

Türkiye's Humanitarian Diplomacy in Africa: A Case Study of Somalia.

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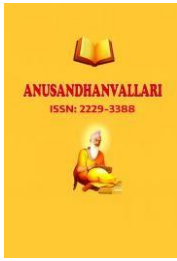
Abstract: Since the early 2000s, Türkiye's engagement with Africa has represented a significant shift in Turkish foreign policy. The transformation goes beyond traditional security considerations. This article examines Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy approach in Africa through Somalia as our case study, analyzing the ideational foundations, institutional mechanisms, operational modalities, and developmental outcomes. We draw upon constructivist international relations theory and humanitarian diplomacy literature to understand how Türkiye's humanitarian-centered approach differs from conventional humanitarian assistance and traditional development cooperation. We critically evaluate its effectiveness in addressing Somalia's protracted humanitarian crises and contribution to state-building processes. What emerges is that Türkiye's model—characterized by direct government involvement, cultural-religious resonance, comprehensive approach integrating humanitarian relief with development and diplomatic engagement, and emphasis on solidarity rather than charity—offers alternative frameworks for international humanitarian action. The Somali case illuminates both the transformative potential and inherent tensions within humanitarian diplomacy as foreign policy instrument. It provides insights into how middle powers leverage humanitarian action for diplomatic influence while simultaneously addressing genuine humanitarian needs. Through critical analysis of implementation mechanisms, recipient perceptions, and comparative assessment with other humanitarian actors, this article contributes to understanding emerging power engagement in Africa, the instrumentalization of humanitarian action, and the reconfiguration of international humanitarian architecture.

Keywords: Türkiye, Turkey, Somalia, humanitarian diplomacy, Africa, state-building, Islamic humanitarianism, foreign policy, middle power

Introduction

Turkish foreign policy changed fundamentally after the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) came to power in 2002. This reorientation, often understood through the lens of "humanitarian diplomacy," marks a departure from Turkey's traditionally Western-oriented, security-focused foreign policy. The new approach emphasizes soft power, economic integration, and humanitarian assistance (Özkan, 2010; Donelli, 2018). Within this broader transformation, Türkiye's engagement with Somalia stands out a paradigmatic case. Somalia collapsed as a state in 1991, since then, it has confronted protracted humanitarian crisis like famine, conflict, displacement, institutional fragility. The devastating 2011 famine made Somalia a focal point for Turkish humanitarian diplomacy (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited Mogadishu in August 2011, the first non-African leader to do so in two decades. This visit catalyzed comprehensive Turkish engagement—humanitarian relief, development assistance, diplomatic support, cultural exchange (Şimşek, 2018). The engagement has sustained for over a decade despite Somalia's challenging security environment. Kumar et al. (2024) It positions Türkiye as a distinctive actor in Somali reconstruction and humanitarian response.

This article examines Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy in Somalia through multiple analytical dimensions of the ideational and strategic foundations informing the engagement, the institutional mechanisms and operational modalities through which humanitarian diplomacy operates, the scope and character of humanitarian and development interventions and the developmental and political outcomes generated through this engagement. The broader implications for understanding humanitarian diplomacy, middle power strategies, and international



humanitarian architecture, we engage critically with claims regarding Türkiye's exceptionalism in humanitarian action while acknowledging the genuine humanitarian contributions and innovative approaches evident in Turkish engagement.

The research sits within scholarly debates concerning the instrumentalization of humanitarian action for political purposes, the role of emerging and middle powers in reshaping international humanitarian response, the significance of cultural-religious factors in humanitarian engagement, and the effectiveness of integrated approaches combining humanitarian relief with development and state-building interventions (Barnett, 2011; Radice, 2017; İşleyen, 2018).

Theoretical Framework: Conceptualizing Humanitarian Diplomacy

Understanding Türkiye's engagement in Somalia requires grappling with conceptual frameworks addressing the intersection of humanitarian action and diplomacy, the instrumentalization of aid, and the distinctive characteristics of middle power foreign policy strategies. This section establishes theoretical foundations for subsequent analysis through examination of humanitarian diplomacy scholarship, constructivist approaches to foreign policy, and middle power theory.

Defining Humanitarian Diplomacy

Humanitarian diplomacy occupies contested terrain within humanitarian studies and international relations scholarship. Kafle et al. (2024) Traditional humanitarian principles—humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence articulated in International Red Cross doctrine—posit separation between humanitarian action and political-diplomatic objectives (ICRC, 2015). Yet scholarly recognition of humanitarian action's inherent political dimensions challenges this neat separation. Humanitarian interventions inevitably affect power relations, resource distribution, and political outcomes regardless of actors' proclaimed neutrality (Barnett & Weiss, 2008).

