

## Understanding Türkiye's New Defense and Security Policy towards Africa: New Dynamics, and New Approaches

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**Abstract:** Türkiye has emerged as one of the most active players in African politics under the administration of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) governments which came to power in November 2002. The AK Party governments have developed new strategies to increase their political, economic, social and security relations with African countries. While Türkiye prioritized soft power policies towards Africa from 2005 to 2016, it began to give precedence to defense and security relations after 2016. This research aims to analyze and explore the main dynamics and driving factors behind Türkiye's evolving defense and security policy with the continent. This study argues that the shifting internal dynamics in Türkiye, and the West's inconsistent policies towards Türkiye became the major reasons and the factors shaping Türkiye's defense and security policy in Africa. This study states that Türkiye's internal and international factors shape Türkiye's defense and security policy in Africa. The main research question in this study is as follows: What factors and dynamics affect and shape Türkiye's African defense and security policy?

**Keywords:** Türkiye, Justice and Development Party (AK Party), Turkish Foreign Policy, Africa, Defense and Security Policy

### 1. Introduction

Africa has been one of the most strategic regions in the foreign policy of the AK Party governments. Since 2005, the ruling AK party governments have decisively taken steps to implement the Africa Action Plan to increase strategic relations between Türkiye and African countries. Türkiye carried out an effective humanitarian foreign policy in Africa from 2005 to 2016 which played a significant role in increasing political, economic, social, and security relations with African countries in the following years. Türkiye became the largest donor country in the world in terms of its national income in the years 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 according to the global humanitarian assistance report published by the Development Initiatives (Development Initiatives, 2017, pp. 44-45). However, Türkiye added security dimension to Türkiye-Africa relations after 2016. For instance, Türkiye has made defense and security agreements with more than 35 African countries and established military bases in Somalia and Libya. 14 African countries have bought Turkish military drones since 2020. Not only from the African countries but also the Middle Eastern, Asian, and European countries began to pay great attention to Turkish military drones after their successful use in the world such as Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Ethiopia. A strategic combination and implementation of soft power and hard power policies of Türkiye in Africa has enabled it to emerge as a new rising power in African politics. This research underscores that Türkiye's soft power policies prepare the ground for developing defense and security relations between Türkiye and African countries.

Much of the academic literature written about Türkiye-Africa relations mainly focuses on soft power aspect of Türkiye-Africa relations, ignoring evolving security relations between Türkiye and Africa. This study aims to examine the main motivations, dynamics, and the challenges behind Türkiye's evolving security policy towards Africa. Furthermore, the research will analyze the relations between Türkiye's soft power and hard power policies towards Africa. The primary research questions in this study are as follows: Why does Türkiye establish a new foreign and security policy towards Africa? Under what conditions does Türkiye formulate its security policy in Africa? The article consists of six sections. The

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first section starts with a conceptual analysis. The second section begins with a historical analysis of Türkiye's security policy from 1945 to 2000. The third section questions why the ruling AK Party government has moved from a soft power approach to a hard power approach. The fourth and fifth sections evaluate the AK Party governments' foreign and security policies in Africa. The last section sums up the key findings throughout the research.

## **2. Security as a Concept**

Security is accepted as a "contested concept" in the scholarly environment (Baldwin, 1997, p. 10). There is no consensus among the scholars about whether the concept will focus on "security of individuals or the security of the states. National security has traditionally been defined in military terms, but this approach has been criticized with arguments that the concept should be defined from a broader perspective. That is, the traditional security concept should be abandoned and instead, the new one needs to address the non-military strategies (Baylis, 2008, p. 73). The most general definition of the concept is "freedom from threats, fear, and danger" (Miller, 2001, p. 16). The concept needs to pay more attention to "human values and needs." While the traditional concept is characterized by competition and unilateralism, the identity of the new security concept should be based on cooperation and multilateralism (Miller, 2001, pp. 18-22).

There are several specific questions about the concept that should be answered to clarify it. The first question is "security for whom?" Whether or not the concept will prioritize "individuals, states, or international security" will be defined. The second question is "security for which values?" There are two values, namely the traditional values which include political independence and territorial integrity and the new values which are social, economic and political rights. (Baldwin, 1997, pp. 13-14). The third question is "from what threats? Security threats such as ideological, economic, or military should be clarified accurately. The states ought to develop appropriate tools to fight the new security threats and should define how long the operation will last (Baldwin, 1997, pp. 15-17).

