

Tur IR

Turkey in Review: October 13 – October 28, 2021

Turkey's Defense Industry Transforms Its Outreach to Africa and Beyond

By Ezgi Yazici

The Turkish government has consistently expanded its Africa outreach as a component of enlarging and diversifying Turkey's global footprint since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's election in 2003. Ankara more recently began using defense ties to strengthen the diplomatic foundations of its outreach to African states. Growing international interest in Turkey's domestic defense industry is speeding up this shift toward a defense-oriented approach in bilateral relations, particularly since Azerbaijan's Turkey-enabled victory in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020.

Turkey is increasingly securitizing its foreign policy by leveraging its growing defense industry. Ankara is presenting its military industries and NATO-level capacity-building training programs to numerous developing countries in exchange for investment, energy deals, and construction projects that benefit the Turkish economy and Ankara's influence abroad. Turkish drones serve as a relatively low-cost defense option for countries like Azerbaijan, Morocco, and Ukraine.¹ The Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) offer training to foreign armed forces including those of Somalia, Azerbaijan, and Libya.² The role of Turkish armed drones and TSK military training

Turkey's Activities Abroad



programs in aiding Azerbaijan's victory in Nagorno-Karabakh likely boosted global interest in Turkish defense assistance offerings.³ Ankara is increasingly leveraging this demand and its growing domestic defense production to include military defense deals and sales to its bilateral agreements -- most significantly in Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Central Asian Turkic states.⁴

Defense sales and cooperation are playing a growing role in Turkish outreach to African countries that Erdogan has long prioritized. Turkish outreach to Africa in the early 2000s centered on expanding Turkey's presence in diplomatic-humanitarian terms. Since Erdogan's election, Turkey has increased its exports to sub-Saharan Africa tenfold, diversified its energy imports to include more African countries, quadrupled its number of embassies in the continent, and completed hundreds of construction and infrastructure projects with its companies in

Africa.⁵ More recently, however, Ankara began to build upon that two-decade-old foundation with more targeted outreach in the defense. Turkey now sells its Bayraktar TB2 combat drones to Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya and is exploring new sales to Nigeria and potentially Ethiopia.⁶ Turkey sells other arms to Kenya, Uganda, and Tunisia; and offers TSK training programs to Somalian and Libyan forces.⁷ Turkey also promotes itself as a security partner on the ground, working with various states in the Sahel and Horn of Africa in security, counterterrorism, and military initiatives.⁸ The number of African countries engaging with Turkey's defense industry through drone sales, arms sales, and training programs is growing steadily.

Expanding Turkey's influence in Africa has been key to President Erdogan's foreign policy objectives and self-perception. Since the early 2000s, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has perceived Africa as an untapped opportunity that could diversify Turkey's diplomatic outreach beyond Europe and the United States while offering new markets to its companies. Successful Africa outreach also elevates Erdogan's self-perception as a leader of both the Muslim and of the "Global South" and larger developing world.⁹

Erdogan's recent four-day trip to Africa aimed to secure key defense and energy deals. President Erdogan and top Turkish officials, including Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, visited Angola, Togo, and Nigeria between October 17 and 20, 2021.¹⁰ Angolan and Turkish officials discussed Turkish drone and armored vehicle sales, bilateral trade agreements, and Turkish powerplant projects.¹¹ Turkey and Togo agreed to advance trade and military cooperation in the first presidential-level state visit Turkey has made to the country.¹² Turkey also signed numerous trade agreements with mutual promises to strengthen military defense and cooperation with Nigeria—likely in line with Nigeria's desire to purchase Turkish Bayraktar TB2 combat drones.¹³

Turkey's Africa outreach—specifically to Nigeria and Angola—is critical for at least two Turkish strategic objectives.

- *Turkey seeks to expand access to and diversify its imports of energy resources away from Russia and Iran and toward Africa and the Caucasus.* Nigeria and Angola are two of the top African oil producers and exporters to Turkey.¹⁴ Nigeria is also Turkey's top sub-Saharan trading partner and has a natural gas agreement with Turkey that was set to expire at the end of October.¹⁵ Turkey also faces other expiring natural gas agreements with Russia at the end of 2021 just as Turkey is likely to see an increase in demand during the winter months.¹⁶
- *Turkey seeks to build and expand a unique global footprint where it can coexist or compete with global actors.* Turkey under Erdogan has pursued opportunities to create low-cost, asymmetrical, competitive advantages that increase its leverage over larger countries despite Turkey's faltering economy and limited global experience. In Africa, Ankara is combining its willingness to offer arms deals and military training with effective rhetoric. Erdogan often capitalizes on the lack of an Ottoman-Turkish colonial history in sub-Saharan Africa to position Turkey as a benevolent ally that promotes "African solutions for African problems" —an implicit criticism of external European involvement in the continent.¹⁷ Ankara is likely observing and learning from China and Russia's activity in Africa in order to coexist or compete with their investments.

