

Towards Africa:

Implications of the Turkish-African Partnership



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**The Political and Diplomatic Implications
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Introduction:

we will discuss the strategic partnership established by Turkey with Sub-Saharan African countries. This relationship began with the countries of East Africa, especially the countries of the Horn of Africa, then moved slowly towards the countries of West Africa, and then Turkey established its strategic partnerships with the countries of Central and Southern Africa. With this partnership, Turkey has posed a new challenge to Western countries, especially the United States and the European Union, as well as to China and the Arab countries, especially the UAE, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Arab Republic of Egypt. In this episode, we shall review this partnership in all its aspects.

The Political and Diplomatic Implications of Turkish-African Relations

The eyes of the major countries turned to Africa, and were keen to organize so-called strategic partnerships with the African continent through the African Union. Therefore, the United States, China and Europe organized summits for periodic strategic partnerships with this continent, as did some regional countries, such as Turkey.

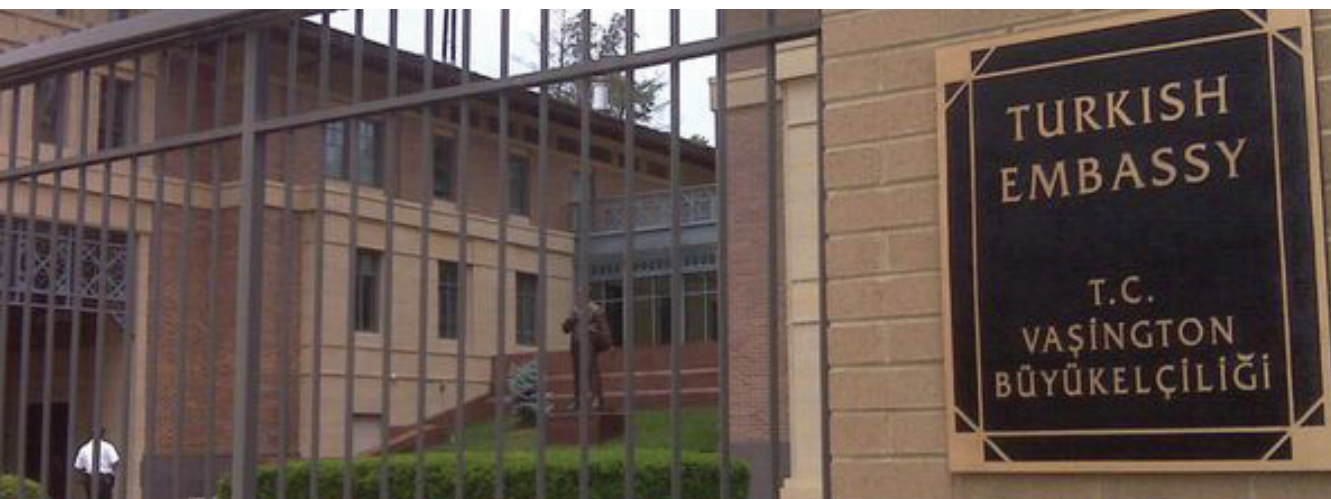
Within the framework of Turkey's multidimensional foreign policy, in 1998 it prepared a plan to open up to Africa in order to achieve a qualitative leap in terms of economic, political and military relations with African countries. In

this context, at the beginning of 2003, the Foreign Trade Advisory in Turkey prepared the “Strategy for Developing Economic Relations with African Countries”, then the Turkish government declared 2005 the “Year of Africa”. In addition, Turkish relations with the African continent have diversified and developed thanks to the increase in the number of high-level mutual visits, the signing of new economic and trade agreements, the establishment of bilateral economic and political mechanisms, and the encouragement of mutual visits of trade delegations.