Security threats were simple, uncomplicated, and predictable in the Cold War era but today they have been very complex, unpredictable, and changeable. While the security threats materialized in the specific geographical borders during the Cold War era, today they have no borders and threaten everyone and every state (Sancak, 2013, p. 129). The 9/11 attacks have significantly expanded the concept and resulted in emergence of the new security threats such as the clash of civilizations, non-state terrorist organizations, radicalism, and failed states. The U.S. occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 was evidence that after the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. developed a new security concept based on its global interests. Moreover, globalization has added new political and sociological dimensions to the concept. For example, with the new social media means, the new concepts such as freedom, democracy, economic welfare and justice have spread and threatened the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region during the Arab Spring (Sancak, 2013, p. 132). Buzan (1991, p. 439) underlines that while the pre-Cold War security pattern was only focusing on militarization of the states, the post-Cold War security patterns included political, economic, societal and environmental dimensions.

Türkiye, as a rising actor on the African continent, has been building a new security concept towards Africa since 2005, consisting of soft power and hard power elements. However, Türkiye highly remained a highly dependent actor on the Western actors in the fields of defense and security until the 2010s. Therefore, Türkiye developed its foreign and security policies in line with the Western interests until the 2000s. Political and economic crises in Türkiye did not allow to be established a robust security cooperation with African countries. The AK Party governments built a new security concept towards Africa from a broader perspective, including political, economic, social and security dimensions to the concept. At the center of Türkiye's security concept in Africa, there has been an effective humanitarian

and development policy with an equal cooperation model based on a win-win policy with African countries.

### **3. Türkiye's Security Policy (1945 to 2000)**

Türkiye's security culture is embedded in the historical and cultural identities of the country (Karaosmanoğlu, 2000, p. 200). The Soviet threat forced Türkiye to make an unequal security partnership with the U.S. against the Soviet threat after the Second World War. There were three critical reasons behind Türkiye-the U.S. rapprochement during the Cold War era. Firstly, Türkiye was looking for financial support to recover its weak economy after the war which devastated the country's economy. Secondly, Türkiye was militarily weak to fight against the Soviet Union (Göktepe & Süleyman, 2015, p. 198). Thirdly, Türkiye was defined as one of the most strategic actors by the U.S. during the Cold War era due to having a unique geostrategic position in the world (Göktepe & Süleyman, 2015, pp. 212-218). Türkiye joined the NATO in 1952, being one of the most active players in the formation of the Balkan Pact (1953) and the Baghdad Pact (1955), and thus Türkiye played an active role in protecting the U.S interests in the Balkans and in the Middle East through these pacts. Significantly, Türkiye joined the Western Security System through NATO and adopted a Western-oriented foreign policy during the Cold War era (Göktepe & Süleyman, 2015, p. 207). According to Karaosmanoğlu (2000, p. 209), Türkiye institutionalized its Western identity with its membership to NATO in 1952. Türkiye was overly engaged in NATO politics and thus failed to balance between its own national interests and NATO's interests (Gül, 2016, p. 311). This had significant consequences for Turkish foreign policy. For instance, Türkiye failed to find political support for the case of Cyprus at the UN General Assembly. After the U.S put a military embargo on Türkiye (1974-78) because of Türkiye's military involvement in Cyprus in 1974, Türkiye began to look for new alternatives to diversify its foreign policy (Gül, 2016, pp. 312-3), and reduce its dependence on the West in the fields of defense and security.

After Turgut Özal became prime minister in 1983, his government followed a multidimensional and proactive foreign and security policy. Özal government endeavored to strengthen its strategic relations with the neighboring countries and pursued an export-oriented foreign policy. Özal put economic considerations at the top of Turkish foreign policy and endeavored to increase economic relations with the Balkans, the Middle East, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and North Africa (Ataman, 2002, pp. 132-136). Özal also made a significant effort to strengthen strategic and economic relations with the U.S to balance Türkiye's relations with Europe (Ataman, 2002, pp. 146-149). The end of the Cold War era changed the traditional global order and led to the emergence of the unipolar system. The new global order pushed states to re-formulate their foreign and security policies to adjust to the shifting international system. In this regard, the end of the Soviet threat and the outbreaks of the conflicts in the neighboring countries surrounding Türkiye necessitated Türkiye to redefine its newly evolving geo-political identity. The end of the Cold War era not only brought about significant changes on domestic politics of Türkiye but also impacted Türkiye's external relations.

