Türkiye's Contribution to Modernization of Africa's Security and Defense Autonomy[1]

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Abstract:

Türkiye's engagement with Africa reflects a strategic evolution from cultural and trade partnerships to transformative security cooperation. This study investigates Türkiye's contributions to African defence autonomy through defence technology exports, capacity-building programs, and strategic collaborations. Employing case studies of Libya and Somalia, the article analyses the impact of these initiatives on regional stability and global power competition. Key findings emphasize Türkiye's role as a partner distinct from traditional powers, advancing defence technologies, training local forces, fostering development, and employing adaptive diplomacy in fragmented security environments such as Libya. The study positions Türkiye as a model for sustainable, equitable, and innovative security engagement in Africa, employing qualitative case analysis to examine the multifaceted contributions of Türkiye's defence initiatives.

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Introduction

Africa's importance on the global stage is underscored by its extensive natural resources, strategic geography, and the legacies of colonization. The continent is home to 30% of the world's mineral reserves, significant deposits of rare earth elements, and 65% of arable land, positioning it as a crucial player in global sustainability and technological advancement. Its geographical location encompasses vital trade routes, including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Guinea, which are essential for international commerce (Boudreau et al., 2024).

Despite its considerable wealth, Africa continues to grapple with the enduring impacts of colonial legacies. The arbitrary borders established during the colonial period, coupled with the state-building initiatives of emerging elites, disrupted traditional social structures and self-governance systems, often stifling local development (Ramani, 2021, pp. 3–4). These artificial divisions, along with insufficient post-independence investment in infrastructure, have contributed to ongoing economic and political challenges. This article aims to answer how Türkiye's defense technology exports and capacity-building programs contribute to African security, and what implications these initiatives have for regional stability and global power dynamics.

Technological Advancements and Security Dynamics

Technological advancements play an increasingly pivotal role in shaping global security. Traditional military strategies have evolved, with innovations such as cyberwarfare, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and advanced defense systems dominating international security discussions. Beyond physical hardware, ideological and media strategies, including disinformation and propaganda, have become critical tools for shaping perceptions and influencing outcomes (Forest, 2021, pp. 14–22). For instance, the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria demonstrate how control over narratives can complement physical warfare. These developments underscore the interdisciplinary nature of security science, which integrates technology, societal factors, and strategic defense to address complex global challenges. These technological innovations not only transform military strategies but also empower African nations to develop their defense capabilities.

Non-Military Contributions: Cultural Diplomacy and Development

Türkiye's engagement in Africa encompasses more than just military partnerships; it also prominently features cultural diplomacy. This effort has significantly strengthened Türkiye's presence on the continent through initiatives such as the Türkiye Scholarships student exchange program and the establishment of vocational training centers. These initiatives exemplify a human-centric approach to international relations, fostering goodwill, empowering local communities, and enhancing long-term partnerships.

For example, Türkiye has awarded scholarships to thousands of African students who have pursued higher education in Turkish universities. Many of these alumni return to

their home countries equipped with valuable technical skills, contributing to local capacity building and deepening the ties between Türkiye and Africa. Similarly, vocational training centers established by various African nations provide youth with essential employable skills, bolstering local economies and fostering people-to-people connections that sustain diplomatic trust.

By incorporating educational and cultural programs into its strategy for Africa, Türkiye highlights the significance of soft power alongside its military and economic contributions, ensuring a well-rounded approach to cultivating sustainable partnerships.

Türkiye's Engagement in Africa

Türkiye has emerged as a significant partner for Africa, offering an alternative to traditional powers. This growing influence aligns with Türkiye's broader aspirations to become a key global player in the defense industry. Türkiye's strategic location, at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa, makes it a vital hub for connectivity and trade. Building on this position, Türkiye has prioritized innovation, particularly in defense technologies, as a cornerstone of its global engagement (Málnássy, 2022, pp. 60–71). Recent statements by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan highlight Türkiye's willingness to contribute to the European New Defense Architecture (Tekin, 2025).

Türkiye's historical relationship with Africa is diverse and perceived differently across various political communities. These perceptions range from viewing the Ottoman legacy as a period of shared history and cultural exchange to interpreting it as a period of foreign rule in certain Arab contexts (Besenyő, 2021, pp. 60–71). While Ottoman influence in North Africa is often associated with governance and cultural exchange, perceptions in certain Arab regions interpret this period as one of foreign rule. Conversely, in Sub-Saharan Africa, the absence of direct Ottoman engagement means that contemporary ties are shaped more by Türkiye's modern diplomatic and developmental initiatives than by historical legacies (MFA, 2024). Despite these varying historical interpretations, Türkiye's contemporary engagement in Africa, characterized by decades of goodwill initiatives such as building schools, mosques, water wells, and health infrastructure, has generally fostered trust and provided a unique foothold in African markets. Türkiye has effectively differentiated itself from other global powers competing for influence on the continent (Fenton-Harvey, 2024) by positioning itself as an ally free from imperialist baggage.

Theoretical Framework: Security Science and the African Context

This section provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the intricate security landscape in Africa. It explores the evolving role of military-technical advancements, particularly within the context of Türkiye's growing military engagement on the continent. It examines the concept of security science, its various dimensions, and its intersection with military-technical sciences, thus establishing a framework for analyzing Türkiye's contributions to African defense autonomy and the implications of its expanding military presence (Swanepoel, 2023, pp. 14–17).

The security concept has significantly evolved from a limited, state-centric view focused on military threats to a broader, multi-faceted perspective that includes economic, social, environmental, and human security. This shift has fueled the growth of security studies as an interdisciplinary field and led to the rise of "security science" which aims to provide a robust framework for understanding and tackling complex, interconnected security challenges.

Linking Theory to Türkiye's African Strategy

Buzan's (2007) multidimensional security model—encompassing military, economic, and societal dimensions—provides a lens to analyze Türkiye's holistic approach. For instance, Türkiye's UAV deployments in Libya (military) align with its economic investments in Sudan and cultural scholarships (societal), reflecting a deliberate integration of security science principles.

Barry Buzan argued in his work, People, States, and Fear, that traditional security understandings were "too narrowly founded" advocating for a broader framework encompassing military, political, economic, societal, and environmental dimensions (Buzan, 2007). Despite security science gaining attention, a widely accepted definition is still difficult to find, highlighting the variety of viewpoints on the subject. This complexity requires a thorough analysis of the current definitions.

