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## Turkey in the Horn of Africa Between the Ankara Consensus and the Gulf Crisis

This brief explores Turkey's increasingly active and assertive foreign policy and growing footprint in the Horn of Africa (especially in Somalia and Sudan). Turkey's role is considered as a factor of both its own domestic drivers and strategic interests in the Horn region. As its economy has grown, Turkish foreign policy has become considerably more assertive and predicated on the ideology of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), shifting to a focus on the Middle East, particularly on Muslim Brotherhood-oriented Sunni sectarianism. Meanwhile, economic and security developments in the Horn have raised the region's relevance as a geostrategic location, leading to a proliferation of foreign military bases, frequently accompanied by soft-power approaches such as investments by foreign companies. Turkey's developmental and economic role in this context has generally been positively received. It is noted for its speed, efficiency and lighter political baggage, yet it is criticised for its bilateral isolationism and lack of oversight. Turkey's shift to more ambitious geopolitical and heavy security roles has been met with caution as competition between Turkey and Qatar against the Gulf has heightened intra-Horn disputes and could be contributing to increased instability.

### Introduction

Over the past decade Turkey has become an increasingly active and assertive regional power. Although its focus has been on the Middle East, and particularly on the Syrian Civil War, ISIS and the region's Kurds,<sup>1</sup> it has also rapidly enlarged its footprint in the Horn of Africa since 2011 – most notably in Somalia. Turkey's move into Somalia during the famine of 2011 became known for its combination of humanitarian aid with commercial ties and state diplomacy, and was eagerly welcomed by many within Somalia: so much so that the *Financial Times* reported on newborn Somali boys being

named Erdoğan and newborn Somali girls Türkiye and Istanbul.<sup>2</sup> Turkish involvement in Somalia also received recognition from the international community – as many were impressed by Turkey's risk appetite and ability to make a relatively large impact on a relatively small budget.

While Turkey's developmental and economic role has generally been positively received by the international community, its shift to more ambitious geopolitical and heavy security roles more recently has been met with caution. Particularly since the June 2017 Qatar blockade, Turkey has drawn closer to Qatar and subsequently been entwined in

1 Van Veen, E. and Yüksel, E. (2018). *Too big for its boots: Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East from 2002 to 2018*, The Hague: Clingendael Institute.

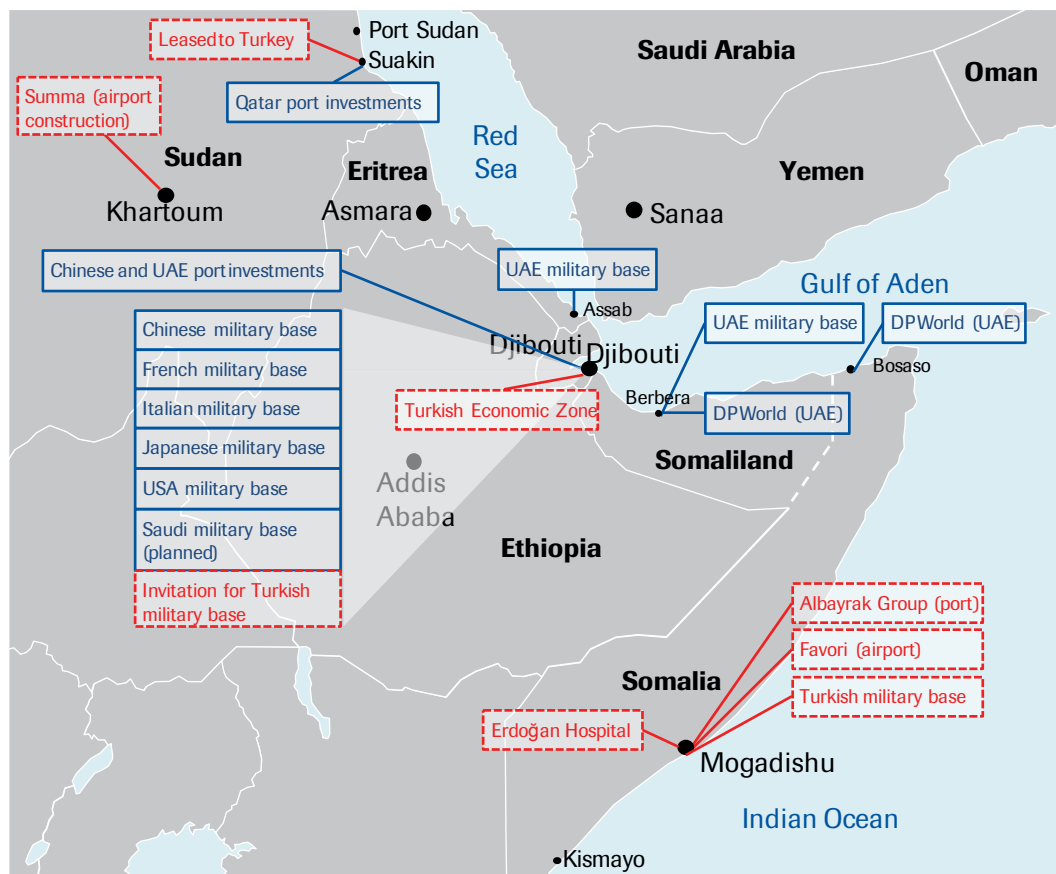
2 Pitel, L. (25 May 2016). 'Somalia reaps rewards of Ankara's investment.' *The Financial Times*. <https://www.ft.com/content/bae31b04-fa6f-11e5-8f41-df5bda8beb40>

Qatar’s rift with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt – all foreign powers with large footprints of their own in the Horn of Africa.<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, Turkey’s (military) activities in Somalia have thus also been framed in relation to tensions in the wider Red Sea region.<sup>4</sup>

This policy brief explores the drivers and consequences of the renewed Turkish engagement in the Horn of Africa. To understand Turkey’s growing footprint in the Horn of Africa, in contrast to its near absence before 2011, this brief starts

off with a short examination of the development of Turkish foreign policy in general. Subsequently, it considers wider developments driving a renewed interest in the Horn of Africa on the part of Turkey as well as other foreign actors. Although it looks briefly at Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia, the brief focuses mainly on Somalia and Sudan, which have seen the most high-profile Turkish engagement. The policy brief then explores the potential positive impact as well as the potential risks inherent in Turkish foreign policy in the Horn of Africa.

