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Charity Registration Number: 208223

Africa Meeting Summary

Turkey and the Horn of Africa: Emerging Interests and Relations

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28 June 2012

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INTRODUCTION

This expert roundtable explored Turkey's foreign policy objectives in the Horn of Africa and identified how Turkish engagement fits with the interests of leaders in the region. Focus was placed on the nature of Turkey's humanitarian assistance, business relations, educational provision and political engagement, with speakers examining Turkey's capacity to deliver as much as is promised.

SERHAT ORAKCI

It has almost been a year since the declaration of famine in Somalia, and therefore a discussion on Turkey and the Horn of Africa was very timely. There have been some developments in Somalia and East Africa over the past year. There was a \$30-million operation by Turkey in Somalia the last year alone, involving a variety of interventions including provision of water, agricultural support and so on. Turkish involvement in Somalia is not launched from Nairobi, but from Mogadishu.

The speaker shared his observations from a decade working in Africa as a student, volunteer and professional. Somalia is complicated by its instability. Although involved as a humanitarian, Mr Orakci has been able to witness political development in the region from the ground.

Turkey is taking a significant initiative in Somalia, and is working with a number of private local NGOs. For some observers, its involvement is surprising, although it should not be. There has been a shift in involvement, not just from Turkey but also from the Islamic world. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Islamic NGOs provide significant contribution to Somalia. Turkey has garnered such publicity because it is working on the ground with its own institutions, including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), the Turkish Red Crescent and the Directorate of Religious Affairs. There are at least 20 large Turkish agencies taking part in development in Somalia at this time.

In 1998, Turkey began efforts to develop its relations with African countries. This programme became more effective in 2005, as Turkey declared a Year of Africa and a new political party came into power. This was also the same year that the African Union (AU) declared Turkey as a strategic partner, and Turkey took up observer status at the AU. There was trade worth \$20 billion between Turkey and Africa in 2011. There are now TIKA offices in Sudan and Ethiopia, and Turkish Airlines is flying to new destinations in Africa – which

has had an effect on relations. Turkey has opened many new embassies, and there are now 30 in Africa. High-level political delegations from Africa make regular visits to Turkey, and it is not just Turkish businesses that are establishing trade links. More Turkish universities now have large Africa departments.

Turkey has expectations from Africa. The trade volume is increasing, and Turkey is seeking political support in international organizations such as the United Nations. Turkey's interventions in Africa provide it with prestige internationally and make it seem like a regional power. It is more active in the Horn of Africa than in North Africa because of historical links there. The legacy of the Ottoman empire helps Turkey to establish new links in the region. During the 16th century, northern Somalia was valued by the Ottomans because of its strategic importance. Ottoman influence can still be seen in Mogadishu and in Berbera, where water channels built during that period still provide water to the cities.

There is a historic link between Turkey and Somalia. In the 1990s, Turkey was part of UN Operations in Somalia (UNOSOM). There was Turkish participation in Operation Restore Hope, and a Turkish general served as force commander. Turkey may see the current times as an opportunity to correct the mistakes made in the 1990s.

Turkey has given huge amounts of humanitarian assistance to south central Somalia. Calls came from Somalis in April 2011 to IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation offices asking for assistance. The UN made a declaration of famine in Somalia in July 2011. This was not initially successful in generating money for aid efforts because people lacked awareness of the issues, but later Turkey called an emergency meeting during which \$350 million was collected to help with the famine efforts. The visit of the Turkish prime minister to Somalia during Ramadan had a big effect for many Somalis. He was accompanied by many journalists, which meant that images of his trip were widely distributed and created more support for Turkey within Somalia. During Ramadan, the way in which Turkish people queued to donate to IHH's Somalia appeal had not been seen before.

Turkey used its previous experience of working in the Horn of Africa, specifically in Sudan, and transferred this to Somalia. Engagement over the past year has changed perceptions of Somalia in Turkey, and the routes opened up by Turkish Airlines between Istanbul and Mogadishu have also been important. It makes the work of organizations on the ground a lot easier.

One thousand scholarships have been given to Somali students by Turkish schools.

Turkish professionals work on the ground in Somalia with local NGOs, which has helped to improve Somalis' perceptions of Turkey, while Somalis are still suspicious of the UN.

AMBASSADOR SHINN

Turkey and Somalia

While there is a tendency to see Turkey's involvement with Somalia as a surprise, it has important antecedents. Turkey had an embassy in Somalia until the state collapse of 1991. In 1993, Turkey contributed a 320-person mechanized infantry unit reinforced by combat support and three frigates to the UN Operations in Somalia. Turkish Lieutenant General Cevik Bir commanded the entire UN force for the year.

At the conclusion of the UN mission, Turkey pulled back from Somalia but returned forcefully in 2010 when it hosted the UN-sponsored Istanbul Conference on Somalia and the Turkish people donated more than \$300 million to combat famine.

