Turkey's Strategic Shift in Africa:

The Emergence of a Unilateral Power?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Africa over the past decade, modern Turkey has expanded a portfolio of interests spanning economic, diplomatic and social areas with noteworthy speed, becoming a significant presence with major impact; this differs significantly in form and focus from the outset of the decade. The rapid growth suggests Turkish engagement in Africa seems likely to be sustained. This warrants a look ahead for African leadership, who might benefit from grounding that forward perspective with a deeper understanding of the trajectory of Turkish priorities and decision-making over the past ten years. This paper, adopting the format of a case study approach, is an effort to support that preparatory objective.

This paper begins with outlining Turkey's African role from a decade ago to set a baseline for three illustrative case studies, (1) the emergence of the Turkish Maarif Foundation, a semi-public organization with over 291 schools worldwide; (2) the TURKSOM military training camp in Somalia; and (3) Turkey's late-2019 intervention in Libya.

As findings, the cases trace how Turkish foreign policy retraced or was a reflection of major domestic events. Two pivotal events that stand out over the past decade were the 2016 coup attempt against the Erdoğan government, after which the Turkish military was brought under tight civilian control, and the 2018 Turkish presidential election, after which ultra-nationalist policies moved into the fore of Turkish policymaking.

The cases further suggest that Turkey's interests in Africa fall into an ongoing area of interest but not a core area. Commercial and cultural interests in Africa over the period may have become less articulated as priorities for Ankara, such as multilateral institutional engagements that were features of Turkish interests in Africa at the outset of the past decade.

For example, in one of the cases, as a reset of institutional affiliations, the Maarif Foundation withdrew from many of Turkey's social and educational partnerships in Africa, focusing instead on undermining its domestic rival and predecessor, Hizmet, everywhere. In another, the foray into TURKSOM in Somalia seems to have become a largely detachable undertaking, more of an expression of hard power resources for soft power purposes with newly-gained Justice and Development Party (AKP) confidence in its control over the Turkish Armed Forces. In the third case, Turkey's intervention on behalf of Misrata and the GNA in Libya seems to have been driven by domestic Turkish priorities, from bolstering ultra-nationalist Mediterranean objectives to securing massive and well-timed hard currency injections for Turkish Central Bank reserves.

The entire decade has been one of dramatic change, and Turkey has undergone several significant changes internally, and in its immediate neighborhood. Perhaps it is no surprise that Ankara's African policies over the period have become less about foreign strategic objectives and more a lens into Turkey's domestic politics. Over the decade, the mechanics of Turkey's foreign policy decision making has become highly responsive to domestic priorities, foregoing longstanding relationships, and far less about stabilizing external Turkish engagement at or beyond its core areas of interest.

For Africa's leadership, structuring offerings with an inwardly-focused Turkey are not a feasible objective. This may mean Turkish engagement in Africa will be more difficult to assess as a matter of strategic interest in Africa. A return to a predominantly commercial basis for Turkish interests, as was prominent at the outset of the decade, is not precluded.

La Turquie en Afrique :
Un Positionnement Original

RÉSUMÉ

Au cours des dix dernières années, la Turquie a fait preuve d'un intérêt économique, diplomatique et social croissant envers l'Afrique, donnant ainsi une présence significative et un impact non-négligeable aux intérêts turcs sur le Continent. L'augmentation de l'intérêt de la Turquie pour l'Afrique mérite l'attention des dirigeants africains qui pourraient en tirer parti, à condition d'avoir une bonne compréhension des priorités turques.

Ce rapport est établi à partir de l'étude de trois cas, mettant en évidence le rôle de la Turquie et ses objectifs en Afrique durant les dix dernières années :

- Mise en place d'une organisation à but éducatif, la Fondation Maarif
- Installation d'un camp d'entraînement pour l'armée somalienne, TURKSOM
- Intervention militaire en Libye fin 2019

Ces cas de figures permettent de montrer comment la politique étrangère turque en Afrique est intimement corrélée aux évènements majeurs de la vie politique en Turquie. On pense notamment à la tentative de coup d'Etat contre le gouvernement Erdoğan en juillet 2016 ainsi qu'à l'élection présidentielle de 2018 qui a mis en avant les politiques ultranationalistes. Ces évènements dimensionnants, ont fait passer la politique étrangère de la Turquie envers l'Afrique au second plan, signe que la politique intérieure reste une préoccupation majeure. On constatera qu'il en est de même pour ses engagements auprès des institutions continentales africaines comme pour ses engagements à l'international.

Pour ce qui est du développement de la Fondation Maarif en Afrique, il nous est donné de constater que cette action dans le domaine éducatif avait aussi pour but d'affaiblir l'organisation politico-religieuse Hizmet qui est tenue comme principal responsable de la tentative de coup d'état de 2016.
Deuxièmement, la participation de la Turquie au travers de l'installation d'une base militaire en Somalie (TURKSOM) permet d'atteindre plusieurs objectifs, à savoir le soutien à l'armée somalienne, une présence militaire turque à proximité du détroit de Bab el Mandeb et par là même, affirmer le rayonnement de la Turquie dans la partie orientale de l'Afrique.
Pour ce qui est de l'intervention de la Turquie en Libye en 2019, les motivations ultranationalistes affichées du gouvernement turc étaient de légitimer leur présence en Méditerranée orientale, mais aussi de recevoir un appui économique à base de devise pour soutenir à l'époque une banque centrale turque en crise.

La période de 2011 à 2021 a été marquée par une succession de faits marquants et dimensionnants pour la Turquie, avec en particulier l'instauration d'un régime présidentiel, la gestion d'une crise économique, un éloignement de ses partenaires de longue date, mais aussi par la tentative de coup d'état de 2016 et la purge politique qui a suivi.

Il nous semble que la politique turque en Afrique est plus le reflet de ses préoccupations, centrées sur sa politique intérieure, que sur un développement d'une stratégie économique ou politique sur le Continent africain.

Il reste cependant clair que le Continent africain présente un intérêt économique important pour la Turquie, en particulier dans le domaine des grands travaux, mais peut-être aussi par la capacité à être présente sur un Continent où se côtoient les grandes nations du monde.
Fort de ce constat, structurer et maintenir des relations politico-économiques durables avec une Turquie égocentrée, parait être une tâche délicate pour les dirigeants africains.

تركيا في افريقيا :
تموقع متميز

ملخص

خلال السنوات العشر الأخيرة أعربت تركيا عن اهتمام اقتصادي ودبلوماسي وسياسي متزايد تجاه افريقيا، الشيء الذي أدى الى حضور لافت وتأثير لا يستهان به للمصالح التركية في القارة السمراء. ان تزايد الاهتمام التركي بإفريقيا يستحق ان يثير انتباه الزعماء الافارقة الذين بإمكانهم الاستفادة من هذا الاهتمام شريطة ان يكونوا على دراية بالأولويات التركية.

تم وضع هذا التصور انطلاقا من دراسة ثلاث حالات تسلط الضوء على دور واهداف تركيا في افريقيا خلال العقد الأخير:

- انشاء مؤسسة «معارف» كمنظمة ذات اهداف تربوية.
- انشاء معسكر تدريبي للجيش الصومالي (تركسوم).
- التدخل العسكري في ليبيا أواخر2019 .

هذه الحالات النوعية تؤكد ان السياسة الخارجية التركية في افريقيا وثيقة الصلة بالأحداث الكبرى التي عرفتها الحياة السياسية داخل تركيا. يتعلق الامر بالخصوص بالمحاولة الانقلابية الفاشلة ضد حكومة اردوغان في يوليوز 2016 والانتخابات الرئاسية في 2018 التي ابانت عن السياسات القومية المتطرفة المنتهجة. هذه الأحداث الجسام ذات الابعاد العميقة أدت الى تراجع السياسة الخارجية التركية تجاه افريقيا الى مستوى ثانوي لفائدة الاهتمام بالقضايا التركية الداخلية.

