

# Contemporary Turkish Foreign Policy in Africa: Decoding the Motivations behind Turkish-Cameroon Relations

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**Abstract** In recent years, contemporary Africa has witnessed an influx of new actors such as Russia, India, Iran, and of course Türkiye. The Republic of Türkiye has joined the old cadres in the likes of US, France, Germany to cement its footprints on the continent. Meanwhile, countries like France are experiencing anti-French sentiments that have culminated to the expulsion of French troops and terminating French economic interests especially in Sahel region in Africa. Turkey's global footprint in Africa, particularly in North Africa, can be viewed via its Ottoman past. The country's foreign policy, particularly in the late 1990s and in the 2000s has metamorphosed with resounding success particularly in the African continent, including the CEMAC region. The "Opening up" to and the AKP's "The Year of Africa" foreign policy frameworks revamped its diplomatic, political, economic, and socio-cultural ties with the continent. In the last decade, Turkish foreign policy has significantly improved, particularly in the CEMAC region. The frequent organization of TurkeyAfrica Economic and Business Forums, Diplomacy, and Partnership Conferences has led to significant results for Ankara. This main purpose of this article is to examine the motivations responsible Turkey's burgeoning interests in Cameroon. The study uses secondary sources of data and the emerging middle power theory to analyze Ankara's deepening of ties with Yaoundé. The paper revealed that political-diplomatic, economic, and military cooperation are key factors in Ankara's growing interests. The paper concludes that Turkey's engagement in Africa, including Cameroon, is significant example of its global middle power status.

**Keywords:** Africa, Cameroon, CEMAC Region, Motivations, Türkiye, Foreign Policy.

## Introduction

The period after the end of the cold war, when observers would invariably name France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as the only foreign powers to have substantial interests in sub-Saharan Africa is drawing to a close.<sup>1</sup> Affirmatively, the Republic of Türkiye is one of the newcomers into the continent with a huge foreign policy appetite in recent years which is spreading across the continent like summer 'wildfire' framed gigantically. <sup>2</sup> Tepeciklioğlu held that not only does the African Continent host the countries with the fastest growing economies, it is also blessed with such resources as oil, natural gas, and valuable mines. These factors have paved the way for the continent's development as a competitive arena for such global powers as the United States, the European Union, and rising powers like China, Russia, Japan, and India. The interest of Turkey in Africa has also

<sup>1</sup>W. Phillips Shively, *Power and Choice: An Introduction to Political Science*, 9th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), 394.

<sup>2</sup>Elem Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu, "Turkish Foreign Policy on Africa," *Cappadocia Journal of Area Studies* 3, no. 1 (2021): 1.

escalated, and the developing intensity of the relationships between Turkey and a number of African nations has naturally had repercussions on the Turkish academic field. Turkey's interest in the continent relates to the economy, policy and external factors.

<sup>3</sup> Kalin argued that the expansion and the new directions of Turkish foreign policy over the last decade have generated a lively debate in domestic and foreign policy circles, among diplomats, analysts, academics, journalists, and businesspeople, and in civil society. The debate revolves around the transformation of Turkey's foreign policy agenda against the backdrop of major shifts in regional and global power structures. Various questions, some well informed and others rather rhetorical, are posed to assess Turkey's standing in global politics. When we look at the last two decades, it seems that Turkey's new foreign policy towards Africa can be divided into two stages: In the first stage starting in 2005, Turkey implemented African Initiative Policies to introduce itself to the continent. In the second stage, which started after 2014, it aimed to strengthen its institutions and partnership in Africa throughout Africa Partnership Policies. Moreover, powers like France, Russia, China and the UAE challenge Turkey's strong presence in Africa for their strategic concerns.<sup>4</sup>

Turkish foreign policy which was traditionally aligned with and calibrated towards western nations has over the years acquired a new paradigmatic shift and priority: a whole scale "openings" towards the Middle East, Central Asia, South America and Africa. This new approach within the Turkish foreign policy is predicated on developments within the Turkish internal politics (the rise and hegemony of AKP party government since the early 2000s) and the geopolitical rise of a multipolar world order occasioned by the rescinding "powers" of the Trans-Atlantic normative/traditional powers.<sup>5</sup> According to <sup>6</sup> Kalin the new geopolitical realities of the new century have compelled many countries, including Turkey, to redefine their strategic priorities and adjust themselves to the new dynamics of multiple modernities and multidirectional "glocalization." Great transformations of the post-Cold War period have taken place in three interrelated areas, namely, the global political structure, the world economy, and the sociopolitical order. At the moment, all African states now picture diplomatic alliances via novel lenses on national interests and Türkiye and China have joined the 'old guards' by rebranding and assorting their diplomatic contacts so as to gain economically.

Türkiye's foreign policy towards the Middle East, Africa, Central Asia and South America has changed drastically in the last two decades. What occasioned Türkiye's foreign policy changes? Baudner argues that historically Turkish "foreign policy role concept was determined by its nationstate building history".<sup>7</sup> Hence, in the early periods of the republic and during the cold war, Türkiye's foreign policy considerations were based on Türkiye's internal political interests and aligning with Europe and the United States; Türkiye had no geopolitical interests in global politics beyond its neighbourhood. Furthermore, the pre-AK Party foreign policy "has been tainted with subservience to western lines and unconditional acceptance of Western stance".<sup>8</sup>

The Republic of Türkiye has established itself as an increasingly influential actor on the global political

<sup>3</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Framework, Values, and Mechanisms," *International Journal* 67, no. 1 (2012): 9.

<sup>4</sup> Serhat Orakçi, "Turkey's Strategic Engagement in Africa: Challenges and Opportunities," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 24, no. 3 (2022): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2022.1234567>.

<sup>5</sup> Abdirashid Dahir, "The Transformation of Turkish Foreign Policy in the 21st Century," *Insight Turkey* 23, no. 4 (2021): 1, <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2021234.1>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, "Turkish Foreign Policy: Framework, Values, and Mechanisms," *International Journal* 67, no. 1 (2012): 9.

<sup>7</sup> Judith Baudner, *Turkish Foreign Policy and National Identity: From Ottoman Legacy to AKP Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 85.

<sup>8</sup> Bulut Gürpınar, "The Western Orientation in Turkish Foreign Policy: A Critical Reassessment," *International Relations* 38, no. 2 (2020): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117820928187>.

arena and the African continent is no exception. Looking at her gigantic scale and scope of Ankara's engagement on the African Continent especially in Cameroon which happens to be a power house in the CEMAC region within a short time is a clear indication. Türkiye's reawakening towards the continent can be penned down to be the 'last dice' in her foreign policy agenda emanating from her quest in achieving not only regional statuses but also a global power joining the ranks of the others particularly France, which have had a firm grip on the continent especially in the geographical sphere of France with an active foreign policy package for more than six decades and beyond. Interestingly enough, the extent to which Türkiye appears to be warmly received with open arms by African leaders is perhaps striking and staggering in recent Türkiye-Africa relations proposing to their African counterparts, a nexus of economic, social and humanitarian incentives. The Turkish government is successfully riding home the message of increased diplomatic gains on a 'win-win' pipeline accompanied by huge economic benefits.