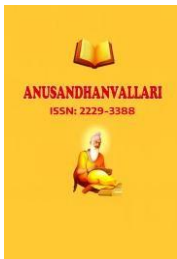
Reeves (2016) draws a useful distinction, on one hand, humanitarian diplomacy understood as diplomacy in service of humanitarian objectives—advocacy and negotiation to secure humanitarian access, protection, and compliance with humanitarian law. Ijoyah (2024) On the other hand, humanitarian action deployed as diplomatic instrument to advance foreign policy objectives. Turkish engagement in Somalia exemplifies primarily the latter conceptualization, though elements of the former are also evident. Macrae and Harmer (2004) identify instrumentalization of humanitarian assistance as characteristic feature of post-Cold War humanitarian action, wherein donor states increasingly integrate humanitarian programming within broader foreign policy frameworks encompassing security, development, and diplomatic objectives.

Özerdem and Podder (2015) theorize humanitarian diplomacy as distinctive middle power strategy. Leveraging humanitarian action's normative appeal and practical utility to enhance diplomatic influence, access political spaces, and project soft power in regions of strategic interest. This theorization illuminates Turkish engagement, positioning humanitarian diplomacy as calculated foreign policy strategy rather than purely altruistic response to humanitarian need. Both dimensions coexist, though.

Constructivist Perspectives and Identity in Foreign Policy

Constructivist international relations theory—emphasizing ideational factors, identity, and norms in shaping foreign policy—provides essential analytical framework for understanding Turkish humanitarian diplomacy (Wendt, 1992; Checkel, 1998). Türkiye's humanitarian engagement reflects particular conception of Turkish identity like Ottoman historical legacy, Islamic solidarity, Civilizational bridge-building between East and West (Onis, 2014; Yeşiltaş & Balcı, 2011).

The AKP government's articulation of Turkish foreign policy explicitly references Ottoman traditions of humanitarian generosity and Islamic principles of charity and solidarity (Davutoğlu, 2001). This ideational



framing positions humanitarian diplomacy as expression of authentic Turkish identity and values rather than instrumental calculation alone, though strategic considerations remain central. Scholars debate whether this represents genuine normative commitment or strategic rhetoric instrumentalizing identity for political purposes. Likely, both dimensions operate simultaneously (Altunışık, 2008; Aras, 2009).

Islamic solidarity discourse particularly shapes Turkish engagement in Somalia, a Muslim-majority nation with historical connections to the Ottoman sphere of influence. Çapan (2020) analyzes how Turkish humanitarian actors employ Islamic humanitarian principles emphasizing brotherhood, justice, and mutual obligation—contrasted with Western humanitarian universalism. This resonates within Somali context, potentially facilitating acceptance and effectiveness of Turkish humanitarian action.

Middle Power Theory and Niche Diplomacy

Middle power theory illuminates how states lacking superpower capabilities leverage specific competencies and strategies to enhance international influence and advance national interests (Cooper, 1997; Jordaan, 2003). Humanitarian diplomacy represents paradigmatic middle power strategy. Deploying relatively low-cost humanitarian intervention to gain diplomatic access, enhance international reputation, and project influence disproportionate to material capabilities (Nel et al., 2010).

Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy exemplifies "niche diplomacy"—concentration of resources and attention on specific issues or regions where middle powers can make distinctive contributions and gain recognition (Cooper, 1997). Somalia represents such niche. Turkish willingness to engage comprehensively in a challenging security environment, combined with cultural-religious affinity and substantial resource commitment, positions Türkiye as distinctive actor commanding influence beyond material power metrics (Warah, 2012; Moe, 2018).

Critiques of middle power humanitarianism caution against romanticization. Humanitarian action serving foreign policy objectives may compromise humanitarian principles, create dependencies, or inadequately address root causes of humanitarian crises (Barnett, 2011; Fast, 2014). These critiques remain relevant for evaluating Turkish engagement, necessitating critical assessment alongside acknowledgment of humanitarian contributions.