**Figure 1 The Horn of Africa with notable Turkish projects in dashed red and selected port deals and military bases of other powers in blue.**



3 Yousef, T. et al. (June 2018). 'What Brookings experts are saying about the one-year anniversary of the Gulf crisis.' Brookings, Op-Ed. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/what-brookings-experts-are-saying-about-the-one-year-anniversary-of-the-gulf-crisis/>

4 International Crisis Group (5 June 2018). 'Somalia and the Gulf Crisis.' [https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/260-somalia-and-the-gulf-crisis\\_0.pdf](https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/260-somalia-and-the-gulf-crisis_0.pdf).

## Domestic drivers of Turkey's turn to the Horn of Africa

Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), founded in 2001 by members of existing conservative parties in the country, has ruled the country since it won a plurality in the parliamentary election of 2002. Under the AKP, the Turkish economy has experienced tremendous economic growth from the 2000s onwards, with GDP rising from USD 200 billion in 2001 to USD 950 billion in 2013 (see figure 2 below). As the AKP was consolidating and testing its domestic rule, driven by pro-business and pro-poor policies at home, its foreign policy was largely oriented towards the status quo. From 2002 to 2010 Turkish foreign policy was based on regional economic cooperation and revolved around the catchphrase 'zero problems with our neighbors'.<sup>5</sup>

Domestic economic growth gave the Turkish state the means to engage in a more assertive foreign policy, and, in turn, successful Turkish companies (sometimes referred to as 'Anatolian tigers') achieved the size and appetite to seek markets abroad.<sup>6</sup> As the AKP consolidated its grip on the Turkish state (primarily vis-à-vis the military) its increasingly secure domestic powerbase bolstered the confidence within the ruling AKP to be bolder abroad as well.<sup>7</sup> The party started realigning its foreign policy away from its economic imperative and bringing it closer to AKP's ideological principles. As well as the shift in aims, Turkish foreign policy also became more issue-specific, less predictable, and increasingly centred

around its ever-more powerful leader, Erdoğan.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, from 2011 to 2015 Turkish foreign policy shifted to a focus on the Middle East, focusing on Muslim Brotherhood-oriented Sunni sectarianism.<sup>9</sup> This was particularly visible in the aftermath of the brief rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the Arab Spring and the 2017 Qatar blockade. Qatar's supportive stance towards the Muslim Brotherhood has led the two states to draw closer over the past decade, most clearly showcased in the establishment of a Turkish military base in Qatar. Although Qatar has a smaller GDP than Turkey, Qatar's huge liquefied natural gas wealth has given it substantial flexible means with which to conduct its foreign policy, which it has used to provide considerable financial support to Turkey. For example, during Turkey's recent currency crisis, Qatar pledged to invest USD 15 billion in Turkey to try to stabilise Turkey's domestic markets.<sup>10</sup> Since the Qatar blockade, Turkey has staked out a position on the side of Qatar (and to a lesser degree Iran), while opposing the four blockading states: Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Egypt and Bahrain.<sup>11</sup>

5 Van Veen, E. and Yüksel, E. (2018). *Too big for its boots: Turkish foreign policy towards the Middle East from 2002 to 2018*, The Hague: Clingendael Institute. p.8-9.

6 Hosgör, E. (2011). 'Islamic Capital/Anatolian Tigers: Past and Present.' *Middle Eastern Studies*. Vol. 47, No. 2. p. 343-345.

7 Jenkins, G. (2018). 'Illusion's End: Erdoğan and Turkey's Coming Economic Chill.' *Institute for Security & Development Policy*. <http://isdpeu/publication/illusions-end-erdogan-turkeys-coming-economic-chill/>

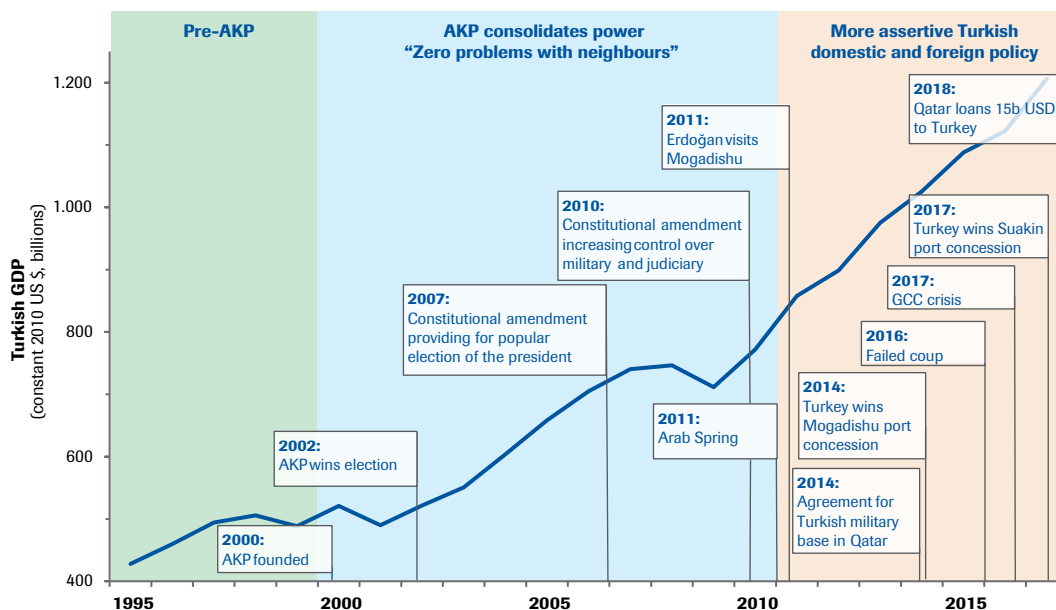
8 Since the failed coup attempt in July 2016, the AKP and Erdoğan have further centralised and captured the Turkish state. Jongerden, J. (2018). 'Conquering the state and subordinating society under AKP rule: a Kurdish perspective on the development of a new autocracy in Turkey.' *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*. p. 5.

