

TARGETING TURKEY, SABOTAGING SOMALIA'S PROGRESS

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Somalia's new year began with a bomb explosion caused by a suicide bomber using a motorcycle. A Turkish construction company that was building a new road between Mogadishu and Afgoye was targeted; the incident led to the death of 5 workers and at least 14 workers wounded. Global media reported Abdiasis Abu Musab from Al Shabab claimed responsibility for the suicide bombing.ⁱ

It is not the first case where Al Shabab targets Turkey's development projects in Somalia. Turkish Airlines, Kızılay, TİKA, and some Turkish NGOs have been targeted by terror attacks since Turkey became a close ally to Somalia. Targeting Turkey in Somalia actually means targeting Somalia's development because all Turkish institutions based in Somalia work tirelessly for the development of Somalia that has been devastated by armed conflicts, humanitarian crises, and domestic disputes for many years.

Somalia's recovery from political instability and economic poverty requires a long period of time. Indicators show that Somalia started to show its development since 2011 but there is too much to go. The country needs unity, progress, and good governance. However, tribal or religious groups like Al Shabab are always ready to sabotage Somalia's development by misleading the Somalis.

Turkey has become a major supporter of Somalia in the last decade by providing development assistance and renewing its infrastructure. As it can be remembered, a short time ago Turkey paid off a part of Somalia's IMF debt costing \$3.4 million.ⁱⁱ After the Covid-19 outbreak Turkey was the first country sending medical equipment to Somalia with a full military cargo plane.ⁱⁱⁱ On many occasions Turkish institutions displayed solidarity and support for the Somali people. No need to list them all but it is enough to say that Turkey is also one of the important donors

of Somalia's national army; Turkey is providing finance and training for Somalian troops.

In February, a presidential election will take place in Somalia. Meanwhile, there are other important political and military developments in the country. Somalia is facing trouble with a diplomatic row with Kenya due to Kenya's interference in Somalia's internal affairs and long-standing maritime border dispute between the two countries.^{iv} It seems that the Farmajo government strongly believes in Kenya's manipulation in the coming election. As a result, Somalia cuts all its diplomatic ties with Kenya in a rapid move although Kenya hosts thousands of Somalian refugees and takes part in the African Union Somalia Mission (AMISOM) which is the main body in Somalia's security structure. On the other hand, another important progress will take place after the US withdraws its troops from Somalia. AFRICOM (The US Africa Command) has already announced its withdrawal in Somalia.^v After the withdrawal 800 US troops will be relocated and positioned in the neighboring countries of the Horn.

When one considers all these he/she would immediately realize that the new year in Somalia may turn such complex issues into an unexpected direction. Somalia needs international support and trustful partners more than ever. At this level, Turkey seems an important partner for Somalia, and strong cooperation between Turkey and Somalia can fill the gaps in its security and development. If Kenya withdraws from AMISOM and the absence of the US troops create any power vacuum, this would immediately enlarge Al Shabab's playground in Somalia. Therefore any power that creates an

obstacle for Al Shabab would easily become an enemy of the extremist group.

Turkey's engagement in Somalia started in 2011 after a deadly famine devastated the whole region. In the aftermath of Erdoğan's historic visit to Mogadishu, cooperation between Turkey and Somalia has deepened through development projects and business partnerships. The airport and seaport in Mogadishu are run by a Turkish company. Moreover, some units in Somalia's national military forces are trained by Turkish military units, where the training is conducted in Somalia and in Turkey. In addition, thousands of young Somalis study in Turkey via Turkey's scholarship program. However, all of Turkey's efforts towards Somalia's development is considered foreign involvement and dangerous from Al Shabab's ideological perspective. No need to say that this extreme ideology formed by foreign influence rather than national or local spirit wants to keep Somalia weak and fragile in order to establish a ground in which the group can secure its economic interest.

In reality, Turkey's support for Somalia is an important case from a humanitarian and development angle. People familiar with Somalia's economic, political and social atmosphere may well know that Somalia, devastated by civil wars, proxy wars, and humanitarian crisis, needs new roads, railways, airports, and more development on national infrastructure and more importantly a well-functioning state with institutions. So far, Al Shabab attacks on Turkey's initiatives have only sabotaged Somalia's progress.

Endnotes

- ⁱ "Several people killed in attack on Turkish company in Somalia", *Aljazeera*, 02.01.2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/1/2/several-people-killed-in-attack-on-turkish-company-in-somalia>
- ⁱⁱ "Turkey clears part of Somalia's IMF debt", *Garowe Online*, 07.11.2020, <https://www.garoweonline.com/en/news/world/turkey-clears-part-of-somalias-imf-debt>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Merve Aydogan, "Turkey delivers Somalia medical aid to tackle virus", *AA*, 04.05.2020, [https://www.aa.com.](https://www.aa.com.tr/en/health/turkey-delivers-somalia-medical-aid-to-tackle-virus/1827857)

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- ^{iv} Hassan Isilow, "Somalia, Kenya diplomatic row unfortunate: Experts", *AA*, 20.12.2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somalia-kenya-diplomatic-row-unfortunate-experts/2082752>

- ^v Ryan Browne, "US forces begin to move out of Somalia", *CNN*, 19.12.2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/12/19/politics/somalia-troop-withdrawal-trump/index.html>