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ARTICLE



# Humanitarian diplomacy as Turkey's national role conception and performance: evidence from Somalia and Afghanistan

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years Turkey has made Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) an essential element of its foreign policy. This article analyzes Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy as a role conception and role performance by focusing on two cases, Somalia and Afghanistan, as the two most significant cases of Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy. It is argued that Humanitarian Diplomacy as foreign policy has provided Turkey with enough flexibility and ambiguity to bring together humanitarianism with interest. At the same time, Turkey's foreign policy interests started to become more legitimate and accepted by linking it to widely respected norms. Finally, HD also helped the AKP to consolidate its international state identity as well as its domestic identity.

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## Introduction

Turkey has been presenting itself as an international humanitarian actor and widely engaged in several conflict-affected states in recent years. Turkey's humanitarian and development aid has increased steadily, especially since 2012 (TİKA 2019, 24). Parallel to its increasing role in humanitarianism, the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* - AKP), which has been in power since late 2002, has presented Humanitarian Diplomacy (HD) as one of the main elements of its foreign policy. Former Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu was the first to use the term HD to describe Turkey's foreign policy and as the central theme of the Fifth Annual Ambassadors Conference in January 2013. From then on, President Erdoğan and the AKP foreign policy elite continued to employ the term 'humanitarian foreign policy.' This narrative was echoed by Turkey's leading aid institutions, namely the Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (*Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı* - AFAD) and the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı* - TİKA). In 2014, Turkey became a member of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OHCA) Donor Support Group, which shapes global humanitarian policies. In 2016, Turkey hosted the first-ever UN World Humanitarian Summit, which Davutoğlu called the 'most meaningful' international event ever held in Turkey (OHCA (UN Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) 2013). In 2021, while presenting the ministry's budget to the parliament, Foreign

Minister Mevlut Cavuşoğlu again labelled Turkey's foreign policy vision as an 'enterprising and humanitarian foreign policy' (Anadolu Agency 28 November 2020).

The concept of HD has been developed mainly to refer to increasing engagement and negotiations by humanitarian NGOs with several parties in conflict environments to provide humanitarian assistance (Regnier 2011). Some governments soon appropriated it to define their foreign policy roles (De Lauri 2018), which Turkey was one of the first to do. However, the use of HD as foreign policy by states has led to significant tensions (De Lauri 2018) and introduced a fuzziness to the concept, particularly through its unclear operational application. The Turkish case in analysing HD is interesting as it problematizes the distinction between the so-called traditional and emerging donors as well as among the emerging donors. On the one hand, Turkey's policies bear similarities and differences with the so-called liberal peacebuilding and state-building model of traditional donors. However, although Turkey has adopted a norm-based approach to its humanitarianism, it distinguishes itself from the Western established donors in claiming to act with 'conscious' while arguing that the Western donors do not actually care and engage the recipients on an equal basis. On the other hand, although Turkey is generally considered part of the so-called 'rising donors,' it can be significantly differentiated from them. While other 'rising donors,' such as India or China, have been staunchest defenders of sovereignty and non-intervention norms, Turkey under the AKP has been eager to adopt an interventionist stance in its approach to HD and engage in state-building activities. As such, Humanitarian Diplomacy as an idea and foreign policy seem to fit perfectly with the ambiguities it creates between norms and interests as well as between concepts and applications. This article aims to make sense of these seeming contradictions and inconsistencies in Turkey's HD as foreign policy by taking a role-theoretical perspective.

Although Turkey's HD, its general characteristics and implementation in specific cases, have been studied (Akpınar 2013; Altunisik 2014; Donelli 2017; Çevik 2018; Eyryce Tepeciklioğlu and Tepeciklioğlu 2021), it has never been analysed as a national role conception. Similarly, although role theory has been used in the study of Turkish foreign policy (Aras and Gorener 2010; Ovalı 2013; Parlar Dal and Erşen 2014; Özdamar et al. 2014; Özdamar 2016), these studies have mainly used Holsti's typology to explain foreign policy initiatives or changes. This study applies role theory to HD as foreign policy. It argues that analysing HD as a role conception helps link it with foreign policy and thus explains how to bring together humanitarianism and interest and unpack its ideational and material sources. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap and argues that the role theory provides conceptual tools to analyse Turkey's HD as a foreign policy. Turkey has used HD as a bridge between the norm of humanitarianism and interest; thus, HD has become both a role conception and role performance for the AKP. Role theory offers especially three sets of conceptual tools to contribute to the analysis of Turkey HD. First, it helps trace the links between AKP's ideology and its HD role conception. Second, it links the foreign policy role conception with domestic politics. Thus, it is argued that focusing on the ideational and material aspect of AKP's national role conception in the case of HD as foreign policy as well as domestic construction of AKP's identity and its reconfiguration of state-society relations account for the differences between Turkey and other rising powers in their approach to HD. Third, role theory also allows analysing the intra- and inter-role conflicts HD as foreign policy creates (Thies 2009; Malici and

Walker 2016). Focusing on role conflicts and the state's strategies to deal with them provides a perspective to understand the utility of the HD as a role conception that allows the AKP to link humanitarianism with interest and to discuss challenges the AKP has been facing in pursuing its HD.

