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TÜRKIYE'S COUNTER-TERRORISM STRATEGY IN AFRICA: A REGIONAL INSTITUTIONALISED GOVERNANCE OF FOREIGN POLICY IN THE LIGHT OF GLOBAL POWER COMPETITIONS

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Abstract

Türkiye's African counter-terrorism policy is one of the key instruments of its foreign policy in a post-Cold War multipolar world that has been conceptualised in terms of "regional leadership" in its quest for status on the world political scene. A multidirectional and multidimensional strategy, combining hard and soft power, has thus been embarked upon in a new drive for institutionalised long-term relations through regional and sub-regional governance within the framework of the African Union. The main objective of this study was, therefore, to explore the institutionalised regional governance of Turkish foreign policy and to understand and identify the variables that determine its counter-terrorism strategy in Africa in the context of competition between global powers. Indeed, Turkish counter-terrorism diplomacy is committed to building enhanced institutional bonds with African countries as an important component of its security foreign policy cooperation, which, on one hand, reflects a backdrop of continuing instability on the continent caused by the growing transnational terrorist threat from jihadist groups affiliated to al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. On the other hand, Türkiye's growing security footprint in Africa as a key player, asserting an increasingly active position, is rooted in a perspective of regional rivalry with the rise of emerging countries and the global south as the main alternative adversaries of the West in a region of geostrategic importance for the world's major powers.

Keywords

Turkish Foreign Policy, Counter-Terrorism Strategy, Regional Institutionalised Governance, African Union, Global Power Competitions.

Resumo

A política antiterrorista da Turquia em África é um dos instrumentos fundamentais da sua política externa num mundo multipolar pós-Guerra Fria, que foi concebida em termos de «liderança regional» na busca por estatuto na cena política mundial. Uma estratégia multidirecional e multidimensional, combinando *hard* e *soft power*, foi assim empreendida numa nova iniciativa para relações institucionalizadas de longo prazo através da governação regional e sub-regional no âmbito da União Africana. O principal objetivo deste estudo foi, portanto, explorar a governação regional institucionalizada da política externa turca e compreender e identificar as variáveis que determinam a sua estratégia antiterrorista em África no contexto da competição entre potências globais. A diplomacia antiterrorista turca

está empenhada em construir laços institucionais reforçados com os países africanos como uma componente importante da sua cooperação em matéria de política externa de segurança, o que, por um lado, reflete um contexto de instabilidade contínua no continente causada pela crescente ameaça terrorista transnacional de grupos jihadistas afiliados à Al-Qaeda e ao Estado Islâmico. Por outro lado, a crescente presença da Turquia em África como um ator-chave, afirmando uma posição cada vez mais ativa, está enraizada numa perspetiva de rivalidade regional com a ascensão dos países emergentes e do sul global como os principais adversários alternativos do Ocidente numa região de importância geoestratégica para as principais potências mundiais.

Palavras-chave

How to cite this article

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Introduction

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power in 2003; Türkiye's foreign policy (TFP) has been completely redefined to enable Africa to become a key partner in the global geopolitical arena. As an emerging power, Türkiye has significantly expanded its influence in political, cultural, economic, and military domains, leveraging both hard and soft power through diplomatic, humanitarian, and religious activism involving anti-jihadist operations. Simultaneously, Türkiye has embarked on a dynamic and proactive 'third way' partnership process, which constitutes an alternative model of cooperation to that of the main traditional partners on the African continent (Toulemonde, 2023). The article, therefore, focuses on Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa as institutionalised regional governance of foreign policy in light of global rivalries between major powers. In this regard, Turkish African policy is a double game between national experiences and international cooperation policies in the fight against terrorism, namely the role of Turkish foreign policy as an influential regional actor in Africa and an emerging power, which has resulted in enhanced cooperation at the sub-regional, trans-regional and international levels in the fight against terrorism.

The analysis attempts to answer a crucial question on Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategies towards Africa as an emerging power to prevent jihadist threats through regional and international institutional architectures in the context of competition between major powers. In a way, this study seeks to provide satisfactory answers to the main guiding questions:

What are the main characteristics of Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategies in Africa as a cornerstone of its foreign policy in light of global power competitions?

How does Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa align with the framework of regional institutional governance?

What are the challenges and limitations of Türkiye's counter-terrorism policy in Africa?

The underlying hypotheses that will be tested throughout the study focus on the common thread of the interdependent variables that analyse the decision-making process in Turkish anti-terrorist policies in Africa as a component of its foreign and security policy during the period following the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), through strategies mixing hard and soft measures. Mainly explained by its national and international

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December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of
Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

experience, this has resulted in a new institutionalised governance engineering in the fight against terrorism, with the strengthening of regional and international cooperation in a context of competition between major powers.

The study focuses on a triangular process mainly based on the description, explanation and analysis of various Turkish anti-terrorism policies in Africa within the framework of the interrelation of hard and soft strategies. In addition, the article was supported by a theoretical "intermestic approach" that reflects the overlap between national imperatives and international dynamics in the era of globalisation (Kurniawati, 2017, p.147), where foreign policy in general and counter-terrorism cooperation in particular are halfway between the local and the global.

The research is inevitably interdisciplinary and strengthened by literature in the fields of foreign policy, security studies and counter-terrorism, as well as political science and international relations. The study will focus on Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa within the framework of institutionalised regional governance of foreign policy; thus, the analysis was consolidated by exploring primary sources and secondary research data (Ajayi, 2025, p.1) with key publications such as reports, journals, articles, and academic works.