Turkey also provided rotating commander for the multilateral Combined Task Force 151 aimed at fighting Somali piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

In 2011, Turkey hosted the Emergency Ministerial Meeting of the OIC's executive committee on Somalia. Prime Minister Erdogan visited Mogadishu in August 2011, the first of non-African leader to do so in two decades. President Sheikh Sharif has made several trips to Istanbul. Turkey reopened its embassy in Mogadishu in 2011 and offered to mediate between the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and Al-Shabaab. However, there remain tensions in the role of Turkey. Turkey expected to be perceived by Al-Shabaab as being Islamic too, but the latter sees the Turkish version of Islam as a watered-down variety. Turkey still received about 400 Somalis for religious training by the Directorate for Religious Affairs and the Turkish Religious Affairs Foundation.

In spite of large presence of Turks in Mogadishu, they have not encountered any attacks. This could be explained by their integration within the Somali community by contrast to the rest of the international community. However, one Al-Shabaab suicide bombing in October 2011 killed many Somali

students applying for scholarships to Turkey and Sudan as well as two Turks. Al-Shabaab justified the attack by claiming that the students were going for intelligence or military training.

In 2012, Turkey's deputy prime minister accompanied the inaugural flight of Turkish Airlines twice-weekly flight to Mogadishu. It marked the first international air carrier and airport security support to Somalia. Turkey also hosted the second Istanbul Conference on Somalia. Doctors worldwide, TIKA, Kimse Yok Mu, Turkish Red Crescent, Humanitarian Relief Foundation and the Physicians for Hope Foundation are active in Somalia. Turkish NGOs operate refugee camps in Mogadishu.

The Gulen-affiliated Nile Foundation of Turkey signed an agreement with TIKA to enhance the education system over a 49-year period and has opened the first Turkish High school in the country. TIKA is also in contact with the government of Somaliland concerning assistance programmes, as Turkey is trying to balance ties with the TFG and Somaliland. TUSKON is encouraging companies to invest in Somalia and associations are being formed. As many as 200,000 Somalis have been treated at Turkish field hospitals and clinics. Recently, Turkey inaugurated a 400-bed hospital and there are plans to provide garbage trucks, build a waste-disposal facility, pave the road between Mogadishu airport and the city centre, dig water wells, and develop agriculture and livestock production. Turkey also agreed to train Somali soldiers.

Turkey, Eritrea, South Sudan and Djibouti

Turkey has embassies in Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia, but not Eritrea nor Djibouti.

The least important relationship is with Eritrea, where Turkey has an honorary consulate in Asmara, sends a few companies and offers PhD scholarships.

The newest relationship is with South Sudan, with a consulate established in Juba in January 2011, which upgraded to an embassy soon after the independence. Turkey assigned 26 police to UNKISS, but apart from that, the relationship remains quiet. Turkey struggles to define the importance of South Sudan for its involvement in the region.

There is a modest relationship with Djibouti, whose president visited Ankara in 2009. Turkey provides humanitarian aid in addition to sizeable scholarships (30 in 2009-10 and 25 in 2010-11). The most important aspect of the

relationship relates to port access for Turkish naval vessels participating in anti-piracy operations in Somalia.

Turkey and Ethiopia

Trade with the Horn is not significant, apart from modest exports to Sudan (\$228 million) and Ethiopia (\$175 million). In 2010, there were virtually no imports from the region.

Ethiopia has the longest relationship with Turkey. Turkey opened an embassy in Addis Ababa in 1926 and Ethiopia opened one in Ankara in 1933. This embassy was closed in 1984 but reopened in 2006. Emperor Haile Selassie visited Turkey twice, the same amount as the Turkish Prime Minister visited Ethiopia. TIKA opened office in 2005. Turkish Airlines began flights to Addis Ababa in 2006. In 2008, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi was co-chair of the Turkey Africa Summit in Istanbul. Turkey provides extensive training each year for five Ethiopians and Turkish Police Academy.

As of 2011, there were 238 Turkish firms investing in Ethiopia with total investments estimated between \$1.3 and \$1.8 billion. Textiles, construction, leather, furniture, agro-processing, and water well drilling are some of the major activities. The two countries also signed numerous MoU's and Turkey is interested in free trade agreements. Turkish Exporters' Union and TUSKON organized trade forum in Addis Ababa in 2011.

In 2012, the two countries held their fifth annual political consultation. Four Gulen schools operate in Ethiopia with 535 students and the relationship is growing.

Turkey and Sudan

Sudan is the most important relationship in terms of political ties. Turkey recognized Sudan after the independence of 1956. Sudan's president visited Turkey in 1982 and 2008 and Turkey's prime minister visited Sudan in 2006. Both countries established an inter-parliamentary friendship group in 1999.

Turkish Airlines serves Khartoum. Turkey is contributing to 40 unarmed military personnel and police officers to the UN peacekeeping mission in Darfur. Turkey tried to walk in middle line on Darfur, but TIKA is involved in Darfur as well as other NGOs such as the Turkish Red Crescent and Gulen-affiliated Kimse Yok Mu.

