Turkey's changing engagementwith the global South

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This article examines Turkey's changing engagement with the global South, focusing on the determinants of President Erdogan's foreign policy in the past decade. On the one hand, Ankara has moved from a nuanced, soft power approach to a reactive, high-pressure strategy that has seen domestic and regional struggles transmuted into global diplomatic infighting. On the other hand, the country's narrative of the global South, as a space offering both economic opportunities and scope for global actorhood, is changing into one that divides those who support Turkish interests from those who do not, thus hindering the development of a consensus on a broader and deeper cooperative agenda with non-traditional actors. The key argument of this article is that Turkish foreign policy's Southern orientation has lost its constructive and developmental direction as a result of complex interactions between, on the one hand, regional upheaval in Turkey's neighbourhood and, on the other, domestic democratic backsliding coupled with Erdogan's executive centralization, especially after the failed coup of 2016. This combination of factors has had two consequences. First, Turkey's foreign policy priorities have shifted from economic growth towards security concerns, with repercussions for its previously benign, developmental approach towards the global South.[1] Second, the self-aggrandizement of the executive in Ankara is

shaping an increasingly centralized foreign policy in which presidential diplomacy and political affinity have become central features of regional policies towards Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa. This article contends that the securitization and increasing personalization of Turkey's domestic and international agenda have contaminated its overall foreign policy, even in non-priority regions.

To substantiate this argument, the rest of the article is divided into three parts. The first part presents the foreign policy trajectory of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) over the past decade, highlighting the determinants, domestic and regional, that have contributed to a shift in the Turkish foreign policy approach—a shift that has inevitably affected Turkey's stance towards the global South. The second part of the article gives a brief overview of Turkey's increased engagement with the global South. The third part analyses the implications of Turkish foreign policy since the Arab Spring through two case-studies: sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Finally, some conclusions are drawn.

Turkey's domestic and external trajectory: regional insecurity, democratic backsliding and foreign policy

The failed coup attempt of 2016 was the bloodiest episode in Turkey's recent history. A marginal group within the military, allegedly linked with Fethullah Gülen, tried to destabilize the executive power and public order, prompting a harsh response from the Turkish government, with the declaration of a state of emergency and an indictment of the Gülen network as a terrorist group. The

incident deepened and accelerated a series of well-established trajectories, both domestic and internationally.

The literature on Turkey's recent foreign policy shift has for the most part focused on the interaction of domestic developments with regional and global dynamics.[2] On the domestic side, the initial years of AKP government, marked by democratization and Europeanization, have given way to a period marked by pressures on both academic and press freedom, especially after the Gezi protests—demonstrations against urban changes heavily repressed by security forces—and increasingly troubled relations with the West, in addition to increased execu- tive oversight on the judiciary—trends that together have signalled a democratic backsliding.[3] Furthermore, the concentration of power in the hands of Presi- dent Erdogan—who dominated Turkish politics as prime minister between 2003 and 2014 and then as president—has been at odds with the formal parliamentary system.

Externally, Turkey's foreign policy has slowly abandoned the 'trading state' model and soft power discourse in favour of a more assertive and coercive approach to regional power.[4] Threats from almost all geographical directions have become increasingly salient for Turkish decision-makers. Vladimir Putin's Russia has behaved assertively both in the Black Sea region and in the Mediterranean, while the Arab revolutions of 2011 intensified the Middle Eastern security dilemma and have put neighbouring regimes at risk. As a result, tensions around the eastern Mediterranean rose, while large cities such as Istanbul and Ankara faced a wave of terrorist attacks by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Islamic State in

Iraq and Syria (ISIS). In parallel with greater geopolitical challenges, a growing mistrust marred relations between Turkey and the West.[5] In this sense, Turkey continues to be a 'double gravity state', a plausible but volatile actor on the edge of the subsystems of continental Europe and the Middle East, and in the midst of confrontational Eurasian regional (dis)order. However, that double gravity operates less powerfully in non-traditional regions.[6]

The trajectory of foreign policy after the failed coup not only continued these trends but also deepened them on the global stage, beyond Turkey's troublesome relations with its neighbours and its difficulties in dealings with the West. How did regional insecurity and democratic backsliding undermine the benign nature of Turkey's foreign policy? In what ways did Ankara channel its economic and security challenges into its approach towards the global South? In addressing these questions, two determinants can be identified that have transformed Turkey's policies towards the global South. On the one hand, the centralization of foreign policy in the hands of President Erdogan became an expression of executive aggrandizement, according greater importance to the leader's political preferences. On the other hand, insecurity in the Eurasian region has shaped a foreign policy narrative centred on Turkey's strategic reorientation, with a focus on fighting domestic enemies and defending (sometimes coercively) the country's interests abroad.

In relation to the first determinant, Turkey's democratic backsliding has deepened, with the political leadership, for the sake of its own survival, inflicting damage on the institutions that sustain democracy. Erdogan himself was central in this political process, advancing a vicious circle of polarizing tactics that provided

incentives for non-democratic behaviour.[7] Among various dimensions, the key feature of this phenomenon has been executive aggrandizement, in which the executive has limited institutional checks on its powers, thus affecting the separation of powers and the political aspirations of the opposition.[8] The country's transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system was a step in that direction, since it increased the centralization of executive power, providing institutional legitimation for Erdogan's de facto power—transforming him from a symbolic strong leader into a real one—and reshaping checks on that power both outside and inside the institutional system.