In 2005, Turkey obtained observer status in the African Union, and assigned its embassy in Addis Ababa to be the Turkish embassy accredited by the African Union. The African Union, in accordance with the decision taken at the tenth summit meeting held in Addis Ababa in 2008, declared Turkey a strategic partner. After the adoption of the Turkish-African strategic partnership document, which was approved in 2010, the “openness to Africa policy” was replaced by the “Turkish-African partnership” policy, according to which relations began to deepen and branch out in all fields.

Turkey has also accredited its embassy in Abuja to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) as of 2005. Turkey joined the International Partners Forum of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) in 2008, and has accredited its embassy in Dar Al-Salaam to the East African Community. In 2008, Turkey became a member of the African Development Bank and the African Development Fund. Thus, Turkey became the 25th member of the African Development Bank outside Africa.

Strategic relations do not arise out of thin air; therefore, Turkey’s economic relations with the African continent are proceeding according to a clear



scheme. As the website of the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates, the strategy of Turkey's economic relations with Africa was developed in 2003, and Turkey paved the way for that strategy by expanding the area of its diplomatic representation in Africa, the number of its embassies in Africa has increased from only 12 in 2003 to about 42 at present. It has also established many economic councils in a bilateral framework, as the number of these councils has reached about 31 councils with 31 countries. In addition, the Turkish Airlines reaches about 54 African destinations.

In addition to all this, the development of relations related to the educational aspect and the provision of educational grants by Turkey to the people of Africa, as well as the health aspect and charitable work by Turkish charitable organizations, whether affiliated with the government or civil society organizations.

The Economic Implications of Turkish-African relations

4 In its economic aspect, the Turkish-African relations reflect the concept of partnership, as it usually works to establish productive projects in African countries, and is keen to have partnerships with the citizens of each country, while the relations of other countries raise the slogan of participation, and actually perform commercial practices that are usually unfavorable to African countries.

Turkey's first economic summit with Africa was held in 2008 in Istanbul, in which 49 African countries participated. In late 2014, the second economic summit between the two parties was held in Equatorial Guinea. Data from the Turkish Statistical Institute show that the value of trade exchange between Turkey and Africa amounted to about US\$22.42 billion in 2019, compared to about US\$20.67 billion in 2014, and nearly US\$5.3 billion in 2003.

Turkish-African Investments:

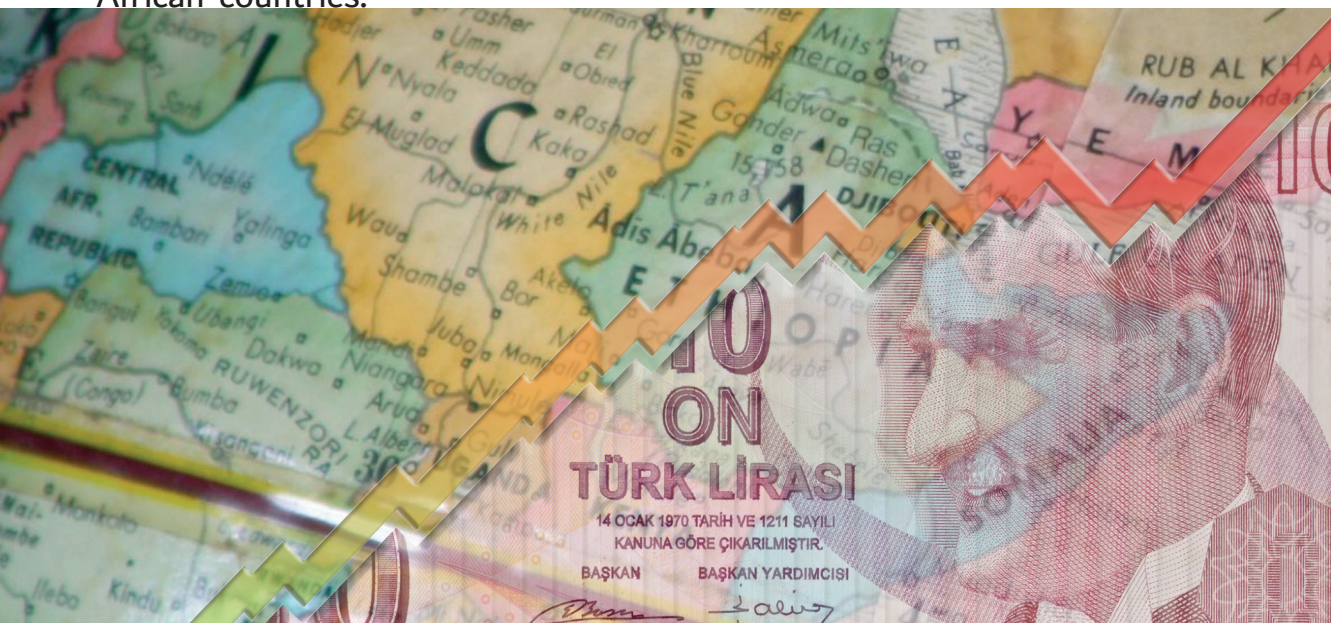
Turkish companies focus their investments in Africa on prominent sectors, including: building and construction, infrastructure, wholesale and retail trade, clothing and textiles, energy, and metallurgical industries. However, the construction and infrastructure sector is the largest share of Turkish investments in Africa. It is estimated that investments in infrastructure

