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# Turkey, Middle Powers, and the New Humanitarianism

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## Abstract

*This article traces the evolution of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy as an example of the new humanitarianism associated with emerging countries. It discusses both the promise as well as the challenges of the new humanitarianism. It then introduces the idea of "middle power activism" in international affairs as one way to understand Turkey's behavior. This lens is then used to identify the aspects of Turkey's behavior that are more likely to endure as contributions to global humanitarian affairs. It identifies state-centered humanitarian aid, regional approaches, and the supplementing of humanitarian aid with political and economic goals as aspects of the Turkish approach likely to endure and to appeal to other emerging actors.*

## Key Words

Humanitarianism, humanitarian diplomacy, emerging powers, middle powers.

## Introduction

The emergence of Turkey as a major actor in humanitarian diplomacy and assistance raises new and important questions for both Turkey and humanitarianism. This paper will consider how the Turkish engagement with humanitarianism can be understood as a form of "middle power activism" in international affairs. The middle power approach serves as a useful framework to explain Turkey's behavior and to predict the emergence of a "new humanitarianism" that is resulting from the efforts of Turkey and other middle powers such as South Korea.

The paper begins with a narrative review of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy and assistance and the controversial issues it has raised. This is followed by a consideration of humanitarianism and the current issues it faces as a result of the emergence of non-Western states as prominent actors in the field. The middle power lens is then introduced as a means of sorting out several unresolved questions about the new humanitarianism. Theoretical and policy implications follow.

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## Turkey's Humanitarian Diplomacy

The sudden emergence of Turkey "from dwarf to giant"<sup>1</sup> in international humanitarian assistance has raised a host of new issues. In 2013, Turkey gave US\$ 1.6 billion in official humanitarian aid, making it the third largest donor after the U.S. and UK. This giving has been accompanied by parallel diplomatic efforts to create humanitarian space and by an expansion of non-official giving. Between 2007 and 2012, the Turkish Red Crescent provided humanitarian aid to 70 countries, delivering US\$ 2.5 billion worth of humanitarian aid in 2012 alone.

Much of this aid has involved assistance to the more than 1.6 million refugees from Syria living in Turkey by early 2015, either in camps or in urban areas. If in-kind contributions for the Syria crisis are included, Turkey's humanitarian

assistance would likely double. But the Syria crisis only accelerated a trend in Turkey's rising humanitarian status that had been taking shape since the end of the Cold War. In the aftermath of the US-led war in Afghanistan in particular, Turkey launched the İstanbul Initiative to provide a combination of humanitarian aid and infrastructure rebuilding to Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most of the early assistance was centered on the subsequent regional crises in the Middle East, especially in Pakistan, Iraq, and Libya. Turkey's NGOs became active in Yemen, Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt during and after their political revolutions, providing humanitarian assistance and assisting migrant populations.

The turning point in Turkey's rise as a *global* humanitarian superpower came in 2011 when Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan decided to launch a major assistance mission to war-torn Somalia after a visit to the country in August with his wife and six cabinet members. The visit, intended to highlight the plight of drought victims, ended a 20 year period where no major foreign leader had visited the capital. The one-day visit was prosaic at the time- the airplane carrying the businessmen, journalists, and NGOs damaged its wing on landing while the government barred the local press from attending- but has since loomed larger in Turkey's own historical imagination as the emblem of its new humanitarianism.

The effective mobilization of government, university, NGO, and private sector partners in Somalia allowed a nation-building exercise without force. “With its unrivaled on-the-ground rebuilding effort and generous scholarship program, Turkey is using Somalia as the first great display of “virtuous power,” wrote Harte.<sup>2</sup> The Somalia initiative attracted wide attention because it eschewed pure humanitarianism and instead embraced business ties, peacebuilding initiatives, education, infrastructure and development aid, and even military aid. Turkey has cited the Somalia example as a model for its engagement with Africa.<sup>3</sup>

