

Turkey and Africa Connections Focused on the Military Industry¹

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Abstract:

The connection between Turkey and North Africa has historical roots, that is why it is understandable that the current Turkish government puts emphasis on the region. Moreover, the AKP-led Turkey has opened the scale and has built connections all over Africa, including the Sub-Saharan part to the southern end of the continent and even the Horn of Africa.

Turkey's expansion into Africa is centred around three pillars: 1) economic policies, 2) expansion of diplomatic missions, 3) and humanitarian assistance. The military assistance and Turkish made military products can be part of more of these pillars but can also be seen as a fourth territory which is really important to Turkey in connection with Africa. For military connections between Turkey and Africa, we can list the following areas: 1) selling of Turkish defence products to African countries, 2) building army bases on African land, like in Somalia or in Sudan, 3) training African troops and giving them products and know-how, like in Libya. In this study, we would like to give a picture of the recent military connections between Turkey and Africa.

Keywords:

AKP, Turkey, African connections, military industry, Turkish manufacturers.

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1. Overview

The current situation is that Turkey has been strengthening its connection with the African continent in the last years.

We are looking for the answer how the connections between Turkey and Africa have strengthened, focusing on the military aspect.

Turkey's cooperation and connection with African countries have multiplied in the last two decades, and the military connections especially has become strong.

To have an insight into the Turkish-African military connections, we should consider these areas: 1) selling of Turkish defense products to African countries, 2) building army bases in African land, like in Somalia or in Sudan, 3) training African troops and give them products and know-how, like in Libya.

In this study first of all we will look through in general the strengthening connections between Turkey and Africa, such as the diplomatic visits, embassies, cultural and economic connections. After that we would like to detail the military connections of Turkey and Africa, as listed above, such as: what kind of military products Turkey has sold to African countries, which African countries are buyers of Turkish products, and what kind of military presence Turkey has on the African continent.

2. Turkey and Africa – strengthening connections

Historically, North Africa can be seen as part of the “traditional sphere of influence” of Turkey, since it was part of the Ottoman Empire. But after 1923, Turkey isolated itself from such former spheres of influence, and oriented itself to the West. Although since 2003, with the leadership of the AKP, Turkey has put emphasis on North Africa again, and Turkish influence is growing in countries like Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya (Saddiki 2020). But nowadays, Turkey has become a major partner not only in North African countries but also south of the Sahara and in the whole continent.

Turkey became an observer member of the African Union in 2005, and strategic partner in 2008, although the country has started its “African Initiative Policy” in 1998 and was guest member of the African Union since 2002. After that, 2005 was also declared as the “Year of Africa” in Turkey. (Torpak 2021) AKP-led Turkey adopted the “Strategy for the Development of Economic Relations with African Countries” in 2003 to increase economic relations with Africa. (Siradag 2018) Since then, there is a visible progress in several fields between Turkey and Africa, such as trade, investment, cultural projects, security and military cooperation, and development projects. Turkey also made its “Africa Partnership Policy” in 2013. (MFA n.d.) “With our Africa Partnership Policy, which is the product of an integrated understanding that includes the activities of public institutions, private sector, non-governmental organizations and humanitarian aid organizations, we aim to contribute to the peace, stability, economic

and social development of the Continent, and develop our bilateral relations on the basis of equal partnership and mutual benefit” stated on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Turkey (MFA n.d.).

The connections between Turkey and Africa strengthened during the leadership of the AKP and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. One data shows how important the African continent is for Ankara: President Erdoğan visited more than half of the African countries personally since he came to power. (Durmaz 2021) We can see on the picture and the chart below that the leader of the Republic of Turkey visited 30 African countries.



Figure 1. President Erdoğan's visits to Africa (Source: African Business)

The List of the countries President Erdoğan already visited in Africa: Algeria, Angola, (Daily Sabah 2021a) Chad, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya. Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Niger,

Nigeria, Republic of South Africa, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, (Daily Sabah 2021b) Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia.

In fact, Erdoğan visited more African countries than any other non-African national leader. (Mitchell 2021) President Barack Obama only visited seven African countries during eight years of his presidency. (BBC 2017) President Trump never visited personally the continent for four years but his daughter Ivanka Trump and the first lady, Melanie Trump visited several African country representing Trump. (Signé 2019) Vladimir Putin only visited five African country since 2000, he rather hosted African leaders in Russia. (France24 2019) China takes the African visit also very seriously, China's leaders have also been regular guests on the continent in the last decades. (O'Connor 2020) In fact, there is a ritual of Beijing visiting Africa at the beginning of every year. The current foreign minister of China, Wang Yi, since 2014 has visited 35 African countries during his annual visits.