Buzan's (2007) securitization theory provides a macro-level lens for analyzing Türkiye's multi-domain engagement, emphasizing how cultural diplomacy (e.g., scholarships) enhances societal stability. In contrast, Lasicová and Ušiak's (2013) multi-layered framework highlights the operational synergy between Türkiye's military-technical interventions (e.g., UAVs in Libya) and socio-economic programs (e.g., TİKA infrastructure in Sudan), demonstrating how systemic integration advances defense autonomy (Lasicová & Ušiak, 2013).
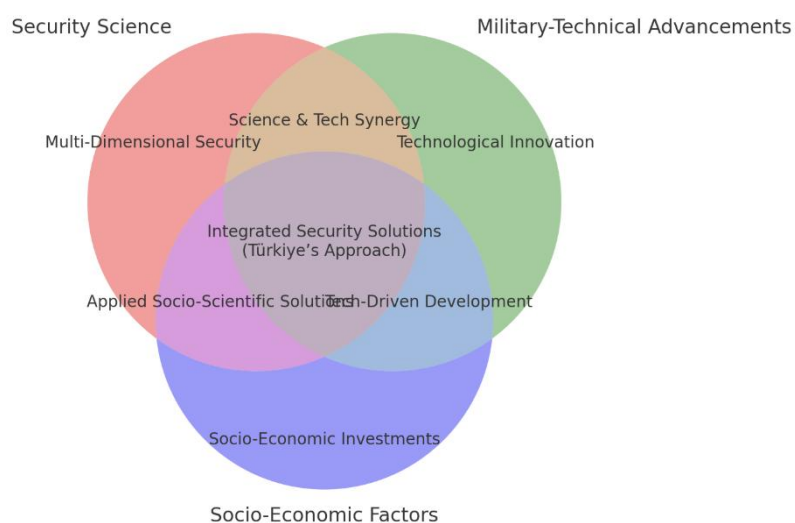
Figure 1: Global Power Focuses and Contributions in Africa
Source: Own library.

This definition aligns with the broader discussion on the interplay between safety and security, as highlighted in academic discourse. For example, revisiting the relationship between these concepts reveals how they intersect in areas such as risk mitigation, crisis management, and infrastructure protection (Karanikas, 2018, pp. 547–551).

Key Strengths of this Definition

Comprehensive Scope: This definition explicitly acknowledges the multi-layered nature of security, encompassing individual, group, local, state, regional, and global levels. This is highly relevant to analyzing Türkiye's engagement in Africa, which operates at multiple levels.

Inclusion of Diverse Factors: The definition explicitly lists a wide range of factors influencing security (military, economic, domestic, social, legal, environmental, energy, and cyber), aligning with the multifaceted nature of security challenges in Africa.

Dynamic and Relative Nature: The emphasis on "temporary (relative) stability" acknowledges that security is not an absolute state but rather a dynamic and constantly evolving condition.

Focus on Elimination of Threats: The definition's focus on eliminating crises, risks, threats, and wars provides a clear objective for security policies and actions.

The evolving and multi-dimensional nature of security is evident in various definitions that extend beyond a purely military-centric focus. Walt (1991) defines security as "the study of the threat, use, and control of military force," emphasizing the role of defense in countering external threats, which aligns with Türkiye's strategic focus on providing advanced defense technologies to African nations (Coates, 2014). Wolfers (1952) describes security as "an ambiguous symbol," incorporating both objective and subjective dimensions, highlighting the necessity of fostering trust and stability, objectives that Türkiye achieves through capacity-building initiatives and humanitarian efforts (Degaut, 2015). Paris (2001) frames security as "the absence of threats to core values," encompassing survival, well-being, basic rights, and a sustainable environment, closely aligning with Türkiye's broader engagement in Africa, which seeks to create a secure and stable environment that promotes governance and development (Paris, 2001). Together, these perspectives reinforce the multifaceted approach to security science advocated in this article, illustrating how Türkiye integrates military, social, and developmental aspects to contribute to Africa's defense autonomy.

Key Debates and African Security Challenges

Security is a contested concept, evolving from a state-centric military focus to a broader, multidimensional understanding. This evolution reflects the changing nature of threats and increasing global interconnectedness. The African context presents unique security challenges, including:

- *Intrastate Conflicts:* Ethnic tensions, resource competition, and weak governance.
- *Transnational Threats:* Terrorism, organized crime, and piracy.

- *Socioeconomic Vulnerabilities:* Poverty, inequality, and lack of access to basic services.
- *Climate Change:* Environmental degradation and resource scarcity.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach involving local, national, regional, and international collaboration. These security science principles are applied in Türkiye's engagements in Africa, as illustrated through case studies in Somalia, Libya, and beyond.

The resurgence of the M23 rebel group in the Democratic Republic of Congo underscores the fragility of African security frameworks. In January 2025, Rwanda-backed M23 forces terminated a ceasefire brokered during the Biden administration and seized Goma, a strategic city of 1 million people. The offensive triggered mass displacement, looting, and prison breaks, while 400 Romanian mercenaries contracted to defend the city surrendered their weapons to UN peacekeepers and fled (Lawal, 2025). This crisis highlights the limitations of external security interventions and the urgent need for sustainable, locally-led defense solutions.

Military-Technical Sciences and Their Intersection with Security Science

Military-technical sciences are a crucial subset of security science. They focus on applying scientific and engineering principles to develop, deploy, and utilize military technology. This field encompasses how technological advancements in weapons, defense systems, and intelligence tools shape military strategy, operational effectiveness, and broader security dynamics.

Military science, as defined by (Piehler, 2024), is a systematized body of knowledge concerning the theory, application, and employment of military units and weapons in warfare and armed conflict. It encompasses military leadership, organization, training, history, ethics, doctrine, tactics, operations, strategy, geography, and technology.

The intersection of military-technical sciences and security science is crucial for addressing contemporary security challenges. Military-technical advancements provide essential tools for security science, enabling:

Enhanced Situational Awareness: Technologies like UAVs, satellite imagery, and advanced sensors.

Improved Response Capabilities: Technologies such as precision-guided munitions, cyber defense systems, and rapid communication networks.

Critical Infrastructure Protection: Military technological advancements are essential for protecting critical infrastructure.

Information Warfare: The use of technology for information operations.

Non-Lethal Weapons: The development of non-lethal technologies.

