

# Turkey's Assistance Model in Somalia: **Achieving Much With Little**



Mahad Wasuge

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**About the Author:**

Mahad Wasuge is a researcher at the Heritage Institute for Policy Studies (HIPS)

\*Mary Harper helped with the research and the writing.

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## Executive summary

Turkey has become one of the most prominent donors in Somalia, eclipsing many traditional donors both in quantity and quality of its assistance. Likewise, Ankara has become a major trading partner with Somalia, particularly in the construction, transportation and service sectors. As of February 2016, the two countries have either signed or are in the process of signing 15 bilateral agreements ranging from trade, health, education and justice to quality assurance agreements. Turkey enjoys a rock star status among many Somalis, both inside and outside the country, for its swift, diverse and highly visible humanitarian and development assistance. Its presence on the ground for five years and neutrality about domestic politics afforded it this unique and elevated standing. However, traditional donors dismiss Turkey as isolationist and say that Ankara over-brands its assistance to Somalia.

Somalia is the largest recipient of Turkish aid in Africa. Indeed it is one of the largest recipients of Turkish assistance globally. Somalia has served as an ideal country for Ankara to showcase its model of humanitarian diplomacy. However, Turkey's role in Somalia goes far beyond that emotional engagement under the banner of humanitarian diplomacy.

The Turkish assistance model combines development, peace-building and business. With its often-emotive emphasis on humanity, Turkey, the world's 17th largest economy<sup>1</sup>, has stepped firmly onto a development platform long dominated by western donors. The country will host the United Nations' first ever World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016 where its work in Somalia will probably be showcased, offering confirmation that it has arrived on the global stage.

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<sup>1</sup> See World Bank assessment, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/turkey/overview>

Somalia occupies a special place in Turkey's national consciousness. The 2011 famine not only touched President Recep Erdogan personally, it also affected the Turkish population in a more general sense after he visited Somalia in August 2011 and raised national awareness. Unlike most other countries, there is a moral and emotional dimension to Ankara's engagement in Somalia. In some ways, the Somali famine became a domestic issue, with many Turkish people feeling a deep sense of obligation to help the suffering by donating money or traveling to the country to help on the ground.

The depth of Turkey's relatively recent engagement in Somalia is visible in the capital Mogadishu. The rehabilitation of a 23-kilometer road across the capital, a new airport terminal and the rebuilding of the former Digfer hospital are all conspicuous symbols of Turkey's role in the development of Somalia. Business and the sense of normalcy in the capital has grown significantly as a result of the rehabilitated roads, particularly in and around Makka Al-Mukarrama Road, the main thoroughfare that snakes through several districts. Other involvements in education, agriculture, business, health, garbage collecting, construction of military barracks, military and police training in Turkey and the peace-building efforts between Somaliland and the federal government made their model unique.

The most visible trade cooperation is Somalia's decision to hand the operations of both Mogadishu's seaport and airport to two Turkish companies. The seaport and airport generate nearly 80 percent of the Somali government's revenue.

The love affair between Somalia and Turkey is perhaps based on over-enthusiastic sentiments from both sides. Since the relationship has matured, and Somalia will have a new government in late 2016, perhaps it is time for a reality check and for the two countries to

forge a more realistic relationship. Turkey has been put on a pedestal for five years, and estrangement has therefore the potential to further damage its reputation than that of other donors. This could have repercussions not just in Somalia but also across Africa, the

## Introduction

On 19 August 2011, the then-Turkish prime minister, now president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, landed in the Somali capital Mogadishu. Accompanied by his wife, daughter and a host of Turkish politicians, business people, celebrities and journalists, he visited starving, internally displaced Somalis in makeshift camps and held their hungry babies in his arms.<sup>2</sup> This trip, at the height of the country's worst famine since 1992, was the first by a non-African head of state in nearly two decades.

The visit not only generated headlines all over the world but also marked the beginning of an unprecedented Turkish engagement in Somalia. It occurred at a time when much of the rest of the world was keeping an arm's length, largely engaging by remote control from offices in neighboring Kenya, with the occasional short trip to Mogadishu's heavily fortified airport. Feeling ignored by the outside world, that their country had become a byword for failed state, Somalis were energized by the visit.<sup>3</sup>

The exception was the African Union stabilization force (AMISOM), which was deployed to Somalia in 2007. African troops, at that time mainly from Uganda and Burundi, were on the ground fighting the militant Islamist group al-Shabaab. The fact that

continent in which Turkey is so keen to establish itself.

Some Somalis also criticize Turkey for being Mogadishu-centric and being an uncritical ally of the Federal Government of Somalia.

AMISOM had forced the group to withdraw from Mogadishu in early August played a significant part in enabling Erdogan and his entourage to walk around the city a few weeks later.

Erdogan's day trip to Somalia served as a catalyst for Ankara to launch an ambitious, multi-layered support program. However, it would be wrong to say that the visit marked the beginning of the relationship. The two nations had already started forming closer ties with the initial impetus coming from Somalia. The then-Somali government led by president Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed had for some time been trying to convince Ankara to adopt a kind of avuncular role towards Somalia. Senior Somali delegations visited Ankara three times<sup>4</sup> before the Turkish leadership committed to engage energetically with Somalia.

Somalia became a platform for Turkey to showcase its new brand of humanitarian diplomacy. It was a risky choice given the ongoing insecurity and the more than two decades of political strife, humanitarian crises and political fragmentation. The highly visible, unconventional nature of Turkey's involvement laid it open to international scrutiny. It was asked openly would Turkey be able to succeed

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<sup>2</sup> World Policy Journal, *Turkey shocks Africa*, Winter 2012/2013, <http://www.worldpolicy.org/journal/winter2012/turkey-shocks-africa>

<sup>3</sup> Insight Turkey, Vol. 13, No. 4 – 2011, *Turkey's Foray Into Africa: New Humanitarian Power?*, Abdirahan Aynte, [http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight\\_turkey\\_vo\\_l\\_13\\_no\\_4\\_-2011\\_ali.pdf](http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight_turkey_vo_l_13_no_4_-2011_ali.pdf)

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<sup>4</sup> Former president Sharif Sheikh Ahmed visited Ankara and received a high profile welcome on 17 December 2009 ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45Jiq0aE\\_Ok](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45Jiq0aE_Ok)) and in May 2011 for the second UN-Turkey led Istanbul conference on Somalia ([http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-second-istanbul-conference-on-somalia\\_-final-declaration\\_-1-june-2012\\_-istanbul.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/the-second-istanbul-conference-on-somalia_-final-declaration_-1-june-2012_-istanbul.en.mfa)) and on 16 August 2011 for an OIC conference for Somalia (<http://www.worldbulletin.net/haber/77610/president-of-somalia-arrives-in-turkey>)

where so many other foreign powers had faltered?

The initial impetus was largely humanitarian and appeared, in part at least, to have been sparked by Erdogan's emotional reaction to famine during Ramadan, Islam's holy month of fasting, in a Muslim country. His visit galvanized others in Turkey to take an interest, from politicians to teachers, from diplomats to doctors, from members of the business community to construction engineers. The wider society also became involved, digging deep into their pockets to donate money for Somalia's starving population.

Economic, diplomatic and security interests soon came into play. Ankara was keen to establish itself as a key global player in diplomacy and development, and Somalia was one of its more eccentric choices to propel itself onto center stage, not only in Africa but also across the world. However, Somalia was not simply a passive recipient of Turkish assistance. It continued to play an active role in seeking Ankara's help, working hard to convince the Turks that it was a worthy cause and that the assistance it received was relevant to its needs.

Unlike most countries whose diplomatic representations to Somalia, if they had them at all, were based in the safety of neighboring Kenya, Turkey opened an embassy at the heart of Mogadishu in November 2011. Humanitarian workers, doctors and teachers flew in to feed the starving and to open hospitals and schools. Turks worked side-by-side with Somalis to rehabilitate the main roads of the capital. Thousands of Somali teenagers received scholarships to study in Turkey. Turkish Airlines became on 5 March 2012 the first international carrier to fly direct to Mogadishu<sup>5</sup> since the collapse of the Somali

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.turkishairlines.com/en-int/corporate/press-room/press-releases/press-release->

state in 1991. This helped to reconnect the capital globally and to challenge its reputation as the most dangerous city on earth.

The speed with which Turkey rushed into Somalia, and the daring 'boots on the ground' approach of its diplomats and humanitarian workers, took traditional western donors, such as the US and the European Union (EU), by surprise. Perhaps they felt a tinge of envy when Somalis inside and outside the country welcomed Turkey's unique approach with unprecedented fervor. Some Somalis even named their boys Erdogan and girls Istanbul.<sup>6</sup> One British diplomat remarked in 2012, "Turkey is the McDonalds of Mogadishu. Its flags are as omnipresent in the city as the golden arches of McDonalds fast food restaurants are in the USA."<sup>7</sup>

The Turkish humanitarian model has generated much praise, particularly from Somali recipients in Mogadishu and beyond. It has also attracted criticism. Although the United Nations (UN), EU, US and other Western powers, which have been involved in the country for decades, usually praise Turkey in public, some criticize it in private. A number of them regard Turkey as a lone wolf and have described its modus operandi as isolationist and uncooperative in its relations with others. Some also view it as a rather naïve newcomer to the complex, challenging world of Somalia.<sup>8</sup>

Initially, some Somalis said Ankara was too focused on Mogadishu and uncritically supportive of the Somali Federal Government. However, over time, Turkey has expanded its activities into other areas, including Puntland

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[detail/turkish-airlines-launches-its-services-to-mogadishu-somalia](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30447039)

<sup>6</sup> The unlikely love affair between two countries, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30447039>

<sup>7</sup> Interview with British diplomat, London, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Interviews and background conversations with western and UN diplomats, Mogadishu, Nairobi, London, 2012-2014.

and Somaliland, thus diminishing its Mogadishu-centric reputation.