projects in Africa are amounted to about US\$170 billion. The Turkish contracting sector has implemented about 1150 projects in various fields of infrastructure, and these works are estimated at about US\$70 billion, as well as the works of Turkish contractors in Africa are estimated at about 20% of their total foreign business worldwide.

Turkey is trying to expand in the African continent, especially in prominent strategic areas, as Turkey considers the African continent one of the promising virgin markets that allows the Turkish presence in return for providing financial temptations in the form of aid or economic projects that increase the size of its African expansion and allow it to control such strategic areas.

Recent years have witnessed a remarkable development, as the volume of Turkish investments in Africa increased from US\$374 million in 2002 to US\$6 billion in 2014. With a quick look at the size and status of Turkish investments in Africa, we can find that most Turkish companies are concentrated in Djibouti, Somalia, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Cameroon.

This Turkish presence in Africa, which includes managing ports and airports in Somalia, strong infrastructure projects in Kenya, or industrial projects in Ethiopia, Niger, Chad, Burkina Faso and Mauritania, comes to represent a competition for the Chinese and French presence in Africa at the level of investment and manufacturing. Turkish investments in Africa are also interested in using local resources, and working to export part of the products of these investments to other countries, which increases the added value for African countries.



Many Turkish companies are involved in most African countries, especially West African countries, in various fields, with the aim of increasing economic benefit and maximizing the interests of Ankara, which has become a trading partner for a number of countries in the region; e.g. Senegal, in which Turkish companies implement some major infrastructure projects such as Abdo Diouf International Conferences Center, the Dakar Sports Palace, the Radisson Hotel, as well as the management of Blaise Diane International Airport for 25 years. Turkey also acquired about 29 other projects worth more than 700 million euros in 2018. While in Cameroon, the Japoma Stadium in Douala was built by the Turkish “Yangan” Group, and financed by the Turkish “Turk Eximbank” with a value of 116 billion CFA. Ankara also signed with Mali in December 2019 through the Turkish “Kalyon” group a Memorandum of Understanding on the project to build a “Metro-bus” in the capital, Bamako. Turkey has pumped about US\$250 million into infrastructure projects in Niger, and a group of Turkish companies was able to win huge contracts, most notably the construction of the new Niamey Airport at a cost of 154 million euros. Ankara is also keen to enhance cooperation with Nigeria in the oil sector, which was evidenced by the visit of the Turkish Ambassador in Abuja to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in August 2019, and the confirmation of Ankara's keenness to cooperate to develop the infrastructure of oil projects in the region, and to strengthen commercial partnership Between the two countries.