The first part of the article concentrates on how the AKP has crafted a discourse of Humanitarian Diplomacy. The focus here is on the narratives advanced by Turkey's political and foreign policy elite and how they tend to utilize the country's cultural repertoire to sediment a new role as a humanitarian state. In addition to ideational sources, there will also be an analysis of the material sources that made HD a national role conception. This will then be linked to domestic utilization of HD role conception. The second part of the article will discuss how HD as a role conception has been linked to role performance in conflict-affected states, focusing on Somalia and Afghanistan as the two most significant examples of Turkey's HD. That part will analyse how Turkey has conducted HD role performance, to what extent humanitarian diplomacy brought humanitarianism and foreign policy together, and with what consequences. There will be a discussion on role conflicts and the strategies developed by the AKP to deal with them.

In understanding the sources of HD role conception, the article uses an interpretive narrative analysis that focuses on the ruling narratives of the state elites and bureaucrats in state aid institutions that frame Turkey as a humanitarian actor (Bevir et al. 2013; Wehner 2020). It is based on the assumption that the AKP's worldview and the historical contingency that it places itself in the matter in its definition of HD. This is then linked to how such a framing of Turkey's HD worked in practice in the two cases. The article uses government reports, public statements, the writings of state elites and aid institution bureaucrats, and interviews conducted periodically since 2013 with actors in Turkey's aid politics, as well as secondary sources that also rely heavily on interviews and field observations to analyse the AKP's HD national role conception and performance.

### **HD as a role conception: the conceptual framework**

States' role conceptions as ideas about their proper place in international relations (Holsti 1970) are a manifestation of their identity and interest. HD as foreign policy role conception is an arena where states can construct their identity as a 'humanitarian compassionate actor' while simultaneously pursuing their interests. In a way, HD role conception, despite the continuously embedded tension between these two objectives (De Lauri 2016), allows them to co-exist as it combines 'humanitarian' with 'diplomacy.' This issue becomes relevant in linking national role conceptions and foreign policy. Like constructivism, which also relies on discourses, role theory faces the challenge of linking national role conceptions with foreign policy practices. As Breuning (1995) argues, this is particularly relevant in the issue area of foreign assistance, as it is generally claimed that while the words emphasize humanitarianism, the deeds practice national interest. Thus, HD as a role conception entailing identity and interest provides a bridging function for states. An in-depth analysis of HD in practice in the case of Turkey unravels how these seemingly contradictory elements in HD work in practice and continuing tensions between them.

In order to unpack these inherent tensions and how they are dealt with in HD as a role conception, first, there is a need to go to the sources of national roles. In the literature on role theory, while some focused more on material sources, others more or less identified norms and identities as the primary source of national role conception. However, Bruening (2011) argued that ideational factors, such as actors' perception of their identity and cultural heritage, and material factors, such as actors' capabilities and opportunities to act, lead to national role conceptions defined by decision-makers. This, in turn, leads to role performance, that is, foreign policy behaviour (Bruening 2011, 26). This article adopts Bruening's framework to discuss HD as Turkey's national role conception and role performance. It is argued that the AKP's national role conception as a humanitarian actor and its foreign policy definition as HD has both ideational and material sources. Adopting this ambiguous concept also helped the AKP link its national role conception with its performance in conflict-affected states.

The relational aspect of national roles has been emphasized in a related debate. Thus, roles are defined as 'the notions of actors about who they are, what they would like to be with regard to others, and how they, therefore, should interact in (international) social relationships' (Harnisch 2011, 1–2). In the case of Turkey, HD as a national role conception has this two-tiered relational aspect. On the one hand, the AKP government utilized the HD role conception to gain status in the international arena. On the other hand, Turkey has used its HD to discursively differentiate itself from 'others' and build its own identity, which the AKP political elite argued was 'authentic.'

This links with the other relational aspect of role theory, which focuses on the domestic realm (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016). When the political elites do provide narratives to justify the role conception domestically, national role conceptions and subsequent foreign policy performances become part of the domestic debate and contestation. In addition, HD, as a role conception, can become an integral part of domestic politics through identity construction as well as state-society relations and societal transformation. This study is based on the assumption that who is in power makes a difference. The way HD was defined and Turkey's humanitarian assistance and interventions were designed and implemented have been related to the AKP and its worldview.

As a national role conception and performance, HD has been essential to the AKP's attempts to reframe Turkey's identity domestically. The political elite presented the HD role as an intrinsic element of AKP's identity based on Islam and a constructed Ottoman tradition. Nevertheless, domestic political contestation only recently started to be observed concerning the AKP's HD national role conception. As Turkey's polarization increases, its HD has also begun to be part of the political debate between the AKP and the political opposition (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, 2).

