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Türkiye and Sub-Saharan Africa: Current State and Prospects for Multi-vector Cooperation

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Abstract. Since the mid-2000s, the expansion of contacts with African countries in socio-economic and military-political spheres has become one of the main directions of Ankara's foreign policy and foreign economic activity. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of Ankara's policy towards Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, based on official documents of the Turkish government, trade and investment statistics, as well as academic literature and reports from leading international think tanks. The study examines Türkiye's multi-vector and multi-factor cooperation with SSA, which encompasses aid to the least developed countries, trade, investment, the implementation of joint economic projects, education, healthcare, military training, and security services. The novelty of the research lies in its systemic approach, which considers economic, military-technical, political, and religious aspects as integral parts of a single strategy to strengthen Türkiye's status as a "global center of power." Economic interaction is illustrated by the growth of Türkiye's trade with SSA countries from USD 742 million in 2000 to USD 12.4 billion in 2023, as well as investments by Turkish companies in infrastructure, energy, and construction. Military-technical cooperation includes the supply of arms and training of African military specialists. Although Ankara traditionally maintains the closest relations with the North African region, the partnership options it offers to countries south of the Sahara are generating increasing interest in this part of the continent, notably due to the anti-neocolonial rhetoric of the Turkish leadership. The authors of the paper emphasize that cooperation with Africa has become a key element of Türkiye's strategy to diversify its foreign relations and enhance its global influence, which injects new dynamism into international relations on the African continent.

Key words: economic cooperation, political contacts, development aid, security, peacekeeping

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Турция и страны Африки южнее Сахары: состояние и перспективы многовекторного сотрудничества

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Аннотация. С середины 2000-х гг. расширение контактов с африканскими странами в социально-экономической и военно-политической сферах стало одним из главных направлений внешнеполитической и внешнеэкономической деятельности Анкары. Исследование посвящено комплексному анализу этой политики в отношении стран Африки южнее Сахары (АЮС), основанному на изучении официальных документов турецкого правительства, статистических данных по торговле и инвестициям, а также на обзоре академической литературы и докладов ведущих исследовательских центров. Рассмотрено многовекторное и многофакторное сотрудничество Турции со странами АЮС, которое охватывает помощь наименее развитым государствам, торговлю, инвестирование, реализацию совместных экономических проектов, образование, здравоохранение, военную подготовку и предоставление услуг по обеспечению безопасности. Новизна исследования заключается в системном подходе, рассматривающем экономические, военно-технические, политические и религиозные аспекты как неотъемлемые части единой стратегии по укреплению статуса Турции как одного из «мировых центров силы». Экономическое взаимодействие иллюстрируется ростом товарооборота Турции со странами АЮС с 742 млн долл. США в 2000 г. до 12,4 млрд долл. США в 2023 г., а также инвестициями турецких компаний в инфраструктуру, энергетику и строительство. Военно-техническое сотрудничество включает поставки вооружений и подготовку африканских военных специалистов. Хотя наиболее тесные отношения традиционно сохраняются Анкарой с Североафриканским регионом, варианты партнерства, предлагаемые ею странам Африки южнее Сахары, вызывают в этой части континента все больший интерес, в том числе благодаря антинеоколониальной риторике турецкого руководства. Подчеркнуто, что для Турции сотрудничество с Африкой стало важным элементом ее стратегии по диверсификации внешних связей и усилению ее влияния на глобальном уровне.

Ключевые слова: экономическое сотрудничество, политические контакты, помощь в целях развития, безопасность, миротворчество

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Вклад авторов. Денисова Т.С.: концептуализация, разработка методологии исследования, проведение исследования, сбор и анализ материалов, подготовка первоначального текста, рецензирование и редактирование рукописи. Костелянец С.В.: концептуализация, разработка методологии исследования, проведение исследования, сбор и анализ материалов, рецензирование и редактирование рукописи. Оба автора ознакомлены с окончательной версией статьи и одобрили ее.

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Introduction

Türkiye has a long tradition of relations with African countries, owing to the long-standing political, economic, and military presence of the Ottoman Empire (Ottoman Porte, 1299–1922) in various regions of the continent. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, vast territories of North Africa, as well as present-day Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Chad, were under the

control of the Porte, wholly or partially. Early in this period, Ottoman sultans established diplomatic contacts with the powerful medieval state of Kanem-Bornu, which encompassed areas of present-day Nigeria, Niger, and Chad. In 1894, for example, the Ottoman Empire sent a special representative to what is now northern Nigeria. The Ottomans also promoted Islam in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), particularly in southern Africa: in the mid-19th century, a group of imams traveled to Cape Town to support the local Muslim community (Rudincová, 2014).

Following the proclamation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the country abandoned its previously established relations with African territories due to the dominance of European powers on the continent and the need for Türkiye to consolidate its position. Prior to World War II, during the presidency of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1923–1938), relations with SSA countries were limited to diplomatic contacts: during this period, Ethiopia was the first and only sub-Saharan country in which Türkiye maintained an embassy (since 1926).

