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ARTICLE



Turkey's International Humanitarian Assistance during the AKP Era: Key Actors, Concepts and Motivations

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the key actors implementing Turkey's international humanitarian assistance, the Turkish understanding of humanitarian assistance, and the main motivations of humanitarian assistance in post-2002 Turkey. Despite that Turkey has recently significantly increased its contribution to international humanitarian assistance, these efforts have received limited research attention from academia. By examining Turkey's governmental, quasi-governmental and non-governmental aid organisations, and a historical account of the early Turkish international humanitarian assistance, the study discusses the relevant domestic, national security, and commercial motivations with respect to the implications of Turkey's humanitarian aid. This study provides an overarching framework of Turkey's international humanitarian assistance, which hopes to make a useful addition to the literature.

KEYWORDS

Turkey; international humanitarian assistance; AKP; humanitarian governance; Turkish foreign policy

Turkey's contribution to international humanitarian efforts has noticeably increased since 2002. During this period, Turkey became the most generous donor in the world with its humanitarian aid expenditures reaching about \$8.4 billion in 2018.¹ Turkey's international humanitarian assistance activities gained momentum after the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Mogadishu in August 2011. Following this visit, Turkish government organisations, business and nongovernmental organisations have engaged in Somalia and provided significant amounts of humanitarian and development aid. Particularly, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) together with other Turkish organisations have provided approximately more than \$500 million in aid.

Turkey's immediate regional crises have even further accelerated Turkey's growing humanitarian status. According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report issued by the Development Initiative (DI), Turkey's humanitarian assistance covers Syria (\$2.58 billion), Yemen (\$1.55 billion), Iraq (\$1.42 billion), Palestine (\$1.15 billion) and South

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¹Turkey remains most generous donor of humanitarian aid', Anadolu Ajansı, available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/turkey-remains-most-generous-donor-of-humanitarian-aid/1597587>.

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Sudan (\$1.1 billion).² More importantly, Turkey became the world's largest refugee-hosting country, hosting the highest number of refugees (3.9 million). It has been reported that Turkey's humanitarian aid expenditures were nearly 1% of its GDP in 2017. Turkey has already expanded its role as a humanitarian assistance actor to one of the most influential humanitarian aid donors among non-OECD-DAC countries.

This trend is frequently reported in the Turkish media. However, despite such increasing importance of Turkish international assistance, Turkey's international humanitarian assistance has so far received limited research attention from academic scholars. The existing literature has covered the discussion of Turkey as an emerging donor for humanitarian crises across the world, particularly Turkey's engagement in Somalia and Syria³ as well as how Turkey's foreign and domestic agendas shape its humanitarian engagement and the challenges of Turkey's global humanitarianism.⁴ Nevertheless, these publications do not fully offer a more accurate depiction of Turkey's humanitarian assistance actors and reflect the country's humanitarian assistance in the context of Turkey's understanding, underpinned by its political, security and economic interests. Thus, the goal of this article is to fill the gap in the literature on the Turkish international humanitarian assistance through offering an overview of the key actors in Turkish humanitarian assistance and explaining Turkey's humanitarian policy and motivations.

The article is organised as follows: section one explores Turkey's humanitarian assistance structure, especially with regards to both major government and non-government humanitarian assistance actors, and their various roles in the humanitarian assistance undertakings. This section shows the significant role of the Turkish public administration system in dealing with international humanitarian assistance.

The second section presents the Turkish interpretation of humanitarian assistance with a focus on discussion of humanitarian assistance from conceptual aspects and Turkey's historical perspective to humanitarian assistance. Through analysing Turkish understanding of humanitarian assistance at both conceptual and historical accounts, this section illustrates how Turkey's humanitarian understandings have impacted the scope and scale of Turkey's international humanitarian aid policies.

The third section provides an analysis of Turkey's international humanitarian assistance motivations during the post-2002 era. By focussing on the dimensions of Turkey's domestic motivations, national security concerns and commercial interests, the section seeks to shed light on whether Turkish humanitarian assistance is an ad hoc condition or a by-product of Turkey's national interests.

Finally, the conclusion summarises Turkey's humanitarian assistance understanding and its key actors, providing an overarching framework of Turkey's humanitarian assistance and making a new contribution to the literature.

²'Humanitarian aid spending makes Turkey most charitable country', Daily Sabah, (20 June 2018), available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkey/2018/06/21/humanitarian-aid-spending-makes-turkey-most-charitable-country>.

³A. Binder and C. Erten, 'From dwarf to giant: Turkey's contemporary humanitarian assistance', World Conference on Humanitarian Studies: Human Security-Humanitarian Perspectives, Istanbul, (2013); A. Özerdem, 'Turkey as a rising power: an emerging global humanitarian actor', in *The New Humanitarians in International Practice* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 64–81.

⁴B. Gilley, 'Turkey, middle powers, and the new humanitarianism', *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 20(1), (2015).

1. Turkey's Key Actors in International Humanitarian Assistance

The Turkish government has traditionally played a critical role in Turkey's humanitarian assistance decision making. The government's role is greater still if one considers the remarkable increase of capabilities of the governmental humanitarian assistance organisations in both budget and functionality in the post 2002 Turkey. During this period, a number of Turkey's non-governmental and quasi-government organisations have increasingly become noticeable as well. However, the impact of these organisations on Turkey's humanitarian assistance remained relatively insignificant compared to the Turkish government institutions. In addition, as will be shown later on, the Turkish non-governmental and quasi-governmental humanitarian assistance organisations have an inclination to follow Turkey's government institutions' international humanitarian assistance goals. Therefore, it is important to focus on Ankara's role in Turkish humanitarian aid decision making processes to understand the totality of Turkey's humanitarian assistance.

1.1. Turkey's Government Organisations

Turkey has a large and complex public administration system compared with many other middle power countries. The Turkish central government sits at the top of all the administrative institutions. Under the central government are the ministries of the presidency, undersecretaries, cabinet departments and other agencies employing more than 2.4 million full time public servants.⁵

Thus, given the scale of the Turkish government and its internal mechanisms and procedures, this study faces a number of potential challenges. First, the duties of the Turkish administrative institutions are often intertwined with each other. This is mainly because several of these institutions were not consolidated under a single organisational culture. For instance, a number of Turkish government institutions were either inherited from the Ottoman Empire, or created during the early Turkish republic period, or transformed significantly in line with neoliberal reforms after the 1980 Turkish coup d'état.⁶ For this reason, these institutions sometimes respond to the same policy agendas with different organisational incentives. This is particularly evident in Turkey's governmental aid organisations, that, for instance, both the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) and the Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD) were involved in the process of delivering aid to Rohingya people in Myanmar.

Apart from the central administration, the Turkish administrative divisions consist of two-level hierarchical system: the local government entities with 81 provinces and over 900 sub-provincial level units.⁷ These local provincial units are established in order to carry out Ankara's policies corresponding to economic, geographic and

⁵Following the 2018 presidential election, the president became the head of executive power in Turkey. The duties and responsibilities of Ministries of Prime Minister have been assumed by the Ministries of the Presidency. 'Türkiye'de Kaç Memur Var? Bakanlık Açıkladı', (4 July 2016), available at: https://www.ntv.com.tr/ekonomi/turkiyede-kacmemur-var-bakanlik-acikladi,h1GGgMkSy0m4wTJ_8TGTCg.

⁶Y. Üstüner and N Yavuz. 'Turkey's public administration today: an overview and appraisal', *International Journal of Public Administration* 41(10), (2018), pp. 820–831.