Despite widespread accolades among Somalis and others, Turkey's motives in Somalia are sometimes questioned. To what extent is its involvement driven by pure humanitarianism? What is the role of naked business interests? Turkey is, without question, winning business contracts in Somalia, including those to run the lucrative airport and seaport. The donor-backed Finance Governance Committee of the federal government found in January 2015 that the seaport contract contained "troubling clauses" and that the original airport contract "lacked precision".<sup>9</sup> It also found that, along with nine other major contracts signed with the Somali government, those to run the sea and air ports were not tendered competitively.<sup>10</sup> The Somali government welcomed the findings, but Somalia and Turkey have previously insisted that companies win contracts in a fair, transparent and competitive manner and that Turkish firms are committed to helping Somalia develop.<sup>11</sup>

More than four years on from Erdogan's historic visit, which according to Turkey's foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, "turned the course of events" in Somalia,<sup>12</sup> it is time to take stock. What has Turkey achieved in Somalia? Now that the initial honeymoon period is over, what do Somalis and Turks make of each other? How does the Turkish model compare with that of the more traditional donors? Has

Turkey been naïve about Somalia? What are the real motives behind Turkey's engagement?

This report seeks to explore these questions, and to lay out the key stages of Turkey's involvement in Somalia since Erdogan's visit in 2011. Moreover, it seeks to understand the Turkish aid model in comparison to other models. While there have been a number of largely desk-based, academic studies of Turkey-Somalia relations, the aim of this study is to give a more substantive contribution from the ground, based on field research in Somalia and Turkey. Researchers visited Turkish projects and operations in Mogadishu and conducted face-to-face interviews with Turks, Somalis, Westerners and others directly involved in the country. The aim is to paint the true picture of how Turkey is engaging with Somalia and what Somalis make of its involvement.

Although the main focus of this report is the humanitarian and development aspects of Turkey's involvement in Somalia, it will also touch briefly on Ankara's other key areas of focus, which include diplomacy, business, trade and investment, security and peace-building, as they are all intertwined.

## Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research method, which allowed interviewees to express in detail their thoughts about Turkey's relationship with Somalia.

A total of 16 in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted in Mogadishu between November and December 2014. The interviewees included three senior members of the Somali Federal Government – President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud and two government ministers dealing closely with Turkey's work in Somalia; representatives from six Turkish humanitarian, development and business organizations working on the ground in Somalia; a Turkish diplomat; a western

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<sup>9</sup> Turkish and Somali sources suggest Albayrak is not reaping the anticipated profits, because government projections in terms of service volume and potential revenue were rather optimistic.

<sup>10</sup> Reuters, *Donor-backed body questions Somali state-contract awards*, 18 February 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/18/somalia-government-idUSL5NOVM30Q20150218>

<sup>11</sup> Informal interviews with Somali and Turkish officials, 2012-2015.

<sup>12</sup> The East African, *Turkey has never colonized Africa*, Mevlut Cavusoglu, 15-21 November 2014.

diplomat; a senior official from the United Nations Mission in Somalia (UNSOM); two Somali young people (one male and one female); and senior members of two Somali civil society organizations.

More informal discussions were held with other Somali politicians, advisers, journalists, security officials, NGO workers and ordinary civilians. A number of other interviews were also conducted with Turkish government and security officials; academics; journalists and business representatives in Istanbul, Ankara and Antalya; Somali students who had received scholarships to study in Turkey; western diplomats in the UK and Ethiopia; and government, media and civil society representatives in Somaliland and Puntland. In several cases the interviewees asked to remain anonymous.

The researchers conducted extensive site visits to Turkish operations on the ground in Mogadishu. These included the seaport, the airport, schools, hospitals and clinics, a mosque, development and humanitarian groups and the embassy. While this study aims to examine Turkey's involvement in Somalia as a whole, field research in Somalia was largely restricted to Mogadishu. Although the bulk of the visits were made in November and December 2014, on the ground research was also conducted at an earlier stage, thus enabling a deeper sense of perspective of how the Turkey-Somalia relationship has developed over time. Due to time, security and other constraints, it was not possible to visit Turkish projects elsewhere.

Moreover, the researchers conducted an extensive literature review and further desk-based research. There were also follow-up telephone interviews and conversations with key informants since the initial research began.

## Traditional donors in Somalia

Somalia was a major recipient of foreign aid even before the chaos that ensued after the fall of the long-serving president, General Mohamed Siad Barre, in 1991. After independence in 1960, the country's strategic position in Africa meant it attracted significant attention from the Cold War protagonists. Initially it received massive support from the Soviet Union, which dramatically switched sides to help Ethiopia in its war with Somalia from 1977 to 1978. The United States then stepped in to fill the void, though its support was not as extensive as Moscow's.

The devastating famine, which developed during the bloody civil war of the early 1990s, led to another form of foreign intervention. The US felt it could not stand by as Somalis starved, with an estimated 220,000 people dying in a 12-month period.<sup>13</sup> The then president, George H.W. Bush, proposed that American troops lead a large UN operation to oversee the safe delivery of humanitarian supplies to Somalia. More than 25,000 US troops were involved in Operation Restore Hope, which was authorized to use offensive military force and initially had some success in ensuring aid reached those who needed it.<sup>14</sup> This became the largest UN operation in the world, involving about 30,000 personnel and costing some \$1.5 billion a year.

The mission found itself in a quagmire, increasingly in confrontation with Somali clan militias. The turning point came in October 1993 when two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in Mogadishu. Eighteen US servicemen were killed in the incident, which

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<sup>13</sup> London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, *Somalia Famine Worst in Past 25 Years*, 2 May 2013, [https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2013/somalia\\_famine.html](https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2013/somalia_famine.html)

<sup>14</sup> Global Security Organisation, [http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/restore\\_hope.htm](http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/restore_hope.htm)



became known as Black Hawk Down. Some of their bodies were dragged through the streets by jeering crowds. The number of Somalis killed has been put in the hundreds, although the official number is not known. The US reaction was swift. The new president, Bill Clinton, ordered his troops home, leaving behind a depleted and demoralized UN force, which was virtually ineffective.<sup>15</sup> This force was led by a Turkish general Cevik Bir.<sup>16</sup>

Following that debacle, traditional donors adopted a hands-off approach. They retreated and largely kept themselves at a safe distance from Somalia rather than engaging directly on the ground. During this period, Arab and Muslim NGOs provided some assistance. Funds from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia supported some Somali charities.

## The Turkish model

Turkey's involvement in Somalia should not be seen in isolation. Although it has received the most attention, the relationship should be viewed in the context of Ankara's wider Africa policy. Turkey has a long history of trade and other involvement in Africa, including Somalia, particularly during the Ottoman Empire. In the 16th century, the Ottomans joined forces with the Somalis to beat back the Portuguese-backed Abyssinians in present-day Ethiopia. Ottoman architecture can be found in Somali coastal towns and cities to this day, such as in the port city of Berbera in the breakaway region of Somaliland.

However, modern Turkey's active involvement in sub-Saharan Africa is relatively recent and can be divided into stages. The first, largely exploratory, stage began in 1998 when the

<sup>15</sup> Mary Harper, *Getting Somalia Wrong? Faith, War and Hope in a Shattered State*, Zed Books, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> He was arrested in 2012 for his role in a 1997 coup, which brought down the government of Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, the predecessor of Erdogan's AK Party.

Africa Action Plan was launched. The second, more significant, phase began in 2005, which Turkey declared as the Year of Africa. This signaled that Ankara was serious about the continent and wanted to be involved on a long-term basis. Ties were strengthened through the opening of embassies and a closer involvement in African institutions. Turkey became an observer at the African Union and a member of the African Development Bank. In 2008, a Turkey-Africa Summit was held in Istanbul, which focused on trade and civil society activities.<sup>17</sup> About 50 African countries were represented at the meeting.<sup>18</sup>

Trade took off during this period. Although on a much smaller scale than that of the larger players such as the US, Europe and China, the growth in trade has been remarkable. According to official figures, Turkey's bilateral trade with sub-Saharan Africa was about \$750 million in 2000. By 2014, it had increased more than tenfold to \$8.4 billion.<sup>19</sup> Another sign of Ankara's growing involvement is the rapid increase in the number of embassies it has on the continent. In 2002 there were 12 diplomatic missions in Africa, but by 2014 there were 39 embassies.<sup>20</sup>

The third stage of the relationship began in August 2011 when Erdogan flew to Mogadishu and took a leadership role not only in the campaign against the famine but trying to help resolve the conflict and rebuild Somalia, at least its capital city. By 2012, Ankara had become "the fourth largest donor in development assistance and third in humanitarian aid generosity".<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-africa-relations.en.mfa>

<sup>18</sup> See Turkey's Rising Role in Africa, [http://turkishpolicy.com/pdf/vol\\_9-no\\_4-ozkan.pdf](http://turkishpolicy.com/pdf/vol_9-no_4-ozkan.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-africa-relations.en.mfa>

<sup>20</sup> The East African, 15-21, November 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Cemalettin Hasimi, *Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy and Development Cooperation*, Insight Turkey, Vol 16, No.1, 2014, pp 127-145,

It is important to point out that Turkey and Somalia do not only see their relationship through the Africa prism. Somalia has other identities, which make it an attractive partner for Turkey. For instance, it is a member of the Arab League, and both countries are members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Moreover, both countries are predominantly Muslim, Somalia being 100 percent Muslim and led then by an Islamist president, which further increased the Islamist-leaning Turkish government's zeal to help.