9 Cop, B. and Zihnioğlu, Ö. (2015). *Turkish Foreign Policy under AKP Rule: Making Sense of the Turbulence*. *Political Studies Review* 2017, Vol. 15(1) 28-38.

10 Ant, O. and Kandemir, A. (15 August 2018). 'Qatar Comes to Rescue as Turkey Moves to Avert Financial Crisis.' *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-08-15/qatar-comes-to-rescue-as-turkey-moves-to-avert-financial-crisis>

11 Van Veen, E. & Yüksel, E. (2018) *Ibid*. p.18.

**Figure 2 Turkish economic and foreign policy development**



Source: World Bank Open Data. World Development Indicators. 'GDP: Constant 2010 US\$.' Retrieved from: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?locations=TR>.

## Strategic significance of the Horn of Africa

Economic and security developments in the Horn of Africa over the past decade have turned the region – especially the coastline – into one of the world’s most important geostrategic locations. On the one hand, the region has a significant economic role. The Horn of Africa is adjacent to one of the most important trade arteries in the world, from the Indian Ocean to Europe through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, passing the Bab el-Mandeb strait between Djibouti and Yemen. The region itself has also seen considerable economic growth, especially in Ethiopia (one of the fastest growing economies of the past decade), which has been developing increasing trade, investment and geopolitical partnerships.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, Turkish trade with Ethiopia has risen one hundredfold in a single decade, from \$40

million in 2003 to around \$4 billion in 2013,<sup>13</sup> and Turkish companies have initiated more than 239 investment projects and joint ventures in Ethiopia since 2003.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, the region is a hotspot of conflict, with piracy off the coast, Al-Shabaab in Somalia, civil war in Yemen and South Sudan, significant popular uprisings in Ethiopia, and a range of border conflicts occasionally flaring up across the region. Foreign powers have looked to the region as a key hub for security activities, ranging from the United States constructing a military base in Djibouti after 9/11 to launch their war on terror (specifically against Al-Qaeda and Al-Shabab), to the UAE and Saudi Arabia using Djibouti and Eritrea in their military campaign in Yemen, to China constructing its first overseas military base in Djibouti and hosting a large peacekeeping

12 Meester, J., van den Berg, W. and Verhoeven, H. (2018). 'Riyal politik: the political economy of Gulf investments in the Horn of Africa.' Clingendael Conflict Research Unit. <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-04/riyal-politik.pdf>

13 Donelli, F. (2018). 'The Ankara consensus: the significance of Turkey's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa.' *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 30:1, p. 12.

14 Clingendael Horn of Africa Investment Database (2017).

force in South Sudan.<sup>15</sup> The combination of economic and security interests converging in the region have translated into a logic of their own, resulting in the region seeing a proliferation of foreign military bases, often accompanied by soft-power approaches such as largescale investments by foreign companies, particularly in ports (see figure 1). As the concentration of foreign powers intensifies, so does the region's importance and the push to secure its ports.<sup>16</sup> In some ways, the Horn of Africa has become a laboratory where different foreign policy approaches and aid modalities meet: not only from traditional Western powers but also from rising powers that are engaging in alternative forms of economic and security development.<sup>17</sup> Turkey – especially in Somalia – is very much part of this trend.

Turkey has a long history in the Horn of Africa, dating back to the Ottoman Empire's presence in the region. In modern times its engagement has been rather limited, until it rose dramatically in 2011 when it entered Somalia. Since then, Turkey has continued to have the most wide-ranging engagement with Somalia (see box 1), and from the end of 2017 onwards it has also significantly built up its presence in Sudan (see box 2). While Turkish engagement in these two theatres has attracted the most international attention and also featured prominently in the larger regional rivalries, it should be remembered that Turkey engages in other areas in the Horn, although in a more limited role. In Djibouti, the State Hydraulic Works of Turkey is constructing a dam, the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs is constructing a mosque, and there are plans for a Turkish Special

Economic Zone.<sup>18</sup> At the end of 2017 the Djiboutian ambassador to Ankara stated that 'possible steps from Turkey to build a military base in the country would be welcomed'.<sup>19</sup> As mentioned above, Turkey's involvement in Ethiopia has expanded over the past decade in the areas of trade and investment, and Ethiopia is Turkey's largest trading partner in the region.<sup>20</sup> Turkish engagement in Eritrea is modest – in 2016 bilateral trade stood at around USD 17.9 million, but Turkey has officially welcomed peace efforts being made between Eritrea and Ethiopia, the lifting of UN sanctions in November 2018 and the recent rapprochement between the two states.<sup>21</sup>