⁷Ibid.

political arrangements. In addition to this, the local administration entities at the municipal (Belediye) level and village (Muhtarlık) level are also made up of the Turkish public administration. The municipalities have been keen to contribute to Turkey's international humanitarian campaigns in terms of fundraising. Particularly, the large metropolitan municipalities such as Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir have been active in participating on matters related to humanitarian assistance.

In a few international humanitarian crises, Turkish local level administrative entities had competing interests by running separate humanitarian programmes and campaigns in order to win electoral popularity. Overall, Turkey's humanitarian aid decision making and processes have involved a wide range of Turkish administrative units from municipality level to presidency level entities. Considering these points, Turkey's structure and the size of the public administration pose a major challenge to determine the true scale of the country's humanitarian assistance.

The Turkish elitist bureaucratic culture with its characteristic of limited involvement of the public is another challenging task for academic research to understand the government's role in offering humanitarian assistance. With the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in the early 1920s, the ruling elite depended on the human capital of the Ottoman bureaucracy to achieve the modernisation of the society and state. To them, a large number of bureaucrats carried forward from the previous era was more effective in helping Turkey's transformation to modernity.⁸ However, this choice had an apparent drawback: during the Ottoman Empire, the public officers were solely responsible to the Istanbul government; and public opinion did not take a pivotal part in policy making.⁹ However, until today, this characteristic of the Ottoman Empire's public administration still casts a long shadow over the present Turkish bureaucracy in that traditionalist views on administrative values such as 'secrecy' remain an imperative characteristic of virtuous public administration.¹⁰

Together with complex administration system and the bureaucratic culture, there is a fundamental challenge of determining Turkish international humanitarian aid, which is arguably unsupervised extra budgetary discretionary fund expenses (Örtülü Ödenek) of the government. Much of this spending is covert in nature and hence takes place behind closed doors.¹¹ However, it is probable that the Turkish government had allocated these non-itemised resources for providing international humanitarian assistance in the past.

With these points in mind, we may look at the major government actors of Turkey's international humanitarian assistance:

⁸F. Bent, 'The Turkish bureaucracy as an agent of change', *Journal of Comparative administration* 1(1), (1969), pp. 47–64, 48.

⁹The role of public opinion in policy making became a noteworthy concern mostly after the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. N. Kapucu and H. Palabıyık, 'History of the public personnel system', *Turkish Public Administration: From Tradition to the Modern Age* (vol. 17), (USAK Books, 2008), p. 207. See also O. Koloğlu, *Osmanlı'da kamuoyu. Vezneciler*, İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Yayınları, (2010).

¹⁰N. Roos and L. Roos Jr., 'Changing patterns of Turkish public administration', *Middle Eastern Studies* 4(3), (1968), pp. 270–295, 273; See also C. Findley, 'Reassertion of the sultanate and foundation of the civil bureaucracy', in *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Porte, 1789–1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 89, 121.

¹¹Note: A speculation about the covert appropriation to the budget, please refer to *Birgün Gazetesi*, '2018'de Gizli Harcamaya 3,7 Milyar TL Ayrıldı', *Birgün Gazetesi*, (28 November 2017), available at: <https://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/2018-de-gizli-harcamaya-3-7-milyar-tl-ayrildi-192948.html>.

1.1.1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Turkish: Dışışleri Bakanlığı)

Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) plays a catalyst function on shaping the Turkish government international humanitarian aid decision process with two distinct functions. Firstly, the MFA is in charge of advising the policy trend of Turkey's international humanitarian aid at the diplomacy level. To achieve its advisory agenda, the overseas MFA staff collect and compile information on humanitarian crises and refer them to the officials of the MFA in Ankara. By assessing carefully on the scale of the humanitarian crisis and its causes that are reported by Turkish diplomatic officials overseas, the MFA coordinates inputs into policy decision making on Turkey's humanitarian aid. Second, the Turkish foreign ministry proceeds with international humanitarian aid tasks if Ankara implements an international humanitarian programme. Notably, it must be underlined that the MFA's coordination tasks usually do not include major operational responsibilities on the ground. In other words, the humanitarian aid responsibilities such as logistics, supply chain management of the aid in the humanitarian assistance recipient locations is not expected to be the under the MFA's administrative management. However, having few operational responsibilities does not rule out the importance of the MFA acting as a coordinator leading the communication between aid recipient institutions and Turkey's humanitarian assistance organisations.¹²

Despite the role of being a communicating actor, the foreign ministry does not put a significant emphasis nor have a specialised department overseeing humanitarian assistance issues in its organisational structure.¹³ If anything, as A. Binder and C. Erten note, the foreign ministry runs a very small department with merely two full-time staff in the realm of humanitarian assistance.¹⁴ Additionally, the curriculum of the MFA's key training institution does not offer any core courses that entirely explore humanitarian assistance related topics.¹⁵ In part this reflects that as a prime government body, the MFA has received relatively limited institutional resources in assisting Turkey's humanitarian aid.

1.1.2. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Turkish: Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon İdaresi Başkanlığı, TİKA)

The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) was established in 1992 after the Cold War. As the aim of TİKA was exclusively providing aid to Turkic populations in the former Soviet Union, TİKA was not the core pillar of Turkey's international humanitarian assistance before the 2000s.¹⁶

During the AKP era, TİKA transformed to become one of the major aid agencies in Turkey, reflecting particular characteristics of the Turkish international humanitarian aid system and shifting its priorities from focussing on Central Asia to worldwide

¹²Kamu Ajans, 'Dışışleri Bakanlığı'nın Yeni Teşkilat Yapısı, Görev Ve Yetkileri', Kamu Ajans, (10 July 2018), available at: <http://www.kamuajans.com/kamu-memurlar/disisleri-bakanligi-nin-yeni-teskilat-yapisi-gorev-ve-yetkileri-h526582.html>.

¹³Hazırlayıcı Eğitim Programı/Diplomasi Akademisi, available at: <http://diab.mfa.gov.tr/hazirlayici-egitim.tr.mfa>.

¹⁴A. Binder and C. Erten, 'From dwarf to giant: Turkey's contemporary humanitarian assistance', World Conference on Humanitarian Studies: Human Security-Humanitarian Perspectives, İstanbul, (2013), p. 5.

¹⁵Hazırlayıcı Eğitim Programı/Diplomasi Akademisi, available at: <http://diab.mfa.gov.tr/hazirlayici-egitim.tr.mfa>.

¹⁶H. Fidan and R. Nurdun, 'Turkey's role in the global development assistance community: the case of Tika (Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency)', Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans 10(1), (2008), pp. 93–111.

operations.¹⁷ According to the TİKA 2018 annual activity report, the agency highlighted its humanitarian assistance programmes covering Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Chad, Kenya, Myanmar (aid to Rohingya People), and Niger.¹⁸

Notably, the government sources state that TİKA's operational budget was around \$65 million, covering its range of operation in 150 countries, but this budget has been disputed by the Turkish media and opposition party politicians.¹⁹ It has been argued that TİKA spends around \$2–3 billion in various aid projects every year although TİKA refutes these claims.²⁰

1.1.3. The Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Turkish: Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı)

The Ministry of Interior Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (Turkish acronym: AFAD) was established in 2009 as an umbrella organisation for risk reduction and disaster management.²¹ Although AFAD is primarily known to focus on domestic disaster and emergencies at the operational level, the organisation has also actively participated in extensive international humanitarian aid activities.²² Moreover, as one of the state's departments, AFAD is also a staunch advocator of the Turkish government's political orientation in international humanitarian activities. According to the current head of AFAD, Gulluoglu, the role of his department in matters of international humanitarian aid was coming from Turkey's 'conscientious heritage granted to our noble nation through history,' covering 'the geography of the heart begins from the heart of Asia and reaches to the heart of Europe' and promoting the idea of 'Faithful Turks Are Here Again.'²³

AFAD's international operations have particularly increased in recent years.²⁴ In 2018, the agency organised fundraising campaigns for many international humanitarian emergencies targeting countries such as Myanmar (aid to Rohingya People), Palestine, Somalia and Syria.²⁵ By 2016, AFAD had provided international humanitarian aid to more than fifty countries with a diversified range and involvement.²⁶

¹⁷G. Özkan and M. Demirtepe. 'Transformation of a development aid agency: tika in a changing domestic and international setting', *Turkish Studies* 13(4), (2012), pp. 647–664.