بخصوص تطور مؤسسة «معارف» يمكننا ملاحظة ان هذه المبادرة في الميدان التربوي كان لها أيضا هدف اخر يتمثل في اضعاف المنظمة السياسية والدينية «حكمت» التي تتهمها السلطات التركية بالضلوع في المحاولة الانقلابية لسنة 2016

بخصوص انشاء قاعدة عسكرية في الصومال «تركسوم» فان هذه المبادرة تمكن من تحقيق عدة اهداف: دعم الجيش الصومالي، تحقيق تواجد عسكري تركي بالقرب من مضيق باب المندب وبالتالي تكريس الاشعاع التركي في منطقة شرق افريقيا.

فيما يتعلق بالتدخل التركي في ليبيا سنة 2019 فان الدوافع القومية المتطرفة للحكومة التركية تتمثل في شرعنة تواجد تركيا في منطقة شرق المتوسط وأيضا الحصول على دعم اقتصادي بواسطة العملة الصعبة لمساندة البنك المركزي التركي الذي كان يعاني آنذاك من ازمة عميقة.

تتميز الفترة الممتدة من 2011 الى 2021 بتتابع الأحداث بالنسبة لتركيا نذكر منها على الخصوص انشاء نظام رئاسي، تدبير الازمة الاقتصادية، التباعد عن الحلفاء التقليديين، المحاولة الانقلابية سنة 2016، عملية التطهير التي تلت المحاولة الانقلابية.

يظهر ان السياسة التركية في افريقيا انعكاس لانشغالات تركيا المتمحورة حول سياستها الداخلية أكثرمن كونها تطورا لاستراتيجية اقتصادية او سياسية تجاه افريقيا. رغم ذلك يظهر جليا ان القارة الافريقية تظل تمثل فائدة اقتصادية مهمة بالنسبة لتركيا خصوصا في مجال الاوراش الكبرى بالإضافة الى رغبة تركيا في التواجد داخل قارة تتنافس عليها القوى الكبرى في العالم.

انطلاقا من هذا التشخيص يتضح ان علاقات اقتصادية وسياسية متينة مع تركيا والمحافظة على تلك العلاقات مهمة حساسة بالنسبة للقادة الافارقة.

Turkey's Strategic Shift in Africa:
The Emergence of a Unilateral Power?

ABSTRACT

Julien Friedman

Turkey's legacy as a major power and its evolving national interest in Africa raise several questions for African leadership in working with Ankara going forward, including how African leaders might view broad trends and interests in their relations with Turkey and policy makers in Ankara. In the spirit of providing a key perspective, this study proceeds with a look at the past decade through a prism of three cases focused by a core proposition, to lend some clarity on the likely centrality of future Turkish interests in Africa to Ankara's policy makers.

The proposition is that unilateral external interests for a national government are more easily pursued and adopted but present a more unwieldy basis for building shared long-term interests, forcing the state adopting them into a smaller set of largely situational policy options. The upside is flexibility, the downside is impermanence.

By contrast, on the other end of the spectrum, multilateral interests feature shared interests as a strategic objective, and a consensus that might have recourse in precedent and even law but, at this end, multilateral external interests may be slower to implement and more unwieldy to adjust. The upside is stability and predictability, the downside is rigidity in the face of circumstance.

If there is a discernibly strong trend toward one or the other pole, as might become visible in a case study approach, the trend might remain over-weighted with future interests in question, in this case Turkey's interests in Africa:

When faced with definitive unilateral and multilateral options on the African continent, which way might Ankara choose to go?

La politique turque sur le Continent africain peut soulever des interrogations auprès des décideurs des pays de ce Continent, compte tenu du fait que d'une manière très claire, les intérêts de politique intérieure turque pondèrent sa volonté de développement en Afrique. L'étude que nous vous proposons cherchera à vous présenter des clés de lecture sur la réalité des objectifs turcs en Afrique durant la dernière décennie, à travers l'étude de trois cas spécifiques.

Au fil de cette décennie la Turquie s'est tournée vers une politique étrangère de type unilatéraliste, c'est-à-dire une tendance à agir en fonction de ses intérêts propres. Nous démontrerons que la posture de la Turquie à l'égard de l'Afrique présente un défi majeur pour les dirigeants des pays de ce Continent. En effet, la politique étrangère turque étant largement pondérée par des évènements de politique intérieure, reste souvent peu lisible quant à sa volonté réelle d'engagement dans la durée. D'un autre côté, la Turquie, fortement centrée sur sa situation intérieure, impactée en particulier par un coup d'état, ne peut consacrer que peu de moyens à son développement sur le Continent africain, sur lequel elle estime nécessaire d'être présente à l'instar d'autre grandes puissances régionales comme l'Europe.

Notre démonstration s'appuiera sur l'étude de trois cas qui marquent l'implication de la Turquie en Afrique :

- *Mise en place d'une organisation à but éducatif, la Fondation Maarif*
- *Installation d'un camp d'entraînement pour l'armée somalienne, TURKSOM*
- *Intervention militaire en Libye fin 2019*

Cependant le constat pourra être fait que ces structures ou ces actions n'ont pas évolué dans le temps, et ce depuis leur mise en place, confirmant ainsi la difficulté conjoncturelle de la Turquie à se déployer de manière unilatérale sur le Continent.

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I / INTRODUCTION

Interests as a Matter of Balance

Over the past ten years, Turkish foreign policy has displayed a diverse set of approaches, and clearly has not been solely interested in unilateralist exercises of power. In areas of vital interest, Turkey swiftly acts in its sovereign interest, and has demonstrated the wherewithal and the will to do so unilaterally.

Multilateral interests - often formalized with rules - tend to expand and bring balance into internal processes.[1] Turkey, a frontline member of NATO, a decidedly multilateral entity, has decades of experience here as well. But, for Turkey, committing to multilateral interests has not precluded pursuing unilateral ones in Turkey's immediate neighborhood, as evidenced in its strategic engagements with Russia, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Israel and Greece, to name a few neighbors, reflecting widely differing Turkish interests and capabilities.

While Turkey's use of unilateral action is manifest across its strategic neighborhood, Africa is not automatically an intrinsic part of it. So, if areas of Africa are in Turkey's strategic neighborhood, and its unilateral preferences have a strategic value, then identifying factors in Africa that invite the pursuit of these preferences may be valuable for Africa's leaders and their advisors.

Expanding Spheres of Interest: Multilateral Next to Unilateral

It may be too simple to adopt a neo-colonialist prism but the viability of unilateral strategies does suggest a preference for unfettered statecraft and power imbalances for enhancing the likelihood of their strategic success.

Though not a rival to an investor like China, nor comparable to France or Britain on historical, cultural and linguistic influence, nor even its own Ottoman-era reach, modern Turkey has expanded an array of interests in economic, diplomatic and religious channels to re-engage with noteworthy breadth across the African continent.

Not all interests that are expansive need to be pursued unilaterally. The expansion of multilateral interest is a central feature of international institution building since the mid-20th century. Whether and how to pursue further integration as well as institution building in the international system has become a key question some 75 years later, in this part of the 21st.

In this broad reckoning, a return to preference for expansive unilateralism by great powers might be both crowding and disruptive to Ankara's pursuit of its national interest, let alone to the value of the multilateral commitments from which it has benefitted. Here, NATO no longer provided the dominant focus for strategic interest in Turkey, let alone for Turkey. (Whether or not the cause is temporary - the effect was seen in the wake of a recessive NATO, a weak EU with a wandering UK and an inverted US - all no doubt relevant to Africa but must be set aside as the focus for a different study).

A brief tour of the horizon is telling about crowding and disruption challenging Turkey's pursuit of its national interest. Greece and Turkey have returned to broad exercises of open rivalry over old disputes. Both China and Russia are now established to varying degrees in the Eastern Mediterranean. France and Turkey have had confrontations on open water and in diplomatic venues. Turkey and Israel have sought and often found a (not always smooth) modus vivendi, albeit writ broadly, and may get serial re-testing in Syria and offshore in natural gas.