African Defense & Development Goals with Military-Technical Sciences

Military-technical sciences contribute to African defense and development by effectively integrating military-technical sciences into their security strategies. African states can:

Enhancing Defense Capabilities: Improving situational awareness, reconnaissance, and precision strike options. Develop their defense industries, reduce reliance on foreign arms imports, and strengthen their decision-making autonomy in defense matters.

Fostering Economic Growth: Stimulating economic activity through local defense industries and technology transfer. Stimulate economic activity through the development of local defense industries, create jobs, and facilitate the development of dual-use technologies with civilian applications.

Building Sovereignty: Enhancing defense autonomy and reducing reliance on external powers. Enhance regional cooperation in addressing shared security challenges through the sharing of information, technology, and expertise.

In the African context, military-technical sciences play a crucial role in addressing:

Counter-terrorism and Counterinsurgency: Technologies like UAVs, advanced communication systems, and biometric identification systems.

Maritime Security: Advancements in naval technology.

Border Security: Technologies like surveillance systems, drones, and advanced communication networks.

Disaster Response: Military-technical capabilities.

Africa's Defense Landscape and Geopolitical Challenges

Africa's defense landscape is shaped by a complex interplay of historical, political, and socio-economic factors. From the enduring legacies of colonialism to modern security dilemmas, the continent faces a unique set of challenges that demand both regional and international attention. The interplay of local governance issues, external interventions, and the competition for influence among global powers underscores the strategic importance of Africa in contemporary geopolitics. This section delves into the historical and ongoing factors influencing Africa's security environment, examining the dynamics of conflict, colonial legacies, and the modern-day proxy wars that further complicate the region's pursuit of stability.

Africa's defense landscape reflects this complexity. Internal conflicts, terrorism, and organized crime, combined with external powers' competing interests, have created significant security challenges. Over recent decades, African states have recognized the importance of modernizing their defense sectors, not only to manage domestic instability but also to safeguard their sovereignty in the face of shifting geopolitical dynamics. Historically reliant on Western military assistance, many African states are now pursuing self-reliance by developing indigenous defense capabilities and forging diverse international partnerships, following a period of hesitation between 1950 and 1980, regarding modernization models inspired by either Western or Soviet approaches (Martin, 2012, pp. 71–86).

A History of Conflict and Colonial Legacies

Africa's tumultuous history is characterized by the interplay between its colonial past and contemporary conflicts. The colonial period laid the groundwork for structural

vulnerabilities, such as weak state institutions and arbitrary borders that disregarded Indigenous sociopolitical dynamics. These issues contributed to the "security racket" model described in Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma, where the pursuit of state security paradoxically undermined rulers through the empowerment of "strongmen." This paradox highlights how colonial legacies continue to perpetuate cycles of instability, with security frameworks rooted in control rather than collaboration (Musah & Fayemi, 2000, pp. 13–42).

The necessity for a comprehensive approach to security is evident. Threats transcend traditional military concerns, extending into economic resilience, political stability, and societal well-being. Security in this context encompasses the capacity to maintain sovereignty while addressing external pressures and domestic vulnerabilities. William G. Thom, in his seminal work African Wars: A Defense Intelligence Perspective, highlights the persistent complexity of these threats. His analysis of conflicts ranging from postcolonial insurgencies in Rhodesia to ongoing strife in the Horn of Africa underscores Africa's position as one of the most conflict-prone yet under-analyzed regions in the world (Thom, 2010, pp. 55–97).

Understanding the African Security Crisis

Africa's security challenges are rooted in complex dynamics that have evolved in the post-Cold War era, characterized by state fragility, small arms proliferation, and the rise of non-state actors. The dissolution of Cold War patron-client relationships dismantled state dominance, giving way to private military companies, warlords, and ethno-nationalist movements, all vying for power within weakened governance structures. This has created an environment where criminal networks, resource-driven conflicts, and socio-economic disparities exacerbate instability (Musah & Fayemi, 2000, pp. 13–42).

To address these challenges, a redefined concept of security is critical—one that prioritizes human security. This entails ensuring basic needs, democratic governance, justice, and sustainable livelihoods. Effective security should expand beyond traditional military approaches to involve governments, NGOs, and civil society, fostering a participatory and inclusive framework. Key strategies include:

Arms Control and Demobilization: Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs are essential to remove excess weaponry from communities and provide pathways for ex-combatants to reintegrate into society. Stricter regulations on arms trade and international cooperation are needed to limit the inflow of weapons.

Inclusive Governance and Transparency: The foundations of peace must rest on accountable governance, open dialogue, and public participation. Transparent decision-making and institutional reforms will rebuild trust and empower marginalized groups, such as women and demobilized soldiers, to contribute to security solutions.

Strengthening State Capacity: Investing in state-building measures, such as professionalizing security forces, enhancing economic reform, and fostering legitimacy, will reduce dependence on non-state actors. Governments should focus on providing

equitable access to resources and fostering economic opportunities for at-risk populations, particularly the youth.

Regional Cooperation: African states must embrace collaborative frameworks, such as those offered by the African Union, to tackle cross-border threats and foster collective security initiatives. Shared resources and cooperative defense planning can help mitigate interstate tensions and strengthen regional stability.

By addressing the structural drivers of insecurity—such as weak governance, arms proliferation, and socio-economic inequities—Africa can transition toward a more stable and prosperous future. Reforming military systems, empowering communities, and redefining security as a human-centric endeavor are pivotal steps in breaking the cycle of violence and fostering sustainable peace.

However, expanding defense partnerships can introduce logistical and operational complications, as demonstrated in Ukraine. The reliance on a combination of Soviet-era and NATO-standard artillery systems during the conflict exposed the challenges of maintaining compatible munitions and ensuring operational efficiency. Variations in caliber standards and a fragmented inventory led to supply chain issues and operational delays (Saw, 2023). Without careful planning for equipment compatibility and maintenance, African nations may face similar hurdles when diversifying their defense relationships.

Global Power Competition in Africa

As shown in Figure 1, Africa's wealth of natural resources and global powers have continually sought to engage with the continent in ways aligned with the strategic interests of global actors.

Country	Technology Focus	Key Contributions
Türkiye	UAVs, training	Affordable, adaptable systems
China	Infrastructure loans	Ports, railways under strategic debt
Russia	Wagner Group presence	Resource extraction, paramilitary
France	Counterterrorism ops	Counterterrorism operations and military bases

Figure 2: Global Power Focuses and Contributions in Africa.