¹⁸Faaliyet Raporu. TİKA, (2018), available at: <https://www.tika.gov.tr>.

¹⁹Türk İşbirliği Ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı. 'TİKA-Türk İşbirliği Ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı', available at: <http://www.tika.gov.tr/tr/sayfa/hakkimizda-14649>.

²⁰G. Ankara, 'TİKA Raporunda Çarpıcı Rakamlar', *Haberler*, (28 October 2013), available at: <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/tika-raporunda-carpici-rakamlar-24996257>, for the Turkish politicians' criticism; Kemal Kilicdaroglu's comments: 'Kılıçdaroğlu'ndan Kızılderiliye Yardım Eleştirisi: O Kabilenin Barajı Var!-Politika Haberleri', *Radikal*, (10 December 2013), available at: <http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/kilicdaroglundan-kizilderiliye-yardim-elestirisi-o-kabilenin-baraji-var-1165530/>; Meral Akşener's comments: 'Meral Akşener: TİKA'yı Kapatacağım Demedim', (4 June 2018), available at: <https://www.haberturk.com/tv/gundem/haber/2000419-meral-aksener-tika-yi-kapatacagim-demedim/>; TİKA's explanation: 'TİKA'dan İyi Parti Cumhurbaşkanı Adayı Akşener'in İddialarına Yanıt', *TRT Haber*, (18 June 2018), available at: <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/tikadan-iyi-parti-cumhurbaskani-adayi-aksenerin-iddialarina-yanit-370431.html>.

²¹E. Caymaz, et al., 'A model proposal for efficient disaster management: the Turkish sample', *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 99, (2013), pp. 609–618, 612.

²²Turkish Parliament, 'Afet ve Acil Durum Yönetimi Başkanlığı ile İlgili Bazı Düzenlemeler Hakkında Kanun', available at: <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/>.

²³Head of AFAD Dr. Güllüoğlu's 8th Year of Syrian Crisis Message, available at: <https://www.afad.gov.tr/tr/26498/Head-of-AFAD-Dr-Gulluoglu-8th-Year-of-Syrian-Crisis-Message&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=ie>.

²⁴Uluslararası İnsani Yardım Faaliyetleri (2019), available at: <https://www.afad.gov.tr>.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶AFAD Başkanı, 'Çalışmalarımız Stratejik Bir Planlamanın Ürünü', (2018), available at: <https://www.afad.gov.tr>.

Additionally, in most recent aid activities, the organisation has provided significant help to victims of the 2019 Albanian Earthquake, as well as organised flood disaster campaign for Sudan.²⁷

1.2. Turkey's Quasi-Governmental Organisations: the Indispensable Players of the Turkish Humanitarian Aid

1.2.1 Turkish Red Crescent Society (Turkish: Türk Kızılayı, TRCS)

The Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) is the principal quasi-governmental humanitarian assistance organisation of Turkey. Established in 1868, TRCS follows its traditional mission defined as: 'to provide relief to the vulnerable and those in need by mobilising the power and resources of the community to protect human dignity any-time, anywhere, under any conditions and to support the enhancement of the community's capacity to cope with disasters.'²⁸

Although the TRCS is a quasi-governmental organisation, in its operational and managerial aspects, it functions not much different than any other government institutions of the Turkish public administration.²⁹ The TRCS has actively placed its practice on special footing in Turkey's domestic and international humanitarian assistance. Particularly, in terms of international humanitarian assistance decision making, the Red Crescent closely follows the Turkish government's guidance. In the last decade, the organisation has delivered humanitarian assistance to 78 countries in line with the Turkish government's latest priorities, given to locations such as Indonesia, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Palestine, Pakistan, Somali, Sri Lanka and Sudan.³⁰

As with many other Turkish humanitarian assistance organisations, the TRCS occasionally undertakes fundraising campaigns in Turkey. The TRCS's income is approximately \$700 million per annum of which almost more than 50% of it comes from Turkish public fundraising campaigns and private donations.³¹ A significant proportion of its income was spent on supporting humanitarian actions. For instance, the Red Crescent had spent around \$295 million in humanitarian assistance programmes in 2017. In this sense, the TRCS plays a dominant role in Turkey's humanitarian aid globally.

1.2.2 The Turkish Diyanet Foundation (Turkish: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, TDF)

The Turkish Diyanet Foundation (TDF) is an organisation known for providing religious oriented charity work (i.e. equipping places of worship) overseas and in Turkey. The organisation operates under the auspices of the Turkey's Directorate of Religious

²⁷'Turkey rushes to the aid of earthquake victims in Albania', available at: <https://En.afad.gov.tr/Turkey-Rushes-to-the-Aid-of-Earthquake-Victims-in-Albania>; 'Humanitarian aid campaign for Sudan begins', available at: <https://en.afad.gov.tr/humanitarian-aid-campaign-for-sudan-begins>.

²⁸Ö. Külcü and H. Külcü. 'The records management capacity assessment system (Rmcas) as a tool for program development at the Turkish Red Crescent Society', *International Journal of Information Management* 29(6), (2009), pp. 483–487, 486.

²⁹O. Hatipoglu, 'Türkiye Kızılay Derneği'nin Kamusalılığı: Bir Çözümleme Denemesi', *Journal of Administrative Sciences/Yönetim Bilimleri Dergisi* 11(22), (2013), p. 170.

³⁰Türk Kızılayı, 'UluslararasıYardımlar', Türk Kızılay Kurumsal Sitesi, available at: <https://www.kizilay.org.tr/neler-yapiyoruz/uluslararasi-yardimlar>.

³¹Gelir Gider Tabloları. Türk Kızılayı, (2017).

Affairs (PRA).³² Established after the abrogation of the Ottoman Caliphate by the Turkish Republic, The PRA is a state institution that executes duties related to religious affairs.³³

Under the AKP governments, the TDF rose in importance and its income and functions have increased considerably. Particularly, the foundation has been actively involved in providing international humanitarian assistance.³⁴ In 2016, after gaining the humanitarian assistance consultation position in the 'Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC),' the TDF increased the range of its activities to involvement in complex humanitarian crises.³⁵ The foundation focuses especially on providing assistance to crises in geographic locations where Muslims live. According to Mehmet Savaş Polat, the president of TDF, by 2019 the TDF has spent around \$111.6 million in Africa, covering a wide range of countries in providing international humanitarian assistance.³⁶

1.3. Turkey's Non-Governmental Organisations

1.3.1. IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation (Turkish: *İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı*)

Founded with the initial aim of supplying humanitarian relief to Muslims during the 1992 Bosnian War, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) has become one of the largest independent NGOs in Turkey in the last decade.³⁷ Although the IHH claims to be impartial in determining humanitarian crises locations in providing assistance, a large proportion of the NGO's humanitarian assistance efforts are directed towards crises in Muslim populations all over the world.³⁸

As an independent NGO in Turkey, despite that the IHH has no formal links with the Turkish government and claims its status as unaffiliated with politics, the religious-ideological roots shared between the AKP and the IHH are explicitly reflected in their close ties. For instance, in the president of the IHH, Bulent Yıldırım's own words, 'recently Turkish foreign practices have had a positive influence on our work as well. Because in a lot of the topics, we have similar views and we act in a similar fashion. There are a lot of issues where we act together in the field.'³⁹

Given the IHH's close association with the AKP administration, the IHH arguably posed a practical impact on Turkey's humanitarian aid policy. According to

³²Ö. Turan, 'The Turkish Diyanet Foundation', *The Muslim World* 98(2/3), (2008), p. 370.

