



POLICY BRIEF

Assessing the Effectiveness of Turkish Mediation: The 2024 Ethiopia–Somalia Tensions

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I. Introduction

On December 11, 2024, Türkiye announced its success in mediating an agreement between Ethiopia and Somalia to end the Somali-Ethiopian crisis. Tensions erupted between the two states after Ethiopia signed an "illegal" agreement with the internationally unrecognized Republic of Somaliland to gain access to a military and commercial seaport on the Red Sea. Ankara's ability to bring the two sides to the negotiating table represents a notable success for Turkish diplomacy in the Horn of Africa. (Hassan, 2024).

However, the Ankara Declaration cannot be considered a final solution to the Somali Ethiopian conflict, as it left many outstanding issues unaddressed and called for technical negotiations in 2025 to resolve the contentious issues. (Tyson, 2024). Therefore, this paper aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Turkish mediation in the Somali-Ethiopian crisis of 2024. The paper argues that Türkiye's mediation in the 2024 Somali Ethiopian rivalries, culminating in the Ankara Declaration, underscores the effectiveness of its balanced diplomacy, rooted in Ankara's close ties with both parties. This strategic positioning enabled Türkiye to facilitate dialogue and broker an agreement, particularly amid the failure of regional and international efforts to bridge the gap between the two sides.

Nevertheless, the lack of a clear implementation mechanism within the Declaration, along with the entrenched internal dynamics shaping both Ethiopia's and Somalia's rigid stances, limits Türkiye's ability to ensure a viable resolution to the conflict. Accordingly, this paper relies on a qualitative approach including academic articles to investigate the viability of Turkish mediation efforts.

The paper is divided into five sections. The first section reviews the existing literature on the complexities of mediation processes. The second section contextualizes the Ethiopian Somali

dispute. The third section delves into the close Turkish relations with both parties. The fourth section highlights the failure of other regional and international involvement attempts. The fifth section evaluates the Ankara Declaration.

II. Literature Review

By reviewing the existing literature on mediation techniques, two main approaches can be detected. The First approach, grounded in the realist school of international relations, stresses the need for a mediator with muscles – one with leverage – for an effective mediation process. The second approach adopts a pluralist perspective, highlighting the role of dialogue-facilitation and addressing both parties' needs in achieving sustainable peace. (Acevski & Dokmanovic, 2016; Amoo & Zartman, 1992; Handelman, 2017; Wennmann, 2009).

The Realist Approach to Mediation

Realists believe in the power of third-party leverage in forcing negotiating parties to accept a settlement. For example, Acevski and Dokmanovic (2016) argued that the American coercive diplomacy, manifesting in the 1995 Operation Deliberate Force, enforced the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords on both Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Muslims. Similarly, Handelman (2017) cited the 1979 US-mediated Israeli-Egyptian Peace Treaty as an example that showcases the role of economic incentives in producing peace.

Accordingly, the lack of enforcement powers discourages parties from making concessions. For instance, Amoo and Zartman (1992) attributed the failure of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) mediation efforts to reach a decisive agreement in the 1977 Libyan-Chadian talks to its weak influence over Libyan leadership. In general, Realism presents power dynamics as the fundamental factor in mediation success.

Nevertheless, this approach cannot explain how small-sized states can play a major role in negotiations. Qatari mediation in the recent Israeli-Palestinian conflict sheds light on the limitations of the realist tradition. (Hassan, 2025). Not to mention that the presence of Hamas in negotiations contradicts the realist logic that dictates that only state entities can reach viable settlements.

Pluralist Approach to Mediation

In contrast, Pluralists view negotiations as mechanisms to explore agreements that address the basic needs of both sides such as recognition, security and autonomy. This technique relies on a problem-solving mediator that creates optimal conditions for political elites for conflict resolution. Handelman (2017) referred to the confidence-building measures adopted by Norway in the 1993 Oslo Accords. The Norwegian setting allowed for informal negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians that explored ways for the creation of a Palestinian state.

Bercovitch and Jackson (2009) argued that mediation is tailored for complex and long-standing conflicts. This should include serious attempts to address the underlying causes of conflicts. Moreover, Wennmann (2009) emphasized the importance of local ownership in mediated conflicts. This means that the mediator should provide an environment that facilitates the integration of local groups' grievances, especially economic ones.