In the 21st century, Africa has become a geopolitical battleground where global powers vie for influence and dominance. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formerly known as 'One Belt One Road' has established itself as a dominant economic partner, investing heavily in infrastructure and securing access to critical trade routes. The Warsaw Institute article highlights China's significant role in Africa, detailing projects like railways, harbors, and government buildings, and emphasizing how China uses loans and infrastructure investments to gain influence. For example, China's control of ports under high-interest loans ties African countries economically. Between 2007 and 2020, China invested $23 billion in African infrastructure, vastly exceeding Western

efforts. These strategies reflect China's focus on economic dominance and strategic footholds in Africa (Hajdu, 2023).

China's engagement extends to contested regions like Western Sahara, where economic and diplomatic maneuvers reflect a calculated strategy to expand its influence. For instance, China has historically supported Morocco's claim over Western Sahara in exchange for access to phosphate reserves and fisheries, while simultaneously maintaining rhetorical neutrality to avoid alienating the African Union's stance on self-determination (Besenyő et al., 2022, pp. 249–262). This dual approach underscores China's prioritization of resource acquisition and geopolitical leverage over normative principles, mirroring its transactional partnerships across Africa (Póczik, 2023).

Russia, meanwhile, has focused on military collaborations and leveraging Cold War-era alliances to strengthen its position on the continent. Instead of a direct military presence, Russia employs the Wagner Group, a private military contractor, to exert influence. The Wagner Group operates in 15 African countries with varying levels of confidence and different contracts and strengths. Their primary areas of activity include the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali, Sudan, and recently, Niger and Gabon. This strategy has allowed Russia to provide military support, train local forces, and stabilize governments while securing economic interests through mining, oil, and forestry concessions (Besenyő et al., 2024, pp. 28–41; Foreign Affairs Committee, 2023).

The United States, though attempting to counter these advances with governance and counterterrorism initiatives, has seen its economic influence wane compared to China's (Aydın & Liu, 2024). Amid this competition, African states are asserting their autonomy by diversifying partnerships. Analysts suggest that Africa's best strategy is avoiding alignment with a single power and fostering relationships that serve the continent's developmental goals (Ndzendze, 2023). This dynamic environment underscores the critical need for defense autonomy and robust internal security systems to ensure sustainable growth and sovereignty (Adzande et al., 2024).

Historical Ties with France, Strategic Role, and Military Engagement

France's enduring influence in Africa, rooted in its colonial legacy and sustained through post-independence Françafrique networks (Bovcon, 2013, pp. 5–26), has been exemplified by military interventions like *Operation Barkhane* (2014–2022). Deploying 4,000 troops across Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad, the operation aimed to dismantle jihadist networks but became emblematic of France's contentious role in the Sahel. While framed as a counterterrorism mission, Barkhane faced widespread accusations of *neocolonialism* for propping up corrupt Regimes that prioritize political stability and often sideline governance reforms. This can lead to the triggering of anti-French protests among civilians, reflecting underlying tensions in the society. Casualties and perceived overreach (Erforth, 2020, pp. 560–582; Gnanguênon, 2014).

The operation's outcomes starkly contradicted its objectives: jihadist violence surged by 300% during its tenure, and the Sahelian public increasingly accused France of

prioritizing geopolitical clout over regional stability (ACLED, 2023). This backlash culminated in a wave of coups—Mali (2020–2021), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023)—where junta leaders expelled French forces and pivoted to Russia's Wagner Group for security partnerships. As a Malian activist asserted, "Barkhane was here to save France's influence, not us" (Olech, 2023). Ultimately, the operation's failure highlighted the collapse of France's paternalistic security model in Africa and its inability to adapt to the evolving needs and demands of Sahelian states.

Despite these efforts, reliance on France has diminished in recent years as African states increasingly seek to diversify their defense partnerships. Türkiye, China, and Russia have emerged as alternative partners, offering competitive options in terms of technology transfer, equipment costs, and reduced political strings. Yet, this diversification brings logistical and operational challenges. As illustrated in Figure 2, Türkiye ranks second globally in drone exports (1,421 units), surpassing Russia and France (Gettinger & Drone, 2019).

Rank	Country	Number of drones(approx.)	Rank	Country	Number of drones(approx.)
1	United States	13,000	5	Germany	670
2	Türkiye	1,421	6	India	625
3	Poland	1,209	7	France	591
4	Russia	1,050	8	Australia	557

Figure 3: Approximate Numbers of Drones per Country
Source: Gettinger and Drone (2019).

Türkiye's Contributions to African Security

Against this backdrop of great power rivalry, Türkiye's approach offers a distinct model of engagement that emphasizes long-term collaboration, as explored in this section.

Defence Exports and Technological Innovation

Türkiye's advancements in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology have garnered global recognition, establishing it as a leading innovator in the global defense industry. As to recent reports, Türkiye has surpassed traditional powerhouses such as China and the United States in UAV exports, accounting for 65% of global sales since 2018. This remarkable achievement highlights the efficacy and competitiveness of Turkish UAVs, including Baykar Defense's TB2 Bayraktar and Akıncı, Turkish Aerospace Industries' ANKA and Aksungur, and Vestel's Karayel (Frantzman, 2020; Besenyő, 2021, pp. 81–84).

Türkiye's UAVs, such as the Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı, have revolutionized modern conflict management. Their affordability and adaptability make them ideal for countering asymmetric threats, as demonstrated in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ukraine. These systems have proven effective in countering asymmetric threats and offer African states a cost-effective alternative to traditional suppliers. Its integration into the

defense systems of six NATO and four EU member states further underscores its strategic importance and Türkiye's growing influence in the global defense market (BaykarTech, 2021). For African states, the availability of cost-effective, proven technologies like the TB2 represents a viable alternative to traditional suppliers, especially in addressing asymmetric threats such as terrorism and insurgency.

Capacity Building Through Training and Knowledge Transfer

Africa's diverse economic conditions and unique security challenges make it an ideal partner for Türkiye's defense initiatives. While some African urban centers exhibit relative affluence, many regions contend with socioeconomic disparities, political instability, and legacy influences from former colonial powers. These powers often exercise control through unequal contracts, strategic financial dependencies, and at times, military or proxy interventions.