The Turkish first lady Emine Erdoğan is strongly committed to humanitarian aid in Africa and published a book in 2020 titled *Afrika Seyahatlerim* ("My travels in Africa"), which has been translated into French, English, and Arabic. (Mashharawi 2021) Turkey is really active in humanitarian actions on the continent: Turkey was the largest humanitarian aid provider in Africa in 2017. (Siradag 2018)

Another important information that shows the strengthening connections is that the number of Turkish embassies in Africa was only 12 in 2002, but it is 43 in 2021. (Aydogan 2021) Soon it will be 44 embassies as one embassy is being prepared in Bissau Guinea, as Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey already said. (Daily Sabah 2021c) Also, the number of the African embassies has increased since 2008, when there were only 10 African embassies in Ankara, now there are 37 African countries who has embassies in the capital of Turkey. (MFA n.d.) The increased number of embassies shows that both sides see each other as an important partner.

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) also operates 22 Program Coordination Offices across Africa currently. There are more Turkish Institutes that are active in the continent: Yunus Emre Institute, Turkish Diyanet Foundation, Anadolu Agency (AA), and Turkish Airlines (THY). Total value of the projects conducted by Turkish companies in Africa exceeds 70 billion USD. (Daily Sabah 2021c)



Figure 2. The number of Turkish embassies in Africa has increased from 12 in 2003 43 in 2021. (Source: African Business)

Another important indicator to show the strengthening connections between Turkey and the African countries is the economy. Turkey's trade with the African continent is nowadays more than 4 times bigger than in 2003. In 2003, it was 5.4 billion USD, and in 2020, it was 25.3 USD. The goal of Turkey to even double this number to 50 billion USD in the coming years. For example, in Ethiopia, Turkey is the second biggest investor. (Mitchell 2021) Turkey has become the third largest importer of Algerian products, and the two countries aim to boost trade to 4.1 billion euros a year. (France24 2021) Turkish Airlines has more and more destinations in Africa, becoming an important company for people to reach Africa and for Africans to reach the world. There were already two Turkey-Africa Partnership Summits (2008, 2014) and the Third Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit was organized under the auspices of Recep Tayyip

Erdoğan. (MFA n. d.) The Summit took place in Istanbul on 17 and 18 of December 2021, after it was postponed in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. (Dedet 2021)

Turkey has better reputation in Africa since many western countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, or France had a long history of promoting dictatorships, secret arms shipments, and business interests through financial assistance, and had divisive policies, which did more harm than good to Africa. (Toprak 2021) The strengthening ties to Africa is part of the remodeling of Turkey as an “Afro-Eurasian state”, as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan plans, so that the country can be a model for the Islamic world and an alternative to the West. (Mitchell 2021) This direction can be seen as a great change since Turkey tried to be accepted as a European Union member for decades, but as the EU “was with a wait-and-see attitude to sanction the Turkish behavior if it does not match the EU’s interests” and therefore postponed Turkey’s membership for years, (Toprak 2021) it seems Turkey started its independent system building of allies.

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey, emphasized that Turkey’s approach to Africa is based on the principle of “African solutions for African problems”. (Hurriyet 2021) That means: “external or foreign solutions were not viable in Africa since they were either ‘imported’ or ‘dictated’ to Africans. Therefore, Africans would not own those solutions. In a nutshell the notion of ‘African solutions to African problems’ implies that this is the time for Africans to take things into their own hands and make use of their resources to solve Africa’s troubles.” (ISS 2008)

Turkey’s expansion into Africa is centered around three pillars:

1. economic policies,
2. expansion of diplomatic missions,
3. and humanitarian assistance. (Toprak 2021)

But in reality, it is not easy to separate these fields, as Ali Bilgic, an expert in Turkish foreign policy at Loughborough University in the UK stated: “it is not possible or advisable to separate Turkish economic, political, humanitarian, and military objectives.” (Mitchell 2021) So in a way we can list a fourth pillar as military connections or this field is connected to all the three other pillars.

Today, Turkish fingerprints are all over Africa. See some examples:

- east Africa’s biggest stadium, the Kigali Arena in Rwanda built by a Turkish construction firm,
- an Olympic swimming pool in Senegal built by a Turkish construction firm,
- a colossal mosque in Djibouti built by a Turkish construction firm,
- on Libya’s battlefields they use Turkish military hardware. (Mitchell 2021)

As we can see, Ali Bilgic also listed the military objectives as 4th objective, and I would like to deal with more about this question.