Türkiye's participation in the founding of the United Nations (UN) in 1945 and its joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1952 significantly impacted its relations with African countries. Its support for Great Britain in the context of the 1956–1957 crisis caused by Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal led to diplomatic tensions with African states of the Non-Aligned Movement. Türkiye's pro-Western stance at the 1955 Bandung Conference, which was credited with establishing a united anti-colonial front of the peoples of Asia and Africa, predetermined a further cooling in relations between the parties.[1] Moreover, during the UN General Assembly (GA) in 1956, Türkiye did not support the idea of granting independence to Algeria (Ersoy, 2012). However, the 1940s and 1950s were also marked by a number of positive events: in 1948, Türkiye supported the UN General Assembly resolution on providing economic assistance to the Sahel region (Ipek & Biltekin, 2013, p. 126).

Until the 1960s, Ankara developed relations with only two independent states on the continent—Ethiopia and Liberia—and maintained limited contacts with North African countries, despite opening a consulate in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1956, and a similar office in Ghana in 1957. However, due to the escalation of the Cyprus conflict in 1963 and the emergence of tensions with the West in the 1970s, Türkiye was forced to diversify its foreign policy and start actively developing contacts, including with African countries. This was hindered, however, by the large-scale economic and political presence of former colonial powers on the continent, as well as new players such as the United States, China, and India, who had their own interests in the region.

A significant expansion of Turkish-African contacts began with the rise to power of Prime Minister Turgut Özal (1983–1989) and his implementation of economic restructuring. Ankara began to perceive the African continent, with its resources and nearly one billion people, as a "particularly important market." A turning point in the development of contacts with Africa came in 1998, when the so-called "Action Plan for Opening Africa" was adopted. This plan, among other things, provided for the establishment of new embassies, conclusion of trade agreements, creation of a special cooperation fund, and participation in military training for Africans and in UN peacekeeping missions (Aleksanyan, 2023). However, the implementation of Ankara's African policy in the late 1990s was complicated by serious internal problems: economic challenges, the Kurdish issue, and others. Therefore, the "Action Plan" remained on paper until 2003.

[1] The Spirit of Bandung // Za rubezhom. June 19, 2025. (In Russian). URL: https://zarubejom.ru/articles/indoneziya-i-mir-solidarnosti/ (accessed: 15.11.2025).

The rise to power of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on March 14, 2003, as the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), which he founded in 2001 and is now the ruling party, marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of economic and political relations with African countries, cooperation with which proved very attractive, in particular due to the potential support of Africans for Türkiye's position on various issues of global politics. In 2003, the "Strategy for Improving Economic Relations with African Countries" was adopted. In 2005, Ankara received observer status in the African Union (AU), and the same year was declared the "Year of Africa" in Türkiye. In 2008, the country became a "strategic partner" of the AU, and at that time the "Türkiye-Africa Summit" was held in Istanbul, with the participation of representatives from 49 African countries.[2] In 2013, Türkiye became a "non-regional member" of the African Development Bank,[3] thus beginning a sustainable process of developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

While Russian researchers (Kostelyanets, 2012; 2016; Mosaki, 2013; Iag'ia & Kolesnikova, 2018; Ozturk & Shishkina, 2020; Volkov & Deych, 2020; Sidorova & Pospelov, 2021; Evgrafov, 2024) analyze Türkiye's African policy, they primarily focus on Ankara's relations with North African states. Meanwhile, Ankara's political and economic interests are increasingly focused on SSA countries, and this article analyzes various aspects of Türkiye's cooperation with the region.

The work of Turkish scholars, who emphasize, among other things, the importance of the ideological content of Türkiye's multi-vector ties with the African continent, also attests to Ankara's growing interest in deepening cooperation with African countries in general and SSA countries in particular in recent years. Thus, Turkish authors emphasize that Ankara skillfully uses anti-imperialist rhetoric to shape an alternative model of interaction with SSA countries (Siradag, 2022; Armutlu, 2025). Furthermore, according to Turkish researchers, the transformation of insignificant historical contacts into a comprehensive partnership is driven by Ankara's desire to diversify its foreign policy and foreign economic relations, a goal the Turkish leadership has set for itself that also is in line with the needs of African states (Demirtaş & Pirinççi, 2024).

The methodological basis of this study is a systems approach, which allows for the examination of Türkiye's multi-vector policy in Africa as a holistic strategy in which economic expansion, military-technical cooperation, religious diplomacy, and official development assistance constitute a unified whole. The study utilized a historical and retrospective method to analyze the transformation of Ankara's African policy—from the limited contacts of the early Turkish Republic to the active "opening up Africa" strategy of the 2000s–2020s. To objectively assess the dynamics of interaction, statistical analysis of foreign trade data, investment volumes, and humanitarian aid distribution, taken from reports by relevant Turkish ministries and international organizations, was used. Furthermore, a comparative political analysis method was employed to compare the Turkish partnership model with approaches to developing cooperation with African states by Western countries, China, and other global players.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

Ankara is offering African countries a partnership option based on a specially developed strategy, driven by the anti-

[2] Türkiye—Africa Relations // Republic of Türkiye. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. URL: https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-africa-relations.en.mfa (accessed: 18.08.2026).

