Somalia: Turkey’s Pivot to Africa in the Context of Growing Inter-imperialist Rivalries
Paul Antonopoulos, Oliver Villar, Drew Cottle and Aweis Ahmed

Making the Nation Great Again: Trumpism, Euroscepticism and the Surge of Populist Nationalism
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SOMALIA: TURKEY’S PIVOT TO AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF GROWING INTER-IMPERIALIST RIVALRIES

Paul ANTONOPOULOS, Oliver VILLAR, Drew COTTLE and Aweis AHMED

With Somalia in the midst of the worse famine in decades, where the international community failed to deliver to the country, Turkey effectively responded to the crisis. This was in conjunction with significant development into the impoverished state. Although a sentiment of brotherly relations dominates the rhetoric, the Turkish investment into Somalia represents a Turkish push into Africa. This can represent Turkey attempting to expand its sphere of influence and demonstrate its growing capabilities as a middle power. With China making significant inroads into the continent, particularly in neighbouring Djibouti and Ethiopia, is Turkey as a NATO member attempting to block the Chinese pivot into Africa, or is it acting in its own self-interests? As resource security becomes imperative, the Horn of Africa only becomes increasingly strategic, however, only Turkey has recognized the importance of Somalia in a changing world.

Key words: Somalia; Turkey; Ethiopia; Djibouti; China.

1 INTRODUCTION

With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War One and after the signing of the Sykes–Picot Agreement, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk became the founding father of the Turkish Republic. Atatürk magnified Turkey's turn to secularization and Westernization, drawing it into the Anglo-American orbit. Turkey was a bulwark for the Western containment of the Soviet Union on behalf of American interests in the Middle East. The United States enlisted Turkey to militarily contain the Soviets in the first years of the Cold War and in 1952, along with French Algeria, Turkey became the only non-Western member of NATO (Phillips 2010, 40). By 1955, through the Baghdad Pact, Turkey along with Iraq, Iran and Pakistan territorially contained this region from the Soviet

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Union with direct military aid from the U.S. (Miller 2007, 146). The Cold War gave rise to Pan-Arabism, where Turkey proved itself to be a valuable ally to counter the influence of Middle Eastern countries the U.S. viewed as Soviet client states (Egypt, Iraq, and Syria).

In 2010, Turkey had signed major energy-related agreements with a resurgent Russian Federation led by President Vladimir Putin (RT 2010). The energy agreements were suspended by Moscow after Turkey shot down a Russian jet on November 15, 2015 in which Ankara claimed the jet breached Turkish airspace from Syria (Guardian 2015). Erdoğan after stubbornly refusing to apologize finally did so on June 27, 2016 (RT 2016a). Recurring rejections of Turkey to become a member of the European Union have damaged relations with the U.S. and other NATO members. U.S. support for the Kurdish People's Protection Units in northern Syria, who are aligned with the Turkey-based Kurdistan Worker's Party and are recognized as a terrorist group, has driven a bigger wedge between Ankara's and Washington's 'war on ISIS'.

Modern Turkey today stands at the crossroads of inter-imperialist rivalry between the U.S., Russia, and, in the Horn of Africa, with the rise of China. Turkey has one foot in NATO and the other foot free to pursue its own interests as it sees fit.

Turkey has provided both humanitarian and developmental aid to Somalia and played a key role in settling its political stalemate. Following the stalemate, a military cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries, followed by trade and investment negotiations. Turkey's entrance into the African continent must be explored in the context of growing inter-imperialist rivalries. This paper investigates whether Somalia has become a gateway for renewed Turkish imperial ambitions in a region where U.S. imperialism is under challenge by its rivals. Only by closely examining Turkey in the crossroads of the major powers can Turkish interests in the Horn of Africa be properly understood. Such an examination must consider the historical relationship between Turkey and Somalia from the Ottoman Era to the present day.