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Beyond the Middle East and Africa, Turkey has taken actions that spread its footprint even wider. The Philippines typhoon of 2013 provided an early opportunity for Ankara to show that

it was interested in humanitarianism beyond its own region or nearby Muslim populations. Erdoğan despatched his deputy prime minister, Beşir Atalay, and the president of the Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (AFAD), Fuat Oktay, to the Philippines to coordinate Turkey’s relief works on the ground. Turkey even gave US\$ 200,000 in 2014 for the construction of a water tank to serve an elementary school on an Indian reservation in Oregon in the United States. In 2016, Turkey will host the first UN World Humanitarian Summit, which Davutoğlu has described it as “the most important international summit ever held in Turkey.”<sup>4</sup>

## Historical Drivers

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, European powers variously negotiated and intervened in the Ottoman Empire in the name of the saving humans (mainly Christians).<sup>5</sup> Arguably, the whole idea of humanitarian diplomacy and, if necessary, intervention, arose in European relations with the Ottomans. Turkey itself also dealt with the humanitarian implications of Caucasus migrants of the 1860s and 1870s and then the breakup of the Ottoman Empire. In addition, the non-governmental activism that plays such a prominent role in contemporary humanitarianism, including the nursing advances associated with the British social reformer Florence Nightingale,

arose in European dealings with the Ottoman Empire. The forerunner of the Turkish Red Crescent Society was formed in 1868 as the Society in Aid of Ill and Wounded Ottoman Soldiers.

Democratization in Turkey after 1983 unleashed a wave of civil society organization, spurred on by rapid economic growth. The end of the Cold War also put new external demands on Turkish foreign policy, beginning with the needs of populations in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. The Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) was established for this purpose in 1992. An almost constant rumble of war on Turkey's borders- the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, the Balkan and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts of the 1990s, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars of the 2000s, and the Syrian crisis of the 2010s- led to rising demands on its humanitarian capacity. This combination of internal reforms and external pressures has forced Turkey into a more active humanitarian stance.<sup>6</sup>

By the second term of the AKP government (2007 to 2011) under Erdoğan, the foreign ministry was already noting the rising importance of humanitarian assistance in Turkey's foreign policy. This unlocked a genuine enthusiasm for humanitarianism in Turkish society. Some local media have linked the sudden enthusiasm for humanitarian diplomacy and assistance to Turkey's successful bid for a United

Nations Security Council non-permanent seat in 2009-10. However, it is better to see both agendas as linked to common underlying structural conditions, internal and external, that have made Turkey both able and willing to play a larger role on the international stage.

With rising influence, however, has come rising scrutiny of Turkey's humanitarian practices. These issues can be essentially grouped into three categories: political neutrality, pro-Islamic bias, and professionalism.

## Issue 1: Political Neutrality

The question of political neutrality has arisen because of the assumptions long made about the nature of humanitarian assistance and diplomacy. Humanitarian diplomacy and assistance is a policy instrument involving the use of non-coercive organization (communication, negotiation, advocacy, mobilization, persuasion, etc.) and material provision by external actors with the intention of assisting vulnerable populations with basic human needs in target countries. It differs from traditional foreign policy in that it steers clear of political issues and avoids coercive methods (threat, sanction, intervention). Many actors such as the ICRC's (full name, abbreviation in parenthesis) R gnier insist that humanitarian diplomacy must be "politically-neutral" and "value-free" in order to be classified as such.<sup>7</sup>

This has meant that the rise of “new humanitarian powers” like Turkey has attracted scrutiny from that community. Turkey’s close integration of its official aid with its political goals- the head of the Turkish Intelligence Organization (MİT) from 2010, Hakan Fidan, was the head the Turkish Cooperation and Development Organization (TİKA) from 2003 to 2007- has raised eyebrows. The Western humanitarian aid community has grown up with the High Liberal assumption that an explicit or barely-concealed political agenda is inconsistent with humanitarian principles.

