

Deconstructing Turkey's Efforts in Somalia

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I. Introduction

The results of Turkey's development and diplomatic efforts in Somalia are striking. Turkey has only been involved in Somalia since 2011, yet it can point to a string of successes, physical edifices, and an arguably outsized presence in the country. Turkey's overall efforts in Somalia and its projection of "soft power" in the forms of money, trade, in-kind donations, infrastructure rehabilitation, and development projects have met a positive reception inside and outside Somalia. This begs the question of why Turkey chose to involve itself in a country that is so often characterized as violent and chaotic; a location in which Turkey possesses neither geopolitical and security concerns nor common borders. The few sources documenting Turkey's actions have largely offered arguments that cited a shared history and a common Sunni Muslim religion and culture.¹ As such, the deconstruction of Turkey's impetuses and motivations behind its decision to involve itself in Somalia is overdue. Also lacking is an exploration of the reactions and actions of Somalis, particularly those in positions of power, and their utilization and even exploitation of Turkey and its efforts in Somalia.

II. Contextualization: Political Prestige and Capital

Turkey is involved in Somalia for two main reasons: political capital in the form of international prestige, and capital. These conclusions are based on the examination of a variety of sources. They indicate that

Turkey's decision to involve itself in Somalia was made at the highest level of government and is part of a wider strategy of enhancing Turkey's global image and soft power.² Once made, this decision was coordinated closely with Turkish businesses, NGOs, and governmental ministries. In short, Turkey chose Somalia as a stage on which to burnish its foreign policy credentials and obtain the soft power status felt by the leadership in Ankara that adequately reflects Turkey's emerging power status.

This involvement came about not because of Turkey's and Somalia's common Sunni Muslim heritage, or its Muslim Brotherhood ties, or because of some greater appeal to charity and development—though these clearly were motivating factors. Rather, Turkey's main aim in engaging Somalia is the political and diplomatic capital it receives outside of Somalia and the region. This comes in the form of commendations and applause for Turkey's diplomatic and humanitarian efforts in a volatile corner of the world. It issues from major powers like the United States and the United Kingdom, as well as Arab states, and includes international organizations such as the United Nations.

Given the natural impetus and desire for international recognition and clout among nation-states, this article argues that the government of the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan chose Somalia as a launching pad for Turkey's desired role as a player on the international stage rather than its traditional role as a regional actor with ambitions that have historically been limited and, more recently, severely frustrated. Turkey's relationship with its near abroad and its policy of "zero problems with its neighbors" are in shambles. Indeed, Turkey presently seems to be facing "zero neighbors without problems."³ Its influence has waned from Egypt to Central Asia for a variety of reasons and forces that Turkey cannot or will not control.⁴

Turkey can point to one bright spot in its foreign policy: Somalia. It represents a cornerstone of Turkey's emerging power foreign policy, a policy whereby it attempts "to present itself as an essential power beyond its immediate neighborhood."⁵ In Somalia, at present, it has been largely successful in this endeavor. Turkey found fertile ground in Somalia for its combination of government-coordinated funding, business ventures, and humanitarian work accompanied by lots of money. Somalia presented an opportunity for Turkey—a very risky opportunity that appears to have been worth the risk. This foreign policy and diplomatic success was possible because by the time Erdoğan and his coterie decided to engage Somalia in 2011, many of

the barriers to success had arguably been lowered. Repeatedly, Somalia had proved to be the graveyard of countless diplomatic, political, and humanitarian gambits. Therefore, Turkey's willingness and ability to take significantly bold risks in Somalia meant a greater return on its investment. This has had the direct result of burnishing Turkey's image on the international stage and especially in Africa, and transforming Turkey into a humanitarian and diplomatic power in a region traditionally outside its sphere of influence.⁶ In turn, the risks taken by Turkey in Somalia have translated into the form of greater potential Somali dependence on Turkish goods, expertise, and services. Somalia has become a major destination for Turkish goods and services, to include construction material, medical equipment, education development and schools, engineering expertise, and household items that range from teapots to clothing. And the Turkish presence is ubiquitous. According to one Somali resident, "Turkey has become the McDonald's of Mogadishu. Their flags are everywhere, just like the yellow arches of McDonald's are everywhere in America."⁷

Turkey's efforts in Somalia are viewed by some as honest and humanitarian in nature. This is a far cry from the explicit or implicit political gestures of other players in Somalia, including the U.K., the U.S., the African Union (AU), and the UN.⁸ Yet, Turkey is not viewed so charitably across Somalia. On the contrary, it has been criticized for focusing exclusively on Mogadishu and, to a lesser extent, regional capitals in Somaliland and Puntland. Indeed, some who feel excluded voice negative sentiments about Turkey.⁹

III. Turkish Foreign Policy in Africa and Somalia: A Literature Review

The literature on Turkey's foreign policy and recent activism under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) is instructive in three ways vis-à-vis Turkey's engagement with Somalia. First, it demonstrates that Turkey's foreign policy for the first 75 years of its existence was largely focused on its membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and influenced by the dynamics of the Cold War. Second, the literature indicates that Turkey began to shift its foreign policy focus from countries to its west to those to its east (Central Asia and the Middle East) after the end of the Cold War and prior to the election of Erdoğan and the AKP in 2002.¹⁰ In particular, Idris Bal's edited work presents an excellent balance between theory,

diplomatic history, emerging power diplomacy, and analyses. Its main area of focus is the post-World War II era but it also makes reference to the post-Cold War decade of the 1990s and, importantly, research from the Ottoman past and the first years of the Turkish Republic.¹¹