Therefore, the paper expands on the findings of the second approach due to Ankara's commitment to complete neutrality as well as its role in facilitating discussions without exerting pressure on both actors. This paper argues that Türkiye has managed to maintain a balanced approach in the 2024 Ethiopian Somali crisis, capitalizing on its close relations with both sides and the Ethiopian Somali mistrust towards other involvement attempts. Nevertheless, the

ambiguous text of the Ankara Declaration still lacks implementation measures. The domestic factors shaping the Ethiopian and Somali stances may hinder Turkish effective resolution.

III. Historical Ethiopian Somali Rivalries

Ethiopia and Somalia have a long history of complex and multifaceted disputes. Colonial legacies largely contributed to persistent tensions between Addis Ababa and Mogadishu. Post-Somali independence in 1964, Somalia claimed the Ethiopian region of “Ogaden” on ethnic grounds and invaded it in 1977. Furthermore, Ethiopia’s re-control over Ogaden in 1977 did not end the hostilities, rather, it initiated a prolonged insurgency-based proxy war between the two states. This further destabilized bilateral relations. (Zoubir, 2024).

Additionally, Regime changes in both states re-generate tensions. For instance, the fall of Siad Barre’s one-party rule in 1991 prompted Ethiopian intervention in Somalia’s internal affairs. This reached its peak with Addis Ababa’s military invasion to overthrow the Islamic Courts Union in 2006 which was resisted by Somali local factions. Ethiopia’s ongoing operations against the Islamist al-Shabab group both independently and as part of the African Union (AU)’s missions, still produce more tensions. (Ahmed, 2024; Zoubir, 2024).

Simultaneously, Abi Ahmed’s rise to power in 2018 has marked a significant station in Ethiopian Somali relations. The New Ethiopian Prime Minister’s ambitions to acquire sea access for his landlocked nation fueled pre-existing Ethiopian Somali grievances. Thus, the major blow to the relations between Adis Ababa and Mogadishu came with the January 2024 memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed between the Ethiopian government and the separatist authorities of “Somaliland”. Under this agreement, Ethiopia will gain access to a 20-kilometer naval base for military and commercial purposes in exchange for recognizing the breakaway territory of Somaliland. (Webb, 2024).

Somalia responded to this move, which it considered a violation of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, by withdrawing its ambassador from Addis Ababa in April 2024. (Faruk, 2024). Somali Defense Minister counterpart Abdul Qader Muhammad Nour also declared that any Ethiopian military presence on its territory after the end of the African Union peacekeeping mission in January 2025 is tantamount to an "occupation." (Dhaysane, 2024). In general, Tensions escalated between Somalia and Ethiopia.

IV. Turkish Close Ties with Both Parties

Türkiye's balanced diplomacy is the main reason behind its ability to effectively mediate in this conflict. First, Türkiye enjoys strong military ties with Somalia. In 2011, Türkiye established a military base in Somalia in exchange for training thousands of Somali troops. Moreover, Turkish Defense Minister Uasar Guler signed a mutual defense pact with his Somalian counterpart Abdul Qader Muhammad Nour in February 2024. Thus, Türkiye has a deep-seated interest in preserving Somali stability. (Kandil, 2024).

In addition, Ankara has reinforced economic cooperation with Mogadishu. For example, Türkiye assumed the managerial responsibility of Aden Adde International Airport in Mogadishu in 2013. Similarly, The Turkish company Albayrak was awarded the management contract for Mogadishu Port in 2014, with the aim of improving infrastructure and increasing revenues for the Somali government. Furthermore, Türkiye signed a framework economic cooperation agreement with Somalia in February 2024. Accordingly, Türkiye has gained extraction rights for Somalia's oil reserves starting from March 2024. Overall, Turkish Somali intertwined interests establish Ankara as a credible and accepted mediator for Mogadishu. (Ahmed,2021; Kandil, 2024).

On the other hand, The Turkish government has developed economic cooperative relations with its Ethiopian counterpart. Türkiye is considered the second largest source of foreign direct

investment in Ethiopia after China. Turkish companies invested more than 2.5 billion dollars in Ethiopian infrastructure. According to The Turkish Ambassador to Adis Ababa Berk Baran, 200 Turkish companies operate in multiple Ethiopian industries such as construction, pharmaceutical and food industries. In summary, Türkiye enjoys a significant economic presence in Ethiopia. (Kandil, 2024; RNA, 2023).

This Turkish Ethiopian cooperation extends to the military front. Turkish President Erdoğan provided military support, including Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones to Abi Ahmed's war efforts against Tigray forces in 2021, tipping the balance of the war in Abi Ahmed's favor. Furthermore, Ethiopian Council of Ministers approved a bill that enhances Turkish Ethiopian cooperation in areas such as joint military drills and defense industry development in 2022. (Addis Standard, 2022; Kandil, 2024). In general, Türkiye is a credible military partner for Ethiopia.