Numerous bilateral agreements were signed, including a free trade agreement. Turkish investments total about \$200 million, mainly in steel, cement, PVC manufacturing, grain import and export, furniture, textile, and home appliances. Turkish companies are also building \$300-million worth of infrastructure projects – competing with the Chinese companies on this sector.

Turkey provides assistance to the health care system, including treatments in Turkey for about 1,000 Somalis annually. The humanitarian and development assistance to Sudan reached \$60 million by the end of 2009. Turkey also provides 10 MA and 10 PhD scholarships annually. Gulen-affiliated school established in Khartoum in 1998, now provide secondary education to 400 students.

What does it mean?

On the economic side, Turkey is expanding in the region. Turks are looking to win contracts, to make profitable investments and to trade with several countries in the Horn.

On the political side, Turkey is asserting its regional power with an expanding definition of its region and an occasional not-so-subtle flashback to the glory of the Ottoman period. There is also a desire to get support from the 54 African countries that constitute more than a quarter of the UN members, on issues such as a non-permanent seat on the Security Council, Cyprus, counterterrorism, anti-piracy and trade disputes in the World Trade Organization.

There is also a religious drive from NGOs and the Turkish government to engage more extensively in predominantly Muslim countries in Africa.

Finally, there is a straightforward humanitarian concern based on Turkey's Islamic culture of giving that comes from the government, Turkish NGOs, the business community and individuals. It would be interesting to track the flow of Turkish governmental and non-governmental aid to Africa. This would probably demonstrate a high correlation of aid to predominantly Muslim countries and to Islamic minorities in other countries.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question:

The Turkish approach is different from the Western approach because it does not seem to be afraid of taking risks – financial and security risks. What can the international community learn from it?

Serhat Orakci:

Turkey is taking risks but its ability to negotiate with Al-Shabaab is still limited. It is in a good position to lead the negotiation, especially looking at the humanitarian dialogue between the two sides. Turkey is using the humanitarian element as a tool to get access to the poorest people in the country, including in the Al-Shabaab-controlled region.

Question:

What can be said about Turkish policies beyond Somalia? What are the foundations for a Turkish approach to Africa in the next five years?

Serhat Orakci:

There is no definite humanitarian state policy for Africa. The humanitarian organizations started to be mentioned in the Turkish National Report for the first time three years ago. Following this mention, the government started to take the role of NGOs in Africa more seriously. The national agency – TİKA – is responsible for a large amount of projects in the field of local cooperation.

Question:

Do you see ethnic tensions between Turkey and ethnic minorities arise in Africa? Do you see a red flag intervention when looking at the role of Turkey?

Comment from a Uganda High Commission official:

Uganda has been involved in Somalia under the AMISOM mission. The main problem that remains with the international intervention is that it tends to see the Somalia problem from a military perspective. The military problem is there mostly because the country lacks the necessary institutions to manage a

conflicting society. The army, the policy, together with governmental institutions and the judiciary are key elements for peace-building. The authority of the state is only legitimized through institutional capacities. Turkey's involvement in Somalia is beneficial because it provides social services, which helps the legitimization of the state. Building on capacity brings better results than short-term focus on humanitarian help.

Jason Mosley:

There is no red flag to Turkey's involvement in Somalia but rather an opportunity, and there are no ethnic conflicts with Somalia.

Question:

What are the reasons behind the importance of the relationship with specific countries only?

Ambassador Shinn:

Turkey is close to Ethiopia on issues related to Somalia to avoid creating a troubled relationship. Turkey might mediate on the Eritrea-Ethiopia dispute, but they will not intervene further. Turkey could have an influence and be a factor to take into account in the relationship between Ethiopia and Somalia as the country works closely with both.

Question:

Turkey works with Ethiopia, builds relationship with the TFG in Somalia and manages to enter Al-Shabaab territory, how does it all fit together?

What is Turkey's level of trust in working on Al-Shabaab territory?

Serhat Orakci:

Turkey and Somalia are working together to find solutions for Somalia's problems. The conference in Istanbul was a key moment in their relationship. Turkey always tries to address Somalia as one state, which brings opposition from the leaders of Somaliland. But the major role of Turkey is its humanitarian involvement and the fact that Turks manage to access Al-Shabaab areas by getting in touch with local leaders.

Audience comment:

There is a danger that Turkey makes the same mistakes as the international community. For example, Somali people have to decide for themselves how they want to reunite and the proactive approach that Turkey is taking is very dangerous for its intervention in the country. By supporting the reunification and trying to find a solution for local problems, Turkey is eventually taking the same approach as the rest of the international community.

Ambassador Shinn:

The main danger in Turkey's involvement is the crosscutting themes between the NGOs and the government interventions. Turkey uses this skilfully so that it seems that it is Turkish NGOs and not the government dealing with Al-Shabaab. Turkish NGOs have a lot of freedom to act independently from the government so that officials are not always aware of NGOs' initiatives.