Türkiye has approached these challenges by prioritizing sustainable development through capacity-building initiatives. Beyond providing advanced defense equipment, Türkiye invests in human capital through military training programs, knowledge transfer initiatives, and infrastructure development. A prime example of this commitment is Türkiye's largest overseas military base in Somalia, which serves as a hub for training Somali forces and enhancing their operational capabilities. Additionally, Türkiye's bilateral assistance—facilitated through agencies like the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA)—extends to countries such as Sudan, Niger, and Djibouti, further solidifying its position as a key ally in Africa (Chaon, 2024).

This strategic focus on fostering resilience and self-reliance contrasts with the extractive approaches often employed by other global actors, positioning Türkiye as a reliable partner for long-term growth and stability.

Strategic Partnerships and Regional Integration

Türkiye has effectively framed itself as an "*Afro-Eurasian state*", reflecting its unique geographical and cultural position between Europe, Asia, and Africa. This identity underpins its efforts to strengthen ties with African nations through diplomacy, trade, and security cooperation. Türkiye's diplomatic footprint on the continent has grown substantially, with the number of embassies expanding from 12 in 2009 to 42 by 2019. This expansion is complemented by increased military cooperation, trade agreements, development aid, and cultural exchange programs, fostering goodwill and positive perceptions among African nations (Ünveren, 2021).

A key aspect of Türkiye's strategy is its emphasis on regional integration. By aligning its initiatives with the African Union's objectives and collaborating with regional security frameworks, Türkiye supports collective efforts to address shared challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, and instability. For example, Türkiye's partnership with Somalia has been pivotal in supporting the Somali government's counterterrorism efforts and rebuilding its defense infrastructure. Similarly, Türkiye has strengthened ties with

Niger and Gambia through security agreements and economic collaborations, targeting regional stability in the Sahel and West Africa.

Year	Key Milestone
2009	Türkiye joins CTF 151 (anti-piracy efforts).
2011	First Africa Partnership Summit held in İstanbul.
2017	Mogadishu military base opens in Somalia.
2019	Libya-GNA maritime agreement signed.
2023	Cybersecurity partnership with Niger launched.

Figure 4: Timeline of Türkiye's Engagement in Africa
Source: Melvin (2019).

A key aspect of Türkiye's strategy is its emphasis on regional integration. By aligning its initiatives with the African Union's objectives and collaborating with regional security frameworks, Türkiye supports collective efforts to address shared challenges such as terrorism, organized crime, and instability. This approach echoes the Ottoman Empire's historical role as a mediator and stabilizing power across diverse regions, where it effectively built alliances with local powers to safeguard mutual interests and maintain regional order (Alloul & Martykánová, 2021). For example, Türkiye's partnership with Somalia has been pivotal in supporting the Somali government's counterterrorism efforts and rebuilding its defense infrastructure, reflecting a blend of modern defense support and capacity-building reminiscent of Ottoman diplomatic strategies. Similarly, Türkiye has strengthened ties with Niger and Gambia through security agreements and economic collaborations, targeting regional stability in the Sahel and West Africa. These efforts parallel the Ottoman approach of leveraging diplomatic, military, and economic tools to manage complex regional challenges and foster applicable, mutually beneficial relationships.

Türkiye's emphasis on mediation and capacity-building offers a contrast to failed external interventions. For instance, Türkiye proposed to mediate the Rwanda-DRC conflict, leveraging its neutrality and growing African partnerships. However, Kinshasa's rejection of Ankara's offer (Ilunga, 2025) reflects the challenges of navigating entrenched geopolitical rivalries. This underscores the importance of Türkiye's long-term, trust-based model—prioritizing local agency over transactional alliances. These engagements demonstrate Türkiye's commitment to fostering mutual growth and development. According to the Republic of Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these initiatives are part of a broader policy framework that emphasizes solidarity, sustainability, and long-term partnerships (MFA, 2024).

Case Studies: Türkiye's Role in African Security

1. Libya: Recalibrating Conflict Dynamics & Security Autonomy

Türkiye's involvement in Libya's civil conflict between the *UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA)* in Tripoli and General Khalifa Haftar's *Libyan National Army (LNA)* in Tobruk reshaped the security landscape and highlighted Türkiye's growing

regional influence. The GNA, backed by the United Nations, sought to stabilize the Libyan capital and uphold a democratic framework, resisting Haftar's authoritarian ambitions to seize Tripoli and consolidate power under a military-led regime. Haftar's LNA received support from key regional powers, including Egypt, the UAE, and Russia (via the Wagner Group), which advanced their strategic interests in North Africa by backing an authoritarian alternative to the GNA (Balzan, 2017). Türkiye aligned with the GNA due to mutual geopolitical interests, particularly the 2019 maritime boundary agreement in the Eastern Mediterranean that directly supported Türkiye's Blue Homeland Doctrine. This intervention not only stabilized the GNA but also influenced neighboring countries' security policies by reinforcing regional maritime security norms. The Blue Homeland Doctrine expresses Türkiye's legitimate maritime rights within the framework of international law. Efforts to protect these rights make an important contribution to global and regional peace in terms of both implementing international law and the possibility of regional countries benefiting from all resources equitably founded by Cihat Yaycı, who is a Turkish author, former rear admiral, and theoretician of irredentism and expansionism.

Key Actions and Impact: Türkiye's involvement in Libya significantly shifted the balance of power during the civil conflict between the GNA and Haftar's LNA. Through the deployment of Bayraktar TB2 UAVs, Türkiye demonstrated the strategic value of advanced, cost-effective technology in modern warfare (Besenyő & Málnássy, 2024, pp. 3–17). Key results included halting the LNA's advance on Tripoli and securing the 2019 maritime boundary agreement, bolstering Türkiye's Blue Homeland Doctrine. While rival powers like Egypt and Russia countered Türkiye's influence, the intervention underscored the role of innovative military technologies in achieving geopolitical objectives (Málnássy, 2024, pp. 104–121).

Strategic Goals: Türkiye's intervention was underpinned by three primary objectives:

1. *Securing the Maritime Agreement:* The Türkiye-GNA deal delineated exclusive economic zones (EEZs) in the Eastern Mediterranean, bolstering Türkiye's claims to contested waters rich in energy resources and challenging rival maritime claims by Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration. This provides additional context for why Türkiye pursued the GNA maritime agreement and how it relates to the broader Eastern Mediterranean conflicts with Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration (Köse, 2021).

2. *Enhancing Regional Influence:* By supporting the GNA, Türkiye expanded its leverage in North Africa, aligning its actions with the Blue Homeland Doctrine, which emphasizes safeguarding maritime interests and securing critical trade routes (Yaycı, 2020).