In 2013, Turkey embarked on a new phase in relations with the continent. This was referred to as The Turkey-Africa Partnership Policy, with the motto 'African issues require African solutions'. In Somalia, Turkey's rock star status among Somalis is largely attributed to its neutrality in the country's intricate domestic politics. This is sharp contrast to other major players who are widely viewed with suspicion.<sup>22</sup>

Ankara has been careful to distance itself from both the traditional donors, especially those associated with colonialism in Africa, and from relative newcomers to the continent such as China, India and Brazil whose main interests are economic. For example, when Erdogan addressed the Gabonese parliament in January 2013 he said, "Africa belongs to Africans. We are not here for your gold." In an article for the East African newspaper, Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu wrote, "We do not consider ourselves as outsiders to the continent, rather a strategic partner working together to make further advances in the areas

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[http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight\\_turkey\\_16\\_1\\_2014\\_hasimi.pdf](http://file.insightturkey.com/Files/Pdf/insight_turkey_16_1_2014_hasimi.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> In a 2015 HIPS survey of over 1,200 Somalis in five major metropolitan cities, 66 percent said the international community either did very little to help Somalia or failed Somalia, whereas 73 percent suggested the role of the international community in the 2016 political dispensation will be significant or very significant.

of democracy, good governance and prosperity."<sup>23</sup> It is not yet clear whether Africa will buy into this new narrative – however keen Turkey is to present itself as the continent's natural partner, untainted by a colonial past.

The Turkish argue their model offers a third way, which includes development, peace-building and business. The former foreign minister, now prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, promoted the idea of Turkey as a "virtuous power" through his vision of "humanitarian diplomacy". Declaring that, "humanitarian diplomacy reflects the compassionate and competent character of the Republic of Turkey and depicts the human-oriented nature of foreign policy, which merges our interests with our values. Turkish foreign policy takes human dignity as a point of reference."<sup>24</sup> This is very much how Turkey presents its engagement with Somalia – as humane and virtuous with mutually beneficial results in trade, diplomatic and cultural relations.

With its often emotive emphasis on humanity, Turkey has stepped firmly onto the development platform long dominated by western donors. Turkey will host the UN's first ever World Humanitarian Summit in 2016,<sup>25</sup> confirmation that it has arrived on the global stage. Skeptical observers dispute Turkey's emphasis on humanitarian diplomacy as the main driver for its involvement in Africa, saying

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<sup>23</sup> The East African, *Turkey has never colonised Africa; it is the continent's natural development partner*, 15 November 2014, <http://www.theeastafrican.co.ke/OpEd/comment/Turkey-has-never-colonised-Africa/-/434750/2523552/-/3jhgbv/-/index.html>

<sup>24</sup> Final Declaration of the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference, [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_fifth\\_annual\\_ambassadors\\_conference.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final_declaration_of_the_fifth_annual_ambassadors_conference.en.mfa)

<sup>25</sup> World Humanitarian Summit, <https://www.worldhumanitariansummit.org>

its main interests are security, trade and prestige.<sup>26</sup>

Ankara's involvement with Africa is multi-faceted: "Turkey has resisted aspects of the traditional western framework. Instead, civilian development actors have been engaged in a hybrid model through which Turkey's own unique global perspective and positioning is reflected."<sup>27</sup> Alongside the state are multiple Turkish NGOs, many of them coordinated by the government aid body, the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) which was formed in 1992 and operates under the prime minister's office. This has led to an explosion of Turkish humanitarian activities on the continent, including the establishment of hospitals, mosques, orphanages, schools and colleges.<sup>28</sup>

Turkey's eccentric and daring choice of Somalia as one of its main focuses in Africa is not without risks. According to the Turkish academic Mehmet Ozkan, "The results and consequences of Turkey's policy on Somalia will undoubtedly shape the view of other African countries towards Turkey".<sup>29</sup> It has entered a potential minefield, given that involvement in Somalia has caused serious difficulties for other more powerful and diplomatically experienced countries, including the US. It is also important to stress that what Ankara learns from its Somalia experience cannot be necessarily replicated elsewhere on the continent because, like all other African countries, Somalia has its own unique set of challenges.

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<sup>26</sup> Conversation with Hugh Pope, International Crisis Group, November 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Teri Murphy and Auveen Woods, *Turkey's International Development Framework Case Study: Somalia*, Istanbul Policy Centre, February 2014.

<sup>28</sup> Benevolence or Selfishness: Understanding the Increasing Role of Turkish NGOs and Civil Society in Africa, <http://ioa.sagepub.com/content/7/1/1.abstract>

<sup>29</sup> Mehmet Ozkan, *Turkey's Involvement in Somalia*, SETA, 2014.

## Turkey and Somalia

There is some difference of opinion about Turkey's role in Somalia. According to president Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, "Somalia is part of Turkey's aggressive approach to Africa. I do not see Turkey as having a unique agenda for Somalia."<sup>30</sup>

It cannot be denied that Somalia occupied in 2011-2013 a special place in Turkey's national consciousness. The famine not only touched Erdogan personally, it also affected the Turkish population in a more general sense. Unlike most other countries, there is a heightened moral and emotional dimension to Ankara's engagement in Somalia: "Its intervention in Somalia was based on a strong moral and ethical belief in the need to end the effects of the famine and cycles of conflict ... plus a sense of duty."<sup>31</sup>

In some ways, the Somali famine became a domestic issue for Ankara, with many Turkish people feeling a deep sense of obligation to help the suffering by donating money or helping on the ground in the cases of humanitarians, medical and teaching staff. In 2011, in the month of Ramadan alone, more than \$200 million was raised in humanitarian aid.<sup>32</sup> As the then-Turkish ambassador to Somalia, Cemalettin Kani Torun, said, "Turks raised the money for Somalia specifically so we had to spend it in Somalia." But Ankara did not close shop and leave when the famine ended. Four and half years on, it's broadening and deepening its engagement way beyond emergency humanitarian assistance.

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Teri Murphy and Auveen Woods, *Turkey's International Development Framework Case Study: Somalia*, Istanbul Policy Centre, February 2014.

<sup>32</sup> Pinar Tank, *Turkey's New Humanitarian Approach in Somalia*, NOREF, December 2013.

Somalia is among the three countries that receive the most Turkish aid. Syria and Pakistan are the two others.<sup>33</sup> By 2013, Somalia was the second largest recipient of Turkish humanitarian assistance after Syria.<sup>34</sup> The official Turkish policy toward Somalia<sup>35</sup> is: eliminating Somalia's international isolation, providing intensive and comprehensive aid, rebuilding vital infrastructure, helping restore security by supporting Somali security and supporting the process of political consensus and state-building and Somali unity. These are also on the wish lists of most Somalis and even if Turkey does not succeed in addressing all of them, this mindset has endeared Turkey to the Somali people whose experience with external actors oscillates between heavy-handedness and well-meaning but not-working interventions. Asked what the international community could learn from Turkey, the country's first ambassador to Somalia, Dr. Kani Torun, now a member of parliament, said, "Implement tangible projects, and have a positive attitude towards Somalis."<sup>36</sup>

Somalia has served as an ideal country for Ankara to display its model of humanitarian diplomacy. It is a fellow Muslim and has massive humanitarian and development needs. This was acknowledged by Turkey's former foreign minister Davutoglu, "Turkey's approach to the Somalia crisis is one of the most visible examples of Turkey's human oriented foreign policy ... Humanitarian diplomacy refers to something more than humanitarian aid. Any diplomacy that does not touch human beings, that does not have a humanitarian essence and does not speak to human conscience will not last for long."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Pinar Tank, *Turkey's New Humanitarian Approach in Somalia*, NOREF, December 2013.

<sup>34</sup> Global Humanitarian Assistance, <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/countryprofile/turkey>

<sup>35</sup> Turkish ministry of foreign affairs.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Dr. Kani Torun, February 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Final Declaration of the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference,



However, Turkey's role in Somalia goes far beyond that of a romanticized, emotional engagement under the banner of humanitarian diplomacy. It has also served as a test bed for Davutoglu's "total performance principle", whereby multiple political and socio-economic groups, trade organizations, NGOs and others are included in the foreign policy process. Some people interviewed for this report, especially members of the UN and the western donor community, criticized in private the Turkish model as lacking transparency and accountability. According to a senior UNSOM representative, "Turkey mixes business, development, government and social issues. The question is, is that appropriate? We don't know the details of their policies. We only see the visible part of the iceberg."<sup>38</sup> He suggested a key reason for Turkey's involvement was economic: "We are not suspicious of Turkey in Somalia. It is not the Ottoman Empire trying to reassert itself. It is more of a market trader."<sup>39</sup> Some of the Somalis interviewed for this paper also questioned the motive behind Turkey's involvement. As one interviewee said, "Turkey

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[http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_fifth\\_annual\\_ambassadors\\_conference.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/final_declaration_of_the_fifth_annual_ambassadors_conference.en.mfa)

<sup>38</sup> Interview with senior UNSOM official, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with senior UNSOM official, Mogadishu, December 2014.

is helping me. Why? What's the transaction here?"<sup>40</sup>

### Famine of 2011 and Erdogan's visit

Many interviewees considered Erdogan's visit to Mogadishu in August 2011 as a turning point, not only in the fight against the famine but in the history of Somalia. They said it opened the eyes of the world to what was happening in the country, and refocused international energy on Somalia. Of course, the UN, Western and some Arab donors and AMISOM were already involved in Somalia, but the symbolic and eye-catching nature of Erdogan's visit precipitated renewed focus.

