of their key regional competitors, became increasingly uncomfortable with the influence Ankara and Doha yielded over Somalia. In the context of this competition, Abu Dhabi saw Somaliland as an important counterweight to Ankara's and Doha's presence in the region and supported its bid for international recognition, thus providing more latitude for Hargeisa in the negotiations and giving it the confidence to walk away.

Despite the ultimate failure of the process, an important takeaway from Turkey's efforts to engage with Somalia and Somaliland is that Ankara saw the mediation process as a protracted one with multiple stages. Despite criticisms of bias in favour of Somalia, Turkey deployed its available tools to keep the parties at the negotiating table. The opening of Turkey's consulate in Hargeisa was an additional "carrot" to encourage Somaliland to continue negotiating.

Unlike its Gulf ally, Qatar, and key competitor, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey lacks the resources to engage in "checkbook diplomacy" to offer appealing incentives, or underwrite peace processes on its own, especially during the frequent crisis circles which it experiences. However, Ankara's negotiating style is not merely that of a third party but includes a complex packet of financial and political tools to ensure that the parties remain committed to the process.

A final factor to consider is the Syrian conflict and Turkey's occupation of Northwest Syria, which has absorbed Turkey's resources and energy, further correlating with Turkey's relative "loss of appetite" for engagement in other conflicts as a mediator.

Turkey's next engagements have however remained unrecorded as, eventually, other actors were preferred over Ankara by the parties, or took the initiative. The first focused on the outstanding disputes between Sudan and South Sudan. Ankara shared with the parties a proposal and roadmap of resolving the various issues that were still outstanding and prevented the normalisation of the relations between Sudan and South Sudan. Although the proposal remained on the table, the parties and the regional states opted for a more localised process under the auspices of the Intergovernmental Authority of Development and, later, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development Plus. Nevertheless, ten years later, Ankara expressed again its intention to play a role in South Sudan - in January 2023 President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan invited South Sudan President Salva Kiir to attend a diplomatic conference and pledged his government's support of the peace process in the country.

Figure 1. "Turkish Mediation and Related Engagement"

Conflict	Year
Iraq Crisis	2003
Israel - Syria	2003
Georgia - Acarya	2003
Azerbaijan - Armenia	2004
Israel - Palestine 2005	2005
Georgia-Abkhazia	2005
Pakistan- Israel	2005
Iraq (Shia-Sunni)	2006
International Atomic Energy Agency-Iran	2006
Israel - Lebanon	2006
Israel- Hamas (Kidnapped Israeli Solider)	2006
EU - Iran	2007

Conflict	Year
Lebanon Crisis	2007
UK - Iran	2007
Afghanistan - Pakistan	2007
Israel - Syria	2008
Serbia-Bosnia and Herzegovina	2009
Croatia-Bosnia and Herzegovina	2009
Phillippines-Moro Islamic Liberation Front	2009
Iran	2010
Kyrgyzstan	2010
Palestine	2011
Somalia	2013
Myanmar	2013
Mali	2006
Libya	2014
Syria (Astana Process)	2017 - 2022
Afghanistan and the Taliban crisis	2020 - 2021
Russia and Ukraine	2022 - 2023

Source: Berkier, 2016:7 and 21, Parlar Dal, 2018:2306

A similar fate to Ankara's attempts to mediate between Sudan and South Sudan met the shortlived process, initiated by Ethiopia's Prime Minister's Desalegn invitation to President Erdoğan to mediate in the Ogaden dispute, which was eventually rejected by the Ogaden representatives (Beriker; 2016), and Turkey's approach to Eritrea to mediate between it and Ethiopia and Djibouti which, however, did not materialise (Aras; 2013) as Sudan and the UAE stepped in later on to broker a series of deals that smoothed the relations between the parties.

Ankara also offered its good services toward a peaceful resolution of a dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan over the al-Fashaga region, which saw clashes between Sudanese and Ethiopian forces in 2020. Sudan signalled its willingness to accept Turkey's mediation, indicating that it considers it a trustworthy partner (*Duvar English; 2021*). Interlocutors in Ankara suggested that the initiative was partly an attempt by Ankara to insert itself as a mediator in the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam dispute. This dispute had renewed tensions between Ethiopia, Sudan and Egypt as Ethiopia had been moving towards making the dam fully operational, causing concern among Sudan and Egypt whose agriculture relies on the waters of the Nile. Turkey, however, did not achieve this.

