

TURKEY'S MULTIDIMENSIONAL STRATEGY TOWARDS AFRICA

IBRAHIM BACHIR ABDOULAYE, ZAINUL ABIDEEN JIBRIL

SETA | PERSPECTIVE

OCTOBER 2021 · NUMBER 68

- What are Turkey's expectations in Africa?
- How to understand Turkey's African strategy?
- How to evaluate Erdogan's recent visit to Africa?

INTRODUCTION

Since the late 1990s, Turkey has sought to develop its relations with African countries through various initiatives such as humanitarian, economic, cultural, political, defense, and others. The need for Ankara to play a crucial role beyond its traditional sphere of influence pushed it to engage with African countries. Turkey and African countries' relations began to strengthen in the early 2000s when the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power. Due to the importance of Africa in its new foreign policy orientation, Turkey declared 2005 as the Year of Africa. Since then, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has made 46 trips to 30 African countries, suggesting Africa's strategic importance to Turkey.

African countries view Turkey as a partner with no history of colonial exploitation on the continent and elsewhere, allowing Ankara to expand its influence through its soft power. Turkey gained a foothold on the continent by promoting economic and social development in an environment of peace and stability and developing bilateral relations based on equal partnership and mutual benefit.

The recent visit of the Turkish president was accompanied by the signing of bilateral agreements and Memoranda of Understandings (MoUs) to strengthen ties with the leaders of the continent in the fields of security, trade, industry, energy, education, health, etc.

AN OVERVIEW OF TURKEY'S AFRICA POLICY

Turkey considers the recent four-day visit of President Erdoğan to the African continent as one of the essential steps in the realization of Ankara's ambitions to make Turkey a player in the international arena. The African states see this visit as a new opportunity to diversify their partners, attract investments, improve the business climate, and create new jobs. So much so that Western countries see this visit as an offensive to conquer new territories, aimed at realizing President Erdoğan's neo-Ottoman ambitions.

Turkey first defined its policy towards Africa in 1998 in a plan known as the Africa Action Plan (Afrika Eylem Planı), developed by the Turkish Foreign Ministry headed by İsmail Cem. The plan aimed to develop economic relations with African countries to open new markets for Turkish companies. However, the econom-

IBRAHIM BACHIR ABDOULAYE

University of Bayreuth, Germany

ZAINUL ABIDEEN JIBRIL

Adamawa State University, Nigeria

ic and political crisis that Turkey experienced delayed its implementation until 2002 when the AKP came to power. Since then, Ankara's new political vision of becoming a major player in the international arena has focused on economic, political, and cultural ties with other countries outside its traditional sphere of influence. Therefore, Africa is one of the main targets of the new political vision because of its geographic proximity, historical and religious ties, economic opportunities, and, above all, the growing need and willingness to participate in any cooperation that might be beneficial. Turkey has taken advantage of these opportunities to expand its influence on the continent in less than two decades. Since President Erdoğan rose to power, Ankara has adopted a multidimensional strategy for the continent, in which various state and non-state bodies simultaneously coordinate diplomatic, economic, political, and cultural aspects. Today, Turkey has 43 diplomatic missions on the African continent, with hundreds of Turkish companies operating in various sectors. Also, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Maarif Foundation, several schools, Yunus Emre cultural centers, and hundreds of NGOs involved in humanitarian activities are operating in several countries across the continent.

Another dimension of this vision is the political discourse of President Erdoğan. His famous book published recently calls for the need for new and fairer world order. Slogans such as "The world is bigger than five" (Dünya beşten büyüktür) and "A fairer world is possible" (Daha adil bir dünya mümkün) aim to attract "third world" countries, especially those in Africa, to form a bloc against Western hegemony.

AN OVERVIEW OF ERDOĞAN'S VISIT TO ANGOLA, TOGO, AND NIGERIA

A warm welcome was extended to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his delegation during his recent visits to Angola, Togo, and Nigeria. The visit was widely reported in the local media, which raised hopes in Turkey for a closer partnership with African countries. Moreover, the streets of the capitals of the

host countries were decorated with Turkish flags and billboards featuring Erdoğan next to his hosts and his slogan "Daha adil bir dünya mümkün." President Erdoğan was accompanied by the first lady, Emine Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Dönmez, Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, Trade Minister Mehmet Muş, and a large delegation of senior officials, bureaucrats, and businesspeople.

The choice of President Erdoğan to pay an official visit to these countries is not random. Angola, located between Central and Southern Africa, is a strategic country that is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and the Conference for Peace and Security in the Great Lakes Region. The world's fifth-largest diamond producer and Africa's third-largest oil producer with an estimated production of over 1 million barrels per day, Angola ranks among the wealthiest countries in Africa in terms of natural resources. As Angola's revenues depend on oil exports, falling oil prices have plunged Angola into an economic crisis. Since then, Angola has sought to diversify its economy to reduce its dependence on oil. The visit of Angolan President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço to Turkey in July is an effort to attract investors and find new markets for Angola's mineral resources. After this visit, relations between Angola and Turkey developed rapidly. At the invitation of his Angolan counterpart, President Erdoğan visited Luanda, which was the first visit by a Turkish president to the country. Before Erdoğan's visit, Turkish Airlines announced that it would start direct flights to Angola from October 13, which is an important step in developing relations between the two countries. At the same time, organizations such as Kızılay carried out humanitarian aid activities that strengthened the bond between the two countries. In this sense, during his visit, Erdoğan stated that his country intends to create a university hospital in Angola to improve the health system.