Like the Turks, many Somalis reacted emotionally to Erdogan's visit. In the words of one Somali cabinet minister: "They came with a very high-level delegation when everybody else shied away from coming to the country. Not only did they come to Somalia, they came to Mogadishu. Prime Minister Erdogan and his family went to IDP camps, and they picked up children normally shunned by others. They shed tears with them and held them in their laps. That resonated with everybody. They made promises, and they followed through with them. The first thing they said was that they were here to assist. They said, starting from next week, our flights will start coming to Mogadishu. It was an unimaginable gesture, and it came through."<sup>41</sup>

Many Somalis felt a deep sense of appreciation for Erdogan and the Turks in general whom they set in stark contrast to other foreign powers. One Somali citizen told us, "They are much better than the so-called Arab nations and the rest of the international community. Always in my heart. Viva Turkey."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Somali civilian, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Somali cabinet minister, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with Somali civilians, Mogadishu, December 2014.

Turkish government officials view Erdogan's trip in a similar light, and some describe it with emotional language. According to Cavusoglu: "That day, a new partnership was born out of the ashes of civil war and humanitarian disaster. From this time onwards, the Turkish and Somali people have been striving shoulder-to-shoulder to ease the situation and to rebuild the country. The phoenix is now ready to rise from the ashes and spread its wings. We are talking about the revival of social, economic and political life in Somalia."<sup>43</sup>

In order to appreciate fully the impetus for Erdogan's visit, and his powerful desire to wake up the world to the desperate situation in Somalia, it is worth quoting at some length an article he wrote for the American magazine *Foreign Policy*. Its very title, *The Tears of Somalia*, highlights how emotionally charged the visit was. He wrote: "This crisis tests the notion of civilization and our modern values. It reveals once again that it is a basic human obligation to pursue international cooperation and solidarity to provide solace for those suffering from natural and man-made disasters ... The tears that are now running from Somalia's golden sands into the Indian Ocean must stop."<sup>44</sup> A month later, while addressing the United Nations General Assembly in New York, Erdogan described the Somali famine as a shame for the international community.

According to a Turkish diplomat interviewed in Mogadishu, a major reason for Erdogan's visit was to "to break the silence of the international community on Somalia".<sup>45</sup> However, the diplomat emphasized that Turkey's involvement began before the prime minister's trip at the Istanbul Conference from 21-23 May 2010, which established a roadmap

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<sup>43</sup> *The East African*, November 15-21, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdogan, *The Tears of Somalia*, *Foreign Policy*, 10 October 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, Mogadishu, December 2014.

for peace-building and development in Somalia: “It didn’t start with Erdogan’s visit – in 2010 Turkey hosted the first Somalia conference, because there was a huge humanitarian problem there, and Turkey didn’t want to be indifferent.”<sup>46</sup> The Somali government had also spent significant effort and persuasive power to convince Turkey to engage and initially met some resistance and skepticism.<sup>47</sup>

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud emphasized how much Erdogan’s open expression of empathy meant to Somalis, as did the fact that he and his entourage braved the massive insecurity of the country: “Mr Erdogan’s visit was a turning point in the history of Somalia. He came here with very important cabinet ministers when Somalia was a no-go zone. Even staff of international NGOs were not coming to Somalia at the time he came here with his family.”<sup>48</sup> A Turkish diplomat said that if he had been Erdogan’s security chief, he would have resigned rather than allow him to come to Somalia during such a risky period.<sup>49</sup>

### The embassy and the ambassador

Apart from the significance of Erdogan’s visit in itself, interviewees remarked that it was followed up by action on the ground. They highlighted that just a few months after the trip a Turkish embassy was opened in the heart of Mogadishu, after being closed when civil war erupted in 1991. Not only was the new embassy located inside the capital city,

ambassador Dr. Kani Torun, a physician-turned diplomat, was uniquely qualified for the post, according to many interviewees.

Ambassador Torun<sup>50</sup>, who before his appointment ran the charity Doctors Worldwide, is the architect behind the oft-cited special relationship between Turkey and Somalia. As the first ambassador since 1991, he cultivated deep relations with both the federal government, states and civil society. His unorthodox, straight talk and can-do attitude appealed to Somalis, and his capacity to navigate Somalia’s complex players was unrivaled. He personified the unique Turkish approach, regularly visiting Somalis in their houses, businesses, universities and other locations. Most importantly, Torun had the full backing of Erdogan and Dovutoglu, which enabled him to navigate the otherwise cumbersome bureaucracy and get things done. However, foreign diplomats in Mogadishu were routinely irked by his “undiplomatic approach”.<sup>51</sup>

Reflecting on his time in Somalia, Torun stresses his tour was “very, very tough”, adding he learned ‘sabr’ (patience) in Somalia. “Every day you learn sabr, sabr and sabr,” he said.<sup>52</sup> Even now, he said, the Turkish government uses Somalia as an example of its unique humanitarian diplomacy in action. “Turkish intervention in Somalia is something Ankara is proud of,” Torun said, adding that “whenever our leaders mention external relations they mention Somalia as a good example ... Somalia is a success story.”<sup>53</sup> The ambassador described his efforts as rewarding, because “you are helping your brothers and sisters.” Torun said the positive changes Turkey made in Somalia gave him “personal joy” and that his work

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>47</sup> An aide to President Sharif recalls the Turkish President Abdullah Gul’s questions about why the Somali government cannot make peace with its Islamist opposition.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Somali president, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, Mogadishu, December 2014.

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<sup>50</sup> In 2015, he was elected to the Turkish Parliament from his hometown of Bursa on the AK Party platform.

<sup>51</sup> A conversation with a western diplomat, December 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Ambassador Kani Torun, February 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

there was “very rewarding”.<sup>54</sup> Seasoned diplomat Olgan Bekar, the head of the East Africa department at the Turkish foreign ministry, replaced Torun and has continued his predecessor’s hands-on diplomatic approach.

### The vast humanitarian effort

Several Turks and Somalis interviewed for this study asserted that Ankara’s initial reason for engaging with Somalia was purely humanitarian and that the primary aim was to arrest the raging famine in southern Somalia and alleviate human suffering. Soon after Erdogan’s visit, the Turkish government, private companies, NGOs and individuals embarked on a vigorous drive to raise funds for Somalia. As a Turkish diplomatic official explained, “We raised a lot of money through public campaigns. The government and NGOs collected \$350 million in the three to four month period after Erdogan’s visit.”<sup>55</sup>

Turkey started to feed the starving, not just in Mogadishu where so many of the hungry had congregated, but also in other parts of south central Somalia. They set up mobile feeding centers and converted bombed-out houses and other buildings into hospitals, clinics and schools.<sup>56</sup> The Turkish Red Crescent set up a camp for the internally displaced at Jazeera on the outskirts of Mogadishu. With its neat rows of clean white tents, a health facility and a football pitch, it put the city’s sprawling, dirty, makeshift IDP camps to shame.<sup>57</sup>

Turkish diplomats said that after their country involved itself so deeply with its humanitarian work, it started to see opportunities in Somalia in terms of development, business, trade and peace-building.<sup>58</sup> Once the UN declared that

the famine was over in 2012, Turkey put more energy into development projects while continuing humanitarian assistance. These included hospitals, schools, agricultural and fishery training centers and water wells. According to the Turkish embassy in Mogadishu, by 2015 there were three Turkish hospitals and 10 Turkish schools across Somalia. All three hospitals are in the capital, the largest built by the Turkish government and the other two operated by Turkish NGOs. There are also seven schools in Mogadishu, including a nursing school, a vocational college, a school for preachers and imams, fishery and agricultural colleges and two high schools (one for boys, one for girls). Moreover, there are two Turkish schools in Hargeisa and a Turkish Quranic school in Galkayo.<sup>59</sup> Although these are modest in number, their visibility has made a difference, as has the fact that they are staffed, at least in part, by Turks. However, some Somali respondents expressed concern that some of Mogadishu’s public buildings have been converted into Turkish private schools and hospitals. There was not much talk of Somali jobs being taken by Turks. It was more the case of Turks transferring skills to Somalis.

### After the honeymoon

Most of the field research for this study was conducted more than three years after Erdogan’s visit. By this stage, Turkey’s impact on Somalia, especially in Mogadishu, was highly visible. This has caused some problems for Turkey. Security in and the around the embassy was increased following a deadly attack by al-Shabaab on a building housing Turkish embassy staff in July 2013.<sup>60</sup> The major road where the embassy is situated has been closed to the public, causing major inconvenience for traffic and pedestrians.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomats in Mogadishu and Antalya, December 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Visit to Turkish projects in Mogadishu, July 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Visit to Jazeera camp, Mogadishu, July 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Interviews with Turkish diplomats in Somalia, Turkey and the UK, July 2012-January 2015.

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<sup>59</sup> Turkish embassy in Mogadishu, July 2015.