³³G. Erdem, 'Religious services in Turkey: from the office of Şeyhülislâm to the Diyanet', *The Muslim World* 98(2/3), (2008), pp. 199–215, 206.

³⁴A. Öztürk, 'Turkey's Diyanet under Akp rule: from protector to imposer of state ideology?' *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16(4), (2016), pp. 619–635, 622.

³⁵Kaya, 'İslam İşbirliği Teşkilatından TDV'ye İstisari Statü', *Yeni Şafak*, (30 April 2016), available at: <https://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/islam-isbirligi-teskilatindan-tdvye-istisari-statü-2459253>.

³⁶TDV'den Afrika Ülkelerine 111.6 Milyon Dolarlık Yardım', *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Resmi Web Sitesi*, available at: <https://tdv.org.tr-TR/2019/10/24/tdvden-afrika-ulkelerine-111-6-milyon-dolarlik-yardim/>.

³⁷Tarihçe', *IHH İnsaniYardımVakfı*, available at: <https://www.ihh.org.tr/tarihce>.

³⁸H. Tabak, 'Broadening the nongovernmental humanitarian mission: the IHH and mediation', *Insight Turkey* 17(3), (2015), p. 199.

³⁹G. Lindenstrauss and S. Kıvam, 'Turkish-Hamas relations: between strategic calculations and ideological anity', (2014), p. 13.

Lindenstrauss and Kivam, many senior staff of the IHH, such as Zeyid Aslan—one of the founders of the IHH—were later appointed to high ranking positions in the AKP.⁴⁰ Additionally, the IHH's frequent involvement of Turkey's politically controversial issues in international affairs is also evidence of the IHH playing an active role in Turkish politics. A notable example in this regard was the IHH involvement in the 2010 Gaza flotilla, that the IHH organised several civilian ships included the MV Mavi Marmara, to head to Gaza to deliver 10,000 tonnes of aid. During a confrontation with the Israeli naval forces, many of the deaths among the nine Turks were affiliated with the IHH.⁴¹ Another example of political involvement by the IHH is that in the wake of July 2009 communal clashes in Xinjiang, together with the Istanbul Peace Platform, the IHH had attempted to invite leaders of anti-China movements—Rebiya Kadeer and the Dalai Lama—to the 'International Human Rights Symposium' held in Istanbul.

Moreover, as part of its tasks as an NGO, the IHH also accepts online donations. The overall fundraising campaigns and purposes were somewhat suggestive of the extent to political ties and some of them perhaps under an internationally controversial political framework.⁴² In sum, the IHH plays an extensive role in various areas of Turkey's humanitarian assistances in seeking opportunities to enhance its importance and influence globally.

1.3.2. Islamic Faith-Based Informal Organisations

In general, Turkish Islamic movements have been keen to get involved in international humanitarian assistance activities, particularly in crises that affected Muslim populations. These movements are often organised informally, operating in secretive ways and deriving their financial support from their followers.

Although, these movements have been increasingly noticeable in Turkish society since 2002, the impact and scale of international humanitarian assistance that they provide remains vague. The Turkish Islamic movements (specifically Sufi orders and Pseudo-Sufi movements) are often unforthcoming about their financial resources, decision making processes and organisational structure on their international humanitarian assistance work. The secrecy of these groups on humanitarian aid expenditure is significant because of two main intentions. Firstly, in line with the secular legislation of Turkey, the organised faith-based movements are not deemed to be legitimate.⁴³ They maintain an unofficial organisational structure. Therefore, these movements operate informally and do not desire to be apparent to the government authorities and mainstream media.

Secondly, due to taxation challenges in Turkey, these movements are usually discreet about the source of their incomes, particularly preferring cash-based donations for their humanitarian fundraising campaigns. Therefore, the exact scale of their

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 12.

⁴¹R. Bayer and E. Keyman, 'Turkey: an emerging hub of globalization and internationalist humanitarian actor?' *Globalizations* 9(1), (2012), pp. 73–90.

⁴²'Online donation.' IHH Humanitarian Relief Foundation, available at: <https://www.ihh.org.tr/en/donate>.

⁴³D. Jung, "Secularism: a key to Turkish politics?" *Interlectual Discourse* 14(2), (2006), pp. 129–154, 140.

international humanitarian aid campaigns and on ground assistance activities often goes unrecognised.

2. Defining and Understanding Turkey's Humanitarian Assistance

The previous section highlights the key actors of Turkey's humanitarian assistance and provides a foundational view that there is more than one official organisation in Turkey which is undertaking Turkey's humanitarian assistance. This section aims to clarify the Turkish understanding of humanitarian assistance. This is particularly important as it may lead to a better understanding of Turkey's humanitarian assistance motivations at both theoretical and operational levels. To explore this theme, the section will use two approaches: presenting Turkey's conceptual understanding and a brief history of Turkey's international humanitarian assistance.

2.1. The Concept of Humanitarian Assistance in Turkey

The term 'humanitarian assistance' has a fairly direct meaning in the Turkish language. This section employs a descriptive approach to clarify both lexical and semantic understanding and use of the term in Turkish.

The Turkish Language Institution Dictionary, which is regarded to be the most authoritative dictionary of the Turkish language, defines the word 'humanitarian assistance' (İnsani Yardım) as follows: 1. *'Helping human beings at the times of natural disasters on issues such as health, sheltering, etc.'* 2. *'Any help offered for the purpose of benevolence.'*⁴⁴

Apparently, the basic concept in Turkish understanding limits humanitarian assistance to natural disasters. The additional meaning implies help provided in the form of 'handouts' for humanitarian protection. Correspondingly, the two meanings of humanitarian assistance are used interchangeably by the Turkish people simply as 'providing aid.'

In addition to this ordinary comprehension, to the Turkish intelligentsia, the connotation of humanitarian assistance is more context-dependent. The words including 'humanitarian assistance,' 'humanitarianism,' or 'humanitarian intervention' often suggest an ironic intention in Turkish intelligentsia's understanding.⁴⁵

The main reason of the context-dependent depiction of the humanitarian assistance is presumably referring to the historical experiences of the Turks during the 19th and 20th centuries, when the European powers legitimised their encroachment of the Ottoman Empire's sovereignty 'on the grounds of humanity.'⁴⁶ Another reason is

⁴⁴Türk Dil Kurumu – Dilimiz Kimliğimizdir', available at: <http://tdk.gov.tr/>.