So, in Africa, where Ankara may enjoy more strategic choice over strategic necessity, Turkey's underlying preferences - further away from this crowding effect - may gain a sharper focus.

A Remarkable Record of Growth

Turkey's increasingly active engagement in Africa, decisively so in some areas, is not just a matter of state policy but an effort that Ankara seems likely to sustain. Indeed, since the rise to power of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Ankara has increased its foreign direct investment (FDI) flows to Africa from $100 million in 2003 to over $6.5 billion in 2017.[2]

Coupled with its opening of more than 41 embassies, up from 12 in 2003,[3] a massive expansion of a civilian air network through Turkish Airlines, with an increasing presence in regional and international religious affairs,[4] its commercial and diplomatic networks seem prepared to play a key role in Africa.

1 - Unilateralism: "Where the powerful state disrespects multilateral norms and adopts a self-centered foreign policy", multilateralism: "requires states to follow international norms and pay more respect to international institution" see Tago (August 2017), p. 2.
2 - Captagay (2019), p. 237.
3 - Akca (2019), p. 1.
4 - Akgun, Ozkan (2010), p. 538.

The Debate: A Strategic Shift toward Unilateral Action?

Economic considerations appear to have led and still seem to permeate through Ankara's decision-making in Africa; the mix in the formula appears to be changing. Turkey's increasing use of its military and political resources alongside earlier social and economic ones, across its African interests, may shed light on a wider strategic set of objectives that seem to go beyond Ankara achieving status in Africa as a power in its own right.

Within current research, the most commonly shared view of Turkey's strategic objectives in Africa among non-Turkish observers is that Turkey's strategy in Africa is shifting to gain recognition as a unilateral power - unilaterality often being understood as a measure of power for major states[5] - similar to Russia's derzhavnost, for some even retracing features of the empire from which the modern Turkish state broke in its early years.

Establishing credibility as a unilateral power, Ankara as the capital of a multi-continental power featuring cultural, religious and economic objectives, certainly echoes its imperial predecessor. This holds many similarities to Russia in Africa, portraying themselves as non-colonial states in the continent and using neo-imperialist rhetoric harking back to past great-power status. Many have dubbed this strategy a form of neo-Ottomanism, citing official Turkish rhetoric and state imagery, often placing Erdoğan's leadership at the center - favoring unilateralism and embracing the risk in pursuing it.

Africa as Litmus Test

Offering lower risk to the Turkish state, Turkey's strategy in Africa may offer a way to add clarity to the observers' debate about Turkey's pursuit of strategies for state power projection. This may help African leadership plan to effectively engage Turkish interests across a broad array of touch points.

A closer look can place available Turkish strategic thinking on Africa, the effect of unilateralism in its rhetoric and the extent to which and where Ankara's foreign policy and decision - making - the proverbial rubber on the road - may reflect a growing preference for unilateralism with regard to engaging African interests and working with those interests and non-African powers.

Rationale for this Study

With Africa's litmus potential in mind, this paper will study three of Turkey's decisions as inflection points for strategic Turkish engagement in Africa. The idea in this approach is to focus on these junctures to clarify where to place Turkey's pursuit of a strategy in Africa along a unilateralist-multilateralist spectrum, rhetorical and exhortative rhetoric, as well long-term geo-strategic risk.

5 - Tago (August 2017), p. 2.

II / BASELINE: TURKEY'S POLICY IN AFRICA 10 YEARS AGO

In 2011, ten years ago, Turkey was quite a bit less involved in the African continent than it is today. Turkey had not been waging war there, and Erdoğan had just visited Somalia for the first time. For comparative purposes, Turkish Airlines only flew to 14 African countries[6] compared to over 37 in 2018[7] - reflecting the very different position Ankara had had in regard to Africa. In 2010, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey's foreign minister at the time, outlined Turkey's "zero problems with neighbors" policy.[8]

1 - ECONOMICS

Turkey has had very volatile but generally high GDP growth. From an economic stand-point, Turkey has had a growing interest in Africa. When judged against China and France's trade and investments in Africa, this interest pales, but it does show a continuity in Ankara's engagement in Africa on an economic basis.

African Development Bank

This was further helped in 2008 with the acceptance of Turkey by the African Development Bank (AfDB) as a Non-Regional Member and, by 2013, as a State Participant in the African Development Fund and Member State of the African Development Bank. This in turn greatly strengthened the Turkish construction industry's African presence through increased access to African infrastructure financing.[9]

Diversification

In the two years from 2009 to 2011, Turkey's GDP went from a contraction of -4.8% to annual growth of 11.2%.[10] One economic reason for making Africa a priority may be market diversification toward a continent with a steady, enormous and critical need for infrastructure, a key exportable area of Turkish economic strength. For the longer term, there will be more than enough projects available even with China becoming the most significant external economic player in Africa.

Infrastructure

By 2011, Turkey was already deepening its economic involvement in the African continent. African countries constituted 19.2% of Turkish contractors' international business volume the same year.[11] Though not as invested in the continent then as it is now, Turkish commercial interests had already been increasing in regard to infrastructure deals; the large and globally active Turkish construction industry being a driver for Ankara's interests in Africa and promoting growth.[12]

2 - DIPLOMACY

Populism with an Islamist Lens

The Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rise to power in Turkey reflected a populist shift in Turkish politics, from the Jacobin secularist system instilled by Kemal Ataturk to the Islamic populism heralded by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. As such, religion had not only become a political lens through which Erdoğan depicts Turkey and its role in the world, but a political tool, as made clear by Turkey's active participation in hosting African religious leaders and participating in the Organization for the Islamic Conference (OIC).[13]

A Series of Turning Points

The 2008 "Ankara Declaration on Turkey– African Partnership" at the African Union's 10th Summit in Ankara, aimed at improving investments and trade, marked an important development for Turkey. The African Union's decision to support Turkey's diplomatic interest in Africa can be linked to economic outreach, but not only, education and religion are also likely candidates for this. This then translated into Turkey's candidacy for the rotating non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for 2009-2010, which was supported by 50 out of 53 African states.[14]

6 - Akca (2019), p. 1.
7 - Captagay (2019), p. 66.
8 - Davutoğlu (2010), pp. 97-98.
9 - Wheeler (2011), p. 50.
10 - Hurriyet Daily News (December 2017).
11 - Islim, Mollaahmetoğlu (October 2018).
12 - Babali (February 2020).
13 - Akgun, Ozkan (2010), p. 538.
14 - Wheeler (2011), p. 48.

The Role of Aid

It also appears that at the time, Ankara had started to use aid, education and religion as ways to further establish itself in Africa. In terms of aid, Turkey's first political foray into Somalia was when a famine struck Somalia in 2011. Erdoğan became the first foreign leader to visit the country, bringing with him humanitarian aid to alleviate the devastating effects of the crisis, an impossible burden on the weak state.[15]
This bold move brought him much praise, served as the starting point to cementing Turkey's role in Somalia, and highlighted the political potential of "personalized" aid to the continent.

A Legacy of Education and Culture

Education in Africa was an older endeavor spearheaded by Fetullah Gülen's followers, prior to the 2013 falling out between the AKP and the Gülen Movement (also known as Hizmet or Service). Though even after this event it has continued to represent a means for subtle diplomatic influence on the continent.

