



Middle Power Engagement in Subregions: Understanding Türkiye's Foreign Policy Towards Horn of Africa

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Abstracts: The shifting alignments and realignments, coupled with the divergence of interests, have resulted in a new and complex geopolitical configuration in the greater Horn region. In this evolving political landscape, the foreign policy strategies of non-regional actors, each armed with their own set of tools and fundamentally competing interests, have been thrown into disarray by the region's changing geopolitical dynamics. Within this fluid and unstable environment, Türkiye, regarded as one of the region's emerging active balancers, is striving to secure its core interests through a range of foreign policy instruments—ranging from soft power to hard power, and from "smart" power to historical legacy. Ankara's "win-win" foreign policy strategy for the wider Horn region has succeeded in instilling hope among many observers that Türkiye will emerge as a true new balancer, capable of addressing Africa's needs. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Türkiye employs a combination of hard power, soft power, and smart power instruments to protect its core strategic interests in the changing geopolitical landscape of the greater Horn region. Considering this context, the study aims to explore the evolving geopolitics of the region in relation to Türkiye's efforts to safeguard its core strategic interests. To address this complex issue, the study employs a qualitative research method and an analytical interpretive approach to examine relevant documents and secondary literature.

Keywords: Horn of Africa, Geopolitics, Türkiye, Soft Power, Hard Power

1. Introduction

Since the official declaration of Türkiye's policy of "opening up to Africa" in the late 1990s, the economic, strategic, diplomatic, and cultural interactions between Türkiye and sub-Saharan Africa have entered a new phase. In 2005, the Turkish government designated the year as the "Year of Africa." That same year, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan made a landmark state visit to Ethiopia and South Africa, marking a significant milestone in the diplomatic history of Türkiye's relations with sub-Saharan Africa. This visit was notable as Erdoğan became the first Turkish leader to undertake an official state visit to a country located south of the Sahara. The Turkish Embassy in Addis Ababa is widely acknowledged as the leading diplomatic mission in the region. As a result, since 2005, it has become evident that sub-Saharan Africa, along with Central Asia, the Balkans, and the Middle East, has become a key focus of Türkiye's new foreign policy direction.

In Türkiye's increasing engagement with sub-Saharan Africa, Ankara has achieved remarkable successes in the greater Horn region, unlike in other parts of the continent. There are two main factors that explain the overarching narratives surrounding Türkiye's swift progress in the greater Horn region. First, Türkiye has a rich historical background, characterized by enduring political and cultural ties with the nations of the greater Horn of Africa—Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan. In this context, as Türkiye sought to become a significant player in the geopolitical and geo-economic dynamics of the greater Horn region, it reassessed its historical role as a form of non-coercive influence (Telci, 2022, p. 77).

Second, like its historical background, Türkiye's deeply ingrained religious heritage also plays a significant role in its emergence as a formidable actor in the region. In this context, it is frequently observed that Ankara seeks to establish more amicable relations with countries in both the Middle

East and the greater Horn of Africa by leveraging the historical ties between these regions and the Ottoman Empire (Telci, 2022, p. 77).

Türkiye's increasing presence in the political, economic, and diplomatic arenas of the greater Horn region has added momentum to the pursuit of alternatives in these key sectors. Ankara's growing interest in reaching out to new markets and potential strategic allies in the region has helped to solidify its relationships (Özkan, 2012; Orakçı, 2022). Above all, the rising geopolitical, geostrategic, and geo-economic significance of the greater Horn region has further heightened Ankara's interest, prompting it to invest considerable energy into making the region a foreign policy priority.

Table 1

Türkiye's Core Interests in the Greater Horn of Africa and Strategies Employed by Türkiye

Greater Horn Nations	Türkiye's Core interest areas in the Greater Horn Nations				Strategies / Instruments Employed by Türkiye		
	Market	Commercial Port	Military Base	Energy	Historical Legacy	Soft power	Hard Power
Somalia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ethiopia	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Djibouti	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sudan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kenya	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Eritrea	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
S. Sudan	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Source: The authors