[3] The Republic of Turkey Joins African Development Bank Group // African Development Bank Group. December 9, 2013. URL: https://www.afdb.org/en/news-and-events/the-republic-of-turkey-joins-african-development-bank-group-12660 (accessed: 18.08.2026).

neocolonialist stance of the Erdoğan government, which constantly emphasizes that Türkiye is on the side of the "oppressed nations."[4] This is part of a broader foreign policy doctrine that the existing international order is dysfunctional and requires radical transformation. Ankara's cooperation with Africa is primarily in the economic, military-technical, religious, educational spheres, as well as in official development assistance (ODA). Currently, competition between Türkiye and its regional rivals (the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, etc.) is increasingly shifting to the African continent, which partly contributes to the spread of the idea of a new "scramble for Africa" (Denisova & Kostelyanets, 2025). It is no coincidence that the "honeymoon" in Turkish-African relations coincided with Türkiye's election in 2008 to a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2009–2010, and many African states supported Ankara in this aspiration.[5]

Türkiye's economic cooperation with African countries can be divided into three components: trade, investment cooperation, and ODA (Bagci & Erdurmaz, 2017, p. 40). Ankara has signed trade and economic cooperation agreements with 50 African countries, as well as free trade agreements with five of them.[6]

The trade volume between Türkiye and SSA increased from USD 742 million in 2000 (with all of Africa in 2002–USD 3 billion[7]) to USD 5.7 billion in 2008[8] and to USD 12.4 billion in 2023[9] (with all of Africa in 2023–USD 40.7 billion,[10] in 2024–USD 36.5 billion[11]). The volume of Turkish exports to Africa in 2024 reached USD 19.4 billion (1.7% more than in 2023).[12]

Agricultural products, raw materials, and fuel occupy a significant place in the structure of SSA countries' exports to Türkiye, with the proportion of these commodity groups varying significantly across individual countries. Türkiye, in turn, imports chemicals and other chemical products (worth USD 3.1 billion in 2024), grains, legumes, and oilseeds (worth USD 2.5 billion), as well as electronics, steel, pearls, precious stones, and jewelry.[13]

[4] Idriss M. A. Turkey—Africa Partnership: A Development-Oriented Approach // Anadolu Agency. January 8, 2020. URL: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/analysis-turkey-africa-partnership-a-development-oriented-approach/1696640 (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[5] The United Nations General Assembly Votes to Seat Turkey // Republic of Türkiye. Embassy in Washington, D.C. October 17, 2008. URL: https://washington-emb.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowAnnouncement/115665 (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[6] Kenez L. Parliament Debate Exposes Financing and Trade Failures in Turkey's Africa Policy // Nordic Monitor. December 9, 2025. URL: https://nordicmonitor.com/2025/12/parliament-debate-exposes-financing-and-trade-failures-in-turkeys-africa-policy (accessed: 11.12.2025).

[7] Kuznetsov Yu. Africa: What Is the Secret of Türkiye's Success and What Should Russia Take into Account? On the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Policies of the Heirs of the Sublime Porte // Strategic Culture Foundation. June 18, 2024. (In Russian). URL: https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2024/06/18/afrika-v-chyom-sekret-uspekha-turcii-i-chto-uchest-rossii.html (accessed: 16.11.2025).

[8] Bilgic A., Nascimento D. Turkey's New Focus on Africa: Causes and Challenges // Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. 2014. URL: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/183490/04208a7feeefed486e3be192c27f0f40.pdf (accessed: 26.11.2025).

[9] Beyaz Z. F. Cumhurbaşkanı Yardımcısı Yılmaz: Türkiye, Afrika kıtasının gelişmesine katkıda bulunmaya devam etmektedir // Anadolu Ajansı. 19.11.2024. URL: https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/politika/cumhurbaskani-yardimcisi-yilmaz-turkiye-afrika-kitasinin-gelismesine-katkida-bulunmaya-devam-etmektedir/3397706 (accessed: 18.06.2026).

[10] Goncharov V. On Turkish Expansion in Africa. Part Two: Main Directions and Instruments of Turkish Policy in Africa // New Eastern Outlook. June 7, 2024. (In Russian). URL: https://journal-neo.su/ru/2024/06/07/o-tureczkoj-ekspansii-v-afrike-chast-vtoraya-osnovnye-napravleniya-i-instrumenty-tureczkoj-politiki-v-afrike (accessed: 16.11.2025).

[11] Bilateral Relations: Türkiye—Africa Trade and Economic Relations // Republic of Türkiye. Ministry of Trade. URL: https://tabef.org/bilateral-relations.html (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[12] Tolmac S., Yildirim E. Türkiye's Trade with Africa Grows on Back of 'Win-Win' Strategy // Anadolu. June 25, 2025. URL: https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkiye-s-trade-with-africa-grows-on-back-of-win-win-strategy/3612490 (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[13] Chukubaev A. Exports from Türkiye to Africa Continue to Grow // Kazinform. February 3, 2025. (In Russian). https://www.inform.kz/ru/eksport-turtsii-v-afriku-prodolzhaet-rasti-957ba4 (accessed: 16.11.2025).