Turkey's move into Somalia was presented as a personal move driven by Erdoğan himself. In 2011 Erdoğan personally authored an English language piece in *Foreign Policy* titled 'The Tears of Somalia', which called on the international community to assist Somalia during the famine and described Turkish efforts to this end.<sup>22</sup> This article was published several months after Erdoğan became the first head of state outside of Africa to visit Mogadishu in 20 years, taking his family and four ministers with him. The humanitarian imperative of intervening in the Somali drought received a strong sympathetic response from the Turkish population, especially during the Ramadan period, yet the intervention also underscored

15 Meester, J. and van den Berg, W. (2018). 'Ports & Power: the securitization of port politics.' *Clingendael Institute*. [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Ports\\_and\\_Powers.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/Ports_and_Powers.pdf)

16 Ibid.

17 Ursu, A.E. and van den Berg, W. (2018). 'China and the EU in the Horn of Africa: competition and cooperation?' *Clingendael Institute*. [https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-04/PB\\_China\\_and\\_the\\_EU\\_in\\_the\\_Horn\\_of\\_Africa.pdf](https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2018-04/PB_China_and_the_EU_in_the_Horn_of_Africa.pdf)

18 Getachew, A. (19 December 2017). 'Djibouti finds strategic economic partner in Turkey: Ambassador.' *Anadolu Agency*. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/djibouti-finds-strategic-economic-partner-in-turkey-ambassador/1008823>

19 Sevinç, Özgenur (2017). 'Djibouti is open to Turkey's efforts to safeguard Red Sea, ambassador says.' *Daily Sabah: Diplomacy*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2017/12/30/djibouti-is-open-to-turkeys-efforts-to-safeguard-red-sea-ambassador-says>

20 Donelli, F. (2018). Ibid.

21 Republic of Turkey: Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 'Relations Between Turkey and Eritrea.' <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-eritrea.en.mfa>; Hürriyet (18 September 2018). 'Ankara welcomes Eritrea-Ethiopia peace deal.' *Daily News: Diplomacy*. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ankara-welcomes-eritrea-ethiopia-peace-deal-136972>

22 Erdoğan, R. (2011). 'The Tears of Somalia.' *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/10/the-tears-of-somalia/>

**Box 1: Turkey in Somalia**

In 2011 during the height of the Somalia famine, the then Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Mogadishu along with a Turkish delegation of around 200 people. This was the first visit from a non-African head of state to Somalia for nearly two decades. Afterwards, Turkey's embassy was reopened, direct flights from Turkey to Mogadishu were established by Turkish Airlines, and considerable aid commitments were made. Since then, Turkish engagement in Somalia has been substantial and multifaceted.<sup>a</sup> Turkish non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such as the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkey Diyanet Foundation have distributed humanitarian aid, while Turkish companies have invested in the country and won important government contracts: notably Albayrak operating Mogadishu's seaport and Favori operating Mogadishu's international airport. Through scholarship programmes for foreign nationals Turkey has brought a substantial number of Somali students to Turkey to study at Turkish schools and universities, especially in the period after the famine.<sup>b</sup> Turkey also supported the creation of social services such as schools and hospitals. Turkey claims to have sent almost USD 1 billion worth of aid to Somalia from 2011 to 2017,<sup>c</sup> while bilateral trade reached around USD 120 million in 2016 and continues to grow as more trade agreements are signed between the two countries.<sup>d</sup> In addition to development aid and commercial ties, Turkey has also taken on an important diplomatic and security role. It has worked on mediation attempts between the federal government in Mogadishu with the breakaway region of Somaliland,<sup>e</sup> but has mostly focused its attention on Mogadishu, where in September 2017 it opened a USD 50 million military training facility where it will train Somali soldiers in their fight against Al-Shabaab.<sup>f</sup>

- a For an overview of the numerous Turkish institutions active in Somalia, see Özkan, M. (2014). 'Turkey's Involvement in Somalia: Assessment of a State-Building in Progress.' *SETA: Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research*. [http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20141118174857\\_turkey%E2%80%99s-involvement-in-somalia-assesment-of-a-state-building-in-progress-pdf.pdf](http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20141118174857_turkey%E2%80%99s-involvement-in-somalia-assesment-of-a-state-building-in-progress-pdf.pdf)
- b Interview with Somali academic, UAE, December 2018.
- c Anadolu Agency (19 March 2017). 'Almost \$1 billion worth of Turkish aid sent to Somalia.' *Daily Sabah Africa*. <https://www.dailysabah.com/africa/2017/03/19/almost-1-billion-worth-of-turkish-aid-sent-to-somalia>
- d APA News (15 January 2018). 'New deal cements Somali-Turkish trade ties.' *APA News: Somalia-Turkey Diplomacy*. <http://apanews.net/en/news/new-deal-cements-somali-turkish-trade-ties>
- e Achilles, K. et al. (March 2015). 'Turkish aid agencies in Somalia: Risks and opportunities for building peace.' *Safer World. IPM|IPC*. <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/189390/turkish-aid-agencies-in-somalia.pdf> p.23.
- f Hussein, A. and Coskun, O. (30 September 2017). 'Turkey opens military base in Mogadishu to train Somali soldiers.' *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-turkey-military/turkey-opens-military-base-in-mogadishu-to-train-somali-soldiers-idUSKCN1C50JH>



the narrative portraying Turkey as a rising power that played well with the AKP's conservative and religious voters. Although some argue that Turkey's reason for choosing Somalia in 2011 was due to a lack of other foreign powers there – a kind of 'virgin territory' – this view is inconsistent with the long-running engagement in Somalia by neighbours, Gulf states, Western powers and international organisations such as the UN and the African Union. Rather, a different view is that there were 'too many interested actors with competing aims',<sup>23</sup> and that 'Erdoğan and his close government ministers, particularly Davutoğlu, chose Somalia, despite the significant risks, because of the potential payout in terms of international recognition, increased diplomatic profile, and profit.'<sup>24</sup> Turkey was also set apart from other foreign actors in the region by the timing of its engagement (at the height of the 2011 famine), its appetite for risk, and its holistic approach, all of which combined to create a successful engagement.<sup>25</sup>