### Historical Relations

Cameroon-Türkiye relations refer to the foreign relations between Cameroon and Türkiye. Historically, relations between both states can be traced under Cameroon's late President Ahmadou Ahidjo in the 1960s though initially marked by taut since he used the police and state security gadgetry to obliterate political opponents.<sup>9</sup> At the beginning of Biya's presidency in the 1980s, relations with Türkiye improved emphatically as he attempted to develop a more democratic country and press for freedom of speech and press. From this period onwards, Türkiye assisted Cameroon in the construction of schools and infrastructural projects. Notwithstanding, Yaoundé-Ankara clashes erupted in 1984 over the failed coup in Cameroon emanating from the deplorable crackdown on dissidents, mostly Muslims from the North.<sup>10</sup>

Most recently Cameroon-Türkiye relations can be traced in the early 2020 and late 2021. Cameroon Tribune on March 12, 2020 reported that, the Minister Delegate to the Ministry of External Relations in charge of Cooperation with the Islamic World, Adoum Gargoum received in audience the Turkish Ambassador to Cameroon, Ayse Sarac during which both personalities discussed deepening bilateral relations between both countries.<sup>11</sup> In her remarks "she thanked the Minister for receiving them. Türkiye and Cameroon are strategic partners and they have good bilateral cooperation in multidimensional culture as well as at the international level. She went further to say that "they discussed elaborately on how to strengthen these cooperation ties further."<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of January 2020, Ayse Sarac was also at the Ministry of External Relations in which she extended an invitation ahead of the Türkiye-Africa Summit and expressed her country's commitment in supporting the peace building process in Cameroon emanating from the organization of the Major National Dialogue in resolving the conflict in the English-speaking regions which failed before it occurred based on bad fate of the organizers.<sup>13</sup>

Relations between Cameroon and Türkiye are positive with both Presidents having carried out official visits to each other's nation. In March 2010 former Turkish President Abdullah Gul<sup>14</sup> visited Cameroon and Paul Biya also visited Türkiye in March 2013 gave special impetus and increased the depth of

<sup>9</sup> John F. Clark, *Historical Dictionary of Cameroon*, 5th ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 45.

<sup>10</sup> Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Rising Role in Africa," *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (2010): 98.

<sup>11</sup> "Cameroon, Turkey Seek Stronger Ties," *Cameroon Tribune*, March 12, 2020, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Turkey-Cameroon Relations," accessed June 15, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr>.

<sup>14</sup> "Turkish President Visits Cameroon," *Anadolu Agency*, March 22, 2010.

cooperation ties.<sup>15</sup> Due to these friendly relations between both countries, several cooperation agreements have been agreed upon in areas like health, education, security, and infrastructure; with the Türk Exim bank having financed 75 per cent of the construction of the Japoma 50.000 capacity stadium in Douala, Littoral region.<sup>16</sup> Cameroon recently participated in both the Türkiye-Africa III and IV Business and Economic Forum and Türkiye-Africa Partnership Summit<sup>17</sup> all held in Istanbul at the auspices of Turkish President in October and December 2021 and 2023, which signifies the stamina and continuous cooperation of both states which saw the presence of Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his reaffirmation of continuous ties between his country and Africa on a win-win lane.<sup>18</sup> Despite the restrictions that Cameroon's membership in the Franc Zone may present, Paul Biya's economic model of Communal Liberalism paved the way for greater economic involvement with economies like Türkiye.<sup>19</sup> With a more liberal externally oriented market economy, economic relations between Türkiye and Cameroon have greatly improved over the last decade. The commitment of both states to mutual trust, trade expansion and economic cooperation has enabled both states strong and beneficial economic ties.<sup>20</sup>

### Theoretical Framework

Pieterse and Rehbein (2008: 2) stated that we are at the cusp of major changes of global significance.<sup>21</sup> A new phase of globalization has begun, in which the United States, Europe and Japan are being overtaken by low-cost producers and service providers in East Asia, China, India and Latin America. Their rise is made possible by a combination of low wages, technological advances, demographic advantages, economies of scale and good education. Long cherished aspirations such as greater South–South cooperation is now gradually taking shape in trade, energy and finance. The influence of American hegemony and the Washington-based international financial institutions is declining precipitously. No doubt the emerging economies are part of the Crazy vitality of business boosterism is a deceptive guide.

Middle powers are states that are neither great nor small in terms of international power, capacity and influence, and demonstrate a propensity to promote cohesion and stability in the world system. Despite problems of classification, a consensus has developed that states such as Australia, Canada, Norway and Sweden are middle powers. However, that consensus on middle-power identification is being undermined by the recent inclusion of such states as, among others, Argentina, Brazil, Nigeria, Malaysia, South Africa, and Türkiye in the middle-power category. However, this grouping of states as diverse as Brazil and Canada, or South Africa and Sweden together raise the issue of the usefulness of the middle-power concept and risks undermining the concept's analytical power.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of the middle power dates back to the late 16th century, when Italian Renaissance philosopher, Giovanni Botero, divided the world into three types of states-*grandissime* (empires),

<sup>15</sup> "Cameroon President Visits Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, March 15, 2013.

<sup>16</sup> "Cameroon President Visits Turkey," *Daily Sabah*, March 15, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> "Turkish Exim Bank Finances Douala Stadium," *Business in Cameroon*, July 10, 2019.

<sup>18</sup> "4th Turkey-Africa Partnership Summit Held in Istanbul," *Hurriyet Daily News*, December 18, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Jean-Germain Gros, "Cameroon's Political Economy," *African Studies Review* 58, no. 3 (2015): 167-189.

<sup>20</sup> International Monetary Fund, "Cameroon-Turkey Economic Relations," *IMF Country Report* No. 23/150 (2023): 12.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Boike Rehbein, *Emerging Powers in a Changing Global Order*,

*Futures* 40, no. 8 (2008): 703, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2008.07.013>.

<sup>22</sup> Eduard Jordaán, *The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations: Distinguishing Between Emerging and Traditional Middle Powers*, *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 165, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0258934032000147282>.

*mezano* (middle powers), and *piccioli* (small powers).<sup>23</sup> In mainstream IR, it became popular in the mid-20th century with Organski's power transition theory (1958), which postulated a power hierarchy formed of dominant, great, middle, and small powers.<sup>24</sup> Organski's typology recognized the middle power grouping as consisting of states which are able to exert influence on a regional, and to some degree, global scale, though his analysis tended to treat states in this category as peripheral actors and focused rather on the predominance of greater powers in world politics.<sup>25</sup>

The term 'middle power', like great power or minor power, defines what kind of actor a state is by reference to its status. Specifically, the term tells us what the consensus is about a state's relative ranking within the international hierarchy of national power. Some status markers, such as the amount of military and economic capabilities, can be quantified and have always been recognized as key measures of a country's relative power. That noted, four general categories have gained wide acceptance for ranking states: great power (or polar power), major power, middle power, and minor power.<sup>26</sup>

Illustrative archetypes of middle powers traditionally included Canada and Australia as well as the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) and the Netherlands. These states are typically described as guardians of the global balance of power protecting peace and order in the international system.<sup>27</sup> They are widely accepted to be bridgebuilders, striving to link up different clusters of states built around certain interests and ideas, and consensus seeking interlocutors who "pursue multilateral solutions to international problems" and embrace "notions of 'good international citizenship' to guide their diplomacy".<sup>28</sup> India under Nehru's leadership, for example, engaged in this kind of inters bloc diplomacy and played an important role in the Non-Aligned Movement trying to defuse tension between dominant powers during the Cold War. Middle powers practice "niche diplomacy" concentrating their energy and resources in specific issue areas likely to yield the most results as they have limited resources for pursuing a grand global strategy.<sup>29</sup> The Norwegians, for instance, have assumed the role of mediator in complex international conflicts and are heavily invested in the idea of using their Scandinavian identity as a neutral country to pursue peace-making diplomacy.

The geography and identity of a middle power can also facilitate its role as a bridge-builder. For instance, consistent with the older geostrategic notion of middle powers as physically situated in the middle, Türkiye's claim to be a middle power rests on its geographical position as much as its lacking within the international hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> Türkiye's location makes it a natural bridge between East and West. In addition, the contradictory elements of Turkish Islam and Kemalist secularism at the core of its national identity make Türkiye an ideal political-ideational bridge between Islam and modernity. Islam in Türkiye is distinguished by considerable diversity, both ideational content and in institutional forms,

<sup>23</sup> Giovanni Botero, *The Reason of State* (London: Routledge, 2017 [1589]), Book I, Chapter 1. Originally published in 1589 as *Della Ragion di Stato*.