2 AN UNDERSTANDING OF SOMALIAN OPPORTUNITY FOR TURKEY

2.1 The republic era

The early leaders of the Turkish Republic, Ataturk and his Kemalist successors led the country into a westernization process by the formulation of a foreign policy that looked to the West. During the Cold War, Turkey was in the Western-aligned bloc and an active member of NATO. In contrast, Somalia was under the colonial rule of Britain in the northern regions and by Italy in the south, which effectively divided ethnic Somalis (Odock 2013, 413). In 1960, Somalia was granted independence as much of Africa experienced de-colonization. After independence, Somalia was open to Soviet aid and influence while Turkey remained firmly aligned to the Western bloc. Soviet-Somali relations were always unstable and in 1977 Moscow cut all military and economic assistance to Mogadishu (Powell 2008, 658). Somalia renewed its relations with Turkey by opening an embassy in Ankara in 1979 and Turkey established an embassy in Mogadishu in the same year (Addow 2015). After the eruption of the Somali civil war in 1991, the Turkish embassy was closed but a non-resident
diplomatic mission to Somalia in Addis Ababa continued until the embassy was reopened in Mogadishu in 2011 (Turkish Embassy in Mogadishu 2016).

2.2 The AKP Party Era

In 1998, Turkey launched an “Opening up to Africa Policy”, which quickly evaporated because of Turkish unpreparedness. Nevertheless, Ankara understood the important role access to African resources would play in the new century. In 2002, a conservative pro-Western, moderate Islamic Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power after strong resentment of coalition governments that have ruled since the 1980 military coup. This allowed Erdoğan to resurrect Turkey's policy towards Africa with little opposition. Erdoğan declared 2005 as “the year of Africa” hosting the first Turkey–Africa Cooperation Summit in 2008 (Shinn 2015, 3).

Under AKP leadership, Ankara-Mogadishu relations were revitalized. Relations with Somalia grew when Erdoğan was in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa for the 2007 African Union meeting (Yükleyen and Zulkarnian 2015, 101). The Turkish President met with the Somali President, Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, and discussed the conditions of Somalia and agreed to a Somali delegation to visit Turkey. Consequently, Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, the former president of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), visited Ankara on several occasions before Erdoğan's first visit to Somalia in 2011 amidst the worst famine in decades (ibid.). This important visit was followed by another in 2015 when Erdoğan announced future projects that would consolidate relations between Turkey and Somalia through economic and military means (Shinn 2015, 8).

2.3 Turkish Foreign policy in Somalia

First envisioned in the 1998 plan were political, economic and military elements. Turkey sought to establish relations with Africa's largest states such as South Africa and Sudan, as well as Tanzania, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Turkey became an honorary member of the African regional organizations, the International Partners Forum of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), the Continental Organization of Africa, and the African Union (Akpınar 2013, 739). Turkish foreign policy was based on establishing relations with selective African states in a multi-strategy of combining economic, political, diplomatic and cultural relations to further Turkish interests (Ipek 2014, 438). Somalia was the most receptive of all African states that Erdoğan explored.

2.4 Turkish humanitarian and development aid in the context of imperialist rivalry

The worst drought in more than two decades occurred in the Horn of Africa in 2011. There were 9.5 million people in a critical condition caused by the shortage of food and water in East Africa, with 4 million alone in Somalia (The Journal 2012). In Somalia, the drought and famine was accompanied by continued conflict, Al-Shabaab terrorist attacks, piracy, government breakdown and economic failure. The ‘international community’ led by the United States and the United Kingdom described Somalia as a “failed state” (Ryan 2014).

For Erdoğan, Turkey's interests in Somalia were presented as humanitarian and as "one of the key principles of Turkish foreign policy” in Africa. Turkish involvement in "crisis zones” was presented as human-oriented policy”
(Davutoğlu 2013, 866–867). In reality, this significant move by Turkey on the African continent was only made possible by Western failures to dominate the region, particularly the ‘failed state’ of Somalia. It followed China’s leading imperialist role that has penetrated Africa.

Turkey’s humanitarian strategy included sending hundreds of tons of food and other essential items and coordinating ‘peacekeeping’ and ‘capacity building’ activities to help police the Somali crisis (Özkan 2014). Turkey’s strategy included government institutions, such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), the Turkish Airline and Kızılay (Turkish Red Crescent), as well as non-governmental organizations such as Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), which aided Turkey’s foreign policy objectives in Somalia (Davutoğlu 2013, 867).

Throughout the drought period in Somalia, Kızılay put together a relief fund for Somalia estimated to be worth over 7 million Turkish Lira. Hundreds of shelters were constructed for displaced Somalis who were fed and provided with basic medical services (Sunday’s Zaman 2016). Another governmental organization, TİKA, provided tens of thousands of tons in food aid, medical materials and services, and established four field hospitals (TİKA 2016).

Ankara’s actions in Somalia during the drought and famine period were justified as an Islamic “faith brotherhood” (Ali 2011, 69). The political and economic crisis gave Turkey a post-crisis nation building role, once reserved for American and major European imperialist powers.