The literature demonstrates just how muscular and coordinated Turkey's foreign policy has been toward Africa under the leadership of Erdoğan and how it ignored the continent prior to his election. However, as Nicholas Danforth demonstrates, the AKP's engagement with Africa and, in particular, the Middle East, has historical precedents rooted in a pragmatism that often eludes scholars who interpret Turkish foreign policy through the lens of an ideological debate between the country's Eastern and Western identities. He asserts that, "In formulating their approaches toward Europe and the Middle East, Turkish leaders have seldom been influenced by the ideologies that determine their domestic politics. Understood in context, [the founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal] Atatürk's disengagement from the Middle East and the AKP's re-engagement with the region were both practical responses to strategic realities."¹²

Turkey's engagement in Somalia may be viewed from the vantage point of emerging power diplomacy. Diplomacy and recognition play central roles in the conventional conferral of state legitimacy and functioning of the inter-state system. They focus on sovereignty and legitimacy; the diplomatic relationships fostered and institutions of diplomacy constructed; and the strategic position of such diplomacy vis-à-vis the conventional state-system.¹³ Andrew Cooper and Dennis Flemer focus on specific riddles about the foreign policy strategies of emerging powers like Turkey. While they focus heavily on Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (the BRICS), they attempt to also provide answers to whether the preference of emerging powers is to utilize established institutions or to use parallel and/or competitive mechanisms. The authors also look at the balance between material interests, status-enhancement, and identity issues as motivators for policy preferences.¹⁴

Some scholars have attempted to go beyond the state-centrism of existing approaches through the examination of how challenges to global governance by emerging powers are rooted in specific state-society configurations.¹⁵ Studies of Brazil, India, and China, as well as Turkey and other regional powers, examine the way domestic arrangements, constructs, actors, and undercurrents influence the nature of the international interventions and behavior of emerging states. Attempts

are made to answer how emerging powers such as Turkey's increased political and economic involvement in the international system define their own internal societal cohesion and development. In the case of Turkey there are:

the self-reinforcing dynamics between Turkey's domestic political-economic transformation in the first decade of this century and the advantageous regional developments in the Middle East at the same time. It holds that this specific linkage—the 'Ankara Moment'—and its regional resonance in the neighboring Middle East carries more transformative potential than the 'Washington Consensus' or the 'Beijing Consensus' so prominently discussed in current global South politics.¹⁶

Over the past decade, Mehmet Özkan has highlighted that Turkey's approach to Africa differs from many other countries.¹⁷ Specifically, he points to the fact that Turkey is a mid-sized country with a developing economy whose interest is trade rather than extraction of resources such as oil. Importantly, Turkey also generally eschews something many Africans resent: free market capitalist baggage aimed at securing the best agreement, regardless of cost.¹⁸

A detailed study of Turkey's developing relationship with Africa for the fifteen years stretching from 1998 to 2013 highlights multiple important steps taken by Turkey and various African countries and organizations, such as the AU, to reach the current state of affairs.¹⁹ In particular, following the implementation of Turkey's 1998 Action Plan for the Opening Policy towards Africa, Turkey participated in AU summits as a guest country after 2002 and obtained "observer status" in the AU in 2005. This status provides Turkey with permanent institutional contacts in Africa, and vice versa. The permanent contact assured through this observer status may also assist in changing perceptions in both Turkey and Africa. The importance—symbolically and politically—of the first and second Africa-Turkey summits as well as the formation of the Africa Strategic Coordination Committee should not be ignored. The Committee was formed in 2010 and the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was assigned as the coordinating institution, arguably lending weight and credence to its mission.²⁰

Soon after Turkey's much-publicized foray into Somalia and the personal visit by Erdoğan and his family to Mogadishu, two mechanisms available to Turkish elites and policymakers were explored by scholars: first, membership in international organizations and, second,

rewriting Turkey's cultural landscape.²¹ Turkey's role in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) and its strategic partnership with the AU are particular areas of focus. Importantly, Turkey's relationship with various African states, to include Somalia, appears to be dominated by the quest for material gains. It is also, "flexible and pragmatic enough to capture the opportunities when they arise. In accomplishing its gains, Turkey resorts to international leadership role in the region by stressing existing commonality of goals (interests) and norms between African states and itself, conducive for cooperation."²²

The research in this analysis fully supports these findings, demonstrating that Turkey's interest in Somalia is driven not by Turkey's and Somalia's common Sunni Muslim heritage, or its Muslim Brotherhood ties, or because of some greater appeal to charity and development. Rather, Turkey's main aim in engaging Somalia is to gain political and diplomatic capital outside of Somalia as well as the locating of another market for Turkish goods. In short, Turkish diplomatic pragmatism has resulted in international praise for Turkey's work but it has also resulted in Turkish businesses, many with strong ties to the ruling AKP, making lots of money. Termed "Turkish exceptionalism" by one scholar, this exceptionalism can be defined as, "the coupling of political altruism, embedded in Prime Minister Erdoğan's personal international agenda, with Turkish 'soft power' in the Muslim world to assist failed states."²³ Such policies simultaneously advance Turkey's national economic interests and the objectives that further its international power and prestige. Importantly, "while Turkey's intention to be a responsible power in Somalia is genuine, the wider geo-politics of Turkey advancing its *raison d'état* is coupled within this paradigm [of Turkish exceptionalism]. As Turkey's latent power grows, it will seek out similar opportunities to use its soft power via international autism to achieve its wide-ranging national interests of becoming a regional and global power."²⁴