The volume of investments in the continent's economy by the end of 2025 amounted to USD 15 billion, and the total value of projects (more than 2,000) in a wide variety of sectors (industry, banking, logistics, energy and construction) implemented by Turkish contractors in Africa exceeded USD 97 billion,[14] of which USD 5 billion is in SSA.[15] The largest recipients of Turkish foreign direct investment (FDI) are Sudan, South Africa, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, and Zambia. In response to the economic growth of many African countries, Türkiye has started investing heavily in its own transport infrastructure, including Turkish Airlines, which currently flies to 40 destinations in 33 SSA countries.[16] Turkish companies are also involved in the operation of transport infrastructure in African countries. Under a 2014 agreement, *Albayrak Group* received the right to manage the port of Mogadishu in Somalia for 20 years.[17] *Summa* is involved in the operation of Blaise Diagne International Airport in Senegal, Diori Hamani International Airport in Niger and Freetown International Airport in Sierra Leone, as well as in the development of Osvaldo Vieira International Airport in Guinea-Bissau.[18]

Turkish companies also have a significant presence in civil construction. For example, *Summa* built the International Convention Center in Dakar, which opened in 2014, and later participated in other major infrastructure projects in Senegal, including the Dakar Arena. In 2024, Turkish companies accounted for 21% of construction work in Africa.[19]

Türkiye is actively involved in the development of energy supply systems by supplying floating power plants: in 2014 to Ghana, then to Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Senegal, Gambia and Sierra Leone (in the last two countries, these floating power plants provide 80% of all electricity[20]). In 2024, the Turkish energy company *Karpowership* announced the plans to expand its presence in 15 more African countries, including Angola, Cameroon, Gabon, Kenya and Nigeria.[21]

Türkiye's involvement in Africa's economic development can be partly explained by simple business calculations: the activities of Turkish construction firms have found a market here thanks to the continent's growing infrastructure needs, while Turkish airlines have begun to operate on previously unserved routes, benefiting both parties.

In the 2020s, Ankara's desire to exploit Africa's natural resources, primarily uranium and gold,[22] as well as oil, has become increasingly noticeable, for example in Somalia, where it is prepared to operate even in conflict conditions.[23]

Official Development Assistance

ODA flows from Türkiye to Africa through the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı*

[14] Türkiye—Africa Ties Advancing to 'Unimaginable Levels': Erdoğan // Daily Sabah. October 17, 2025. https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkiye-africa-ties-advancing-to-unimaginable-levels-erdogan (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[15] Parlar Dal E., Dipama S. Assessing Turkey—Africa Engagements // Africa Policy Research Institute. April 27, 2023. URL: https://afripoli.org/assessing-turkey-africa-engagements (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[16] Flight Destinations and Current Flight Plan // Turkish Airlines. URL: https://www.turkishairlines.com/en-gr/flight-destinations/ (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[17] Mogadishu Alport // Albayrak Group. URL: https://www.albayrak.com.tr/en/sectors/logistics/mogadishu-alport-limani (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[18] Aviation // Summa. URL: https://www.summa.com.tr/en/activities/aviation.htm (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[19] Goncharov V. On Turkish Expansion in Africa. Part Two: Main Directions and Instruments of Turkish Policy in Africa // New Eastern Outlook. June 7, 2024. (In Russian). URL: https://journal-neo.su/ru/2024/06/07/o-tureczkoj-ekspansii-v-afrike-chast-vtoraya-osnovnye-napravleniya-i-instrumenty-tureczkoj-politiki-v-afrike (accessed: 16.11.2025).

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Turkey Eyes Niger Mining Projects amid Competition for Uranium // Mining.com. October 22, 2024. URL: https://www.mining.com/web/turkey-eyes-niger-mining-projects-amid-competition-for-uranium (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[23] Sezer C. Turkey Signs Energy Cooperation Deal with Somalia // Reuters. March 7, 2024. URL: https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/turkey-signs-energy-cooperation-deal-with-somalia-2024-03-07/ (accessed: 18.03.2026).

Başkanlığı, TİKA), which has funded a number of projects in Sudan, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Gambia, among others, and has 22 offices on the continent.[24]

In 2005, Türkiye's total ODA amounted to USD 11.8 million (1.96% of total ODA to Africa), covering five SSA countries and Libya (Ipek & Biltekin, 2013, p. 135). In 2022, Turkish ODA to Africa reached USD 59.72 million, and in 2023, USD 59.27 million,[25] with the largest shares going to Somalia (USD 10.98 million), Sudan (USD 7.89 million), Libya (USD 6.39 million), Guinea-Bissau (USD 5.97 million), Senegal (USD 1.76 million), Guinea (USD 1.42 million) and Niger (USD 1.31 million).[26]

The dynamics of Turkish aid to African countries, however, remained uneven. After a decline in the relative share of African aid in the second half of the 2010s, ODA volumes have started to increase again in recent years. In 2024, SSA countries accounted for USD 124.26 million of Türkiye's USD 139.58 million official aid to the African continent as a whole.[27] Thus, SSA currently accounts for the bulk of Turkish ODA in Africa.