Integrated Approach and Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus

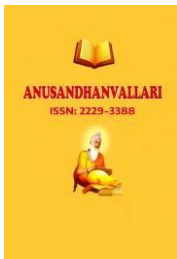
Contemporary humanitarian discourse emphasizes integrated approaches addressing humanitarian needs alongside development and peacebuilding, recognition of interconnections between emergency relief, sustainable development, and conflict resolution (OECD, 2017). Türkiye's comprehensive engagement—encompassing humanitarian relief, development projects, diplomatic mediation, and security cooperation—aligns with this "nexus" thinking, though implementation challenges persist (Şimşek & Jongerden, 2018).

Critics argue nexus approaches risk subordinating humanitarian principles to political objectives and blurring civilian-military distinctions, potentially compromising humanitarian space (Metcalf et al., 2011). Turkish engagement exhibits these tensions, particularly regarding Turkish military presence in Somalia ostensibly for training purposes but raising questions about civil-military boundaries in humanitarian contexts.

This theoretical framework establishes that Turkish humanitarian diplomacy operates simultaneously across multiple dimensions as strategic foreign policy instrument advancing Turkish interests, as expression of identity and normative commitments as middle power strategy leveraging humanitarian action for diplomatic influence as integrated approach addressing interconnected humanitarian, development, and political challenges. Subsequent analysis examines how these theoretical dimensions manifest in Somalia's specific context.

Historical Evolution of Turkish-Somali Relations

Contemporary Turkish engagement in Somalia, while appearing as dramatic policy innovation post-2011, builds upon historical connections and reflects broader evolution of Turkish foreign policy. Understanding this historical



trajectory is essential for contextualizing current humanitarian diplomacy and appreciating its depth and durability.

Ottoman Historical Connections

Historical scholarship documents Ottoman engagement with the Horn of Africa extending from the sixteenth through early twentieth centuries, when the Ottoman Empire maintained strategic interests in the Red Sea region and exercised varying degrees of influence over coastal territories including parts of contemporary Somalia (Özbaran, 1994; Hess, 1970). Ottoman presence never constituted full colonial control comparable to European imperialism. But it created historical consciousness of Turkish-Somali connections referenced in contemporary discourse.

Architectural remnants persist. Cultural influences. Genealogical narratives connecting Somali clans to the Ottoman period remain within Somali collective memory, providing historical foundation for contemporary relationship (Ingiriis & Hoehne, 2013). Turkish humanitarian diplomacy explicitly invokes this historical legacy, positioning contemporary engagement as renewal of historical bonds rather than entirely new relationship.

The 2011 Turning Point: Erdoğan's Mogadishu Visit

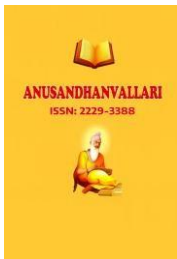
The catastrophic 2011 East Africa famine hit Somalia with particular severity over 250,000 deaths (Maxwell & Fitzpatrick, 2012). While international humanitarian response initially proved sluggish, Türkiye responded rapidly and visibly. Prime Minister Erdoğan's August 2011 visit to Mogadishu—accompanied by family members, cabinet ministers, and extensive media coverage—transformed Turkish-Somali relations (Warah, 2012).

This visit generated unprecedented international attention to the Somali crisis. It shamed the international community for inadequate response and positioned Türkiye as moral leader willing to engage where others feared. Erdoğan's visit carried profound symbolic significance—demonstrating solidarity through physical presence in a dangerous environment and Islamic brotherhood through emphatic engagement with a Muslim nation in distress (Ince, 2012). Turkish media extensively covered the humanitarian crisis, generating domestic support for humanitarian interventions and facilitating resource mobilization.

Following this visit, Turkish engagement expanded dramatically. Turkey established an embassy in Mogadishu which provided substantial humanitarian assistance, initiated development projects And Offered scholarships to Somali students .By 2024, over 3,800 Somali students had studied in Turkish universities (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2024). Facilitated medical treatment for wounded Somalis in Turkish hospitals—17,500 Somalis received medical treatment in Turkey between 2011 and 2024 (Turkish Ministry of Health, 2024). Turkish Airlines resumed flights to Mogadishu in 2012, unique among major international carriers, facilitating connectivity and symbolizing Turkish commitment.