To emphasize this executive centralization is not to say that Erdogan was not previously, as prime minister, the central figure in foreign policy decision-making. Nor does this shift represent a swift change in foreign policy behaviour. But the displacement in the years after the Arab Spring of influential figures such as Ali Babacan, Abdullah Gül and Ahmet Davutoglu, in addition to a lack of institutional balance between the presidency and parliament, enhanced Erdogan's ability to make decisions without serious internal or external checks and balances. The decision-making process moved almost entirely into the hands of Presi- dent Erdogan and a narrow circle of advisers, some of whom have institutional responsibilities, others of whom have been selected on the basis of personal or even family ties.[9] In parallel with this trend, an alliance between the AKP and the ultra-nationalist MHP party—with deep roots within the military, security and intelligence corps—and the rising level of civilian control over the military after the failed coup gave him extra political incentives to advance an assertive agenda

both domestically and regionally, for example, against militant and terrorist groups within Turkey and in Syria and Iraq.

This institutional shift has allowed President Erdogan to put his own imprint, both formally and substantially, on foreign policy.[10] Erdogan's rhetoric exhibits a mix of nationalism, anti-westernism and disregard for international organizations,[11] and emphasizes the role of Turkey as a 'powerful regional actor' and an 'unstoppa- ble power'.[12] The transformative rhetoric of an increasingly revisionist Turkey has been reinforced by a growing sense of isolation *vis-à-vis* the West and an upsurge in western criticism on issues ranging from concerns regarding the rule of law and human rights to democratic backsliding, as expressed in the European Commission's 2020 report on Turkey.[13] Meanwhile, the dominant-leader model has contributed to Turkey's foreign policy being used even more as a personal instrument to expand and energize Erdogan's domestic constituency. Eschewing its traditional partners, Turkey has developed deeper relations with those countries that recognize its regional role and take increasingly anti-western and anti-US stances.

Regarding the second determinant, Turkey's neighbourhood has been embroiled in cumulative turbulence, including active armed conflicts in Iraq, Syria (where Ankara has deployed a significant number of troops in the north-east) and Nagorno-Karabakh (where Turkey supported Azerbaijan against Armenia), Moscow's annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and the competition for advantage in terms of maritime delimitation and energy resources in the eastern Mediterranean.[14] In this context, Ankara perceived itself as increasingly locked in, with Russia militarily present in every regional conflict and Turkey's claims in the

Mediterranean blocked by the East Med Gas Forum nations and traditional disputes on Cyprus—the latter adding an additional layer of tension with the EU, especially with France which usually have a common approach with Greece and Cyprus towards the Eastern Mediterranean.

In the environment prevailing after the failed coup, most of the security pressures were related to internal and/or regional conflicts, such as the empowerment of the Kurdish movement in Turkey (the Kurdistan Workers' Party, PKK) and Syria (the Democratic Union Party–People's Protection Units, PYD–YPG), the presence of ISIS, both along the Syrian–Turkish border and within Turkey, and the scarcely manageable refugee influx.[15]

In the early days of the Syrian civil war, Turkey's attitude towards refugees was closely intertwined with its foreign policy strategy, as the government initially saw an opportunity to improve its regional influence.[16] Turkey, expecting that the Assad regime would fall quickly and Syrian refugees would then return to Syria, decided to operate an open-door policy towards those fleeing the country. The official narrative at the beginning of the crisis emphasized a moral-humanitarian stance; but at the same time Ankara supported the Syrian opposition, support that reflected both security and non-security motivations.[17] However, as border security threats increased, Ankara responded coercively, and immigration policy became more restrictive.

External pressures pushed for internal changes. After the end of the Turkish–Kurdish peace process, around late 2014 and early 2015, a new securitized approach, accompanied by a rise in nationalistic rhetoric, laid the ground for a

political alliance (known as the People's Alliance) between the AKP and the ultra-nationalist MHP party.[18] The ideological turn towards hard-line nationalism in government policy has reinforced the promotion of a more interventionist and security-focused foreign policy, especially regarding regional disputes.[19] At the same time, a split within the conservative movement prompted the Islamic cleric Fethullah Gülen to oppose Erdogan's political plans from 2013 onwards.