The Somalis have widely praised Ankara's approach in their country, which is based on a more visible Turkish presence on the ground than that of traditional donors. Turkey's involvement in Somalia is tied to a few terms, and differs significantly from past perceptions of Western interventions. Turkey appointed a special envoy for Somalia in 2018; the number one envoy on Turkish foreign policy, and instructed him to renew efforts to reconcile the Somali federal government and the breakaway region of Somaliland, although this is unlikely to succeed in the near term. This presence may be motivated by an attempt to reduce Emirati influence there.

In the same context, Ethiopia is considered one of the most important centers of Turkish investment in Africa, where the volume of Turkish investments amounted to nearly US\$3 billion, surpassing China and India. The number of Turkish companies operating in Ethiopia reached 350 companies, attracting more than 400,000 Ethiopian workers.



It should be noted here that the main scope of Turkish investments in the brown continent is mainly in the infrastructure and construction sector, roads, infrastructure and housing, where Enka is one of the most profitable Turkish construction companies in Africa in addition to other sectors that Turkish companies are trying to acquire; such as energy, telecommunications and manufacturing, especially in light of the fierce Chinese competition in these sectors. Based on the information of the Foreign Investment Index Report of the Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Council for the year 2019, Turkish investments in Africa rose by 11% to US\$46 billion.

Mechanisms and Tools for Strategic Partnership

Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA): This agency is considered one of the most vital tools for translating the foreign policies of the Turkish state, which has extended its activities to about 140 countries around the world, including the African Union. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) opened its first office in Africa in 2005 in Ethiopia. It currently has about 21 coordinating offices on the African continent. These offices manage long-term development projects in a number of African countries. The Turkish Foundation for Cooperation and Development has achieved many development projects in 40 African countries through its offices, which were initially located only in three countries, namely, Ethiopia, Sudan and Senegal, before spreading to many African cities.

The Turkish SADAT Inc.: It represents an important arm of the Turkish policy in Africa, as it is a mastermind and an executing arm for its goals,

which involve external expansion in the conflict areas on the continent. It is also employed in various forms, such as the sale of weapons, security and intelligence services, and can be involved in some illegal matters.

The Turkish “Al-Maaref” Foundation: established by the Turkish government to manage external schools. This Foundation now has 23 branches in Africa and about 333 schools in 43 countries. It was able to establish offices and branches in a number of countries in the region, namely Chad, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Sudan. This Foundation is accused of being a long arm of the Turkish regime in Africa with regard to providing educational services as part of the strategy of “Turkization” of Africans, especially as it aims to raise a new generation of political Islamist activists to mobilize around the Turkish policy in Africa.

Humanitarian aid: There are many soft power tools for Turkish policy in Africa, and on top of them comes humanitarian aid, as Ankara is heavily involved in the field of aid and food distribution to the peoples of Africa. There are also a number of Turkish institutions operating in the region, such as the Turkish Red Crescent, the Turkish Religious Endowment and the Union of Turkish Humanitarian Societies. These organizations carry out humanitarian and relief activities in many countries of Africa.

The Security Implications of Turkish-African Relations

Despite all this Turkish enthusiasm for Africa, it is important to put the significance of Africa in the prism of Turkish national security interests. If Turkey should set the highest priorities for Turkish foreign policy and national security, Africa will certainly not be among the top five priorities,



which include: countering the Kurdish Separatist Movement in Syria, avoiding more refugee flows from Syria, enhancing energy security thanks to stable relations with Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan, reducing the damage to relations with the United States, and obtaining a fair share in the eastern Mediterranean for gas exploration.

Turkey is seeking to extend its military influence to the Horn of Africa, and to conduct joint exercises with the armies of the region. It has already signed security agreements with Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda to train security forces in those countries.

Turkey also has a naval base in Djibouti, and doubts have been raised about Turkey's intention to establish a military base as part of its presence on the Sudanese island of Suakin, opposite the Saudi port of Jeddah.