In regard to the study of emerging powers and the quest for international prestige and status, Oliver Stuenkel argues that the 2009 BRICS summit was successful because it institutionalized a nascent organization in the eyes of other international actors. At the same time, belonging to the new club helped member states raise their international profile and status, which is useful for achieving joint or individual national goals.²⁵ Stuenkel and other scholars take the quest for international prestige as a given. Indeed, much has been written on the competition for international sporting events, such as the World Cup and

Olympics, which confer on host countries the twin benefits of prestige and profits.²⁶

In Turkey's case, its interests and discourse under AKP leadership reveal both a much more ambitious foreign policy agenda that, on the one hand, attempts to place Turkey in a favorable position to shape the contemporary international order and, on the other, allows it to expand its economic and commercial networks at the global level. Based on statements made by then Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu in 2010, Turkey aims to be a key figure in the resolution of regional conflicts and to further promote regional security and economic integration. In addition, the AKP wishes to cement Turkey's economic and diplomatic presence at the global level. In this respect, the Middle East and Africa play a particularly crucial role, especially given recent developments with the European Union (EU) that make Turkey's membership less palatable to Turks.²⁷

IV. Why Turkey Chose Somalia

Evidence strongly suggests 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.²⁸ From a political economy perspective, while investments in hot spots such as Somalia are risky, the rewards can be great. The rules of the game in politics and business either do not exist as they would in more stable states or when they exist in an unstable environment are often ignored or fungible. As will be demonstrated, this is precisely the situation that Turkey has been able to exploit so well.

But why did Turkey choose to become involved in Somalia rather than another state, either in its near abroad or in Africa? It seems that Turkey avoided countries that were economically and politically stable, at least when compared with Somalia. For example, Turkey could have chosen to work in Ethiopia or South Sudan. Closer to Mogadishu, it could have expanded its presence and clout in Somaliland, a de-facto and self-declared independent region of Somalia that has experienced internal stability for much of the past two decades. However, this article argues that it is precisely this type of political and economic stability that led Turkey to eschew engagement with a country like Somaliland. Instead, Turkey's leaders chose to involve the country in a more unstable Somalia. Simply put, Turkey's soft power appeal and

ability to start from scratch are made easier in a place like Somalia precisely because of the instability, violence, and history of stymied engagements by major international actors. In short, any Turkish successes in Somalia would be outsized given the difficulty of an environment that suffers from byzantine clan politics, a terrorist insurgency, and an infrastructure that is dilapidated or destroyed. This played directly into Turkey's main aim in engaging Somalia: to gain political and diplomatic capital outside Somalia.²⁹ Somalia is the Turkish government's answer to Turkey's "place in the sun," to use an archaic but prescient phrase.

Turkey's humanitarian and development actions, its diplomatic presence, its flights in and out of Mogadishu via Turkish Airlines, and its willingness to host conferences about Somalia in Istanbul and Ankara have won Turkey prestige on the international stage.³⁰ It has arguably made Turkey indispensable in Mogadishu to many Somalis.³¹ It has also made Turkey an international player outside its own backyard. It is now an essential power and player when it comes to issues related to the Horn of Africa, an area traditionally outside Turkey's sphere of influence.

A. The Question of History

Perhaps President Erdoğan and his government viewed Somalia nostalgically given its history. Indeed, Turkey, in the form of the Ottoman Empire, was historically engaged at least peripherally in Somalia. This is a fact that has been repeated *ad nauseam* by Turks and non-Turks alike as proof of an almost organic relationship between the two states.³² However, the Ottomans were only briefly allies of the Adal (Awdal) Sultanate, supplying weapons to assist in the Sultanate's wars in Abyssinia, and in attempts to repel Portuguese invaders in the sixteenth century. Interestingly, the Ottomans were mainly involved not in the area around Mogadishu, but in what is now the de-facto independent state of Somaliland. The Adal Sultanate's original capital was located in northern Somalia near what is now Djibouti, at Zeila, (Zayla) prior to moving inland to Harar, which is currently located in Ethiopia. Ottoman buildings still stand in Berbera, the main port city of Somaliland, as proof of their former influence. But brief historical exchanges of guns and political support and the remains of a few buildings cannot possibly explain the motives underscoring Turkey's current actions in Somalia.

B. Anatolia's Tigers

Clues to Turkey's decision to become involved in Somalia may be found in the intrepid Turkish businesspeople who have a history of prospering in difficult areas. Turkey's foray into Somalia was predicated on Turkey's accomplishment of something similar, first in Central Asia in the 1990s, and then in Iraq vis-à-vis development and diplomacy and the broadcast of soft power after the American-led invasion.³³ Turkey's presence in the form of commerce, education, and industry are on display particularly in the majority Kurdish regions of Iraq.

