

ANKARA DECLARATION: ROLE OF TURKIYE IN AFRICA

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Marking a significant transformation in East Africa's geopolitical dynamics, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan held a meeting with Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud in Ankara on December 11, 2024, demonstrating Turkiye's increasing role as a key diplomatic player in Africa¹. Following almost seven hours of discussions, the outcome document -- "Ankara Declaration" -- appeared to achieve notable success in resolving the dispute of Ethiopia's unexpected Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Somaliland, the self-declared republic in Somalia, in January 2024.² According to the January 2024 MoU, Ethiopia planned to secure commercial access and establish a naval base at Somaliland's strategically important Berbera port on the Red Sea, based upon Ethiopia's recognition of Somaliland as a sovereign state.³

1 "What Ankara Declaration means for Türkiye's relations with Africa?" Anadolu Agency, December 16, 2024. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/opinion/opinion-what-ankara-declaration-means-for-turkiye-s-relations-with-africa/3425738>

2 "Africa File Special Edition: Ankara Declaration Reduces Ethiopia-Somalia Tensions but Leaves Issues Unresolved." Institute for the Study of War, December 18, 2024. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounders/africa-file-special-edition-ankara-declaration-reduces-ethiopia-somalia-tensions-leaves>.

3 "Relations between Turkey and Somalia", Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, December 12, 2024. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/relations-between-turkey-and-somalia.en.mfa>.

Tensions further intensified as the land-locked Ethiopia pursued access to maritime routes, while Somalia expressed concerns regarding the potential violation of its sovereignty over Somaliland, which is internationally recognized as part of its territorial boundaries. The situation has raised concerns regarding potential conflict, particularly in light of Egypt's deployment of approximately 5,000 troops and the provision of weapons to Somalia, subsequent to a defence agreement established in August, which was intended to serve as a deterrent to Ethiopia.

This highlights the necessity for mediation, exemplified by Turkiye's proactive diplomatic efforts, which began with an initial round of discussions in early July 2024, followed by a second round in August, with the objective of resolving the underlying disagreements between both parties. The initial phase, characterized by "shuttle diplomacy," involved President Erdogan engaging in individual discussions with his Ethiopian and Somali counterparts. Ultimately, these negotiations progressed to the point of convening both leaders in a joint meeting, representing a more effective approach to diplomacy as opposed to imposing a predetermined solution.⁴

As a result of the meeting, Ethiopia has consented to recognize Somalia's territorial integrity in return for securing commercial access to the Somali coastline. A subsequent series of discussions are scheduled for February 2025 to reinforce these initiatives, which will include a technical delegation tasked with outlining the mechanisms through which Ethiopia will secure equitable access to maritime resources while upholding the sovereignty of Somalia.

Turkiye's strategic role in Africa diplomacy

The "Ankara Declaration" aims to bolster Turkiye's interests through the protection of its investments and diplomatic ties with Ethiopia and Somalia, thus solidifying Ankara's role as a prominent international powerbroker and a crucial participant in the broader Red Sea region.⁵ Turkiye's strong relationships with both Ethiopia and Somalia have enabled it to play a pivotal role in facilitating the "Ankara Declaration". Since 2011, there has been a consistent expansion of these ties, initiated by Ankara's significant humanitarian aid to Somalia during a catastrophic famine. The relations further enhanced in 2017 with the establishment of the military facility in Mogadishu, known as TurkSom, aimed at training Somali forces, specifically to combat groups like al-Shabaab, which have been a

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Türkiye Pushes for Diplomatic, Economic Influence in Africa." *Daily Sabah*, December 17, 2024. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-pushes-for-diplomatic-economic-influence-in-africa>.

persistent threat causing instability in Somalia. Now President Erdogan will visit Somalia and Ethiopia in early 2025.⁶

This growing engagement indicates Turkiye's strategy of cultivating equitable connections in the region. In contemporary era, Turkiye has strategically positioned itself to address a significant gap particularly left by the western powers and the United States and China, which have historically played a pivotal role in Africa, have decreased their involvement in the Continent's conflicts.

Furthermore, the "Ankara Declaration" has significantly bolstered Turkiye's standing as a diplomatic entity on the global stage. This is demonstrated by commendations from the U.S., the United Kingdom, Germany, the United Nations, and other international actors regarding its diplomatic initiatives aimed at resolving the Ethiopia-Somalia conflict.⁷ Considering the confidence in Ankara's mediatory abilities, Western nations that aim to interact with the Horn of Africa in the future may perceive Turkiye as an essential conduit for cooperation.

What next for Turkiye in Africa?

As President Erdogan is set to visit both nations in early 2025, Ankara will continue to strengthen its relations with Ethiopia and Somalia. Along with this, the African Union's support of the "Ankara Declaration" would enhance confidence in Turkiye's mediatory role throughout the African Continent, particularly in critical regions such as Libya and Sudan. In addition to mediation, Turkiye is focused on trade and investment initiatives in the Continent.

Initially, Turkiye largely was focused on the Horn of Africa, but now it has extended its engagement throughout the Continent by establishing relations with West African countries like Nigeria and Senegal, as well as in the Sahel region. It is also regarded as a dependable partner in several investment initiatives, particularly in infrastructure. In 2023, for example, Turkish workers participated in construction projects worth around \$85.5 billion, including airports, hospitals, railroads, and residential developments, as reported by the Trade Ministry of Turkiye. Collectively, these initiatives have fortified Ankara's interface across the Continent.⁸ Turkiye's multifaceted diplomatic approach

6 "Erdogan to Visit Ethiopia, Somalia in Early 2025 after Landmark Deal." *Daily Sabah*, December 18, 2024. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-to-visit-ethiopia-somalia-in-early-2025-after-landmark-deal>.

7 "The United States Welcomes the Ankara Declaration by Ethiopia and Somalia." *U.S. Department of State*, December 20, 2024. <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-welcomes-the-ankara-declaration-by-ethiopia-and-somalia/>.

8 Türkiye Pushes for Diplomatic, Economic Influence in Africa." *Daily Sabah*, December 17, 2024. <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkiye-pushes-for-diplomatic-economic-influence-in-africa>.

positions it to further deepen its collaboration with Africa, paving the way for a potentially transformative role.