3. *Countering Rival Powers:* Türkiye's presence balanced the influence of regional adversaries like Egypt and the UAE, as well as global actors like France and Russia, who sought to expand their strategic dominance in Libya by backing Haftar. A pivotal aspect of Türkiye's strategy was the maritime jurisdiction agreement signed with the GNA on November 27, 2019, which delineated exclusive economic zones in the Eastern

Mediterranean. This agreement not only bolstered Türkiye's claims to contested waters rich in energy resources but also countered the influence of rival powers in the region.

Challenges and Rival Powers: Despite its successes, Türkiye faced significant challenges in navigating the complex geopolitics of Libya. Egypt vehemently opposed the GNA due to concerns over its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood, while France and the UAE criticized Türkiye's intervention, fearing destabilization and the strengthening of Islamist-leaning factions. Russia's Wagner Group amplified these challenges, providing direct military support to Haftar, escalating the conflict, and increasing the risk of a proxy war in the region. These rival powers' actions often clashed with Türkiye's strategic goals, necessitating a delicate balance between maintaining its influence and avoiding broader escalation.

By intervening in Libya, Türkiye not only solidified its role as a critical partner to the GNA but also reinforced its position as a key regional player capable of influencing the security architecture of North Africa. This involvement underscored the strategic value of Türkiye's advanced military technologies, such as UAVs, as tools for projecting power while simultaneously advancing geopolitical objectives in contested regions.

In early 2025, Türkiye's engagement with Libya's eastern factions deepened further when Major General Saddam Haftar—son of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar—visited Ankara for formal military meetings, signaling a significant warming of relations. Shortly after, the Libyan House of Representatives, aligned with the LNA, established a parliamentary committee to re-examine the 2019 Türkiye–GNA maritime agreement, which had been dormant due to internal divisions. This move is interpreted as a potential precursor to broader recognition of the maritime MoU by both Libyan factions, reinforcing Türkiye's long-term strategy in the Eastern Mediterranean. These developments underline Ankara's adaptive diplomacy and its capacity to re-engage former adversaries in pursuit of shared security and energy interests (Libyan News Agency, 2025).

This shift reflects Türkiye's pragmatic recalibration strategy. By presenting Libya's eastern factions with tangible maritime and economic benefits—such as contesting Greek and Egyptian EEZ claims—Ankara has offered a "better deal" that reframes past hostilities into future cooperation. The evolving relationship with the LNA demonstrates how Türkiye's strategic diplomacy combines short-term tactical gains with long-term geopolitical recalibration.

2. Somalia: Capacity Building for Defense Autonomy

In Somalia, Türkiye has adopted a long-term approach that blends military and economic engagement to address security and development challenges. This partnership reflects Türkiye's commitment to fostering defense autonomy in fragile states (Eyrice Tepeciklioğlu et al., 2023, pp. 289–294; Talbot, 2023, pp. 53–85).

Key Actions: The establishment of Camp TURKSOM (Somali Turkish Task Force Command), Türkiye's largest overseas military base, has been central to training Somali forces. These efforts have strengthened Somalia's ability to combat threats posed by

groups like Al-Shabaab. Additionally, Türkiye has assumed management of Mogadishu's airport and seaport, enhancing economic activity and governance.

Outcomes: Türkiye's holistic approach has not only enhanced Somalia's defense capacity but also positioned Türkiye as a trusted partner in the Horn of Africa. Over 1,500 Somali forces have been trained, contributing to a measurable decrease in security incidents in key regions. These efforts align with Türkiye's hybrid peacebuilding model, simultaneously advancing short-term stabilization and long-term resilience (Eyrice-Tepeciklioğlu, 2021, pp. 200–211).

Challenges: Despite these gains, over-reliance on Turkish training risks creating new forms of dependency. For instance, 80% of Somali officers trained by Türkiye reportedly lack post-training logistical support, raising sustainability concerns (Melvin, 2019, pp. 14–16).

Sustainability Considerations: Türkiye's military presence offers a dual opportunity: to foster Somalia's defense autonomy and contribute to regional stability. However, to avoid replicating external aid pitfalls, Türkiye must support broader capacity-building—including logistics, institutional reform, and closer alignment with AU-led security strategies.

3. Sudan: Broadening Security Partnerships

Sudan's strategic location along the Red Sea makes it pivotal in regional security dynamics, and Türkiye's deepening partnership reflects its ambitions to expand its influence in the region.

Türkiye's 99-year lease on Suakin Island integrates military collaboration (e.g., naval training facilities) with economic revitalization, including tourism infrastructure and port modernization. This dual approach mirrors Ottoman-era strategies of combining trade and security, fostering Sudan's capacity to safeguard Red Sea trade routes while stimulating local employment (MFA, 2024). However, tensions with Egypt over Nile River disputes complicate long-term sustainability.

Key Actions: Türkiye has established facilities for military training and implemented significant development projects through the *Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA).* These projects include building schools, hospitals, and agricultural infrastructure, reflecting Türkiye's multidimensional approach to partnerships.

Strategic Importance: Sudan's proximity to key maritime trade routes and its role in the Red Sea region underscore its value to Türkiye's security and economic strategies. By bolstering Sudan's defense capabilities and contributing to its development, Türkiye has strengthened ties with a nation pivotal to maintaining stability in the region.

Challenges: Challenges in managing the ongoing humanitarian crisis and ensuring effective partnerships amid internal conflict.

4. Niger and Gambia: Securing the Sahel and West Africa

Türkiye's expanding footprint in West Africa highlights its commitment to addressing the unique security challenges of the Sahel, particularly in Niger and Gambia.

Niger: Counterterrorism and Tech Transfer

Türkiye's 2023 cybersecurity partnership with Niger exemplifies its focus on asymmetric threats. By deploying Bayraktar TB2 drones and training Nigerien forces in digital surveillance, Türkiye addresses Sahelian jihadism while reducing reliance on French-led operations. This aligns with Niger's post-2023 coup shift toward diversified partnerships, though interoperability challenges persist with existing Western systems (Mustapha, 2024).

Gambia:

Türkiye's role in Gambia focuses on internal security and economic development. Turkish advisors have provided critical training to Gambian police forces, while Turkish companies have taken on the management of key infrastructure, including ports.

Challenges: Issues of logistical compatibility when integrating Turkish systems with existing Western technologies.