Mogadishu airport, roads and transport systems as well as key roads connecting the airport to the presidential palace and city centre were reconstructed. With only two rivers in Somalia suitable for irrigation, Turkey opened an agricultural school to train Somali agronomists to prepare for any future drought crisis, which crippled the country in 2011. With the collapse of the central government in 1991, Somalia’s education system was virtually destroyed. In 2011, Ankara and Mogadishu signed a 49-year agreement to develop the Somali education system (Wasuge 2016, 17). Thousands of Somali students were awarded Turkish scholarships by the government and NGOs to study in Turkey (Shinn 2015, 9).

2.5 Security and diplomatic relations

In 2010, Ankara signed a military cooperation pact with Somalia after the Somali Chief of Staff and other retired generals with their Turkish counterparts discussed the restructuring of the Somalian army in 2010 (International Crisis Group 2012, 14). As part of the nation-building project, a school for non-commissioned officers was announced for 100 officers and Military Ground, Air and Naval schools were established. Somali security officials were trained in Turkey. Turkey has taken on the role of combating piracy off the Somali coastline by sending several military ships to protect Turkish merchants and shipping (Özkan 2014). According to these agreements reached by Ankara and Mogadishu, Turkey has built a military training base in Somalia for the Somali National Army (Today’s Zaman 2016). The United States and Ethiopia have condemned Turkey’s African plans (Wasuge 2016, 19). Washington views a strong Somalian military as a security threat to neighbouring states, Ethiopia and Kenya, which have regions where ethnic Somalis are numerically dominant.
2.6 Trade and investment cooperation

Somalia’s security problems and political instability has denied commercial exploitation of oil, minerals, precious stones, fishing and livestock. In the process of Somali state-building and stability, Turkish business interests view the Somali market favourably because it is “Muslim” and “open to take risks” (Harte 2012, 31).

In 2012 the first Somali-Turkish business association of Somali businessmen was established (ibid.). Turkish capital invested over $50 million into financial services, communication, textile, and money market in Somalia (Kagwanja 2013). Although trade opportunities between Somalia and Turkey were few, the exploitation of Somali natural resources offered future long-term prospects (Shinn 2015; Harte 2012, 31).

Turkey’s economy is growing rapidly and lacks adequate energy resources. Currently Turkey relies upon the import of approximately 600,000 barrels of oil per day from mostly Russia, Iran and Iraq. It is estimated that Somalia’s northern Puntland has oil reserves of 10 billion oil barrels (Africa Review 2014). The Turkish oil company, Genel Energy PLC, has been awarded a contract to explore oil reserves in Somaliland and to drill five oil wells. According to Genel Energy, it will invest more than $400 million into this energy project (Kagwanja 2013).

In 2014, trade between Turkey and Somalia was estimated to be worth $64 million. In a recent development, the TFG handed the operations of both Mogadishu’s seaport and airport to two Turkish companies” (Wasuge 2016, 18). Bilateral trade agreements were estimated to be worth $72.3 million in 2015, Turkey seeks to expand trade until 2025 estimated to be worth billions (Kagwanja 2013).

2.7 The role of Turkey in political settlement and peace keeping in Somalia

While the international community recognizes Somalia as a single unitary nation state, there are numerous self-governing autonomous regions, including the breakaway northern region of Somaliland, which claims to be an independent state, separated from Somalia since 1991 (Daniels 2012, 105). Turkey’s multi-strategy foreign policy towards Somalia balances “proactive engagement” with “crisis management” (Sazak and Woods 2015). Turkey played a key role in the peace and mediation process of nation building among Somali regions, holding several conferences in Istanbul. Turkey has been involved in 12 major peace processes to find a consensus between opposing Somali factions. Foreign intervention, particularly from U.S.-backed Ethiopia, as well as the international community’s spasmodic commitment to fight Islamic terrorism or offer meaningful assistance to Somalia, has enhanced Turkey’s role in Somalia (Akpinar 2013, 743). Wahhabi terrorists launched an insurgency against the recognized Somali TFG in 2006. Al-Shabaab, an Al-Qaeda affiliated group, has the means and power to destabilize Somalia. Recent newcomers ISIS have small cells operating in Somalia (ibid., 742).