The rise of Islam and the rise of Kurdish nationalism became two major security threats for Türkiye in the post-Cold War era (Müftüler-Bac, 1996, pp. 255-258). The rise of the Welfare Party in the 1994 local elections was seen as a significant and alarming threat by the Kemalist elites in Türkiye. Moreover, Türkiye's support to the U.S. during the Gulf War of 1990-1991 caused an increase in the rise of Kurdish nationalism and economic issues in Türkiye. Importantly, the Gulf War created a political vacuum on the border of Türkiye, and therefore the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization gained significant ground in the region. To destroy the military bases of the PKK in northern Iraq, Türkiye conducted a military operation called "Operation Steel" in March 1995 (Müftüler-Bac, 1996, pp. 260-64). Türkiye developed a military-oriented security concept rather than a civilian-oriented one after the 1995s, which ignored democratic values and damaged the political and economic development of the country (Cizre, 2003, p. 213).

During the Cold War era, Türkiye failed to develop an independent foreign and security policy because Türkiye was highly dependent on the U.S financially and militarily. The most important evidence for this was that Türkiye's military operation in Cyprus in the 1964s was prevented by the U.S. In addition, Türkiye's NATO membership undermined development of an independent foreign and security policy of Türkiye during the Cold War era. For example, Türkiye supported France's foreign interests in North Africa in this era. In addition, internal dynamics such as political and economic crises in Türkiye emerged in the post-Cold War era prevented developing relations with Africa.

#### **4. Türkiye's Foreign and Security Policy under the AK Party Rule (2002-present)**

Turkish foreign policy makers during the first term of the AK Party government endeavored to increase regional cooperation among the Middle Eastern countries. Türkiye advocated a realist foreign policy during the first term of the AK Party government (Oğuzlu, 2020, p. 133). While Türkiye took a moral position during the Arab Spring, it failed to develop a rationalist foreign policy towards Syria, Egypt, and Libya. The AK Party government took important steps to gain strategic autonomy from the West. In particular, the economic crisis of 2008 in the West and Obama's foreign policy priorities encouraged Türkiye to develop a more strategic autonomous foreign policy (Oğuzlu, 2020, pp. 133-135).

Türkiye announced the year 2007 as the "year of Latin America" and the high-level visits increased between Türkiye and the countries in Latin America. For instance, Brazilian President Lula da Silva paid an official visit to Türkiye in 2009, making the first time in history a Brazilian president made such a visit. President Erdoğan, serving as prime minister at the time, visited Mexico for the first time to develop the bilateral relations in 2009. Türkiye signed agreements with Brazil, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay in different fields and, joint economic councils were set up between the countries. Türkiye and Armenia also signed an agreement in Zurich to normalize the relations and launch the economic and political relations (Kanat, 2010, p. 215). Türkiye developed an economic-oriented foreign policy during this time. Think-tanks, NGOs, business associations, non-state actors, and public opinions became a significant part of the foreign policy-making process (Kanat, 2010, p. 216).

Türkiye actively endeavored to be a "trading state" during the first and the second terms of the AK Party governments. The AK Party governments implemented several important policies to develop its new identity of a trading state. The most important policies are as follows: The "zero problem" policy, developing strong relations with the EU, including new actors to the foreign policy mechanism, and developing a new understanding of cooperation with neighbors and beyond (Kirişci, 2009, pp. 41-2). Furthermore, the mediating role in resolving the disputes between states, along with political and economic reforms, significantly contributed to strengthening the identity of trading state (Kirişci, 2009, pp. 40-53).

Türkiye began to change its soft security policy after the two historic events, namely the Arab Spring (Uprisings) and the failed military coup on July 15, 2016. These two incidents have profoundly affected the evolution of the ruling AK Party governments' security concept. The Arab Spring, especially developments in Syria, has not only deep political, economic, and security implications for Türkiye, but it also has far-reaching regional and global repercussions (Aran & Kutlay, 2024, p. 5). In this sense, Türkiye is currently hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees in the world, with a total number of 3.2 million (Aran & Kutlay, 2024, p. 7). During the conflicts in Syria, the U.S. has supported the Kurdish People's Protection Units/Democratic Union Party (YPG/PYD) affiliated to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorist organization in Northeastern Syria (Aljazeera, 2023). Since 2016, Türkiye has conducted



four military operations in Northern Syria to prevent the possibility of the establishment of a new terrorist state on the Turkish border.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the U.S. and Western countries have supported and protected the perpetrators of the failed military coup took place in Türkiye in 2016 conducted by Fethullah terrorist organization (FETO) (Turhan, 2024, pp. 795-6). While NATO has not protected Türkiye against the terrorist attacks from Northern Syria since 2019 (Heukelingen & Deen, 2022, p. 3), some of the Western countries put arms embargo against Türkiye due to Türkiye conducting military operations in Northern Syria. At the same time, Türkiye's experience with the U.S. over the F-35 fighter project in 2019 has forced Turkish policymakers to redefine Türkiye's national security strategy after 2016 (Heukelingen & Deen, 2022, p. 3).