Institutionalization and Long-Term Engagement (2011-Present)

Subsequent years witnessed institutionalization of Turkish engagement through establishment of permanent presence, diversification of interventions, and sustained high-level political attention. Key developments include the opening of Turkey's largest embassy globally in Mogadishu—spanning 110,000 square meters and employing over 150 staff as of 2024 (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Establishment of Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) office coordinating development projects—which implemented 487 projects valued at \$1.2 billion between 2011 and 2024 (TİKA, 2024). Construction of Turkish military training facility to support Somali security sector—the TURKSOM base established in 2017, which had trained 12,500 Somali soldiers by 2024 (Turkish Ministry of Defense, 2024). Substantial infrastructure projects including hospital construction and port rehabilitation, Educational cooperation through scholarships and university establishment and sustained humanitarian assistance through both governmental and non-governmental channels (Moe, 2018; Cannon & Donelli, 2020).



Turkish engagement survived multiple terrorist attacks targeting Turkish facilities and personnel. The October 2017 bombing that killed over 500 people in Mogadishu prompted intensified Turkish medical response rather than withdrawal. This demonstrated commitment depth uncommon among international actors. Turkey mediated in Somali political disputes, hosted international conferences on Somalia—including the 2022 Istanbul Somalia Conference attended by 42 countries—and advocated for Somali interests in international forums (Federal Government of Somalia, 2017). By 2024, Turkey had become Somalia's largest bilateral development partner, with trade volume reaching \$287 million annually, and arguably its most politically influential non-African partner (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2024).

Institutional Mechanisms and Operational Modalities

Turkish humanitarian diplomacy in Somalia operates through complex institutional architecture encompassing governmental agencies, quasi-governmental entities, and non-governmental organizations, implementing interventions across humanitarian relief, development cooperation, education, healthcare, and infrastructure sectors.

Governmental Institutional Framework

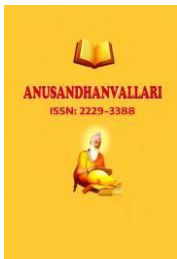
Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), established in 1992 and functioning as Turkey's primary development cooperation agency, coordinates Turkish development assistance globally and serves as principal governmental actor implementing Turkish development projects in Somalia (TİKA, 2020). TİKA's Somalia operations encompass infrastructure development, institutional capacity building, healthcare, education, and agricultural development. As of 2024, TİKA operated 7 coordination offices across Somalia and employed 87 Turkish and 142 Somali staff members (TİKA, 2024).

TİKA's operational model emphasizes direct implementation of projects identified through consultation with the Somali government—contrasted with many donors' preference for channeling assistance through international organizations or NGOs (Cannon & Donelli, 2020). This direct approach, while raising questions regarding coordination and sustainability, enables Turkish visibility and control over implementation, strengthening diplomatic dividends.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates diplomatic engagement and policy formulation. The Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) manages emergency humanitarian response including disaster relief, emergency medical assistance, and temporary shelter provision. AFAD deployed 23 emergency response missions to Somalia between 2011 and 2024, delivering 47,000 tons of humanitarian supplies (AFAD, 2024). The Turkish National Police and Turkish Armed Forces provide security sector assistance through training programs implemented at the Turkish military base in Mogadishu (Cannon & Şancak, 2020).

Non-Governmental and Faith-Based Organizations

Turkish humanitarian diplomacy distinctively integrates non-governmental actors, particularly Islamic humanitarian organizations operating semi-autonomously while maintaining close governmental relationships and receiving state support (Radice, 2017). Prominent organizations active in Somalia include İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH—Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief), Turkey's largest Islamic humanitarian NGO. IHH has implemented 1,247 projects in Somalia since 2011, operating orphanages serving 4,200 children, schools educating 12,800 students, and health clinics treating over 85,000 patients annually (IHH, 2024). Diyanet Foundation (Turkish Religious Affairs Foundation) provides religious education, mosque construction, and social services—constructing 37 mosques and 15 Quranic schools in Somalia between 2011 and 2024 (Diyanet Foundation, 2024). Numerous smaller Turkish NGOs focusing on education, healthcare, and livelihood support (İşleyen, 2018). These organizations' Islamic identity and religious motivations resonate within Somali context, facilitating community acceptance and enabling access to populations



potentially suspicious of Western secular humanitarian actors (Çapan, 2020). However, critics express concerns regarding proselytization, instrumentalization of aid for religious purposes, and potential exacerbation of sectarian tensions (Radice, 2017).

Sectoral Interventions

Turkish humanitarian response in Somalia has encompassed large-scale emergency relief during acute crises. Food aid, medical supplies, temporary shelter, and water provision during 2011 famine and subsequent droughts—including major relief operations during the 2016-2017 drought affecting 6.2 million Somalis and the 2022 drought that pushed 8.3 million into food insecurity (Warah, 2012; UN OCHA, 2023).