Despite inter-imperialist rivalries across Africa and resistance from Washington and its regional allies, Ankara has brought together competing warring factions in Somalia and the unrecognized breakaway province of Somaliland. This
involvement by Ankara is unprecedented. In 2013 Turkey hosted diplomatic talks between the presidents of Somalia and Somaliland in Ankara and Istanbul, involving cabinet ministers in several separate meetings in Turkey (Anadolu Agency 2013).

2.8 Somalia as the gateway to expanding Turkish interests in Africa

When considering Turkey's intervention in the Syrian War, its military permanently stationed in Iraq under the guise of fighting ISIS, and its recent deployment of troops to Qatar, its nation-state-building attempts of Somalia suggest an expanding influence in Africa. In the context of global, inter-imperialist rivalries, these inroads may also be strengthened through the recent Turkish-Russian rapprochement in Europe and the rise of China in Africa; allowing Turkey to manoeuvre in an unstable Horn of Africa that is still under contention.

Turkey, which had warm relations with Damascus before the outbreak of the Syrian War, in 2011 paradoxically, became the key state in the establishment, training and arming of the Free Syrian Army in the proxy war against President Bashar al Assad (Young et al. 2014, 16). With strategic interests in Africa and the Middle East, Washington cannot prevent Turkey's engagement with Somalia. Turkey's contribution in supporting and protecting radical Islamist groups in Syria fighting Assad cannot be underestimated (Lawson 2013, 142). On August 24, 2016 Turkey began to directly intervene in Syria with its military expelling ISIS and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) from areas between the west of the Euphrates River to the Free Syrian Army and Turkey-backed Islamist proxies-held Azaz region.

Since late 2015, Turkey deployed its ground troops in Mosul's Bashiqa region in Iraq as part of Turkish military operations targeting ISIS. This decision was without any coordination or approval from Baghdad, Washington or Iraq's new ally, Iran. Baghdad has continually called the intervention a violation of Iraqi sovereignty yet Ankara has refused to leave the country.

The announcement in early 2016 of a Turkish military base in Qatar will reportedly include army, navy, air force, and Special Force units as well advisors and trainers to the Qatari military (PressTV 2016). This move provides Turkey with direct access to the Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean, and Arabian Sea, as well as a base of operations to project its own influence in the immediate vicinity of the oil-rich microstates of Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates.

The history of Turkey since the Ottoman Empire alongside growing inter-imperialist rivalries highlight Ankara's ability to pursue its own foreign policy objectives in contested conflict zones. Turkey's push to become a major regional player has seen the expansion of Turkish influence through military means in the Middle East. In Africa, Turkey's pivot for expanding influence has been unique as it has adopted a soft power strategy in an unstable region where no imperialist rival can currently dominate.

Turkey's military assistance to Somalia in the form of aid, training and supervision, has been limited to Somali troops, with a focus on state building (Sputnik News 2016b). What this demonstrates is a geostrategic and patient Ankara, which will exert its influence through either soft or hard power. Carter Findley, a professor of Islamic civilization at the Ohio State University's Mershon Center for International Security Studies argues, that "Turkey has
completed its adjustment to the post-Cold War era. It's developed a fully
globalized foreign policy” (Tovrov 2012).

Somalia strategically sits on the Gulf of Aden, just at the entrance of the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, a pivotal global shipping lane connecting the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. The Gulf of Aden has been plagued by Somali piracy in which Turkey has actively policed (Hurriyet 2008). With piracy diminishing, the al-Qaeda affiliated al-Shabaab terrorist group remains the major destabilizing force in Somalia. Should this threat be eliminated or should al-Shabaab gain more ground, either one of these national security problems could provide Ankara with the casus belli it needs for direct military involvement.

At a strategic juncture in the Horn of Africa, the tiny Somali-majority nation of Djibouti, with its neighbouring states being Somalia to the south and Ethiopia and Eritrea on its eastern and northern borders, symbolizes inter-imperialist rivalry in the region. The United States hosts its largest African military base in Djibouti, and NATO-ally France and its key Asian ally, Japan, also host a military presence. China, which has economically penetrated the continent, has begun construction of its first overseas military base in Djibouti, and Saudi Arabia will establish a military presence there (Sputnik News 2016a). The maritime chokepoint of Bab el-Mandab is what makes Djibouti a key node in the Gulf of Aden-Suez Canal trade route (see picture 1).