## Evaluating Turkey's role in the region

Turkey's role in the Horn of Africa can broadly be divided into two parts: the first is developmental and economic in nature, and the second is geopolitical. Although there is considerable overlap between the two,<sup>26</sup> it seems that Turkey has focused primarily on the first since entering Somalia in 2011 and has gradually shifted towards the second in

following years. Turkey's developmental and economic role is characterised by humanitarian aid, developmental assistance and commercial ties, and is often recognised by the international community as having a broadly positive influence in the region, although with some caveats. However, Turkey's geopolitical role is characterised by power projection and regional rivalry and is seen by many as contributing to additional tension and cleavages. This short exploration of Turkey's role in the Horn of Africa first focuses on (mostly technical) aspects of the Turkish developmental and economic approach, particularly in Somalia, and its strengths as well as its limitations. The second part of this section focuses on Turkey's geopolitical engagement and ties it into the broader struggle for power in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East at large.

### The Ankara Consensus

The Turkish approach in Somalia differs from that of Western engagement models and has received both praise and criticism. It has been described as an integrated approach that 'combines development, peace-building and business'.<sup>27</sup> From the start, Turkish engagement in Somalia 'combined political, developmental, economic, and humanitarian support, and has brought together a variety of actors – government officials, aid agencies, Civil Society Organisations, religious organizations, municipalities, and the private sector'.<sup>28</sup> This contrasts strongly with Western engagement in Somalia, which typically focuses on either humanitarian and development aid or on security; occasionally both but rarely in a truly integrated fashion. It is also uncommon for these international actors to explicitly tie commercial private sector activities into the mix of humanitarian and development programmes.

Within Somalia, Turkey is praised for its speed and efficiency. Because several prominent Turkish companies are now

23 Cannon, B. (2017). 'Turkey in Africa: Lessons in Political Economy.' *Florya Chronicles of Political Economy*. 3 (1), p.93-110.

24 Cannon, B. (15 November 2016). 'Deconstructing Turkey's Efforts in Somalia.' *Bildhaan*, Vol. 16. p.104.

25 Cannon, B. (2017). *Ibid*.

26 This is particularly the case for Turkey's 'military base', which has been perceived by many as power projection, but can also be seen as a logical extension of Turkey's developmental assistance to the Somalia National Army. See: Antye, A. (2012). 'Turkey's Increasing Role in Somalia: An Emerging Donor?' *Al Jazeera Centre for Studies*. p. 4. <http://studies.aljazeera.net/mritems/Documents/2012/3/22/201232213350836734Turkeys%20Increasing%20Role%20in%20Somalia.pdf>

27 Wasuge, M. (2016). 'Turkey's Assistance Model in Somalia: Achieving Much With Little.' *The Heritage Institute for Policy Studies*. p. 29. <http://www.heritageinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Turkeys-Assistance-Model-in-Somalia-Achieving-Much-With-Little1-1.pdf>

28 Donelli, F. (2018), *Ibid*. p.71.

operating in Somalia (Al-Bayrak managing the port of Mogadishu, FAVORI managing the airport, and Turkish Airlines flying into Mogadishu), Turkish groups can run development and security projects more efficiently through their own channels, as they have easy access to key logistical hubs.<sup>29</sup> Turkey thus directly controls transport and delivery, allowing it to cut out any role for aid brokers and ‘briefcase businesses’ operating mainly out of Kenya, which are so negatively viewed within Somalia. Additionally, Turkey’s approach is mostly based on bilateral relationships, dealing directly with actors in Somalia, while Western donors often take a multilateral approach. For example, while other international partners might donate substantial funds to Somalia through intermediary channels such as the UN, Turkey often sends funds directly, mostly to Mogadishu. Consequently, funds arrive faster and there are fewer overhead costs. Multilateralism also requires more time discussing and planning. A Turkish spokesman recounted his frustration with working with other donors on maritime security in Somalia, as they spent time on endless ‘papers and strategies’. The Turkish government grew so frustrated with the international community that it eventually decided on ‘simply giving four boats to the Somali coastguard and supplying them with fuel and salaries’.<sup>30</sup>

The obvious trade-off here is that more direct and independent implementation does not necessarily incorporate best practices embedded in established donor organisations. Most notably, there is less accountability. With this in mind, it is unsurprising that in addition to being praised for its speed, the Turkish approach is criticised for its lack of oversight, as well as for being ‘isolationist’ and for ‘overbranding’ itself.<sup>31</sup> Turkey’s unilateralism and implementing speed may contribute to a lack of oversight and what one study calls the ‘failure to take into account the corrupt nature of the government’.<sup>32</sup> Turkey’s role in

the port of Mogadishu is a clear example: a Turkish company upgraded port facilities, but the way in which the contract was tendered raised some concerns and a UN report alleges that private Turkish money is flowing into the hands of Somali politicians.<sup>33</sup> Similar issues arise in the operational stage: while Turkey may have taken over the management of Mogadishu port, shipping and logistics providers report that financial controls on their operations remain weak.<sup>34</sup> While many argue that Turkey should increase its coordination with other international and regional actors to improve accountability and coordination, some say that Turkey’s success in Somalia is precisely because of its unilateralism and its focus on internal over multilateral coordination (specifically the integrated approach of Turkish ministries and government agencies with NGOs and companies).<sup>35</sup>