Consequently, the Gülen network was progressively sidelined from the public arena, until in May 2016 it was classified as a terrorist organization and subsequently dismantled within Turkey after the failed coup, while Ankara demanded that foreign governments limit the actions of the network, thus weakening its global reach.[20]

How have these numerous domestic and regional developments affected the Turkish approach towards the global South? It is clear that democratic backsliding is at odds with a soft power framework and makes the country less attractive to some audiences.[21] Ankara's new, assertive and security-oriented approach has downgraded Turkey's Southern orientation, which was previously connected to a search for economic opportunities. Moreover, this move from a nuanced, soft power approach to a reactive, high-pressure strategy has transformed the priorities and nature of Turkey's global South agenda, giving greater emphasis to the defence of national interests and an assertive stance towards local enemies and regional competitors. While Turkey has not completely abandoned the trade-based, soft-power approach—especially in the global South—that agenda has suffered a slow transformation into something less attractive. In order to substan-

tiate these arguments, this article focuses on two regions in the global South: sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America. Turkey has historical connections with other global South regions, such as the Middle East, North Africa, central Asia and the Islamic world as a whole. This article, however is particularly concerned with looking at non-traditional venues of Turkey's foreign policy, where regional strategies and diplomatic activism have increased ties since the late 1990s. Turkey's approaches to other parts of the global South, for example south and east Asia, have been less regional and more bilateral, focused on relations with individual countries such as India, China and Japan.

A recent actor: the rise of Turkey in the global South

Until the early 2000s, Turkey was closer to the global North, both strategically and economically. From the 1950s until the end of the Cold War, it was not a typical associate of the global South, which—as heir to the Cold War notion of the Third World—can be understood as multiple regional spaces in which developing countries predominate. During the Cold War, Ankara participated in the Afro-Asian Bandung Conference, but its official discourse emphasized the existence of two camps and, while it acknowledged the development of a non-bipolar, middle way, its own choice was to work as a fully aligned country, albeit among the non-aligned.[22] The intimidating threat of the Soviet Union, Turkey's NATO membership and its aspiration to become part of a west European institutional network were strong incentives to avoid an alternative route. A search for fresh

horizons prompting a new gaze towards the global South began only after the invasion of Cyprus in 1974, in which Turkey not only directly faced a NATO ally—Greece—but also suffered harsh sanctions from the United States and west European countries. Finally, the political–economic turn towards trade liberalization and the ending of bipolar tensions in the late 1980s eased Turkey's relations with non-traditional partners in the South as the end of the bipolar world opened up a new horizon for South–South cooperation. In consequence, Turkey slowly diversified its political and economic partnerships, despite the western anchor of its political reforms and foreign policy orientation. The global South dimension of Turkey's foreign policy emerged not only from the post-Cold War context and the globalization process, but also from the external consequences of its structural reforms and transition to a neo-liberal development model from the 1980s onwards.[23] In opening up external trade and the capital account, the Turkish economy made a dramatic change from an inward-focused, state-led model towards a swift integration into global markets. Trade consistently expanded to new markets, high-ranking visits started to flow outwards, and in 1998 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published action plans for both Latin America and Africa, setting the basis for the unprecedented activism of the AKP years.

From the arrival of the AKP on the scene in 2001 until the Arab Spring in 2011, Turkey's interest in the global South was closely related to both external constraints and domestic incentives, particularly those related to economic performance and the political needs of the AKP's governing coalition. The main goal of the AKP government's increasing engagement in the global South was to become

a global player while supporting its ambitious foreign policy goals regionally and globally. Initially, it focused on a soft power agenda and developed a wide range of formal institutions to advance its interests globally, in addition to providing informal support to business organizations, Islamic networks and NGOs.[24] The global South was presented as a space for accessing economic opportunities, seeking political legitimacy and gaining international support, despite Ankara's priorities regarding the EU accession process. In 2000, regions of the global South with which Turkey did not traditionally have strong relationships (east Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and south Asia) represented less than 6 per cent of its exports and around 13 per cent of its imports. Ten years later, exports to these regions had jumped to 9 per cent and imports from them to 22 per cent.[25] At the same time, the AKP's conservative identity gave way to a concentration of attention on the least developed countries,[26] and on Islamic-inspired multilateral institutions such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Developing Eight (D-8).

Turkey's developing trade dynamics with new regions in the global South continued even as its domestic and regional environment became more troubled. By 2018, the four regions enumerated above accounted for almost 11 per cent of

exports and more than 26 per cent of imports, driven by China's rise, while the stock of overseas foreign direct investment continued to grow, especially in Africa. Despite this concrete progress, Ankara's commercial rationale was progressively sidelined by a series of challenges, as noted above, such as political polarization, democratic backsliding and regional insecurity. The Gezi Park protests, the split between the AKP and the Gülen network, and the disruption of the peace process with the Kurds in 2014, as well as diplomatic failures in the wake of the Arab Spring, began to change the Turkish agenda in respect of the global South. Although at first Ankara focused on a positive and economically based agenda, its engagement with these regions started to take on a grimmer tone, owing to infighting at home and the increasing securitization of the domestic and international agendas.

Sub-Saharan Africa: between humanitarianism and power politics

Turkey is among the emerging powers that have widened the scope of their foreign policy in the past two decades by following a multidirectional approach. Within this strategic framework, Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, is one of the main regions in which the Turkish government has increased its presence. Turkey's approach to sub-Saharan Africa has shown high flexibility and has changed over time. The existing literature generally indicates that Turkish policy towards sub-Saharan Africa effectively began in 2005, when the AKP government announced the 'Year of Africa' to implement a new approach towards the continent. Up to that point, the Turkish presence in Africa had been limited to a few

links with the countries of North Africa and a small number of other nations on the continent, including Nigeria, Ethiopia and South Africa. These apart, Turkish foreign policy generally ignored parts of Africa to the south of the Sahara.[27] The decision to open up to sub-Saharan Africa in 2005 was motivated by a mixture of economic and political factors. Besides being an area with high economic potential, sub-Saharan Africa, especially the Horn of Africa and the western Sahel, also has a significant number of Muslim communities. From the perspective of Turkish policy-makers, cultural and religious proximity has been considered a useful factor in establishing relations with African people, and it aligns with the ideological orientations of the AKP's political elites.