The case of Libya is also important for transforming Türkiye's security concept over the years. In 2020, the Haftar's army which is supported by Egypt, the UAE, and France began to attack the Government of National Accord (GNA) to capture the Western side, but it retreated because of significant logistical and military support of Türkiye to the GNA. In addition, Türkiye has set up a military base in Libya in Western Libya to protect the interests of the GNA and the interests of Türkiye in North Africa and the Mediterranean (Heukelingen & Deen, 2022, pp. 5-7). Moreover, Türkiye signed a maritime deal with the GNA in 2019 which aimed to establish an exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Against this agreement, Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, France, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and the UAE established the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) in 2020 to stop Türkiye's existence in the Eastern Mediterranean and nullify its deal with the GNA signed in 2019 (Heukelingen & Deen, 2022, pp. 6-7). Despite this, Türkiye actively begun searching for oil and gas in the Eastern Mediterranean (Dailysabah, 2021).

Until the 2010s, the ruling AK Party governments developed proactive and multilateral relations with the neighboring countries and beyond. The ruling party governments redefined its traditional foreign policy parameters. While the traditional foreign policy prioritized strengthening its relations with the West, it neglected its relations with the non-Western actors and regions. According to the ruling party governments, Türkiye is not only neighbor to the West, but also it is neighbor to Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Therefore, Türkiye is an Afro-Eurasian country rather than a Western country. Based on this fact, Türkiye established strong political, economic, social and security relations with Africa since 2005. The AK Party elites reinterpreted its historical dynamics. While the Kemalist elites in Türkiye defined the legacy of the Ottoman as a threat to Türkiye's secular identity, the ruling party defined that the Ottoman history in Africa is a significant asset to increasing bilateral relations with African countries. For instance, the ruling party recognizes the lack of Türkiye's colonial history in Africa is a significant asset to develop strategic relations with the continent.

The new geopolitical developments in the region emerged with the Arab Spring compelled Türkiye to redefine its new security threat and challenges. Particularly, the Syrian crisis posed the new security threats to Türkiye. After 2011, Türkiye took important steps to increase its defense and security capacity to reduce its dependence on the West and increase its strategic capacity to answer these challenges such as PKK attacks on Türkiye and the military embargoes of the West against Türkiye. Türkiye began to develop a more independent foreign and security policies in line with its national interests because of increasing its defense and security capacity. The limited capacity of Türkiye in the fields of defense and security did not enable Türkiye to establish an independent foreign and security policy with Africa in the Cold War era. After the Syrian crisis emerged in 2011, Türkiye implemented four military operations to the Northern side of Syria to stop the attacks of PKK and eliminate the terrorist bases on the borders of Türkiye. These examples indicate that Türkiye can conduct its military operations independently

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<sup>1</sup> These military operations are as follows: (1) Euphrates Shield in al-Bab region conducted on 24 August 2016; (2) Olive Branch in Afrin region conducted on 20 January 2018; (3) Peace Spring in Between Ras al-Ayn and Tel Abyad conducted on 9 October 2019, and (4) Spring Shield in Idlib region conducted on 27 February 2020.

when it has its own defense and security capacity. Likewise, Türkiye protected the Government of National Accord (GNA) against the Haftar's military attacks by using its newly developed sophisticated weapons in Libya including Turkish drones. The case of Libya proves that Türkiye has played a more active security role in protecting its strategic allies in Africa, depending on its strategic power in the fields of defense and security. It is important to highlight that Türkiye's dependence on the West in the fields of defense and security was reduced from 80 % to 20 % during the ruling party governments. This gives a significant leverage to Türkiye in its regional and global politics.