3. Turkish-African military connections

3.1. Selling Turkish defense products to Africa

One of the greatest problems that African countries face is security as traditional partnerships between Africa and Europe, or African countries and their former colonial masters have failed to sustain peace and stability on the continent. Huge conflicts emerged through Africa and often Western allies failed to help. We can see that these conflicts “ranging from tribal warfare to international skirmishes, military assets range from very primitive to state-of-the-art weapons”, (Babos 2007) and some terror organizations or rebellious militias also get somehow better and better weapons.

Therefore, it has been a strategic goal for African countries to purchase high quality defense products and to develop a new type of security relationship with non-Western countries. Turkey have been seen as an experienced country in the fields of defense as Turkey is an important member of NATO and has been fighting against terrorist groups inside and outside the country. African countries have seen Turkey as a reliable actor in the security field and they seek to benefit from the experience and Turkey aims to share its defense and technological experience with African countries. (Siradag 2018) Turkish military products have an important economic and defense role but also symbolize the country’s independence in a way. After historical traumas, Turkey aims to be self-sufficient in the field of military and defense industry. The country has a goal to increase the defense industry export. So, Africa can be a new market, and Turkey does not want to miss out.

As a matter of fact, Turkey is building connections all over the African continent and in the Sub-Saharan region and is making business of military products in these countries too. In recent years, there were military-related business treaties worth hundreds of millions of USD. (Besenyő 2012) What is more, several countries in the African continent are purchasers of Turkish military equipment. In 2018, Turkey made an 84.35 million US dollar income from the selling of these products to: South Africa, Tunisia, Ghana, Nigeria, Chad, Libya, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Senegal. (Besenyő 2021)

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly released a report in 2019 on conventional arms trades that provides data on exports to African countries. From that we know that Turkey’s defense industry in 2018 exported 40 wheeled armored personnel carriers to Burkina Faso, 20 to Chad, three to Ghana, six to Mauritania, and 25 to Senegal. These were Otokar Cobras. Turkey also exported 183 pieces of 7.65 mm handguns and 400 semi-automatic pistols to Burkina Faso, 100 semi-automatic small and light pistols to Cameroon, six 9 mm handguns to Ghana, 100 handguns and 30 semi-automatic pistols to Kenya, 180 semi-automatic pistols to Mozambique, 30 semi-automatic pistols to Nigeria, and 719 handguns, two 45 caliber Zig M1911s and 4 semi-automatic small and light pistols to South Africa. Zambia imported 25 handguns and 110 semi-automatic small and light pistols from Turkey and Zimbabwe imported 77 handguns and 20 semi-automatic pistols. Turkey exported 100 9 mm ZIG 14s to Ethiopia and 17 9 mm Zigana M16s to South Africa. Turkey also exported ten MP5 MTS A3 submachine

guns to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and 208 assault rifles to Senegal. (Cronjé 2019) Apart from these, Turkey mainly sells electronic and technical equipment and armored transport vehicles, ships for African countries. (Besenyő 2021) As we can see from the products, the main Turkish manufacturers that export military products to Africa are: TİSAŞ, Katmerciler, SSB, Otokar.

The following African states are the main recipients/purchasers of Turkish military products: South Africa, Tunisia, Ghana, Nigeria, Chad, Libya, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Kenya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cameroon, and Senegal. (Sünnetcí 2019)

For Turkish military companies, the African presence is so important that they organized the 1st Turkey-Africa Defense, Security and Space Forum on 7-9 November 2018, which became so successful that the 2nd Turkey-Africa Defense, Security and Space Forum was organized only one year later between 6 and 8 November 2019. Since then, now it is the 4th Turkey-Africa Defense, Security and Space Forum being organized. Another successful event is the Turkish-African Congress which has been organized 11 times since 2005. (TASAM n.d.)

In 2019, Tanzania agreed with Ankara to buy Turkish weapons for its army. (Bakeer 2019) Kenya spent 91.4 million US dollar on armored vehicles from Katmerciler, a Turkish manufacturer, to deploy them against al-Shabaab militants. (Daily Sabah 2021d) The contract is about 118 armored vehicles to Kenya. In 2019 Katmerciler, received an export order of \$20 million USD from an “unidentified African country,” as it was made known. (Torpak 2021)

3.2. Turkish military presence in Africa

Turkey already built some connection in Africa and military is needed to secure the projects. Federico Donelli, a scholar at the University of Genoa specializing on Turkey’s Africa policy said: “Middle Eastern political rivalry and security dynamics have been exported to Africa, especially the Horn of Africa. As a result, Turkey, like other regional actors, increased its military presence in the area.” (Mitchell 2021) Turkey has been establishing a security partnership with Africa in order to maximize its own national interest. (Siradag 2018)

Turkey contributes to the UN peacekeeping operations. Between 1993-2018, Turkey contributed to 12 UN peacekeeping operation in Africa, most of them was under the AKP leadership. (Ibid) Since the AKP leadership, Turkey entered nine UN peacekeeping operation on African soil in Liberia, Ivory Coast, Burundi, Sudan, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Mali. Also, three other UN peacekeeping operation were continued since the AKP was elected. (US Peacekeeping n.d.)