Although Turkey's policy towards sub-Saharan Africa was initiated only recently, it has already gone through a number of different stages, and it is possible to identify three phases of Turkish involvement in the region: 2005–2010, 2011–2015 and 2016 to date. Between the opening agenda (the Africa Action Plan), set up by the then foreign minister Ismail Cem at the end of the 1990s, and the launch of the 'Year of Africa' by the AKP government in 2005, the priorities, the means and the actors involved have all changed.[28] However, two elements distinguish Turkish involvement in Africa from that of other extraregional actors, particularly in the sub-Saharan region, and have remained unaltered: (1) the lack of a comprehensive strategy that clearly specifies objectives and the means to achieve them; and (2) a constant interconnection with Turkish domestic politics. The lack of a comprehensive strategy for sub-Saharan Africa has allowed the Turkish agenda to develop in an extremely flexible way, which means it is more inclined to adapt to structural

changes, both internal to Turkey and regional, and to growing challenges.

In the beginning, the Turkish aim was to get closer to the African continent to gain access to a new economic market. During these years, the government, headed by an emerging conservative political elite, experienced several constraints within Turkish institutions, including the opposition of some ministers and most of the diplomatic service and cadres.[29] This environment led to the establishment of a large number of new institutions and state agencies (e.g. AFAD [Disaster and Emergency Management Authority] and the Yunus Emre Institute) and the strengthening of the prerogatives of existing ones (e.g. TIKA [Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency], Diyanet [Directorate of Religious Affairs] and DEIK [Turkish Foreign Economic Relations Board]) to bypass institutional blocks.[30] This unorganized approach was instrumental in the establishment of a multiplicity of new diplomatic, economic and cultural ties with Africa.[31] Turkey consolidated these diplomatic and economic relations by exploiting a range of instruments of public diplomacy and establishing a range of contacts. During the opening phase (2005–2010), Turkey quickly built up a network of relationships, in part through the efforts of Turkish Airlines (THY), which provided direct connections with 35 African countries.

Some tangible achievements, such as the election of Turkey as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (2009–2011), and the increase in trade relations with the African continent, were made possible by the AKP government's decision to encourage the involvement of Turkish civil society organizations. Thus a wide range of NGOs, from business associations to various charitable foundations,

operated in a complementary manner to the African policy of the Turkish state.

The mixed-layer approach adopted by the AKP government gave rise to the civil society–state nexus that is still one of the distinguishing traits of Turkey's policy within and towards sub-Saharan Africa. The growing Turkish presence in Africa, indeed, has not only met the demands of the economic sector—especially construction and manufacturing—for new markets, but has also boosted relations between the AKP political elite and a large part of its conservative constituency. Thanks to its emerging role as a humanitarian actor, the Turkish state gained international visibility and was also able to nurture the relationship between the AKP and social actors, particularly conservative NGOs, around the concept of 'humanitarianism' (*Insaniyetçilik*). That concept links the Turkish government and non-governmental actors on the ground, and seems to be a synthesis of the traditional approach to humanitarian aid and Islamic humanitarianism.[32]

Furthermore, the cultural dimension has been an important aspect of Turkish policy in sub-Saharan Africa. Besides the traditional high-culture tools, such as schools, scholarship programmes and Turkish-language courses, Turkey has spread its brand in Africa through entertainment television programmes, especially TV series (*dizi*). As in other regional contexts, including Latin America, this phenomenon is constantly growing in sub-Saharan Africa.[33] Although it may appear simply a pop phenomenon, in reality the broadcasting of these series increases the visibility of Turkey's brand, arousing curiosity among the audience.[34]

The lack of a top-down strategy led to the absence of effective coordination but, at the same time, allowed Turkish civil society organizations to operate on

the continent independently, building trust among local populations through the strengthening of personal relationships. While the lack of strategy proved an advantage at the macro level, on the ground it represented a constraint on Turkish intervention, with a pronounced dispersal of resources and, in many cases, overlapping initiatives. The AKP government therefore chose to increase the prerogatives of TIKA, such as logistics and fiscal advantages, and political support by the JDP government,[35] which had been operating in Africa for a long time. The resulting improvement in coordination of activities on the ground gained momentum following the Turkish humanitarian response to the Somali famine in 2011.[36]