⁴⁵Some examples of criticism on the Western interpretation of the term can be found at: E. Denk, 'Birleşmiş Milletler Illüzyonu', Al Jazeera Türk - Ortadoğu, Kafkasya, Balkanlar, Türkiye Ve Çevresindeki Bölgeden Son Dakika Haberleri Ve Analizler, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/gorus/birlesmis-milletler-illuzyonu>; D. Perincek, 'Katil' Söyleminin 30 Yıldır Öğrettikleri', available at: <https://www.aydinlik.com.tr/Katil-Soyileminin-30-Yildir-Ogrettikleri-Dogu-Peri-ncck-Kose-Yazilari-Eylul-201>; 'Neden Yemen Değil? - Dinçer Demirkent', Gazete Duvar, (September 2017), available at: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/yazarlar/2017/09/07/neden-yemen-degil/>.

⁴⁶D. Rodogno, 'Chapter ten nonforcible intervention in the Ottoman Macedonian provinces (1903–1908)', *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914*, vol. 10 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 243.

based on a similar rationale to that of the past, the majority of Turkey's intelligentsia interprets the peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions in the Middle East and North Africa in the last two decades as a series of Western-led military invasions and occupations. Hence, the intelligentsia is distrustful of the 'humanitarian assistance' concept as they relate it to Western dominance and influence.

With regard to Turkey's international humanitarian aid, the general concept of humanitarian assistance is used frequently in the same sense as development aid in Turkish usage. Specifically, since 2002, the AKP appears to be more in favour of interpreting the narrative of development aid as being inclusive of humanitarian assistance. The problem of this choice over a more integral use of the concept is that it comes from ambiguity rather than a conceptual vagueness in the interpretation of humanitarian assistance. The ambiguous use of humanitarian assistance offers two advantages to Turkey's decision makers at the domestic level. First, it provides an administrative justification of allocating resources to the international development aid in the context of humanitarian assistance. Second, by referring to development aid as a subset of humanitarian assistance rather than an end in itself, the ruling party can use an appealing rhetoric during elections.

Regarding Turkey's commitment to international humanitarian principles, in a number of speeches made by Turkish decision makers, Turkey has acknowledged the significance of these principles in both vocabulary and substance. For instance, in a speech at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Latvia, President Erdogan stated that 'we strongly defend humanitarian principles and universal values in the UN, NATO, G20 and the EU.'⁴⁷ A similar note was also made by the former Turkish Prime Minister Davutoglu at the 24th Summit Meeting of the League of Arab States in Doha. Davutoglu highlighted that delivering humanitarian relief to Syria by the Turkish Red Crescent is 'in conformity with international legitimacy and humanitarian principles.'⁴⁸ Besides, Turkey's acceptance of international humanitarian principles has also been prevailing in the context of annual and operational reports issued by Turkey's humanitarian assistance organisations on various occasions.

In this respect, it can be concluded that the key Turkish humanitarian assistance actors have no disinclination in recognising international humanitarian principles. Nonetheless, there are cases that Turkish humanitarian assistance decision makers disdained the international humanitarian principles if they perceive the outcome of the humanitarian assistance as an issue of a national security concern⁴⁹. For instance, during the Syrian Civil War, Turkey's government decision makers occasionally refused to cooperate with several international third-party humanitarian assistance organisations to deliver humanitarian aid through Turkish borders into

⁴⁷Presidency of the Republic of Turkey, 'The unresponsiveness of the West against the tragedy of the East wounds the consciences', <https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/3313/the-unresponsiveness-of-the-west-against-the-tragedy-of-the-east-wounds-the-consciences>.

⁴⁸Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Statement by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey at the 24th Summit Meeting of the League of Arab States', (26 March 2013), available at: http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-mr-ahmet-davutoğlu-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey-at-the-24th-summit-meeting-of-the-league-of-arab-states_-26-march-2013_-doha.en.mfa.

⁴⁹International Crisis Group. 'Blurring the borders: Syrian spillover risks for Turkey', Europe Report, (April 2013), p. 11.

the particular regions of Syria.⁵⁰ Turkey's reaction has been mainly because of the scrutiny that the international third-party assistance was potentially exacerbating risks to Turkish national security, supporting The People's Protection Units (YPG) and Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) in Syria, that Turkey and a number of countries regard as terrorist groups.

2.2. A Brief History of Turkey's International Humanitarian Assistance

The history of the modern Turkish international humanitarian assistance can be dated back to the era of the Ottoman state's decline. During this period, the Ottoman Empire was facing several challenges which included economic crises, social uprisings, disastrous military defeats and loss of territories. The ensuing loss of Ottoman power has reinforced a perception of *realpolitik* among the Turkish ruling elite, suggesting that 'the state may secure its survival only through the balance of power politics.'⁵¹

Driven by a survival mindset, the Ottoman Empire facilitated humanitarian aid as one of the many active tools of its foreign policy to balance against threats from other states. For example, the Ottoman Empire had provided humanitarian assistance to the people of Ireland during the Great Famine. Behind the Ottoman Sultan's compassion was the intention to deter a potential military coalition between the United Kingdom and the Russian Empire in the 1840s against the Ottoman Empire.⁵² Similarly, the Ottoman Empire also supplied humanitarian aid to Russia's adversaries (e.g. Sweden and Kashgar in 1876) in order to distract the Russian Empire's armed challenge from the Ottoman territories.⁵³

In addition to continuing the previous era's balance of power calculations in humanitarian assistance decision making, the Ottoman Porte used international humanitarian assistance as its political leverage to foster national cohesion. By actively promoting Pan-Islamism as a justification and emphasising the Sultan's position as Caliph—the head of the entire world's Muslims, Sultan Abdulhamid II actively offered Turkish humanitarian aid to mostly Muslim nations.⁵⁴ In this context, the Ottoman Empire was expecting to gain specific political advantages and prestige from the Muslim world by creating a political image, and thereby using the image to prevent a bulk of independence movements of non-Turkish ethnic and linguistic Muslim nations (e.g. Arab and Albanian nationalist ones) at the home front.

⁵⁰Response Plan for the Syrian Humanitarian Operations from Turkey July 2014 – June 2015. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2014, Response Plan for the Syrian Humanitarian Operations from Turkey July 2014 – June 2015, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/Syrian-arab-republic/response-plan-syrian-humanitarian-operations-turkey-july-2014-june-2015>.

⁵¹A. Karaosmanoglu 'The evolution of the national security culture and the military in Turkey', *Journal of International Affairs*, (2000), pp. 199–216, 201–203.

⁵²S. Çelik, 'Between history of humanitarianism and humanitarianization of history: a discussion on Ottoman help for the victims of the great Irish famine, 1845–1852', *Werkstatt Geschichte*, (2014), pp. 13–28.

⁵³U. Ünal, and M. Albayrak, *Cihan-penah: Osmanlı'dan günümüze insani diplomasi* (Shelter of the world: humanitarian diplomacy from the Ottoman period to the present) (Istanbul: T.C. Başbakanlık Devlet Arşivleri Genel Müdürlüğü, Osmanlı Arşivi Daire Başkanlığı, 2016.) and Ç. Gönder, 'Kaşgar Emirliği'nin Osmanlı Devleti'ne Tâbiyeti', *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları* 15(30), (2016), pp. 1–30.

⁵⁴E. Zürcher, 'Reactionary despotism or culmination of the reforms? the reign of Sultan Abdulhamit II', in *Turkey: A Modern History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), p. 77.

Nevertheless, despite scoring a number of small-scale diplomatic victories, the Sultan's image of distinguishing himself with the piousness (Pan-Islamism) and generosity (International humanitarian assistance) failed to contribute in tackling the grave security problems of the Empire.