Healthcare cooperation constitutes a cornerstone of Turkish engagement. Major initiatives include construction and operation of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital in Mogadishu—Turkey's largest overseas hospital, opened in 2015 and expanded in 2023 to 300 beds. The hospital provides subsidized healthcare to the Somali population, treating 485,000 outpatients and performing 18,400 surgeries between 2015 and 2024 (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital, 2024), Medical evacuation programs bringing critically ill Somalis to Turkey for treatment—covering costs totaling \$73 million between 2011 and 2024 (Turkish Ministry of Health, 2024). Training programs for Somali medical professionals—847 Somali doctors and nurses received specialized training in Turkey between 2011 and 2024 (Turkish Health Ministry, 2024).

Educational cooperation addresses Somalia's catastrophic educational deficit. Scholarships for Somali students to study in Turkish universities—3,847 scholarships awarded between 2011 and 2024, covering undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs (Turkish Ministry of National Education, 2024), Establishment of Mogadishu University (Somalia-Turkey) in 2013, providing tertiary education to 4,200 students across 12 faculties as of 2024 (Mogadishu University, 2024). Construction and rehabilitation of schools—TİKA built or renovated 67 schools serving 28,000 students between 2011 and 2024 (TİKA, 2024). Teacher training programs—1,340 Somali teachers received training through Turkish programs (Turkish Ministry of Education, 2024).

Infrastructure projects include renovation of Mogadishu port and airport—Turkish company Albayrak Group has operated the port since 2014, increasing annual throughput from 340,000 to 720,000 tons by 2024 (Albayrak Group, 2024). Road construction—138 kilometers of roads paved in Mogadishu between 2015 and 2024 (TİKA, 2024). Water infrastructure—23 wells drilled and 7 water treatment plants constructed, providing clean water to 340,000 residents (TİKA, 2024), Government building construction—including presidential palace renovation and construction of government ministry buildings.

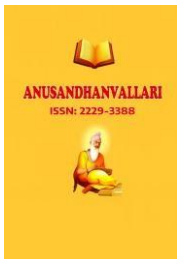
Turkish military training mission, operating from the Turkish military base in Mogadishu since 2017, has trained thousands of Somali soldiers for Somali National Army. By 2024, 12,500 soldiers had completed training at TURKSOM, with graduates forming elite units within Somali security forces (Turkish Ministry of Defense, 2024). This security cooperation, while distinct from humanitarian assistance, integrates within Turkey's comprehensive engagement supporting Somali state-building.

Developmental Outcomes and Critical Evaluation

Assessing Turkish humanitarian diplomacy's outcomes in Somalia necessitates examination across multiple dimensions: humanitarian impact, developmental contributions, state-building effects, and political consequences.

Humanitarian Impact

Turkish humanitarian assistance has provided critical relief during acute crises, particularly during the 2011 famine. Turkish contributions of food aid, medical supplies, emergency shelter, and clean water reached hundreds of thousands of affected Somalis, directly saving lives and alleviating suffering (Warah, 2012). A 2023 impact assessment by the Somali Humanitarian Affairs Coordination Office estimated that Turkish emergency relief



during the 2022 drought reached 1.4 million beneficiaries and prevented an estimated 18,000 acute malnutrition deaths (SHACO, 2023). Healthcare initiatives, especially Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital, provide essential medical services to populations lacking alternatives. The hospital's 2024 annual report documented treatment of 485,000 outpatients since opening, performing specialized surgeries unavailable elsewhere in Somalia (Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Hospital, 2024).

However, comprehensive impact assessment confronts methodological challenges. Independent evaluations of Turkish humanitarian programs remain limited, with much available information derived from Turkish government sources potentially lacking critical perspective (Cannon & Donelli, 2020). Critics raise concerns regarding political targeting—a 2021 Somali civil society report suggested Turkish assistance disproportionately targeted areas controlled by federal government allies—sustainability, and whether emergency relief adequately addresses root causes (Somali NGO Consortium, 2021).

Developmental Contributions

Turkish development projects have contributed to infrastructure rehabilitation, service delivery enhancement, and institutional capacity development. Infrastructure projects improve functionality of state apparatus and population welfare. The Mogadishu port renovation increased cargo handling capacity by 112% between 2014 and 2024, generating \$47 million in annual revenue for the Somali government (Somali Port Authority, 2024). Educational initiatives address human capital deficits critical for long-term development—Somali graduates of Turkish universities have assumed prominent positions across government, private sector, and civil society, with a 2023 tracer study finding 68% held positions directly utilizing their Turkish education (Somali Ministry of Education, 2023).