The role assumed by Turkey in Somalia has been the real watershed in its engagement with Africa. Since the famine, this east African nation has become the pivot of Turkish policy on the continent. The humanitarian intervention in Somalia has had a significant impact on both Turkish policy and the Turkish presence in the region.[37] From the former perspective, Ankara's initiatives in Somalia prompted it to enhance the humanitarian dimension of its policies. A few months later, building on the popularity it had gained at the international level, Turkey decided to invest further in humanitarian diplomacy, which it institutionalized as a niche area.[38] This choice was in line with Turkey's aim of increasing its role both in the international hierarchy and in global governance.[39] Like all emerging powers, indeed, Turkey has adopted a status-seeking policy, identifying humanitarian diplomacy as a niche sector in which it can distinguish itself[40] and which provides an alternative narrative grounded in a common Islamic heritage.[41]

Ankara's deepening involvement in Somalia transformed the Turkish presence

in sub-Saharan Africa, embodying the adoption of a proactive unilateral approach towards regional political issues. Until then, Turkey had remained external to the political and security issues of the region, engaging only in multilateral initiatives such as anti-piracy and counterterrorism operations.[42] The initial phase of Turkish political engagement in Somalia focused almost entirely on aid and assistance to a population fatigued by 20 years of civil war and a number of famines. In the second phase, launched in 2014, Turkey's efforts followed a twofold direction. First, Turkish diplomacy, firmly convinced of the need to ensure the territorial integrity of Somalia, promoted dialogue between the internationally recognized Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the six federated states of the country, with particular concern for the two de facto states, Somaliland and Puntland.[43] Second, the Turkish state has supported the complex process of state- and institution-building by focusing on the security sector.[44]

Together with other extra-regional actors, such as Qatar and the UAE, Turkey has launched a series of initiatives aimed at the reconstruction of the Somali defence capacity. The long-term goal is for the FGS to achieve a sufficient level of self-reliance in security matters to reduce the presence of foreign troops on its soil, where the main threat is represented by the terrorist group Al-Shabaab. Turkey's contribution to the Somali cause has increased the spread of its brand not only on the continent but also internationally as a global player. The most interesting outcome, however, concerns the implementation in Somalia of an unusual intervention model in high-risk environments, characterized by a multistakeholder approach with top-down coordination on the ground by the state.[45] This

mechanism has allowed Turkey to develop an unconventional capacity-building approach and to establish a network of links through which trust can be built with local people. As a result, Turkey has been credited as a reliable political partner not only in Somalia but also in several other African states, such as Mali, Niger and Senegal. At the same time, the promotion of a Turkish formula for development—the so-called Ankara Consensus—is both an alternative approach to African sustainability problems and a useful political discourse to foster Turkish ambitions as an emerging global power.[46]

The promotion of the Ankara Consensus has brought Turkey to the attention of many African countries, long in search of an alternative to western and Chinese proposals.[47] At the same time, Turkish officials have adopted a sort of Turkish Third-Worldism, expressing harsh criticism of globalization as a new form of western colonialism and modern slavery.[48] However, statements with a significant media impact seem to be more strongly related to the current anti-western domestic political discourse rather than being grounded in deeply held beliefs. This discourse does not oppose the globalization process itself and its economic and financial effects, as the traditional post-Marxist wave of criticism did, but rather implies a broader and deep criticism of international governance. President Erdogan and Turkish senior diplomats base their ethical discourse in this area on the motto 'the world is greater than five (members of the Security Council)', which strongly resonates with African people. This narrative represents a radical critique of the status quo in the international system, inspired by the notions of global good and responsibility.

The years 2016–2017 marked another turning point in Turkish policy towards sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of domestic changes, two goals seemed to rise to the top of Turkish policies towards the continent. The first was action against the activities of the Gülen movement and its affiliated local groups; the second was rivalry with the Middle Eastern powers. In Africa, the Gülen organization had played a central role in Turkish policy since the late 1990s, through the opening of schools and other educational and cultural activities.[49] Throughout the following decade, using a multistakeholder approach, the movement was able to proliferate and create a tight network in many African countries.

Within the framework of its African agenda, the Turkish state decided to privatize public diplomacy to the Gülen movement and other NGOs (such as the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, Erenköy Cemaati and Süleymancilar), exploiting their ability to cultivate interpersonal relations.[50] Privatization implies outsourcing the implementation of the state's public diplomacy initiatives to private entities. However, the lack of institutionalized relations between the state and the private entities prevented the former from exercising control over the latters' activities, allowing them to develop their own agendas, which are sometimes in conflict with the state's interests. This weak point led to a complete rupture in 2014 in the form of the rift between the AKP and the Gülen movement, which had begun to act as an anti-state lobby in Africa and other regions. Accordingly, the conflict between the movement and the Turkish authorities had a profound impact on Turkish policy in Africa. The Turkish state had to counter Gülenist propaganda and, at the same time, set up alternative institutions (the

chief of which was the Maarif Foundation) that could replace the movement's activities.[51] Therefore, tackling Gülenist activities, perceived as a national security threat by the Turkish state, has become one of the priorities of Turkey's Africa policy and a determinant of its securitization.[52]

While the failed coup of 2016 was a turning point in Turkish domestic and foreign policy, as well as a factor in the shift to a more securitized approach towards the global South, regional competition has also played a part. Changes in regional security patterns between 2015 and 2020 have affected the nature of the Turkish presence in sub-Saharan Africa. The Saudi-led military intervention in Yemen, and the subsequent rift within the Gulf Cooperation Council leading to the emergence of a faction—the so-called Arab Quartet—opposed to Qatar, a Turkish ally even in Africa, have given Turkey's presence in Somalia a greater geostrategic significance.[53]