<sup>60</sup> BBC, *Deadly bomb hits Turkish target in Mogadishu*, 27 July 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23478001>

Perhaps Turkey's trailblazing role in Somalia has introduced a spirit of competition, encouraging other Muslim nations to increase their involvement and visibility. The UAE and Qatar, for instance, have recently focused significant energy on Somalia. Toward the end of 2015, the UAE committed to paying the basic salaries of the army, which was a constant problem for the federal government.<sup>61</sup> As one Somali cabinet minister put it: "There are some other countries, like the UAE, that are also doing fantastic work. The UAE is providing health facilities and helping with sustainability in areas liberated from al-Shabaab. They provide the basic services for the liberated towns and villages – for example, a small clinic, a school and a police station. They have people on the ground like the Turks do, and they also deliver very quickly."<sup>62</sup>

Turkey's giant ambitions in Somalia are crystallized by its construction of a new embassy at a seafront location in Mogadishu's ancient Abdiiaziz district. At a reception for Turkey's national day on 29 October 2015, the new ambassador Olgan Bekar announced the soon-to-be-completed embassy will be the largest Turkish embassy in the world. A Turkish engineer who constructed the embassy told the researchers who visited the site in November 2014 that it would have the capacity for about 100 staff and cost \$64 million to build. The engineer said the workforce was 40 percent Turkish and 60 percent Somali, with some 300 Somalis employed earning \$20 a day. Some of the Somali workers had already learned building skills as they were involved in the construction of a state-of-the-art nursing school, hospital and mosque on the site of Mogadishu's Digfer hospital. Others were learning on the job. Researchers witnessed Turkish builders teaching Somali workers a variety of building skills such as mixing

concrete and laying bricks. The Turkish site manager said, "Somalis are clever and hard working. Whatever we know, we are teaching them. It's better to have Somalis, because Turkish workers are expensive. 100 percent of the Somalis working here will have a good future."<sup>63</sup>

Since 2011, Turkish governmental organizations have implemented and coordinated projects in Somalia. TIKA is involved with education, agriculture, health and water management in a number of Somali regions. It has recently started implementing projects in Somaliland and Puntland and has made exploratory visits to the towns of Kismayo and Jowhar. By December 2014, 450 students had graduated from an agricultural training center run by TIKA. The students came from areas in and around Baidoa, Kismayo, Marka and Jowhar. Tuition is free and they are given agricultural equipment to take home once they have completed the course. TIKA also plans to open a civil aviation school in the grounds of the international airport.<sup>64</sup>

Turkey has rehabilitated 23 kilometers of key roads in Mogadishu. Smooth tarmac has replaced the pot-holed streets, which were virtually impassable at times. Although the rehabilitated roads do not cover a large distance, they have captured the attention of many Somalis and are often the first subject brought up in conversation about the role of Turkey in Somalia. The quality of the Turkish-built roads, in particular the lack of drainage, was one of the main points of criticism raised by Somali respondents. The subject came up again and again during interviews. One interviewee said, "When the rain comes, you see many places under water, and that water can easily demolish the roads. The Turks have made a technical mistake." Another added,

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<sup>61</sup> Conversation with senior Somali government official, January 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Somali government minister, Mogadishu, December 2014.

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<sup>63</sup> Visit to construction site of new Turkish embassy, November 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with TIKA officer, Mogadishu, December 2014.



“The only negative thing I have to say about them is that they built roads without a drainage system. It is time we paid closer attention to what the Turks are actually doing and how they are doing it.”<sup>65</sup> The researchers sought a response from TIKA to these complaints, but so far none has been forthcoming.

Somali interviewees said one major impact of road construction has been the recent development of businesses that could not have existed without smooth, passable roads. For example, people can transport and sell goods using wheelbarrows, which was not possible when the roads were rough. The resurfaced roads have also led to a boom in auto-rickshaws or Bajaj. This has provided Mogadishu’s population with a much cheaper form of transport than normal cars, with fees varying between \$1 and \$5, depending on the distance. These vehicles can travel down very narrow streets, impassable for normal cars. They have also created employment opportunities for many Somalis.

The Turkish Red Crescent (TRC) came to Somalia in 2011. In December 2014 it set up Jazeera camp, home to more than 28,000 internally displaced people. It has also resettled more than 5,000 families. It has a mobile bakery and mobile kitchens, which produce more than 14,000 meals a day. Since 2011 the TRC says it has distributed 20,000 metric tons of flour, more than 20,000 metric tons of sugar and more than 50,000 metric tons of food throughout the country.<sup>66</sup> Although these efforts are modest compared with the vast humanitarian operations of international organizations, it is interesting that Turkey has received so much goodwill, whereas bodies such as the UN continue to attract cynical criticism from many Somalis.

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<sup>65</sup> Interviews with a Somali civil society member, December 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Turkish Red Crescent, Mogadishu, December 2014.

The TRC has also established a large waste management center near the airport. With the help of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, rubbish collection trucks have been shipped to Mogadishu. They work with the Mogadishu Municipality to collect garbage on the main streets of the city. Its Somali employees, who were trained by Turkish garbage collectors, drive the trucks and dispose of the waste. The TRC said it now has more than 400 staff of whom only 10 are Turkish citizens.<sup>67</sup>

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud praised the way Turks are training Somalis as construction workers, teachers, doctors, nurses and rubbish collectors: “They taught the Somalis to drive the vehicles – that’s what makes the difference. We have been constantly preaching to our international partners – ‘Don’t do the work for us, do the work with us’. This is the difference – the Turks are doing the work with us. They are training the Somalis, improving their capacity and introducing a new work culture to Somalia.”<sup>68</sup>

### Education assistance

Turkey has provided scholarships to thousands of Somali students. There are currently about 3,000 Somalis studying in Turkey, almost half of them receiving scholarships either from the government or Turkish NGOs.<sup>69</sup> Scholarships were initially offered for secondary school as well as tertiary education up to PhD level, but now they are mainly focused on higher education.

A researcher for this report interviewed Somali students studying in Turkey from 2012 to 2015. Some said they wished they could study in English, not Turkish, as English is a more useful language. One student said he was terrified

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Turkish Red Crescent, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Turkish embassy in Mogadishu, May 2015.

about returning to Somalia upon completion of his studies as he feared al-Shabaab would target him now that it has declared Turkey an enemy.<sup>70</sup>

## Trade between the two countries

According to the Turkish government, trade between the two countries was valued at \$64 million in 2014, and was projected to triple in 2015. The main sectors include construction, service and goods. Perhaps the most visible trade cooperation between Turkey and Somalia is the latter's decision to hand the operations of both Mogadishu's seaport and airport to two Turkish companies, to the chagrin of western and Arab partners. The seaport and airport generate nearly 80 percent of the Somali government's revenue.

The Albayrak Company took over management of the seaport in October 2014. The manager of the port said his company offered the best deal, which involves handing over 55 percent of the port's gross monthly income to the Somali Federal Government. During the seven-month period from October 2014 to April 2015, the company deposited some \$9.4 million into the Central Bank of Somalia, representing the government's share. According to government reports, the revenue from Mogadishu's port has steadily increased since Albayrak took over.

The company manager at the time the researchers visited the port explained the great difficulties he and his staff had in convincing port workers to adopt new ways of working: "Most of the people who used to earn a lot of money unofficially from the port were not happy when our company took over. But once the public and the port workers saw how committed and transparent we were, they became convinced."<sup>71</sup> He denied media reports that hundreds of port workers had been fired.

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Somali student, Istanbul, November 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Interview with Albayrak port manager, December 2014.

According to the Turkish embassy in Mogadishu, in mid 2015, 430 Somalis were employed at the port on a permanent basis, while 2,500 had temporary contracts. It said that salaries worth \$600,000 were disbursed every month.

In September 2013, the Turkish company Favori took over the management of Mogadishu's Adan Adde International Airport from UAE firm SKA after signing an agreement with the Somali Federal Government. This was not without controversy and generated a lot of media attention, a court case and parliamentary debate. The company manages everything from ground handling, passenger service, cargo and fuel to general airport maintenance. According to a company report, the number of international and local flights arriving at the airport doubled between 2013 and 2014.<sup>72</sup>

Despite criticism about the way the government contracted the Turkish company to operate the airport, Favori constructed a new, sleek terminal that would shame many African airports. Somalis and other observers point out that SKA never proposed doing this, despite running the airport for years. Favori finished the new terminal to coincide with Erdogan's second visit in January 2015.

## Peace-building and conflict resolution efforts

Turkey has also been involved in peace-building efforts in Somalia. Initially, it tried to help with reconciliation efforts between the federal government and al-Shabaab, but this eventually came to nothing. Turkish diplomats said efforts to assist with the logistics for indirect talks had mixed results. Also, Ankara took over from the United Kingdom as the host of talks between Somalia and the self-declared

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<sup>72</sup> See report released by Favori in April 2015, <http://www.somalicurrent.com/2015/04/28/mogadishu-aden-ade-international-airport-flights-double/>

republic of Somaliland. Although the high profile nature of the Somalia-Somaliland talks were not commensurate with the lack of substantive outcome, Turkish mediation has, in fact, yielded some tangible results. The federal government and Somaliland have agreed, for the first time since 1991 to jointly operate air space management. But the talks seem to have faltered, and in December 2015 Somaliland declared it preferred another mediator. However, Turkish officials say that Somaliland, as of February 2016, is supportive of Ankara's mediation role.<sup>73</sup>

African Union troops and the Somali National Army are taking the lead in trying to restore security in the country, but Turkey has also played a role. This has been more controversial than other Turkish interventions. For example, an early Turkish initiative to train the Somali military was met with resistance from the US and Ethiopia. Turkish diplomats expressed frustration about efforts to work together with others on training the military, citing the example of a meeting in January 2013 when it requested funding for its comprehensive training plan for the Somali army. The diplomat said, "nobody gave any funds so now we decided do it bilaterally." Turkey is now building the only and largest military barracks for the Somali army in Jazeera on the outskirts of Mogadishu. Some 150 Turkish military trainers will ultimately teach at what will become a fully-fledged academy for the Somali army.<sup>74</sup>

Given that AMISOM is mandated by the UN and bankrolled by the US and EU, it is not surprising that they didn't give money to Turkey. However, Turkey is now co-chairing with the US a key security group for Somalia called Peacebuilding State-building Goal #2 (PSG2), part of the New Deal Compact which

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, February 2016.  
<sup>74</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat in Mogadishu, December 2014.