### **5. Türkiye's Multifaceted Foreign Policy towards Africa**

Türkiye historically has a deep relationship with Africa dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. 13 African countries remained under the control of the Ottoman State from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman State prevented the colonial activities of Spain in North Africa and battled with the Portuguese Army to stop its colonial policy in East Africa and in the Red Sea in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Ottoman State provided political, military and economic support to the Sultanates of Muslims in East Africa against the expansionist policies of Portugal (Kavas, 2006, pp. 33-45). Moreover, the Ottoman State made the agreement with the Kanem-Bornu Empire in the fields of defense and security in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, aiming to protect the Muslim pilgrims while going to the holy cities and using the trading routes (Orhonlu, 1969, pp. 121-123). The Ottoman State also sent a Muslim scholar Ebubekir Efendi to South Africa in 1863 to solve the religious problems of the South African Muslims and to teach the religion of Islam them (Argun, 2005, pp. 31-35).

Türkiye's relations with Africa remained very limited from the 1923s until the AK Party government came to power in 2002 (Özkan, 2008, pp. 2). Türkiye's engagement with Africa in the Cold War era was mainly related to Türkiye's Cyprus crisis. For instance, Türkiye sent delegations to the African countries in 1965 to seek political support from African countries regarding Türkiye's policy towards Cyprus (Turhan, 2023, pp. 213-5). After Türkiye's military involvement in Cyprus in 1974, the U.S. put a military embargo against Türkiye. This forced Türkiye to find the new alternatives to diversify Turkish foreign policy and decrease its dependence on the West (Balci, 2021, p. 161). One can argue that Türkiye's foreign policy with Africa remained far from developing consistent foreign relations with the continent during this period. The Turkish coalition government in 1998 prepared a comprehensive plan for Africa called the "Africa Action Plan," which provided a strategic roadmap for developing political, economic, and social relations with African countries. However, the plan for Africa was not successfully implemented by the Turkish coalition government because political and economic crises in the country did not allow it to be implemented (Hazar, 2024, pp. 71-2).

The AK Party governments redefined the traditional foreign policy of Türkiye, developing a proactive and multifaceted foreign policy towards Africa. In particular, the year 2005, declared by Türkiye as a Year of Africa, became a milestone for Türkiye to put into action the Africa Action Plan. One can argue that the AK party governments have successfully implemented the "Africa Action Plan of 1998." One of the most important factors behind the successful implementation of Africa Action Plan is political stability in Türkiye which has lasted since 2002 with AK party governments. Also, Türkiye's growing economic power since 2002 has enabled the country to carry out the Africa Action Plan. Türkiye adopted the "Strategy for Developing Economic Relations with African Countries" in 2003 to diversify its economic relations. Türkiye particularly followed a proactive foreign policy with African countries through high level visits, agreements, and humanitarian aid programs. Türkiye's aspiration to be elected as a non-permanent member at the UN Security Council for the period of 2009-2010 significantly motivated Türkiye to get more actively engage with African countries at the first years of the AK Party governments. As a result of Türkiye's active engagement with Africa, Türkiye was accepted as a strategic partner of the African Union (AU) in 2008 at the AU Summit held in Addis Ababa. Türkiye's constructive

relations with the African Union has been critical for increasing bilateral relations with African countries, and Türkiye's visibility in the continent.

Türkiye has increased its political, economic, social and security relations with African countries by using Türkiye-Africa Summits as a strategic tool. In this sense, Türkiye has organized Türkiye-Africa Summits since 2008 to institutionalize its relations with Africa. The first Türkiye-Africa Summit was held with the participants of 49 African countries in İstanbul in 2008, aiming to develop political and humanitarian aid policies. The second summit was held with the participants of 32 African countries in Equatorial Guinea in 2014, concentrating on strengthening political and economic relations with African countries. The third Türkiye-Africa Summit was held with the participants of 38 African countries in 2021 in İstanbul, focusing political, economic, and security relations with Africa. Türkiye-Africa Summits have provided opportunities for Türkiye to establish strategic partnership and strengthen bilateral relations with African countries.

Türkiye only had 12 diplomatic missions across the continent until 2009. The AK Party governments have opened 32 embassies across the continent since 2009, having 44 diplomatic missions in Africa to date, and thus Türkiye became the fifth country in Africa that has one of the largest diplomatic networks across Africa. Likewise, the number of African diplomatic missions in Ankara has also increased from 10 to 38 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye). The increasing number of Turkish embassies in Africa has not only strengthened political relations with African countries but also increased economic relations. There are three important reasons behind the increasing number of Turkish diplomatic missions in Africa. Firstly, Türkiye aims to increase its visibility through its diplomatic missions in Africa. Türkiye had a lack of enough diplomatic representation in Africa which undermined developing bilateral relations with African countries. Secondly, Türkiye attaches importance to developing strategic relations with Africa to strengthen its geopolitical position in world politics in the 21st century. Thirdly, Türkiye aims to increase its economic and trade relations with non-Western actor and decrease its dependence on the West.