It is evident that Ankara's engagement with the geopolitical and geo-economic landscape of the Horn region has increased dramatically since 2010. In this vein, Türkiye became a representative member of the East African Community in 2010. While Ankara has also emerged as a primary security advocate for Somalia, it further solidified its presence by opening its largest overseas military base in Somalia in 2017 (Hussein & Coskun, 2017). Additionally, Ankara pledged to rebuild the devastated Suakin port along Sudan's Red Sea coast in 2017 (Küçükgöçmen & Abdelaziz, 2017). However, this initiative was disrupted by the regime change and the deteriorating political situation in Sudan. Although Türkiye's role as a strategic ally and economic partner in sub-Saharan Africa (Demirtaş and Piriñçi, 2024) in general, and the greater Horn region in particular, has strengthened, there have been growing challenges to Ankara's strategic interests in the region. The primary challenge to Türkiye's increasing geo-economic and geostrategic interests in the greater Horn region stems from the region's unstable geopolitical landscape, which results from the multipolarity of the global order. In light of this context, the present study aims to address key questions related to the changing geopolitics of the greater Horn region in relation to Türkiye's strategic interests. To address this complex issue, a qualitative research method, combined with an analytical interpretive approach, is employed to examine documents and secondary literature. The following research questions guide this paper: In what ways does the evolving geopolitical landscape of the greater Horn region impact Türkiye's strategic interests? To what extent have historical instruments contributed to the protection of Ankara's core strategic

interests in the Horn of Africa? How have soft power and hard power instruments, or a hybrid of both, contributed to Türkiye's ability to safeguard its strategic interests in the broader Horn region?

To address these questions and examine the challenges posed by the changing geopolitics of the greater Horn region to Türkiye's strategic interests, this paper is organized into four sections. The first section explores the shifting geopolitical landscape of the greater Horn region. The second section analyzes the role of historical instruments in shaping Turkish foreign policy toward the broader Horn region. The third section examines how soft power tools have contributed to the protection of Ankara's strategic interests in the region. Finally, the fourth section discusses the hard power instruments that Türkiye has employed to safeguard its foreign policy objectives in the region.

2. The Shifting Geopolitics of the Greater Horn Region

The evolving nature of regional alignments and shifting geopolitics in the Greater Horn of Africa creates significant geostrategic and geo-economic uncertainties for both local and foreign players. The region is particularly sensitive to geopolitical realignments due to the presence of numerous extra-regional and extra-continental actors with diverse and often competing interests. These global and emerging regional actors find it relatively easy to influence the political dynamics of the Greater Horn for two main reasons. First, the actions and motivations of local powers are continually shaped and disrupted by both natural and man-made crises, resulting in persistent instability in the regional balance of power. Second, the region's geographic proximity to the volatile Arabian Peninsula means that instability in the peninsula directly impacts the geopolitical alignments of the Greater Horn.

The critical challenge in the geopolitical dynamics of the Greater Horn region lies in the fact that local actors do not drive the region's geopolitical configuration. Instead, foreign powers dictate the region's geopolitical alignments and realignments (Telci, 2022, pp. 73–87). At times, conflicting interests among these foreign actors generate regional tensions, while in other cases, their rivalries escalate into proxy wars. The ongoing civil war in Sudan exemplifies the latter scenario (Mohammad, 2023). Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that the growing geopolitical instability in the broader Horn region stems from a range of factors, including illicit arms trafficking, piracy, disputes over maritime access, water resource concerns, challenges in water management, and money laundering. The region's stability has been significantly undermined by the presence of fragile states like Yemen and Somalia—strategically located on either side of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait—and, more recently, Sudan.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), coupled with the establishment of its maritime base in Djibouti, adds another layer of complexity to the already tense geopolitical situation in the Horn. This is particularly evident in efforts to secure the Gulf of Aden's vital maritime routes. China's growing military presence in the region is primarily driven by its global commercial maritime objectives and expanding economic ventures in East African ports. Beijing's engagement reflects its imperative to protect critical shipping channels and safeguard its increasing investments in the region (Gambino, 2020). The Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean regions are undergoing significant strategic shifts due to emerging regional conflicts. These include the collapse of Yemen, the civil war in Sudan, Israeli aggression in Palestine and the wider region, and fractures within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) (Sharfi, 2022, pp. 244–245).