The geographic distribution of Turkish ODA indicates that Ankara directs the majority of funds to Muslim-majority countries, but these countries are also among the poorest on the continent, meaning Türkiye's actions are also aligned with the needs of recipient countries. However, the expansion of contacts between Ankara and the Sahel states demonstrates that geopolitical considerations are becoming more important in Turkish-African relations.

The volume of Turkish ODA to Africa is still insignificant, but it has a significant impact on the daily lives of African people, as it includes, for example, direct food distribution and the construction of schools and hospitals in disadvantaged areas. Most of the aid is provided directly, rather than through international organizations.[28] For example, in the Nigerian capital of Abuja, there is the *Nizamiye* Hospital, the construction of which cost the Turkish side USD 30 million and which offers specialized services, including free ones.[29]

Türkiye currently has healthcare cooperation agreements with more than 20 African countries. Joint projects include improving medical infrastructure and training local personnel.[30] For example, Ankara has established a vocational training center in Madagascar, maternal and child health centers in Niger, and women's shelters in Cameroon. Turkish doctors are participating in health screening campaigns.[31] During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ankara sent masks, sewing machines and fabrics for their production, as well as ventilators and other medical supplies to Africa—South Africa,

[24] TİKA Carried Out 1884 Projects in the Last 5 Years in Africa // Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. May 31, 2022. URL: https://tika.gov.tr/en/detail-tika_carried_out_1884_projects_in_the_last_5_years_in_africa/ (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[25] Turkish Development Assistance Report 2023 // TIKA. 2025. P. 18. https://tika.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TURKIYE-DEVELOPMENT-ASSISTANCE-REPORT-2023-ENG-final.pdf (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[26] Ibid. P. 19.

[27] Türkiye Kalkınma Yardımları Raporu 2024 // Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı (TİKA). Ankara, 2025. P. 16–17. URL: https://tika.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/TKY-2024.pdf (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[28] Parlar Dal E., Dipama S. Assessing Turkey—Africa Engagements // Africa Policy Research Institute. April 27, 2023. URL: https://afripoli.org/assessing-turkey-africa-engagements (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[29] Barnett J. Between Islamism and Pragmatism: Interrogating Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey—Africa Relations // Journal of Middle East Politics and Policy. 2021. P. 26. URL: https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Barnett+Fall+2022.pdf (accessed: 26.11.2025).

[30] Bilateral Relations: Türkiye—Africa Trade and Economic Relations // Republic of Türkiye. Ministry of Trade. URL: https://tabef.org/bilateral-relations.html (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[31] Dahir A. H. Turkey's Evolving Engagement in Africa // TRT World Research Centre. 2020. P. 12. URL: https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Evolving-Turkey-Africa-Partnership.pdf (accessed: 20.11.2025).

Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, Rwanda, Eswatini, Zambia, Angola and South Sudan.[32]

Military-technical and Political Cooperation

During the Cold War, Türkiye pursued a pro-Western foreign policy and distanced itself from the Non-Aligned Movement, which hindered its rapprochement with African countries. However, as Ankara's relations with African countries began to improve, they became mutually beneficial, and cooperation began to develop rapidly.

Türkiye's African policy rests on two pillars: historical ties, primarily between Northeast Africa / the Horn of Africa and the Ottoman Empire in the 16th–19th centuries, and an anti-neocolonialist discourse. While deliberately "forgetting" the Ottoman enslavement of Africans, Ankara constantly emphasizes that it differs from the continent's Western partners, who have a "colonial past" in Africa.[33]

All Turkish governments, despite differences in their domestic and foreign policies, have made efforts to develop a national defense industry. In the 1970s, major state-owned defense companies such as Turkish Aerospace (TAI, 1973) and Military Electronic Industries (ASELSAN, 1975) were established, and by the late 1980s, several private military-industrial complex (MIC) enterprises had also emerged, either with the participation of existing Turkish firms or in partnership with international syndicates. For example, *Tusaş Engine Industries*, a manufacturer of aerospace engines, was founded in 1985 as a joint venture (JV) between TAI, General Electric (USA), the Turkish Armed Forces Foundation, and the Turkish Aeronautical Association. In turn, one of the leading Turkish defense manufacturers, FNSS Defence Systems, was founded in 1988 as a joint venture between the American company FMC Corporation (now part of BAE Systems) and the Turkish *Nurol Holding*; another company, *Otokar*, began producing tactical wheeled vehicles under license from Land Rover in 1987, and armored vehicles *Akrep* and *Cobra* in the early 1990s.[34] In 2011, ASELSAN acquired a South African engineering firm and created ASELSAN South Africa, a company that produces electro-optical instruments for the military and aerospace industries.[35]

