

## Policy Brief

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# Africa and the “Ankara Consensus”

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PB - 20/22

“Turkey’s turn to Africa is the result of several factors: the economic liberalization process undertaken in the 1990s, Ankara’s aim for greater voice in international institutions, and Turkey’s rivalry with Egypt and the Gulf states. Scholars have observed that Turkey’s public diplomacy, which some have dubbed the “Ankara consensus” is consciously designed as an alternative to the Washington consensus of neoliberal economic growth and the Beijing consensus of state-led growth, that valorizes stability over democracy.”

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## INTRODUCTION

Since declaring 2005, the year of Africa, Turkey has cultivated extensive economic and political relations across the continent. Since the mid-2000s, Turkey has increased the number of its embassies in Africa from 12 to 43.<sup>1</sup> The development projects and institution building may have slowed down during the COVID pandemic, but last October, President Tayyip Erdogan was back on the continent for a three-nation tour of Angola, Nigeria, and Togo. In December 2021, the Third Turkey Africa Partnership Summit was held in Istanbul. And in February of this year, the Turkish President returned again to the continent, visiting Congo and Senegal. Erdogan has now visited more than 30 African countries in his capacity, first as prime minister and then as President. Referring to the Action Plan of December's Turkey-Africa summit, the head of state underscored his commitment and described the plan as a "roadmap in our relations for Africa for 2022-2026."<sup>2</sup> In Kinshasa, he arrived with a shipment of 100,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccines, promising to send an additional million soon. Shortly before visiting Dakar, Erdogan published a piece on the newsite AllAfrica. In an oblique reference to France, (which had just announced its military withdrawal from Mali,) the President stated that Turkey is not a country, "tainted with colonialism and its millennial history on the African continent." He added: "We are eager to expand our cooperation, which has increased via mutual visits and investments, on the basis of mutual respect, equal partnership and win-win in the future period."<sup>3</sup>

This piece looks at Turkey's growing economic and political presence on the African continent, noting how the turn to Africa occurred as a result of several factors: the economic liberalization process undertaken in the 1990s, Ankara's aim for greater voice in international institutions and Turkey's rivalry with Egypt and the Gulf states. Scholars have observed that Turkey's public diplomacy, which some have dubbed the "Ankara consensus" is consciously designed as an alternative to the Washington consensus of neoliberal economic growth and the Beijing consensus of state-led growth, that valorizes stability over democracy. Turkey champions peacebuilding and mutual engagement and does not reject capitalism. As Federico Donnelly has argued, the Ankara Consensus "takes two aspects from the Arab model - religious meaning and aid as a foreign policy tool - and puts them together with other elements including an important feature of the Beijing consensus: the non-conditionality principle."<sup>4</sup>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Africa's ties to Turkey are centuries-old since the Ottoman Empire had a presence in North Africa and the Horn of Africa. The Turkish Republic that succeeded the Ottoman Empire in 1923 had limited ties with the African continent during the Cold War; as African states emerged from colonization, Ankara was embroiled in the Cold War and set on a Western-oriented foreign policy. With the end of the Cold War, Turkey had more space to maneuver. An economic liberalization process in the 1990s would give rise to a growing private sector, which in turn began looking for new external markets. As sociologists

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1. <https://african.business/2021/03/trade-investment/turkey-builds-embassies-across-africa-as-erdogan-boosts-influence/>

2. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/30354/turkey-africa-relations-are-built-on-pragmatism-and-convergence>

3. [https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/cumhurbaskanimizin\\_kaleminden/detay/president-erdogan-pens-article-on-turkish-senegalese-relations-for-the-allafrica-website](https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/english/cumhurbaskanimizin_kaleminden/detay/president-erdogan-pens-article-on-turkish-senegalese-relations-for-the-allafrica-website)

4. Federico Donnelly, "Being "Southern" without Being of the Global South: The Strange Case of Turkey South-South Cooperation in Africa" in [https://www.routledge.com/Turkey-in-Africa-A-New-Emerging-Power/Tepeciklioglu-Tepeciklioglu/p/book/9780367502218\\_p.83](https://www.routledge.com/Turkey-in-Africa-A-New-Emerging-Power/Tepeciklioglu-Tepeciklioglu/p/book/9780367502218_p.83)

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Karaoğuz and Gürbüz have shown, in the early 1990s, as Secular Turkish business elites tapped western markets, the newly emergent religious business class began looking to access Africa's and Middle Eastern markets, building on a common religious heritage.<sup>5</sup>