The Turkish military base was inaugurated in Somalia on the strategic Gulf of Aden (the entrance to Bab al-Mandab Strait and the Red Sea), to be the first Turkish military base on the African continent. About three classes graduated from the Turkish Training Center, since its opening in 2017.

Turkey also tended to establish military cooperation with Nigeria in the fields of training, etc., as two rounds of military talks were held between two high-ranking delegations from the two countries. In the second round, the head of the Turkish delegation and the Commander of the Air Force at the time stated that the prospects for military cooperation between the two countries are wide open, and that he is looking forward to start establishing implementation mechanisms for that. In 2018, the Turkish President declared that his country was ready for security and military cooperation with Mauritania and Mali to enhance security and confront terrorist threats, as per his claim.

One should look at Turkey's opening of a military base in Somalia, or its previous attempts to exert influence in Sudan in this regard. Turkey's real objective in Africa is often primarily commercial because Ankara is always looking for new markets for its construction companies and opportunities for its manufacturing sector exports. The Turkish president likes to promote his country as a regional power; however, limited progress has been made in this regard, and the next phase of Turkey's strategy in Africa has yet to be written. Turkey's ability to gain US support in its strategy of economic and political influence in Africa naturally depends on the relations between Ankara and Washington.

US-Turkish Partnership to Counter Chinese Influence in Africa

The question about the potential role that Turkey can play in Africa, especially in the context of countering Chinese economic influence, arose in a virtual seminar organized by the “Turkish-American Business Council” headed by Mehmet Ali Yalcındağ, on June 24, 2020, entitled “Time for the Allies to be Allies: The Turkish-American Global Supply Chain”. Yalcındağ is one of the industrialists who has close relations and business partnerships with the Trump family, especially Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, as he is the owner of Trump Towers in Turkey.

US Senator (Republican) Lindsey Graham, who was the keynote speaker at the symposium along with Senator David Vetter, offered words of encouragement for Turkish-US cooperation in Africa in confronting China. Speaking about a free trade agreement between Ankara and Washington, Graham said, “When we start to integrate the two economies, we will become more effective partners in Africa. Nothing pleases me more than partnering with Turkey to provide the African continent with alternatives to Chinese products and influence.” Graham noted that there is an “increasing desire” in the wake of the Corona pandemic within the United States to search for alternatives to “China's domination of several supply chains.” Graham explained that Turkey is in a good position to compensate for the US dependence on China, noting that Ankara can provide better quality goods at competitive prices to the African consumer instead of Chinese products.

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Enhancing the prospects of Turkish-US cooperation requires ambitious goals, such as concluding a free trade agreement, increasing the volume of trade to \$100 billion, or establishing a US-Turkish partnership, within the right framework. However, there are currently major problems in Turkish-US relations, and none of these projects can be implemented without the approval of the Congress. At first glance, it appears that Senator Graham put forward the idea of US-Turkish cooperation in Africa as an incentive for Ankara to deal first with the main problems related to Turkey's image in the United States.

While Washington was busy discussing its rotation to Asia, China turned to Africa, where it found huge untapped economic resources and opportunities. The flow of Chinese investment to Africa during the period 2003-2017 increased at a rate of more than 35 times, while US investment in the continent increased by only about 35%. According to the Global Chinese Investment Tracking Index of the American Enterprise Institute, the value of Chinese investments and construction in Africa has reached nearly US\$2 trillion since 2005. Under such circumstances, it is no coincidence that the United States is concerned about China's economic and strategic influence in Africa. Many observers believe that Washington decided to form the “American Military Command in Africa” (AFRICOM) to disperse the momentum of Chinese influence in it, because preferential access to African resources is still an important element of the US national security.