Developing economic relations with African countries has been one of the most important strategic goals of the Turkish foreign policy during the AK Party governments. Türkiye's economic relations with Africa were at the lowest level prior to 2005. For instance, total trade between Türkiye and Africa was \$5,3 billion in 2003, but this figure reached \$37 billion in 2024. Türkiye's total trade with Sub-Saharan Africa also exceeded \$10 billion in 2020 from 742 million in 2000 (T.C. Ticaret Bakanlığı, 2023). Moreover, Turkish contracting companies have taken the projects which are worth \$85 billion in Africa to date (Ekonomim, 2023). There are several reasons and dynamics behind Türkiye's growing trading engagement with Africa. Increasing the number of diplomatic missions across the continent has resulted in booming political and economic relations between Türkiye and African countries. Diversification of Turkish economy has been a strategic priority of the AK Party governments because Türkiye needs to find new economic markets for its export-oriented foreign policy, and it aims to reduce its dependence on the West. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made more than 50 visits to African countries since 2005. Erdoğan's visits to different African countries have been playing a key role in increasing political and economic relations with the continent. Furthermore, Türkiye's active humanitarian diplomacy and its growing social relations with the continent pave the way for deepening economic relations with African countries. The lack of colonial history of Türkiye in Africa helps to facilitate deepening strategic relations between Türkiye and African countries.

The AK Party governments have pursued a proactive foreign policy in providing humanitarian and development aid in African countries. Particularly, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) became a pioneering public institution in proving aid to African countries. While TİKA, as an aid provider of the state, was only operating in Asia and in the Balkans prior to 2002, it began to expand its geographical areas, including in Africa with its 22 offices. Türkiye provides its aid projects in a wide

range of fields in Africa including health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure. For instance, TİKA built hospitals in Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Niger, and Libya, providing free treatment to thousands of African patients every year. Ozkan (2012, p. 129-30) argues that Türkiye's active engagement with Africa is the result of the domestic political and economic change of Türkiye during the AK Party era and globalization.

The example of Somalia is important to understanding Türkiye's holistic humanitarian approach in Africa. After the President Erdoğan as a prime minister of the time visited Somalia in 2011 with a large of delegation to draw attention of the international community to severe drought and humanitarian crisis, Türkiye initiated the biggest humanitarian aid campaign in its history in Somalia to reduce the sufferings of humanitarian crisis. In doing so, over a billion dollars for humanitarian and development aid projects was spent to Somalia since 2011. Türkiye has rebuilt Somalia's schools, airport, seaport, hospitals, roads, and public institutions destroyed by the long-standing conflict in the country. In addition, Türkiye has provided scholarship to hundreds of Somali students to study in Türkiye since 2011 to strengthen social and cultural relations between Türkiye and Somalia. It is significant to underline that no African and international air companies operated to Somalia because of the security risks in the country. Türkiye contributed to reconnecting Somalia to the world by initiating the flight of Turkish Airlines (THY) in 2012. Private sectors, public institutions, and Turkish NGOs have been actively working together to implement humanitarian and development aid projects in different countries in Africa. Due to the implementation of proactive aid policy, Türkiye was accepted as the largest donor country in the world in the years 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2021 according to the global humanitarian assistance report published by the Development Initiatives.

Türkiye does not interfere the internal affairs of African countries through the provision of its humanitarian aid and not tie its aid to political, economic and military conditions. There are three important reasons behind Türkiye's active engagement with Somalia/Africa. Firstly, there are strong historical and cultural ties between Türkiye and Somalia/Africa dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This historical relationship pushes Türkiye to take more responsibilities to find a solution to Somalia/Africa's severe humanitarian crises and to develop bilateral relations. Secondly, Türkiye aims to diversify its political, economic, and security relations with non-Western actors to reduce its dependence on the West. Thirdly, Türkiye desires to increase its geopolitical influence in the world politics through active engagement with the Horn of Africa which is geopolitically and geoeconomically one of the most strategic regions in the world.