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that these conflicts offer only a limited perspective on the evolving strategic power dynamics in the region. Naval forces from the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia maintain a significant presence in the Horn of Africa, regularly engaging in critical regional events such as the Yemen War, the Sudan Crisis, the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, Ethiopia's internal unrest, Somalia's fragmentation, and the water resource dispute between Egypt and Ethiopia (Sharfi, 2022, p. 245).

In the geopolitical landscape of the Greater Horn region, uncontrollable factors such as armament, technology, multinational organizations, and terrorism transcend state borders and intertwine with the region's geopolitical framework. These forces operate beyond the reach of national laws and regulations. Consequently, post-modern colonial entities wield more power and wealth than the collective capacities of many smaller nations in the region. Major international powers often assert their dominance when the security of their interests is at risk, thereby dictating the actions of smaller nations. Few states in the region possess the strength to resist or withstand such external influences. As a result, instead of expending resources addressing every potential threat posed by distant actors, the leaders of these smaller nations tend to wait for directives from more powerful regional or international players (Munene, 2023, p. 3).

The geopolitical dynamics of the Greater Horn of Africa face an additional challenge in the form of power projection. Politically and economically turbulent, the region has become one of the most critical areas globally, where the power projection efforts of emerging and global powers are frequently contested. A key illustration of this dynamic is the exportation of Middle Eastern rivalries to the Greater Horn, which has significantly jeopardized the region's security. In particular, the geopolitical landscape of the Horn of Africa has been shaped by power projection strategies and the competition among Middle Eastern powers to establish military bases. These activities have continually disrupted and reshaped regional alignments (Telci & Horoz, 2018, pp. 143-166). As is often the case, rival Middle Eastern states, driven by divergent interests, are increasingly drawn to the geopolitically strategic Horn of Africa. However, the countries of the Greater Horn are not merely passive observers in these developments. On the contrary, they actively leverage the involvement of Middle Eastern and other external powers, using their strategic positions to influence outcomes. This strategic maneuvering has fostered greater political integration between the Greater Horn and the Middle East. As a result, the growing militarization of the Horn of Africa by Middle Eastern states, coupled with the region's deeper integration into Middle Eastern security dynamics, has placed unprecedented strain on the stability of the Horn of Africa (Yimer & Erko, 2023, p. 78).

The geopolitical landscape of the Greater Horn region is characterized by aid-dependent geopolitics. Nations in this region increasingly rely on foreign aid, which, in turn, undermines their capacity for independent decision-making. This growing dependence on external donors, international financial institutions, and development agencies—many of which pursue their own interests and impose numerous conditions—further strains the region's geopolitical environment. As a result, aid often functions as a tool for exerting geopolitical influence, transforming recipient nations into proxies. This reliance intensifies the vulnerability of individual countries, creating opportunities for dominant states to exploit this dependency to their advantage while perpetuating instability in the region. Consequently, the act of soliciting aid exacerbates the degree of reliance, granting geopolitical leverage to external powers that appear to thrive on maintaining the Horn of Africa's fragile state. Moreover, the region faces an increasing risk of extra-continental powers advancing their interests through proxy relationships. This trend poses significant threats to the long-term stability of the Horn and undermines the sovereignty of individual states. The resulting entanglement with external rivalries weakens regional autonomy and diminishes the capacity of local actors to address their internal and cross-border challenges effectively (Yimer, 2021; Munene, 2023, p. 4).

The Greater Horn region is a highly valuable geopolitical target for powers seeking to exert influence. In other words, it is one of the most sought-after geopolitical “preys” on the planet for global “predators.” This is largely due to the region's strategic significance, driven by security concerns and commercial rivalries. The competition in the Horn of Africa involves global actors that benefit from the current international status quo, including the United States, its European allies, Japan, Australia, Israel, and South Korea. With their advanced economies and strong military capabilities, these nations aim to maintain the existing international system, which supports their alliances and interests. Their

engagement with the resource-rich African continent often prioritizes their own benefits while overlooking the pressing issues facing the region. At the same time, other regional and global players, such as Russia, China, India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Iran, have been expanding their involvement in Africa. It is worth noting that certain actors, such as Türkiye and Qatar, have engaged with the continent through peace and development agendas, offering a distinct approach compared to others. However, the largely unregulated competition among these powers exacerbates the geopolitical instability of the region. Proxy wars, arms smuggling, the empowerment of non-state actors, rentier politics, and money laundering are all factors that worsen the security landscape and undermine stability in the Greater Horn.