Turkey's young defense industry will continue to shape the country's outreach abroad as it refines and expands its defense production at home. Ankara is likely to sharpen the defense component of its outreach, to observe and learn from larger external actors in the region, and to capitalize on its advantages over them to carve out a greater role for itself in the continent. Its lower-cost

drones are one of those key advantages. However, Ankara may face diplomatic consequences for exporting combat drones to a growing number of countries and may face production obstacles and an increasingly competitive market for drones as it pursues this path. Ankara's unique defense assistance and military outreach will increasingly sharpen and spearhead its foreign relations as it seeks to insert itself into regions already crowded with many external players with greater capital and resources than those of Turkey.

Turkey's Activities Abroad

1. October 26: Turkey prepared for a potential cross-border military campaign into northern Syria. Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) sent at least ten military convoys to reinforce its military positions across northern Syria.¹⁸ The largest convoys—with tanks, heavy weaponry, cement blocks, armored personnel carriers, and likely other equipment—reached Tal Abyad in Raqqa Province and Jabal Zawiyah in Idlib Province between October 26-28.¹⁹ Local sources estimate up to 400 vehicles are in Idlib, and a few hundred are in Tal Abyad as of October 28.²⁰ Local sources also reported additional reinforcements to Ras al Ayn, Hasakah Province, on October 28. The Turkish government has not confirmed any deployments, but a Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) spokesperson confirmed that SNA deployments have occurred in preparation for a Turkish incursion.²¹ The reported TSK and SNA reinforcements span a long frontline from Idlib to Raqqa Governorate that could challenge the Turkish military and resource bandwidth more than previous incursions.²² Turkey will likely need to prioritize a specific area between the Euphrates River and the Turkish-controlled "Peace Spring Zone" in northeast Syria, most likely Ayn Issa or Ayn al Arab, as a result. Pro-regime forces and Iranian militias sent military reinforcements toward Tal Rifat in anticipation of a potential Turkish military offensive.²³

2. October 26-27: Turkey extended troop deployment in Iraq and Syria until October 2023 despite opposition disapproval. The Turkish Parliament ratified a motion to extend Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) deployments to Syria and Iraq for two years on October 26—likely until after the upcoming general elections in 2023.²⁴ Erdogan recommended a two-year extension for the first time ahead of the current motion's expiration on October 31.²⁵ Further Turkish military incursions into Iraq and Syria require Parliament's approval, as does the potential military campaign against the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) in northern Syria that Erdogan and other government officials signaled in recent weeks. Erdogan's coalition holds the majority of parliamentary seats. Turkey's main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) voted against the motion for the first time, accusing the government of mismanaging Turkish forces in Syria.²⁶ The CHP likely seeks to retain the support of Turkey's large Kurdish electorate, who mostly oppose actions against the YPG, ahead of a potential run-off election between Erdogan and CHP's presidential candidate in 2023.

3. October 18-28: Turkish officials proposed purchasing Russian fighter jets to pressure the United States for F-16 sales. Turkish officials likely prefer US aircraft, which are easier to integrate with Turkey's existing systems, to their Russian counterparts. Turkish officials are therefore likely trying to coerce the United States, rather than truly changing their acquisition priorities. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu stated on October 28 that Turkey will consider buying Russian-made SU-35 and SU-57 fighter jets if the United States "does not resolve issues over F-35 jets."²⁷ Turkish Defense Industries President Ismail Demir also said that Turkey will turn to Russia for new aircraft if US-Turkish talks on the F-16 fighter jets fail.²⁸ Turkey requested 40 F-16s and 80 modernization kits for its existing jets to upgrade its air force fleet after its 2019 removal from the F-35 fighter jet program.²⁹ Turkish officials argue that Washington needs to provide Turkey with F-16 fighter jets to compensate for Turkey's \$1.4

billion payment into the F-35 program.³⁰ US leaders have said that US defense sales to Turkey cannot resume until Turkey gives up its already-purchased Russian S-400 missile systems and commits to not acquiring the system in the future.³¹

4. October 14: Turkey hosted Taliban leaders in Ankara: Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu hosted a Taliban delegation led by Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in Ankara on October 14.³² The two parties discussed bilateral relations, trade, humanitarian aid, migration, and air transport issues.³³ The Taliban held a series of meetings with Western countries in Qatar earlier that week. Muttaqi encouraged Turkey to provide renovation and reconstruction projects in Afghanistan.³⁴ Separately, a group of former Afghan government officials announced the formation of the “National Resistance Council” on October 22.³⁵ Local sources have reported some former Afghan government officials, including Abdul Rashid Dostum, Atta Noor, and Masoom Stanekzai, have been in Turkey in recent months.³⁶ Various social media accounts speculated that the Council may be based in Istanbul, Turkey, but these claims are unverified.