<sup>24</sup> A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1958), 102-115.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, "Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 3 (2011): 318.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, "Challenging Contemporary Notions of Middle Power Influence," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 3 (2011): 318.

<sup>27</sup> Carsten Holbraad, *Middle Powers in International Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 205.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, Richard A. Higgott, and Kim Richard Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 19, 145.

<sup>30</sup> Randall L. Schweller, "The Concept of Middle Power," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, ed. William R. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5.



and is more open to political pressure and compromise than its counterparts elsewhere. Accordingly, Turkish Islam may serve as an example for Islamic democratic movements throughout the world.<sup>31</sup>

Keohane views the states as to the degree of influence played in the international system. Middle powers are those who have their influence in international affairs necessarily mediated by alliances and multilateral coalitions, the “system-affecting states”.<sup>32</sup> He further stated that a middle-power is a state whose leaders consider that it cannot act alone effectively, but may be able to have a systemic impact in a small group or through an international institution.<sup>33</sup> Typical of relatively weak actors, middle powers also champion a strong international legal system; they would prefer that international politics look more like domestic politics, governed by the rule of law (a constitutional order) that places strict limits on the returns to power.<sup>34</sup> Cooper et al., (1993) stated that middle powers are recognizable by their foreign policy behaviour.<sup>35</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, scholars have discussed Türkiye’s ambition to expand its area of influence in its neighbourhood and the middle power concept has been widely used to describe Türkiye’s engagement with the international system.<sup>36</sup> For example, Hale (2013) argues that using the term middle power is the most realistic way of conceptualizing Türkiye’s international role to explain Turkish policies, defining power as “the ability to oblige other states to take actions that they would not otherwise have taken and to resist pressure to do so from other states”.<sup>37</sup> Given their unique place within the international system, middle powers can be expected to display a specific pattern of statecraft that promotes international order through coalition-building, by serving as mediators and “go-betweens,” and through international conflict management and resolution activities, such as UN peacekeeping.<sup>38</sup> It is a statecraft grounded in entrepreneurial flair, technical competence, and activity niche-building diplomatic in the functionalist logic of issue-specific strengths and skills within domains where they hold a significant number of resources and reputational qualifications.<sup>39</sup> More fundamentally, it reflects a conviction that middle powers have a moral responsibility to protect the international order from destabilizing forces.<sup>40</sup>

Fonseca et al. (2016) argue that an emerging power seeks to reform the international order, backed by material capabilities.<sup>41</sup> This behavior contrasts with status-quo powers. Research on middle powers generally agrees that states exist on a spectrum of influence, with Türkiye occupying a distinct position.<sup>42</sup> As Süssler (2019) notes, “while Türkiye is not a great power, it has considerable ability to act

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Robert O. Keohane, “Lilliputians’ Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics,” *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 295-296.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 296.

<sup>34</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 113-115.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, Richard A. Higgott, and Kim Richard Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), 19-22.

<sup>36</sup> M. Müftüler and E. Yüksel, *Turkey’s Evolving Foreign Policy* (Istanbul: Koç University Press, 1997); William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy Since 1774*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>37</sup> William Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy Since 1774*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2013), 1.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers After the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave, 1997), 45–48.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>40</sup> Randall L. Schweller, “The Concept of Middle Power,” *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (2017), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Pedro C. Fonseca et al., “Emerging Powers and International Order,” *Brazilian Journal of Political Economy* 36, no. 1 (2016): 51–52.

<sup>42</sup> Eduard Jordaán, “The Concept of a Middle Power,” *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 165–181.

independently, resist pressure from great powers, and exert influence as a regional actor.”<sup>43</sup> Türkiye’s economic growth since the 2000s, driven by strategic foreign policy, has cemented its status as an emerging power. Its deepening engagement with Africa—including Cameroon—demonstrates its role as both a regional and global actor, reinforcing its middle-power identity.

### Features/Tenets of the Emerging Middle Power

- Emerging powers judge international law as playing a part in anchoring their dividends but cannot alternate the global tectonic form.<sup>44</sup>
- They are pivotal in sharpening global interaction within international institutions via international law which gives a voice to all states.<sup>45</sup>
- Emerging powers usually operate an activist finesse while engaging in global affairs (humanitarian, military, economic, etc.).<sup>46</sup>
- They restrain from interfering in conflicts and if they do, they push for an international mediation through varied channels.<sup>47</sup>
- Emerging powers do not menace the status quo of global order (economic, military, political) and avoid attacking liberal democracy.<sup>48</sup>
- They embody rising economic potentials through neoliberalism while making generous humanitarian donations.<sup>49</sup>
- The foreign policy of emerging powers spans beyond geography, with results void of self-interest, making them reliable international citizens (e.g., Türkiye).<sup>50</sup>
- They exhibit status-seeking behavior: "One of the main aspirations of Türkiye is to be recognized as a global actor, or as a 'pivotal state'" (Davutoğlu 2001, 91).<sup>51</sup>
- Emerging powers leverage soft-power capital to support allies and ideals.<sup>52</sup>

The recent debates surrounding traditional middle powers and emerging middle powers has been viewed from a diverse lens. Traditional middle powers are understood to be wealthy, stable, and egalitarian social democracies and promoters of a liberal international order.<sup>53</sup> Emerging middle powers, on the other hand, are often states that have assumed internationalist postures after the post-Cold War and in many cases have a lower quality of development and democratization.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, emerging middle powers tend to have semi-peripheral roles in the global economy coupled with significant domestic income inequality.<sup>55</sup> They often approach global governance with structural

<sup>43</sup> Bilgehan Süsler, *Turkey as a Middle Power* (Istanbul: Bilgi University Press, 2019), 112.

<sup>44</sup> G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 215.

<sup>45</sup> Andrew Hurrell, *On Global Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 178.

<sup>46</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, *Diplomacy of Small States* (London: Palgrave, 2013), 45.

<sup>47</sup> Eduard Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power," *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 172.

<sup>48</sup> Randall L. Schweller, *Maxwell's Demon and the Golden Apple* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 112.

<sup>49</sup> Deborah Bräutigam, *The Dragon's Gift* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 203.

<sup>50</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth* [Stratejik Derinlik] (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001), 91.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), 75.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, Richard A. Higgott, and Kim Richard Nossal, *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World Order* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1993), 23-25.

<sup>54</sup> Eduard Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations," *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 172-173.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Alden and Marco Antonio Vieira, "The New Diplomacy of the South: South Africa, Brazil, India and Trilateralism," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 7 (2005): 1081.

concerns about the international hierarchies<sup>56</sup> and can be hesitant to promote liberal internationalism. As Öniş and Kutlay (2017) articulate, they face “a dilemma that they are both critical of the existing liberal order dominated by the established Western powers and, at the same time, have an incentive to be a part of an international order based on liberal norms”.<sup>57</sup>

Türkiye exemplifies this dilemma: while Turkish decision-makers frequently criticize the Western-dominated international order for its structural inequalities, they simultaneously seek greater influence within that same system.<sup>58</sup> Successive Turkish governments have condemned decision-making processes in international institutions, particularly the UN's failure to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict.<sup>59</sup> President Erdoğan's slogan "The World Is Bigger than Five" – targeting the UN Security Council's permanent members – encapsulates this critique, which he characterized as "the biggest-ever rise against global injustice."<sup>60</sup> However, as Kirişçi and Bülbül demonstrate, Türkiye has paradoxically benefited from this liberal order, with NATO, G-20, and WTO membership bolstering its soft power since the 2000s.<sup>61</sup> Even Erdoğan has defended multilateralism, criticizing the Trump administration for undermining the liberal international order in both UN speeches and op-eds.<sup>62</sup>

Turkish foreign policy over the last decade has exhibited behavioral characteristics of an emerging middle power in several key ways. First, as Jordaan (2003; 2017) observes, a defining feature of emerging middle powers is their role as "eager, and often leading, participants in regional structures," frequently identified as regional powers.<sup>63</sup> A central objective of AKP-era foreign policy has been to position Türkiye as both a regional power and an influential global actor.<sup>64</sup> To achieve this, Turkish policymakers have:

- Cultivated relations with Muslim-majority Middle Eastern states.
- Deepened ties with regional organizations like the OIC.