Generally speaking, Hizmet is an Islamist movement inspired by the preaching of Turkish Islamic figure Fetullah Gülen, leaning heavily on education and civic service. Gülen's Hizmet followers opened schools in Africa prior to Erdoğan's rise to power and effectively expanded Turkey's cultural reach and interest in Africa from the early 2000s. The AKP enabled the faith group's multi-sectoral network to lead over 100 schools in 50 out of the 53 African countries by 2013, the same countries which had backed Turkey for a seat at the UNSC in 2008.[16]

3 - MILITARY

Multilateral First

Militarily speaking, on its own, Turkey had very little involvement in the continent in 2011. Turkey had so far acted in Africa almost exclusively under multilateral banners, the United Nations (UN) - providing personnel to five different UN peacekeeping operations in Africa, UNMIS in Sudan, MINURCAR in Chad and the Central African Republic, MONUC / MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNOCI in Cote d'Ivoire and UNMIL in Liberia.[17]

NATO in Libya

Interestingly in retrospect, when the UN came to intervene in Libya in 2011, Turkey at first opposed it. Ankara eventually joined the international community as part of the NATO operation, after much American insistence.[18]

Multilateral Muslim Brothers

Continuing with Libya, the collapse of Qaddafi and the ensuing war, chaos and political vacuum, placed many Libyan political Islamists in the position of finding affinities with Turkey, whether in links through the Muslim Brotherhood (MB), benefitting from a regional political windfall, or from the coastal enclave of Misrata, distinctive in Libya for its Ottoman-era historical, ethnic and then MB-related links to Erdoğan's Turkey.

This was only augmented by successive UN-backed positions in Tripoli for a Misratan stake in state power. The seemingly endless Libyan reshuffle within the Tripoli-focused UN process continually proved beneficial to the Islamist bent of Turkish interests in the years following 2011.[19]

A Mainly Multilateral Baseline

Although Turkey had shown remarkable recent growth in its economic and diplomatic interest in the African continent, the scale of its activities did not require hard power as has become the case on some fronts when it moved into engagements outside of its UN/NATO mandates. As will be shown, some of its current actions contrast significantly with the mostly multilateral baseline established in 2011.

15 - Cannon, Rossiter (2019), p. 171.
16 - Angey (2018), p. 53.
17 - Wheeler (2011), p. 49.
18 - Harchaoui (December 2020), p. 3.
19 - Ibid., p. 3.

III / TURKEY'S DECISION TO CREATE THE MAARIF FOUNDATION - JUNE 2016

1 - CONTEXT

The Maarif Foundation is a Turkish-government-funded organization educating over 28 703 students in 291 schools in 34 countries with activities in over 55 countries.[20] It was founded in June 2016, or around a month prior to the failed coup against the Erdoğan-led government. Many schools had been opened by Fetullah Gülen's followers around Turkey, the world, and Africa in particular, even before the Turkish state had demonstrated any interest in the continent.

The Gülen-led Hizmet movement had been a strong ally of the AKP, as Hizmet affiliates and supporters were well represented in law enforcement and the judiciary. Gülen's Hizmet in effect stuck with the AKP in confronting the then independent Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) at the beginning of the 2010s. In the Ergenekon and the Sledgehammer cases, Gülen's Hizmet supported the arrests and prosecutions of many high-ranking military officials and AKP opponents,[21] but tensions between the Gülenist Hizmet and the AKP emerged and continued to rise through 2012-2013.

The AKP closing of many Gülen-led prep schools in Turkey and AKP calls to close Gülen-led schools abroad preceded a massive-scale corruption scandal that targeted high-ranking AKP officials in December 2013. Many pro-AKP supporters openly blamed the corruption scandal on the Gülen movement's 'parallel-state' taking revenge on the AKP.[22]

The AKP counter in the period following the scandal proved effective at pushing out Hizmet followers from political processes and starting to close schools abroad. Though, the AKP had no structure to replace the Gülenists in education diplomacy, leaving Turkey with a gaping hole in its previously strong foreign education policy (from its institutional affiliation with Gülen).

To close the gap, the semi-public Maarif Foundation was created. The foundation was energetically anti-Gülen from the outset, and only a month after its founding tried to take full advantage of the 2016 coup attempt and the blame placed on Gülen and his followers, closing many more schools than the Turkish state had been able to previously.[23]

20 - Nordic Monitor (February 2021).
21 - Captagay (2019), p. XVIII.
22 - Akyol (January 2014).
23 - Akca (2019), p. 4.

2 - THE MAARIF FOUNDATION AND A STRATEGIC SHIFT IN EDUCATION

According to the foundation's official website, it was created in order to serve "as a gateway to [Turkey's international education arena] that will contribute to enhancing cultural and civilizational interaction and paving the way for achieving [common] well-being."[24]

Though it is not in the mission statement, the pro-AKP Turkish media has often labelled the taking over of schools run by "FETO" (the Fetullah Gülen Terrorist Organization, a somewhat foamy anti-Gülen appellation for the group), as one of the main prerogatives of the Maarif Foundation, to curb the organization's "illegal finances," and its "strategy" to "undermine the State."[25]

The Maarif Foundation explicitly provided agency for a purge within an education space targeted by AKP for closure, interestingly by either acquisition or dis-establishment. According to Maarif's head, Birol Akgun, the Foundation was able to close 75% of all Gülen-linked schools worldwide, excluding those in Europe and the US, and has done so by either turning the schools into Maarif schools, into local public schools, or selling them to other international private schools.[26]

Indeed, Turkey adopted the Maarif agenda at a time when its education system saw over 70,000 teachers fired or suspended in the purge following the 2016 coup attempt. There were many public schools in desperate need of teachers in Turkey, hence sending them around the world seems like a fraught affair.

For the purpose of turning Gülen schools into Maarif ones worldwide, to keep the diplomatic platform operating, the Turkish AKP government needs a significant number of staff and resources. According to the International Science Association (ISCASS), Turkey has had issues with having enough qualified teachers, finances and physical capacity.[27]

In this context, the export of AKP government-sanctioned teachers to schools around the world, for the purpose of turning Gülen schools - many having operated for over 30 years - into Maarif ones, replacing staff with at best a remote connection to the new domestic AKP urgency, must have seemed like an ambitious, tough and costly endeavor.

24 - Maarif Foundation website
25 - Daily Sabah (January 2021).
26 - Ibid.
27 - ISCASS (2019), p. 2.

3 - THE MAARIF FOUNDATION IN AFRICA

In Africa, in the shadow of the largely successful Gülen schools, the Maarif Foundation has had an important role to play, with fewer political or cultural impediments. The AKP seems to get three main benefits from Maarif in varying degrees: Getting rid of what it views as a major rival and enemy, prestige and influence back to Turkey through educating some of the continent's elite, and a potentially increased, AKP government-sanctioned presence with a long-term agenda.

The upsides from Maarif do not preclude costs or downsides from the transition from Gülen schools, a major one being undermining a legacy of longevity. With the Turkish economy's current downturn, it is very possible that over time many schools will be either dropped by the Maarif foundation or, as reflected elsewhere in Maarif practices, sold to other international schools (integrating them into the public education sector would be a more difficult and burdensome task for many African states).

Though the Maarif has interesting facets which may prove useful to Turkey in the long-run, it does represent a sizable commitment. The investment recently ballooned by over 300% to 1.23 billion lira or 140 million euros, drawing much criticism due to hardships faced by the domestic education system.[28]

Turkey's strategic commitment to foreign ties through education, including Africa, is a factor behind the creation of the Maarif Foundation but there has been a backlash within Turkey due to the costs incurred, and there has been a backlash in Africa from the closure policies, sometimes lasting months before reopening.[29] Countering the Gülen movement takes priority and is often at odds with the preceding objective, Turkey's strategic commitments through education. The AKP-led Turkish state reset the outreach to conform to AKP prerogatives first, and used ongoing commercial cooperation and aid to leverage many states to agree to transfer or close schools,[30] reflecting the priority of the anti-Gülen mission for the Maarif organization.

If Erdoğan and the AKP's hold on power were to end, it is very possible that the crusade against Gülen's Hizmet would end. Though Turkey would still have an important stake in education on the African continent, an AKP-shorn Maarif might be re-gifted to Turkey's new leaders or it might just be suppressed, as it is an unambiguous embodiment of the AKP government and its world views.

28 - Buyuk (February 2021). 29 - Daily Sabah (January 2021).
29 - Stockholm Center for Freedom (December 2017).
30 - Angey (2018), p. 61.