Turkish involvement in Somalia also differs from Western donor states in that it has a larger and more integrated presence on the ground. Traditional donor representatives in Somalia are often located in neighbouring Nairobi for security reasons, and when travelling in Mogadishu they are secluded in heavily secured hotels. In contrast, Turkish development workers are much closer to the Somali population. One Somali minister is quoted as saying that the Turkish ‘*have knowledge of the country, they are learning Somali, they are on the streets and they are driving the trucks. Who else can do that?*’<sup>36</sup> It is no surprise that many Somalis (particularly those in Mogadishu) feel closer to the Turkish than to other international partners. This, coupled with its reduced reliance on brokers, gives the Turkish more

29 Wasuge, M. (2016), *Ibid.* p. 20-21.

30 *Ibid.* p.21.

31 *Ibid. op. cit.* p.20-21.

32 *Ibid. op. cit.* p.21.

33 UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea. *Letter dated 31 October 2016 from the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 751 (1992) and 1907 (2009) concerning Somalia and Eritrea*, New York: United Nations. *op. cit.* p.98. [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2016\\_919.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2016_919.pdf)

34 Interviews with shipping and logistics providers in the UAE, December 2018.

35 Cannon, B. (2017). *Ibid.* p. 95.

36 *Ibid.* p.24.



local support and negotiating power than they would otherwise have, especially given the modest size of its aid budget. It is not only Somalis who appreciate this difference; according to a Western development worker who has worked on ports in Mogadishu, 'With the Turkish, the difference in mentality is not so big. The Turkish are less arrogant and integrate better into the community.'<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, the Islamic soft-power approach that Turkey implements as an integral part of its development programming, through the construction of mosques, religious educational institutions and Imam-Hatip schools, has also been relatively well received.<sup>38</sup> Especially in Somalia, Turkish religious education has been welcomed by some Somalis as a counterbalance to Wahhabi influences from the Gulf, and the associated Turkish cultural influences have helped establish trust between Somali and Turkish elites.<sup>39</sup> The ideological congruence between the AKP and political factions aligned to the Muslim Brotherhood in Somalia and Sudan may also have helped Turkey's entry into these countries, although its importance should not be overstated. While the previous Somali administration of Hassan Sheikh Mohamud was connected to Al-Islah (the Somali branch of the Muslim Brotherhood), the current Farmaajo administration has no clear ties to the Brotherhood yet sided with Qatar in the GCC

(Gulf Cooperation Council) crisis.<sup>40</sup> Turkish engagement in the region has been driven more by pragmatism than ideology.

A last crucial difference between Turkey and other development actors operating in the region is that in some ways Turkey is considered to carry less 'political baggage' by Somalis. Western powers such as the US, the UK and France are often focused on issues around democracy, governance and human rights, and are therefore perceived to be meddling in countries' internal affairs. Gulf state engagement can come with (the perception of) religious strings and is often of an overt political nature, and with the war in Yemen their proximity can be too close for comfort. China, on the other hand, suffers from the perception that it is a new colonial power and that accepting its financial support carries the risk of a debt trap.<sup>41</sup> Compared to these alternatives, Turkey is geographically close enough but not too close, harbours modest ambitions for the continent, and is culturally and religiously similar. In this sense, Turkey can usefully provide 'a third option as a diplomatic and strategic partner to African states',<sup>42</sup> This third option has been coined by some as the 'Ankara Consensus': a mix of democratic

37 Phone interview with Western development worker conducted by author in May 2017.

38 Examples include the sizeable Somalia Central mosque and the Haci Tenzile Erdogan mosque in Mogadishu.

39 Tol, Gonul (2019). 'Turkey's Bid for Religious Leadership: How the AKP Uses Islamic Soft Power.' *Foreign Affairs*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2019-01-10/turkeys-bid-religious-leadership>.

40 Soliman, Ahmed (2017). 'Gulf crisis is leading to difficult choices in the Horn of Africa.' *Middle East Eye: Gulf Tensions*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/gulf-crisis-leading-difficult-choices-horn-africa>; Staff reporter (2017). 'Somalia: Confidential report warns against former Islamist's close ties with president.' *Garowe Online*. <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/somalia/somalia-confidential-report-warns-against-former-islamists-close-ties-with-president>. If anything, the Farmaajo administration is domestically rumoured to be closer to members of the former Al-Ittihad, a group with which Al-Islah has clashed in the past.

41 Alves, A. in Cannon, B. (2017). 'Turkey in Africa: Lessons in Political Economy.' *Florya Chronicles of Political Economy*, 3(1), p. 94; Donelli, Federico (2018). 'The Ankara consensus: the significance of Turkey's engagement in sub-Saharan Africa.' *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 30:1, p. 65; Cheng, A. in Kalandula, A. and Shaw, T. (2018). 'Security and Development in the Horn of Africa: Emerging Powers, and Competing Regionalisms.' *Institute for Peace and Security Studies*, Addis Ababa University. Vol. 11, Issue 11. p. 3.