The inability of states in the Greater Horn of Africa to effectively govern their territories, combined with the rise of non-state militant groups, significantly contributes to geopolitical change and instability in the region. The broader Horn of Africa has increasingly become a safe haven for non-state actors, primarily due to the limited capacity of governments to regulate their territories and their frequent struggles to exert influence beyond their borders. Consequently, the interplay of state weakness with the influence of global and regional entities has further eroded the region's geopolitical and geo-economic stability (Aidi, 2020).

3. Türkiye and the Horn of Africa: A Historical Perspective

The Horn of Africa has historically been a focal point for the rivalries of several international and regional security actors. The region has a well-established history of hosting military bases for both regional and global entities (Medani, 2012). Following the 9/11 attacks, there has been a temporary increase in competition among international and regional security actors for military bases in the sub-region (Lefebvre, 2012). The increase in pirate attacks during the 2000s and concerns about maritime security have played a significant role in shaping the involvement of foreign actors in the security affairs of the region (Yimer & Amour, 2020). The region's security dynamics have been significantly impacted and worsened by the uneven military buildup and external involvement with conflicting interests. Türkiye perceives the increasing rivalry in military base establishment as a significant obstacle to its expanding commercial and geopolitical interests in the region. Ankara is concerned about the growing military and commercial competition in the wider Horn region, specifically due to the increased engagement of Middle Eastern regional powers. Therefore, in order to overcome the increasing competition from neighboring competing players, Türkiye formerly relied on the historical heritage of the Ottomans in the region as an essential rhetorical tool.

In this regard, it is apparent that Ankara prides itself on being the only country from emerging actors in the Horn region with strong historical legacy. Unlike other rival Middle East actors, Türkiye appeared in the North East Africa region in 1517 during the time of the Ottoman ruler Sultan Selim I. In 1585 the Ottoman Sultan's suzerainty extended from Mogadishu to the port of Mombasa, encompassing the entire coastal region (Omar, 2001, p. 19). In the mid-16th century, the Ottoman Empire formed a province known as Habesh Eyalet, with its administrative center located in Suakin. The Habash Eyalet encompassed present-day territories such as Eritrea, Djibouti, and certain regions of Sudan, Northern Somalia, and portions of eastern Ethiopia (Donelli, 2018, p. 49). In addition, Türkiye played a prominent role in the global anti-colonial resistance movement of the 1950s and 1960s by recognizing and supporting the newly independent nations in the broader Horn region of Africa and across the continent. Therefore, these historical attachments of Ankara with greater Horn region give Türkiye better chance than other rival actors to establish a friendly strategic alliance with nations in the region. For instance, in the 2015 state visit, President Erdogan said:

The relations between Türkiye and Ethiopia dates back to 16th century. Memluk Turkish State and the Ottoman Empire established the first relations with this vast territory called Abyssinia and these relations have continued for centuries. There still are many families of Turkish origin

in Harar [in eastern Ethiopia]. We never have and never will forget the support of the Harar Turks for the Ottoman Empire during World War One (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye).

The above explanation of President Erdoğan shows how Türkiye try to use major historical ties as an important rhetoric fodder to advance the modern era core strategic interests of the country in Ethiopia and the greater Horn region in general. Furthermore, while conceptualizing the historical bases of Türkiye's relations with Ethiopia, President Erdoğan stated the following:

Prophet Muhammed of Islam and his friends were subjected to serious torture in Mecca. As the torture got unbearable, Prophet Muhammed advised some of his companions to migrate to Abyssinia. 15 of the first Muslims travelled here on a boat and sought shelter from King Necasi. Although people of Mecca demanded their return, King Necasi did not hand them over, as was his reputation 'reliable and fair'. He told the Muslims that they could stay as long as they wanted. This incident has a very important place in Islamic history. What matters here is that a Christian king, a Christian state protected the first Muslims with great tolerance. Such solidarity between Muslims and Christians in the 7th century in 615 is very significant. Since that time, since the 7th century, Ethiopia has always been the land of tolerance and respect for difference. That's why Ethiopia is a reliable and trustworthy country (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye).