The main players at the forefront of Turkey's efforts in Iraq and in Somalia are Turkish businesspeople who are composed largely of the Anatolian bourgeoisie, the so-called Anatolian Tigers. The Anatolian Tigers were the main beneficiaries of the liberalization of Turkish market space that began in fits and starts in the 1980s and then picked up steam under successive AKP governments. The Anatolian Tigers capitalized on these gains. After all, they were largely responsible for catapulting Erdoğan to power more than a decade ago.³⁴ In return for their continuing electoral support, Erdoğan and his government are on the lookout for new markets for goods produced by Turkey, primarily those of the Anatolian Tigers.³⁵

Erdoğan's government and its Turkish business partners likely understood that by gambling in volatile Mogadishu, they would automatically be viewed as intrepid and visionary as well as humanitarian. No such praise or the accompanying diplomatic and political punch would come from investing in infrastructure in another state in the Middle East or the East Africa region. As a counterfactual example, if Turkey had invested in another impoverished state with a history of violence, such as South Sudan or Somaliland, it is safe to say that Turkey's international prestige would not be as inflated nor would it produce the accompanying diplomatic clout. As important as is South Sudan's oil, the logistics of working in such a place, coupled with less visibility, necessarily preclude major Turkish involvement. While Turkey did not involve itself in Somalia on account of a shared history or its common Sunni Muslim populations, Turkey's presence fits more seamlessly in a place like Somalia than South Sudan. In the case of Somaliland, the visibility and outside recognition are severely lacking. For example, Turkey's control of the small airport in Hargeisa or the moribund port in Berbera, both in Somaliland, do not provide the

same international caché as control of the airport and port in Mogadishu. Turks would not be shepherding diplomatic personnel and humanitarian aid for major world powers if they were in Somaliland. Thus, the accolades from the U.S., the UN, and others that come from Turkey's admittedly risky and important investment efforts in Mogadishu would not have been as readily forthcoming were the Turks in Hargeisa rather than Mogadishu.

V. Turkey as a Positive Force in Somalia?

Beyond divining the rationale behind Turkey's calculated entry into Somalia, the truth is that Turkey's actions in Somalia have been viewed as largely positive, inside and outside Somalia. UN officials publicly praise Turkey's actions.³⁶ They admire the ability of Turkish charities and government employees to work in areas of the Somali capital seen by Westerners as too dangerous. Turkish building sites have mushroomed in Mogadishu's central Hodan district, which was at the epicenter of a protracted battle between Islamist rebels and African Union forces deployed to the coastal city to prop up the UN-backed government.³⁷

A. Somalis and Turks: Natural Allies?

While Turkey's involvement in Somalia has arguably produced certain positive results, Turkey must appreciate that it alone cannot solve the country's many challenges. Turkey must secure the support and cooperation of Somalis in order for it to capitalize on the development of its government networks and business opportunities in Somalia. Thus far, Turkey has been rather more successful than others. Humanitarian efforts, the building of schools, and the willingness of Turks to take the risks associated with being in Mogadishu have all played a part. Visits by President Erdoğan have also proved incredibly popular.

When Erdoğan first visited in 2011, he brought along his wife, his children, ministers, businessmen, and artists. The visit to Mogadishu was the first by a non-African leader in two decades.³⁸ Erdoğan's visit with his family signifies how personal and important to Turkey their commitment to and investment in Somalia was regarded, especially given the lack of security guarantees on the ground in mid-2011. Follow-up visits, direct flights from Istanbul to Mogadishu, and the building of hospitals and roads have all raised Turkey's profile in Somalia.

Indeed, Turkey is understandably popular in Somalia in certain circles. An analysis of Turkey's efforts over the past four years indicates that it has been successful in winning hearts and minds, at least in Mogadishu, where Turkish-built hospitals, roads, and schools are cherished signs of development, and names like "Erdoğan" for baby boys and "Istanbul" for baby girls are very popular.³⁹ Funding for education and development is generous, timely, and welcome in Somalia. Turkey previously offered 1,200 scholarships, available to Somalis for university education in Turkey.⁴⁰

B. Timing is Everything

It is impossible to understand Turkey's successes in Somalia if one ignores two criteria: (a) when Turkey became involved in Somalia and (b) the incredible resilience, entrepreneurship, and innovation of Somalis. Turkey fortuitously decided to become involved in Somalia in late 2011. In this the Turks were blessed with very good timing even though the move was risky. By most estimates the threat of terrorism had ebbed in large parts of Somalia, in particular in Mogadishu. The al-Shabaab terrorist group had been forced to retreat from Mogadishu and would shortly lose its main source of revenue to Kenyan forces when they captured the key charcoal shipping port of Kismayo. The groundwork that the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) troops had laid since 2007, particularly that done by troops from Uganda and Burundi, spearheaded al-Shabaab's slow but steady retreat from various regions in Somalia. Indeed, it can be argued that contributions by African countries like Burundi and Uganda, which have been fighting against al-Shabaab for years, have been overshadowed by Turkey's charm offensive.

At the same time, a new famine crisis brought Somalia back into international headlines. In response, Erdoğan's government did not simply offer to work with Somali businesses and have Turkish NGOs provide aid. He made a long-term commitment to Somalia backed with a robust diplomatic presence and the promise to provide aid for reconstruction then and in the future. Indeed, Turkey immediately pledged to re-open its embassy. This indicates either luck, political savvy, or both in that when Erdoğan rolled out his strategy in Somalia, he did so precisely when eyes were focused on the country on account of the famine. This further supports the evidence that Erdoğan and his

AKP cadre chose the right time to act and were intent on the potential international prestige from Turkey's involvement in Somalia.