42 Cannon, B. (2017). *Ibid.* p. 94.

liberalism (Washington consensus) and authoritarian capitalism (Beijing consensus).<sup>43</sup>

### Turkey in the geopolitics of the Gulf crisis

Unlike its developmental and economic role in the Horn of Africa, Turkey's geopolitical ambitions in the region have not received a similarly warm welcome. Although some argue that the Turkish military base in Mogadishu can be more accurately described as a 'military training camp' and its intended purpose is to help the federal government of Somalia ensure stability in the country, it is often seen by international media, as well as by many Arab states, as a sign of power projection and securitisation.<sup>44</sup> Turkey's base and its support for the Somali National Army have been positively received by politicians in Mogadishu, but when the larger regional perspective is considered, it is hard not to see Turkey's role as a challenge to Arab interests, with concomitant risks of escalated rivalry and tensions. This is because Turkey's military involvement in the Horn of Africa cannot be seen in isolation from other foreign powers and it is not limited to Somalia.

Turkey's support for Qatar has pitted it in direct opposition to the blockading states: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt. Within this standoff, actors in the Horn of Africa have been pressured into taking sides, while at the same time attempting to play off foreign backers and funders against each other in long-standing patterns of extraversion. This is playing out across the Horn, but Turkey's role is especially notable in Somalia and Sudan. In Somalia, Turkish efforts have focused on Mogadishu while the UAE has followed a similar script in Somaliland (and Puntland), establishing a military base in Berbera after Emirati port operator DP World won a 30-year concession to manage

the port and a promised USD 442 million investment.<sup>45</sup> Saudi Arabia and the UAE have put pressure on the federal government of Somalia to support their side against Qatar, with threats of withholding aid and financial support to local politicians. Qatar and its ally Turkey have managed to leverage their role in Mogadishu, however, and the federal government of Somalia has refused to officially take sides. Qatar, in turn, provided USD 385 million in assistance to Mogadishu in 2018.<sup>46</sup> The UAE's important role in the self-declared Republic of Somaliland and semiautonomous Puntland and its trade with Kismayo creates additional tension between Mogadishu and Somalia's regions.<sup>47</sup> All in all, the competition between Turkey and Qatar on the one hand and the different Gulf powers on the other has heightened intra-Somali disputes and is contributing to increased instability.<sup>48</sup>

Outside of Somalia, Turkey has increased its engagement with Sudan at a time when Sudan has experienced a tense relationship with its northern neighbour Egypt, over the disputed border area of Halayeb as well as Sudan's support for Ethiopia's Grand Renaissance Dam on the Blue Nile and general economic hardship. At the same time, Sudan has benefited from substantial investment from Qatar, which had invested an estimated USD 3.8 billion in Sudan by 2017.<sup>49</sup> When President Erdoğan

43 Donelli, F. (2018). Ibid. p. 58.

44 Cannon, B. and Rossiter, A. (5 October 2018). 'Re-examining the 'Base': The Political and Security Dimensions of Turkey's Military Presence in Somalia.' *Insight Turkey*. <https://www.insightturkey.com/early-view/re-examining-the-base-the-political-and-security-dimensions-of-turkeys-military-presence-in-somalia>

45 Abdi, R. (3 August 2017). 'A Dangerous Gulf in the Horn: How the Inter-Arab Crisis is Fuelling Regional Tensions.' *International Crisis Group*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/dangerous-gulf-horn-how-inter-arab-crisis-fuelling-regional-tensions>

46 Dudley, D. (4 April 2018). 'East Africa Becomes A Testing Ground for UAE and Qatar As They Battle For Influence And Opportunity.' *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/dominicdudley/2018/04/04/uae-qatar-horn-of-africa-proxy-dispute/#3f1ad7446ad2>

47 Ibid.

48 International Crisis Group (5 June 2018). 'Somalia and the Gulf Crisis.' *International Crisis group: Africa*. Report 260. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/260-somalia-and-gulf-crisis>

49 The Peninsula Online in Shay, S. (January 2018). 'Turkey-Sudan strategic relations and the implications for the region.' *IPS Publications: Institute for Policy and Strategy*.

### Box 2: Turkey in Sudan

Although historical ties between Turkey and Sudan date back to the Ottoman Empire, Sudan leaned more towards Saudi Arabia and the UAE than to Qatar and Turkey in the GCC crisis. Over the past decade Sudan has been in a tight financial situation and has received billions of dollars of assistance from both Qatar and the blockading Gulf states. Attempting to keep both sides on board, Sudan remained neutral in the Gulf crisis, offering to act a mediator when the GCC crisis first broke out.<sup>a</sup> Recently, however, Turkish engagement in Sudan indicates that the Sudanese regime has moved closer into the Qatar-Turkey orbit. Turkish President Erdoğan visited Sudan on 24 December 2017 (while accompanied by top-level Qatari military officials), after which Turkey and Sudan signed agreements worth USD 650 million and promised to increase bilateral trade. One notable result of the visit was the announcement that Turkey would be granted a 99-year lease to the Ottoman-era port of Suakin on the Red Sea, officially to be revived as a tourist hub for pilgrims on Hajj.<sup>b</sup> The Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour stated that Turkey would ‘build a dock to maintain civilian and military vessels’ and said the deal could ‘result in any kind of military cooperation’.<sup>c</sup> The deal also included the presence of Turkish forces in Port Sudan and will see Turkey train Sudanese forces in counterterrorism.<sup>d</sup> Since the announcement of the Suakin port deal, Turkish companies have stepped up their involvement in Sudan. In September 2018 Turkey and Sudan signed a USD 100 million deal for Turkish companies to engage in oil exploration and agricultural investments in Sudan,<sup>e</sup> while Turkish construction firm Summa plans to start building Sudan’s largest airport, Khartoum International Airport, worth USD 1.15 billion, in 2019.<sup>f</sup>