The objective of this study is to analyse the various determinants of Turkish foreign policy towards Africa, namely to refine the understanding of Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategies based on an integrated overview that includes soft and hard measures, as well as the actors, factors and institutions that influence its main orientations, particularly within the framework of the African Union. Meanwhile, the article aims to identify the key elements of regional and international cooperation between Türkiye and Africa in the fight against terrorism in the context of rising geostrategic rivalry between the major powers. However, the study is not limited to an analysis of Türkiye's counter-terrorism policies in Africa but also examines the current regional context of the hybrid jihadist threat, thereby enabling a 'holistic approach' that includes non-traditional aspects of coordination and cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

The study methodology will provide a privileged perspective for analysis, primarily through a systemic approach, describing the complexity and explaining the interactions between the various components (Belleville, 2019) and factors that have strongly impacted Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in the African porous environment characterised by the spread of jihadist networks (inputs) and the dynamics of a multidimensional set of interacting actors of anti-terrorism at the national and regional levels (outputs), then cooperation policies of anti-terrorism under institutionalised governance as feedback in light of global power competitions. Indeed, Turkish hard power and security cooperation in Africa have seen increased engagement, particularly in counter-terrorism operations through military and defence commitments, defence agreements, drone diplomacy, military footholds via training facilities intended to bolster the struggle against terrorism, and the deployment of private military mercenaries to tackle the security threats posed by transnational terrorism (Kamal, 2025). This trend is apparent in factual data concerning Türkiye's defence and aerospace exports in 2023, reaching an unprecedented peak of $5.5 billion, showing a 27% surge for Turkish drones, which have emerged as specialised instruments in combating terrorism when confronted

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Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

by rebellious jihadist groups, particularly in countries such as Togo, Niger, Nigeria, and Somalia (ADF, 2024). Alongside the militarised and securitised approach of Türkiye's foreign policy in Africa regarding counter-terrorism, soft power has been employed (Oğuzlu, 2007, p.92), notably via structured humanitarian diplomacy with the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). This agency has grown into a vital actor in charitable assistance and development projects, economic and technical partnerships with African nations within the educational sphere, and infrastructure projects, particularly in Somalia (Haşimi, 2014, p.135-136), thereby enhancing abilities to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism.

The article is organised as follows. First, it is devoted to understanding the Turkish foreign policy as an emerging power in global politics. Then it examines Türkiye's Africa policy roadmap endowed with a new dynamic perception of a hegemonic regional power. After that, Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa has been highlighted in particular through the regional institutional governance and the double game of hard and soft approaches. Finally, the study evaluated the main challenges and limits of the Turkish counter-terrorism policy, including the spread of a continuum of transnational terrorist threats and the global power rivalries.

The Turkish Foreign Policy: A Projection of an Emerging Power in Global Politics
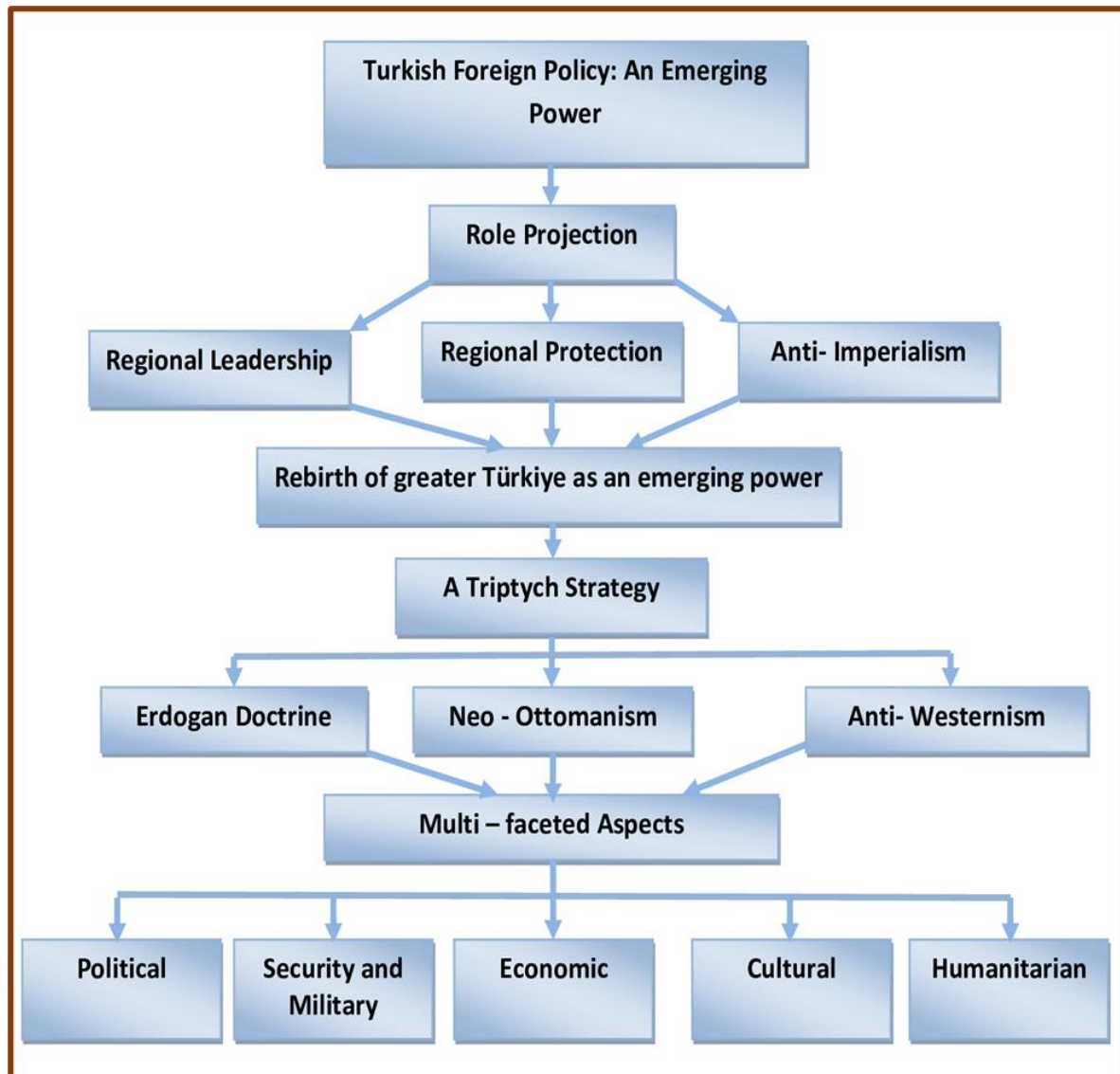
The growing influence of emerging powers in international affairs in shaping the new world order is closely linked to the declining role of existing international organisations and Western diplomatic interventions; these are opening the door to new actors, mostly emerging powers, notably Türkiye, which is leading changes within the international system as a key regional player (Islam, 2024). Türkiye's leaders are aspiring not only to become a 'regional power' but also a global player. Türkiye has therefore sought to consolidate its role as a 'rising power' by leveraging its influence in its immediate geographical neighbourhood and beyond by engaging with other emerging powers on the one hand and with global and regional organisations on the other (Gürzel, 2014). Indeed, conceptions of the national roles (CRN) in Turkish foreign policy are based on the decisions, commitments, rules and actions that the country constantly has to exercise in the international arena and in the regional systems subordinate to it, in particular the role of 'balancing' between the power blocs, that will enable it to preserve its autonomy in an international context characterised by competition between the great powers. Conversely, on the domestic level, there is a consensus between the elites and the structures of decision-making on the national roles, both vertically (between the elites and the masses) and horizontally (between the elites), in the process of implementing a proactive and efficient foreign policy (Cantir, 2012).