IV / TURKEY'S DECISION TO OPEN A MILITARY TRAINING BASE IN SOMALIA - SEPTEMBER 2017

1 - CONTEXT

With its poverty-stricken population, its ongoing civil war and the terrorism it faces on a daily basis through Al Shabaab and an Islamic State offshoot since 2015, a climate of insecurity reigns in Somalia. This has not stopped Turkey from investing heavily both diplomatically and commercially in the state. Indeed, Turkey has greatly increased its economic and diplomatic footprint in Somalia, with its exports to the country totaling $5.1 million in 2010 and over $123 million by 2016.[31] With total investments now reaching over $1 billion,[32] Turkey's interest in the state appears evident.

As part of its efforts to develop its position in Somalia, it inaugurated a military training base called Camp TURKSOM in Mogadishu in September 2017 - its largest foreign military base to date. Though difficult to pinpoint the exact date of the start of construction, according to the Turkish Anadolu Agency, construction for the base would have begun around March 2015,[33] very likely overlapping with that of the Qatar base.

The facility houses around 200 Turkish soldiers and officers including around 100 instructors meant to deliver curriculums to batches of 1500 Somali soldiers,[34] aiming to graduate around 10 000 troops or around 3 battalions per year.[35] Though the base represented a new dimension of Turkish military presence in the state, it had already operated training missions there, having previously signed a smaller scale military training pact in May 2010, having led the second UN operation in Somalia, UNOSOM II in 1993,[36] and having invested in the African Union mission stationed in the country.

2 - CAMP TURKSOM'S PURPOSE

The base met several objectives according to governmental and pro-governmental sources. To them, the TURKSOM base ostensibly serves to strengthen the Somali security apparatus, and gives Turkey a forward presence by establishing an overseas base, emulating other powers such as the US, with their own bases. TURKSOM thus makes Turkey the sixth non-African country to have permanent bases in Africa, most of them in this part of the continent (after the US, France, UK, China and Japan). Turkish military writers emphasize the rich resources of the Horn of Africa and choke points in the region like the straits at Bab al Mandab. Interestingly, they often include the possibility of extending Turkey's arms markets, noting a coherent military force and stability are needed on the customer side to do so.[37]

For most of these objectives to be credibly met, the TURKSOM "base" needs to be fully staffed as an operating forward military base. Though some pro-Turkish media have pushed the idea that the TURKSOM facility is indeed a forward operating military base, definitionally and objectively there may be a few gaps. Indeed, compared to other overseas Turkish bases, even though TURKSOM is technically the largest, it has relatively few soldiers stationed there, not enough to support military operations from the bases: a smaller Kosovo base has twice as many troops[38] the base in Qatar has considerably more. TURKSOM is very much a training facility, and at least currently, could not function as a launchpad for Turkish military activity in the region.

31 - Coskun, Hussein (September 2020).
32 - Özcan (November 2020).
33 - Anadolu Agency (October 2016).
34 - Cannon, Rossiter (Winter 2019), p. 170.
35 - Kasapoğlu (November 2020).
36 - Cannon, Rossiter (Winter 2019), p. 173.
37 - Şahin et al. (2019), p.22.

Interestingly, the TURKSOM timeline fits and follows from a domestic political context centered around the AKP and the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). The progressive purging of TAF leadership, from trials in the 2010s running up to 2016 and the failed coup, the AKP government was focused on ensuring a TAF loyal to Erdoğan's leadership. After this domestic cycle was complete, the AKP government started to rely upon and deploy the TAF in much more political contexts.

After the ouster of Gülenists from government, many military officers who had been jailed on Ergenekon and Sledgehammer charges were freed. Many acquired influential positions in the military and the state – perhaps influencing Turkey's foreign policy toward further military involvement around that time.[39]

3 - TURKSOM'S ROLE IN TURKEY'S POLICY

Turkey is known for using aid as a soft power tool in Africa, spending over $1 billion on aid and infrastructure in Somalia through organizations like the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Turkish Red Crescent.[40] Having a strong security apparatus is a first step for a war-stricken state like Somalia to hold together. Turkey's strategic calculus of using soft power tools still fits the TURKSOM format – even though it does include elements of hard power. In the case of TURKSOM, Turkey seems to be using its hard power expertise to help it achieve soft power objectives.

As many Turkish military commentators have noted, Turkey could indeed be seeking great power prestige from TURKSOM. The aid that has been given to Somalia has been extraordinary, and great power prestige may be a bonus outcome from billions spent on the ailing state.

TURKSOM is meant to train over half of Somalia's projected force of 22,000[41] and does so through a costly process, sending soldiers for additional training in Turkey and teaching them Turkish through intensive language courses.[42] Turkey's decision to open TURKSOM as a military training facility in Somalia does not appear to be based on a decision to eventually project military power from TURKSOM.

Instead, TURKSOM appears to have been a way to unilaterally deepen Turkey's involvement in the region, through Somalia, perhaps made possible by Turkey's increased ability to deploy hard power resources for soft power purposes, a model that can be seen among most of the other great powers represented in Africa. At the same time, it is hard to gage if the shift towards hard power is solely, and more importantly soundly driven by the objective stated above. Whether this adoption of soft power missions had to follow Erdoğan's' taming' of the Turkish military is less clear and may need to be left for further analysis of the Turkish military.

Turkey's position vis-à-vis the anti-Muslim Brotherhood leadership of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt is another aspect. Each is much more directly affected by nearby developments in Somalia than would be Turkey. As military powers, they cannot but respect Turkey's depth and capability. Building TURKSOM does elevate Turkey strategically in their context, with a contrast sharpened as Erdoğan charts an increasingly Islamist path aligned with Muslim Brotherhood interests. Turkey's setup in TURKSOM - from this standpoint - is perhaps also a reflection of Erdoğan's commitments to Qatar, where support for the Muslim Brotherhood has been a source of conflict with its neighbors.

38 - Cannon, Rossiter (Winter 2019), p. 177.
39 - Edelman (March 2021), p. 18.
40 - Unveren (February 2021).
41 - Cannon, Rossiter (Winter 2019), p. 174.
42 - Which is understood to be taking place at the Isparta Commando Training Command known for training soldiers who fought in Syria and Iraq,

V / TURKEY'S DECISION TO INTERVENE IN THE DEFENSE OF TRIPOLI IN LIBYA - JANUARY 2020

1 - CONTEXT

The Libyan Civil War had been an ongoing series of mostly skirmishes in relatively confined areas since 2011, when a NATO coalition intervened and tipped the scales, mostly with air power, under the Responsibility to Protect campaign. The result of the intervention pushed its long term dictator, Muammar Qaddafi, out of power, leading ultimately to a struggle between many stakeholders in Libya, among them a UN recognized government, aligned with the Misrata-based political Islamist General National Congress (now the Government of National Accord or GNA) operating in the coastal west, controlling most of Tripoli, and remnants of the Libyan National Army that would eventually coalesce under self-appointed Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, one of the few former Generals who fled Qaddafi for a time to the US. Extremist factions like Al-Qaeda, the Islamic State (IS), many of whom drifted over to Libya for the fight, were mostly in the coastal hills roughly in the center. Various other factions, either had tribal or localized roots or, in most cases, both.

Prior to the war, Turkey had had a generally good commercial relationship with the Qaddafi regime and enjoyed important outstanding contracts, believed to be worth around $28 billion at the time of the collapse.[43] Though, after some convincing from NATO, Turkey renounced opposition and its veto on the operation and thus backed the no-fly zone imposed over the country.

It is also important to note that much of the Libyan coast, where most Libyans live, had been Ottoman. As a direct heir to the ancient Roman empire, Ottoman Libya retraced the ancient Roman Tripolitania in the west, and Cyrenaica in the East. Over the centuries, coastal Ottoman trading hubs across the Eastern Mediterranean had significant populations of imperial purpose, often a mix of Turkish and Egyptian - in many places closer to the Anatolian core, alongside a Greek population that traced back to Alexander's Macedonian empire. Many Libyans still regard the Misratan legacy, roughly in the middle of the western and eastern halves, as an Ottoman imposition on the Libyan tribes. With all of that history, the affinity between the Turks and the Misratans is current, and many have close commercial ties to Turkey.