Leveraged historical and cultural identity to build soft power.<sup>65</sup>

This strategy proved particularly effective in the early 2000s when Türkiye emerged as a potential model for Muslim democracies, though its appeal waned following setbacks in economic performance and democratic governance.<sup>66</sup>

Turkish foreign policy makers have attempted to practice niche diplomacy using Türkiye's unique geographical and cultural position between the East and the West and presenting themselves as bridge-

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 1082.

<sup>57</sup> Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "The Dynamics of Emerging Middle-Power Influence in Regional and Global Governance: The Paradoxical Case of Turkey," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (2017): 2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid 164.

<sup>59</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "UN Must Reform for Peace in Palestine," *Daily Sabah*, September 25, 2018.

<sup>60</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, *The World Is Bigger Than Five* (Istanbul: TRT World, 2018), 112.

<sup>61</sup> Kemal Kirişçi and Sebnem Bülbül, "Turkey and the Liberal International Order," *Brookings Institution Report*, October 9, 2018, 5.

<sup>62</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, "Why the World Must Support Multilateralism," *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2018.

<sup>63</sup> Eduard Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations," *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 172-73; and Jordaan, "South Africa: An Emerging Middle Power," *International Affairs* 93, no. 2 (2017): 404.

<sup>64</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth* [Stratejik Derinlik] (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2001), 112-15.

<sup>65</sup> Ziya Öniş, "Turkey and the Muslim Middle East," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010): 89-92.

<sup>66</sup> Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "The Dynamics of Emerging Middle-Power Influence," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (2017): 815; Ahmet T. Kuru, "The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model," *Insight Turkey* 17, no. 3 (2015): 45-63.



builders. Davutoglu, for example, often emphasized that Türkiye has access to both the global north and south, and he identified mediation and humanitarian diplomacy as the key components in gaining Türkiye a greater say in global governance (Davutoglu, 2013a, 2013b).<sup>67</sup> As Wohlforth et al. (2017: 533)<sup>68</sup> argue, one of the strategies middle powers use to seek status is formulating policies which will allow them to be perceived as a “good power” with foreign policies that have a moral dimension. Türkiye is a good example in the sense that Turkish decision makers have tried to develop the moral dimension of Turkish foreign policy investing in Türkiye’s image as a mediator and a humanitarian power. Accordingly, Türkiye assumed the role of a mediator in a number of international conflicts, mostly in its immediate neighbourhood, and was an eager participant in multilateral initiatives on peace making. Most notably, it launched indirect peace talks between Israel and Syria in 2008 (Davutoglu, 2013b: 85),<sup>69</sup> negotiated a nuclear deal with Iran in 2010 working in collaboration with Brazil (Barrionuevo and Arsu, 2010),<sup>70</sup> and set up the Group of Friends of Mediation under the UN framework in 2010 in a joint effort with Finland for peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention (Davutoglu and Tuomioja, 2012).<sup>71</sup>

Turkish foreign policy decision makers also concentrated their efforts to develop what they called Türkiye’s “humanitarian diplomacy”, increasing Türkiye’s assistance to developing nations and responding to major humanitarian crises around the world (Davutoglu, 2013a; Çavuşoglu, 2016).<sup>72</sup> Türkiye eagerly took part in international initiatives to discuss the global humanitarian system. For example, it hosted the first-ever World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and promoted its image as a humanitarian actor in international forums, underlining that it hosts the largest refugee population in the world which includes more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees (*Hürriyet Daily News*, 2016, 2018).<sup>73</sup> The Turkish government emphasized the humanitarian dimension of Turkish foreign policy when engaging with the developing world. For example, as Foreign Minister Çavuşoglu (2016) explained, “humanitarian diplomacy is one of the main components of Türkiye’s approach towards Africa”.<sup>74</sup> Scholars have highlighted Türkiye’s transformation from an aid recipient to an aid donor country and characterized Türkiye as a “new humanitarian power” (Ali, 2011; see al Ozkan, 2013b; Özkan, 2013a; Habiyaemye and Oğuzlu, 2014).<sup>75</sup> The government complemented its “humanitarian diplomacy” with

<sup>67</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy: Objectives and Challenges," *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 3 (2013a): 1-18; Ahmet Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth: Turkey's International Position* (Istanbul: Küre Yayınları, 2013b).

<sup>68</sup> William C. Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations: Good States and the Social Dimension of Status Seeking," *Review of International Studies* 43, no. 3 (2017): 533.

<sup>69</sup> Davutoğlu, *Strategic Depth*, 85.

<sup>70</sup> Alexei Barrionuevo and Sebnem Arsu, "Turkey and Brazil Broker Nuclear Deal with Iran," *New York Times*, May 17, 2010.

<sup>71</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu and Erkki Tuomioja, *Mediation and Conflict Prevention: The Group of Friends of Mediation* (New York: United Nations, 2012).

<sup>72</sup> Ahmet Davutoğlu, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy: Objectives and Challenges," *Turkish Studies* 14, no. 3 (2013): 1-18; Mevlüt Çavuşoglu, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy: Principles and Practice," *Perceptions* 21, no. 1 (2016): 15-32.

<sup>73</sup> "Turkey Hosts World Humanitarian Summit," *Hürriyet Daily News*, May 23, 2016; "Turkey Still Hosts Largest Refugee Population," *Hürriyet Daily News*, June 20, 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Mevlüt Çavuşoglu, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy in Africa," *Turkish Review of African Studies* 12 (2016): 45.

<sup>75</sup> Rabia Ali, "Turkey: The New Humanitarian Power?" *Middle East Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (2011): 25-34; Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Rising Role in African Humanitarian Aid," *Insight Turkey* 15, no. 4 (2013b): 112-125; Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy in Somalia," *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (2013a): 343-353; Abraham Habiyaemye and Tark Oğuzlu, "Turkey-Africa Relations: The Soft

a policy aimed to increase trade and cultural exchanges with African nations. As a result, Ankara's approach gained Türkiye considerable soft power and was welcomed particularly by African governments which depended on Turkish aid the most.<sup>76</sup>

As Önis and Kutlay (2017) stress, to conduct effective foreign policy, emerging middle powers need to have "the ability to serve as role models based on their soft-power resources – i.e., the quality of their developmental and democratic credentials".<sup>77</sup> In this regard, major domestic setbacks Türkiye has faced in recent years, including a decline in democratization and economic performance, have limited Türkiye's attractiveness on the global stage and constrained the abilities of Turkish foreign policy to exercise soft power to shape politics beyond its borders.<sup>78</sup> The weakening of the Turkish Lira, coupled with the consolidation of power by the government, has diminished Türkiye's middle power image along with its capacity to serve as a role model. This is in contrast with the pre-Arab Spring Turkish foreign policy when Türkiye boosted its soft power in its neighbourhood and when there was a debate in popular and academic circles in the Western world on whether Middle Eastern states could follow the "Turkish model" and whether Türkiye's experience with democratization and economic development may have a demonstration effect on the other countries in the region.<sup>79</sup>