In the case of Somalia, Turkey’s “political stand”, for instance, has involved not asking questions to the host government about the uses of aid or about conditionality in the form of governance reforms. As a Turkish journalist put it, quoting a discussion with the Somali ambassador to Turkey, “Turkish aid... does not come with many strings attached.”<sup>8</sup> This political choice has given the assistance operation a *de facto* bias for the state and the sitting government, one reason why Turkish diplomats and aid workers have been the targets of attacks by radical Islamists who claim that the country is a front for Western “invaders”. Indeed, Turkey has explicitly made the combatting of Islamic extremism a key justification for its humanitarian giving in Muslim countries. It has also prompted speculation in the local media that Ankara has broader designs on the

region. “Turkey’s humanitarian interests in Somalia over the past years are not enough to explain why Turkey has become one of the main actors in the country,” wrote a Somali newspaper.<sup>9</sup> A journalist in Turkey, meanwhile, commented: “While Turkey’s soft power approach seems so far to have won the hearts and minds of some Africans, the rhetoric Turkish officials use is disturbing to many others. A phrase I often hear punted around by Turkish officials, ‘Whatever we are doing in Africa, we are not expecting anything in return’, undermines their aid. The recipients do not want to be considered so naïve they would believe such self-sacrificial claims.”<sup>10</sup>

Such political questions also extend to Turkey’s key INGOs. The politicization of Turkey’s humanitarian INGOs began when the Turkish Red Crescent Society was a big fund-raiser in the U.S. for the Turkish War of independence in the 1920s. In recent times, attention has centered on the Humanitarian Aid Organization (İHH), which operates in over 100 countries. In 2010, İHH led an ill-fated “freedom flotilla” to provide humanitarian relief and construction supplies to Gaza in 2010, which had been under an Israeli blockade since 2006. Israeli commandos stormed the boat, killing nine (another later died of injuries). The mission was planned shortly after Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan walked out of a panel meeting that

included Israeli president Shimon Peres at the annual Davos Summit in 2009 after making several barbed comments about Israel. While Ankara tried to dissuade the group from carrying out the mission, and while İHH had negotiated in good faith with Syria and Israel to open official aid corridors to Gaza, the mission was clearly designed as an act of protest rather than humanitarianism. In 2014, an İstanbul court started prosecuting in absentia the four Israeli military commanders who led the raid.

Elsewhere, the İHH has issued highly charged political statements on the status of Turkic-speaking Uighurs in China's far western Xinjiang territory, calling for a statement of humanitarian concern on the issue from the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).<sup>11</sup>

In 2003, Turkish military intelligence was claimed to be using the Turkish Red Crescent as cover to move weapons from Turkey to Turkmens in Iraq. US military members detained eleven Turkish military officers for their involvement in the operation and led them off in hoods (hence it is known as the "hood event"). And in three kidnapping cases—a kidnapped Turkish journalist in Syria who was released in Iran, the rescue of two Iranian Revolutionary Guard officers from Syria, and the release of two Turkish Airlines pilots by Hezbollah in Lebanon in return for nine members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard—İHH seems to have coordinated closely with

the Iranian government as a de facto official representative of Turkey.

Turkey's difficulties in embracing the principle of political neutrality may stem from its own past. For many years, Turkish disagreements with foreign powers on humanitarian assistance to its own Kurdish populations has reflected the ineffably politicized nature of humanitarian aid. However, as expectations of political neutrality have become commonplace, Turkey finds itself out of step with the Western humanitarian community, which expects at least some degree of separation between political agendas and humanitarian needs. As the *Cihan News Agency* concluded: "There are humanitarian organizations... that act less like aid groups and more like the tools of intelligence services. Such 'humanitarian' organizations may help intelligence agencies cover up their operations in foreign territories. However, they severely damage the credibility of Turkish citizens as the friends of those in need."<sup>12</sup>

Still, two factors mitigate the charge of politicization. One is the simple point that humanitarianism is a type of *public* policy. As the former UN Emergency Relief Coordinator and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland puts it: "Blankets and food rations are provided when inadequate political and security measures fail to address the root causes of the crisis."<sup>13</sup> That is, *all* actors engaged in humanitarian diplomacy or assistance are

pursuing “political” or “public” agendas – whatever mixture of self-interest, commitment, and sympathy that entails. Several scholars have questioned the notion that humanitarianism should be separated from political and developmental goals.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the issue of the “narrow” political interests Turkey sometimes pursues as part of its humanitarian assistance needs to be separated from the “broader” political interests it is pursuing. These latter concern normative attempts to build a more cooperative and inclusive international order, a question we return to below. Turkey has made humanitarianism a key dimension of its foreign policy, with explicitly political goals of transforming the international order. Such broader political interests do not discredit its humanitarianism, given their normative underpinnings.