Across Libya, Sudan, Niger, and Somalia, Türkiye's interventions reflect a nuanced and adaptable strategy (Sıradağ, 2018, pp. 308–325). While Libya and Somalia represent high-stakes engagements with direct military involvement, Sudan and Niger illustrate Türkiye's capacity to leverage economic and technical partnerships. Despite challenges such as geopolitical tensions and regional instability, Türkiye's actions underscore its commitment to fostering local capacity and advancing Africa's security autonomy.

5. Comparative Analysis: Türkiye vs. Traditional Powers

While China prioritizes infrastructure loans (e.g., BRI ports) and Russia leverages paramilitary groups (e.g., Wagner), Türkiye distinguishes itself through localized capacity-building. For example, Türkiye's Mogadishu military base trains Somali forces, whereas France's Operation Barkhane focused on direct counterterrorism. This contrast highlights Türkiye's sustainability-driven model.

Region	Key Actions	Outcomes	Challenges
Libya	Deployment of UAVs, military advisors, and logistical support.	GNA stabilization, expanded maritime claims.	Tensions with Egypt, Russia, and UAE
Somalia	Opened Mogadishu base (2017); training Somali forces and developing navy and coastguard.	Enhanced local defense autonomy.	Sustainability of reliance on Türkiye
Sudan	Redevelopment of Suakin Island (99-year lease); economic and military collaboration.	Increased Red Sea influence, strengthened ties	Tensions with Egypt, political instability
Niger	Signed military agreements; provided training and technical	Enhanced regional security, stronger partnership.	Integration with Western systems

	support for counter-jihadist efforts.		

Figure 5: Comparative Analysis of Türkiye's Engagement Across African Nations.

Türkiye's nuanced approach to African security prioritizes local needs while advancing its strategic interests. From deploying advanced defense technologies in Libya to building long-term capacity in Somalia, Sudan, Niger, and Gambia, Türkiye has established itself as a credible and flexible partner. By integrating military, economic, and diplomatic efforts—and recalibrating its stance even with former rivals such as Haftar in Libya—Türkiye demonstrates the potential for adaptive, sustainable, and mutually beneficial partnerships in Africa's evolving security environment.

Türkiye's Cultural and Educational Initiatives

Since 2011, Türkiye Scholarships have enabled over 61,000 African students to study in Türkiye, fostering goodwill and building a network of African professionals educated in defense, governance, and development. For instance, Somali officers trained in Türkiye's military academies now lead counterterrorism units, showcasing the tangible impact of these programs (Özuygun, 2024, pp. 32–54).

Institutions like the Maarif Foundation operate 175 schools across 26 African nations, providing quality education to over 17,000 students annually (Kavak, 2024). These schools not only deliver academic excellence but also serve as cultural bridges, promoting mutual understanding. Additionally, Türkiye's cultural diplomacy extends beyond education. Programs such as the "African Students Meets Business Life" initiative connect African graduates in Türkiye with global employment opportunities, contributing to their socio-economic empowerment. Türkiye's engagement also includes cultural festivals, sports collaborations, and artistic exchanges, fostering a deeper understanding and mutual appreciation between Turkish and African societies (Özkan, 2014, pp. 83–119). By integrating education, culture, and people-to-people connections, Türkiye has positioned itself as a credible and innovative ally on the continent, though its continued success may depend on sustaining influence in fragile states where institutional legitimacy remains in flux.

One notable graduate of Türkiye Scholarships, a former officer from Mali, now oversees security strategy in his region, leveraging Türkiye's expertise in military training and regional stability frameworks. On the other hand, operating cultural centers in 10 African nations, the Yunus Emre Institute fosters language and cultural exchange, enabling Africans to engage with Türkiye's history and values. Beyond education, Türkiye's cultural diplomacy initiatives extend to community-building programs, such as vocational training for women and youth in Somalia, and joint sports collaborations with Gambia. These efforts strengthen grassroots ties, ensuring long-term mutual benefit.

Conclusion

Türkiye's engagement with Africa offers a replicable model for other nations seeking to balance strategic interests with equitable partnerships. By prioritizing local capacity building and integrating socio-economic and military strategies, Türkiye addresses immediate security challenges while fostering long-term development. This dual approach has enabled Türkiye to establish itself as a credible and innovative partner capable of responding to Africa's complex security landscape.

Türkiye's evolving approach in Libya also illustrates the fragility of long-term engagement in fragmented states. After intervening militarily to support the UN-recognized GNA and halt Haftar's advances, Türkiye has gradually built diplomatic bridges with Haftar-aligned factions. This transformation, potentially paving the way for broader recognition of the 2019 maritime agreement, shows Ankara's ability to recalibrate and leverage geopolitical incentives. By highlighting the benefits of maritime delimitation in opposition to Greek and Egyptian claims, Türkiye has reframed the maritime deal as a strategic asset for all Libyan factions. While this approach showcases diplomatic agility, it also underscores the fragility of sustaining influence in environments with unresolved governance divisions.

Future opportunities lie in expanding collaboration on emerging fields such as cybersecurity, climate resilience, and satellite technologies. For instance, Türkiye's expertise in developing UAVs and space technologies could support African nations in addressing border surveillance, disaster management, and resource allocation challenges. Similarly, joint climate resilience initiatives, such as constructing drought-resistant infrastructure or enhancing water security, can contribute to regional stability. Future research should explore the long-term impact of Türkiye's capacity-building initiatives on African defense autonomy, providing insights for other middle powers aiming to balance strategic interests with equitable partnerships.

Türkiye's model also provides valuable lessons for middle powers aiming to establish equitable partnerships in the Global South. By emphasizing mutual benefits, cultural diplomacy, and sustainable development, Türkiye demonstrates how nations can contribute to global stability while advancing their geopolitical objectives. As global competition in Africa intensifies, Türkiye's balanced and inclusive approach serves as a blueprint for fostering resilient and prosperous partnerships.

Key Findings and Analysis

Türkiye's strategic engagement in Africa has emerged as a significant model for addressing the continent's evolving security and development challenges. The study highlights three primary dimensions of Türkiye's contributions:

Defense Innovation and Technology: Türkiye's advancements in UAVs and other military technologies have positioned it as a global leader in defense exports. These innovations, epitomized by the Bayraktar TB2, have provided African nations with cost-effective, adaptable, and proven solutions for addressing asymmetric threats such as

terrorism and insurgency. The integration of Türkiye's technologies into African defense systems underscores its role in strengthening Africa's defense autonomy.