The economic boom that Türkiye experienced in the mid-2000s led to an increase in funding for defense in general and the development of new models of military equipment in particular. By the 2020s, an increasing number of small and medium-sized enterprises began working in the defense sector as subcontractors: in the early 2000s, there were 56 such companies in Türkiye, and by the early 2020s, their number had reached 1,500, largely due to government financial incentives.[36]

In the mid-2010s, Turkish defense companies turned their attention to the African market in an effort to diversify their exports. While Turkish military products previously consisted primarily of small arms and ammunition, armored vehicles were later added, and recently, combat and reconnaissance UAVs have become the leading

[32] Orakçi S. The Rise of Turkey in Africa // Aljazeera Centre for Studies. 2022. P. 14. URL: https://studies.aljazeera.net/sites/default/files/articles/documents/2022-01/The%20Rise%20of%20Turkey%20in%20Africa.pdf (accessed: 22.11.2025).

[33] Barnett J. Between Islamism and Pragmatism: Interrogating Neo-Ottomanism in Turkey—Africa Relations // Journal of Middle East Politics and Policy. 2021. P. 27. URL: https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.hudson.org/Barnett+Fall+2022.pdf (accessed: 26.11.2025).

[34] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[35] Dahir A. H. Turkey's Evolving Engagement in Africa // TRT World Research Centre. 2020. P. 9. URL: https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Evolving-Turkey-Africa-Partnership.pdf (accessed: 20.11.2025).

[36] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

arms export (Kurç, 2024). Turkish drones are considered no less effective than those produced by Western countries, while also being more affordable for African countries.

Regarding armored vehicles, Morocco, Libya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Niger, Togo, and Burkina Faso have already purchased a significant number of Turkish armored personnel carriers (APCs). Tunisia, which receives 26% of Turkish arms, is the largest importer in Africa. It is followed by Nigeria (18.3%), Libya (11.0%), Egypt (7.3%), Rwanda (7.3%), Burkina Faso (5.5%), Ghana and Morocco (4.9% each), Uganda (3.7%), and Senegal (3.0%).[37] In 2021, Türkiye's defense and aerospace exports to the continent reached USD 460.6 million, up from approximately USD 83 million the previous year.[38] Thus, in 2021, the Turkish company *Katmerciler* accepted an order from the Kenya Defence Forces for the supply of 118 mine-resistant armored vehicles, signing a contract worth USD 73 million.[39] Although Ankara continued to lag behind the largest traditional arms exporters to Africa in terms of total supply volume, its growth rate and expansion of its product range indicated its emergence as a significant supplier (Kurç, 2024).

Along with expanding arms exports, Ankara has developed military advisory, educational, and military-technical cooperation with African states. This includes training military and law enforcement personnel, the activities of military attachés, and the conclusion of cooperation agreements in the security and defense industries.[40] Thus, Ankara has signed partnership agreements with more than 25 African countries, which include, in particular, the transfer of military technologies and the establishment of joint production of electro-optical sensors, surveillance and electronic warfare systems, mine-clearing vehicles and light weapons.[41] At the same time, Turkish defense companies offer competitive prices for their military equipment, without any political strings attached, making Türkiye a convenient partner for Africans in terms of the price-quality ratio of arms exports. Furthermore, Türkiye provides military and police training on the continent and has stepped up its participation in counter-terrorism initiatives in African states.[42]

The number of African embassies in Ankara has grown from 10 in 2008 to 44 in 2025,[43] and interestingly, many African diplomatic missions in Türkiye are headed by serving or retired generals.[44]

Among SSA countries, Türkiye has security agreements (ratified mainly in 2017–2018) with Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Djibouti, DRC, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda.[45] Military training programs are targeted at various security services—the army, gendarmerie, coast guard, and police. Turkish instructors have already

[37] Parlar Dal E., Dipama S. Assessing Turkey—Africa Engagements // Africa Policy Research Institute. April 27, 2023. URL: https://afripoli.org/assessing-turkey-africa-engagements (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[38] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[39] Hartung J. Kenya: Forging a Symbiotic Relationship with Turkey // International Institute for Strategic Studies. 2021. URL: https://horninstitute.org/kenya-forging-a-symbiotic-relationship-with-turkey (accessed: 18.11.2025).

[40] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Türkiye—Africa Ties Advancing to 'Unimaginable Levels': Erdoğan // Daily Sabah. October 17, 2025. https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkiye-africa-ties-advancing-to-unimaginable-levels-erdogan (accessed: 17.11.2025).

[44] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[45] Ibid.

trained dozens of Kenyan police officers in counterterrorism and drug trafficking techniques.[46] In 2020, Türkiye signed defense pacts with Niger and Nigeria, in 2021 with Togo and Ethiopia, in 2022 with the DRC and Senegal.[47]

In February 2025, Ankara signed a military agreement with N'Djamena, Chad, to take control of the Abéché military base, which the French garrison had abandoned at the end of January of that year. In turn, the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (*Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı*, MİT) established an office in Niger.[48] These deals demonstrate, firstly, the expansion of the Turkish military presence on the continent, partly due to the completion of large-scale operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party in Syria and Iraq,[49] thus freeing up some special forces units for their transfer to Africa, primarily to the Sahel region; secondly, its interest in restoring the influence of the Ottoman Empire in Africa; and, finally, Türkiye's advantage as a reliable player for African governments, compared to France.