VI. An Intrepid Nation

Added to the issue of timing, a new Somali Federal Government (SFG), with more powers and definitely more prestige than the previous Somali Transitional Government (STG), was elected in 2012. With the election of the SFG, Turkey was blessed with willing partners who had a mandate to rule and distribute resources until well into 2016. In addition, intrepid Turkish businesses found willing partners in Somalia. Though a bit cliché, trade and entrepreneurship are considered by many to be the lifeblood of the Somali people, and have flourished in many areas during the last two decades in spite of the instability, terrorism, and lack of infrastructure.⁴¹ Livestock, including camels and cattle, has remained the mainstay of Somalia's economy and is currently flourishing on account of healthy demand from Egypt and the countries of the Arabian Peninsula. After decades of instability, Somalia's access to telecommunication infrastructure and the Internet is assisting other industries to thrive. The Somali telecom industry is estimated to be one of the most competitive and dynamic in Africa. Financial services, such as those offered by Dahabshiil, a Somali-owned money transfer business, and their competitors, have also seen rapid expansion, and, like telecoms, are embracing the latest technology.

Given the relative peace and stability of 2011–2015, the entrepreneurship of Somalis, the access to cash inflows and technology, and a relatively stable government in Mogadishu, the timing of the Turks paid off. If Turkey had embarked on a foray into Somalia ten years earlier, it is safe to say that their ability to achieve success would have been severely curtailed. But Turkey also recognized the potential to do serious business in Somalia. As Abdirashid Duale, CEO of Dahabshiil, noted, "One of the things that most impresses me about the Turkish approach to the Somali territories is the recognition of the significance not just of our existing commercial successes, but of our economic potential, particularly in construction, real estate, mining and agriculture."⁴²

VII. How Turkish Money Provides Access and Prestige

Is Turkey's success in Somalia simply about roads, hospitals, and schools? Is it all about timing, relative stability, and peace? Was Turkey, through its NGOs, religious organizations, and business acumen, simply able to step in and fill key gaps in education, health, and infrastructure development? The answer to these questions is both yes and no.

Turkey is popular because of its visible and useful projects. Turkish workers have built new hospitals and upgraded existing ones, improved access to safe drinking water, repaired damaged roads, and constructed the new international airport. But Turkey's ability to build and act purposefully in an often unstable and clan-dominated Somalia stems primarily from money. Direct cash payments from Turkey (reportedly delivered, at times, in suitcases to an internationally recognized but corrupt and relatively weak federal government in Mogadishu) automatically provide Turkey with an inordinate amount of influence in Somalia.⁴³ Figure 1 demonstrates how the independent variable of Turkish money, often in the form of direct cash payments from the Erdoğan government, has provided the access to the vital Somali stakeholders in the SFG that Turkey required. The independent variable of Turkish money leads directly to the dependent variable of access, which then provides the dependent variable of influence over Somali powerbrokers, politicians, and clan leaders. Influence, in turn, has often led the dependent variable of control: direct Turkish control of resources, be that the airport, the port, and/or major infrastructure projects, such as roads and hospitals. In turn, the building or maintenance or improvement of infrastructure (transportation, health, education, commercial) leads directly to the prime motivating force behind Turkey's foray into Somalia: international prestige and clout. Not surprisingly, the independent variable of money, directly influencing all the listed dependent variables, resurfaces again and also happens to be the end product in this cycle. In short, Turkish money begets more money for Turkey while at the same time offering the possibility of access, influence, and control.

This influence has, among other things, allowed Turkey to sign a major military deal that allows it to train the Somali Armed Forces as well as construct sophisticated military camps.⁴⁴ Additionally, it has resulted in Turkish companies being given lucrative and powerful contracts to run the international airport and the port of Mogadishu. Most

importantly, it also gives the Erdoğan government a recognized place at the international negotiating table on Somalia and the region.⁴⁵

Turkey is now viewed globally as a political and diplomatic power largely because of the risks it has taken in Mogadishu and its subsequent successes. Turkey's additional efforts on the humanitarian and development fronts in the form of education, hospitals, schools, and related infrastructure have only added to the luster of its mission and the praise it receives from Somalis, international organizations, and states.

VIII. The Pitfalls of Turkey's Presence in Somalia

Regardless of the large amounts of Turkish money circulating in the hands of Somali stakeholders, the Erdoğan government and Turkish businesses should not be viewed as philistines. Turkey, in this respect, is no different from the majority of other international stakeholders in Somalia. They arguably play the same money game, although not as effectively or with the same positive results as the Turks. Looked at in this way, Turkey is simply playing by the rules. Correspondingly, Turkey also faces the same pitfalls that bedevil all other actors in Somalia.