This maritime route is essential to the world economy as over 20,000 ships, accounting for 20% of global yearly exports as of 2012, passes through this strait that connects the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea (Anderson 2012). This is the most vital maritime trade route from Asia to Europe. Of those 20,000 plus ships, Japanese ships account for 10%, with China’s USD$1 billion daily trade with the European Union heavily relying on this route (Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (2016). This offers a compelling reason why the first overseas military bases of China and Japan are located in Djibouti, and why they sent naval forces to combat Somali piracy in the late 2000s.

The stability of Djibouti in a region engulfed in conflict allows for the international community to secure the straits from bases in the country. Yemen,
which at its closest point to Djibouti is only 30km away, is experiencing a civil war with aggressive foreign intervention from a Saudi-led coalition (Hegazy and Doust 2016, 16; Antonopoulos 2016). This makes Yemen untenable as a base of operations to secure and monitor Bab el-Mandab. However, with the two hotspots of Yemen and Somalia within easy reach of Djibouti, not withstanding its importance for global economic security, it also offers itself as a position of base to deal with regional conflict.

With the Saudis involving itself in the Yemeni Civil war between Houthi rebels and their allies against the internationally recognized government, and the Saudis expanding their own influence on Yemen since March 2015, it offers a reason for Saudi military interests in Djibouti. The Saudis can open another front against the Houthis as they control large swathes of Yemen's Red Sea coast. It has been consistently alleged (and concurrently denied) that Iran is supplying the Houthis with weapons and aid with ships (Bayoumy and Ghobari 2014). Therefore, Djibouti’s future hosting of the Saudi military base is another proxy front in the Saudi-Iranian geopolitical rivalry.

The U.S. base in Djibouti, Camp Lemonnier, serves as Washington's main conduit point in their 'War on Terror' in the Horn of Africa. As a base point, the U.S. has been able to launch counter-terrorism operations in Yemen and Somalia, including drone strikes, from Djibouti (Whitlock 2012). It currently hosts a massive 4,000 strong force (Navy Installations Command 2016). The French act in the same capacity, with Djibouti acting as a point d'appui for its military operations across Africa, including operations in the Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of the Congo on the opposite side of the continent. It currently hosts 1,900 troops (Business Insider 2015).

Landlocked Ethiopia relies on Djibouti for port access, and China has massive investments in the country, surpassing $30 billion in 2014, 60 times more than year 2000 levels (Jeffrey 2016). Projects include the construction of Africa's largest dam; the 188 meter Tekezé Arch Dam which was part of a $365 million hydropower project that added 300 megawatts to Ethiopia's grid (Power 2009).

The country of 830,000 people and limited land space has become congested by the presence of the Americans, French, Japanese and now the Chinese and Saudis. The increasing geopolitical importance of the Horn of Africa with huge investment opportunities and conflict has allowed Ankara to enter this region as a site for exerting its influence. Despite Wahhabi terrorism, piracy and drought, no other state but Turkey has identified Somalia as both geostrategically valuable and profitable. Every Western country has ignored Somalia given its ‘failed state’ status. According to Joshua Walker, the head of the Turkey program at the German Marshal Fund of the United States, "Turkey has said 'our intentions are peaceful,' and it wants to make Somalia a foreign policy crown jewel for what can be accomplished in the world" (Tovrov 2012). In the midst of inter-imperialist rivalries, this is a strategic move by Ankara.

Turkey has attempted to exercise influence in Cameroon, South Africa and Congo, but these countries have already been courted by other states, most significantly the United States, France, China and the United Kingdom ((Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). Somalia remains as a neglected failed state. Driven by the belief that there are enormous oil reserves in its Puntland region, Turkey has prepared operations to exploit Somalia's natural resources once a level of stability security is established (Palmer 2014, 104). As in Syria, Iraq and other conflict zones, it is not in the interest of imperialist rivals to have Somalia stable and secure.
According to the then Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, Turkey extended aid to Somalia as a ‘humanitarian obligation,’ not for strategic reasons. Turkey was not seeking to gain influence with a new government but only attempting to establish peace in a country with ‘shared Ottoman heritage.’ Somalia’s reaction to the July 2016 coup attempt against Erdoğan suggests that Ankara has a persuasive influence on Mogadishu. The Turkish Ambassador to Somalia, Olga Baker, paid tribute to the Somali people and the government in its reaction to the failed coup attempt, stating: “We really appreciate the attitude of Somalis people and its leadership against the coup attempt in Turkey. All the cabinet members visited me to show the solidarity of Somali government. This is brotherhood” (Awale 2016).