Nothing had pointed towards Turkey conducting any significant unilateral actions in Libya on the behalf of the GNA or Misratans in general, but they did already enjoy active support from Qatar while the relatively secularist Haftar and the LNA enjoyed the support of the UAE. This appeared to change around April 2019,[44] when Haftar decided to break the national stalemate and advance towards Tripoli. He did so emboldened by the Russian private military corporation Wagner group (in addition to the tacit support of states like France and Egypt, and possibly, according to a UN report, clandestine support from entrepreneurial collaborators of then-US president Donald Trump, like Erik Prince).[45]

The often militarily-dominant Misratans initially appeared to buckle in what became unusually heavy fighting along the coastal roads. This proved to be the inflection point for Turkey's real entrance into the conflict, first supplying Bayraktar TB2 drones and officers to pilot them following the onset of Haftar's advance,[46] then officially announcing its intervention in January 2020.[47]

Around the same time as Turkey's first support to Libya, in October 2019, Turkey announced a TAF offensive into north-eastern Syria code-named Operation Peace Spring, largely against the US-allied Kurdish-majority Syrian Democratic Forces. It followed hard upon Erdoğan engaging then US President Trump directly, whereupon he summarily ordered US troops redeployed from large parts of the Kurdish enclave. Intervention by the TAF from its border into Syria in force was massive but measured, fully telegraphed, and it soon gained Russian acquiescence. The message was clear, this was no longer a war by proxy for Turkey.

43 - Kientz (November 2020), p. 12.
44 - Kington (May 2019).
45 - Walsh (February 2021).
46 - Paid for an ordered by the GNA, Tastekin (September 2019).
47 - Gall (January 2020).

2 - TURKEY'S MOTIVES FOR INTERVENING IN LIBYA

In Libya, Russia was operating under a nominal proxy, Wagner, against Turkey's ally, formed around the UN-recognized GNA, and was making swift progress. It is not clear whether Russian acquiescence in Syria motivated Turkey to act but the collapse of the GNA appeared imminent. The immediate conditions preceding Turkish intervention are worth listing:

- **Haftar's rapid advance toward Tripoli, with clear Russian support.**
- **Ankara's allies in Misrata rapidly running out of options.**
- **Turkey going through a surge in political nationalism.**
- **The TAF arguably under the tightest civilian control since Ataturk.**
- **An increasingly plausible risk of even losing Misrata to the Russian-assisted advance.**
- **MB-related reversals, among which the GNA might number, thanks in part to the UAE.**
- **A tactical opportunity to intervene decisively, committing few TAF troops to the ground.**
- **Few worries of a Trump-led US triggering a direct backlash.**

The sudden and massive increase in Turkish support to the defense of the Misratan-backed GNA in Tripoli[48] reflected the urgencies of the facts on the ground, but it rapidly became more than redeploying proxies from Syria to fight Russian proxies in Libya.

Turkey had been providing support to the GNA from at least 2014. Erdoğan appeared to have purposely kept Turkey's role small. Reporting suggests it was mostly through allowing arms to be smuggled from Turkey by Misratans exiled in Turkey under Qaddafi.[49] At the time, the post-Qaddafi conflict in Libya was just taking shape and was largely marked by low-intensity skirmishes among militia groups, with the Misratans protecting themselves by increasingly seeking a pivotal role.
In July 2013, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) had suffered a major regional reversal, and the Misratans were no doubt weakened by it. Next door in Egypt, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi had ousted elected Egyptian MB leader Mohamed Morsi from the Egyptian presidency. Tensions between MB-supportive Erdoğan and the largely secularist TAF General Staff were on their approach to a 2016 crescendo. NATO's role in precipitating the Libyan deterioration was inhibiting a coherent multilateral intervention. So, despite growing shortcomings in MB-allied Qatar's support for the Misratans, Turkish scenarios for an AKP-ordered move into Libya on behalf of the MB-backed Misratans were simply not feasible.

The facts were different four years later. When Turkey started its remarkable drone campaign on the behalf the Misratan-backed GNA, interestingly, Turkey did so after the GNA had agreed to pay for the support. Even then, with Turkish drones seeming to have numbered in the dozens, conflict was still small-scale in comparison to UAE-backed raids and Russian Wagner Group's task forces providing ground support.[50]

In the same period, the 2018 Turkish elections brought ultra-nationalists to the political forefront as part of the governing coalition with the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).[51] This shift included policies reflecting an increased sense of nationalism and even ethno-nationalism, and a narrative for entering conflicts to defend 'natural' allies.

48 - Phillips (July 2020).
49 - Wehrey (2020), p. 18-19.
50 - Tastekin (September 2019).

Frictions occasionally emerged within the new ruling coalition. Erdoğan's MB-friendly flavor of political Islam was not a natural fit for the mostly secular ultra-nationalists, they did not always coexist happily. In Libya, a convergence of both narratives presented itself. With Erdoğan managing his coalition partners, Turkey's domestic political calculus now included obligations that it could meet publicly by taking a role in the Libyan conflict.

In Libya, the root of the word 'Misrata' suggests Egyptian (Misr means Egypt in Arabic) immigrants to contemporary Libyans. Muslim Brotherhood-linked Misratans claimed Turkish ethnic links. The Libyans identify the arrival of the Misratans as recent, during the period when the Ottomans ruled the Eastern Mediterranean, including Egypt, over most of the span between the 16th and 19th centuries.[52]

From 2014 to 2019, Turkish media had come largely under Erdoğan's control. For Libya, domestic Turkish media adopted high contrast motifs like Haftar's forces oppressing 'Turkish' Libyans, referring to them as Koroğlu, evoking ancient pan-Turkic heroic imagery.[53] This was a new approach - supplying a narrative for guiding Turkish interests in Libya. Neither the term nor the population had received much Turkish media exposure in the years prior.

At a first glance, Haftar's advance on Tripoli appears to have been decisive for Turkey's intervention. However, the Mediterranean memorandum signed with the GNA (on behalf of all of Libya) in November 2019-shortly after the start of Haftar's campaign-is often cited as the main reason for Turkey having intervened in the conflict. The Mediterranean memorandum sets a maritime boundary and offers Turkey a bilateral treaty that establishes an expanded Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), enabling controversial territorial and resource claims opposed by nearly every other sovereign interest in the region, contravening several legal and commercial multilateral ones.

The run up to the Mediterranean memorandum tells more about Turkish interests than Libyan ones. Turkey had tried to get the GNA to sign it for Libya several times before. In 2018, defense minister Hulusi Akar visited the GNA to convince it of Greece's violation of Libya's continental shelf – an effort that was swiftly brushed aside by the Libyan side.[54] Later, when the GNA signed it as Libya, it was in the face of an existential threat the GNA faced in late 2019 / early 2020, after which Turkey intervened and saved the GNA. The GNA's ultimate acceptance of the Mediterranean memorandum was all but explicitly transactional by that point.

Several other factors seemed important in limiting the risks Turkey faced in its defense of the GNA. One was the UN Secretariat's endorsement of the GNA, albeit in an extenuated diplomatic reconciliation process that had lost gravity over the years. On the one hand was the US, where regional policy was increasingly adrift, let alone moving away from NATO. Erdoğan enjoyed strong bilateral US ties at almost exclusively the head of state level. Without much to contradict it, Erdoğan no doubt had more room to act with less backlash. On the other hand, he faced an unstable but momentarily effective array of support for Haftar and a military campaign. Some European states like Germany and Italy were even in effect supporting the GNA via residual support of the UN process.

51 - Kadercan (July 2018).
52 - Orphan (January 2020).
53 - Guvendik (September 2020).
54 - Ekathimerini (November 2018).

Turkey's military intervention was quickly effective. Its drones and Turkish-supported ground forces, generally Syrian mercenaries,[55] stopped the advance decisively. Erdoğan had managed to limit its costs and the risk of involvement while maximizing its impact and extricability, particularly from actions perpetrated by its proxies on the ground. It was a remarkable success for Erdoğan and offered a sharp contrast to what he was able to do in response to the fall of Morsi in Egypt.