3.2.1 Army base in Somalia

Turkey opened a military base in Somalia. The base cost 50 million USD and was built in two years. It has the capacity of 1500 soldiers at a time, so this is Turkey's largest base outside of Turkey, which is near Mogadishu, Somalia's capital. Besides Turkey, the United States of America and the United Arab Emirates has also military presence in Somalia. (Al Jazeera 2017)

As it is well-known, Somalia is a target of the pirates because the country is on the strategic way of shipping trade. The strategic importance of trade routes on the ocean and sea, such as near to Somalia, has multiplied in the last years and the pirates take advantage of it, which already caused millions of dollars in loss. (Babos 2011)

So it is not without any purpose that Turkey spent more than 1 billion USD in Somalia, and Turkey invested in the country's transport infrastructure, roads, hospitals, and schools. Turkish companies operate Mogadishu's seaport and airport. And the Turkish Airlines was the first international carrier to fly to Mogadishu in 20 years. (Mitchell 2021) An interesting hint about the Turkish army base in Somalia is that it trains Turkish-speaking Somali soldiers that experts says Ankara expects to contribute to a new geopolitical reality in the Horn of Africa. The Somali soldiers first get a Turkish language course, and they even take their oath in Turkish and Somali language. The Somali troops also follow the same ceremonial rituals as the Turkish Armed Forces, including singing the Turkish Military Academy's traditional anthem. (Kasapoglu 2020)

Turkey signed a special security and defense deal with the Republic of Sudan in 2018, which could result, according to many experts, in establishing a military base in the latter in the foreseeable future." (Siradag 2018) Turkey planned to restore the strategically important Suakin Island located on Sudan's Red Sea and to establish a dock for the restoration of military and civilian vessels on the island. According to the Sudanese Foreign Minister, the country would continue to deepen its security and defense relations with Turkey. (Sabah 2017)

Turkey signed military, security, and defense pacts with more than 25 African countries. Those countries which have defense and security deals with Turkey are:

Algeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Congo, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia. As a part of these agreements, Turkey has provided training to hundreds of soldiers and police officers from many countries in Africa. (Siradag 2018)



Figure 3. Turkish defence cooperation in Africa (Source: Besenyő 2021)

3.2.2. Turkish training of the Libyan army

Turkey provided military equipment to the Libyan government who fights against rebels. The conflict was not like a “powerful leader against little group of rebels” situation: although the UN recognized the government of Libya, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Russia supported Khalifa Haftar, the leader of the rebels. So, behind the scenes it was a conflict of greater powers. (Mitchell 2021) In support of the Libyan Government of National Accord, Turkey deployed hundreds of soldiers and thousands of Syrian fighters in its battle against forces of Libya's General Khalifa Haftar. (Jones 2021)

Turkish-made drones helped the Libyan government to win battles against rebels. In 2020 Turkey also took a step further by a direct intervention in Libya, putting Turkish soldiers and mercenaries on the borders of Algeria and Tunisia. In the end of 2020, Turkey's parliament authorized an 18-month extension of its Libya troop deployment. "Turkey has the largest military base on the Tunisian border, a naval base, [and] camps populated by Syrian mercenaries," said Jalel Harchaoui of the Clingendael Institute in The Hague. (France24 2021) Also, the Turkish military constructed an airbase and wants to establish a naval base in Libya, a plan opposed by Egypt and France. (Jones 2021) Turkey in the last three years ratified a maritime memorandum between Tripoli and Ankara, which declared a 16-nautical mile-wide



corridor from southwest Turkey to northeast Libya as an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that ignores the rights of Greece. (Harchaoui 2020)

4. Conclusion

The AKP-led Turkey has opened the scale and has built connections all over Africa now, including the Sub-Saharan part to the southern end of the continent and even the Horn of Africa.

Turkey's expansion into Africa is centered around three pillars: 1) economic policies, 2) expansion of diplomatic missions, 3) and humanitarian assistance. The military assistance and Turkish-made military products can be considered a part of these pillars but can also be seen as a fourth territory which is really important to Turkey in connection with Africa. For military connections between Turkey and Africa, we can list the following areas: 1) selling of Turkish defense products to African countries, 2) building army base on African land, like in Somalia, 3) training African troops and giving them products and know-how, like in Libya.

Conflict of interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

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