### **Ideational and material sources of the AKP's humanitarian diplomacy role**

The sources for Turkey's HD lie in both the ideational and material realms. Ideationally, the AKP's perception of Turkey's identity and its cultural/historical heritage has been employed to adopt HD as a national role conception. This normative structure legitimated the HD frame and consequent actions. The political elite and the officials heading assistance organizations frequently refer to 'conscience,' 'valuing human life,' and 'assistance to the oppressed and victims' as drivers of Turkey's HD. Thus, Turkey has branded

itself as an actor that ‘advocates justice, conscience and fairness’ (TİKA 2017). The title of TİKA (2017) annual report was ‘Turkey: The World’s Conscience’ (TİKA 2017). These values are claimed to originate in Turkey’s identity and historical heritage (Various TİKA and AFAD reports). Although not always openly stated, the reference to identity refers to Islamic identity. Erdoğan, for instance, speaking at the ceremony held for the mevlid-i nebi week<sup>1</sup> (*mawlid-i nabi*), said that ‘the reason why we care about the troubles of people who are thousands, ten thousand kilometres away from us is Islam as the common denominator between us’ (TRT Haber 8 November 2019). A corollary of this identity is the Ottoman past; in AKP’s ideology, these two are linked. The Ottoman Empire is seen as the epitome of an Islamic state, as it ruled a vast territory and existed for about nine centuries. Thus, the AKP argues that in addition to the values that come from Islamic identity, Turkey’s ‘deep-rooted past’ gives Turkey a responsibility towards the people in areas once controlled by the Ottoman Empire. On this point, Davutoğlu (2013, 868) stated that ‘we act without differentiating between our citizens and the people with whom we share a common history.’ Thus, the AKP links its HD with Turkey’s Muslim identity and the Ottoman past, as these core elements of its role conception almost inevitably make Turkey active in HD. As these ideational elements are so intrinsic to its identity and ideology, despite ‘the Realist turn’ in Turkey’s foreign policy under the AKP since 2016 (Altunisik 2020), the emphasis on humanitarianism as an identity and the associated discourses continues. In fact, the HD, as a national role conception that allows pursuing interests in addition to focusing on humanitarianism, does not contradict with increasing emphasis on *realpolitik*. Furthermore, the framing of HD as such and mainly focusing on ‘Islamic geography’ and Turkey’s ‘responsibilities’ allow the AKP to be more interventionist as opposed to other ‘rising powers’ who were less eager to challenge sovereignty and non-intervention norms.

Norm conceptions are relational in that they reflect how states position themselves in social relationships. In every humanitarian crisis, the AKP political elite, especially President Erdoğan, juxtaposes Turkey’s stance against those of ‘others’ (Langan 2017). Here, the others are primarily ‘the Europeans,’ ‘the West,’ and ‘the developed countries.’ However, more recently, ‘the leaders of the Arab world’ were also meant to criticize their perceived inaction in ‘dealing with fellow Arabs’ and Muslims’ suffering.’ For instance, calling on the oil-rich countries, President Erdoğan said, ‘If the oil-rich Muslim countries determined and gave their alms (*zakat*) to the poor countries, there would be no poor left across the world. Are they doing so? No, they are not’ (Turkey Tribune 11 April 2018).

The AKP political elite has also frequently referred to ‘the failure of the West’ in dealing with today’s humanitarian crises, especially in the context of Syria and Somalia, and on the issue of the oppression of Arakan Muslims in Myanmar. In 2015, Erdoğan, speaking in Strasburg to an audience of Turks living in Europe, argued that Turkey had taught Europe and the world ‘a lesson in humanity’ by hosting, at that time, two million refugees from Syria (BBC News 5 October 2015). In Somalia and other places in Africa, the discourse also generally juxtaposes Turkey’s assistance against the involvement of an ‘imperial Europe’ with its colonial past (Langan 2017). In all these contexts, the AKP aimed to differentiate itself from others by framing itself as an actor that cares. Speaking in response to the flaring of violence against Muslims in Arakan in 2017, Erdoğan said, ‘unfortunately, the world is blind and deaf in the face of developments in Myanmar. It

does not see and hear.’ (Deutsche Welle Turkish 28 August 2017). Similarly, holding a press conference with Somalian president Mohamed Farmaajo, Erdoğan stated that,

Fourteen million people, mainly women and children, are suffering from famine across Africa. Many *developed western countries* are playing the ostrich in the face of such human tragedies. On the other hand, we are doing everything in our power through the Turkish Red Crescent and Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) to deliver aid (Presidency website 26 April 2017, emphasis added).

Thus, the attempt to position itself internationally as a ‘more humanitarian actor’ than others has been used to define Turkey’s international identity through the construction of ‘others.’ In addition, HD role conception that emphasizes Turkey’s humanitarian actor-ness internationally has been used as a status symbol. As Barnett (2011, 20) argues, humanitarianism and compassion have become status symbols in global politics. This is even more relevant for so-called ‘rising powers,’ as HD can be seen as one of the practices of self-identification that positions these countries near the status of a developed country. Langan (2017) makes a similar argument that in the case of Turkey, the stalling of the EU accession process beginning in 2005 has played a significant role in Ankara’s quest for activism in other regions of the world, including as a humanitarian actor. At the same time, such a role has provided an opportunity to complain about the EU, which has been presenting itself as a normative power.