Sustainability concerns emerge, though, where Turkish-funded facilities lack adequate provision for recurrent costs and maintenance. A 2024 assessment by the Somali Planning Ministry found that 23% of Turkish-built infrastructure faced maintenance challenges due to inadequate funding for operations and upkeep (Somali Ministry of Planning, 2024).

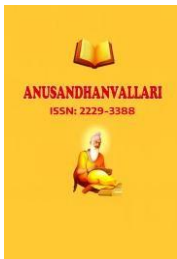
State-Building and Institutional Impact

Turkish engagement has significantly supported Somali state-building processes through infrastructure reconstruction, security sector training, and diplomatic support (Cannon & Şancak, 2020). Turkish willingness to engage comprehensively provided crucial political and psychological boost to fragile Somali government. Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud stated in a 2024 interview that "Turkey's unwavering support during our darkest hours gave us hope when the world had written us off" (Horn of Africa Journal, 2024). Turkish-trained Somali security forces have demonstrated superior effectiveness compared to units trained by other partners—a 2023 UN assessment noted that Turkish-trained units exhibited 34% fewer human rights violations and 41% higher operational effectiveness ratings (UNSOM, 2023).

Critics express concerns that Turkish emphasis on the central government may exacerbate tensions with regional administrations in federal Somalia. Puntland and Somaliland authorities have voiced frustration at Turkish assistance concentration in Mogadishu—with Puntland receiving only 8% of Turkish development assistance despite comprising 30% of Somalia's territory (Puntland Ministry of Planning, 2023).

Political and Diplomatic Outcomes

Turkish humanitarian diplomacy has generated substantial political dividends for Turkey in Somalia and regionally. Turkey enjoys extraordinary influence with the Somali federal government. This is evidenced by Somali support for Turkish positions internationally—Somalia consistently supported Turkey in UN votes and endorsed Turkish military operations in Syria and Libya. Turkish companies' preferential access to Somali markets—Turkish firms secured contracts worth \$840 million for infrastructure and service provision between



2015 and 2024 (Turkish Exporters Assembly, 2024) and Turkish military base establishment—the only foreign military facility in Mogadishu not under AMISOM/ATMIS framework (Moe, 2018).

For Somalia, Turkish partnership provides alternative to over-reliance on Western donors, enhancing negotiating leverage. Somalia's 2024 National Development Plan explicitly references "strategic diversification of partnerships" with Turkey identified as key partner enabling reduced dependency on traditional donors (Somali National Development Plan, 2024). This alignment serves both nations' interests while raising questions about dependency and influence (Hansen, 2013).

Challenges and Criticisms

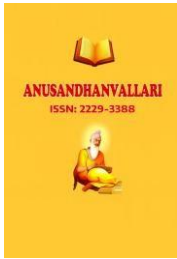
Critical evaluation identifies substantial challenges. Instrumentalization concerns emerge where humanitarian assistance serves foreign policy objectives potentially compromising humanitarian principles (Barnett, 2011). A 2022 Overseas Development Institute report noted that Turkish humanitarian operations in Somalia "frequently prioritize visibility and political impact over needs-based targeting" (ODI, 2022). Coordination deficits arise where Turkish emphasis on bilateral direct implementation bypasses established coordination mechanisms. UN humanitarian coordinators in Somalia have privately expressed frustration at limited Turkish participation in humanitarian coordination forums (Fast, 2014).

Sustainability questions persist regarding long-term financing and maintenance. Capacity development limitations emerge where direct implementation rather than Somali institutional capacity building undermines local ownership. A 2023 evaluation found that only 27% of Turkish projects incorporated explicit capacity building components with Somali counterpart training (Independent Evaluation Group, 2023). Civil-military blurring potentially compromises humanitarian space—humanitarian organizations expressed concern that proximity of Turkish humanitarian operations to Turkish military facilities may endanger humanitarian actors (Metcalf et al., 2011). Accountability gaps exist with limited independent monitoring. Cultural sensitivity concerns persist despite Islamic solidarity rhetoric—some Somali commentators have criticized Turkish approaches as paternalistic, with one prominent Somali intellectual describing Turkish engagement as "neo-Ottoman paternalism wrapped in humanitarian rhetoric" (Ingiriis, 2018).