Somalia has become another battleground of political rivalry between opposing alliances. Evidence of this has been the choice of the Dubai-owned company DP World to invest in the port of Berbera in Somaliland.[54] Although the decision was linked to strategic concerns about control of the Red Sea and developments in Yemen, the trilateral agreement signed by the Emirati group, Ethiopia and the regional government of Hargeisa has undermined the authority of Mogadishu, indirectly hitting its two main backers: Ankara and Doha. The Turkish presence in Somalia has assumed a greater security dimension since Ankara's decision in 2017 to open a training facility in Mogadishu.[55] Although the base is formally and legally a military facility for the training of the Somali National Army (SNA),[56]

in practice it is a fully fledged Turkish military outpost in the region. Nevertheless, the symbolic nature of this military structure, as well as the potential it gives Turkey to project its power in the area or potentially to use SNA troops in missions and operations aligned with Turkish interests in the region, has the effect of making the 'base' a potential threat to the interests of its rivals.[57]

Sub-Saharan Africa, however, is no longer a priority on the Turkish foreign policy agenda. Although the Red Sea and Libya have increasingly become an arena for Middle Eastern power competition, Turkey seems to be adopting an increasingly prudent approach. Moreover, like all Turkish foreign policy, the African agenda has become increasingly subservient to the AKP's domestic interests. The increasing importance accorded to the security dimension has reduced the role of soft power instruments in Turkey's African agenda. However, Turkey is still investing resources in the educational and humanitarian sectors in a few countries considered strategically relevant, such as Somalia and Sudan. Meanwhile, Turkey has redirected part of its resources to other regions of the continent such as western and south-eastern Africa.[58]

Latin America: shifting priorities and regional partners

The intensity of the Turkish presence in Latin America is not as high as in sub-Saharan Africa, although ties have increased in the past two decades. Turkish soap operas have become a global trend, which fully arrived in Latin America in the 2010s. Millions of viewers witnessed Turkish family and social life in *Binbir Gece* (1,001

Nights) and *Fatmagül'ün Suçu Ne?* (Fatmagül) and saw the roots of Turkish nationalism with *Diriliş: Ertuğrul* (Resurrection: Ertugrul). The widespread success of such shows created a flow of tourists from Latin America, reinforcing Turkish Airlines' plans to open new routes linking Istanbul to the region. As part of its ambitious business model, Turkish Airlines opened the first route, linking the Eurasian country with Buenos Aires and São Paulo, in 2012. In subsequent years, it opened three additional routes, linking Istanbul with Havana and Caracas; Bogotá and Panama; and Mexico City and Cancún. Turkish policy towards the region, however, was not defined only by soap operas, tourism and international flights, even though these channels offered an unprecedented diffusion of Turkey's cultural and historical heritage.

The expansion of Turkish Airlines was also representative of Ankara's growing economic interests in Latin America, where Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Argentina have become Turkey's main trade and investment partners. Turkish imports from Latin America as a whole jumped from around US$3.5 billion in 2010 to 8.5 billion in 2018, while exports doubled in the same period, reaching US$3.2 billion.[59] Another interesting element in the relationship is the growing number of Turkish companies investing in the region. Up to the mid-2000s, Kordsa—a Sabanci Holding subsidiary—was the only company from Turkey investing in Latin America, but nowadays more than 20 Turkish companies operate in the region, mostly in the automotive, mining and transportation sectors.

Erdogan's late approach to the region involved increased support for Turkish businesses' plans to trade and invest, a surprising affinity with Venezuela, fuelled

by a common anti-US and anti-western discourse after the failed military coup in 2016, and a diplomatic agenda that increasingly prioritizes weakening the influence of the Gülen network.

However, domestic priorities related to struggles within Turkey and its neighbourhood have muddied the political and diplomatic waters. Latin American countries pay particular attention to extraregional powers' global networks, especially their relationships with the United States, the European Union and the United Kingdom. If these emerging powers have positive relations with western countries—especially the United States and the core EU nations—that eases their interactions with Latin American countries. This is because of the constraints placed by the international power structure and traditional diplomatic patterns on the collective and individual agency of Latin American countries.[60] The same applies to human rights and democracy records. Most Latin American countries are cautious about developing relations with countries that are viewed as having dubious records in these areas, such as Iran, in order to avoid possible internal criticism and international retaliation. Turkey has not reached Iranian levels of controversy, but the democratic backsliding and troubled relations with Washington and Brussels have made the country less attractive in Latin American diplomatic circles, especially in the light of Ankara's increasingly friendly relations with Nicolás Maduro's Venezuela.

In this context, Turkish interactions with Latin America, especially at a senior political level, are no longer viewed exclusively as a win–win relationship, although economic cooperation has continued to make progress. Between the mid-2000s

and early 2010s, the agenda was basically trade-oriented, and Brazil was identified as Turkey's main like-minded regional partner, in a relationship which developed through the signature of the 'Action Plan for a Strategic Partnership' and the tripartite nuclear deal with Iran.[61] However, after this period Turkey's regional policy changed in three key ways: in terms of priorities, partners and narratives.