The political dimension of Türkiye's presence was also clearly evident in Sudan. Under the regime of Omar al-Bashir (1989–2019), Ankara combined economic and military-political cooperation with contacts with Islamist circles. The change of power in April 2019 forced the Turkish leadership to reverse course: preserving its accumulated economic and political positions became more important than supporting individual ideological partners. By the time of al-Bashir's overthrow, Turkish companies' investments in Sudan were estimated at approximately USD 600 million.[50]

The Suakin Island project has become a key element of Turkish-Sudanese cooperation. The 2017 agreements envisaged the restoration of the historic port infrastructure and the creation of a berth for servicing civilian and military vessels.[51] Another notable project was the opening in 2014 of the Sudanese-Turkish Research and Training Hospital in Nyala, South Darfur, built with the assistance of TİKA.[52]

While Türkiye's presence in Sudan and the Horn of Africa has caused concerns in Egypt and the Gulf states, Ankara's growing influence in the Sahel states has become a matter of concern for the West, especially France, which has accused the Turkish government of fomenting anti-French sentiment in Africa.[53] Indeed, Türkiye's policy in the Sahel is multi-vector, but Ankara's cooperation with regional states remains very limited compared to its activities in, for example, Libya, Somalia, and Algeria, and is limited primarily to the construction of mosques, madrassas, and infrastructure facilities; not a single Sahel country is among Türkiye's top ten largest

[46] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

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[48] Parens R., Plichta M. Turkey's Return to Africa // Foreign Policy Research Institute. March 10, 2025. URL: https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/03/turkeys-return-to-africa (accessed: 22.11.2025).

[49] Bashirli R. Türkiye Sends Troops to Africa // Haqqin.az. September 24, 2025. (In Russian). URL: https://haqqin.az/news/360977 (accessed: 16.11.2025).

[50] Alaranta T. Turkey in Africa: Chasing Markets and Power with a Neo-Ottomanist Approach // Finnish Institute of International Affairs. 2020. URL: https://fiia.fi/en/publication/turkey-in-africa (accessed: 18.08.2026).

[51] Kucukgocmen A., Abdelaziz K. Turkey to Restore Sudanese Red Sea Port and Build Naval Dock // Reuters. December 26, 2017. URL: https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkey-to-restore-sudanese-red-sea-port-and-build-naval-dock-idUSKBN1EK0Z1/ (accessed: 18.08.2026).

[52] Nyala Sudan Turkish Training and Research Hospital Inaugurated // Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency. March 10, 2014. URL: https://tika.gov.tr/en/detail-nyala_sudan_turkish_training_and_research_hospital_inaugurated/ (accessed: 18.03.2026).

[53] Macron Blames Russia and Turkey for Bolstering anti-French Sentiment in Africa // France 24. November 20, 2020. https://www.france24.com/en/france/20201120-macron-blames-russia-and-turkey-for-bolstering-anti-french-sentiment-in-africa (accessed: 18.11.2025).

trading partners in Africa.[54] However, in the 2020s, trade and investment flows from Türkiye to Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, where Ankara is implementing projects in the fields of education, healthcare and water supply, have expanded.[55]

Since the 2010s, Türkiye has made a significant contribution to UN security efforts in Africa and has increased humanitarian aid deliveries to conflict-affected areas in Nigeria, Niger, and other countries.[56] By implementing training programs for Malian and Nigerien military personnel, as France scales back counterterrorism efforts in its former colonies, Türkiye has expanded its engagement with the Sahel states. Ankara has also contributed personnel to the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), and others.

It should be noted that the nature of cooperation between Türkiye and SSA countries is influenced—in the context of Ankara's aspirations to become a member of the European Union (EU)—by its relations with that association. When Türkiye had the opportunity to join the EU in the 2000s, Ankara used this opportunity as a foreign policy asset, positioning itself as a global center of power, including on the African continent. For example, in 2006–2007, Türkiye participated in the EU missions in the DRC—*EUFOR RD Congo* and *EUPOL Kinshasa*.[57] At that time, Ankara's African policy was aligned with that of the EU.