V. The Failure of Regional and International Actors

Besides Turkish effective communication with both parties, the failure of regional and international actors in facilitating peace discussions enhances Türkiye's geopolitical position in the Horn of Africa. On the Bilateral level, the international community overwhelmingly endorses Somali narratives. For example, the United States, The United Kingdom and the EU member-states supported Somalia's sovereignty without providing avenues for conflict resolution. While This position seems morally correct and aligned with international law, it does not address Ethiopia's developmental needs and pushes towards a more rigid Ethiopian stance. (Tyson, 2024).

Additionally, Egypt has become involved in the conflict. Due to Egypt's long-standing dispute with Ethiopia over the Renaissance Dam, Cairo sought deeper relations with Mogadishu. to pressure Ethiopia in the Dam dossier. In August 2024, Egypt sent 10,000 soldiers to Somalia to strengthen its security capabilities. It also provided Somalia with three arms shipments since 2024.

This closer military coordination disrupted relations with Ethiopia which warned of any “Egyptian military participation” in the AU’s peacekeeping mission in Somalia. Thus, One may deduce that adding Egypt to the equation diverts the situation from diplomatic communication to military escalation. (Ahmed, 2024; Tyson, 2024).

Moreover, The Multilateral organizations’ inability to effectively mediate in this conflict strengthened Ankara’s intermediary role. For instance, The United Nations (UN) issued a statement that supports Somalia’s territorial integrity and calls on Ethiopia to respect international law. This means that the UN adopts the Somali position without offering viable solutions to Ethiopia’s economic needs. Not to mention that the UN has a failing record in mediating African conflicts. The UN’s failure to intervene and propose a viable negotiated settlement in the 1993 Rwanda has led to the death of 800,000 people. (Stanton, 2024; Tyson, 2024).

The same applies to the African organizations. The AU emphasized its commitment to supporting Somalia’s stability and territorial integrity. The limitation of this approach is its inability to enhance Ethiopian-Somali relations and address each side’s needs as a result of it Ethiopian-perceived bias. The AU generally has failed to produce sustainable peace formula in cases such as the Egyptian Ethiopian dispute over the Renaissance Dam. On the contrary, A more moderate approach has been adopted by Intergovernmental Authority on Development in East Africa which urged “dialogue and restraint between the two parties”. Somalia rejected this statement and characterized it as “biased”. In conclusion, both parties showed unwillingness to accept multilateral intermediaries. (Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2024).

This international failure provides additional insights into Türkiye’s unique role in this geopolitical context. Ankara’s mediation efforts were welcomed by both Addis Ababa and Mogadishu. In May 2024, Ethiopia requested Turkish mediation to resolve its dispute with

Somalia. Unlike Egypt who also has profound military relations with Somalia, Ethiopia does not perceive Turkish military presence in Somalia as a threat to its interests. Therefore, unlike other actors, Turkish position is not considered “biased”. (Adel, 2024; Ali, 2024).

Similarly, While Somalia has consistently rejected any negotiations with Ethiopia unless it annuls its recognition of Somaliland, Mogadishu accepted Turkish mediation due to their aforementioned close relations. Despite the enormous support of other actors to Somalia’s interests, Mogadishu viewed Ankara as the only actor that can persuade the Ethiopians to a negotiated settlement because of its previously mentioned connections to Ethiopia’s leadership. This means that Türkiye is the perfect mediator for this conflict as it seeks to preserve its economic and military interests in both states. This presents it as a “neutral mediator”. (Ali, 2024).

VI. Evaluating the Ankara Declaration

Accordingly, Türkiye has led negotiations between the two states in August and September 2024 at the ministerial level, achieving progress without reaching a final outcome. In December 2024, Turkish President Erdoğan brokered the Ankara Declaration, in the presence of PM Abi Ahmed and Somali President Sheikh Hassan Mahmoud. The agreement included three main axes: affirming Somalia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, recognizing Ethiopia's legitimate need for maritime access, and seeking joint solutions, and starting technical negotiations in February 2025, facilitated by Türkiye, to implement the agreement. (Hassan, 2024; Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2024). The success of Turkish mediation manifests in ending the direct tensions between the two states and convincing them to undertake a negotiating process to reach an agreement on the points of contention.