Recipient Perspectives

Somali perspectives on Turkish engagement reveal complex, differentiated perceptions. A 2024 survey of 1,800 Somalis across multiple regions found 73% viewed Turkish assistance positively, 18% held mixed views, and 9% viewed it negatively (Somali Public Opinion Research Institute, 2024). Positive dimensions include genuine solidarity demonstrated through high-level visits—Erdoğan's willingness to visit during crisis created powerful impression. Rapid response during acute crises—Turkey often responded faster than traditional donors. Religious and cultural affinity—shared Islamic identity facilitated acceptance. Visible projects providing employment—Turkish projects employed 18,700 Somali workers between 2011 and 2024, generating \$127 million in wages (TİKA, 2024). Reduced conditionality—Turkish assistance avoided governance conditionalities characteristic of Western aid (Hansen, 2013; Warah, 2012).

Critical perspectives include concerns about Turkish commercial interests—perception that Turkish aid facilitates Turkish business access. Sustainability questions—worry about maintenance of Turkish-built facilities, Desire for greater Somali participation—frustration at limited Somali involvement in project design and implementation. Some discomfort with extent of Turkish influence—concern about over-dependence on single partner and Regional imbalance—frustration from Puntland and Somaliland at Mogadishu-centric assistance (Ingiriis, 2018; Cannon & Donelli, 2020).



Broader Implications for Humanitarian Action and International Relations

Turkish humanitarian diplomacy in Somalia carries implications extending beyond bilateral relations to illuminate broader transformations in international humanitarian architecture, middle power strategies, and North-South relations.

Humanitarian Diplomacy as Middle Power Strategy

Turkey's Somalia engagement demonstrates humanitarian diplomacy's efficacy as middle power strategy for enhancing international influence disproportionate to material capabilities. Between 2011 and 2024, Turkey invested approximately \$1.8 billion in Somalia across humanitarian assistance, development projects, and military support (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This is relatively modest compared to Somalia's total international assistance—estimated at \$18.4 billion during the same period (World Bank, 2024)—yet generated outsized political influence. This suggests humanitarian diplomacy represents replicable strategy for middle powers, though success depends on cultural-religious affinity, willingness to engage in challenging environments, and strategic interests justifying sustained commitment (Özerdem & Podder, 2015).

Diversification of Humanitarian Architecture

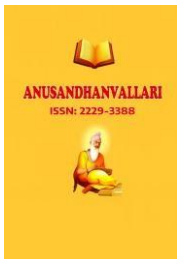
Turkish and other emerging actors' expanded humanitarian engagement contributes to diversification of international humanitarian architecture previously dominated by Western donors (Harmer & Martin, 2010). This diversification potentially benefits recipients through enhanced choice and reduced Western hegemony. Somalia's ability to cultivate multiple bilateral partnerships—Turkey, UAE, Qatar, China—provides leverage in negotiations. However, it also creates coordination challenges and potential for conflicting standards. The Somalia humanitarian response plan for 2024 involved 47 different donors and implementing partners, creating what one UN official described as a "coordination nightmare" (UN OCHA, 2024).

Islamic Humanitarianism and Civilizational Discourses

Turkish engagement exemplifies "Islamic humanitarianism"—humanitarian action motivated by Islamic principles and framed through Islamic solidarity discourse (Çapan, 2020). This represents alternative to Western secular humanitarian universalism, raising questions about compatibility and complementarity between different humanitarian traditions. Turkish humanitarian actors explicitly reference Islamic concepts like sadaqah (charity), zakat (obligatory almsgiving), and ummah (Muslim community) in framing assistance. A 2023 content analysis of Turkish humanitarian communications in Somalia found Islamic terminology used in 84% of public statements, compared to 12% usage of universal humanitarian principles language (Istanbul University Humanitarian Studies Center, 2023). Benthall and Bellion-Jourdan (2003) document long tradition of Islamic charitable action operating alongside Western humanitarianism.

African Agency and Partnership Diversification

From African perspectives, Turkish and other emerging powers' engagement provides alternatives to traditional dependence on Western donors. Somalia's embrace of Turkish partnership reflects strategic calculation to diversify partnerships and reduce over-reliance on particular donors (Hansen, 2013). Somali Foreign Minister Abshir Omar Huruse stated in 2024 that "our partnership with Turkey demonstrates that African nations need not rely exclusively on traditional donors who often impose conditions incompatible with our sovereignty" (Somali Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). This diversification represents rational response to power asymmetries characterizing traditional North-South relations. However, scholarship cautions against romanticizing South-South cooperation, noting power asymmetries persist—albeit configured differently (Taylor, 2014).