Given Mehmet Ali Yalcındağ's close ties to the Trump family, and backchannels between Jared Kushner and Yalcındağ, it is understandable that the Turkey-US Business Council event on cooperation between Washington and Ankara may create high expectations in this regard. Senator Lindsey Graham's statements about a potential US-Turkish partnership in Africa also deserve attention; however, a more realistic analysis of the state of Turkish-US relations indicates that any hope for serious cooperation between Ankara and Washington in Africa will remain mere aspirations. The prospects for the development of this cooperation will largely depend on the progress that will be made at the level of bilateral relations, especially with regard to the issue of the Russian S-400 Air Defense System between Ankara and Washington.

As the veteran Turkish journalist Murat Yetkin puts it: “What US Senator Graham said during the webinar may not have been what the Turkish business representatives wanted to hear, but they were clear enough not to weave any ambitious hopes about the future of Turkish-US relations, especially in the

field of economics and trade.” Yetkin notes that Graham described Turkey's decision to purchase the Russian S-400 Air Defense System as the biggest problem in the eyes of Congress, given that Turkey's policy toward Syria constitutes an additional source of contention between the two countries in the eyes of US regulators. Referring to these two major issues, Graham stressed the importance of working together to confront China in Africa, as an area of potential bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the future.

Conclusions

The Turkish state seriously seeks to be an influential and effective regional and international player and relies on strengthening its relations in all fields with African countries in an effort to influence the political and security equations, and to form various axes that support and serve its interests, and enhance its regional status.

After decades of Turkey's adoption of the policy of openness to the brown continent, this policy has begun to bear fruit today and produce successful and prestigious relations in many different fields, most notably the political and economic.

Turkey has increased its investments in African countries in recent years, especially after the Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) held the reins of power in Turkey, which tops the list of the world's fastest growing economies.

Turkey supports political Islam movements in Africa, and is looking for new allies after the fall of the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan, as Turkey has an expansionist project in which Libya represents a starting point towards Africa. Hence, Ankara seeks to cooperate with some forces of political Islam in the region, with the aim of changing the balance of power through the extremist organizations that Ankara wants to weave the threads to link them.

The Turkish government always stresses that ensuring the security of Turkey's economic and commercial interests in Africa, and establishing economic relations with it can lead to political and ideological ties in the future through which Ankara can build strong influence on the continent and the region, as it is a significant movement space for it, and search for opportunities for partnerships in the African coast which would enhance Turkey's position as an effective regional and international power.

The Turkish government believes that the trend towards expanding Turkey's relations with Africa and its sphere of influence will compensate for the losses incurred by Ankara during the last decade at the regional and international levels, both politically and economically, in light of the crises in Ankara's relations with the West and its increasing isolation in the Middle East. It is also expected that the manifestations of militarization in Turkey's relationship with African countries will increase during the next stage in lights of the intertwining of the security and geopolitical scenes in the region.

There is an increased possibility of a French-Turkish clash in the future, which may take different forms and expressions, in light of the threat of Turkish expansion of French interests and traditional influence on the African continent, and the growing concern of European countries about Turkish moves in West Africa in light of the sensitivity of issues that threaten European security.

Finally, even if the United States was seriously looking for partners to work against China in Africa, Turkey would not be a natural choice, given its many problematic relations with other US partners in East, West, and North Africa. In East Africa, particularly in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea, Washington may prefer strong economic and strategic interests with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt rather than Ankara. These three American allies are at odds with Turkey over Erdogan's support for political Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood. In West, Central and North Africa, France is the dominant player, and Paris is an ally of Washington and has historical, trade, financial, cultural and diplomatic relations with the United States more than Turkey, although its economic presence is less influential than the Turkish economic presence, especially in terms of infrastructure, and both of them reduce the Chinese influence.

Although Turkey is trying to gain US support for its presence in Africa to restrain the Chinese influence, it cannot actually replace it, and it will not be able to ignore cooperation with it. Therefore, threatening Turkish-US cooperation against China in Africa may be just a form of political opportunism as the two powers are neither economically nor militarily equal.

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