Another crucial factor that could strengthen Ankara's position in the strategic competition within the Greater Horn region is the narrative of Westernism and Islam. As previously mentioned, President Erdoğan highlighted the historical religious role of a Christian king, stating: "When the Muslims were being oppressed, Prophet Muhammad considered Abyssinia a secure zone and said, "The king in Abyssinia is reliable and trustworthy; you will go there"" (Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye). In this context, alongside the historical legacy of the Ottomans in the region, religion has played—and will likely continue to play—a pivotal role in Türkiye's diplomatic engagements with the Greater Horn region specifically and the African continent more broadly.

4. Securing Türkiye's Core Interests in the Greater Horn of Africa through Soft Power

Türkiye's aspiration to expand its trading partners, coupled with its declining relationships with traditional Western allies, has fueled a growing interest in the Greater Horn region and sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. This interest stems from Ankara's strategy to offset diminishing interactions with traditional allies by forging new alliances. In its pursuit of stronger ties with Africa, Ankara has strategically employed soft power. Soft power is defined as "the ability to have influence by co-opting others to share some of one's values and, as a consequence, to share some key elements on one's agenda for international order and security" (Nye, 2005; Colin, 2011). Over the past two decades, Türkiye has significantly increased its investment in soft power across sub-Saharan Africa (Sıradağ, 2022, pp. 1-14). The Greater Horn region has benefited from this enhanced engagement. Türkiye's soft power initiatives encompass a broad spectrum of activities, including educational programs, funding for medical facilities, aid diplomacy, airline diplomacy (Němečková & Varkočková, 2024), and cultural and religious diplomacy (Eyrice Tepeciklioglu, 2023, p. 191). These efforts have collectively strengthened Türkiye's influence and fostered positive relations in the region.

Türkiye's expanding influence in Africa is characterized by distinctive attributes that align with a win-win strategic roadmap. By adopting this approach to foster bilateral relations with African nations, Ankara has positioned itself as a prominent emerging actor on the continent, attracting the interest of regional stakeholders. Furthermore, in developing Ankara's win-win strategic framework for engagement with Africa, President Erdoğan frequently references the historically favorable relations between the Ottoman Empire and the continent. As President Erdoğan stated, "Our ancestors have never had a colonial post in Africa in their millennial history [...]. Our ancestors, who established states

that spread across three continents, have never acted with imperialist purposes in other regions” (Tih, 2017). This perspective underscores Türkiye's commitment to building equitable and mutually beneficial partnerships with African nations, distinguishing its approach from other global actors.

The trade relationship between Türkiye and Africa serves as a clear reflection of the win-win strategic roadmap that Ankara has established with the continent (Bayram, 2020, p. 42). In line with this principle, Ethiopia and Türkiye signed a cooperation agreement in August 2021 during the state visit of Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to Ankara. The two countries entered into multiple cooperation agreements across various sectors during this visit, including an agreement in the domains of hydrocarbons and mining. This agreement has the potential to significantly enhance the already strong commercial ties between Ethiopia and Türkiye, which are supported by over 200 Turkish enterprises and have an estimated value of two billion dollars. The agreement encompasses a wide range of activities, including the advancement and promotion of gas and oil exploration and exploitation, the joint identification and development of projects related to the construction and maintenance of gas infrastructure, and the application of gas technologies. Additionally, it provides for bilateral cooperation in areas such as information exchange, training programs on hydrocarbons and minerals, and participation in conferences and workshops (Devecioglu, 2021).

Bilateral cooperation between Türkiye and Somalia is also witnessing remarkable growth. In March 2024, Ankara and Mogadishu signed an offshore oil and natural gas cooperation deal (Sezer, 2024). Similarly, on February 7, 2024, Türkiye's Defense Minister Yaşar Güler and Somalia's Defense Minister Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur finalized a decade-long defense and economic cooperation agreement aimed at strengthening bilateral relations and promoting regional stability (Maruf, 2024).

Additionally, Ankara is actively pursuing free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries in the wider Horn region to foster favorable conditions and enhance economic cooperation. In this regard, Türkiye is currently engaged in substantive FTA negotiations with Somalia. Simultaneously, Türkiye is expediting its ongoing FTA discussions with Djibouti, a strategically significant nation in the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, the FTAs established with Sudan will take effect upon ratification by the respective legislative bodies (ITA, 2024).