However, as Türkiye's EU accession process began to stall, security coordination between Ankara and Brussels began to weaken. Currently, Türkiye does not participate in any of the EU's 10 peacekeeping/military training missions in Africa, although it does contribute to the EU's activities within the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) based on a framework agreement signed in 2006. As a result, Ankara and the EU conduct military training for officers, for example, for the Somali National Army, but without any coordination. However, Ankara provides more comprehensive training programs, maintaining liaison with remote garrisons.[58]

Religious Diplomacy

With the AKP's rise to power, religious and related non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to play a more prominent role in Türkiye's African policy. State structures, foundations, and NGOs became involved in educational, humanitarian, and cultural projects, forming an additional channel for Turkish soft power on the continent (Guner, 2021; Haynes, 2022). Muhammad Fethullah Gülen's (1941–2024) Hizmet (Service) movement, which established schools and other educational institutions in African countries, played a significant role in the initial phase. Following the 2016 coup attempt, relations between the Turkish authorities and the movement finally descended into open confrontation, leading Ankara to seek the transfer of its educational institutions to other Turkish organizations, primarily the *Maarif* Foundation (Guner, 2021).

[54] Carbone G., Casola C. Sahel, 10 Years of Instability: Local, Regional and International Dynamics // ISPI. 2022. P. 126. URL: https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/10_years_instability_sahel_report.ispi_.2022_0.pdf (accessed: 20.11.2025).

[55] Lebovich A. Unravelling Turkish Involvement in the Sahel: Geopolitics and Local Impact // Clingendael Institute. 2023. P. 5. URL: https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/Policy_brief_Unravelling_Turkish_involvement_in_the_Sahel.pdf (accessed: 21.11.2025).

[56] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[57] Tanrıverdi Yaşar N. Unpacking Turkey's Security Footprint in Africa: Trends and Implications for the EU // SWP Comment. 2022. URL: https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2022C42/ (accessed: 04.01.2026).

[58] Parens R., Plichta M. Turkey's Return to Africa // Foreign Policy Research Institute. March 10, 2025. URL: https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/03/turkeys-return-to-africa (accessed: 22.11.2025).

Currently, Türkiye's religious diplomacy is primarily aimed at expanding the country's influence in Africa against the backdrop of the strengthening multi-vector presence on the continent of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Iran.[59] Ankara is promoting the so-called Turkish Islam in SSA, positioning it as more tolerant than the alternatives offered by countries in the Middle East and North Africa. At the same time, Türkiye is providing humanitarian aid to areas affected by wars and conflicts (Chad, South Sudan, Niger, Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), etc.), establishes Islamic study centers, and has already published translations of the Quran into nine African languages. It has launched a "sister city" project: for example, the Çankaya district of Ankara has become a sister city with Djibouti, the Merzifon district of Amasya with Dakar, and the Buka district of Izmir with Maputo.[60]

This direction of Turkish policy was noticeably manifested in Ethiopia, where Muslims make up a significant part of the population. Türkiye's educational presence has also expanded amid the restructuring of the network of institutions previously associated with Fethullah Gülen's movement. At the same time, religious and educational tools were combined with political diplomacy: in 2021, Ankara offered mediation in resolving the border dispute between Ethiopia and Sudan, and the Sudanese side publicly agreed with the Turkish initiative.[61]

Overall, African cases demonstrate that Ankara flexibly uses the religious factor and, as a rule, subordinates it to broader political and economic objectives.

Instead of a Conclusion: Features of the Turkish Model of Interaction with SSA Countries

The expansion of cooperation in various fields between Türkiye and the countries of SSA is the result of several factors: Ankara's desire to strengthen its influence on the international stage and become a regional powerhouse in its rivalry with other regional and global powers, growing demand for energy and other resources, the need to develop new markets for its products, and so on. However, behind this seemingly pure pragmatism lies a deeper strategy, representing not just a geopolitical maneuver but an attempt to rethink traditional models of cooperation with Africa. Turkish diplomacy, often referred to as the "Ankara Consensus," is attempting to offer an alternative not only to the Western but also the Chinese approach, emphasizing not paternalism, but a "partnership of equals" based on mutual benefits and respect for sovereignty. However, the rhetoric of equal partnership and distancing from Western colonial legacies is also characteristic of Chinese policy in Africa (Aydın & Liu, 2024). Therefore, the uniqueness of the Turkish model lies not so much in the uniqueness of its declared principles, but in the combination of various instruments and Ankara's ability to relatively quickly link diplomatic, commercial, transport, humanitarian, educational, and military-technical channels of interaction.

As Prime Minister and then President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made 53 official visits to 31 African countries,[62] which in particular

[59] Mahmood O. S. The Middle East's Complicated Engagement in the Horn of Africa. Has the Involvement of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar and Turkey Helped or Hurt East Africa? // Small Wars Journal. February 2, 2020. URL: https://archive.smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/middle-easts-complicated-engagement-horn-africa (accessed: 22.11.2025).

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demonstrates Ankara's intention to establish a long-term presence in Africa. However, the further expansion of Turkish-African cooperation will also depend on Türkiye's own internal resource capacities, primarily the state of its economy and its ability to simultaneously support a wide range of foreign policy, investment, humanitarian, and military-technical initiatives. Türkiye's ability to maneuver in relations with the West, Russia, and China allows it to maintain a relatively independent approach to Africa. In the medium term, the sustainability of Türkiye's presence will depend on Ankara's ability to maintain its current combination of economic, political, humanitarian, and military-technical instruments in the face of increasing competition from external players.

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