The Turkish state-run media, Anadolu Agency, reported that after the failed coup, the Somali government announced on July 16 that it would be suspending a school linked to the Gülen movement believed to be behind the failed coup attempt, at the request of Ankara. Notwithstanding Davutoğlu’s earlier statement about Turkey’s humanitarian obligation and shared Ottoman heritage, following the coup, all Gülen operated institutes were seized by the Turkish embassy or given over to the Somalian government (Anadolu Agency 2016).

Ankara is attempting to establish its sphere of influence over the pivotal waterways, and has done so in a state that has virtually been abandoned by the major powers and denied the resources for state building and infrastructural development. With an established military presence in the Middle East, Turkey is expanding its political, economic, cultural and increasing military presence in East Africa.

Turkey has established a presence to spread its influence into the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya. Even if Turkey’s economic investment in Somalia ends, its presence in Africa from an inter-imperialist perspective is the main priority allowing Turkey a gateway into countries as the continent is opened up to 21st century imperialism. Turkey’s venture into Somalia has allowed it to gain a presence on the continent that has seen France, Britain, the United States and China compete for supremacy in recent years.

This pivot for Turkish influence in Africa via Somalia as its gateway has seen Turkey undertake twelve diplomatic missions in 2009 across the continent, and thirty-nine in 2015 (Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). This further demonstrates a measured assertiveness by Ankara, which recognizes the limits and opportunities in engaging in inter-imperialist rivalry in the twenty-first century.

2.9 Twenty-First Century Imperialism in the Horn of Africa

The Turkish push into the Horn of Africa through Somalia can be understood in the historical context of the dynamics of inter-imperialist rivalry and its new forms of control and domination. The implosion of the Soviet Union, and U.S. President George Bush’s announcement of a ‘New World Order’ on September 11, 1991 assumed a unipolar world led by the United States in which it was assumed that American primacy in the United Nations, NATO and other international organizations, would go unchallenged (YouTube 2011). What was not envisaged was the transformation of Russia as a rising regional power
challenging American hegemony. Russia has experienced resurgence along with its strategic cooperation with China in the framework of a multipolar 'BRIC' world order outlook. In this global recasting the U.S. would most likely remain the most powerful military power but ceases to be the sole superpower as in its short-lived unipolar New World Order.

With the beginning of the twenty-first century, the U.S. sponsored destabilization programs and counterinsurgency efforts across the globe (Villar and Cottle 2011; Villar and Cottle 2015). Although the collapse of the Soviet Union gave the Americans and its major Western allies full reign of their imperial ambitions across the globe for the best part of nearly two decades, the resurgence of Russia and China has brought complexity to the Anglo-American Empire. Russia since its resurgence under President Vladimir Putin has established military bases in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Syria, and Vietnam, and in the breakaway provinces of Abhkazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria in Moldova. This is dwarfed by 662 bases the U.S. maintains across the globe according to the Pentagon as of 2011, but is ineffective in neutralizing growing inter-imperialist rivalries (Jacobson 2011; RT 2016c). Turkey and Russia have now agreed on ending the bloodshed in Syria, but it remains to be seen if this will eventuate (RT 2016b). Regarding China, it has only expanded its military influence in Djibouti. The congested Djibouti military-scape does not allow for middle powers such as Turkey to expand its influence further into the Horn of Africa and the imperative waterways, as it is already overcrowded by the major powers. U.S. backed Ethiopia remains landlocked since the success of the Eritrean separatists in 1991, Eritrea is insular-focused, and Somalia remains unstable because of al-Shabaab, weak government institutions and piracy. Turkey's inroads into Africa have been tolerated by inter-imperialist rivals to the West, Russia and China, which could potentially challenge Beijing's heavy investments across the continent (Turner 2014). Turkey is a key member of NATO with the second largest standing army (Yeşilada 2012, 132). With the increasing cooperation between Moscow and Beijing, and Beijing's continued push into Africa, is Turkey's engagement in Somalia an effort to halt the Chinese penetration into the continent on behalf of its American and Western allies?

In the diplomatic and economic rush into Africa, the United States, France, and the UK are outpaced by China. Since the decolonisation period, France and the UK had been the primary commercial partners in Africa. In 2009, China became Africa's largest trading partner, with a balance trade of USD$90 billion in 2009 (Mapunda 2014, 83). In the same year, the United States was ranked second with a trade balance of $86 billion (ibid.).