Türkiye's growing role as a regional power has been enhanced since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) gained power. Thus, the elite and decision-makers in Turkish foreign policy have formulated and maintained conceptions of self-identification with the coherent roles of the categories of 'regional leader', 'regional protector' and 'collaborator in the world system' (Aras, 2010). However, the architecture of Turkish foreign policy revolving around the projection of an emerging power in world politics is undeniably

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December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

carried out under Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. As a result, Türkiye's foreign policy has been marked by neo-Ottoman rhetoric and anti-Western discourse, with an Islamic connotation that uses identity as a vehicle for achieving pragmatic foreign policy objectives and the national interest (Hazır, 2022). This is constructed within the framework of a unique perception of Turkish identity in light of globalisation, taking into account the reality of the Turkish model, which has a democratic experience as a Muslim country (Arı, 2009) in an extremely volatile national and international context, particularly in Africa. (See Diagram 1 drawn up by the author)
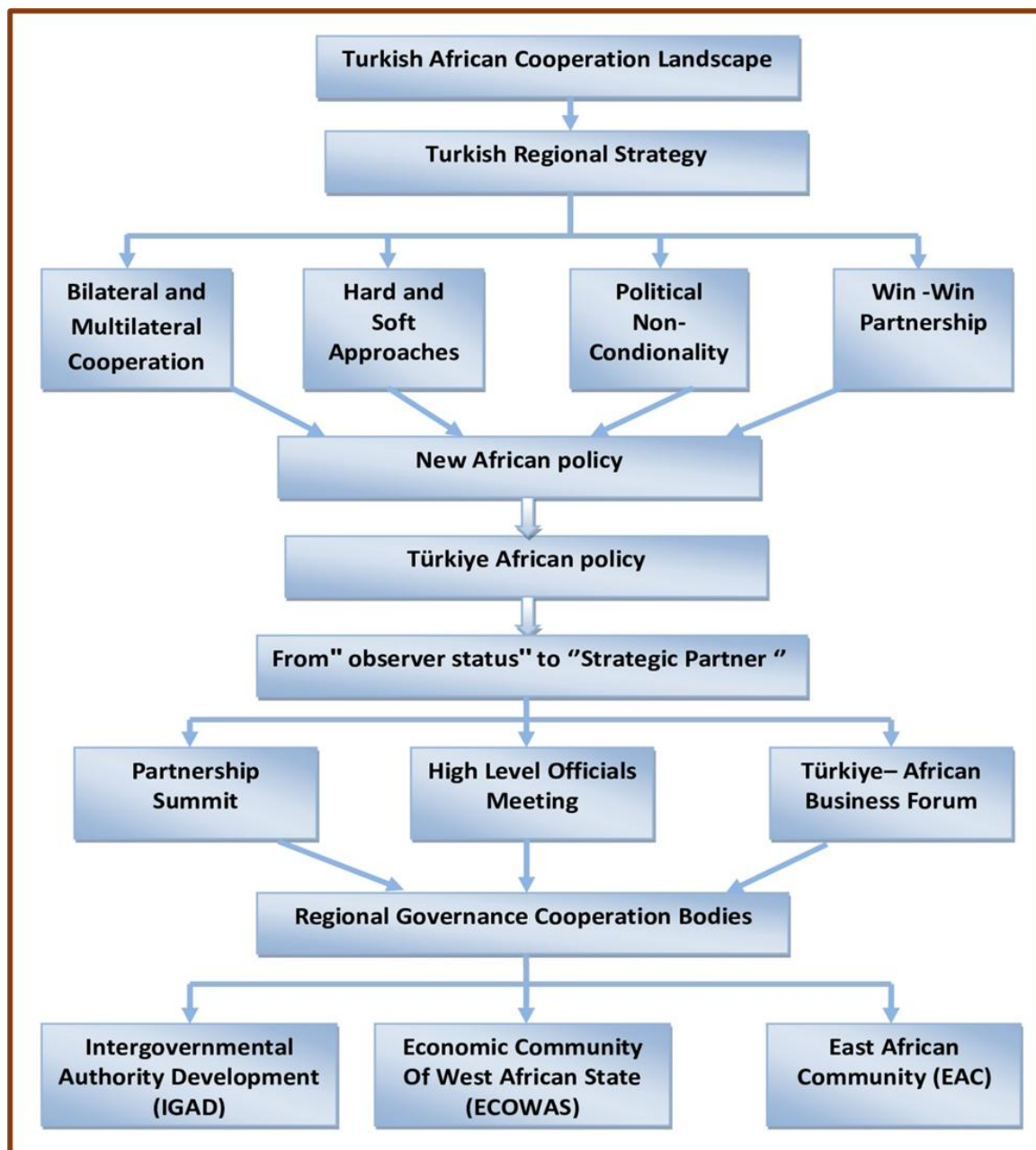
Diagram 1