Some commentators point to a lack of a concerted long-term strategy regarding Libya in general, made evident by Turkey's inability to deal with local tribal dynamics.[56] The criticism is probably arm chair-limited. Libyans have trouble dealing with Libyan tribal dynamics. Many Libyans would not have helped rescue the Misratans from losing a nearly decade long grab for national dominance. Turkey's cautious warfare choices and lack of perceivable plan to deal with key Libyan tribes may just as well indicate strategic prudence, rather than lack of preparedness.

3 - TURKEY'S GAINS FROM INTERVENING

Erdoğan did get a lot out of pushing off the Russians and stalling Haftar's forces. The Bayraktar drones were deployed with strategic-level success. Turkey's Libyan presence also broadened Erdoğan's options for pursuing a pressure strategy on Europe, as it put Turkish operations next to another major source of refugee flows into Europe - but facts and available information do not indicate that an African refugee pressure strategy was a central objective.

Erdoğan effectively re-asserted Turkey's status as an Eastern Mediterranean power. The Mediterranean memorandum appears to have been one of the most important pieces in Ankara's strategic calculus, coupled with mollifying the ultra-nationalists' need to defend Turks at home and abroad, in this case Libya.

The objective of fulfilling unilateral ethno-nationalist objectives seems to have driven much of the action and colored the lens by which Turkey officially formulates its view of the Eastern Mediterranean and its 'isolation'. Firmly in control, Erdoğan shifts Turkey's strategic posture to suit his sense of Turkish priorities, embracing rivals and distancing allies when it suits him. The lack of consistency may not be without costs, but it is there. Turkey bought a Russian S-400 air defense system despite the ire of its NATO allies.[57] Turkey has also guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity, and blocked Russian mercenaries in Libya while cutting deals with the Russians to attack Kurds in Syria. The convolutions of Russian and Turkish interests in Azerbaijan, Syria, the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya offer many examples.

In Turkey's Mediterranean memorandum, there is another example, possibly shedding light on a more consistent objective. Erdoğan had tried to get Misrata through the GNA to sign up to it several times before. The effort was not a spur of the moment attempt. Perhaps tentative at first, it seems to be in retrospect a genuine attempt to launch Turkey's nationalist 'Mavi Vatan' or 'Blue Homeland' doctrine, with renewed interest in it after the AKP brought ultra-nationalists into its coalition after the 2018 elections.

55 - Strategy Page (March 2021).
56 - Ibid.
57 - Marcus (April 2019).

Penned around 2006/7 by secular nationalist Turkish admirals, the Blue Homeland concept outlines maximalist claims concerning the Mediterranean and rejects provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which Turkey never ratified. The doctrine sees a zero-sum equation against historical rivals and EU members Greece and the Republic of Cyprus, whose island is partially inhabited by an unrecognized Turkish population. Both have grown resource rich in offshore hydrocarbons along with other non-EU eastern Mediterranean states like Israel and Egypt in particular, without Ankara's benefit or blessing.[58] (Lebanon and Syria's claims to the same offshore resources, despite the extreme weakness of both states, are presumably part of the equation as well).

With the Blue Homeland concept as a backdrop, and the benefits of succeeding in an endeavor such as saving the GNA, Turkey appears to believe that intervening in support of an internationally-recognized GNA entity in Libya could help it plead its case for a redrawing of maritime jurisdictions. The realistic prospect for actual gains from multilateral legal action are remote, requiring a departure from accepted international law.

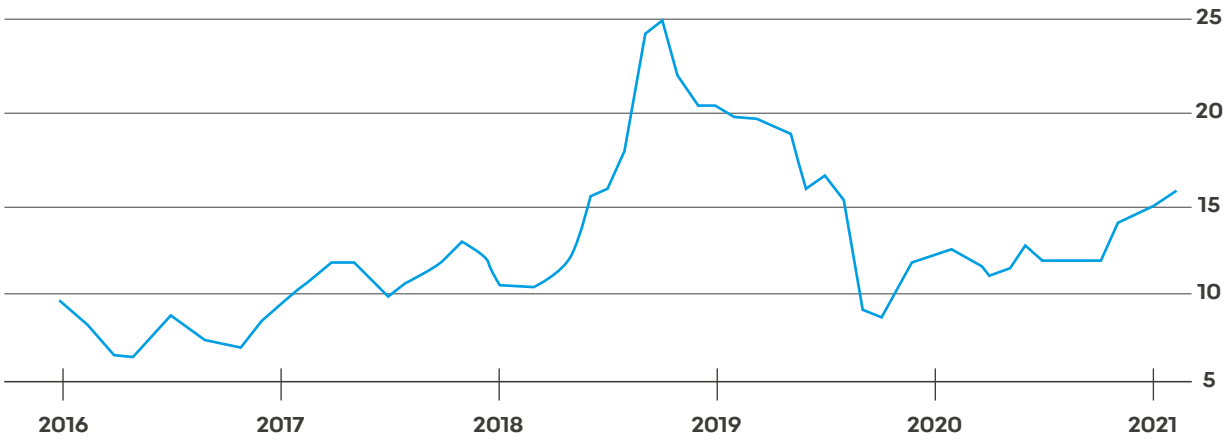
Turkey's other actions, keying off the GNA agreement, have not met with great success. Increasingly defiant offshore Mediterranean gas surveys have shown little gas. With Blue Homeland in the strategic posture, this appears to be more than just a resource issue. Erdoğan's need to assert offshore sovereignty also serves domestic maximalist nationalist objectives.[59] With Libya, Erdoğan linked the intervention to domestic ethno-nationalist requirements as well as UN-recognized territorial integrity, defending the Koroğlu (Misratans as heroic Turks) and then finally securing GNA support for the Mediterranean memorandum.

Turkey's intervention enabled it to gain access to Libya's gold and dollar-rich foreign exchange reserves, then hovering around $85 billion, to alleviate its own hard currency crisis through cash injections – in addition to over $12 billion paid to Ankara, in effect, for the intervention.[60] The GNA-controlled Central Bank of Libya is also believed to have granted the Turkish Central Bank a $6 billion interest-free loan to shore up domestic hard currency demand due to the collapse of the lira in Turkey's January 2018 economic crisis.[61]

TURKISH INFLATON REMAINS ELEVATED

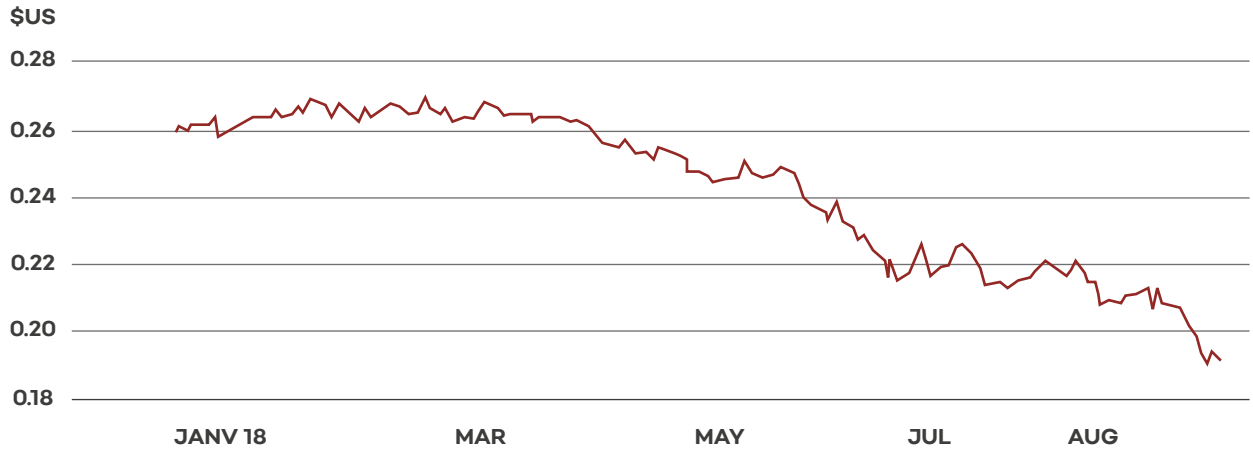
Year-on-year change in CPI (%)

Source : Bloomeberg ©FT



58 - Gingeras (June 2020).
59 - Harchaoui (December 2020), p. 8-10.
60 - Middle East Online (June 2020).
61 - Atalayar (November 2020).