5. October 18-25: President Erdogan threatened to expel ten foreign

¹ <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/uav-magnate-baykar-to-build-centers-for-turkish-drones-in-ukraine>
<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/morocco-receives-turkey-armed-drones-report>
<https://www.wsj.com/articles/armed-low-cost-drones-made-by-turkey-reshape-battlefields-and-geopolitics-11622727370>

² <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/1-of-3-somalian-troops-to-be-trained-by-turkey-envoy/1931275>
<https://www.gmfus.org/news/turkeys-overlooked-role-second-nagorno-karabakh-war>
<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkish-soldiers-continue-to-provide-military-training-consultancy-for-libyan-army>

³ <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210319-after-big-wins-interest-in-turkish-combat-drones-soars>
<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/turkey%E2%80%99s-drones-and-proxies-are-turning-tide-war-194576>

⁴ The host countries often welcome Turkish investments and interest as a means to diversify often energy-dependent economies, improve militaries, bring in

ambassadors for supporting jailed Turkish philanthropist. Erdogan demanded the Turkish Foreign Ministry declare US Ambassador to Turkey David Satterfield and nine other ambassadors to be “persona non grata” and threatened to remove them from Turkey on October 21. The ambassadors called for the release of imprisoned philanthropist and businessperson Osman Kavala in a joint statement on October 18.³⁷ Erdogan stepped back from his initial threat after a cabinet meeting with his ministers on October 25. Turkish officials, including Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, likely sought to soften Erdogan’s reaction to avert a diplomatic crisis with multiple countries. The ambassadors of the United States, Canada, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and New Zealand joined the October 18 statement. Erdogan’s mercurial position on this diplomatic confrontation also led to significant fluctuations of the Turkish lira as part of a longer-running free fall of the currency’s value.

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industry expertise from Turkish companies, and forge partnerships with a new actor on the continent. In return, Ankara receives favorable energy and investment deals to expand and diversify Turkey’s access to various energy and mining resources. It pragmatically prioritizes resource allocations to regions with geopolitical or energy assets that are important to Turkey.

⁵ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/-number-of-turkish-embassies-in-africa-rises-from-12-to-42/1619429>

<https://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkey-africa-relations.en.mfa>

<https://african.business/2021/03/trade-investment/erdogans-ambition-drives-turkeys-africa-surge/>

⁶ https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_business/2021/10/08/tunis-takes-delivery-of-its-first-turkish-armed-drones,109697033-bre

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-expands-armed-drone-sales-ethiopia-morocco-sources-2021-10-14/>

<https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkey-aims-to-boost-cooperation-in-defense-industry-with-nigeria/2396812>

<https://www.facebook.com/farmarocofficielle/posts/2987561524802147>

<https://www.arabnews.com/node/1935236/middle-east>
<https://www.airrecognition.com/index.php/news/defense-aviation-news/2021/september/7667-morocco-receives-first-turkish-bayraktar-tb2-unmanned-aerial-vehicle.html>

⁷ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/turkey-joins-scramble-africa-arms-sales-krltd8wlb>

⁸ <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkeys-sahel-strategy>

⁹ <https://www.insightturkey.com/commentaries/a-post-2014-vision-for-turkey-africa-relations>

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2013/apr/10/turkey-development-partner-africa>

¹⁰ Turkish Foreign, Defense, and Energy ministers joined Erdogan for the tour

The high-level Turkish delegation left Turkey at a time of and despite a heightened possibility for a new Turkish incursion in northern Syria. Ankara's prioritization to put Syria decision-making on hold and travel to three African states highlights Turkey's Africa outreach as a key priority for the leadership.

¹¹ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/live/turkish-president-arrives-in-southern-african-nation-of-angola/2395075>

¹² <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-president-appreciates-togo-s-support-in-fight-against-feto-terror-group/2396879>

¹³ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/turkey-nigeria-determined-to-deepen-cooperation-erdogan>
Turkey and Nigeria likely extended the expiring natural gas deal. Neither delegation confirmed the extension, however.

¹⁴ <https://www.trade.gov/energy-resource-guide-turkey-oil-and-gas>

¹⁵ Turkish and Nigerian officials signed an energy cooperation deal. However, neither country formally recognized the extension of the natural gas deal. Turkey's original natural gas deal with Nigeria dates back to 1995.