In addition to ideational sources, one can locate material sources and how they are perceived by the political elite in constructing a national role conception. In Turkey’s case, material characteristics such as increasing military capabilities and economic performance until recently played a role in its growing humanitarianism and adoption of HD as foreign policy. As Hatipoglu and Palmer (2016, 246) explain, ‘once a middle power exceeds a certain threshold in its capabilities,’ tools such as foreign assistance ‘suddenly enter the state’s foreign policy toolkit; and [...] we observe an immediate increase in the amount (or frequency) of their use.’ Again, HD then provides a framework for countries like Turkey to pursue seemingly contradictory policies of humanitarianism and foreign policy based on military, political and economic interests.

Besides capabilities, Bruening’s model also focuses on the opportunity to act, which is ‘possibilities afforded by the circumstances’ as a source of national role conception. The conflicts and instability in the Middle East after the Arab uprisings, particularly the Syrian civil war and the refugee crisis it created, have been a development that contributed to Turkey’s HD role. In addition, the civil wars in Libya and Yemen, instability in neighbouring Iraq, and continuing conflicts such as in Afghanistan and famine in Somalia have all provided opportunities for involvement by Ankara. Overall, the instability in its broader neighbourhood has compelled Turkey to adopt HD to help with humanitarian crises and achieve the general foreign policy aim of supporting stability around it.

In addition to these individual crises and instabilities in its neighbourhood, the AKP’s perception of the changing international order providing opportunities for countries like Turkey played a role in its developing HD as a national role conception. There is a perception in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that global politics is once again shifting and allowing more opportunities for ‘middle powers’ or ‘rising powers’ to play a role. Turkey has seemed to be one of these actors in recent years that have been anxious to seize the

opportunity to take its place in the evolving international order. It is interesting to observe similar behaviour in other ‘rising powers,’ such as China, Brazil, and India, in that all have increased their humanitarian and development assistance in recent years. Thus, HD was seen as an opportunity for a ‘rising Turkey’ in the changing international order. For Davutoğlu (2013, 865), Turkey’s HD was thus an ‘adaptation to new the international climate [...] which emerges from its determination to become an active actor during this period of rapid historical change.’ As such, the government seemed to perceive HD as a status symbol denoting Turkey’s aspiration and purportedly rising position in the transforming international order. It is important to note that the AKP’s perception of the changing global order entails transitioning from a unipolar to a multipolar world and a ‘dissolution of the West-centred world’ (TİKA 2017). Thus, the AKP framing of Turkey’s HD represents its worldview and its ambitions to reconstruct Turkey’s global identity and its position as a non-Western leader on the rise.

### **Humanitarian diplomacy role: bridging foreign policy and domestic politics**

The politics and rhetoric of HD, in addition to helping forge its international identity, help the AKP in its quest to rebuild Turkey’s domestic identity. In many ways, the AKP came to power as an outsider and presented itself as the voice of those with religious sensitivities claimed to have been peripheralized in republican history. Throughout its reign, the AKP has claimed to represent Turkey’s ‘true identity,’ emphasizing Islamic civilization and the Ottoman past. Building on the notion of *zakat* (Islamic practice of almsgiving), HD has become an essential part of this new identity. At the same time, HD has been used to reinforce ‘Islamic social capital’ (Çevik et al. 2018, 176) as HD as foreign policy has been empowering Islamic NGOs. The AKP period has witnessed Islamic NGOs’ growth in activities and engagement in international humanitarian diplomacy (Turhan and Bahçecik 2021) either because they accepted AKP’s foreign policy identity or just because they supported Turkey’s official policies.<sup>2</sup> They work closely with the AKP in HD in response to humanitarian emergencies, especially in Africa and the Middle East (Interviews with representatives of humanitarian NGOs, September-December 2014). Another active NGO in Turkey’s HD has been the Turkish Red Crescent (*Kızılay*), Turkey’s largest humanitarian organization going back to Ottoman times. *Kızılay*, however, has gotten increasingly close to the government and thus has become a hybrid organization. Under the AKP, *Kızılay* has become very active internationally and now has permanent representatives in Somalia, Iraq, Palestinian territories, and Yemen (Middle East Monitor 13 December 2016). Thus, HD as a role conception allowed the AKP to consolidate its domestic identity and reconfigure state-society relations by empowering the Islamist NGOs and creating a space for them in foreign policy.

In addition to NGOs, several foundations have become active internationally and have engaged in HD with the government. These foundations (*vakıfs*), although independent of the state on paper, in practice, worked very closely with the AKP government. The Turkish Diyanet Foundation, established in 1975, has organic links with the official Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) and is active in more than 140 countries (Çitak 2020, 175). In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, it provides scholarships and religious training in several countries. Similarly, the newly established Maarif Foundation is active in the field of education in 67 countries, including



Afghanistan with 49 schools and 12 dormitories, Iraq with 12 schools, and Somalia with seven schools and three dormitories.<sup>3</sup> Thus, HD has created a space of activism and legitimacy for Islamic actors in foreign policy while at the same time strengthening them in the public sphere.

As a result, how the AKP political elite has conceptualized and implemented Turkey's HD became part of domestic politics and contestation. The most controversial aspect of the AKP's HD in this regard has been the Syrian case, as, through the influx of refugees into Turkey, the issue has become part of the domestic debate. Although Turkey has tackled the influx of such high numbers of refugees in such a short time relatively well, the topic is increasingly becoming a point of criticism of the government. Thus, it is used by some opposition parties from time to time. HD then has also become a tool the government uses to fend off such criticisms. Even during the first year of the Syrian crisis, when the refugee numbers were still relatively low, Davutoğlu responded to criticisms by casting the issue as part of Turkey's HD (Middle East Monitor, 13 December 2016).