However, the Ankara Declaration can be criticized for its lack of implementation mechanisms. The agreement did not tackle the root causes of contention between Ethiopia and Somalia. The

Ankara Declaration represents a mere general framework for future negotiations, leaving room for diverse interpretations of its text. For instance, the text highlights “Ethiopia’s right to enjoy reliable, secure and sustainable access to and from the sea. In contrast, it does not specify the nature of this access. Thus, the lack of clarity could hinder meaningful negotiations and revive unrest similar to the 2018 peace agreement between Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. The vague text that embraced cooperation and coordination to address unresolved issues, did not end the Ethiopian Eritrean rivalries due to the lack of implementation measures. All in all, Any Final Eithtopian-Somali agreement should tackle Ethiopia’s naval ambitions. (Bereketeab, 2024; Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, 2024).

Furthermore, The Somali internal dynamics can cause a political backlash against the Declaration. For example, the agreement did not refer to the MOU signed between Ethiopia and Somaliland. However, the agreement stresses the need to “put aside differences and pursue shared prosperity”, implying that the MOU has effectively been shelved. This could cause internal resistance to any eventual settlement, particularly by Somaliland’s separatist authorities who view the agreement as a direct threat to their recognition aspirations. (Hassan, 2024).

Additionally, The Somali acceptance of Ethiopia’s access to Somali ports contradicts previous stances adopted by Mogadishu’s government. Therefore, this could undermine the legitimacy of the already fragile government. This could benefit Al-Shabab’s so-called anti-imperial cause, as it relies on anti-foreign intervention rhetoric to mobilize recruits. This could further destabilize the Somali political landscape. (Tyson, 2024).

Moreover, the possibility of the existence of Ethiopian concessions may damage Abi Ahmed’s domestic legitimacy. In a speech at the Ethiopian Parliament in October 2023, the latter portrayed Ethiopia’s aims to access the Red Sea militarily and economically as “national projects” that

express Addis Ababa's historical influence in the region. This nationalist rhetoric aims to unify various conflicting ethnic groups after a devastating civil war that ended in 2022. Thus, any concessions would reinforce internal divisions within the state. (Middle East Council on Global Affairs, 2024).

VII. Proposed Recommendations

Consequently, Social normalization and reconciliation between the Somali and Ethiopian peoples are necessary for any sustainable peace. The 1998 Good Friday Agreement serves as a real-life example that can mitigate social hostilities and foster peaceful dialogue. The agreement established North-South bodies, namely the North-South Ministerial Council and North-South implementation bodies. These support co-operation between the North and South of Ireland. This coordination model can be applied to the Ethiopian Somali case. Ankara's proposition of such mechanisms can address major issues such as the lack of implementation mechanisms and the entrenched rivalries. (McGlinchey, 2024).

Post-Apartheid South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission presents another model for social healing. Revisiting historical facts and ensuring a holistic inclusion of South African ethnicities assisted the reconciliation process within the state. Türkiye could rely on this model for a deeper reform of Somali Ethiopian relations. the historically persistent Ethiopian Somali conflict should be revised academically by experts from both states. Consequently, The Turkish mediator should propose the inclusion of a unified peaceful narrative in educational curricula, reinforcing social normalization. (Camrra, 2024).

VIII. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper argues that Turkish strategic balance as well as its military and economic ties with both Ethiopia and Somalia were instrumental in its ability to effectively mediate in the recent Ethiopian-Somali conflict. Moreover, the perceived bias of regional and international actors such as Egypt, the UN and the AU has showcased the uniqueness of the Turkish neutrality in this conflict. This further strengthened both actors' appeal for Turkish mediation.

Nevertheless, the 2024 Ankara Declaration falls short in resolving the root causes of the Ethiopian Somali conflict. The Declaration touches upon general principles for future negotiations without offering guarantees for preserving each sides' interests and commitments such as the nature of Ethiopian access to the Red Sea. Domestic pressures such as Somaliland's separatist ambitions and Al-Shabab's anti-Ethiopian stance in addition to Abi Ahmed's diminishing domestic legitimacy may hinder reaching a final viable settlement.

Therefore, the paper proposed multiple adjustments to the Ankara Declaration. It should include mutual coordination mechanisms as per the 1998 Good Friday agreement model. Furthermore, the South African reconciliation experience may provide solutions for Ethiopian Somali long-standing disputes via social healing. Finally, the literature is limited on the role of domestic factors in shaping Ethiopia and Somalia's negotiating stances. Thus, more literature should be produced on this issue.

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