By 1908, when the 'Young Turks' assumed power, the Ottoman Empire's policy paradigm was altered once more. Facing both domestic and foreign existential threats to the empire, the new political priorities of Istanbul were aligned with the idealistic aspirations of Turkish nationalism. Consequently, the Young Turk government started to view political Pan-Turkism as a panacea for separatist nationalist movements and European hegemony. Accordingly, the Ottoman Empire's international humanitarian assistance priority has been redirected from a Pan-Islamism agenda to a Pan-Turkish one. In parallel with the new nationalist policy direction, the Ottoman humanitarian aid played a futile role in chasing wishful geopolitical objectives in Central Asia. Yet, the image of a benevolent empire providing aid to other Turkic nations has been a reasonably useful narrative to reinforce a national identity of Turkishness among Turks within the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁵

By contrast, after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the Republic of Turkey renounced the nationalist practice of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism. A new non-interventionist foreign policy direction was adopted under the motto of 'peace at home, peace in the world'. In other words, the priorities during the new era were focussing on domestic stability and economic growth. Thus, the idea of providing international humanitarian assistance became a secondary priority in Turkey's foreign policy. Turkey's non-interventionism approach was evident when the great powers attempted to support the independence movement in the Xinjiang region in 1933, creating the First East Turkestan Republic, Turkey had paid little foreign policy attention and did not seek politicisation of the issue or state intervention to offer any international humanitarian assistance to the rebels.

During the Cold War period, any Turkish international humanitarian assistance was mainly determined by the Cold War power dynamics between the Soviet Union and the US. By joining the Western camp, Turkey turned itself from being neutral to humanitarian aid into an aid recipient.

Even so, by the end of the Cold War, Ankara began facing an identity crisis: Turkey's crucial role as a military ally of the West began to lose its significance as a consequence of the collapse of the Soviet Union; and Turkey's relations with the West had also started deteriorating as Turkey's different perceptions on the post-Cold War security discourse and values.⁵⁶

The crisis led Ankara to craft a new foreign policy objective for Turkey. Accordingly, the idea of the 'Turkish Model,' which had the potential to widen Turkey's room for diplomatic manoeuvre under the new unipolar structure of the international system, has been utilised by the Ozal government. The model conflated Turkey's ambitious foreign policy goals with Pan-Turkism. Moreover, the new strategy was partially aimed

⁵⁵M. Hanioglu, 'The political ideas of the Young Turks', in *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford: University Press on Demand, 1995), p. 210.

⁵⁶X. Guo, 'Is Turkey acting fairly? Turkey's choice in T-Loramids', *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 11(2), (2017), pp. 69–89, 75.

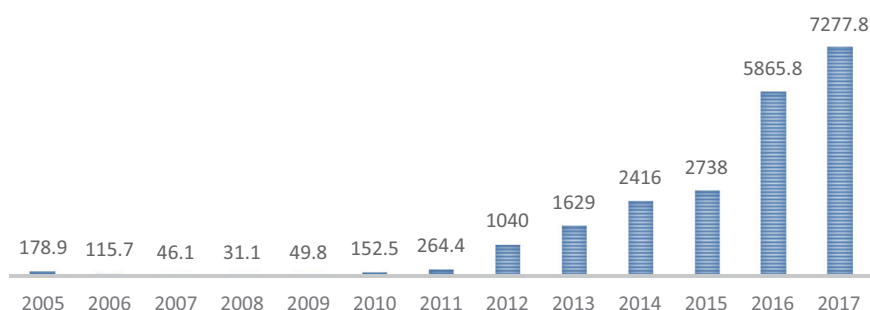


Figure 1. Distribution of Turkey's official emergency and humanitarian assistance by years (2005–2017; Million US Dollars). Source: TIKA Annual Report 2018.⁵⁹

at showing the West that Turkey would still act as a precious ally, being a functioning Muslim secular democracy and a role model to the newly established independent Turkic states in Central Asia.⁵⁷

In this context, the Turkish decision makers realised that acting like a leader with such a vision in Central Asia, Turkey was required to be a generous humanitarian and development aid donor. However, lacking extensive financial resources, institutions and organisational prowess, and facing pressure from other regional players in Central Asia, Ankara had to step back and 'the role model' foreign policy was disregarded in practice.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, Turkey's attempt has made an everlasting impact on the organisational planning and management aspects of Turkish humanitarian assistance: in 1992, TIKA was established, aiming to undertake Turkey's humanitarian assistance to other countries. Meanwhile, alongside the Turkish government's humanitarian efforts, a number of Turkish Islamic movements carried out their first significant international humanitarian assistance campaigns during this period. Notably, unlike the Turkish government, they have been continuously maintaining their operations over time in the region.

The historical analysis shows that foreign policy goals and domestic concerns were usually evident in Turkish international humanitarian assistance to different extents. Particularly, after the AKP won an unexpected landslide victory in the Turkish parliamentary elections in 2002, and changed the way of dealing with Turkey's economic and political circumstances, the similar foreign and domestic concerns on providing international humanitarian assistance were highlighted once more (Figure 1).

What is particularly notable from Figure 1 is the speed and scale of the surge in Turkey's international humanitarian aid between 2008 and 2017, that the average annual growth rate of the humanitarian aid expenditure was more than 50%. The continued rise in expenditure highlights the fact that Turkish humanitarian aid has been one of the major concerns for the AKP government.

⁵⁷W. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy, 1774–2000* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002), pp. 220–224.

⁵⁸S. Sayari, 'Turkish foreign policy in the post-cold war era: the challenges of multi-regionalism', *Journal of International Affairs*, (2000), pp. 169–182, 174–176.

⁵⁹'TIKA Annual Report 2018', available at: <https://www.tika.gov.tr/upload/2019/TurkishDevelopmentAssistanceReport2017/Kalkinma2017EngWeb.pdf>.

3. The Motivations of Humanitarian Assistance in Post-2002 Turkey

As mentioned earlier, Turkey's humanitarian assistance has increased significantly in funding and scope since 2002. Taken at face value, the increase is not peculiar as it goes along with Turkey's relatively active role in foreign affairs and thriving commerce with the rest of the world. This trend begs the question of what sort of motivations do shape Turkey's humanitarian assistance during this period. Examining these motivations can also contribute to the understanding of whether Turkish humanitarian assistance policy is ad hoc or orients from its national interests.

It should be highlighted that similar to the traditional aid actors, Turkey's role of being a 'good international citizen' and its sincere humanitarian motivations underpinning international humanitarian assistance should not be ignored. However, simply using a sincerity argument may not fully cover the whole aspects of Turkey's international humanitarian assistance. Turkey's domestic, national security and economic motivations are also significant drivers of its international humanitarian assistance, rendering Turkey's pragmatic approach and relevant realist-oriented dimension.