Turkey's HD abroad, on the other hand, has been generally spared from the domestic debate. Rather than criticizing Turkey's HD, especially in the early years, the opposition also contributed to the AKP's framing. Soon after Erdoğan visited Somalia in 2011, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), went to Somalia in August 2011 and visited a refugee camp at the Kenyan-Somali border, where Somalians affected by drought and famine were staying. The CHP delegation distributed aid packages together with teams from Kızılay, and Kılıçdaroğlu praised what Kızılay was doing there, encouraging citizens to contribute to the organization (Anadolu Agency 2011). In those years, the opposition only questioned Turkey's HD once in the case of Afghanistan, when a Turkish helicopter crashed, and 12 soldiers died in the accident (Kardas 2012). However, in recent years, opposition parties have grown quite critical of government aid institutions and Kızılay, making their financial and administrative lack of transparency an issue in the parliament (Haber Analiz 22 October 2020; Hürriyet 3 February 2020).

### **Role performance: humanitarian diplomacy in action**

Afghanistan and Somalia stand out as two countries where the comprehensiveness of Turkey's HD can be fully observed. At first sight, the two contexts differ in significant ways. Turkey's involvement in Afghanistan started in the context of the US-led NATO operation in that country after 9/11, thus before the adoption of HD as role conception. Turkey's activities there took place within the framework of a multilateral intervention, which began shortly before the AKP came to power. On the other hand, Turkey's HD in Somalia started in 2011 and was a bilateral engagement. However, over the years, the AKP's engagement with Afghanistan has also become more independent (Sey and Seufert 2016) and unilateral as it increasingly fell into the framework of HD. In both cases, Turkey is involved in the state-building process and, thus, engaged in an HD that is multi-dimensional.

In both Afghanistan and Somalia, where Turkey does not share a land or maritime border, the AKP has extensively utilized the frame of cultural proximity. This is not surprising as despite the government's and the NGOs' discourse, which claims that they provide humanitarian aid irrespective of the recipients' identities, an analysis of Turkey's

HD, in general, demonstrates the significance of cultural, historical, and geographical ties in terms of the primary beneficiaries (Kavaklı 2018). Historical and cultural closeness has been used to justify Turkey's HD role conception towards these countries and its involvement in these relatively faraway places.

In defining Turkey's HD role conception, the AKP referred to its ideational basis. Such framing served several purposes. On the one hand, it justified Turkey's involvement with both domestic and international actors. On the other hand, it located Turkey as the holder of a compassionate identity in the Islamic world. President Erdoğan, while addressing external and domestic actors, references Islam and Islamic solidarity in building Turkey's HD role conception. In an extraordinary meeting of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul on Somalia and a press conference after returning from his first visit to Mogadishu, Erdoğan referred to the Quran (5:32) and the Sunnah both to justify Turkish aid and to encourage other members to do the same (Erdoğan 2019, 3003–309, 317–318, 321). Similarly, Erdoğan cited what he called intense efforts by Turkey to bring peace to Afghanistan in reference to a Hadith that said, 'The Muslim is a brother to another Muslim [...] Whoever fulfils the needs of his brother, Allah will fulfil his' (Erdoğan 2019, 321).

There are mutually reinforcing processes at work here. On the one hand, the AKP government, in line with its conceptions of HD, prefer to get involved in countries with perceived historical and cultural links. On the other hand, cultural proximity also allows Turkey to enter some conflict-affected states. This is evident in the characterization of Turkey by the officials of the recipient countries, who also emphasize cultural closeness with Turkey. For instance, in the case of Afghanistan, the importance of the long history of ties and cultural similarities has been quite frequently emphasized by Afghan actors.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Somali officials have frequently referred to cultural closeness with Turkey (Wasuge 2016, 26). Thus, Turkey's characterization of its role is sometimes reflected in role expectations.

A close examination of Turkey's HD also reveals that, in some cases, within the recipient countries, the AKP seems to have developed even better relations with some groups. This happened in Afghanistan, a country of multiple ethnic identities as Turkey's HD, in addition to its general character, also focused more on Turkic groups such as Uzbeks and Turkmens. Besides the capital Kabul, where Turkey's aid has mainly been centred, Turkey also focused on the Northwest region, which has been for years controlled by General Dostum, a warlord with Uzbek background who served as the vice president between 2014 and 2020, and who has been in close contact with Turkey (, table).