Capacity Building and Long-Term Partnerships: Beyond exporting military equipment, Türkiye prioritizes capacity-building through training programs, technical support, and infrastructure development. Initiatives like the Somali Turkish Task Force Command and investments facilitated by *TİKA* demonstrate a commitment to fostering self-reliance and resilience among African nations.

Cultural and Educational Engagement: Türkiye's soft power approach, including scholarships, educational exchange programs, and artistic initiatives, has deepened people-to-people connections and enhanced mutual understanding. These efforts strengthen diplomatic ties and create a foundation for sustainable collaboration.

Türkiye's holistic strategy, which integrates technological, economic, and cultural dimensions, distinguishes it from traditional African powers. By addressing immediate security needs while fostering long-term partnerships, Türkiye has positioned itself as a credible and innovative ally on the continent.

Furthermore, Türkiye's evolving role in Libya reflects both the adaptability and fragility of its strategic model. Initially intervening to halt Khalifa Haftar's advance and support the UN-recognized GNA, Türkiye has since recalibrated its approach by initiating formal dialogue with eastern factions, including the LNA. The recent diplomatic engagement with Saddam Haftar and the reactivation of discussions around the 2019 maritime agreement suggest that Türkiye is leveraging geostrategic incentives— such as expanding Libya's EEZ rights vis-à-vis Greek and Egyptian claims—to transform prior adversaries into pragmatic partners. This reflects an emerging trend in Türkiye's security diplomacy: combining hard power intervention with long-term political flexibility to secure shared strategic outcomes. However, this approach also reveals potential fragilities, particularly if institutional fragmentation in Libya persists. Thus, the Libyan case illustrates both the reach and the limits of Türkiye's hybrid engagement strategy in fragile post-conflict states.

Policy Recommendations for Africa's Security Future

To ensure sustainable security and development, African nations and their partners, including Türkiye, should consider the following policy recommendations:

Promote Defense Autonomy: African states should adopt Türkiye's Mogadishu UAV Training Center (2023) model, which combines drone exports (e.g., Bayraktar TB2) with local maintenance workshops. For instance, Niger could replicate this by partnering with Turkish Aerospace Industries to establish a regional drone manufacturing hub, reducing dependency on imports and fostering technical skills.

Strengthen Regional Cooperation: Collaborative frameworks under the African Union (AU) and regional organizations should be reinforced to address cross-border threats, share intelligence, and coordinate responses to transnational challenges.

Integrate Security and Development Strategies: Security initiatives must align with socio-economic development plans. Investments in education, infrastructure, and

governance reform are critical for addressing the root causes of instability, such as poverty and inequality.

Focus on Capacity Building: Long-term partnerships should prioritize knowledge transfer and the training of local security forces to ensure sustainability. Programs similar to those implemented by Türkiye in Somalia can serve as benchmarks for other nations.

Encourage Inclusive Partnerships: African nations should diversify their defense partnerships to avoid dependency on a single power. Engaging multiple partners allows for tailored solutions while mitigating risks associated with geopolitical rivalries.

Cybersecurity Partnerships: Collaborate on developing a robust cybersecurity infrastructure to combat growing digital threats. Türkiye's recent collaboration with Niger on enhancing digital infrastructure provides a model for tackling cybersecurity threats. Establishing regional cyber-defense hubs in Africa, supported by Türkiye's expertise, could significantly mitigate risks posed by cybercrime and terrorism. For example, Türkiye's 2023 agreement with Niger to protect critical infrastructure from Boko Haram cyberattacks—including AI-driven threat detection systems—could scale regionally under ECOWAS oversight. This mirrors Türkiye's Domestic Cyber Shield Initiative, which reduced ransomware attacks by 40% in 2022 (DTO, 2024).

Climate Resilience: Partner on initiatives addressing climate-driven security risks, such as water scarcity and resource competition. As water scarcity becomes a growing security issue, Türkiye's experience in sustainable infrastructure development, such as dam construction and drought-resistant irrigation, could provide African nations with critical tools for climate resilience.

Space Technologies: Leverage Türkiye's advancements in satellite technologies for border surveillance and disaster management. Türkiye's satellite technologies, such as those developed by the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK), could be leveraged to improve Africa's border surveillance and disaster management capabilities. Collaborative efforts in this field would enable real-time monitoring of environmental changes and security threats.

Türkiye's Role in Implementing Recommendations: Türkiye's existing initiatives align with these goals. For example, its cybersecurity partnerships with Niger (2023) and satellite technology transfers to Sudan exemplify opportunities for collaborative innovation.

Opportunities for Sustainable Safety and Security in Africa

Looking ahead, Türkiye and Africa can explore new opportunities for collaboration that build on existing achievements and address emerging challenges:

Cybersecurity and Digital Infrastructure: As cyber threats grow, Türkiye's expertise in cybersecurity can help African nations safeguard critical infrastructure and develop robust digital defenses.

Climate Security and Resilience: Climate change poses significant risks to Africa's stability. Joint initiatives to develop climate-resilient infrastructure and address resource-based conflicts could enhance regional security.

Space and Satellite Technologies: Türkiye's advancements in space technology can support African nations in areas such as border surveillance, disaster management, and communication networks.

Youth Engagement and Education: Expanding scholarship programs and vocational training initiatives will empower African youth to contribute to their nation's security and development.

Humanitarian and Peacekeeping Collaboration: Türkiye's experience in humanitarian operations and peacekeeping can complement African-led initiatives, fostering shared leadership in addressing regional crises.

Future Perspectives

In summary, Türkiye's engagement with Africa demonstrates a strategic blend of defense diplomacy, cultural exchange, and economic cooperation. By leveraging advanced military technologies such as UAVs and establishing long-term capacity-building initiatives, Türkiye has positioned itself as a unique partner, fostering defense autonomy for African states. These actions have bolstered regional stability while reshaping global power dynamics. In Libya, the ability to convert tactical military intervention into long-term diplomatic normalization—particularly by convincing former adversaries of shared economic gains—offers a preview of Türkiye's capacity for iterative diplomacy. However, such flexibility also demands careful management to avoid overreach or perceived opportunism. Looking ahead, Türkiye's African partnerships could extend into cybersecurity collaborations to address emerging threats, satellite technologies for disaster management, and climate resilience projects to tackle resource-based conflicts. By prioritizing these areas, Türkiye can strengthen its role as a model for sustainable and equitable partnerships on the continent.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributors

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