Türkiye's engagement in Africa goes beyond trade relations, leveraging substantial investments in infrastructure development as a critical component of its soft power strategy. Ankara allocates billions of dollars to the construction of essential infrastructure, including airports, railways, and roadways. Significant resources have also been directed towards expanding Turkish Airlines' network across the continent. Currently, Turkish Airlines operates flights to 41 African countries, serving a total of 61 destinations. This extensive network has significantly enhanced connectivity between Africa and Türkiye, further strengthening economic and diplomatic ties.

Investing in the construction of new mosques, masjids, and other houses of worship, as well as maintaining existing ones, is a key strategy employed by Türkiye to strengthen its cultural and religious influence. For instance, in Djibouti, the largest mosque in East Africa was built by Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (TDV). Similarly, TDV is involved in the reconstruction and refurbishment of the Mosque of Islamic Solidarity in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. This mosque is the largest in the Horn of Africa. The role of religion in Turkish foreign policy has grown significantly, paralleling the expansion of operations by faith-based Turkish non-governmental organizations abroad. This trend underscores the observation that “Türkiye's use of religion as a form of soft power gradually increased in the last two decades after [...] the Justice and Development Party assumed power in 2002” (Eyrice Tepeciklioglu, 2023, p. 193). Moreover, institutions such as the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), Türkiye's Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), Türkiye's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD), and the Turkish Maarif Foundation play pivotal roles in Ankara's soft power diplomacy with the nations of the Greater Horn region (Yimer & Erko, 2023, p. 88).

Turkish media and films have significantly bolstered Türkiye's influence by establishing offices and news centers in several African nations, thereby enhancing its soft power. To strengthen its media diplomacy efforts, Türkiye's official news agency, Anadolu Agency (AA), has expanded its presence across Africa. AA opened its first office on the continent in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia's capital, marking the beginning of its operations in Africa. It now maintains offices in numerous African capitals, including countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Morocco, Nigeria, Somalia, South Africa, and Sudan. In 2020, Türkiye's state broadcaster TRT began airing programs in Swahili, aiming to engage African audiences further. Türkiye's growing media presence in Africa not only strengthens Ankara's diplomatic ties with African nations but also supports its foreign policy objectives by shaping African perspectives on Türkiye. Additionally, Turkish media's prominence helps bridge reciprocal information gaps and construct a favorable narrative about Türkiye in African nations (Eyrice Tepeciklioglu, 2023, pp. 194-195).

An additional notable aspect of Ankara's soft power strategy to advance its mutually beneficial policy agenda in the Greater Horn region and Africa as a whole is the Turkish government scholarship program. This initiative has enabled hundreds of students from the Greater Horn region to benefit from educational opportunities. These scholarships, offered to international students at the higher education level, should not be viewed in isolation from other soft power instruments; rather, they are designed to complement and reinforce them. In essence, Türkiye leverages higher education scholarships as a strategic tool to establish and promote its soft power on a global scale, fostering long-term relationships and enhancing its influence worldwide.

Additionally, "development aid projects" and "humanitarian diplomacy" are widely employed as key instruments in Türkiye's soft power projection. The absence of conditionality in Türkiye's assistance has significantly enhanced recipient nations' trust in Ankara's political agenda, which is rooted in mutual respect and non-interference. Over time, numerous African nations have come to regard Türkiye as a vital ally and a viable alternative to counterbalance Western dominance (Marcou, 2022). Ankara has also strategically utilized travel diplomacy as an essential tool of soft power to strengthen ties with the Greater Horn region and Africa at large. Since the official declaration of Türkiye's open-door policy towards Africa, Turkish officials—including ministers, the president, public emissaries, and business leaders—have made numerous visits to various African nations. This proactive engagement underscores Türkiye's commitment to fostering robust and mutually beneficial partnerships across the continent.