### Criticisms of Middle Emerging Power Theory

- States belonging to the emerging middle power rank can lose their status if they deviate from orthodox hegemony doctrines.<sup>80</sup>
- Human rights issues undermine their credibility.<sup>81</sup>

A key criticism regarding Türkiye is the gap between rhetoric and action particularly its inability to fully align capabilities with foreign policy ambitions. This is evident in its interventions in Syria and Libya, the Cameroon conflict, and tensions with Egypt.<sup>82</sup>

In conclusion, the term "emerging middle power" has become an applicable analytical framework for elucidating Ankara's foreign policy tactics in Africa and Cameroon, positioning Türkiye as a global player.<sup>83</sup> Türkiye exemplifies the tenets of an emerging power, despite flaws in its internal politics, democratization challenges, economic vulnerabilities, and human rights record.<sup>84</sup> Were Ankara an EU member, these dilemmas which currently lead analysts to question its middle-power status would likely

Power Dimension," *South African Journal of International Affairs* 21, no. 3 (2014): 395-410.

<sup>76</sup> Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Africa Policy: Soft Power in New Context," *Perceptions* 19, no. 4 (2014): 85-108.

<sup>77</sup> Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "The Dynamics of Emerging Middle-Power Influence in Regional and Global Governance: The Paradoxical Case of Turkey," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10357718.2016.1266460>.

<sup>78</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, "The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model for the Middle East," *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 3 (2015): 111-28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12148>.

<sup>79</sup> Sinan Ülgen, *From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), 15-17; Ömer Taşpınar, *Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2012), 42-45.

<sup>80</sup> Eduard Jordaan, "The Concept of a Middle Power in International Relations," *Politikon* 30, no. 1 (2003): 172-73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0258934032000147282>.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, "The Disaggregation of Middle Power Diplomacy," *International Journal* 71, no. 4 (2016): 563, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702016686385>.

<sup>82</sup> Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "Turkey's Foreign Policy Activism: Vision and Capacity," *Insight Turkey* 22, no. 1 (2020): 15-18, <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2020221.02>.

<sup>83</sup> Ziya Öniş and Mustafa Kutlay, "Rising Powers in a Changing Global Order: The Political Economy of Turkey in the Age of BRICS," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 6 (2017): 1329-31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2017.1333413>.

<sup>84</sup> Ahmet T. Kuru, "The Rise and Fall of the Turkish Model," *Middle East Policy* 22, no. 3 (2015): 115-18, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12148>.

diminish as constraints on its global potential.<sup>85</sup> As Amitav Acharya (2014: 59) observes, the terms "emerging powers" and "rising powers" recognize the growing economic, political, and strategic status of nations traditionally categorized as part of the "Global South."<sup>86</sup> This classification remains fluid, typically encompassing BRICS+ countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) along with Indonesia, Mexico, Argentina, Australia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Türkiye.<sup>87</sup> As Andrew Cooper notes, "The depiction of rising powers has been expansive, fluid and contested...No one acronym has the field to itself."<sup>88</sup>

### Motivations for Ankara's Interests in Cameroon (CEMAC)

According to Dahir (2021: 5), several practical reasons explain the rapid progression of Turkey's Africa policy under successive AK Party governments since 2002. These include:

1. The need to discover new economic opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa.
2. The strategic goal of presenting Turkey as a distinctive regional/global actor vis-à-vis traditional Western power.<sup>89</sup>

The deepening of Türkiye-Cameroon relations reflects this policy shift, particularly after the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AK Parti) came to power in 2002.<sup>90</sup> This reorientation emerged partly in response to the EU's 1997 rejection of Türkiye's candidacy, prompting Turkish elites to prioritize previously neglected regions like Africa, Latin America, and Asia.<sup>91</sup> The tangible outcomes include:

1. Expanded bilateral trade
2. Strengthened diplomatic ties
3. Turkish Airlines' direct flights to Yaoundé and Douala.<sup>92</sup>

In the lens of geopolitical discourse, Ankara's deepening of ties with Yaoundé in the CEMAC region, act as intriguing focal point. The rationales responsible for propelling Turkey's engagement in Cameroon stems from political, economic, socio-cultural, and strategic in nature. Within the ambits of trade and diplomatic connection, this section of the paper aims to present a multidimensional viewpoint by navigating the labyrinthine corridors of Turkey-Cameroons relations in recent years.

### Political Reasons

Türkiye is determined to promote its development model which combines economic development with

<sup>85</sup> Nathalie Tocci, *Turkey's European Future: Behind the Scenes of America's Influence on EU-Turkey Relations* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), 207–9.

<sup>86</sup> Amitav Acharya, *The End of American World Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 59.

<sup>87</sup> Andrew F. Cooper, "The BRICS and the Privileging of Informality in Global Governance," *Global Policy* 7, no. 1 (2016): 62, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12312>.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew F. Cooper and Daniel Flesmes, "Foreign Policy Strategies of Emerging Powers in a Multipolar World," *International Studies Review* 15, no. 3 (2013): 390, <https://doi.org/10.1111/misr.12047>.

<sup>89</sup> Abdirashid Dahir, *Turkey-Africa Relations: The New Strategic Partnership* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 5.

<sup>90</sup> Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Institutional Capacity in Africa: The Role of TİKA and Other State Agencies," *Perceptions* 21, no. 2 (2016): 42-43.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>92</sup> "Turkish Airlines Expands African Network," *Journal of Transportation Economics* 54, no. 3 (2021): 112.

humanitarian assistance by exporting it not only to Africa but in most developing states. Following the declaration of 2005 as the 'Year of Africa,' Türkiye launched several initiatives that made Ankara a strategic partner in continental and regional organizations, such as the African Union and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, almost half of whose 57 members are African states.<sup>93</sup> However, Türkiye's 2011 humanitarian intervention in Somalia and its subsequent state-building projects in the country have deepened Türkiye's influence in Africa, resulting in the emergence of the Turkish development and humanitarian aid model in academia, alternatively known as 'Ankara Consensus.'<sup>94</sup> Federico Donelli (2018: 58) notes that this model, "which is both an alternative approach to African sustainability problems and a useful political discourse to foster Turkish ambitions as an emerging global power" could "explain the peculiar set of prescriptions that Türkiye promotes in sub-Saharan Africa based on its own development experience that could be considered a mix between democratic liberalism (Washington consensus) and authoritarian capitalism (Beijing consensus)."<sup>95</sup>

Regarding Africa, the Turkish policymakers extensively use narratives of Global South solidarity often noting that what differentiates the Turkish model is 'our focus on mutual respect.' Erdoğan earmarked.<sup>96</sup> Dahir (2021) added that, the model burnishes Türkiye's anti-colonial rhetoric, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, by fashioning Türkiye as 'Africa's friend and development partner' which is against colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of exploitation.<sup>97</sup> The anti-western discourse in Turkish public diplomacy towards Africa helps Ankara act as a counterweight against colonial powers, such as France and other European powers.<sup>98</sup> In the eyes of Biya's regime the Ankara Consensus is an excellent model to grasp in meeting the 2035 prospect of his country with little or no strings attached as compared to the exploitative patterns of Western economic models, particularly that of the French and of course that of the Chinese.<sup>99</sup>

### Strengthening of South-South Ties

Sönmezoğlu (2006: 192-193) stated that as well as economic and trade relations, African states at the UN General Assembly held a key position during the ratification process.<sup>100</sup> The Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) was founded to promote South-South cooperation and stood out of the bloc politics of the Cold War. Today, the whole African states are members of the Non-Alignment Movement. In 1945, South African Union, Egypt, Ethiopia, and Liberia were the only African states to join the San Francisco Conference in which they obtained founding member status of the United Nations. The number of member African states reached 20 in 1960 and 35 in 1964 at the United Nations. Independent African states used the United Nations General Assembly as a platform to struggle for apartheid regime and independence issues.<sup>101</sup>

Türkiye's former President Abdullah Gül explained that Türkiye attempted to build relations with Africa by making 'health, education, agriculture, environment, infrastructure and capacity building' strategic areas (Gül, 2008: 2).<sup>102</sup> In matching action with words, in 2010, Former president Gül visited

<sup>93</sup> Mehmet Özkan, "Turkey's Institutional Capacity in Africa," *Perceptions* 21, no. 2 (2016): 35-58.