At present, Turkey has the capacity to contribute to the success of mediation processes in the multilateral domain, where it can pool its resources together with other actors or provide technical assistance in support of broader peace processes. The work of the modestly funded TİKA is not negligible, and its presence on the ground throughout the region makes it a valuable potential element of peace processes attached to mediation and peacebuilding projects. This is also the case for the Turkish Red Crescent, AFAD and other organisations, such as the fifth training program launched by TİKA for twelve Organisation of Islamic Country member states in cooperation with the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) and the Ministries of Health of Turkey and Sudan organised in the Gambia, or the quiet diplomacy again performed by TİKA on both sides of the Somalia/Somaliland dividing line during Turkey's mediating efforts.

## Part 3: Conclusions

This paper's brief overview of Turkey's experience and engagement in mediation processes suggests that Turkey's ambition to become an international player with a high potential to influence and achieve positive outcomes is not matched by the results of Turkey's engagement in this field, especially if one adopts established definitions of mediation as an institutionalised process.

There are many factors in favour of Turkey's aspiration:

- ▶ Turkey has established political and economic ties especially in Africa through primarily aid and trade, but also often packaging together economic penetration and security promotion, institution building and peace-making. These all make it an appealing and potentially effective third party in disputes.
- ▶ Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as prime minister until 2014 and president after, travelled to the region and tirelessly promoted this package together with activity that cast Turkey as a custodian of Islamic culture and developed religious networks that enhanced Turkey's weight especially in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and the coastal countries of west Africa.
- ▶ Turkey's relative success in Libya, Syria and Somalia has been aided by its lack of "colonial baggage", stressing the alternative to the Western development and peacemaking approach. Ankara articulates an anticolonial discourse which it reiterated by offering support without the conditionality attached the mainstream Western mediation and peacebuilding initiatives.
- ▶ Turkey not only emphasises the lack of a colonial past and ambition, but also criticises the allegedly neo-colonial "predisposition" by its Western partners.

On the other hand, there are several obstacles to Ankara's projecting itself as a reliable and/or desirable mediator:

- ▶ Turkish foreign policy — particularly after 2012 — has acquired an ideological dimension that also permeates its peacemaking activities. Ankara's support of like-minded Sunni political partners in the MENA and African regions have made it difficult for it to be perceived as impartial.

- ▶ Turkey's political imagination is constrained by its own approach to the Kurdish issue within its borders and abroad and makes it difficult for it to think creatively and flexibly in instances that such attributes might lead to successful mediation, as the Somalia/Somaliland dispute suggests.
- ▶ Unlike the Gulf states, Ankara lacks the resources required for facilitating mediation processes and encouraging the parties in such processes to see material benefits at the end of the road.

The meagre outcomes of Turkey's attempts to engage successfully in mediation processes are partly a product of the focus of our peace process monitoring tools and the difficulty in obtaining data on more localised and less public processes of mediation taking place in conflict zones and conducted by military and intelligence personnel. Refocusing and developing sensitive data collection toolkits is something that will enrich and nuance our already sophisticated databases.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> This study adopts the broad definition of mediation suggested by Zartman and Touval (1996) whereby "mediation is best thought of as a mode of negotiation in which a third party helps the parties find a solution which they cannot find by themselves." [p. 446]. Often called "assisted negotiation", mediation requires a mutually acceptable third party to assist the parties. In contrast to judicial processes, mediation is an informal, flexible and largely private process.

<sup>2</sup> This discourse of "enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy" was conceptualized and announced at the 9th Ambassadors Conference held in Ankara in January 2017 and was further elaborated at the 10th Ambassadors Conference in August 2018.

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the Astana process, see Kortunov 2019, and Al Jazeera 2017.

<sup>4</sup> As Tziarras (2022a) points out, "the Astana process did try to be more inclusive than the UN-led talks, by adopting a more bottom-up approach and attempting to engage regional players and domestic actors. However, significant representation and legitimacy weaknesses persisted. Turkey and Iran became Russia's primary talking partners and domestic Syrian groups involved in the conflict were invited as well. ... The issue here is not only with who is excluded, but also with who is included" as Turkey pushed for the inclusion of groups that are internationally proscribed as terrorist but pressed for the exclusions of the Kurdish forces that had played a significant role in the conflict, and both demands were heeded by Russia. At the end of the day, even if one disregards these failures of the process, the inclusiveness and the modicum of a bottom-up approach is not sufficient to equate it to a mediation process.

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