The fact remains that the Turks, unencumbered by other international obligations or allies in Somalia, found willing partners in the SFG.⁴⁶ President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, elected in 2012, was greeted as a break from previous, corrupt Somali transitional government authorities. However, the best estimates show he has become almost as corrupt as his predecessors.⁴⁷ The corruption in Mogadishu is so publicly rife that even Turkey declared a brief end to its policy of providing direct cash payments to the SFG in early 2014, though reports are conflicting.⁴⁸ Soon after, it was announced that the payments would begin again.⁴⁹ Turkey's reasons for direct cash payments to the SFG are simple and straightforward. The current Turkish Prime Minister and previous Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, pointed to the lack of any viable banking infrastructure in Somalia, which necessitated the provision of direct cash aid from the Turkish government to the Somali government. "No banking service is offered in Somalia," Davutoğlu said, while emphasizing that the government of Turkey had provided monthly payments of \$4.5 million to the federal government of Somalia in the second half of 2013.⁵⁰ By some estimates, Turkish aid to Somalia by mid-2012, both in cash and in-kind, was well in excess of \$350 million.⁵¹

A. Turkey and Reform in Somalia

Given the allegations, the levels of corruption, and the fact that most of the money destined for Somalia from the international communities falls into the hands of select stakeholders, calls for reform and changes to the way business is done in Somalia are legion.⁵² Yet for the time being, Turkey's policy of direct cash payments to the SFG and other stakeholders is paying dividends. Why would Turkey change its tactics and apply pressure on the SFG to reform, as some have urged?⁵³ The deck is stacked against such actions. Should Turkey choose to pressure the SFG, it would likely be unsuccessful. This is because the large amounts of money flowing to the SFG come from multiple sources and via various methods, most of them opaque.⁵⁴ For example, aid to Somalia from Saudi Arabia would continue to flow, as would largesse from the U.K., even though the foreign policy objectives of these two countries vis-à-vis Somalia are often at odds. Add to this the millions of dollars from all other regional and international actors currently operating in Somalia. The cash and "donations" never stop flowing.⁵⁵ Only its recipients change from time to time. "Despite all [the] glaring inefficiencies and failures [of aid agencies and international actors in Somalia], the aid industry continues unabated; in fact, it is going from strength to strength. Statistics indicate that the number of aid agencies and NGOs has mushroomed."⁵⁶ Yesterday it was dished out to TFG officials. Today it goes to SFG officials. Should Turkey choose to cut off funding to the SFG it would sting, but it would not spell the end of the SFG by any means. Turkey would only be punishing itself.

B. A Tarnished Image?

To be clear, Turkey's ultimate goal of prestige and international clout are seemingly at odds with the methods it uses in Somalia, such as practices that engender corruption. However, the situation in Somalia leads much of the world to view it, "as nothing but trouble, a drain on resources and a source of Islamist terror."⁵⁷ Somalia is the most emblematic example of a failed state, according to countless reports. It has been without a functional government that can broadcast its power beyond Mogadishu for three decades. Past and current governments are "unable and/or unwilling to provide for the essential human needs of its citizens—in terms of security as well as adequate food, clean water, health care, and education."⁵⁸ In short, rules that ostensibly

govern international relations elsewhere are largely absent in Somalia. As noted, there is little to no oversight of funds going in and out of the country. Furthermore, actors from the international community, be they states, organizations, or businesses, often have competing agendas and therefore few of their efforts, including humanitarian efforts, are coordinated. It is precisely because of Somalia's status for three decades as a failed state that "Turkish exceptionalism" has worked so well. In this case, Turkish exceptionalism, "adds to a rational choice of engaging in Somalia, because the payoffs over the long run are very lucrative: it enhances Turkish soft power while building its regional status as an emerging world power."⁵⁹ Turkey's pragmatism in Somalia leads it to simultaneously pursue self-interested goals (prestige) as well as furthering its business interests. The way to accomplish this is through money, which provides the access to Somalia's rulers.

C. The Security of Turkey's Investment and Long-Term Prospects in Somalia

Turkey's position in Somalia is arguably unstable. Contracts and agreements signed by the current SFG are not necessarily subject to scrutiny or parliamentary approval as required by the constitution. As such, oil and gas tenders as well as other contracts—including the Soma Oil and Gas deal—are riven with irregularities and may prove fleeting when a new government assumes power by the ballot box or otherwise.⁶⁰ The methods used by Turkey to its advantage to cut deals with the SFG may be the same methods used against them in the future. For example, Favori LLC, a Turkish company with ties to the Erdoğan government, gained control of the Mogadishu Airport under opaque circumstances, at the expense of a South African-staffed SKA International Group.⁶¹ After the Favori contract was publicly leaked, the UN Monitoring Group for Somalia and Eritrea accused Favori LLC of paying senior members of the SFG a \$1.8 million "Initial Premium Fee" to remove SKA from the airport. Central Bank of Somalia records confirm that the \$1.8 million was deposited on 24 January 2014.⁶² Though it controls the airport in Mogadishu for the time being and opened a new terminal, Turkey should understand that its hold on the airport is likely tenuous given past SFG behavior.⁶³

The administration of President Hassan Sheikh also offered the Turkish firm Albayrak Group the contract to run Mogadishu's seaport for twenty years, allegedly in exchange for payments of between

\$6 and \$8 million to the SFG.⁶⁴ Though they have the contract to run the seaport, questions remain about the Turks' ability of to manage it, given protests by port workers when the Albayrak Company took over operations in September 2014.⁶⁵ But the port protests also demonstrate something else. Not all Somalis are overjoyed that the Turks are in Somalia. Turks and Turkish interests in Somalia have been attacked on numerous occasions.⁶⁶ They remain a prime target of the al-Shabaab terrorist group.