<sup>94</sup> Federico Donelli, "The Ankara Consensus in Somalia," *International Spectator* 53, no. 3 (2018): 56-71.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>96</sup> Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Speech at Turkey-Africa Summit, Istanbul, December 18, 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Abdirashid Dahir, *Turkey-Africa Relations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 6.

<sup>98</sup> Rahmane Idrissa, "Anti-Colonialism as Foreign Policy," *African Affairs* 120, no. 480 (2021): 443-461.

<sup>99</sup> "Cameroon-Turkey Joint Declaration," *Cameroon Tribune*, March 12, 2022, 5.

<sup>100</sup> Faruk Sönmezoğlu, *Turkish Foreign Policy and the UN* (Istanbul: Derin Yayınları, 2006), 192-193.

<sup>101</sup> Adekeye Adebajo, *UN and the Global South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 45-48.

<sup>102</sup> Abdullah Gül, *Turkey's Foreign Policy Vision* (Ankara: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008), 2.



Cameroon as part of his African tour while strengthening bilateral ties.<sup>103</sup> Türkiye's deteriorating relations with traditional regional powers such as Egypt and with the European Union (EU) can be seen as catalysts for Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's announcement, in early 2015, that Africa would be an increasingly important region for Turkish interest (*Daily Sabah*, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015).<sup>104</sup> The countries of SSA offer the potential to support Türkiye's global policies, which sometimes compete with those of both Western and emerging countries.<sup>105</sup> Using south-south ties in order to foster its global agenda, Türkiye's deep engagement with the African continent including Cameroon has been viewed as a strategy to achieve a global power status with which most African states supported her 2009-2010 UN-Security Council non-permanent membership.<sup>106</sup> Türkiye received the support of all but two African countries in securing a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for the period 2009–10; and it again lobbied African countries intensively when seeking a seat for 2015–16, arguing that a seat for Türkiye would be another voice for Africa (Arıncı, 2014 as cited by Shinn, 2015: 7).<sup>107</sup>

In solidifying ties with Türkiye in line with the development vision of Cameroon dubbed "Vision 2035," President Paul Biya's visit to Türkiye from 25-28 March 2013 was the very first by a Cameroonian president, giving special impetus to bilateral relations.<sup>108</sup> These visits accelerated rapprochement, significantly increasing Cameroonian public interest in Türkiye.<sup>109</sup> Recent years have seen:

- Multiple cooperation agreements signed
- Completed legal frameworks for bilateral relations
- Increased official visits, including:
  1. Defense Minister Joseph Beti Assomo (28-21 January 2018)
  2. Former Employment Minister Zacharie Perevet (20-22 February 2018).<sup>110</sup>

Aligned with Biya's Vision 2035 goals, Cameroon has launched transformational infrastructure projects with growing participation from Turkish firms.<sup>111</sup>

## Economic Reasons

Although Turkey's negative perception of the African economy persisted during the Cold War era, important steps have been taken to refute such perception after the Cold War. The post-Cold War period marked the beginning of functional economic diversification in Turkish foreign policy objectives tailored after the strategic doctrine of Neo-Ottomanism.<sup>112</sup> So, with methodological attraction Türkiye extended its economic tentacles to the Western world especially the United States and European Union.

<sup>103</sup> "President Gül's Visit to Cameroon," *Cameroon Tribune*, March 10, 2010, 4.

<sup>104</sup> "Davutoğlu: Africa Key to Turkish Foreign Policy," *Daily Sabah*, January 5, 2015.

<sup>105</sup> Mehmet Özkan, *Turkey's Rising Role in Africa* (Istanbul: SETA, 2014), 78–82.

<sup>106</sup> Bülent Aras, "Turkey in the UN Security Council," *Perceptions* 18, no. 3 (2013): 35–58.

<sup>107</sup> David Shinn, *Turkey's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council, 2015), 7.

<sup>108</sup> "Biya's Historic Visit to Turkey," *Cameroon Tribune*, March 29, 2013, 1.

<sup>109</sup> Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Cameroon-Turkey Relations Report* (Ankara: MFA, 2019), 15.

<sup>110</sup> "Cameroonian Ministers Visit Turkey," *Anadolu Agency*, February 23, 2018.

<sup>111</sup> International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Infrastructure Boom: Turkish Partnerships* (Brussels: ICG, 2021), 8-9.

<sup>112</sup> Chikezie Enwere and Fatih Yilmaz, *Turkish-African Relations in a Changing Global Context: Political, Economic, and Cultural Aspects* (Istanbul: Istanbul University Press, 2014), 9-10.



But when faced with the task of rectifying its membership of the European Union, Türkiye began to send emissaries to Africa in order to explore opportunities for economic and commercial cooperation.<sup>113</sup> Thus, a comprehensive and global plan involving Türkiye's economic relations with Africa was developed to legitimate Turkey's status as an axis state with pivoted influence in African politics and economy. However, Africa with economic growth rate of 5% a year offers a new prospect for economic development, which prompted

Türkiye to redefine its international identity from that of an ally of the West to that of an active and constructive player in African economy.<sup>114</sup>

At the Second Turkey–Africa Partnership Summit which was held in November 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea. President Erdogan and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Cavusoglu headed the Turkish delegation, which included around 200 business representatives.<sup>115</sup> Some 30 African countries were represented, seven at presidential level.<sup>116</sup> The participants issued a general declaration called the 'New Model of Partnership for the Strengthening of Sustainable Development and Integration', but did not issue a final communiqué.<sup>117</sup> They also postponed discussion of a shortlist of joint projects until a later date.<sup>118</sup> By deepening trade ties with Africa, Turkey seeks to establish new markets for its manufactured goods on the continent.<sup>119</sup> Turkish goods are slowly becoming popular among the African consumer markets because they are generally of a higher quality than Chinese products and are more competitive than European goods in terms of price.<sup>120</sup> Turkey is also looking to find African markets for its construction industry. Turkish construction companies have already undertaken significant infrastructure projects in the continent, such as East Africa's largest indoor sports facility in Rwanda, a 336 km high-speed railway in Tanzania, a 400 km railway in Ethiopia, and a 51km long railway project in Senegal, which is the first in the West African nation.<sup>121</sup> The volume of infrastructure projects implemented by Turkish companies in Africa has reached over \$71 billion, of which \$19.5 billion is in the Sub-Saharan African region.<sup>122</sup> Compared to Chinese rivals, the Turkish construction companies are praised for their willingness to transfer technology, increased flexibility in terms of letting the host country manage the projects and using English as a working language.<sup>123</sup>

In recent years, Ankara's major exports to Cameroon consist of iron and steel, manufactured goods, food items, textiles, cement, plastics, industrial and furniture including the signing of energy cooperation agreements with Cameroon and other SSA states.<sup>124</sup> Ersoy (2013) earmarked that Türkiye also signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with Mauritius in 2011, and is currently in negotiations with Cameroon, the DRC and Seychelles, although some of these negotiations have proceeded slowly.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Enwere and Yilmaz, *Turkish-African Relations*, 9-10.