Source: Author

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Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

Türkiye's Africa policy: A New Hegemonic Regional Power

The roadmap for the role of Turkish foreign policy in the post-Cold War era has been endowed with a new dynamic vision of 'historical geography' designed to considerably intensify Türkiye's ties with Africa, a continent to which traditional foreign policy had not accorded a sufficiently high profile. In this context, a new repositioning of the foreign policy structure was initiated with the 'Action Plan for Opening to Africa' in 1998, which plays a founding role in Türkiye's African policy, with the characterisation of different perceptions of roles in the African regional system that include 'developer', 'faithful ally', 'defender of the faith', and 'anti-imperialist' (Öztürk, 2023). Türkiye's policy towards Africa is one of the main tools of its foreign policy in the pursuit of its role as a global power. Relations between African countries have been established since the Ottoman Empire and have been strengthened by modern Türkiye, which has established a complex network of political, military and economic linkages with Africa. Turkish-African relations have been pushed to the top of the political agenda under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; hence, Türkiye has considerably strengthened its ties with the African continent through a two-pronged strategy. Firstly, with a 'diplomatic blitz', the number of Turkish embassies has risen from 12 in 1998 to 44 by 2024, particularly in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea. Therefore, The concept of an 'Afro-Eurasian' nation has also been materialised, led by a leadership built around a symbolic image of 'Erdogan the African', championing 'Neo-Third Worldism', a notion present in Turkish African rhetoric, and adding to this another considerable asset: African countries with a Muslim majority, where traditions, Islam and progress are compatible (Slaski, 2023).

Relations between Türkiye and Africa have been shaped by a dual strategy: on the one hand, they rely on a multitude of actors, including government bodies, private sector companies, and faith-based groups. This was complemented by soft power: humanitarian aid, education and cultural initiatives, then shifted to the hard power of partnership, while positioning itself not only as a defender of African aspirations but also as a viable alternative to traditional powers such as China and Western countries (Nogueira Pinto, 2024). Thus, the main concern of Turkish foreign policy as a new emerging power with hegemonic aspirations is to discredit its rivals in Africa by taking advantage of the emergence of anti-Western sentiment, proposing other forms of cooperation based on non-interference, territorial integrity and political non-conditionality (Touazi, 2025). Türkiye's strategic ambitions have been shaped by different schools of thought since the end of the Cold War, namely the Islamist strategic vision of the AKP, the secular nationalist, and the Eurasian school of thought, all of which are merged to support the projection of Turkish power, tinged with an ideological dimension linked to the geopolitical rivalry for leadership of the Sunni Muslim world and beyond. In so doing, Türkiye's African policy is shaped by a multifaceted lure for regional hegemony with strong geostrategic ambitions, including the Middle East and then North Africa, before extending to the whole continent. Emphasis has therefore been placed on the instruments of soft and hard power to project Turkish influence (Young, 2020).

Diagram 2

Source: Author

In terms of institutional cooperation architecture, Türkiye's relations with the African Union (AU) have undergone a major transformation since the conversion of its role from that of a guest country in 2002 to observer status within the African Union in 2005 and then to a strategic partner in 2008. However, Türkiye coordinates closely with the African Union Commission through meetings and summits of high-level officials with a view to implementing a new model of partnership and intergovernmental cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (a), 2022), prioritising enhanced collaboration on current issues in the

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December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

global arena and on the regional scene, in particular peace, security, governance and justice; this was particularly with the adoption of a joint action plan for the period 2022-2026 (Ergocun, 2021). Meanwhile, within the framework of regional integration organisations, Türkiye's new African policy has been reshaped in line with the geopolitical landscape towards multidimensional cooperation and partnerships, particularly with East Africa, as well as with a policy of institutionalised regionalisation driven by regional bodies such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African Community (EAC) (Eshete, 2024), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS). Türkiye's new policy towards Africa has surpassed the sole prerogative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to include non-state actors, business organisations and other semi-structured institutions, where sub-regional bodies are playing a pivotal role in the political dynamics in Africa. On one hand, the economic and trade relations are sustained through the Turkish-African Business Association (TABA) and the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEİK). On the other hand, within the framework of the development and humanitarian activities, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TIKA) prioritises a human cooperative approach with the African continent (Ngwa, 2020). (See Diagram 2 drawn up by the author).

Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutional Governance

Anti-terrorism has become a priority on Türkiye's foreign policy agenda in Africa as part of regionalised institutional governance, reflecting Türkiye's internal security imperatives and the need to increase a multi-dimensional cooperation strategy at the international level to address the threat of transnational terrorism with the rise of local regional affiliates of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Africa in a context of competition between major powers.