- a Cafiero, G. (20 June 2017). ‘Qatar-GCC crisis unsettles Sudan.’ *Al-Monitor*. Qatar-GCC crisis unsettles Sudan
- b Amin, Mohammed (18 March 2018). ‘Suakin: ‘Forgotten’ Sudanese island becomes focus for Red Sea rivalries.’ *Middle East Eye*. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/suakin-island-sudan-turkey-saudi-arabia-egypt-394055164>
- c Ibid.
- d Ibid.
- e Reuters (11 September 2018). ‘Turkey signs agriculture, oil exploration deals with Sudan.’ <https://www.reuters.com/article/turkey-sudan/turkey-signs-agriculture-oil-exploration-deals-with-sudan-idUSL5N1VX14L>
- f *Hurriyet Daily News* (18 October 2018). ‘Turkish firm to start building Sudan’s “biggest airport”.’ Ankara. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-firm-to-start-building-sudans-biggest-airport-138029>

visited Sudan in December 2017 he was accompanied by top-level Qatari military officials. Turkey's deal for Suakin island in Sudan, which included possible military cooperation, was followed up several months later by a USD 4 billion deal between Qatar and Sudan to develop the port.<sup>50</sup> In combination with Egypt's support for the Saudi and UAE blockade of Qatar, and Turkey's subsequent support for Qatar, this has led to the accusation in Egyptian media of a Sudanese-Turkish-Qatari axis that is undermining Egypt.<sup>51</sup> The current Egyptian regime is particularly worried by this, considering Turkey and Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt during the aftermath of the Arab Spring.<sup>52</sup>

Turkey's engagement also risks it becoming embroiled in tensions between governments and local populations in the Horn. After the failed 2016 coup in Turkey, the influence of the AKP in the Horn of Africa was soon visible: Gülen-run schools and hospitals in Somalia were closed or handed over to the Turkish state – some that very same week.<sup>53</sup> Many of these institutions are still not up and running again.<sup>54</sup> In Sudan, the closing of these institutions has contributed to public concern over the closeness of the Sudanese and Turkish regimes, along with fears of Turkish support for the Islamic Movement in Sudan.<sup>55</sup> Following the closure of such highly visible social services, beneficiaries of these services wondered what remained of Turkish engagement apart from its more

self-interested economic and political components.

## Conclusion

For policy makers working on development and security issues in the Horn of Africa, there are three aspects of Turkish foreign policy in the region that are important to consider.

First, Turkey's role in the Horn of Africa should be seen through both its domestic drivers and strategic interests in the Horn region. Turkey's economy has grown dramatically since 2000, and Turkish foreign policy has changed noticeably in the last ten years, becoming considerably more assertive and predicated on the ideology of the AKP and its increasingly powerful leader Erdoğan. This is not the case for only the Horn of Africa, but it is the case for Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East and Africa in general. At the same time, the Horn of Africa has developed into an especially relevant geostrategic area for such a policy. Consideration of these factors is needed in order to understand Turkey's current and future engagement.

Second, the combination of diplomatic, humanitarian, commercial and military engagement is highly visible. Turkey seeks to position itself as a rising power, an image that plays well in domestic electoral politics. Additionally, Turkey's engagement has been presented as a highly personal venture driven by Erdoğan himself. Any significant changes to these policies are thus likely to align with Turkish electoral cycles, and the impact of any successes or failures in Somalia should to some degree be seen in the same electoral context.

Third, while Turkey has made significant long-term investments in infrastructure in the Horn, especially in Somalia, and has taken up a 99-year lease of Suakin Island, it is hard to estimate its longer-term commitment. Over the past decade the main foreign funders in the Somali and Sudanese political landscape have been the Gulf states, aiming to deny access to actors considered as friendly to the Muslim Brotherhood.

50 Reuters (28 March 2018). 'Sudan, Qatar to sign \$4 bln deal to manage Red Sea port.' *Hurriyet Daily News: Economy*. Khartoum. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/sudan-qatar-to-sign-4-bln-deal-to-manage-red-sea-port-129415>

51 Shay, S. (January 2018). Ibid.

52 Salloukh, B. (2013). 'The Arab Uprisings and the Geopolitics of the Middle East.' *The International Spectator, Italian Journal of International Affairs*, 48:2, p. 42.

53 Sheikh, A. (30 July 2016). 'Turkey's anti-Gülen crackdown ripples far and wide.' *Reuters: World News*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-gulen-education-idUSKCN10A0AM?feedType=RSS&>

54 Donelli, F. (2018). Ibid. p. 75.

55 Written correspondence between the author and an international development worker in Sudan, November 2018.




Turkey has made significant inroads in certain areas but is considered a relatively new actor in the region and aligning with it brings uncertain prospects. Nonetheless, Turkish engagement, especially its social interventions, has been viewed relatively positively, and the potential long-term

impact of the considerable number of young Somalis being educated and encultured in Turkey may reinforce connections between the countries in the longer term. As Turkey expands its foothold in the region, clashes along the lines of the GCC crisis may become more entrenched.

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[www.clingendael.org/cru](http://www.clingendael.org/cru)  
[cru@clingendael.org](mailto:cru@clingendael.org)  
+31 70 324 53 84

 @clingendaelorg  
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### About the author

**Willem van den Berg** worked for Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit as a research assistant for the Business & Peace programme. In this capacity he conducted research on the role of the private sector in conflict-affected areas.

**Jos Meester** is a Research Fellow at Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit, where he leads the Horn of Africa programme and the Business & Peace programme. His work focuses on the functioning of the private sector in conflict-affected environments. He is particularly interested in supply chains that span political divisions, as well as the close relationship between political and private sector elites and its consequences for the stability of political power structures.

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