¹⁶ <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkeys-energy-import-bill-up-65-7-pct-in-sept-168942>

¹⁷ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/erdogan-calls-for-a-fairer-world-urges-africa-to-act-together>

¹⁸ <https://twitter.com/Realistqx/status/1453087987764453379>

<https://twitter.com/LindseySnell/status/1452906971317800964>

¹⁹ https://twitter.com/L_Team10/status/1453372861649981450

https://twitter.com/StanteaR_/status/145311188343173122

<https://twitter.com/OGNreports/status/1453080037834514442>

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<https://twitter.com/bifikirver/status/1453234546347024387>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-27/turkey-reinforces-syria-troops-for-possible-attack-on-u-s-ally>

²¹ The SNA spokesperson statement

<https://arabi21.com/story/1393967/%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A..-%D8%AD%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7>

<https://arabi21.com/story/1393967/%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A..-%D8%AD%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7>

<https://arabi21.com/story/1393967/%D8%AD%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A..-%D8%AD%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D9%83%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%B1-%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%83%D9%8A%D8%A7>

²² Turkey increased its reconnaissance activities across northern Syria including Tal Rifat, Idlib Governorate, and Ayn al Arab.

<https://twitter.com/GDarkconrad/status/1452559922986725376>

<https://twitter.com/GDarkconrad/status/1452999845984227334>

<https://twitter.com/GDarkconrad/status/1451833013868929028>

<https://twitter.com/GDarkconrad/status/1451100616336494593>

²³ Turkish-backed and pro-regime forces also both dropped leaflets to the Tal Rifat area warning of a possible Turkish incursion in early October.

<https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2021/10/syrian-government-forces-deploy-response-turkish-threat>

<https://twitter.com/Magedabdelnour1/status/1451967816622657541>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nalxwjQLHcI>

<https://www.zaitunagency.net/63922/>

²⁴ <https://www.dw.com/tr/irak-suriye-tezkeresi-tbmm-den-ge%C3%A7ti/a-59632314>

²⁵ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-erdogan-troops-syria-iraq-extension-request>

²⁶ <https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/legislation/chp-to-oppose-extending-troop-mandate-for-cross-border-ops>

<https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/chp-tezkereye-hayir-diyecek-3708775>

²⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/us-should-deliver-f-35s-ankara-paid-for-or-return-money-turkey/2405426>

²⁸ <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/russian-fighter-jets-still-in-the-game-if-turkey-us-f-16s-talks-fail>

²⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkey-seeks-40-f-16-jets-upgrade-air-force-sources-2021-10-07/>

³⁰ <https://ahvalnews.com/turkey-us/ankara-talks-washington-purchase-f-16-fighter-jets-erdogan>

³¹ <https://warontherocks.com/2021/10/not-a-divorce-but-a-defense-decoupling-whats-next-for-the-u-s->

turkish-alliance/; <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/senate-bill/1790/text>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/us-lawmakers-express-concern-over-reports-potential-turkey-f-16-purchase-2021-10-26/>

³² The delegation included Information and Culture Minister Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwa, Intelligence head Abdul Haq Wasiq, Deputy Interior Minister Noor Jalal Jalali, Shahabuddin Delawar, Suhail Shaheen, Mohammad Ibrahim, and Abdul Qahar Balkhi.

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/taliban-delegation-to-visit-ankara-to-discuss-turkey-afghanistan-ties>

³³ <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/talibandan-turkiyeye-ust-duzey-ziyaret-3706851>

³⁴ <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/ankara-ziyareti-sonrasi-talibandan-aciklama,fv4hbCHY4oWstTJISbx9Dw>

<https://www.dailysabah.com/politics/diplomacy/taliban-delegation-to-visit-ankara-to-discuss-turkey-afghanistan-ties>

³⁵

<https://twitter.com/ShorayNezarAAES/status/1450289438089691144>

<https://tolonews.com/afghanistan-175143>

Abdul Rab al-Rasul Sayyaf, Mohammad Mohaqiq, Younus Qanuni, Salahuddin Rabbani, Atta Mohammad Noor, and Abdul Rashid Dostum members of the council according to anonymous reporting

³⁶ Claims that the NRC is based in Istanbul, Turkey are unconfirmed and are disputed.

An Ankara-based account shared the video of Masoom Stanekzai visiting an immigration office in Ankara on October 14.

<https://twitter.com/AhmadQasani/status/1448635736664776708>

Another account reports that Ankara asked Atta Noor to leave Turkey after Cavusoglu met with Muttaqi

<https://twitter.com/AhmadQasani/status/1450494667712249865?cn=ZmxleGlibGVfcmVjcw%3D%3D&refsrc=email>

Abdul Rashid Dostum fled to Turkey in 2017 and was receiving medical treatment in Turkey earlier in 2021. He likely returned to Afghanistan in August. His current location is unknown.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210805-notorious-afghan-warlord-returns-to-fight-for-besieged-home>

³⁷ <https://tr.usembassy.gov/statement-on-four-years-of-osman-kavalas-detention/>