## Issue 2: Islamic Bias

The second issue that has been raised about Turkey’s emergence as a global humanitarian actor is the role of Islamic foundations and cultural linkages. The concern is that humanitarianism may be delivered in a manner that promotes a regressive version of Islam or which favors Muslim over non-Muslim populations. This is especially the case since the Turkish model of humanitarianism involves a close linkage between official giving and actions by the state and the

integration into that effort of civil society and business organizations. And since the trend has been growing influence of Islamic civil society and business organizations- the traditional secular Turkish Industrialists’ and Businessmen’s Association (TÜSİAD) is today challenged by the Islamic Association of Independent Industrialists and Businessmen (MÜSİAD)- this translates into more Islamic pressures on Ankara’s humanitarian foreign policy.

There is an irony here since the origins of Western humanitarianism were in caring for Christian groups at risk in the decaying Ottoman Empire.<sup>15</sup> However, there is little evidence thus far that the Islamic orientation undermines the delivery of humanitarian aid and much evidence that it inspires it and makes it more effective and durable. Islamic-inspired İHH and partly state sponsored the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS), founded in 1868, have a cultural inroad in many of the countries where Turkey operates such as Afghanistan and Somalia, allowing them to provide education and healthcare in an effective manner. It has also given Ankara more influence in encouraging peace and humanitarian space among Sunni groups. The search and rescue team of the TRCS was one of the first to reach afflicted areas in Pakistan following a 2005 earthquake because of its cultural ties. The İHH has even been put in charge of developing a code of conduct for Islamic humanitarian organizations for the OIC.



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Also, secularists in Turkey, despite avowedly being more internationalist than the “parochial” Islamists, lack the motivations for carrying it out. As Tabak puts it: “Why have nationalists, liberals or socialists, while having the frames of international engagement, not developed cross-border institutional humanitarian action, while Islamic groups have?”<sup>16</sup> He argues that the AKP has unlocked not only a revived Muslim sensibility and civil society space but has also encouraged a globalist rather than exclusionary Islamic sensibility. “The idea of *ummah* has, in this sense, been replaced by an Islamic internationalism that suggests having cross-border humanitarian engagement as a holder of Islamic religious identity, yet without having a focus exclusively on Muslims.”

Moreover, the attention to humanitarian needs of Islamic populations may remedy a blind spot in Western countries. As Binder and Erten put it: “It is worth noting that the key crises that...[define] Turkish humanitarian assistance- Bosnia, the Kashmir earthquake, the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar, Somalia and

Syria- all are crisis situations that were and are marked by limited Western efforts to find effective political solutions or sufficient humanitarian assistance to predominantly Muslim populations. The...[lack of] Western attention thus provides a credible justification for the Turkish government to fill the gap and focus on Muslim populations affected by war and disaster.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, Turkey’s INGOs have both a functional advantage and a normative justification for paying particular attention to humanitarian crises involving Muslim populations.

### Issue 3: Professionalism, Effectiveness, and Sustainability

The third line of critique of Turkey’s humanitarianism revolves around its various departures from “best practice” as developed primarily among Western INGOs, the Western-dominated United Nations humanitarian system, and Western governments. As Akpınar has noted in her study of Turkey’s Somalia foray, despite the political payoffs, the effort has been constrained by Turkey’s lack of capacity and expertise, its focus on personalistic and one-off actions, and its lack of public support at home and regional support abroad.<sup>18</sup>

The financing and political support of Turkey’s various humanitarian endeavors



raises issues of both transparency and sustainability. Because Turkey is still a developing country, the government has not made its external spending a high profile issue and thus reliable and consistent figures are not always easy to come by. In addition, since up to 75% of spending on major crises has come not from budgetary allocations but from government-organized telethons, there are questions about how “donor fatigue” could more easily undermine the sustainability of Turkish efforts. The question of the domestic political support for an enlarged international giving campaign is crucial. Whether the idea of a “grand restoration” of Turkish identity through humanitarianism is enough to motivate everyday support remains to be seen.