Anti-terrorism at the heart of Türkiye's foreign policy priorities in Africa

Traditional counter-terrorism efforts at the regional and international levels have been based primarily on the military and security aspects. In contrast, postmodern policies primarily emphasise cooperative efforts that involve bilateral and multilateral diplomacy among governments to address the nature of terrorism that crosses international borders; consequently, the counter-terrorism preoccupation has become the top agenda of foreign policy (Rogers, 2008). Meanwhile, counter-terrorism has been integrated into the policies of the strategic agenda, including the internal and external dimensions; in this sense, the terrorist threat has transformed the political priorities (Galli, 2008). That's why counter-terrorism practices are based on a configuration that integrates institutional processes under a "security umbrella" (Huysmans, 1998). Terrorism and violent extremism have become the main threats to national, regional and international security. Combating the transnational terrorist threat and building resilience are therefore at the heart of public security and foreign policy. From this perspective, counter-terrorism activities are based on the principles of proportionality and adaptability, as well as on

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December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of
Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

partnership and cooperation between different actors and sectors, which are essential to address the global threat of terrorism (Canda, 2022). Since 11 September, counter-terrorism strategies have intensified exponentially, with greater emphasis on non-traditional interventions as part of a systematic process of cooperative security (Lum, 2006). Whereas a proactive and multi-institutional strategy focused on 'soft power', with a 'multi-layered and risk-based approach', has been promoted to effectively prevent violent extremism (PVE) (Schmid, 2020), thus anti-terrorism has become a priority in the new Turkish foreign and security policy towards Africa.

In the context of the 'post-September 11 world' and the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), the proliferation of transnational terrorist attacks and their Islamic nexus have become a central preoccupation of international relations. Türkiye has demonstrated a unique foreign policy path halfway between Westernisation and Europeanisation by embracing the role of a secular democracy with an Islamic identity and a majority Muslim population. However, Türkiye's policy of anti-terrorist cooperation is built on the matrix of an antithesis to the symbolic references and stereotypical images of post-September 11 2001 global governance that considers Islam as the negation of secular modernity and liberal democracy and the precondition for success in the global war on terrorism (Keyman, 2009). Therefore, Türkiye has changed its foreign and security policy towards Africa since 2002, particularly through the strengthening of its institutional relations with African regional and sub-regional organisations in the field of anti-terrorism as its main concern. These dynamics are undergone by Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), establishing new Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) parameters of comprehensive cooperation with various institutions, mechanisms and agencies in Africa to play a more active role in African politics (Siradag, 2013). Nevertheless, Erdogan's Muslim revival was illustrated by the support expressed for the Islamist causes of the Muslim Brotherhood in the post-revolutionary period of the Arab Spring (Kirby, 2023).

Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy: between domestic considerations and international cooperation

Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa reflects a dual pattern of domestic and national experience on the one hand, and its contributions to the international community's efforts to tackle terrorism, particularly jihadist terrorism, on the other. In Turkish foreign policy decision-making circles, there is a consensus based on the fact that the success and effectiveness of efforts to counter the global terrorist threat will be short-sighted and obsolete in the absence of regional and international cooperation. That is why Türkiye has been at the forefront of efforts to counter terrorism by strengthening cooperation between states at both bilateral and multilateral levels. This has been achieved, on the one hand, by insisting on the principle of non-discrimination between terrorist organisations and on the obligation to act with equal determination to prevent and counter all terrorist groups. On the other hand, the rejection of any erroneous association of terrorism linked to religiously motivated jihadist groups such as Al-Qaida and DAESH with any religion or ethnic group. Türkiye is actively involved in the UN's counter-terrorism mechanisms as part of the UN's counter-terrorism strategy and Security Council resolutions. Türkiye also initiated the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
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VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

(GCTF) and is a member of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) through Türkiye's Financial Intelligence Unit (MASAK); moreover, it coordinates actively with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and co-chairs the Working Group on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (b), 2022).

Moreover, Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa is also influenced by its strong national experience of effectively confronting various terrorist organisations, notably the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Armenian Secret Liberation Army (ASALA). As part of a paradigm shift in its counter-terrorism strategy, Türkiye has adopted a holistic approach to the fight against terrorism that includes political, cultural, social and economic dimensions, thereby supporting hard security measures and providing sustainable solutions, as well as maintaining a strong focus on international cooperation with institutional instruments. The institutional framework involved in anti-terrorism cooperation consists mainly of the ministries of the interior, justice and foreign affairs, as well as the general staff of the armed forces and the intelligence services as operational structures. In addition, the Department of Internal Security Strategies was established in 2018, supported by the Counter-Terrorism Coordination Council, which oversees the implementation of counter-terrorism activities with the Counter-Terrorism Department, which is part of the General Directorate of the Turkish National Police (Committee on Counter-Terrorism, 2021).

The institutionalised regional engineering of Türkiye's anti-terrorism foreign policy in Africa

According to the steps taken to stop violent extremism, Türkiye has promoted its inclusive interpretation of Islam through various government agencies, most notably the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which aims to combat hate speech, stop recruitment, and discredit terrorist propaganda (United States Department of State, 2020). In light of this, a comprehensive strategy to counter violent extremism (CVE) has been shaped as part of a de-radicalisation and disengagement process to reintegrate and rehabilitate terrorists and armed militants (San, 2020). Africa has also become a battleground for Erdoğan against the former Hizmet religious movement, described as a terrorist organisation. That's why it urged African countries to adopt a vigorous policy in the fight against this violent extremist faction led by Fethullah Gülen (Fabricius, 2024). However, the "Fetullah Gülen Movement" is particularly engaged in Africa and endowed with a Universalist Islamist vision, influenced by the mystical Islam of the Nakshibendiyya Sufi brotherhood and attached to certain nationalism, with an activism in the world of education, the media and business (Balci, 2015).

Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy of international cooperation in the fight against jihadists has been implemented as part of a renewed approach that considers transnational religious extremist movements as key actors that challenge national security. That is why a Turkish perception of postmodernist security in the fight against terrorism has emerged, giving primacy to vertical and horizontal institutional cooperation with African regional organisations to promote effective action against the hybridisation of the globalised jihadist threat (Yilmaz, 2011). Besides, Türkiye collaborates closely with

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VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
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December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

the institutional architectures of the African Union in charge of the fight against terrorism. Indeed, collective cooperation is occurring principally through the Commission of the African Union within the framework of the Department of Peace and Security (DPS). More importantly, counter-terrorism coordination is supported by the African Union Peace and Security Council (PSC) with accelerated operationalisation of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), and collective efforts to address the terrorist threat have incorporated proactive governance in hybrid risks with the sub-committee on counter-terrorism linked to the Defence and Security Division (DDS). However, the institutional arrangements for Turkish-African cooperation recognise the transnational nature of the terrorist threat. To this end, a series of mechanisms have been deployed through a trans-regional partnership with the member states of the regional economic communities while maintaining a high level of cooperation with the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services in Africa (CISSA) and the African Police Cooperation Mechanism (AFRIPOL) (Nkalow Ngoula, 2016).