Several agreements were signed at the end of this visit. Angola and Turkey signed seven other coopera-

tion agreements in mutual assistance in customs, agriculture, and education. The two states have set a goal to achieve \$500 million in bilateral trade, which currently stands at \$132 million. On the one hand, Angola hopes to attract Turkish investments, especially in infrastructure, energy, and mining, and export its crude oil to Turkey. On the other hand, Turkey wants to export goods such as blue flour, textiles, furniture, and foodstuffs and thus help its companies win contracts for large projects, especially in construction and mining. The purchase of armored vehicles and drones was also the subject of discussion between the two parties. An Angola-Turkey business forum was organized on the occasion of the visit.

In Togo, the second stage of Erdoğan's visit, security issues and the fight against terrorism were at the center of discussions between the two countries. The issue of FETÖ has been the central topic in the relations between the two sides in recent years. After several diplomatic initiatives, Togo finally agreed to close the schools of the Gülenist movement and hand them over to the Maarif Foundation, a diplomatic victory for Ankara in its fight against FETÖ. In this regard, a "Host Country Agreement between the Maarif Foundation of Turkey and the Republic of Togo" was signed during Erdoğan's visit. The Turkish and Togolese foreign ministers also signed a "protocol on the exchange of land for diplomatic representations."

Although trade was not the focus of the exchanges between the two parties, the Togolese side insisted on a trade balance. Turkey's exports to Togo were \$184 million between 2017 and 2020. At the same time, Togo's exports were only \$13 million. Togo hopes to attract Turkish investment to balance its trade. With the Port of Lomé, the Togolese authorities hope to make the country the center of Turkish trade in West Africa.

Moreover, during this visit, a meeting on regional issues and bilateral cooperation took place between President Erdoğan and three West African heads of state in the Togolese capital, Lomé. The meeting was attended by Togolese President Faure Gnassingbé, Burkina Faso President Roch Kaboré and Liberian

President George Weah. At the end of the mini-summit, the four heads of state reaffirmed their determination to fight the scourge of terrorism without discriminating between terrorist organizations, including DAESH, FETÖ, Al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram. Ankara said it was ready to help these countries fight extremist groups by providing its intelligence expertise.

The visit to Abuja, the Nigerian capital, was the last stop of President Erdoğan's four-day tour in the African continent. Trade, the fight against terrorism, and defense were at the heart of the talks between the two parties. Nigeria faces threats from terrorist groups and armed bandits; therefore, it wants to develop military and defense cooperation with Turkey. In this sense, Nigeria has signed a defense industry agreement with Turkey that could open the door to export Turkish weapons, especially military drones and UAVs, to Nigeria. Moreover, the two countries signed eight bilateral agreements/MoUs in areas including energy, mining, and hydrocarbons.

Nigeria, Africa's number one oil producer with over 2 million barrels per day, exports oil and gas to Turkey. According to the data declared by Turkish authorities, the volume of bilateral trade amounts to about \$743 million. The countries hope to increase the bilateral trade volume to \$2 billion.

The FETÖ issue remains a bone of contention between Ankara and Abuja. Nigeria is one of the few West African countries that has not closed the schools of the Gülenist movement, which Ankara declared a terrorist organization after an attempted coup in July 2016. The organization is well established in Nigeria, with schools in various states and even a university in the Nigerian capital. Turkey's diplomatic efforts to have these schools closed have not yet been successful. To support these efforts, Turkey has proceeded to open a Yunus Emre Cultural Center in Abuja and opened the newly renovated public secondary school in Wuse, Abuja, through TİKA. Also, as part of his efforts, President Erdoğan drew the attention of his Nigerian counterpart with these words: "This sensitivity that we have shown in the fight against terrorism, I hope, will be reciprocated by our Nigerian brothers, sisters, and counterparts."

CONCLUSION

President Erdoğan, who made his 46th visit to the continent, is determined to make Turkey a major player in Africa, a vision that goes beyond economic cooperation. The Turkish strategy is based on a bilateral, regional, continental, and global dimension integrating multiple aspects, including politics, economy, culture, and humanitarian efforts, described as “quite

global” by some African diplomats. This recent tour of Erdoğan in Angola, Togo, and Nigeria aimed to strengthen political, economic, and cultural ties, an opportunity for Erdoğan to highlight the injustices of Western countries towards the African continent and reiterate his call for a more just world. This multidimensional strategy of Turkey in Africa will attract more attention and debate in the coming years.



SIYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
مركز الدراسات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | [@setavakfi](https://twitter.com/setavakfi)