Somalia signed with international partners in 2013.<sup>75</sup>

Turkey currently provides scholarships for both officers and non-commissioned officers in Turkey. Some are being trained for the nascent Somali navy and the yet to be established air force. Turkey has also donated 32,000 uniforms to the Somali security forces.<sup>76</sup> The EU, US and UAE are also involved in training the military. Turkish diplomats emphasized the importance of standardizing and coordinating the training of the army.<sup>77</sup>

### Erdogan's return



This cartoon by the famous Somali artist Amin Arts shows how, in the eyes of most Somalis, Turkey helped transform Somalia - at least Mogadishu - between 19 August 2011 and 25 January 2015 when President Erdogan made his second trip to the country. Somalia has come a long way from the humanitarian catastrophe of 2011 that claimed the lives of nearly 260,000 people.<sup>78</sup> Of course, the progress is not all down to Turkey, but it is

<sup>75</sup> The Somali Compact, [http://www.pbsdialogue.org/media/filer\\_public/65/42/6542fe9f-4ca8-464b-ba42-ad7064454298/the\\_somali\\_compact.pdf](http://www.pbsdialogue.org/media/filer_public/65/42/6542fe9f-4ca8-464b-ba42-ad7064454298/the_somali_compact.pdf)  
<sup>76</sup> Turkish embassy in Mogadishu.  
<sup>77</sup> Turkish diplomat, September 2015.  
<sup>78</sup> Al Jazeera news report, May 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/05/201352113337568731.html>

significant that so many Somalis see its role as indispensable.

The purpose of Erdogan's second visit was to see what Turkey had achieved since 2011 and to pledge funding for new projects. He came as part of a tour of three African countries including Ethiopia and Djibouti. He and the Somali president officially opened a new airport terminal. He also visited the former Digfer hospital, rebuilt by Turkey and now named the Mogadishu Somalia-Turkey Training and Research Hospital. The hospital has 205 beds and was fully equipped by the Turkish government.

During his day-long visit, Erdogan pledged new multi-million dollar projects and signed bilateral deals involving trade, development, sports, culture and marine transport. He said the Turkish government would help build 10,000 new homes in Mogadishu, continue to fix roads and rehabilitate ports and invest more in defense and agriculture.



## Turkish model versus traditional donors

### Speed versus bureaucracy

One of the main issues raised by respondents was what they perceived as the remarkable speed of delivery of Turkish humanitarian and development assistance, especially when compared with other donors. Most Somali and Turkish interviewees voiced their exasperation with what they described as the slow pace and over-bureaucratization of the traditional donors in Somalia who, they said, spend more time talking about aid projects than implementing them. For example, a Somali government official said, "If I ask the UN to do something it takes months. If I ask Turkey the same thing, it delivers the following week." Some western diplomats also praised Turkey's direct and efficient approach: "They get humanitarian aid to people and places others cannot. And they do it quickly."<sup>79</sup>

Interviewees said one reason for Turkey's relative speed is that it has engaged with Mogadishu in a holistic way, combining diplomacy, humanitarianism and business interests. The Turkish embassy and TIKA were cited as key in terms of the efficient coordination of Turkish activities on the ground, thus ensuring the rapid delivery of assistance.

Another reason given for Turkey's speed in implementing tangible change in Mogadishu is its joined up presence in the city. Turkish Airlines<sup>80</sup> was cited as playing a key role as it provides a direct and regular link between the two countries. The view was that now Turkish

<sup>79</sup> Interview with western diplomat, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>80</sup> In February 2016, Turkish Airlines halted flights to Mogadishu after an explosives-laden laptop blew up aboard a Turkish Airlines chartered flight that was ferrying passengers from Mogadishu to Djibouti. It's unclear if it will resume flights.

companies manage the seaport and airport, Turkish groups can import with even more ease and efficiency the necessary goods and equipment to rehabilitate roads and other infrastructure. Improving the roads has proved to be a relatively quick, easy and effective way of winning the hearts and minds of the Somali people. As a government minister told a member of the research team while driving to the international airport, “If it wasn’t for Turkey it would have taken us two hours to get to the airport.”<sup>81</sup>

Turkey’s close, on-the-ground relationships with members of the Somali government, and the training, financial and logistical support it gives to them, helps explain why it has avoided many potential obstacles in its dealings with government agencies. However, these relationships have opened Turkey up to criticism from that it does not perform sufficient oversight of its funding and fails to take into account the corrupt nature of the government.

Some respondents said the UN and western countries have not been able to emulate Turkey, because their bureaucracies are too cumbersome, they do not have such a holistic approach and some are not physically present in the country. These three factors were identified by interviewees as the main reasons that traditional donors have made little impact during the past two decades, compared to what they saw as the significant achievements of Turkey in the five years it has been actively involved in Somalia. However, it is important to point out that the UN and a number of western and other countries have committed vast resources to Somalia – money, personnel and time. Even though their contributions might be less obvious than that of the Turks, the scale of their intervention over the years dwarfs that of

Ankara, or “the new kid on the block”<sup>82</sup> as one Somalia expert puts it.

Turkish officials expressed frustration with other donors. They said, even in cases when they would have preferred a more coordinated approach, other donors were simply too slow. A representative of the Turkish government cited as an example efforts to improve maritime security. He said Turkey became so fed up with the international community’s endless “papers and strategies” that it ended up “simply giving four boats to the Somali coastguard and supplying them with fuel and salaries”.<sup>83</sup>

Representatives from Somali NGOs and civil society organizations said Turkish groups were far more efficient in providing them with funds than most other donors. According to a program manager of a Somali foundation: “There is a bilateral relationship between Turkey and Somalia. Our organization has a bilateral relationship with organizations in Turkey. If we need \$100,000, we get \$100,000. Things are different with others. For example, when the Somali president went to Japan, they pledged to give him \$50 million. He came home expecting the funds, but instead he received a letter telling him the money would come through the UNDP. The UNDP will take about 20 percent as an administration fee and will dictate to Somalia how the remaining 80 percent is spent. They say, ‘If you want this money, you have to do A, B, C’. Sometimes you wish you didn’t have their money in the first place. Sometimes I wish I could tell the donor to take its money back, because it’s not getting to me in the way I wanted.”<sup>84</sup> However, these comments highlight what some would interpret as lack of oversight by Turkey.

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with Somali cabinet minister, Mogadishu, December 2014.

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with a Somali civil society leader, January 2016

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Turkish official, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>84</sup> A program manager of the Somali Foundation, Mogadishu, December 2014.

Perhaps one reason why funding involving the UN is so cumbersome is that more weight is put on trying to ensure the money is spent responsibly.

## Aid on the ground

One of main differences between Turkey and most other donors is that the Turks have opened offices in Mogadishu. It is not just the embassy that is inside the city. Aid groups, teachers, doctors, business people and other Turks live there too. However, they take security seriously and do not simply let anyone walk into their offices. Some rarely venture outside their compounds, although it is not uncommon to see Turkish road engineers working alongside Somali colleagues on the streets of Mogadishu. But it would be an exaggeration to say Turks walk freely around the city.

The Somali president said Turkey was different, because it did not work through intermediaries: “In the past 20 years, most of the donors, especially from the western and Arab worlds, have been using intermediaries like NGOs. This is the normal thing to do in Somalia. But Turkey is on the ground doing the work. And it is doing the work with Somalis.”<sup>85</sup> His words were echoed by the representative from a Somali NGO: “The Turkish in Somalia are among us. They eat with us while the Europeans stay at the airport. There is no comparison. They drive inside the city. Some of them died for us, yet death does not deter them. They became our comrades. They make you feel they are our brothers. That makes all the difference.”<sup>86</sup>

Turkish humanitarian workers said the only way they could do their jobs effectively was by working and living close to the Somali

population. A representative of the Turkish Red Crescent said: “We did not come here to dominate. We have to understand the people. We come from the same culture – an Islamic culture – and I’m not talking about religion. We work with the Somalis, and we are very happy. We play football together. We do our daily activities together. We eat lunch on the same table. This is crucial for the humanitarian agencies. First we have to understand the other side, then we can provide the relief. The reason why we have succeeded in Somalia is because we have close cooperation. That is the key.”<sup>87</sup>

Turkey’s decision to operate in this way is not without risk. It has led to the observation that Turkish diplomats, aid workers, business people and others are “seemingly unhampered by the security concerns that limit western engagement on the ground”.<sup>88</sup> But, in the words of a Somali government minister, Turkey’s bold decision to install itself in Mogadishu is likely to reap rewards: “They opened an embassy inside the city. They are our neighbors. For that they are risking a lot, and for that, the expectation is that they will outdo everybody else ... My own judgment is that Turkey’s first impulse was humanitarian. Somalia is after all a Muslim country, and Turkey is a Muslim country. But Turkey is a country that is an international player today, and therefore it has its own strategies. I am sure they know more than we do about the resources of this country and the weaknesses of this country. So they can help and, at the same time, be in a very competitive position when the resources come in.”<sup>89</sup>

Although some traditional donors and others are now coming closer, some to the

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with a Somali NGO representative, Mogadishu, December 2014.