Türkiye's African counter-terrorism strategy: a double game between hard and soft approaches

The fight against terrorism in Africa requires a solid security and military infrastructure, as well as the use of sophisticated materials and equipment with advanced technologies to support counter-terrorism operations. Here again, unlike American or European countries which often impose conditions on counter-terrorism cooperation, Türkiye stands out for its approach of unconditional support for counter-terrorism operations, with the supply of military equipment including Turkish drones and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) in particular the Bayraktar TB2 fighter plane, as well as the Anka, Karayel and Aksungur aircraft. The military attachés and officers responsible for promoting cooperation in the fight against terrorism often accompany the coordination and exchange of information between the various intelligence and security services with agreements on security cooperation and defence against terrorist organisations (Vial, 2025). However, Turkish military and defence diplomacy has established long-term institutional ties of strategic cooperation with African countries in a context of growing instability linked to jihadism on the continent, thereby strengthening its existing instruments through a mutually reinforcing policy of counter-terrorism partnership (Tanrıverdi Yaşar, 2022).

The use of armed drones by jihadist groups such as Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimeen (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) has pushed African countries in their counter-terrorism operations to turn to Türkiye, which has become the world's leading exporter of drones to Africa. Thus, in 2024, Türkiye's arms exports had reached a record level of $7.1 billion in more than 18 African countries, representing an increase of 103%. The Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı combat drones are the central instruments in the fight against terrorism in Ethiopia, Togo, Niger, and Libya. Moreover, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have also deployed these drones (Bhattacharya, 2025) to combat jihadist groups in the Sahel. Türkiye also supplied Algeria with its Aksungur and Anka drones to Tunisia; the STM defence company supplied Togan drones to Nigeria (Dedet, 2023). Additionally, Türkiye's hard strategies for addressing terrorism in Africa

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December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of
Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

involve the engagement of Turkish military troops in UN peacekeeping missions in Mali and Central Africa, a commitment that began in 2016, even though Türkiye and Somalia had already created a joint task force command in 2017 (Heibach, 2024, p.315). Consequently, TURKSOM stands out as Türkiye's most extensive overseas military training facility, operating five training sites in Libya since 2020 and also supplying African countries with security equipment to tackle the increasing threat of jihadist rebellions (Aksoy, 2022).
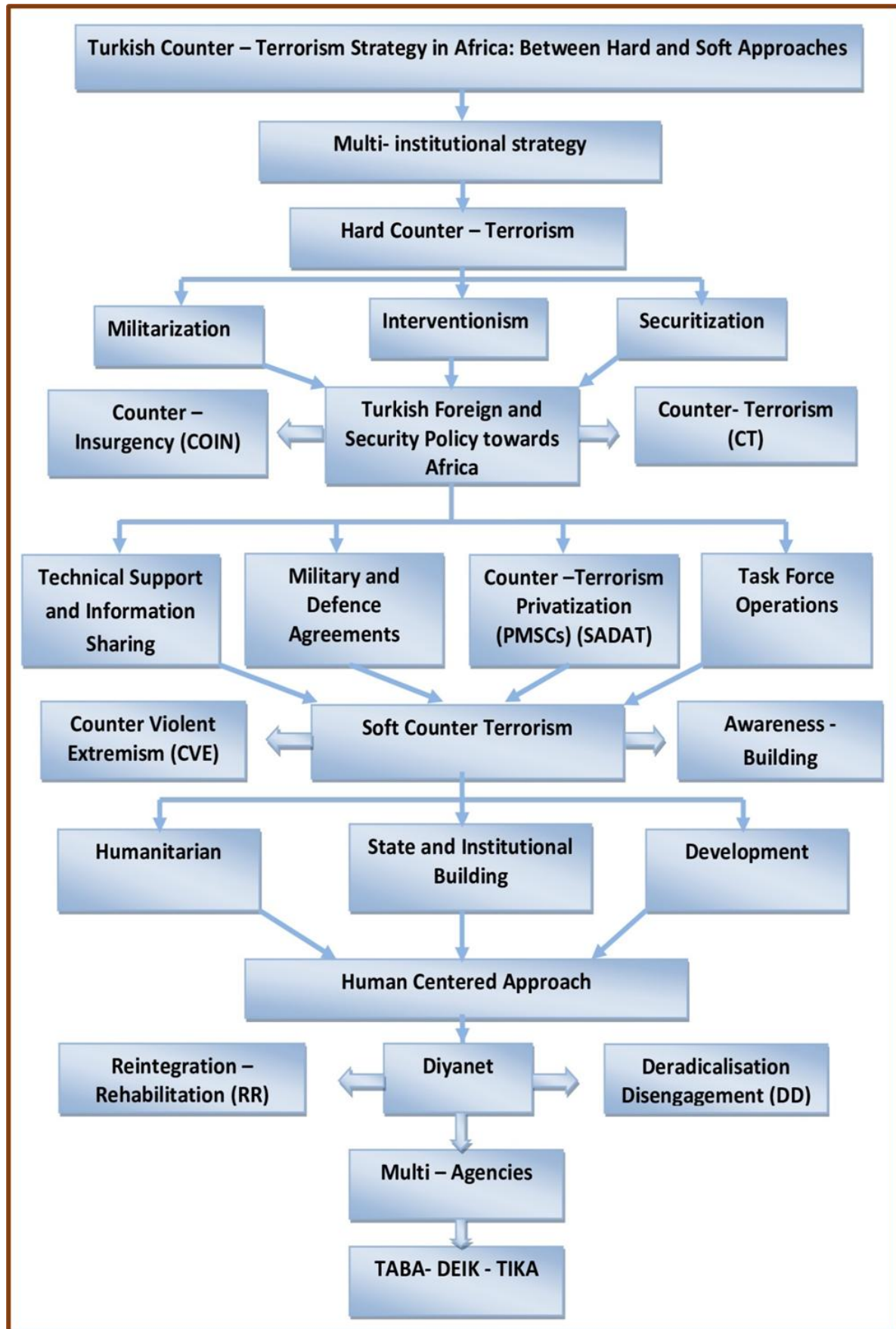
Türkiye's counter-terrorism policy in Africa is characterised by a mix of soft and hard measures as part of its long-term multidimensional foreign policy aimed at strengthening its status as an 'indispensable partner' for African countries and expanding its sphere of influence in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), particularly linked to the perception of Turkish decision-makers as a 'great power'. In this context, the African continent has been the scene of terrorist attacks, from the Horn of Africa to the Sahel and West Africa, with the intensification of Al-Shabaab attacks and the growing threat from local branches of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (Dal, 2023). That is why, at the 2024 Türkiye-Africa summit on defence and security, African countries called for Türkiye to step up its efforts in the fight against terrorism, contributing to the goals of peace, security and development in Africa in line with the continent's Vision 2063 objectives. Indeed, the fight against extremist organisations such as Boko Haram and ISIS requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account local realities and the diverse cultural dynamics of African actors, especially Sufism, which reveals the inclusivity of Islamic identities in the region but also, serves as a bulwark against violent extremism (TASAM, 2025).