3.1. Domestic Motivations

The AKP's party documents and opinion leaders' publications and statements from open sources suggest that a set of predetermined 'national interests' does not apply to humanitarian assistance policy making. In contrast, there is a recurring moral emphasis on self-defined humanitarian values in these policy writings. For example, the AKP's senior foreign policy advisor, the former foreign minister and prime minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu, defines 'Turkey's Humanitarian diplomacy' as follows: Humanitarian diplomacy is based on a critical equilibrium between conscience and power. In this equation, if a state has conscience but no power, it shows weakness. If it has power but no conscience, it becomes a tyranny. Our idea is for Turkey to be a compassionate and powerful state.⁶⁰

Furthermore, Davutoglu directly links Turkish foreign policy with the humanitarian assistance goals: Our presence in the streets of Gaza, Myanmar and Somalia reveals our capacity for global diplomacy. Turkish foreign policy has increasingly adopted this quality of humanitarian diplomacy.⁶¹

President Erdogan has also supported the argument for describing Turkey's growing power in the region and international humanitarian aid capabilities, but sometimes added an 'anti-Western' tone. For instance, in his speech given to the General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2011, the President criticised international community for not being ashamed to watch the famine in Somalia 'as if it were a movie.'⁶² He said, 'the long and shameful colonial history that had led to Somalia's current situation also must be examined... Turkey had launched a comprehensive aid campaign for Somalia and had collected some \$300 million in donations,

⁶⁰ A. Davutoğlu, 'Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy: objectives, challenges and prospects', *Nationalities Papers* 41(6), (2013), pp. 865–870, 886.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² United Nations, 'Turkey: general assembly of the United Nations', available at: <https://gadebate.un.org/en/66/turkey>.

even as its official humanitarian assistance to the country surpassed \$30 million. It had also held a donor conference that had resulted in millions being raised.⁶³

Apparently, these remarks made by the AKP's elite reflect Turkey's desire for establishing an image of acting in solidarity with disadvantaged nations, acquiring a reputation for not only being a compassionate state in the region, but also as a powerful country being capable to provide the humanitarian aid internationally.

However, a group of Turkish scholars challenged the AKP's political rhetoric on displaying idealistic motivations behind its policies.⁶⁴ Rather, they argue, the rhetoric is a pragmatism driven approach aiming at strengthening the ruling party's ascendancy in Turkey's domestic politics. As Öniş, among them, points out, Turkey's 'domestic politics has become heavily intertwined with foreign policy, and foreign policy has emerged as a major instrument for gaining a competitive edge in domestic politics.'⁶⁵ He argues that the AKP leadership has been particularly effective in using pro-active foreign policy as a tool for projecting its 'globalist' and progressive image to gain advantage over its opposition parties, the CHP and the MHP, and thereby won the hearts and minds of the Turkish public.⁶⁶

Indeed, in regard to Turkey's position in providing international humanitarian assistance, the AKP's domestic politics angle is not only more apparent, but also the AKP's anti-imperialist stance is thought to be reflected. It must be underlined that in Turkey, the general understanding of anti-imperialism is characterised by the context of conservative populism rather than the socialist understanding of easing global inequality. Moreover, the AKP was formed from the Turkish conservative populism tradition which positions itself as being critical of the Turkish left and its anti-imperialist stance. Thus, the AKP's core principles and values should not be read as a contradiction to its humanitarian assistance policy. Instead, the use of an anti-imperialist tone in Turkish policy making indicates recognition of societal input and hence the moral arguments that have been used by the AKP elite cannot be considered isolated from being responsive to domestic public opinion. As a result, it can be argued that one aspect of the Turkish benevolent rhetoric for its international humanitarian assistance during the post 2002 era is more likely driven by high profile populist sentiments to strengthen the AKP's popularity in Turkey.

Indeed, the AKP's morality-based rhetoric on international humanitarian assistance does find a large domestic audience in Turkey, and the domestic support to Turkey's humanitarian assistance originates simply due to three reasons. Firstly, there is the emphatic consideration. Turkey is located in a disaster-prone geography, where the risk of natural and man-made disasters significantly impact on society, environment and economic growth. Turkish citizens had traumatic experiences with hazards and

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴More on this argument see also N. Criss, 'Parameters of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP governments', UNISCI Discussion Papers 23, (2010); A. Murinson, 'Turkish foreign policy in the twenty-first century', Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, (2012); S. Gagaptay, 'Is Turkey leaving the West?' *Foreign Affairs* 26, (2009); J. Snellen and K. Kirişçi, 'Turkey and the West: fault lines in a troubled alliance', *Naval War College Review* 71(3), (2018), p. 20; I. Turan, 'Turkish foreign policy Interplay between the Domestic and External.' Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011.

⁶⁵Z. Öniş, 'Multiple faces of the 'new' Turkish foreign policy: underlying dynamics and', *Insight Turkey* 13(1), (2011), pp. 47–65, 57.

⁶⁶Ibid.

disasters. For instance, during the Izmit earthquake in 1999, the country had lost more than 17,000 lives and 250,000 people have been left homeless. For decades, thousands of people were killed or wounded in terrorist attacks in Turkey. Due to the similarities of these troubles to what Turkish citizens have suffered in the past, almost every humanitarian crisis in the rest of the world receives considerable media attention in Turkey. In this context, the Turkish public seems to scarcely raise public opposition to the government's budget spending on overseas humanitarian aid. Particularly, the AKP's supporters are even proud of Turkey's influence towards global humanitarian assistance.

Secondly, a faith origin of humanitarian aid that comes from Islamic rules and traditions is apparent in Turkey. The faith reason for Turkish domestic support to Turkey's humanitarian assistance can be observed from generous financial donations to humanitarian assistance fundraising from ordinary Turkish citizens during religious festivals. As Gilley claims, up to 75% of Turkish humanitarian aid comes from government-organised fundraising campaigns rather than the Turkish government's budgetary spending.⁶⁷

Thirdly, there is the legacy of the Ottoman Empire's great power status. With the rise of political and social conservatism after the 1980s, a revivalist nostalgia for 'great power' status representing the Ottoman Empire, acting as the principal representative agency on humanitarian actions, has appeared in Turkey. In this sense, there are public perceptions of promoting a revival of the Ottoman Empire's grandeur and implement international humanitarian aid policies.⁶⁸ Much of these perceptions are arguably manifestations of revivalist thinking and based on historical fiction. Nonetheless, by and large, the public believes that Turkey's international humanitarian assistance constitutes the historical reconstruction of the Ottoman Empire's powerful past in the image of modern Turkey.

Overall, given the domestic support for Turkey's international humanitarian aid, it is not surprising to see that the AKP policy makers frequently emphasise international humanitarian assistance to match what the Turkish public desire to see.

3.2. National Security Motivations

There is also a national security standpoint to Turkey's international humanitarian assistance in which Turkey's immediate and ever changing national security interests determine the main direction of the aid delivered.

Turkey's security aspect in humanitarian assistance is relatively apparent in its assistance to neighbouring countries affected by humanitarian crises.⁶⁹ For instance, in Syria, Turkey has provided humanitarian aid to the villages and cities liberated from Islamic radicalism and terrorism. To Turkey, international humanitarian assistance comes from the notion that providing humanitarian assistance makes Turkey safer in

⁶⁷B. Gilley, 'Turkey, middle powers, and the new humanitarianism', *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 20(1), (2015), p. 45.

⁶⁸M. Altunışık, 'Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy: the AKP model', *CMI Brief* 8, (2019), p. 2.

⁶⁹M. Altunışık, 'Turkey as an 'emerging donor' and the Arab uprisings', *Mediterranean Politics* 19(3), (2014), pp. 333–350, 336.

its unstable region. Particularly, a large number of potential refugees flowing to Turkey were the key concern of Turkey's national interests. Humanitarian aid was seen as one of the ways to prevent the tide.

Moreover, Turkey's humanitarian assistance has been contributing to Turkey's operational strategy of military intervention in the Middle East. Specifically, during Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield in Syria, as J. Jager observes, Turkey's humanitarian assistance suggested Turkey's 'consolidate gains' mindset, that through providing aid, Turkey tended to influence the Syrian population, and thereby prolong Turkish military's stay in Syria.⁷⁰

Overall, to Turkey, with the surge of radicalism and terrorism in the Middle East, providing humanitarian assistance to the conflict zones appeared to be not only a way of forestalling threats to Turkey's national security, but as a legitimate rationale for achieving Turkey's security aspirations.