## **6. Türkiye's Defense and Security Policy towards Africa**

Türkiye has recently been an active player in Africa in the fields of security and defense. Türkiye has developed several security strategies to increase its security cooperation with African countries. Firstly, Türkiye has exported its newly developed weapons products to African countries. In particular, the successful use of Bayraktar TB2 drones in different countries including Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Ukraine, and Ethiopia have made Turkish drones popular in the world. More than 33 countries have purchased Bayraktar TB2 drones, 14 of them are from African countries. Significantly, Türkiye's total defense industry exports reached to 7.1 billion in 2024. While Russia, France, China, and the U.S. become the largest arms suppliers to Africa, Türkiye's arms exports to Africa remains less than one percent compared to the exports of the main arms suppliers (Alemdar, 2021). Türkiye's growing involvement in security in Africa marks that Türkiye's strategic importance on arms exports in Africa increases day by day. Through Turkish drones, Türkiye has been a new influential political and security actor in African affairs.

Secondly, Türkiye has signed military training cooperation agreement with more than 30 African countries. Türkiye first began to be involved in security of Africa through such agreements. The third is defense diplomacy which is significant for promoting Turkish military weapon systems in African



countries. In this sense, Türkiye sent Barbaros Turkish Maritime Task Group to Africa between March and June 2014 and visited 24 ports in 25 countries across the continent (Yaşar, 2022, pp. 2-3). In addition, the AK Party governments appointed 25 military attachés in Africa (T.C. Milli Savunma Bakanlığı), playing a crucial role in promoting Türkiye's new weapons systems across African countries. Türkiye's active participation in the defense fairs around the world has a positive impact on increasing its defense and aerospace industry exports.

There are several reasons behind African countries' high interests in exporting Türkiye's defense industry products. Firstly, Turkish defense products are cheaper than western ones. Secondly, Türkiye doesn't put any political conditionalities on security and defense agreements signed with African countries. Thirdly, using Turkish drones is easy in the geographical conditions of Africa (Dal & Dipama, 2023, pp. 28-9). Importantly, Türkiye shares its technology and expertise with African countries in the fields of defense and security (Kurç, 2023, p. 2) and manufactures quality and technologically advanced weapons systems. Significantly, African countries establish their own air power fleet through Turkish drones without spending a substantial amount of money (BBC, 2024). Türkiye's success on terrorism and defense technology in the world makes it an attractive partner for African countries.

Moreover, the implementation of defense industry policies under the control of the Presidency of Defense Industries contributes to the rapid elimination of bureaucratic obstacles and the faster development of defense industry policies (Federico, 2023, pp. 15-6). A strong cooperation between public and private defense companies boosts Türkiye's defense industry capacity (Fridolin & Kitio, 2020, pp. 51-53). Whereas 56 Turkish companies manufactured for the Turkish defense industry in 2002 (Dedet, 2024), today, 2000 small-and medium-sized Turkish companies produce for the Turkish defense and aerospace industry (International Crisis group, 2023, pp. 2-6).

Türkiye has also engaged with the international organizations to contribute to Africa's peace and security. For instance, Türkiye became actively involved in counter-piracy and counter-terrorism activities off the coast of Somalia, in the Gulf of Aden, and in the Indian Ocean within the framework of NATO from 2009 to 2016. In this regard, Türkiye led the NATO counter-piracy operations in this region between January and June of 2012. Moreover, Türkiye has been contributing to the Combined Joint Task-151 (CTF-151) with its warships which is a multinational naval force established in 2009 to fight against piracy and terrorism in the same region. Türkiye has taken the leadership of the CTF-151 for the sixth time (Yılmaz & Ekiz, 2024). Furthermore, Türkiye is currently contributing to the five peacekeeping operations of the UN in Africa and provided \$5 million for the G5 Sahel in 2018 to contribute to peace and security in the Sahel region (Dal & Dipama, 2023, p. 31).

Türkiye has been actively involved in mediation process between African countries to sustain peace and security. In this regard, Türkiye was involved in peacemaking process among different countries including Sudan, Eritrea, Libya, Somalia, and Somaliland. Besides, Türkiye has recently played a mediating role between Somalia and Ethiopia in December 2014. A tense political crisis between Ethiopia and Somalia emerged after Ethiopia signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Somaliland in January 2024. According to this signed MoU, Ethiopia will have access to sea through Somaliland. In return, Ethiopia will recognize Somaliland as a state. As a result of Türkiye's active engagement in mediating process between Somalia and Ethiopia in 2024, both Somalia and Ethiopia signed the Ankara Declaration under the President Erdoğan's supervision in Ankara in December 2024, declaring that Ethiopia fully recognized the territorial integrity of Somalia, and Somalia acknowledged that Ethiopia has a right to have access to sea for commercial aims in the territory of Somalia in accordance with international law. Türkiye's efforts on mediation and peacebuilding in Africa makes it a proactive and visible actor in the continent which opens new strategic opportunities for Türkiye in Africa in the fields of politics, economics, and security. Türkiye's mediating role in Africa has also legitimized its security activities in Africa (Akpınar, 2013, p. 740).