However, Türkiye's proactive counter-terrorism policy, with its commitment to providing material resources and capacity building to African countries as a legitimate mediator on the continent, can be partly explained by its Muslim heritage. Indeed, Erdoğan has used Islam as a political weapon, emphasising religious affiliation in international relations. Türkiye has thus built closer ties with Africa by using political soft power tools in the fight against terrorism. As a result, Ankara has supported the creation of religious schools and mosques in Muslim African countries; in addition, it has exploited its Ottoman Islamic past as an ideological leverage to increase its geopolitical influence in Africa. At the same time, Türkiye has embarked on a hard-line counter-terrorism strategy through multilateral military cooperation as an active member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), offering African states considerable technical assistance, particularly in the areas of capacity building and training in the fight against piracy and terrorism (Kharief, 2022). In the meantime, the Turkish privatisation of counter-terrorism in Africa is implemented through the Private Military and Security Companies (PMSCs), namely with the increased activities of the International Defence Consultancy Company (SADAT), aligned with the Turkish foreign policy objectives and has deeply impacted African political conflict dynamics. The SADAT is operating as a hybrid structure of 'mercenaries', similar to the Russian private military company system, i.e., a 'Turkish Wagner'. But it is characterised by the use of religious and cultural denominators to promote cooperation in the defence industry between Islamic countries and as a key player in counter-terrorism policies (St-Pierre, 2024). From an African perspective, Turkey's approach to addressing the terrorist threat is multidimensional, with a particular focus on interventionism and militarisation within the framework of measures ranging

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

from counter-insurgency (COIN) and counter-terrorism (CT) to strengthening anti-terrorist capabilities. Since then, Türkiye has contributed to multilateral efforts for peace, security and international stability in Africa, particularly in Mali, the Central African Republic (CAR), Congo, Libya, Sudan, South Sudan and Somalia. Nevertheless, unlike other international actors involved in the fight against terrorism in Africa, such as the United States, France, the European Union, China and Russia, Türkiye, as an emerging power, is primarily seeking to reposition itself geostrategically among the major powers (Ehrhart, 2019).

Turkish efforts in Africa in terms of soft power as an instrument for preventing radicalisation and violent extremism have materialised through the institutionalisation of cooperation through various governmental bodies, including the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), the Turkish Maarif Foundation, and the Presidency of Religious Affairs (DIYANET), as well as non-governmental organisations, which have been heavily involved in development and humanitarian aid projects (Çelik, 2024). Indeed, Diyanet embodies Turkey's confessional diplomacy in Africa with a very powerful network in Mauritania, Ethiopia, Somalia, Tanzania, Kenya, Niger, Uganda, Sudan, Cameroon, Madagascar, Ghana, South Africa, and Chad. The services provided focus on religious education, mosque construction, and scholarship programmes for African students to take Quran courses or study at theological faculties in Turkey. Moreover, religious and Islamic NGOs play a pivotal role in faith-based diplomacy in preventing violent extremism, such as the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE) and the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation (Oprea, 2024, p.176-177). In this context, in 2020, the Maarif Foundation had established 144 schools in 24 African countries with scholarships for students from countries with large Muslim populations, such as Egypt, Somalia, Morocco, Libya, Sudan, and Nigeria (Tepeciklioğlu, 2020). Meanwhile, TIKA is considered a soft power mechanism of Turkish anti-terrorist strategy in Africa, operating over 22 offices across the continent and implementing various aid initiatives (Dedet, 2021), especially in the Horn of Africa and Somalia, where it has managed about 160 projects focused on education, infrastructure, and local development since 2011, efforts that have significantly aided in reclaiming areas previously controlled by the Islamist group Al-Shabaab (Sofos, 2022, p.21). (See Diagram 3 drawn up by the author)

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

Diagram 3

Challenges and Limits of the Turkish Counter-Terrorism Policy in Africa: Between Global Power Rivalries and Terrorist Threat Nebulas