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Turkey has also raised eyebrows by its broadening of the definition of humanitarianism to include development assistance, peacebuilding, and much else, as in Somalia. After announcing the 2016

humanitarian summit, foreign minister Davutoğlu stated: «Hopefully, İstanbul will become a UN hub of international mediation, development, peace activities, humanitarian and women issues.»<sup>19</sup> While this blurs the boundary between humanitarian assistance and other forms of foreign policy, this critique is odd coming at a time when the global foreign assistance agenda is being reorganized around the principles of *resilience* and *national ownership*, both of which put a premium on long-term integrated aid and on aid that is defined by the affected national community itself (which may want bridges instead of blankets). In that sense, Turkey’s broadening of the humanitarian agenda is consistent with emerging trends.

In addition, Turkey’s humanitarian assistance has been seen as personalistic and uncoordinated, working as it does mainly from the prime minister’s office rather than from an autonomous and professionalized agency and lacking any institutionalized status, such as a line item in the budget. Turkey is not a member of the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC- although it has been offered membership). It has resisted attempts by the UNHCR to co-manage its Syrian migrant camps (although six UN agencies were involved in helping it serve the camps) and has also rejected a role in the camps for Western INGOs. Its officials insist that broader coordination with the DAC or the UN system would

hamper its rapid response to crises such as that in Syria. “Here at the MFA, we can either respond to the Syrian refugee crisis or discuss with other donors on how to engage more closely,” Binder and Erten quote one official saying.<sup>20</sup> The mayor of Mogadishu is more blunt: “If I request computers from the UN, they will take months and require a number of assessments. They will spend US\$ 50,000 to give me US\$ 7,000 of equipment. If I request computers from Turkey, they will show up next week.”<sup>21</sup>

Ankara sees multilateral coordination on humanitarian diplomacy and assistance as imposing unnecessary costs on its rapid actions and broader foreign policy aims. The Ministry of Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD) argues that the UN and EU procedures for doing humanitarian reconstruction projects are too cumbersome and prevent rapid responses. At the same time, Turkey touts its attainment of a high-level of “interoperability”- its systems can easily work with those of others- which is a basic aid principle long-espoused by the aid community but difficult to implement because each has its own internal system designed to ensure accountability to its own stakeholders. It can get UNICEF workers into the field far faster than rival countries even though it lacks official coordination systems.

The lack of official coordination with regional and Western actors means that it is difficult for partners to scale with Turkish efforts, potentially reducing overall impact. Yet much of this is simply a reflection of the newness of Turkey’s efforts. The quick scaling up of its international engagement and thus professionalism- which the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) provides a strong driver for given the 2-year process of consultations leading up the summit- suggests that these transitional issues will decline in importance. More fundamental differences about the purposes and design of aid are likely to remain.

## Emerging States and Humanitarianism

The issues raised by Turkey’s humanitarianism can be usefully framed in two different contexts: emerging states and middle powers. Despite recent interest in the role of emerging states, to date most scholarship on humanitarian diplomacy and assistance has focused on INGOs and international and regional institutions, especially the UN system. This seems to reflect the normative bias mentioned above that excludes state behavior from the field by definitional fiat. Minear, for example, writes that states “instrumentalize assistance and protection activities.”<sup>22</sup> Smith insists that

“state diplomats pursue a multifarious set of interests responding to a specific national interest [while]...humanitarian officials pursue an international interest in respect of a narrowly focused mission, which is to respond to humanitarian need.”<sup>23</sup>