Türkiye has been actively involved in peace and security in Somalia since 2011. Türkiye first began to get involved in security in Somalia through military training cooperation agreements. Through these agreements, Türkiye has trained thousands of Somali soldiers and Somali police forces since 2011. Secondly, Türkiye established its largest overseas military training base known as TURKSOM in Somalia in 2017 to train Somalia's national army and police forces. Thirdly, Türkiye signed a defense and economic cooperation agreement with Somalia in February 2024. According to the agreement, Türkiye will establish a naval army of Somalia and protect Somalia's waters against the external threats. Türkiye's security policy in Somalia has had a wide range of objectives including reconstruction of Somalia, strengthening of political unity, ensuring economic development, establishing a national military force, and providing humanitarian and development aid (Rossiter & Cannon, 2019, p. 173). Particularly, Türkiye's historical dynamics and its evolving geopolitical identity have provided significant motivation for the ruling AK Party governments to actively engage with the Horn of Africa.

There has been a significant transformation in African politics. The new actors including China, India, Russia, Brazil, and Türkiye have been actively engaged with Africa in the areas of politics, economy, and security. Türkiye aims to diversify its political, economic and security relations with non-western actors and to reduce its dependence on the West. In this sense, Türkiye as a non-colonial history in Africa has appeared as a significant actor in Africa during the period of the AK Party governments. Similarly, African countries look for new partners to diversify their political, economic, and security relations with the non-Western actors and to reduce their dependence on the West (Sıradağ, 2018, pp. 319-20). The colonial history and the negative images of the traditional actors in Africa push African countries to work with the new actors. African countries aim to become fully independent from the former colonial powers.

Türkiye's humanitarian and development aid policies have prepared the ground for developing cooperation in the fields of defense and security. Türkiye's political, economic, social relations with Africa began after 2005 have been influential driving forces in increasing security cooperation with African countries. In other world, Türkiye's security policy consists of both soft power and hard power policies, and Türkiye's political, economic, and social relations have a complementary aspect to its security relations. Türkiye's growing's involvement in peace and security in Africa show that Türkiye has increased its geopolitical influence in Africa over the last decade. It seems that Türkiye is more likely to play an active player in African politics and become an influential actor on the global arms export.

## **7. Conclusion**

Türkiye remained a highly dependent actor on the Western financial and military support during the Cold War era. The U.S. military embargo on Türkiye (1975-78) became a milestone to start developing Türkiye's own defense and aerospace industry capacity and reduce its military dependence on the West. Even though the end of the Cold War era brought about a significant number of strategic opportunities for Türkiye, Türkiye failed to take enough political steps to strengthen its defense and aerospace industry because of the securitization of domestic policy. After the AK Party came to power in 2002, Türkiye has been under a significant political, economic, social, and security transformation. The AK Party governments redefined Türkiye's foreign policy identity emerging from its geopolitical, geoeconomic, and historical dynamics. In this regard, the AK Party governments defined Türkiye as an Afro-Eurasian country and sees Türkiye's active engagement with Africa as a reflection of its historical, geographical, and geostrategic identities.

Türkiye emerged as an influential humanitarian power in Africa after 2005 but the new threats and challenges facing Türkiye such as the 15 July failed military coup, the terrorist attacks on Türkiye, the West's military and technological embargoes on Türkiye strongly sparked Türkiye to advance its own defense and security industry capacity. Domestic and external factors are among the significant factors driving Türkiye's newly evolving security concept towards Africa. This research emphasizes that while

Türkiye is becoming a growing security actor in African politics, it also implements its active humanitarian aid policy in Africa.

The changing dynamics in Africa and the shifting global order contribute to the development of Türkiye-Africa security relations. Especially after 2000, a multipolar global system emerged and created challenges to the Western-led order. Especially, China and Russia's increasing political, economic and military power in world politics are perceived as a great threat and challenge against the West's hegemonic power in the world. African countries are more likely to achieve in diversifying their foreign policies and reducing their dependence on the West through increasing strategic cooperation with China, Russia, India and Türkiye. New strategic security cooperation models are more likely to emerge with the new actors. In this context, Türkiye's increasing security relations with Africa are more likely to play a significant role in rebalancing the relations between African countries and the former colonial powers of Africa.

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