5. Securing Interests through Hard Power: Türkiye and the Greater Horn of Africa

To safeguard its fundamental strategic interests in the greater Horn of Africa region, Türkiye is increasingly integrating hard power into its soft power foreign policy approach, aiming to promote Ankara's national interests in the area. In global political transactions, power refers to the ability to exert influence over others in order to advance one's national interests. Hard power can be defined as the capacity to influence others through "coercion" rather than "persuasion." In contrast, soft power is the ability to "persuade others to do what one wants" (Wilson, 2008, p. 114). As previously noted, Türkiye's foreign policies towards Africa are increasingly blending soft and hard power. This deliberate integration of both forms of power to advance national interests is referred to as "smart power," as defined by Ernest J. Wilson. Wilson describes "smart power" as "the capacity of an actor to combine elements of hard power and soft power in ways that are mutually reinforcing, such that the actor's objectives are advanced effectively and efficiently" (Wilson, 2008, p. 115).

In recent years, Ankara has aggressively employed soft power tactics to safeguard its national interests in the broader Horn of Africa region. Additionally, Türkiye has begun to establish its hard power presence in this strategically vital area in a methodical and cautious manner. The growth of the Turkish arms industry and the effectiveness of Turkish military technology (Fukuyama, 2021) are key

factors that position Türkiye as a formidable force, capable of effectively leveraging hard power to protect its strategic interests in the greater Horn region. Ankara's significant technological advancements have enabled it to engage confidently in diplomatic transactions with nations in the region. The reliability and high performance of Turkish drones, in particular, have garnered significant appeal from several governments, fostering strategic alliances with Ankara. Moreover, Türkiye's increasing success in military vehicle production has become an additional means of exercising hard power and safeguarding its strategic interests in the broader Horn region (İnanç, 2021). By capitalizing on its investments in military technology and expanding its market reach, Ankara has effectively used the African market's demand for Turkish-made military hardware as a "bargaining chip" in political and economic negotiations.

Türkiye has strategically demonstrated its pragmatic approach by utilizing both soft power and hard power, or a combination of the two, to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes. In other words, Türkiye has sought to showcase the pragmatic nature of its win-win strategic roadmap through a complex pattern of employing both hard and soft power. Ankara's commitment to this strategy was evident in 2011 when Erdogan visited the capital city of Mogadishu and pledged a comprehensive assistance package to the Republic of Somalia. Following this humanitarian intervention, Türkiye reopened its embassy in Mogadishu later that same year. In 2017, Türkiye established its largest military base outside its borders in Somalia (Cannon and Rossiter, 2019, pp. 167-188). Ankara not only supplied advanced Turkish weaponry to the Somali Armed Forces but also constructed a defense university, Camp TURKSOM, in Mogadishu to provide military training for Somalia. This move marks a significant step towards Ankara's geopolitical objectives in the Horn of Africa. While the shift from humanitarian aid to building a military presence may seem to contradict the peaceful nature of soft power, it highlights the close relationship between these two aspects in Türkiye's foreign policy.

As a result of increasing Turkish investments in both soft and hard power infrastructure in the greater Horn of Africa, Ankara has become an active economic, political, and military actor in the region (Telci, 2021). Türkiye's growing assertiveness in the Horn is clearly demonstrated during key moments marked by significant events. For instance, on January 1, 2024, following the signing of the Ethiopia-Somaliland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for partnership and cooperation, Türkiye reaffirmed its strong support for Somalia. In a solidarity statement, Öncü Keçeli, spokesperson for the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, wrote on X: "We reaffirm our commitment to the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Somalia. We emphasize that this position is also a requirement of international law" (Keçeli, 2024). In response, Farhan Jimale, Somalia's Director of Communications and Public Relations, issued the following statement: "Thank you, brotherly Türkiye, for your steadfast solidarity with our government. We appreciate your support and commitment to the unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of #Somalia..." (TRT World, 2024). In contrast, on October 13, 2023, in a televised address, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed stated: "Ethiopia's existence as a nation is linked to the Red Sea," emphasizing that his country needed access to a port and that "peace" in the region depended on "balanced mutual sharing" between landlocked Ethiopia and its neighbors (African News, 2023). The political tensions and geopolitical realignments that have emerged in the Horn of Africa since the signing of the Ethiopia-Somaliland MoU are particularly concerning.

In this context, the naval defense agreement signed between Ankara and Mogadishu on February 22, 2024, has been interpreted as a direct response to the port agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia. It is important to note that the Defense and Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement was signed on February 8, 2024, between Somalia's Minister of Defense Abdulkadir Mohamed Nur and Türkiye's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar. Additionally, these consecutive defense agreements between Ankara and Mogadishu were signed precisely one month after the Ethiopia-Somaliland Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which granted Ethiopia access to the Berbera Port on the Red Sea.