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Turkish Red Crescent, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>88</sup> NOREF, *Turkey’s new humanitarian approach in Somalia*, Pinar Tank, December 2013.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Somali cabinet minister, Mogadishu, December 2014.

international airport, some to heavily secured hotels and other buildings in Mogadishu, they still maintain a distance from the Somali population, and therefore cannot fully understand their needs. A Somali NGO worker who implements projects funded by the EU explained how difficult it is to access other donors compared to the Turks: “I went through five check points in order to meet my European Union partners. This makes me feel I have been violated.”<sup>90</sup>

Somali respondents said they considered Turkey to be an equal partner. According to a representative of a Somali NGO: “We work with the international community. We have a good relationship with all the organizations we work with. However, when we work with Turkish organizations, we feel like equal partners. The Turks respect the Somalis as equals.”<sup>91</sup>

Some Turks, especially teachers, have brought their families to live with them in Mogadishu. They live in compounds and have security, but it is nowhere near the level of that provided at the area in and around the international airport where the UN, some embassies and other international organizations are based.

Not all Turks in Mogadishu have such a sense of duty and missionary zeal. A Turkish airport worker said he detested Somalia so much that he was counting the days until he could leave. He said he could not cope with the insecurity and the fact that he could not move freely around the city. He felt like he was in prison, and he missed his family. He said he would never again return to the country.<sup>92</sup> A construction worker at the site of the new Turkish embassy was equally negative: “It’s

difficult being in Mogadishu, because our skin color is different. We live in a shanty area. I won’t stay here a day longer than I have to. I have had enough, and I miss my family. We live here on site – 70 people in total – the Turks and a few Somali security guards. Recently, a rocket landed here in the compound at 1:30am. Luckily nobody was killed. So we built the perimeter walls higher, from four to six meters.”

The presence of the Turks on the ground in Mogadishu has given them unique advantages in the city. It means they are more in touch with what Somalis want and need, which endears them to many local people. The fact that the Turks have moved in to Mogadishu has helped create the impression that they are the main providers of assistance to the Somali people, even though the reality is very different.

### Visibility versus invisibility

The words visible and tangible came up again and again during interviews. In the words of a senior UN official in Mogadishu, “I worked on Somalia from 2005-2008. There was no significant Turkish presence at that time. I returned in 2013. Mogadishu was completely different. The Turkish presence was visible. The airport, Turkish Airlines, the roads, the lights, the IDP camp at Jazeera, the university, the hospitals. Turkish people were on the roads working with the Somalis. The Somalis cherish the Turkish model, because it is visible, tangible and has an impact. The Somalis say it empowers them, because it is joint work done together by the Turks and the Somalis. But the work of the Turks is very small compared to the UN and others. During the peak of the famine in 2011, the Turkish raised about \$200 million. International aid, mainly through the UN, was about \$1 billion.”<sup>93</sup>

President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud observed that one reason why Turkey was so popular in Somalia was that it was doing something

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<sup>90</sup> Interview with Somali NGO worker, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Somali NGO worker, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with Turkish airport worker, Mogadishu, December 2014.

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with UN official, Mogadishu, December 2014.

different and new: “What I am sure of is that the old model doesn’t work anymore ... Somalis might not even notice the food deliveries, the mother and child health kits, which are still very essential – because these have been coming for the past 20 years. But when they see the street lighting or the rehabilitation of a two kilometer road or a hospital, that’s what makes a difference for the people. That is why people are saying Turkish aid is always more effective than the others. The people want to see something different.”<sup>94</sup>

A Somali government minister said the highly visible nature of Turkey’s engagement with Somalia would lead to preferential treatment in future: “The Turks are now being favored for many things, because they have established the expertise. They have the knowledge of the country, they are learning Somali, they are on the streets, and they are driving the trucks. Who else can do that? They are sacrificing their lives because of that.”<sup>95</sup>

Some respondents made the point that, although the amount of money Turkey has spent in Somalia is far less than contributions from traditional donors, they believe it has yielded more in terms of development. They said this might be due in part to Turkey’s preference for highly visible projects, which have at times exaggerated the scale of its contribution in comparison to other donors, many of whom have a more subtle, nuanced approach.

Turkey was fortunate in that it arrived in Somalia at a time when the country was changing. Al-Shabaab withdrew from Mogadishu in August 2011, diaspora Somalis were starting to return, and Somalis themselves were investing more and rehabilitating and rebuilding their shattered

city. It could be said that some of the praise given to Turkey should have gone to the Somalis themselves. It is not just the Turks who changed Mogadishu, the Somalis did it too and perhaps more profoundly. Diaspora resilience is epitomized by the defiance of a restaurateur from London, Ahmed Jama, whose The Village restaurants are repeatedly targeted by al-Shabaab but who has refused to capitulate.<sup>96</sup> And as mentioned earlier, the role of AMISOM has been vital. Without improved security, Turkey would have been unable to operate in the way that it does.

But visibility has come at a cost. Although initially al-Shabaab did not attack the Turks, they were later targeted. The loss of Turkish lives at the hands of al-Shabaab, and the group’s openly declared hostility towards their presence in Somalia, have been game changers. The honeymoon feeling has been shaken. Security and suspicion have increased. And perhaps Turkey now feels its position, although different, is not that as far apart as previously thought from other foreign powers involved with Somalia.

## Unilateralism versus multilateralism

Traditional donors have criticized Turkey for failing to coordinate with others and for operating in a unilateral fashion. However, Somali government officials and other residents of Mogadishu praised Turkey for going solo. A Somali minister said, “It seems that Turkey is alone, and it does its own thing. It is quicker and more focused than all the others. The Turks simply say we are going to do this road, and they do it. We are going to do this light, and they do it. It takes forever for others to do the smallest thing.”<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Somali cabinet minister, Mogadishu, December 2014.

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<sup>96</sup> The New Yorker wrote in 2013 about the multiple bombings of The Village restaurants, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/09/30/now-serving>

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Somali cabinet minister, Mogadishu, December 2014.



As time progresses, Turkey has started coordinating more with other donors. As a Turkish diplomat observed, “Initially the UN, EU and others were very, very critical of Turkey. They said Turkey didn’t cooperate or coordinate. But the Turkish position was very clear. We are in Mogadishu. We are ready to cooperate with everyone. We always call them to come back to Mogadishu and come onto the ground. We shared all information with them from the beginning. After some time they changed their approach to Turkey. Our relation with the UN and others is good now, but unfortunately Turkey has the only western embassy in Mogadishu. We welcome the international community’s increasing engagement with Somalia, because it is a failed state, and Turkey cannot afford to do it on its own. We therefore need to cooperate and coordinate, and avoid duplication.”<sup>98</sup>

A UN official remarked that Turkey is now more open to a multilateral way of working: “Turkey is more multilateral, because it is part of the New Deal process. There is no doubt that Turkey could go a step further. It needs to be more multilateral, and it needs to be reassured that it’s okay to be multilateralist. And it’s certainly not as closed as Qatar and the UAE.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, Turkey is playing a significant role in the New Deal Compact agreed in Brussels in September 2013. It co-chairs with the US Peace and State-building Goals, which focuses on security. In February 2016, Istanbul will host the High Level Partnership Forum (HLPF), the highest platform for dialogue within the New Deal. President Erdogan is co-chairing the meeting with President Hassan Sheikh, just six months before Somalia holds elections. It’s the second time that Turkey will play a major role in shaping the politics of Somalia just before elections, which it also did in 2012.

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with UN official, Mogadishu, December 2014.

A western diplomat said he understood why Turkey often failed to coordinate with traditional donors: “Turkey is not interested in coordinating with others, and there are some good reasons for this. The others are too slow, bureaucratic and process-oriented – ‘trying to get things right’ whereas the Turkish go out and do it. We need assessments and so on, which take too long.” The western diplomat was optimistic about the future relationship between Turkey and other donors but said it would take a long time. “I see potential complementarity with the Turks, but we have a long way to go on this.”<sup>100</sup>

Turkish officials agreed it was important to cooperate and coordinate more, partly to avoid duplication: “We need more collaboration and coordination, more sincere sharing of information. The traditional donors have to believe in the Somali people. I personally believe in them.”<sup>101</sup> TICA agreed with this assessment: “We are not separate. We help the needy people. Those who want to coordinate with us, we welcome them. Before we came here the international community was based in Nairobi.”<sup>102</sup>

However, as stressed by the International Crisis Group, which in October 2012 published one of the first in-depth studies of Turkey’s involvement in Somalia, there is need for great care: “Turkey should tread with caution. Over 20 years many states and entities have tried to bring relief and secure peace in Somalia, often leaving behind a situation messier than that which they found. Ankara must understand that it cannot solve the country’s many challenges alone.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Interview with Western diplomat, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with western diplomat, Mogadishu, November 2014.

<sup>103</sup> ICG, *Assessing Turkey’s Role in Somalia*, 8 October 2012.