IX. Coordination of Efforts: Unilateral versus Multilateral

Former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu presciently noted in 2012, soon after Turkey jumped feet first into Somalia, that, "While the entire world was looking to Somalia from the outside and holding conferences in foreign capitals, Turkey has sent its most active civil society groups and aid organizations into Somalia, to be able to demonstrate that we share a common fate with Somalia."⁶⁷ This was a simplification, of course. The "world" has been involved in Somalia since long before the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991 and the subsequent civil war and continued armed conflict.⁶⁸ In fact, Turkey's ability to act on the Somali stage is all the more impressive given the sheer number of actors already at play there and the spheres of influence they have carved out for themselves over the past two decades. These include but are not limited to nation-states (the U.S., the U.K., Ethiopia, Kenya, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, etc.), the United Nations and entities tied to it, the African Union and AMISOM, hundreds of NGOs, the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), and the European Union Mission to Somalia.

A recurring theme in relation to Turkey's presence in Somalia is the need for coordination of its efforts with other international and regional actors. According to this logic, coordination and cooperation are the only means of ensuring Turkey's overall and continued success in Somalia.⁶⁹ Based on the research, this analysis argues that the Erdoğan government's success in Somalia is precisely because it has chosen to act in a unilateral and uncoordinated fashion.

It is precisely because the international community is at cross purposes in Somalia that so much money is wasted on policies that counteract one another. The multiplicity of actors lacking a coherent vision or the veneer of coordination has arguably done more damage to Somalia than anything else. "While Turkey's interest in Somalia has

brought it into international spotlight, the interest that has been shown by the international community has been nothing more than ‘pseudo acts of kindness’ towards Somalia. To this day, the international community has been reluctant to solve any of Somalia’s long-standing problems.”⁷⁰

It is a testament to the disjointed, competing, and ultimately ineffective nature of the work done by hundreds of stakeholders in Somalia over the past quarter of a century that Turkey has found fertile ground for its development projects, business interests, educational endeavors, and military agreements. Indeed, though Turkey’s reasons for being in Somalia ultimately rest on burnishing its image by raising its international prestige and making money, Turkey’s activity is largely welcome precisely because it is effective in areas where so many others fail. It can be argued that the current unilateral nature of its engagement in Somalia is precisely the reason for Turkey’s relative gains vis-à-vis other stakeholders. It also rests on coordination of Turkish efforts. These involve not only the Turkish Foreign Ministry, the Turkish Health Ministry, the Religious Affairs Directorate, the Turkish Red Crescent, and other government entities, but NGOs such as Humanitarian Relief Foundation (İnsani Yardım Vakfı/İHH) and Kimse Yok Mu (literally, “Is anyone there?”). Smaller groups like Dost Eller (Friendly Hands), which offers civil society assistance, and the Turkish Businesspeople and Industrialists Confederation (TUSKON), which develops trade and investment between the two countries, also operate in Somalia. The efforts and actions of these stakeholders are coordinated from Ankara by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA).⁷¹

X. Conclusion

Turkey’s foray into Somalia was primarily motivated by its desire for international recognition as an emerging power. Turkish money and aid donations delivered directly and unilaterally to key stakeholders in the SFG assisted the process. This provided Turkey with access to and influence with key patrons in the administration of President Hassan Sheikh. This, in turn, led to Turkish control over and management of major assets in Somalia, notably the airport and seaport. It has also provided Turkish businesses and the Turkish government with lucrative contracts. In the process, unilateral Turkish rebuilding efforts, offers of scholarships, renovations of hospitals, and the hosting

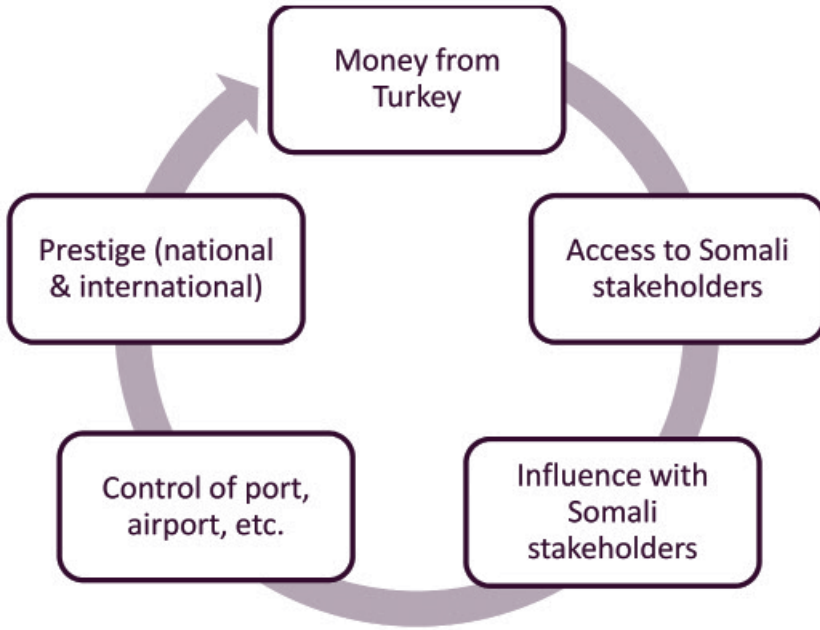


Figure 1: Relationship between the main variables, including the independent variable of Turkish money delivered to Somali stakeholders that led to the genesis of numerous dependent variables: Turkish access, influence, control, and international prestige and clout. These independent variables, in turn, lead to more money and more power for Turkey.

of international conferences on Somalia have resulted in the international accolades and diplomatic clout craved by the Erdoğan government. Turkey is now viewed as a peacemaker in Africa and, to some, as a savior to Somalia.⁷² Turkey is looked at by many as an honest broker in the Horn of Africa. Turkey and Turkish businesses are regarded favorably, at least by Somali stakeholders who engineered Turkey's control of the airport and port. Furthermore, Turkey is close enough geographically to be considered a friendly power by Somalis, but far enough away to remain aloof in a way that the Arab states, Ethiopians, and Kenyans cannot.