With a development aid of 1.8 billion USD by 2021 and around 13,000 in development assistance projects, Afghanistan has become Turkey's largest development programme abroad.<sup>5</sup> The support has primarily focused on education, health, and infrastructure. In the early years of its engagement, Turkey began to run Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Wardak and Jawzjan provinces and to differentiate itself from others by becoming the only PRTs run by civilian diplomats as opposed to military personnel (Kaya 2013, 24). In developing capacity in the area of health, in 2011, 'the Health Departments of the two countries agreed to have Afghan doctors, nurses and midwives, and other medical officials train in Turkish medical schools in programmes ranging from three months to one year' (Kaya 2013, 27). Over the years, Turkey has provided health

services to nine million people. Afghanistan also became one of the countries that Turkey has offered Covid-19 assistance (Anadolu Agency 11 June 2020). As part of Turkey's HD, more than 100 schools have been built, and construction continues on a Turkish-Afghan women's university. The *Maarif* Foundation has also become active in Afghanistan and has provided education to 6000 students in 45 schools. More than 4000 Afghan students have benefitted from the Turkey scholarship.<sup>6</sup>

In addition, Turkey has been providing training to the Afghan military and police force both in Turkey and in Afghanistan as part of the state-building process. Turkey has mediated on several occasions, hosting eight meetings between Afghanistan and Pakistan; this has been considered vital for both countries' stability. Turkey's HD has also included the goal of increasing economic relations between the two countries. Turkish officials have openly stated that 'Turkey considers Afghanistan a valuable partner in trade and investment,' especially in energy, mining, transportation, and regional connectivity.<sup>7</sup> In 2012 the two countries signed a Strategic Partnership Deal, and Turkey declared its plans to stay engaged after the withdrawal of NATO. In fact, after the Taliban takeover and withdrawal of the US and other NATO forces, including Turkey, in 2021, the AKP government has been trying to gain a foothold in Afghanistan, mainly by trying to help in running the Kabul airport. In parallel, HD has again been used as an entry point to Afghanistan. President Erdoğan, referring to the deepening humanitarian crisis in the country, has stated that Turkey will continue to fulfil its duty of brotherhood' towards the Afghan people (Daily Sabah 12 October 2021). As a result, an Afghan delegation headed by the acting foreign minister visited Turkey to hold talks with the foreign minister and Turkey's two aid organizations, AFAD and TİKA, and the Directorate of Religious Affairs, *Diyanet* (Daily Sabah 14 October 2021).

In Somalia, on the other hand, Turkey acted bilaterally, starting a highly publicized comprehensive HD effort, which is presented as a model. After then-Prime Minister Erdoğan's visit, Turkey provided 15 thousand tons of mainly food and medicine in the first phase. Soon after, TİKA established an office in Mogadishu and began coordinating projects, especially in infrastructure, municipalities, education, and health. More than 1000 Somalian students have received Turkey Scholarships. Overall, Turkey's humanitarian and technical assistance to Somalia exceeded 1 billion USD. In the meantime, Turkish Airlines began commercial flights. Turkey first re-opened its embassy in Mogadishu in November 2011. Later in 2014, a consulate general in Hargeisa and thus established its presence on the ground (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website).

As part of its HD in Somalia, Turkey has also been involved in facilitation and mediation by hosting international conferences on Somalia in 2010, 2012, and 2015 and hosting the High-Level Partnership Forum in February 2016 (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs website). Turkey appointed a special envoy in 2018 to mediate between Mogadishu and the breakaway region of Somaliland. On 30 September 2017, Turkey opened its largest overseas military training academy, the Turkish Military Training Centre, in Mogadishu. As a result, through training held both in Turkey and Somalia, Turkey had 'trained close to 1,500 Somali soldiers out of its 10,000 commitment' by 2020 while at the same time 'building and training the nation's air force' (Shajkovci et al. 2020). In 2018, Turkey and Somalia signed an economic partnership agreement. As a result, Turkey's imports have increased, jumping more than eight times in 2011 from the previous year and continuing its steady increase after each year, finally reaching

242 million USD in 2019 (DataTurkey database). Encouraged by the AKP government, Turkish companies built and operated air and seaports in Mogadishu. Turkey contributed to Somalia's debt relief by pledging around 2.4 million in Special Drawing Rights (SDR), an IMF reserve currency (Anadolu Agency 6 November 2020). In 2020, Erdoğan announced that Somalia had invited Turkey to explore offshore oil (Reuters 20 January 2020).

The links between humanitarianism and the interests of donor countries have been pretty well-established in the literature. The existence of such links has been argued for traditional donors (Meernick et al. 1998) as well as new ones (Binder and Meier 2011). The concept of HD, which goes beyond emergency humanitarian aid, has a high probability of including such interests. Thus, as Breuning (1995, 235) claims, the dichotomy of 'donor interest versus recipient need' may be simplistic. Furthermore, as explained above, Turkey's narrative about HD involves merging humanitarian motives with interests, albeit defined as mutual interests (Interview with a TİKA official, 28 August 2013; Conversation with an AFAD official, 9 December 2017). Constructed from Turkey's perspective, the economic and commercial interests, the attainment of global and regional power and influence, and more general goals such as supporting regional stability do not necessarily contradict or undermine humanitarian aims. As HD is more than humanitarianism and requires more comprehensive and long-term commitment and engagement, strategic, political and economic interests generally enter the picture. Turkey's claim here is that these objectives also benefit the recipient states and align with Turkey's interests.