Ankara also saw Africa as a possible source of diplomatic support. As analysts have noted, it is not a coincidence that the "honeymoon period" in Turkey-Africa relations overlapped with Turkey's bid for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council in 2009.<sup>6</sup> A large number of African states supported Ankara's bid for UNSC membership. In February 2009, then-President Abdullah Gül traveled to Tanzania, where he assured his host that issues raised by the Security Council were related to Africa. "The Turkish Republic will be the spokesperson for Africa, the UN. It will support Africa on all its issues."<sup>7</sup>

## SOFT POWER

Since the rise of the Islamically-oriented Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the early 2000s, Ankara developed a more robust religious diplomacy. In the early 1970s, Turkish officials began using the Diyanet religious body to serve Turkish migrants in Europe. Religion played a minimal role in the foreign policymaking process. The AKP government would lift legal restraints on NGOs, allowing religious organizations to work abroad. The Gulen movement, then an ally of the AKP government, began building schools and humanitarian organizations mostly in African countries with large Muslim populations (but also in Angola and South Africa). After the coup of 2016 and the fallout between Erdogan and Fethullah Güllen, Ankara called African states to shut down Gulen centers and programs.<sup>8</sup> Conservative Islamic groups favored by the government would step in to fill the vacuum. '

Turkey's religious diplomacy has been aimed at raising the country's profile, and influence especially as Egypt, UAE and Saudi Arabia have developed a presence on the Horn of Africa, and increasingly on the Sahel.<sup>9</sup> The Turkish state – and its allied organizations – are thus promoting a "Turkish Islam" on the continent, presented as more tolerant than alternatives presented by other Middle Eastern and North African countries. Ankara has provided humanitarian aid and set up Quran-learning centers and published Quran translations in nine African languages. For Eid ul-Adha, the Diyanet also started "Qurban by proxy" program in 2018, for war-afflicted countries like Chad, South Sudan, Niger, Mali, and the Central African Republic.<sup>10</sup> Diyanet has also set up a "Sister City Project" launched in the early 90s for the Turkic republics but more recently extended to African cities. Thus the Cankaya district of Ankara is now a sister city with Djibouti City; Amasya's Merzifon district has been paired with Dakar, Senegal; and Izmir's Buca area matched with Maputo Mozambique.

In August 2011, Erdogan, with his family in tow, visited Somalia, providing support and calling for relief at the height of a harsh famine. This was the first visit to Mogadishu by a leader from outside Africa in almost two decades. Ankara has subsequently invested

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5. Hüseyin Emrah Karaoğuz and Selman Emre Gürbüz, "The Political Economy of Turkey Africa Relations" in <https://www.routledge.com/Turkey-in-Africa-A-New-Emerging-Power/Tepeciklioğlu-Tepeciklioğlu/p/book/9780367502218>

6. Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Ali Onur Tepeciklioğlu, "Introduction: Contextualizing Turkey's Africa Policy," in <https://www.routledge.com/Turkey-in-Africa-A-New-Emerging-Power/Tepeciklioğlu-Tepeciklioğlu/p/book/9780367502218>

7. Today's Zaman, (February 24, 2009) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25767304>

8. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23739770.2019.1632588?journalCode=rifa20>

9. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/01/middle-east-complicated-engagement-horn-africa>

10. <https://www.diyamet.gov.tr/en-US/Content/PrintDetail/11758>

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heavily in the Somali capital. As Donelli writes, Somalia “has [since] become a laboratory for Turkey. A clean slate on which it can test its capacity not only in humanitarian emergencies, but also in conflict mediation, the state-building process and development programs.” In 2017, Ankara opened its largest overseas military facility in Mogadishu. Turkish companies now manage Mogadishu’s main air and seaport, generating 80% of the Somali state’s revenues. Turkey has also contributed 2.4 million towards Somalia as IMF debt.<sup>11</sup> Turkey’s military also trains the Somali armed forces in Mogadishu and Turkey. A recent report by the International Crisis Group observes that Turkey has used its growing leverage in Somalia to support local organizations that lean towards the Muslim Brotherhood.<sup>12</sup> If Turkey’s presence in the Horn of Africa has unsettled Egypt and the Gulf states, Ankara’s growing profile in the Sahel has rattled Western states, particularly France. In November 2020, while France struggled to contain various jihadi groups in the Sahel, Macron publicly accused Turkey (and Russia) of promoting anti-French sentiment in Africa,<sup>13</sup> by trying “to play on post-colonial resentment,”<sup>14</sup>.