Given the current climate of corruption, the competing goals of regional and international players, and the inability of the government to broadcast its power beyond portions of Mogadishu, it is politically and economically savvy for Turkey to act in a unilateral, highly coordinated fashion and carve out its own sphere of influence in Somalia and

the wider region. By exploiting the status quo in Somalia, Turkey has helped itself as well as Somalia in some visible cases.

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Notes

1. See Tovrov 2012; International Crisis Group 2012; and Bingöl 2013.
2. See Aras 2005; and Oğuzlu 2007.
3. Taşpınar 2012, p. 135.
4. See Hinnebusch 2015.
5. Lough 2012, author's translation.
6. Hasimi 2014, p. 128.
7. Harper 2013, p. 164.
8. See Bruton 2014, pp. 3, 9, 27.
9. Özkan and Orakci 2015, p. 349.
10. See Makovsky 1999. See also Oğuzlu and Dal 2013.
11. See Bal 2004.
12. Danforth 2008.
13. McConnell, Moreau, Dittmer 2012.
14. Cooper and Flemes 2013.
15. Gray and Murphy 2015.
16. Bank and Karadağ 2013, p. 288.
17. See Özkan 2010a. Also see Özkan and Akgün 2010.
18. See Özkan 2010b. See also Özkan 2011.
19. Arslan and Karagül 2013, p. 21.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Korkut and Civelekoğlu 2012.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Gullo 2012, p. 1.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
25. Stuenkel 2014.
26. See Dwyer, Forsyth, and Spurr 2006. See also Walker, Kaplanidou, Gibson, Thapa, Geldenhuys, and Coetzee 2013.
27. Simão, Barrinha, Nasser, and Cravo 2014, pp. 4–5.
28. Cagaptay 2014.
29. See Ülgen 2010.
30. Kasapoğlu 2012.

31. Hasimi 2014, pp. 127–128.
32. International Crisis Group 2012, footnotes 3 and 4.
33. Dombey and Guler 2013.
34. Aneja 2012.
35. “Türkiye Somali’de yumuşak güç deniyor” (6 June 2012). Incomplete Citation?
36. Dinçer 2014.
37. Khawaja 2012.
38. Mesfin 2012.
39. Harper 2014.
40. Harte 2012.
41. Nenova 2004.
42. Duale 2012.
43. *Reuters* 2014a.
44. Shafi’I 2014.
45. Robinson 2015.
46. For a detailed report of corruption in previous Somali Transitional Governments based on budgetary figures from 2009–2013, see Fartaag 2014.
47. UN Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea 2014.
48. *Reuters* 2014b.
49. *Somaliland Sun* 2014.
50. Erdem, *Hurriyet Daily News* (13 May 2014).
51. Duale 2012.
52. See Fatah, *Horseed Media* (23 December 2013). See also Arman 2013.
53. International Crisis Group 2012.
54. One report estimated that the conflict in Somalia has cost the world over \$55 billion as of 2011 (Norris and Bruton 2011). Another estimate stated that in 2012, Somalia received US\$627 million in international humanitarian assistance, making it the fourth largest recipient. Initial estimates for 2013 total US\$713 million. Somalia has also been in the top ten of recipients of humanitarian assistance in seven of the ten years from 2002–2012. Humanitarian assistance peaked at US\$1.1 billion in 2011, when it was the second largest recipient of humanitarian assistance. See “Somalia: Key Figures 2013,” *Global Humanitarian Assistance* (2013).
55. Menkhaus 2014.
56. Warah 2011.
57. Harper 2012, p. 2.
58. Jamal 2013.
59. Gullo 2012, p. 6.
60. See Chonghaile 2014. See also Scheck and Forelle 2014.
61. *Key Media* 2013.
62. Bahadur 2014.

63. Turkish businesses are in direct competition with other businesses, many which have been operating in Somalia for years. For example, the abrupt cancellation of SKA's existing contract raised questions as to whether Turkey's aid and largesse have created an unfair competitive advantage with the SFG. Yet it also shows that the SFG may, in certain cases, provide contracts to the highest bidder. See Westaway 2013.
64. Bahadur 2014.
65. Omar and Sheikh 2014. See also *Yeni Akit* 2014.
66. See Gürcanlı 2013. See also *Haber Turk* 2015.
67. Abdi 2012.
68. Mohamed Siad Barre, also spelled Maxamed Siyaad Barre (c. 1919–1995), was the last president of a unified Somalia, who ruled the country from October 1969, when he led a bloodless military coup against the elected government, until January 1991, when he was overthrown in a bloody civil war.
69. International Crisis Group 2012.
70. Özkan 2014, p. 50.
71. For a thorough listing and explanation of all Turkish agencies and organizations operating in Somalia see *Ibid.*, pp. 35–46. See also Bingöl 2013, pp. 98–99.
72. Gullo 2012, p. 7.

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