The analysis of Turkey's HD in conflict areas, in fact, demonstrates the links with Turkey's foreign policy. For instance, Turkey's HD in Somalia came in the general context of Ankara's engagement with Africa, which started in the late 1990s and accelerated in the 2000s after the AKP came to power (Özkan 2010). Similarly, Turkey has had longstanding interests in Afghanistan. In addition to a long history of relations between the two countries and Turkey's long presence there as part of the international force, the AKP government has been increasingly interested in Afghanistan, especially in its oil and gas resources and its importance in transregional transportation routes since the 2010s (Sey and Seufert 2016, 2). In this regard, HD has provided opportunities for access and possibilities to create new political ties and consolidate existing relationships. Furthermore, AKP was clear from the beginning about the objectives of increasing political, economic and military relations depending on the opportunities. Yet, all this was framed as 'equal partnership' and 'mutual gain.' HD role conception allowed this framing to be possible (Sucuoğlu and Sazak 2016, 2016).

However, Turkey's HD role performance at times led to intra-role conflict as it became difficult to achieve humanitarianism and interest at the same time. This occurred when Turkey's roles as a humanitarian actor and an external actor pursuing its interests by developing economic and military relations seemed to clash in certain instances. Such a perception of Turkey's role has affected the expectations (alter ego) among the actors in these countries. In these instances, Turkey has faced the danger of being dragged into domestic competition and conflict. Turkey has engaged local actors, community leaders, beneficiaries, and political actors as part of its HD. In doing so, the AKP government has put much effort into portraying itself as an 'apolitical and disinterested donor' (Tank 2013). However, post-conflict state-building processes are more complicated, as the

donor country is inevitably perceived as a party to a domestic power struggle. This happened in the case of Somalia several times. Turkey's training of the Somali military and providing it with military equipment could be seen as crucial to consolidate the state in a country where for years there was none and fight against terrorist groups such as al Shabab. This meant that al Shabab began targeting Somalian civilians and Turkish aid workers, doctors, engineers, and facilities. For instance, in 2013, al Shabab attacked the Turkish embassy, killing three people and wounding nine others. In May 2019, it claimed responsibility for a car bomb that killed a Turkish construction engineer working at the Turkish military training facility in Mogadishu (New York Times 22 July 2019). More broadly, there have been difficulties in sustaining impartiality. As part of capacity building, Turkey's military support also attracted the attention of the political opposition when the government repressed those who were demonstrating against the postponement of elections. The opposition leaders sent a petition to the Turkish embassy in Mogadishu urging Turkey not to send a planned shipment of armaments (Reuters 16 December 2020). Turkey responded by inviting 'the Federal Government and the Federal Member States to come together and resolve disputes with an inclusive and constructive dialogue based on the consensus reached on 17 September 2020' and stressing 'the importance of holding the elections without further delay' (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 24 March 2021).

Meanwhile, the Turkish ambassador in Mogadishu cooperated to mediate between the parties to find a way out of the political impasse (Anadolu Agency 24 March 2021). However, the Somalian president announced in April 2021 that he would extend his term in office by two years. This saga in Somalia demonstrated that maintaining impartiality and neutrality may be more challenging. It also showed that the extensive nature of HD necessitates deeper engagement with the country and its state, which creates tensions and ambiguities. Turkey's increasing strategic, political, and economic involvement also made it more difficult to reconcile the recipients' humanitarian interests with the interests of Turkey. At the same time, this may cause conflicts with cognitive assertions and their material interests. All this points to role conflicts.

The tension between humanitarianism and diplomacy has also been evident in that Turkey's HD entails the danger of turning these conflict-affected states into an arena for competition among regional powers. Since HD goes beyond humanitarianism and involves comprehensive and sustained involvement, it entails the danger of being implicated in regional rivalries. Becoming part of regional competition could exacerbate existing tensions in these already vulnerable and unstable states. This has happened to some extent in Somalia, a country strategically located in the Horn of Africa, controlling the Bab al-Mandeb Strait that links the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean (New York Times 22 July 2019). The increasing influence of Turkey, as well as Qatar, in Somalia attracted the UAE, which threatened stability by supporting the breakaway state of Somaliland.

On the other hand, Turkey's HD in Afghanistan, as it has taken place within the context of multilateral involvement, has been the least controversial in this regard. The AKP government, on the one hand, used the NATO umbrella to continue its presence there, while on the other hand, it developed an increasingly independent policy. As part of the former, it developed close relations with several actors, such as warlord General Dostum who later became a vice-president and supported the state-building process and the new government. President Erdoğan's visit to Kabul after the controversial

presidential election there in 2014 marked the beginning of this new era. Thus, it seemed like Turkey managed the inherent tensions in its HD role conception. However, the Taliban takeover and the withdrawal of NATO forces have been challenging for Turkey's position. The AKP has been trying to adjust to the new reality and even aimed to turn this into a new opportunity. Erdoğan's claim of Islam as the common ground between Turkey and the Taliban and Turkey's response to the Taliban's need for humanitarian assistance, albeit limited due to the economic crisis in Turkey, can be considered as attempts to face these challenges. In response to the country's worsening humanitarian crisis, Turkey sent three rounds of aid with the 'kindness train' in January, February and March 2022 (Daily Sabah 15 March 2022). This operation, organized by AFAD and implemented with the participation of 11 humanitarian organizations, became another example of state-NGO cooperation in HD. In the meantime, Turkey has been continuing its efforts to take responsibility for the security of Kabul airport together with Qatar. Whether Turkey will be able to create strategic leverage in Afghanistan and re-make it part of its HD with comprehensive involvement remains to be seen.