<sup>115</sup> David H. Shinn, "Turkey's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Shifting Alliances and Strategic Diversification," *Chatham House Africa Programme* (2015): 7.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Shinn, "Turkey's Engagement," 7.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, "Turkey's Growing Footprint in Sub-Saharan Africa," *The New York Times*, March 15, 2021, 7.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

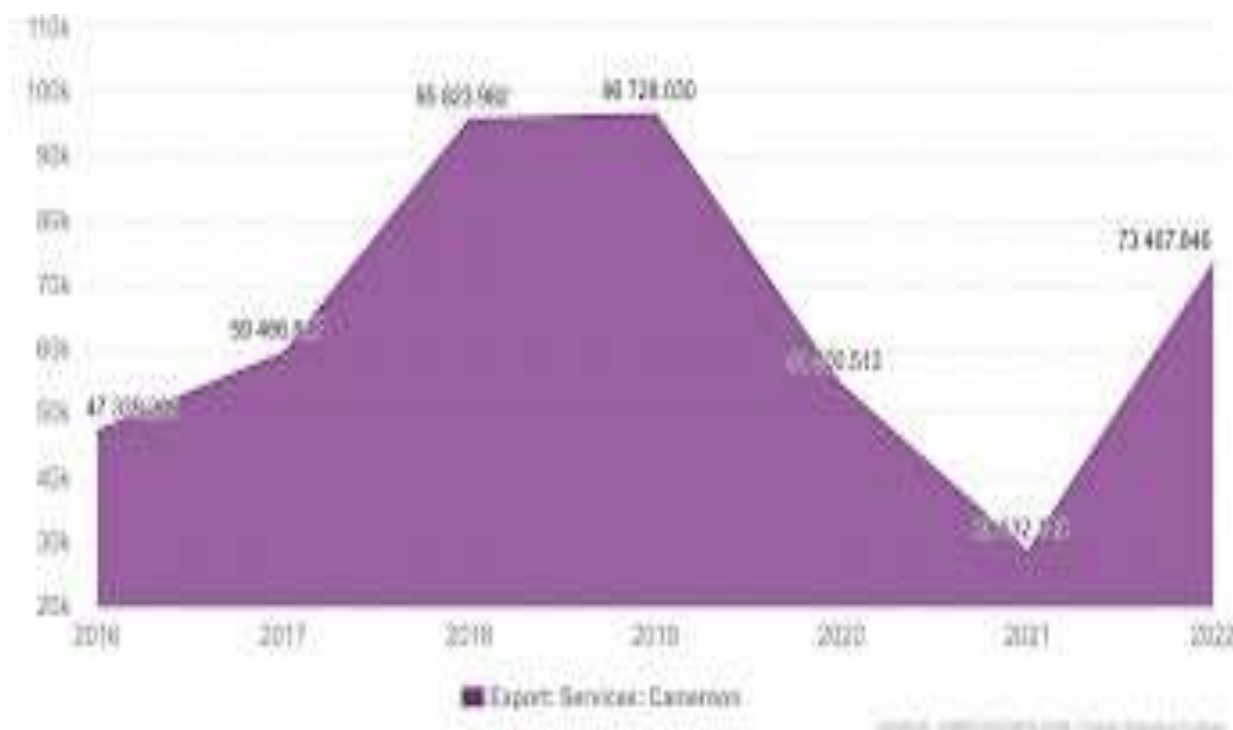
<sup>122</sup> Dahir, "Turkey's Growing Footprint," 7.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> David H. Shinn, "Turkey's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Shifting Alliances and Strategic Diversification," *Chatham House Africa Programme* (2015): 12.

<sup>125</sup> Yasin Ersoy, "Turkey's African Policy: The Case of Somalia," *Perceptions* 18, no. 3 (2013): 15.

African markets are now experiencing Turkish goods into markets which stems from textiles, household appliances, furniture, and construction materials among others.<sup>126</sup> In 2008, the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey and the Union of African Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Commodity Exchanges agreed to establish the Turkish-African Chamber, the aim of which was to increase economic dialogue and cooperation.<sup>127</sup> Member countries include Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan and Uganda. However, the organization seems to have accomplished little so far.<sup>128</sup> Turkey's Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK) has also encouraged the establishment of bilateral business councils with African partners. More than 20 of such councils have been established, with Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Mauritius, Mozambique and Senegal all opening offices in 2014-15.<sup>129</sup>



**Figure 1.1. Turkish Exports and Services to Cameroon 2016-2022**

### Deepening of Cooperation

The essence of the cooperation is to promote self-reliant economic development. Consequently, Turkey established the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) in Addis Ababa in 2005 and later in Khartoum and Dakar in 2006 and 2007 respectively to support development projects in Africa.<sup>130</sup> In 2008, in cooperation with the Turkish Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock, TIKA started the African Agricultural Development Program in over thirteen Africa countries with the sole aim of strengthening agricultural development in Africa.<sup>131</sup> Also, Türkiye gave direct economic

<sup>126</sup> Shinn, "Turkey's Engagement," 12.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ersoy, "Turkey's African Policy," 15.

<sup>129</sup> Shinn, "Turkey's Engagement," 12.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Kamer Karakurum Özdemir and Onur Akgül, "Turkey's Development Assistance in Africa: The Case of TIKA," *Perceptions* 20, no. 3 (2015): 67-89.

support to Africa's development through its business associations such as the Turkish Confederation of Businessmen and industrialists (TUSKON), Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges (TOBB), The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MUSIAD), and The Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM).<sup>132</sup> The sole goal of these business associations is to establish strong economic relations with African states, provide new opportunities for joint investment and economic cooperation as well as to organize business meetings of Africans in Türkiye and encourage Turkish investors to invest in Africa, thereby promoting the tenets of economic reciprocity.<sup>133</sup>

Also, as part of the plough to foster cooperation on a religious front, the Turkish Religious Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı) under the Turkish presidency which seeks to spread the faith, practice and worship of Islam has been operating in certain African states in collaboration with other Turkish NGOs and national NGOs to support Muslim faithful's during the period of Ramadan in the provision of basic utilities in breaking of fast such as milk, flour, rice, tea and other food staples.<sup>134</sup> The strategies of Ottoman's soft power include the use of religious secularism as a symbol to control the inflow of goods from Africa to Europe, attracting the cooperation of Muslims and Christians.<sup>135</sup> A strong bridge was built between Muslims and other religions which provided the Ottoman's the needed mutual coexistence and independence for the promotion of friendly trade relations making it one of the most powerful economic actors in the world. Another soft power strategy used by the Ottoman Empire was to strengthen its trade hegemony in Africa was its commitment in preventing European colonial incursions into Africa.<sup>136</sup> In recent years, The Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK) has been at the forefront in spearheading economic cooperation between Türkiye and the rest of the world.<sup>137</sup> On October 12-13, 2023, DEİK was at the center of the 4<sup>th</sup> Türkiye-Africa Business and Economic Forum that took place in Istanbul with both state and private businesses from Africa present under the patronage of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.<sup>138</sup>

### Ankara's Quest for Raw Materials and Trade

In the quest for raw materials from Cameroon geared at feeding Turkish industrial appetite, Türkiye and Cameroon on Tuesday signed an "Agreement for Encouragement and Protection of Mutual Investments" in Ankara.<sup>139</sup> Economy Minister Zafer Caglayan signed the agreement on behalf of Türkiye while Foreign Minister Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo signed it on behalf of Cameroon at a ceremony held in the Economy Ministry in Ankara. Speaking at the ceremony, Zafer Caglayan said that he hoped the agreement would be beneficial for the two countries.