First, the fight against terrorism (especially against Gülen's FETÖ, the PKK and ISIS) has risen to the top of the Turkish agenda, against the background of a range of active regional conflicts. This has caused a split in Turkey's priorities in Latin America, generating something of a hybrid approach to the region. On the one hand, Latin America was pointed to as a 'new base of the Gülenist Terror Group (FETÖ)',[62] as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs looked for political support after the attempted coup.[63] On the other hand, although Ankara's political priorities have changed, Latin America is still both geographically and politically distant from the turmoil surrounding Turkey. With the exception of Argentina, Mexico and Uruguay, which have significant Armenian communities, there are no anti-Turkish lobbies in the region. Furthermore, Latin American countries do not have direct stakes in the increasing number of conflicts in which Turkey is involved, for exam- ple in Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and Syria, beyond supporting general principles of territorial integrity, non-intervention and peaceful dispute resolution.

Second, the AKP's major regional partner—Brazil—entered a major economic and political crisis, suffering a relative decline which halted its rise towards becoming a global power,[64] just as Turkey entered a period of 'precious loneli-

ness'.[65] On the bilateral side, there were no high-level meetings in the period 2013–2018, and in 2015 Brazil's Federal Senate unanimously approved the 'Motion of Solidarity with the Armenian people during the course of the centenary of the campaign of extermination of its population'.[66] Facing this void, Turkey tried unsuccessfully to get closer to the countries of the Pacific Alliance—particularly Mexico under President Peña Nieto—and later, after the failed coup of 2016, began to look favourably on Venezuela, not least because of western pressure against the Maduro government and some political affinities between the two nations. This is not to say that Turkey pursued a passive policy, but rather that it was centred on Erdogan's agenda. For example, between 2015 and 2020, the Turkish president visited Latin America more often than any previous high-ranking Turkish member of government. A series of presidential tours included visits to Mexico, Colombia and Cuba in 2015, to Chile, Peru and Ecuador in 2016, and to Venezuela, Argentina and Paraguay in 2018, on top of previous visits as prime minister in the 2000s to Brazil and Chile. At the same time, TIKA opened regional coordination offices in Mexico City (2015) and Bogotá (2016), while the Latin American and Caribbean office of the Anadolu Agency was also opened in Bogotá (2017).

Third, narratives were heavily affected from the mid-2010s. Every Turkish institution has suffered from the country's turn away from a narrative centred on soft power to a different approach related to Ankara's changing political and regional context and linked to growing ties with Russia, which have created new difficulties in dealing with Washington and Brussels.[67]

New avenues of global South cooperation have also emerged in strategic areas such as satellite technology and collaboration in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. However, political affinities based on anti-western/anti-American sentiments encouraged grey zone operations to avoid US sanctions and led to some non-transparent business dealings, which started to undermine Turkey's soft power attractiveness among both western and Latin American audiences. Two cases are particularly interesting concerning Turkey's changing regional agenda: Argentina and Venezuela.

Buenos Aires has been relatively resistant to the AKP's active diplomacy, showing more continuity in a relatively cold bilateral relation. In the 1990s, during the Menem administration, Argentina was a key partner in Turkey's regional policy. However, from the mid-2000s bilateral relations between Argentina and Turkey came under strain after the Argentinian parliament passed a bill recognizing the massacres of Armenians living under Ottoman rule as 'the Armenian genocide'. The decision was strongly criticized by the AKP government, which decided unilaterally to freeze relations for a couple of years. Even worse, a day before the first official visit of a Turkish prime minister to Argentina in 2009, prearranged to normalize relations, the government of the City of Buenos Aires decided to suspend the inauguration of a bust of Kemal Atatürk—the founder of modern Turkey—because of pressure from the powerful local Armenian community. Erdogan cancelled the visit unilaterally and continued his journey to Chile.

A couple of years later the then president of Argentina, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, tried to mend relations, visiting Turkey with a delegation of impor-

tant business figures, but with little effect. Despite the widening political gap between the two nations, the trade and economic agenda kept moving normally—for example, with the opening of the Turkish Airlines route—until Argentina imposed import restrictions during Kirchner's second term. As a consequence, Buenos Aires became less attractive for Turkish businessmen and officials, and the only large Turkish company there—Kordsa—decided to move its operations to Brazil.

Relations remained at a low ebb until 2015, when the administration of President Mauricio Macri eliminated the trade restrictions. During the period since then, the relationship between Turkey and Argentina has been characterized by ups and downs. On the one side, commercial flows were normalized and—as a key milestone in their bilateral relations—Buenos Aires and Ankara increased their cooperation with the signature of an agreement in early 2019 to develop a joint geostationary satellite. Also, Erdogan participated constructively in the G20 meeting in Buenos Aires in 2018, where he openly supported Argentina's bid for OECD membership.[68] On the other, the priorities of the Turkish agenda found little resonance with the Argentinian authorities. Buenos Aires's official reaction to the failed coup in 2016 was not positively received by the Turkish authorities: Argentina merely released a statement—on the same day—calling for a 'peaceful and constitutional resolution of the development in Turkey', without naming the failed coup, and also referring to human rights concerns.[69] Months later, in the first high-level encounter between Macri and Erdogan, at the 2016 G20 meeting in Hangzhou, the Turkish leader asked his counterpart to combat the 'FETÖ

networks'.[70] A similar request was made emphatically by the foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoglu, during an official visit in January 2017,[71] but again without generating much response from the Argentinian government.