However, policy cohesion in the national security aspect of Turkey's humanitarian assistance has not always been evident. In the case of humanitarian aid to Syria, during the early insurgency phase of the Syrian Civil War, while the aid organisations backed by the Turkish government delivered humanitarian aid, providing support to the Syrian Turkmen Brigade and The Free Syrian Army (FSA), a number of Turkish municipalities from the Southeast region of Turkey took an opposite direction to the Turkish government by sending humanitarian aid to armed Kurdish groups who were the main competitors of the FSA and Turkmens in fighting for territorial gain.⁷¹ Apparently, Turkey's local level administrative units have the chance to run separate humanitarian programmes from the Turkish government administration. The inconsistent interest-orientation between Turkey's administrative authorities and Turkish local governments indicates a degree of disharmony in promoting Turkish foreign aid policies.

3.3. Commercial Motivations

The use of humanitarian assistance as a means of obtaining economic advantage is also a factor in Turkey's assistance decision making.⁷² However, the relationship between obtaining economic advantage and humanitarian aid in Turkey's case is more subtle than that observed in domestic and national security reasons.

The 2001 Turkish economic crisis and subsequent IMF-directed economic programme have changed the structure of the Turkish economy in a very certain way. The economic recovery has been fast, especially in the early years of the 2000s. The combination of domestic capital accumulation and low global interest rates have particularly contributed to Turkey's economic growth in the post-crisis period. The new

⁷⁰J. Jager, 'Turkey's operation Euphrates shield: an exemplar of joint combined arms maneuver', *Small Wars Journal* 17(6), (2016).

⁷¹M. Dağ, 'Kayapınar Belediyesi'nden Rojava ve Şengalli Ailelere Yardım', *Hürriyet*, (17 November 2014), <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/kayapinar-belediyesinden-rojava-ve-sengalli-ailelere-yardim-37009919>.

⁷²J. Hausmann and E. Lundsgaarde, 'Turkey's role in development cooperation' United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, (2015). p. 3.

economic reforms encouraged a large number of Turkish companies to pursue international opportunities and expand their operations beyond Turkey's traditional markets notably to the locations where Turkey's humanitarian assistance has been offered.

Turkey's humanitarian effort in the cases of African countries is an especially striking example to understand the nexus between Turkey's economic interests and its international humanitarian assistance. In general, whenever a humanitarian crisis has occurred in Africa, Turkey has been enthusiastic to play an active role in providing aid. As a result, Turkish humanitarian aid largely contributes to the friendly image which later becomes a beachhead for Turkish companies to establish their operations in Africa.⁷³

Yet, Turkey's intentions in providing humanitarian aid in Africa have been arguably pushed back to the discourse of Turkey's pursuit of material and strategic motives. As Kaya and Warner (2012) argue, 'despite this altruistic rhetoric, Turkey's involvement in Africa is part of a greater foreign policy strategy aimed to improve Turkey's economic prospects, along with its regional and international standing.'⁷⁴ From this perspective, Turkey's international humanitarian assistance is viewed as being intentionally engaged in a relationship with Turkey's economic and political interests.

However, this view has been arguably opposed by the opinions that Turkish aid has been often not subject to any conditionality and sometimes remained ad hoc in policy measures. For instance, Pinar Tank, a senior researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo, acknowledges that 'The Turkish approach gives its engagement a 'human face' ... The delivery of aid is often directly to beneficiaries, frequently without conditions' in the case of Turkey's aid involvement in Somalia.⁷⁵ Similarly, Gizem Sucuoglu and Jason Stearns, a Senior Programme Manager at New York University's Centre on International Cooperation (CIC) and a Senior Fellow at the CIC and Director of the Congo Research Group respectively, believe that Turkey as a humanitarian aid actor remains ad hoc and has not yielded structured planning given the evidence of the absence of detailed and structured assessments facilitating the prompt delivery of aid and services in Somalia.⁷⁶ Thus, the simplistic view of Turkey's international humanitarian aid as a straightforward reflection of Turkey's state-level mercantilist incentives fails to capture the whole picture of Turkey's true intentions on its humanitarian aid activities.

4. Conclusion

In light of the above, this paper discussed the framework of Turkey's humanitarian assistance and the motivations of humanitarian assistance under the AKP rule. The Turkish governmental, quasi-governmental and non-governmental organisations in the context of Turkey's public administration system have extensively framed Turkey's international humanitarian assistance.

⁷³C. Zhang, 'Turkey's African strategy and policy: a review', *Journal of West Asia and Africa* 9, (2011), pp. 53–67, 61.

⁷⁴K. Kaya and J. Warner, 'Turkey and Africa: a rising military partnership?' Leavenworth, Kansas: The Foreign Military Studies Office, (2012), p. 7.

⁷⁵P. Tank, 'Turkey's new humanitarian approach in Somalia', NOREF Policy Brief, (2013), p. 2.

⁷⁶G. Sucuoglu and J. Stearns, 'Turkey in Somalia: shifting paradigms of aid', *South African Institute of International Affairs*, (2016), p. 26.

The understanding of Turkey's humanitarian assistance among Turkish citizens is generally straightforward as 'providing aid.' The Turkish intelligentsia often detaches humanitarian assistance from the ordinary understanding, but places it under larger scrutiny and the theme of criticising Western foreign policy.

The everlasting collective historical memory of the 'unjust' act of imperial powers' encroachment of the Empire's sovereignty 'on the grounds of humanity' during the Ottoman era has shaped the Turkish elites' perception of humanitarian assistance towards this aspect.

The historical outline of Turkey's humanitarian assistance suggests that modern Turkey inherited a legacy from the Ottoman Empire for providing international humanitarian assistance to other nations. Turkey considered humanitarian assistance as a policy instrument of Turkish foreign affairs for implementing its realist-oriented focus and pursuing the national interest of survival. Notably, other than the governmental organisations, some non-governmental organisations in Turkey remained rather focussing on self-interest, imposing their own senses of moral obligation over humanitarian aid, which may not be part of the instrument of Turkey's foreign policy.

During the post-2002 AKP era, Turkey's humanitarian assistance has intensified. Turkey has emerged as one of the top donors to humanitarian crises across the world. Given that Turkey is a middle power country in international politics, the scale of the Turkish international humanitarian assistance compared to Turkey's role at the international level is rarely questioned. It appears that Turkey is 'punching above its weight' when undertaking the Turkish humanitarian assistance programmes. For this reason, the study highlights the AKP era's domestic politics ambitions, national security concerns and commercial interests. The study suggests that not only domestic political motivation reflects Turkey's motivation of offering humanitarian assistance, but also its realist concern for the security and economic agenda capturing Turkey's humanitarian assistance intention.

In sum, the article is a modest contribution to the literature on a comprehensive understanding of Turkey's humanitarian assistance. To some extent, Turkey's humanitarian assistance as an integral part of the Turkish foreign policy has received limited research attention and in-depth analysis. By exploring the overarching humanitarian assistance framework of Turkey, this study provides more detail of Turkey's key aid organisations, a historical account of the early Turkish international humanitarian assistance, and the relevant motivations with the implications of Turkey's humanitarian-oriented policies. This study hopes to yield further research on extensive analysis regarding Turkey's humanitarian aid practice and policies.

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