Cameroon is a door for Türkiye to enter Central and Western Africa and the country is a strong commercial and economic partner of Türkiye, Caglayan said. As the Turkish government, we are determined to carry our relations with Cameroon to the highest level possible in all fields, Caglayan noted.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Shinn, "Turkey's Engagement," 14.

<sup>133</sup> Chikezie Enwere and Fatih Yilmaz, *Turkish-African Relations in a Changing Global Context: Political, Economic, and Cultural Aspects* (Istanbul: Istanbul University Press, 2014), 12.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Enwere and Yilmaz, *Turkish-African Relations*, 13.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> DEİK. (2023, October 13). *4th Turkey-Africa Business and Economic Forum Held in Istanbul*. <https://www.deik.org.tr>

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> "Turkey, Cameroon Sign Investment Protection Agreement," *Daily Sabah*, March 5, 2013.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

"Cameroon is a door for Türkiye to enter Central and Western Africa and the country is a strong commercial and economic partner of Türkiye," Çağlayan stated. "As the Turkish government, we are determined to carry our relations with Cameroon to the highest level possible in all fields," he added. Noting Cameroon's ambition to become the most important country in its region by 2035, Çağlayan expressed confidence that "with its strategic position, Cameroonians will reach such a goal."<sup>141</sup> He drew parallels with Türkiye's own 2023 development goals, stating: "The star of developing countries will shine in the upcoming term. By working hand in hand, we can reach our goals." The Turkish minister emphasized that increased investments following the agreement would contribute to "production, employment and tax incomes" while boosting bilateral trade volume. Cameroonian Foreign Minister Mbonjo affirmed that the agreement would advance bilateral relations, describing Cameroon as a country of "freedoms" with investor-friendly laws and regulations.<sup>142</sup> Highlighting Cameroon's remarkable economic growth in recent years, Mbonjo extended a direct invitation to Turkish investors.<sup>143</sup> The Turkish-Cameroonian trade volume stood at \$150 million in 2011.<sup>144</sup>



**Figure 1.2. Shows the products exported to Turkey from Cameroon.**

In 2020, Cameroon exported \$40.8M to Turkey. The main products exported from Cameroon to Türkiye were Sawn Wood (\$16.6M), Cocoa Beans (\$16.3M), and Scrap Vessels (\$3.21M).<sup>145</sup> During the last 25 years the exports of Cameroon to Türkiye have increased at an annualized rate of 6.73%, from \$8.01M in 1995 to \$40.8M in 2020.<sup>146</sup>

**Source:** BACI HS6 REV. 1992 (1995 - 2020).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Pierre Moukoko Mbonjo, address at Turkey-Cameroon Investment Agreement Signing Ceremony (Ankara: Turkish Ministry of Economy, March 5, 2013).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Turkish Statistical Institute, *Turkey-Cameroon Bilateral Trade Report* (Ankara: TÜİK, 2012), 15.

<sup>145</sup> Gaël Raballand et al., *BACI International Trade Database: HS6 Revision 1992 (1995-2020)* (Paris: CEPII, 2021), dataset.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

## Military Cooperation

Another possible explanation for Türkiye's deepening ties with Africa is the need to find a market for the Turkish defense and armaments industry.<sup>147</sup> Türkiye is currently home to seven of the world's top 100 defense companies.<sup>148</sup> With increased prestige, the Turkish defense and armaments industry is gaining attention from around the world and Africa is no exception. Türkiye produces defense equipment, such as armored vehicles and weapons, that has been sold to several African countries, including Senegal, Kenya, and South Africa.<sup>149</sup> In an attempt to open up markets for its armaments industry, Ankara has inked bilateral agreements with five Sub-Saharan African countries to cooperate in the production, procurement, and maintenance of defense and military equipment.<sup>150</sup> This category includes the widely praised Turkish drone programs, which has recently aroused African interest in the face of security threats in many parts of the continent.<sup>151</sup> So far, it has been confirmed that Tunisia and Morocco<sup>152</sup> have officially agreed on deals with Türkiye, worth \$80 and \$69.6 million respectively, for the acquisition of several dozens of the Bayraktar TB2 unmanned drones. It has also been reported that Ethiopia recently placed orders for Turkish drones.<sup>153</sup>

The reports from renowned media and Turkish media outlets on the successful breakthroughs of Turkish military drone programs and other military innovations has been used by President Erdoğan to galvanize military cooperation with African states during his recent state visits in the realm of fighting terrorism.<sup>154</sup> With the stronghold of Boko Haram in Nigeria and the insecurity in Angola, both states have pledged to purchase Turkish-made unmanned aerial vehicles in combating terrorism and insecurity within and beyond their borders.<sup>155</sup> The flying report card of Turkish armed drones in Libya, Nagorno Karabakh, Ethiopia, and in the ongoing war in Syria plus Ukraine, is no doubt that these armed drones are becoming hot cakes in conflict zones.<sup>156</sup>

In line with fostering military cooperation, Cameroon and Türkiye have engaged in high-level talks. According to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most recent Cameroonian delegations included Defense Minister Joseph Beti Assomo (January 28–31, 2018) and former Minister of Employment Zacharie Perevet (February 20–22, 2018).<sup>157</sup> Given the protracted conflict in Cameroon's Anglophone regions (Southern Cameroons/Ambazonia), where separatists have tactically overrun military barracks, analysts speculate that the Yaoundé regime may seek Turkish military assistance—particularly Bayraktar TB2 drones—to target Ambazonian hideouts, especially if traditional suppliers

<sup>147</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, "Turkey's Expanding Military Footprint in Africa," *International Defense Review* 54, no. 3 (2021): 8-9.

<sup>148</sup> "Top 100 Defense Companies 2021," *Defense News*, August 2021.

<sup>149</sup> Dahir, "Turkey's Expanding Military Footprint," 8.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>151</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, "Turkey's Drone Diplomacy in Africa," *EDAM Defense Review* no. 5 (2022): 12-15.

<sup>152</sup> Dahir, "Turkey's Expanding Military Footprint," 9.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Jones, D. (2022, March 10). *Turkey's drone diplomacy in Africa*. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com>

<sup>155</sup> Abdi Latif Dahir, "African Nations Turn to Turkish Drones as Conflicts Rage," *The New York Times*, April 5, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com>.

<sup>156</sup> Can Kasapoğlu, *Turkey's Drone Warfare: Lessons from Libya and Karabakh* (Istanbul:EDAM, 2021), 45–48.

<sup>157</sup> Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations Between Türkiye and Cameroon," accessed June 15, 2023, <https://www.mfa.gov.tr>.



(China, Russia, the U.S., and France) reduce arms exports.<sup>158</sup>

## Conclusion

To conclude, the examination of Turkish foreign policy in Cameroon in the CEMAC region reveals an intertwining of historical ties, strategic and succinct rationales pertaining to Turkish interests in Cameroon. Through a panoramic view of the historical relations between Cameroon and Turkey, it is clear that the relations between these states are deeply rooted, especially within the last decade, hence acting as the foundation for present-day interactions. From the paper middle power status displayed via the leverage of its soft power and economic diplomacy portfolio is critical. Based on the rationales responsible for Turkish interest in Cameroon, the paper unpacked a blend of political, economic, geopolitical, and socio-cultural factors. In a nutshell, this paper underscores the complex nature of Turkey's engagement in Africa within the CEMAC, with a special focus on Cameroon. By encouraging connections across historical, theoretical, and empirical analysis, this article contributes to grasping Türkiye in Sub-Saharan Africa with the case of Cameroon diverting away from the usual analysis of Ankara's relations mostly with traditional partners such as Somalia, Sudan, and the Northern African states in international affairs.

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<sup>158</sup> International Crisis Group, *Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis: How Turkey Could Fill the Arms Gap*, Report No. 312, May 2023, 12–14.

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