Conclusion

This analysis of Turkish humanitarian diplomacy in Somalia reveals complex, multifaceted engagement exemplifying both humanitarian action's transformative potential and its inherent tensions when deployed as foreign policy instrument. Turkish engagement has provided crucial humanitarian relief during acute crises, supported infrastructure reconstruction, contributed to state-building processes, and established Turkey as distinctive actor in the Horn of Africa. The comprehensiveness, sustained commitment, and cultural-religious resonance of Turkish approach distinguish it from many international actors and generate genuine appreciation among many Somali constituencies.

Critical evaluation simultaneously identifies legitimate concerns. Instrumentalization of humanitarian action for political purposes, Sustainability of Turkish-supported initiatives, Coordination challenges, Civil-military blurring and questions about Somali ownership. Turkish engagement serves Turkish national interests alongside humanitarian objectives, creating tensions requiring careful navigation. Between 2011 and 2024, Turkey transformed from minor actor in Somalia to arguably its most influential bilateral partner, demonstrating humanitarian diplomacy's efficacy while raising ethical questions.

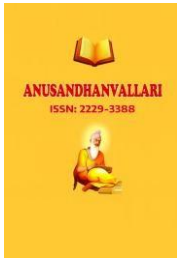
The Somalia case illuminates humanitarian diplomacy as effective middle power strategy for enhancing international influence through relatively modest financial investments combined with political attention and strategic risk-taking. However, this instrumentalization raises enduring ethical questions about humanitarian action's appropriate relationship to political objectives. Can humanitarian assistance remain true to humanitarian principles while simultaneously serving foreign policy goals? The Turkish case suggests the answer is complex—both objectives can coexist, though tensions inevitably emerge.

Broader implications concern diversification of international humanitarian architecture. Turkish and other emerging actors challenge Western hegemony and offer alternative approaches. This diversification potentially benefits recipients through enhanced choice, though coordination challenges persist. By 2024, non-OECD donors provided 31% of humanitarian assistance to Somalia, up from just 8% in 2010 (Development Initiatives, 2024). The prominence of Islamic humanitarian discourse highlights civilizational dimensions of contemporary humanitarianism, requiring engagement with diverse humanitarian traditions beyond Western secular universalism.

From Somali perspectives, Turkish engagement provides valued alternative, delivers tangible assistance during desperate circumstances, and demonstrates solidarity resonating culturally and religiously. The 2024 Somali public opinion survey found 73% of respondents viewed Turkish assistance positively, with particularly high approval among youth (82%) and residents of areas receiving Turkish assistance (87%) (Somali Public Opinion Research Institute, 2024). However, Somali voices also express concerns about sustainability, ownership, and extent of Turkish influence. These concerns remind us that partnerships inevitably involve power asymmetries requiring critical attention.

Assessing whether Turkish humanitarian diplomacy represents model for international humanitarian action or problematic instrumentalization requires recognition that both dimensions coexist. Turkish engagement makes genuine humanitarian contributions while simultaneously advancing Turkish diplomatic interests. The challenge lies not in eliminating tensions—impossible given humanitarian action's inherently political character—but in managing tensions through transparency, accountability, coordination with humanitarian principles, and sustained attention to recipient priorities and perspectives.

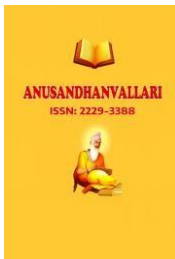
As international humanitarian crises multiply—UN OCHA projects 339 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2024, up from 274 million in 2024—and humanitarian architecture transforms through emerging powers' expanded engagement, the Turkish experience in Somalia provides instructive case study. It demonstrates humanitarian action's potential to simultaneously address urgent needs, reshape international relations, challenge



established paradigms, and raise enduring questions about power, solidarity, and ethics of intervention. The Turkey-Somalia partnership represents simultaneously a distinctive bilateral relationship, an exemplar of humanitarian diplomacy as foreign policy instrument, and a window into broader transformations of international humanitarian action in an era of shifting global power relations and diversifying humanitarian actors. As we look toward 2024 and beyond, understanding these dynamics becomes ever more critical for practitioners, policymakers, and scholars grappling with humanitarian action's evolving role in international relations.

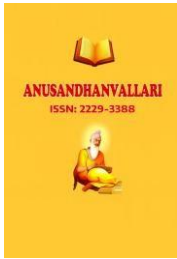
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