## Conclusions

This article focused on a specific role adopted by Turkey in recent years, namely Humanitarian Diplomacy, to explain Turkey's policy choice of increasingly engaging in conflict-affected states through the cases of Afghanistan and Somalia. Powered by Turkey's increasing economic and military capabilities and in the context of instability around it that has created opportunities to act, the AKP has developed a cultural and historical narrative to frame itself as a humanitarian actor. The analysis shows that the narrative of a humanitarian actor engaged in HD was conceptualized by the political and bureaucratic elite as predicted by the role theory. This ruling narrative served the AKP to build its international identity as a 'rising power' and the voice of the 'oppressed' and consolidated its domestic identity and influence through discourse and social capital. Thus, the AKP's imagination of a new role was linked to its foreign policy objectives, as expected in role theory, and its domestic aims. In that sense, the article demonstrated that the domestic politics aspect of the role theory should go beyond domestic contestation to include domestic consolidation.

In defining its HD, the AKP developed specific roles that are not always novel, yet it managed to differentiate itself from others. On the one hand, similar to the efforts of alleged rising powers to craft a new language of HD, which unpacks the hierarchies that exist even in the sphere of humanitarianism, the AKP focused on the role of equal partner and mutually beneficial interaction to differentiate itself from the 'established donors.' On the other hand, the AKP added its own role conception that constantly references an imagined cultural and historical closeness. This element also differentiated AKP's HD from other 'rising donors.' The language of cultural and historical affinity and responsibility led AKP's HD to be more interventionist than the other 'rising donors,' which continued to be reluctant to intervene in the name of humanitarian purposes and especially engage in state-building. However, Turkey's interventionism is also different from the conditionality of the established donors.

The most novel element of Turkey's HD has been to put aside the implicit distinction between compassion and interests that underlies much of traditional humanitarianism

and HD. In fact, the AKP humanitarianism, cast in the language of HD, has not shied away from pursuing political, economic and military interests. On the contrary, this was presented within the rubric of mutual interest. Yet, although such explicitness challenged the obvious reification, it has not spared the AKP from the pitfalls of HD. Thus, with all its ambiguity, HD became a valuable tool in both defining Turkey as a new role conception as well as a repertoire of foreign policy tools by making it also a part of role performance. As De Lauri (2016, 1–2) argues, HD is packed with ‘structural dilemmas, hidden intentions and dramatic implications.’ As a result, the AKP has also faced dilemmas and contradictions that have made it difficult to bridge the embedded tensions between foreign policy and economic interests, on the one hand, humanitarian objectives on the other, and between taking sides and impartiality. In other words, Turkey’s HD has faced challenges emanating from intra-role conflicts. The Turkish case demonstrates how the state’s utilization of the HD leads to the overlapping of humanitarianism with the states’ political, security and economic agendas. As Turkey’s foreign policy has become more assertive and militaristic in recent years, contradictory role performances may result in more role conflicts between serving as a benign power focusing on humanitarianism and mutual benefit and a more assertive power easily utilizing hard power. Although up to a certain point, the HD, allowing to go beyond mere humanitarianism, has served as a mechanism to prevent dysfunction due to role conflict, this may become more difficult in the long run and lead to ‘role strain’ (Cronin 2001).

However, what is clear is that HD has served several functions as a role conception and role performance for the AKP government. It helped AKP construct and consolidate its domestic and international identity and allowed it to be active in different countries. It allowed it an entry point that is considered legitimate and accepted. HD also helped the AKP to link its role conception and role performance in an effective way, and it continues to be one of the crucial facets of the AKP’s foreign policy.

## Notes

1. Mevlid-i Nebi refers to the celebration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad. It started to be celebrated in Turkey in 1989.
2. Thank you for an anonymous reviewer for this point.
3. The *Maarif* Foundation was established on 17 July 2016 to engage in educational activities in Turkey and abroad. One of the objectives of the Foundation is to acquire schools that belong to the Fethullah Gülen movement all over the world after the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016. <https://turkiyemaarif.org/page/42-DUNYADA-MAARIF-16>.
4. For instance, the governor of Wardak Province, where Turkey was heading the reconstruction team, said, ‘The Turkish programs are very sympathetic and acceptable to Afghans because they work within the Afghan culture and are sensitive to Afghan values. We have a very good strong historical relationship with Turkey’ (Kaya 2013, 24).
5. Unless noted otherwise, the data on Turkey’s HD in Afghanistan has been gathered from the speech by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Yavuz Selim Kiran, Webinar on *Turkey-Afghanistan Relations after a Century*, Organized by SETA, 1 March 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C4HGOrQiLdo>.
6. In 2010, the AKP government established the Turks Abroad and Related Communities Presidency (YTB), which initiated the Turkey Scholarship program in 2012. It has become an essential part of Turkey’s HD.

7. Turkey's imports to Afghanistan increased steadily from 2002 onwards and spiked in 2009. However, due to increasing instability in Afghanistan, Turkey's imports declined after 2012, reaching 148 million USD in 2019, and investment remained limited (DataTurkey database).

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