China has identified six special economic zones in Africa which are crucial to its interests: Chambishi and Lusaka in Zambia, Jinfei in Mauritius, Ogun and Lekki in Nigeria, Egypt, Algeria and Ethiopia (Bräutigam and Xiaoyang 211, 32). Since the success of the Eritrean independence movement, Ethiopia has become landlocked and relies on Djibouti for sea access (Meseret 2016). The only sea access for Ethiopia and China into Ethiopia is via Eritrea, Djibouti or Somalia. With Eritrean-Ethiopian relations being adversarial at best, their only realistic options remain Djibouti and Somalia for Ethiopia's sea access. Although a Chinese naval base is being prepared in Djibouti, the military presence of, France, the U.S., and Japan, Djibouti is a dubious nodal point for Chinese investment interests in Ethiopia and is representative of the imperial rivalry in the region.
Mogadishu’s political establishment is willing to co-operate with Addis Ababa as their invitation for Ethiopia’s intervention in the 2006-2009 War in Somalia demonstrated. This occurred despite previous Somali irredentist ambitions against Ethiopia with the Ogaden War. Despite their past difficulties, Ethiopia may seek to properly secure another avenue of sea access through Somalia, in the future.

Ethiopia has already begun using the deep-water seaport in Berbera in Somalia’s unrecognized breakaway province of Somaliland for limited import and export (Davinson 2016). This would suggest that through this outlet, China might have a new avenue to bypass the congestion of Djibouti and secure its trade routes to Ethiopia via Somalia. Somalia only has another two deep-water ports in Mogadishu and Kismayo. However, these are unsuitable alternatives as Kismayo lies near the Kenyan border, and Mogadishu is 1,400km away from Addis Ababa. The untapped Berbera port is the most suitable option in Somalia as it lies 915 km from Addis Ababa, just a bit further than Djibouti city, which lies 864km away. Somaliland remains a stable and safe province in what is otherwise a chaotic country (Gilmer 2014, 35). Although it is not known whether China will continue to solely use the military congested Djibouti, Berbera offers a deep-water port within easy access of Addis Ababa and Bab el-Mandab.

In these new developments, it must be questioned whether Turkey’s successful penetration into Somalia is to hinder any Chinese influence into the strategically located country on behalf of the U.S. and its Western allies. Instead, it demonstrates that 21st century imperialism offers incentives to ‘BRICS nations’ who wish to compete in a world market by encouraging imperial rivalries for the best economic outcome. Turkey’s strategy in Somalia is another chapter in this challenge for a multipolar world order.

If analysed through the lens of 21st century imperialist rivalry, the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed Africa to be dominated by America’s Western alliance. The rise of China has not only threatened, but overtaken 21st century imperialistic and capitalistic ambitions on the continent by the U.S., UK and France. A Chinese push into the virtually forgotten and untouched Somalia would further threaten U.S. and Western imperialism in Africa. The thousands of miles of untouched Somali coastline straddling strategic sea-lanes has been under-utilized and forgotten by the West and allows China the option of a second access to Ethiopia away from the Western alliance dominated Djibouti. It can only be speculated that the successful Turkish pivot into Somali economic, humanitarian and military sectors could potentially thwart Chinese efforts into Somalia if Turkish interests were threatened.

Although China in 2015 gave Somalia $15 million in aid money and reopened its embassy, this is miniscule compared to the humanitarian and diplomatic efforts of Turkey (Horseed Media 2015). Impoverished Somalia is open to aid and investment from any state, however, in the event of any NATO-China showdown, it is only conceivable that Somalia would back its Turkish partners who have invested heavily in this country. This would be the ultimate test of Turkey’s newly claimed worldview.
3 Conclusion

The Turkish pivot in Somalia not only serves to expand Turkish influence when considering its actions in Syria, Iraq and Qatar, but also competes with other imperialist rivals. The Ethiopian economic zone designated by the Chinese partly explains China’s first overseas military base in Djibouti to protect its investment. The Turkish domination of Somalia gives Ankara the option to either serve the American Western alliance or to use Somalia as a buffer state to block U.S. and Western imperialism. Whatever Ankara chooses, all roads for Erdoğan currently lead to Moscow and Beijing’s ever expanding Silk Road, making Somalia a gateway for renewed Turkish imperialism in the context of growing, global, inter-imperialist rivalries in the Horn of Africa.

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