## THE SAHEL

Yet, as Hannah Armstrong has written, aside from a few security assistant programs, “In reality, Turkey’s forays into the Sahel have so far been mainly an exercise of soft power projection.” Ankara has built mosques and hospitals in Bamako and Niamey. The Turkish International Cooperation Development Agency (TIKA) has provided water and religious schooling in rural areas. Turkey claims that partly to protect its investments, it has supported security efforts and peacebuilding initiatives like Mali’s Algiers peace agreement of 2015. Turkey has also contributed \$5 million to the G5 Sahel Joint Force (a task force launched by Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad and Mauritania in 2017.) In July 2020, Ankara signed a defense pact with Niger. According to the International Crisis Group report, if Gulf Arab and Western states have reacted negatively to Turkey’s rising profile, “many civilians have cheered Ankara’s rapid push into the region.” People in the Sahel see Turkey as less domineering than France, more of a partner, and sharing a common Islamic heritage: “Turkey, for example, is not bent on curbing migrant flows like Europe.”<sup>15</sup>

When engaging with Africa, Turkish officials have noted that Turkish officials will claim that the Ottoman rule was not a colonial project, often adding that Ottoman rulers helped resist European colonial encroachment. As Ezgi Guner has remarked, fear of neo-Ottoman domination could arise as Ankara’s turn to Africa “consists of making a Muslim world in its own image,” and propagates a Turkish model of state-religion relations and Islamic education. Such opposition, however, has yet to materialize, and Turkey is finding some foreign policy success in Africa. As the editors of the recent volume *Turkey In Africa: A New Emerging Power?* have observed, Turkish foreign policy is in crisis: “Turkey’s proactive and multi-dimensional foreign policy approach failed in many areas,” but not in Africa, as the continent continues to, “provide a space where Turkey can satisfy its struggle for status

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11. <https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/analyses/rise-turkey-africa#a13>

12. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/turkey-sahel#:~:text=Ankara%20is%20strengthening%20ties%20with,additional%20competition%20in%20the%20region.>

13. <https://www.france24.com/en/france/20201120-macron-blames-russia-and-turkey-for-bolstering-anti-french-sentiment-in-africa>

14. <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1076943/politique/exclusif-emmanuel-macron-entre-la-france-et-lafrrique-ce-doit-etre-une-histoire-damour/>

15. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/sahel/turkey-sahel#:~:text=Ankara%20is%20strengthening%20ties%20with,additional%20competition%20in%20the%20region.>

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and test its foreign policy ambitions.”<sup>16</sup> Yet economic difficulties at home and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, where Ankara caught in a delicate balancing act between East and West, has done little to support Kiev and refused to impose economic sanctions on Russia (a major source of Turkey’s natural gas), may oblige Ankara to turn its full attention to the European arena once again.

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16. <https://www.routledge.com/Turkey-in-Africa-A-New-Emerging-Power/Tepeciklioglu-Tepeciklioglu/p/book/9780367502218>

## About the Author, Hisham Aidi

Hisham Aidi focuses on cultural globalization and the political economy of race and social movements. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University and has taught at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), and at the Driskell Center for the Study of the African Diaspora at the University of Maryland, College Park. He is the author of *Redeploying the State* (Palgrave, 2008) a comparative study of neo-liberalism and labor movements in Latin America; and co-editor, with Manning Marable, of *Black Routes to Islam* (Palgrave, 2009). In 2002–2003, Aidi was a consultant for UNDP's Human Development Report. From 2000 to 2003, he was part of Harvard University's Encarta Africana project, and worked as a cultural reporter, covering youth culture and immigration in Harlem and the Bronx, for *Africana*, *The New African* and *ColorLines*. More recently, his work has appeared in *The Atlantic*, *Foreign Affairs*, *The New Yorker* and *Salon*. Since 2007, he has been a contributing editor of *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Culture, Politics and Society*. Aidi is the author most recently of *Rebel Music: Race, Empire and the New Muslim Youth Culture* (Pantheon, 2014), a study of American cultural diplomacy. Aidi teaches the SIPA MIA survey course *Conceptual Foundations of International Politics* and seminars in SIPA's summer program.

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The PCNS advocates the concept of an open, responsible and proactive « new South »; a South that defines its own narratives, as well as the mental maps around the Mediterranean and South Atlantic basins, within the framework of an open relationship with the rest of the world. Through its work, the think tank aims to support the development of public policies in Africa and to give experts from the South a voice in the geopolitical developments that concern them. This positioning, based on dialogue and partnerships, consists in cultivating African expertise and excellence, capable of contributing to the diagnosis and solutions to African challenges.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author.

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