In the case of Venezuela, there has been a clear breaking point—in contrast to the uneasy and fluctuating relationship with Argentina. Ever since the Bolivarian revolution, Ankara has been cautious about showing open support for the populist leader Hugo Chávez. For almost a decade and a half, despite international activism and open support for the Palestinian cause from both sides, there was no high-level meeting between the Venezuelan president and Erdogan. This changed with the coup attempt of 2016. The government of Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, rapidly issued a statement condemning the bloody episode, and later the Venezuelan leader drew parallels with his own country.[72] From then on, relations began to blossom. Maduro visited Turkey four times, and Erdogan paid a visit in 2018, prior to the G20 meeting in Buenos Aires. The two countries concluded agreements on a broad range of issues, including agricultural exchanges, defence and security cooperation, trade, culture, and the development of health infrastructure, including the construction of a new hospital and the provision from Turkey to Venezuela of COVID-19 supplies such as ventilators, PCR testing kits, facial masks and biosecurity suits, among other things.[73] Venezuela became the centre of a Turkish network of gold trade and investments in the 'Arco del Orinoco', which peaked in 2018 with around US$900 million of gold imports from Venezuela. At the same time, Maduro did not hesitate to take over two schools linked to the Fethullah network in Venezuela and hand them over to the Maarif Foundation.

The impressive expansion of Turkish interests in Caracas is just another expres- sion of Ankara's increasingly strained relations with the West, as US–Turkish relations deteriorated both bilaterally, owing to clashing perspectives on a wide range of issues—including the Pastor Brunson affair,[74] the problems related to the extradition of Fethullah Gülen and Turkey's increasing defence cooperation with Russia—and regionally, especially regarding American collaboration with the YPG's Syrian Kurds in fighting ISIS.[75] International isolation and a common anti-US/anti-western rhetoric brought about an accelerated *rapprochement* between the two leaders,[76] although the basis for further partnership remains uncertain. On the one hand, Ankara's involvement seems to be reactive and short-sighted; and in the past two years there has been some rowing back on commitments owing to a fear of international sanctions: examples include the large-scale importation of gold and the withdrawal of the provision of services from Turkey's Ziraat Bank to Venezuela's Central Bank.[77] Nevertheless, relations with Caracas represent the leading Latin American case in which the failed coup of 2016 altered Ankara's previous regional foreign policy.

Conclusions

The Southern dimension of Turkish foreign policy is representative of the AKP's changing approaches internationally. The global South experienced a peak of Turkish interest during the first decade of AKP rule, when trading-state logic and the use of soft power tools drove a rapid increase in political, economic and

even cultural relations. Instability around Turkey's borders and democratic backsliding, however, have progressively reduced the significance of the global South on the Turkish political agenda. As a result, regions such as Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa, which have low economic relevance for Turkey and are of limited interest to the Turkish public, have become more peripheral, despite increases in exports and investments. Notwithstanding the recent slowdown of its economic performance, Turkey still aspires to compete with major global economies, particularly the BRICS countries; and to fuel growth, it needs foreign investment. Accordingly, Turkey will probably seek to increase its ties with traditional western economic powers and rising Asian ones, especially China, thereby relegating Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa to a marginal role in the coming years.

However, the global South still has a place in the Turkish foreign policy narrative, for three reasons, each of which is intertwined with domestic politics: the exploitation of anti-western rhetoric by President Erdogan; the advancement of the domestic security agenda; and the exploration of economic opportunities.

Notwithstanding this domestic focus, one point to consider is that the Turkish agenda in Africa has not developed dependency relationships but has sought to establish cooperative or even partnership ways of working. As a result, many of the bonds established by Turkey with African countries in recent years may be maintained even in the face of a drastic reduction in resources allocated to the continent. Similar arguments can be presented regarding Latin America: even as the agenda becomes less intensely focused on economic issues, the political and

economic ties developed during these past years will probably remain intact. Turkey's domestic and external choices have been driven by the need to deploy its resources in crisis scenarios closer to its borders and in more relevant areas of its national security and economy. In the meantime, the Turkish economy, which even before the COVID-19 crisis was showing several weaknesses, will face an inevitable backlash, exacerbated by the military campaign in Syria and, to a lesser extent, involvements in Libya and Nagorno-Karabakh. The future of Turkey's foreign policy, in turn, will probably be determined by the resilience of the Turkish economy. A slow recovery in production and exports will compel the Turkish state to reallocate resources, reducing investment in hard power and, to a higher degree, in humanitarian diplomacy and development aid. Therefore, it is to be expected that there may be a progressive downsizing of Turkey's global projection, with a consequent refocusing of its resources in its own neighbourhood.

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