Consequently, the defense agreement between Türkiye and Somalia appears to be a direct reaction to the bilateral agreement between Somaliland and Ethiopia, which provided Ethiopia with access to the Somaliland coastline. Furthermore, Türkiye had already initiated talks between Somalia and Ethiopia to de-escalate tensions arising from the latter's agreement with Somaliland (Gbadomosi, 2024).

Beyond its aim to counter Ethiopia's efforts to gain maritime access, the agreement between Mogadishu and Ankara can also be seen as an expansion of Türkiye's hard power and its projection of influence in the greater Horn of Africa (Helou, 2024). As such, the defense and naval agreement first established in 2016 between Mogadishu and Ankara signals Türkiye's increasing readiness to employ coercive measures to protect its strategic interests in the Red Sea region. This agreement with Mogadishu may also mark the beginning of similar deals between Türkiye and other key nations along the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa.

On the other hand, Türkiye has maintained a neutral stance thus far on the Sudanese crisis. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan reached out to Sudan's head of state and army chief, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, as well as the leader of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), with the aim of helping resolve the ongoing tensions. Erdogan proposed that Sudan's military leaders engage in negotiations in Türkiye, suggesting direct talks between the competing factions. This position positioned Türkiye as one of the few countries to offer such a proposal. Thanks to Ankara's diplomatic balancing act in its relations with both al-Burhan and Hemedti, the Turkish capital became a logical choice for hosting direct negotiations between the two Sudanese generals. In other words, Türkiye's balanced approach to its relations with both parties in Sudan made it the most appropriate mediator to suggest hosting direct talks. Although Türkiye expressed its willingness to mediate, the two Sudanese generals declined the offer. Despite this, Türkiye appears to be adopting a "wait-and-see" approach, observing the turmoil in Sudan without taking immediate action (Sudan Tribune, 2023).

Nevertheless, through its policy of neutrality during the Sudanese crisis, its "wait-and-see" stance during Sudan's transition period, and its solidarity stance during the Ethiopia-Somalia dispute, Ankara has worked to safeguard its strategic interests in the broader Horn of Africa. These interests include, but are not limited to, new markets, business opportunities, and defense exports. However, the evolving geopolitics of the Horn and the increasing geopolitical strain caused by the emergence of a multipolar world order continue to pose significant challenges to Türkiye's strategic and geopolitical objectives in the region.

6. Conclusion

A new and complex geopolitical configuration has emerged in the greater Horn of Africa due to growing realignments and shifting alliances driven by divergent interests. This changing geopolitical landscape has posed challenges to the foreign policy strategies of non-regional actors, who possess a range of foreign policy tools but often pursue conflicting objectives. In this volatile environment, Türkiye is working to safeguard its strategic interests by utilizing a variety of foreign policy instruments, including summit diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, commercial diplomacy, military aid diplomacy, educational diplomacy, humanitarian aid diplomacy, and "flight diplomacy." Additionally, the historical legacy of the Ottoman Empire in the region has been leveraged as a key element in justifying Türkiye's win-win strategic approach toward the Horn of Africa and, more broadly, towards the entire African continent.

Türkiye's ambition to expand its business relationships, coupled with growing opportunities in the African market, has driven Ankara's increasing interest in Africa. However, it is important to recognize that the deepening ties and strategic alliances between Türkiye and Africa go beyond mere trade and the use of soft power tools. The rapid development of Türkiye's defense technology, which competes

with Western and Russian military equipment in terms of quality, has also played a significant role in strengthening the partnership. In practical terms, Türkiye's commitment to enhancing security cooperation with Africa—through efforts such as fighting terrorism, sending peacekeeping forces, training military personnel, and signing military cooperation agreements—adds substance to Ankara's win-win foreign policy approach toward Africa.

Furthermore, Türkiye's foreign policy toward Africa, particularly its win-win strategic roadmap, challenges the Western political mindset, which is often rooted in outdated notions of superiority and subordination. Türkiye's approach to Africa offers a promising alternative, and it is this win-win foreign policy that has inspired hope among many observers, positioning Türkiye as a potential new and genuine balancer capable of addressing the needs of African nations.

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