Türkiye is making considerable efforts to fill the security vacuum left by Western disengagement in Africa, while its anti-terrorism policies complement those of Russia. Given that France and Türkiye are rivals for influence in Africa, Türkiye has been highly critical of France's neo-colonial anti-terrorist military intervention in the Sahel. Türkiye is leveraging its Muslim roots and shared cultural values with the predominantly Muslim countries of the Sahel as an advantage over competition from Western powers, thereby establishing itself as a leading alternative to Western and Russian security partnerships in the fight against terrorism in Africa (Tyson, 2025). China, Russia, Türkiye, and some Gulf states have been involved in Africa as part of the great powers' race for influence, which presents both advantages and disadvantages, particularly in terms of regional counter-terrorism governance. Although this presence has increased operations against jihadist groups, it has had a relatively limited impact because of the conflicting political agendas of the national interests of these powers (Wilén, 2025). However, Türkiye must avoid falling into the trap of repeating the failed Western anti-terrorism governance strategies that are overly focused on a dual game of security obsessions and militarisation. In this regard, Türkiye must be imperatively grounded in the local realities of African countries but also advocate a fight against terrorism with strong commitment from the various actors and the support of the international community and international and regional organisations. At the same time, Turkish anti-terrorism operations must incorporate a holistic and inclusive approach in order to eliminate the breeding ground for terrorism while promoting the priority of anti-terrorism resolved by African solutions and thus play the role of 'active auxiliaries' in the face of competition between major powers (Zhu, 2024).

Furthermore, the major obstacle to Türkiye's counter-terrorism policy in Africa is the constant rise of nebulous jihadist threats, with a significant number of terrorist entities across the African continent hampering counter-terrorism cooperation operations. The main active terrorist groups include regional affiliates of Al-Qaeda, namely Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin (JNIM). Meanwhile, in the broader landscape, there are local branches of the Islamic State in Africa, such as the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and the Islamic State in Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda (ISSKTU) (Warner, 2018). Indeed, jihadist movements maintain complex links with international terrorist networks, exploiting state failure and ungoverned spaces across the African continent, thus providing fertile ground for the rise of radicalisation and violent extremism in a typical African context of poor governance, economic deprivation and social marginalisation. This poses a considerable challenge to operational capabilities and multifaceted regional and international counter-terrorism efforts (Rufus, 2024). While, the 'coup belt' that shook the West African region from 2020 to 2024, on one hand, has a direct impact on the trajectories of jihadism and anti-terrorism policies, on the others this has led to the emergence of new international actors, namely Russia and Türkiye, who are occupying a central place in the regional chessboard to counter the jihadist threat. However, it remains to be seen whether their efforts in the fight against

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
*Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of
Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions*
Touazi Ilas

terrorism will be effective in the long term or whether they will suffer the same fate as Western anti-terrorism strategies, which are doomed to failure (Thurston, 2024).

Concluding Analysis

Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa is undoubtedly part of the flaunting game-changing of its foreign policy conceptions of the national roles (CRN) as an emerging power with global aspirations shaped under the leadership of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and deeply orientated with the political agendas of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). However, Turkish Foreign Policy (TFP) reflects an increasing role projection of power, claiming regional leadership, but this dynamic is undergone on one hand within an enhanced regional cooperative approach with global and regional organizations. On the other hand, the TFP roadmap in the post-Cold War era and in the current volatile geopolitical landscape is construed under a triptych strategy, including anti-imperialism, anti-Westernism, and the neo-Ottoman 'Erdoğan doctrine, which paves the way to the rebirth of the great Türkiye.

Türkiye's Africa policy is categorized under the characteristics of the new hegemonic regional power in a context of global power competitions with a rapidly changing African environment; thus, counter-terrorism diplomacy at bilateral and multilateral levels has become a high-level item on the Turkish foreign policy agenda and an instrument of its security policy toward the African continent. Indeed, TFP is spearheaded through an institutionalized regionalization within the African Union (AU) and the regional organizations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the East African Community (EAC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Meanwhile, Türkiye's new policy towards Africa is sustained through the non-state actors, business agencies and other semi-structured institutions, namely the pivotal role of the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TIKA) in the African development, political and humanitarian dynamics.

Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategy in Africa is elaborated through regional institutional governance, with an intensified interest since 11 September, which has reshaped the order of priorities from traditional security focus to postmodern counter-terrorism policies. In this regard, Türkiye has been in the spotlight due to attempts to associate Islam with terrorism, adopting a distinct foreign policy with a unique model that reconciles Islamic identity and secular democracy. In Africa, Türkiye's counterterrorism strategy reflects both its contributions to the international community's efforts to combat terrorism, especially jihadist terrorism, and its own domestic and national experiences. The institutionalised regional engineering of Türkiye's anti-terrorism foreign policy in Africa is constructed under a comprehensive strategy including humanitarian, religious diplomacy and preventing violent extremism (CVE) led by the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet), forming a double game between hard and soft approaches. However, Türkiye's privatization of counter-terrorism operations in Africa is driven by the private military and security companies (PMSCs), particularly with the intensification of the International Defence Consultancy Company (SADAT) activities.

JANUS.NET, e-journal of International Relations
e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

Nevertheless, Turkish counter-terrorism policy in Africa has numerous challenges and limits. Namely, the constant emergence of jihadist threats with regional affiliates of Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State has turned the continent into a sanctuary for global jihadism, hence undermining regional and international policies in the fight against terrorism. Simultaneously, competition between global powers with contending political agendas and national interests are not serving sustainable anti-terrorism cooperation of the African countries. That is why Türkiye's counter-terrorism strategies must avoid the western failures by supporting Africans' efforts rooted in local realities to find integrated solutions to their complex problems that are the root causes of terrorism, radicalization and violent extremism.

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VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

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Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
Türkiye's Counter-Terrorism Strategy in Africa: A Regional Institutionalised Governance of Foreign Policy in the Light of Global Power Competitions
Touazi Ilas

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e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
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e-ISSN: 1647-7251
VOL. 16, Nº. 2, TD1
Thematic Dossier - *Emerging Powers In-between Global and Regional Organizations*
December 2025, pp. 127-148
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