## Business interests

Although the initial driving force was largely humanitarian, Turkey has never hidden the fact that it also wants to do business in and with Somalia. Turkish-Somali business forums have been convened. Turkish businesspeople have come to Mogadishu to explore possibilities in many sectors including fishing, textiles, furniture-making and construction including building shopping malls. As early as 2011, Turkish exports to Somalia had jumped to \$40 million, from just \$2.3 million in 2007.<sup>104</sup> Somali exporters are also thriving in Turkey. They say goods from Turkey are cheaper than those from the west and of better quality than those from China.<sup>105</sup>

Turkey has embarked on some very large-scale business ventures in Somalia. The one that has received the most media attention is Turkish Airlines, which has a lucrative and busy route to Mogadishu – a monopoly on which it sets the prices. For example, a round trip economy flight from London to Mogadishu in August 2015 costs about \$2,500; a round trip economy flight from Minneapolis to Mogadishu about \$5,500; and a round trip economy flight from Stockholm to Mogadishu more than \$2,500.<sup>106</sup> By comparison, a round trip from the same destinations to Nairobi costs half as much.<sup>107</sup>

Turkish ventures such as the rehabilitation of roads, management of the port and the construction of a hospital, mosque, embassy and airport terminal have created job

opportunities for Somalis. In some cases, they have also generated revenue for the Somali Federal Government. Albayrak has proved particularly lucrative for the authorities thanks to a 45 percent/55 percent sharing of port revenues, with the larger part going to Somalia. Before Albayrak took over, there were allegations of serious corruption, with significant portions of revenue going to particular individuals. Some Somali respondents were unhappy that Turks are charging fees for health and education, especially when schools, clinics and hospitals are based in facilities that used to be free. Turkish diplomats were keen to promote joint ventures with Somali business people who they praised for their dynamism and wealth. According to one diplomat, “The Somali business community is incredibly resilient. Joint ventures will be a win-win situation.”<sup>108</sup>

## Cultural advantage

Turkey’s Muslim identity and the religious orientation of the AK party were cited as reasons why Turkey has been more widely accepted by Somalis. It is as if religion has somehow legitimized Turkey’s involvement in the country. As a Somali minister said when asked about the special relationship, “Maybe it is the fact that they go to the mosque together. It is also the incredible risks Turkey is prepared to take as a young and growing power. There was also a historical link between Somalia and Turkey during the Ottoman Empire.”<sup>109</sup>

It is significant that on the site of one of Turkey’s showpiece projects in Mogadishu, the former Digfer, now the Somalia-Turkey Training and Research Hospital and nursing school, an enormous Ottoman-style mosque has been built, with capacity for 2,000 worshippers. Special Turkish artists were flown in to do the

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<sup>104</sup> Turkish statistical institute, Foreign Trade Statistics Yearbook

<sup>105</sup> Interviews with Somali businessmen in Turkey, December 2014.

<sup>106</sup> Turkish Airlines website.

<sup>107</sup> An explosion on the Somali airliner, Dallo Airlines, on 2<sup>nd</sup> February that killed a man and injured two was said to have targeted a Turkish Airline that did not showed up that day, and this further indicates the challenges Turkey faces in Somalia. Some fear had the plot succeeded, Turkish Airline flights to Somalia could have been jeopardized.

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with Turkish diplomat, Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Somali cabinet minister, Mogadishu, November 2014.

artwork for the mosque. There have been suggestions of a neo-Ottoman influence in Somalia and possible religious overtones in the relationship.

### Mogadishu-centric approach

Turkey's focus on Mogadishu received much criticism, especially from interviewees outside the capital.<sup>110</sup> However, Turkish officials made no apologies for this: "We have no regrets about focusing on Mogadishu first and the regions later, because the situation was so bad in Mogadishu. We are now focusing on Hargeisa, Garowe, Baidoa, Kismayo and will then move to Beledweyne."<sup>111</sup>

Turkey is improving on this and opened a consulate in Hargeisa in 2014. TIKA stressed that it also works in Somaliland and Puntland and that it also visited Kismayo to do an assessment. The Turkish Red Crescent also spoke of its activities outside the capital: "We do food distribution in Puntland, Somaliland and the central regions. We recently delivered 4,000 kilos of dry food to Puntland, plus made other deliveries to Kismayo, Beledweyne and Berbera." This is not a significant amount of food, and it will be interesting to see if Turkey starts to carry out a more concerted program of expansion across the country.

In Somaliland, apart from the Turkish-run schools, a number of shops and restaurants advertise themselves as Turkish. However, they are owned and run by Somalis and have no Turkish staff whatsoever. It is as if Turkey has become a selling point, regardless of whether or not it is involved directly in the venture.<sup>112</sup>

### Oversight issues

Turkey became involved in Somalia at a time when the capacities of state institutions were extremely weak and affected by rampant corruption and poor performance. It has attracted criticism for being too unquestioning of the governments of presidents Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed and Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. However, Turkish diplomats in Mogadishu insisted they were balanced in their approach: "Our aim is not to support one side in Somalia but to support the Somali people." They emphasized the role of trust, saying this was one of Turkey's proudest achievements in Somalia: "Because of Turkey's comprehensive approach we have gained the trust of the Somali people. Humanitarian, development and peace-building – all three have been achieved against a background of trust and confidence."<sup>113</sup>

When asked about oversight of the 55 percent of port revenues given to the Somali government, the Turkish manager of the port said he did not know what happened to the money: "I really don't have any idea what happens to the money. We just hand it over to the government, to the treasury account at the Central Bank. I don't know what happens after that ... I hope it is going in the correct way."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Interviews with government officials and journalists in Somaliland and Puntland, May-August 2015.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with a Turkish diplomat in Mogadishu, December 2014.

<sup>112</sup> Visit to Somaliland, August 2015.

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<sup>113</sup> Interviews with Turkish diplomats, Mogadishu and Antalya, December 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with port manager, Mogadishu, November 2014.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to gain a better understanding of Turkey's unique humanitarian and development model in Somalia compared with traditional donors, and to share lessons learned and policy considerations with other donors, development actors, policymakers, academics and the general public. Our investigations revealed that Turkey's initial engagement with Somalia was purely humanitarian with the aim of alleviating human suffering in 2011. After Erdogan's visit, the Turkish government, private companies, NGOs and individuals embarked on a fundraising campaign for Somalia. Most of our research, which was conducted three years after Erdogan's visit, shows that the Turkish impact in Somalia, especially in Mogadishu, was highly visible. Turkish involvement in education, agriculture, health, construction of roads, garbage cleaning, construction of military barracks, military and police trainings in Turkey and the peace-building efforts between Somalia and Somaliland made their model different from the traditional donors and highly visible.

The findings also show that Turkey received a warm welcome from Somali leaders and the Somali people because of the historical relationship between the two countries and their Muslim identity. The majority of the Somalis who participated in this study expressed positive attitudes towards Turkish engagement in Somalia. Western countries working in Somalia were concerned about the low level of coordination and cooperation with them but believed that Turkey was more visible and quicker to act.

## Lessons learned

Turkey's successful aid and development model can be instructive to other donors

operating in Somalia and elsewhere. Key lessons are:

1. **Tangible:** Perhaps the greatest success of the Turkish intervention is its ability to provide tangible results with its modest contribution. Somalis are increasingly weary of capacity building and workshops and would like to see assistance focusing on vital infrastructure.
2. **Speed:** Humanitarian disasters require urgent intervention. Traditional donors are stymied by overly bureaucratic processes, often undermining the impact of the intervention. In comparison, the Turkish intervention has been swift and reactive to local needs.
3. **Results:** Turkey took a practical, results-oriented approach compared with the process-oriented traditional donors. While processes are important, they should not become a hindrance to the overarching objective of the assistance.
4. **Partnership with recipients:** Many Somalis and other observers noted that Turkey's model puts high premium on 'working with Somalis' not 'working on Somalis'. The mutual mistrust between most traditional donors and Somalis is based on the perception that, unlike Turkey, traditional donors don't view them as partners.
5. **Diversity of projects:** Turkey's impressive intervention was truly comprehensive, complimenting humanitarian assistance with development, business, trade and cultural exchanges.
6. **Neutrality:** Despite its visibility, Turkey has largely managed to remain neutral on the domestic politics of the country. This has strengthened the perception of legitimacy that it enjoys among Somalis.

## Policy considerations

Based on our research findings, we put forward the following policy considerations to Turkish organizations, traditional donors and the Somali government:

### To Turkish organizations

- Turkish organizations need to improve their collaborations with other donors in order to achieve their collective objective of improving the lives of Somalis. Traditional donors have been a major force for good for over two decades. Dismissing them is both unfair and counterproductive.
- Over-branding continues to be an issue for the Turkish interventions. This is both immodest and unnecessary in the quest to deliver much needed assistance. Turkish organizations can learn a lesson from their counterparts in terms of giving credit to the government in projects.
- Despite improvements, a significant portion of Turkish assistance is still focused in and around Mogadishu. Turkey can improve this substantially as the regions attract less external aid and their challenges and needs are as significant as Mogadishu's.

### To the traditional donors

- Turkey is a new but a vital partner in humanitarian and development assistance to Somalia. Collaborating would mean greater impact for Somalis and Somalia. Dismissing them as isolationist is not only improper but hugely risky.
- Turkey offers tangible lessons in speed, practicality, neutrality and ability to navigate the complex Somali environment. These lessons could be applied by others.

### To the government of Somalia

- Use the exceptional relations with Turkey as a catalyst for trade and investment in long-term projects and partnerships. Turkey's assistance will end one day but its trade partnership could be enduring.
- While preserving the special relationship, exercise maximum transparency in awarding major contracts to all companies. This will improve the economy in the long run.