TURKISH LIRA VS US DOLLAR



Source : Bloomeberg. Last update 09/08/2018 10:30 BST

BBC

In contrast with Somalia, intervention in Libya offered solutions that now seem to have been close to core and urgent Turkish interests. However, there is no doubt that the stunning results on the ground of the drone deployment added to Turkish prestige as a military power. Erdoğan chose a path that would highlight Turkish projection of military power, rather than following NATO, bolstering a unilateralist view many Turks share of their national interest.

From a strategic perspective, Turkey's dramatic intervention in Libya is less about Africa and more a recast of Turkish national interest in the Eastern Mediterranean, which has re-emerged as a broadened but core area of interest. There was a need for gaining at least grudging GNA endorsement of the Turkish territorial claim with its Libyan state signature power.

With the post-2018 coalition in place, the Turkish priority in Libya seems to have been domestic. For most, the domestic drivers for intervention were likely overshadowed by Turkey's remarkable military effectiveness in Libya. Nonetheless, Turkey's priorities in Libya seem primarily domestic.

- **There was a narrative recasting of the Misratans backing the GNA as part of a heroic Turkic legacy, a motif that is by design not to carry far beyond a Turkic-focused audience.**
- **As an indicator of limits in audience appeal, it was only with grudging acquiescence and an existential crisis - after repeated attempts - that the GNA signed on to an expansive Turkish Eastern Mediterranean vision, on behalf of Libya, half of which it did not represent.**
- **Priorities seem to have been domestic again when the same GNA provided Libyan Central Bank relief for Ankara's Central Bank hard currency crunches. This infusion was probably truly heroic in impact, as the Turkish Central Bank was in real trouble at the time.**
- **By contrast, a history of Muslim Brotherhood ties between the Misratans, the Qataris and Erdoğan's AKP did not appear to be decisive on their own for Erdoğan to intervene, at least in the mid-decade years before the 2018 elections, when MB interests in Misrata were already clear.**

The intervention in Libya was about shaping narratives, but not all about blowing new life into an expansive nationalist doctrine. There was saving the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Misratans - but they were recast as Turkish heroes who stood behind the GNA, and so saving them was not just by an MB-supportive Turkish head of state. Equally so, the intervention was an unprecedented opportunity to get a hard currency windfall from the GNA in a time of real need, again exercising Libyan state signature power. And, perhaps more than a peer among equally compelling reasons, a way to intervene decisively and kinetically with drones and proxies without a high risk of direct entanglement.

VI / CONCLUSION

A DECADE OF CHANGES

This paper took a look at cases covering the last decade of Turkey in Africa for a perspective on what may come. Turkey's emergence as a regional power with interests in Africa is still an evolving proposition. As far as the last decade suggests, Turkey's story in Africa is very much about Turkey's domestic situation. And, no doubt, the changes in both have been dramatic over the last decade.

Africa is geopolitically one of the most interesting regions of the world for testing the strategies and objectives of powerful states. Often enough, African policies expose narrative and rhetoric to a test of actions and decision-making. In that spirit, the case studies here used inflection points to highlight selected Turkish activity on the continent for the decisions that steered them, with the hope of highlighting Turkey's track record for the prospects it holds for African economic and political gain.

In the last decade, the cases show a penalty Turkey paid shifting policies and sacrificing longstanding engagements to conform its foreign policy to changing domestic priorities. Turkey's African policies and associated decisions became less about strategic objectives and more a lens into Turkey's domestic politics. Over the decade, the mechanics of Turkey's foreign policy decision making became highly responsive to domestic priorities,[62] far less so to stabilizing Turkish engagement at or beyond the edge of its core areas of interest.

If Turkish domestic inclinations toward unilateralism prove to be decisive, domestic unilateralism may drive Turkey to engage where its chances of political success are highest, and where multilateralist structures are weakest. In this sense, there are more than a few beleaguered parts of Africa, and others like Libya and Somalia that might be good fits for a Turkey embarking upon this path.

It may be tempting to generalize from this narrowing of options for Turkey into a narrative that places Turkey into a bucket with states willing to risk multilateral isolation to achieve its objectives, but it is far from clear that Erdoğan's Turkey will want to go that far, or follow the example of Putin's Russia. For one, Erdoğan has been positioning Turkey to oppose Russia in many places, including Libya.

There are policy muscles that atrophy with disuse. The largely unprecedented (since 1945) disruptive effect of US domestic politics on international multilateralism, over the latter part of our decade-long look back is also a factor. That disruption is over, for the moment at least.

Strengthened multilateralist approaches are broadening policies that require more energetic Turkish engagement. It is a shift that Erdoğan and Turkey must address, at least for the term of the current US administration, which is (for the time being) decidedly no longer open to being trumped by one card played from the top. This is a fairly abrupt change, and it will force Turkish state organs to return to breadth in foreign policy, if only to create some room for the top leadership around Erdoğan to maneuver and stay focused on priorities.

62 - Neset, Strand (2019).

THE MULTILATERALIST PROMISE

A lot of stock is being put into African multilateralism as Africa's best path for sustained stability and growth, and for dealing with global scale challenges like climate change and trade. Most African leaders have adopted this approach, and that their best chance for growth will be in part a multilateral story, soon to be written in Africa. Africa has had centuries of contending with unilateralist actors, external and continental, and those who are led by its glitter.

In this context, where Turkish actions on the continent may appear unilateral, they may give cause to an immune response from its most promising African counter-parties. In other words, Turkish preferences for unilateral engagement might be seen as potentially disruptive to an African multilateral growth story. This has the potential to be economically limiting to Turkey and could lower its commercial prospects in Africa, especially loosening the stake Turkey might have had in the unprecedented infrastructure investment which many expect in Africa.

If Turkey's leadership moves away from expanded nationalist pursuits and a unilateralism that fits expanding nationalism easiest, it may pay a domestic price with ultra-nationalists. Going the other way, away from unilateralist pursuits of nationalist objectives, dampens the risk from isolation in multilateral support for domestic economic woes. Further eroding of lower-class conditions will spell trouble at home, and new cleavages with a reinvigorated NATO might prove disruptive to Turkey's defense postures.

These are difficult and core areas of interest for Turkey. But these do not appear to be within the scope of Turkey's interests in Africa. Commercial and cultural interests in Africa seem less and less fully articulated as priorities for Ankara, let alone set in multilateral formats. TURKSOM in Somalia seems a largely detachable undertaking.

WHAT MIGHT BE

All that said, this is not a paper about Turkey but an effort to highlight Turkey's foreign policy decision-making to shed light on impact and implications for Africa. Nonetheless, as we have seen, domestic Turkish priorities have and are likely to continue to figure large in that decision making.

Economic cycles tell a similar story. When the economy suffered from turbulence in Turkey, commercial interests in Turkey turned toward the continuing growth story across the African continent, uneven and difficult as this cycling may be for building long term continent-wide Turkish commercial interests. With reporting quarters during Covid-19 featuring systemic economic reversals in Africa and Turkey, this is a key area that will bear watching.

For Africa's leadership, there may be few offerings that can be made compelling with domestic impact in Turkey.[63] But, Africa is building up to a generational scale investment in infrastructure, and building infrastructure is central to Turkey's exportable commercial strength.

African governments are progressively adding gravitas to their own multilateral efforts - in part to meet the generational challenges they know they face. Here too, Turkey may find its strong multilateral legacy in Africa from a decade past to provide firmer footing upon which to develop its interests in Africa.

63 - Edelman (March 2021), p. 29.

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