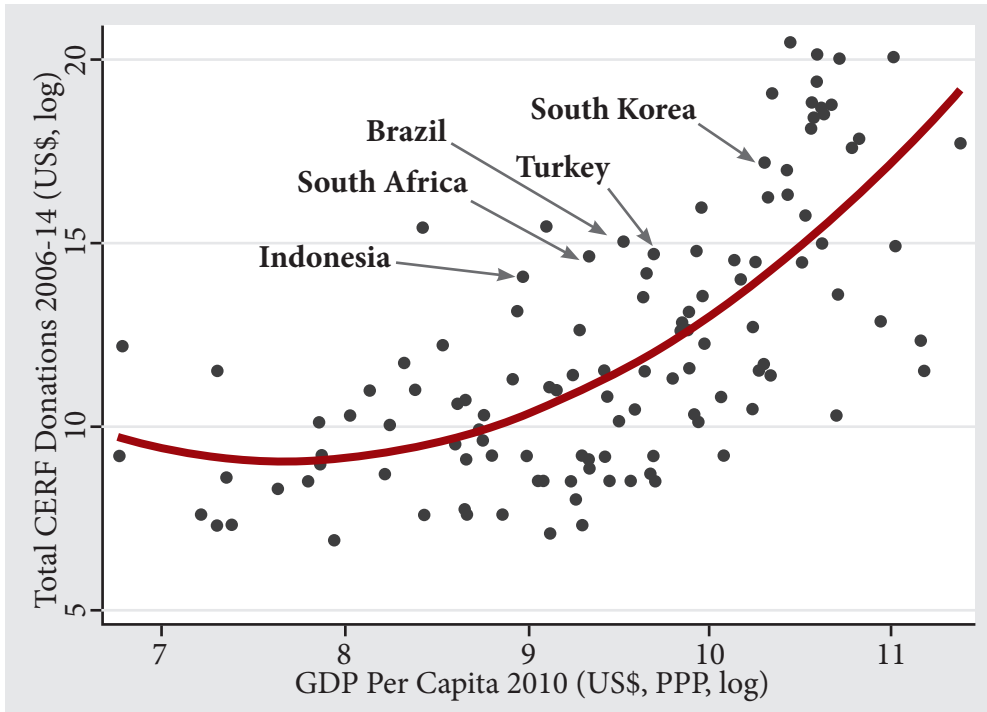
Yet beyond the obvious point that every humanitarian operation run by INGOs or UN agencies depends critically for funding and support on sovereign states, sovereign states may act more morally and ethically than INGOs and international institutions in given crises precisely because they have a choice of policy instruments. The term “humanitarian diplomacy” originated in a book that asked how the U.S. *government* could be more effective in securing basic human rights for vulnerable populations.<sup>24</sup>

Even if it was possible or desirable to exclude sovereign states from the definition of humanitarian actors in the past, that position is untenable today in an era of emerging powers that aspire to make their own contributions to global humanitarianism *in the name of the state*. “The South continues to voice that humanitarian assistance should transcend the concept of relief and be linked with national priorities,” asserts the former head of the OIC’s humanitarian operations in a briefing paper.<sup>25</sup> The reason why UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon appears to have

chosen Turkey over Switzerland as the site for the first UN humanitarian conference in 2016 is an awareness that the rules of the game are being redefined by the states of the “global South” and that without engaging them directly there is a danger that humanitarianism as a universal enterprise will fall apart.

The emergence of new economic powers in humanitarianism can be seen, and foreseen, visually by looking at national contributions to the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) from its launch in 2006 to 2014. As can be seen from Figure 1, there is a significant relationship between a country’s development level (GDP per capita) and its contributions to the CERF. In effect, richer countries give more because they can afford to. It may be that domestic resistance to “foreign aid” declines once a country’s economy reaches a point where the basic needs of the population have been met. What is important to note is all of the so-called emerging powers—of which Turkey, South Korea, South Africa, Brazil, and Indonesia are shown here—are large over-contributors. These countries make humanitarian assistance a priority because it fits well with their active diplomatic agendas that seek to increase influence through such good international citizenship. These countries have both the capacity and the will to reshape the global humanitarian agenda.

**Figure 1: Contributions to CERF Relative to Development Levels**



Binder and Meier’s survey of Turkey, India, Brazil, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and China shows that non-Western states differ systematically from Western ones in their approaches to humanitarian assistance and diplomacy. As we have seen with Turkey, they find that these nations have a broader conception of humanitarianism; are more likely to embrace state-to-state cooperation rather than by-passing the host-nation state; are more often motivated by immediate crises in their own regions; prefer in-kind assistance using their own national

goods; do not closely track internally nor require transparency and monitoring of the funds from host nations (“hands off approach”); prefer to align their practices with regional organizations such as ASEAN or OIC rather than with the UN-led system; and prefer to funnel aid through their own national INGOs rather than through others. Turkey in particular has stressed that it has a boots-on-the-ground approach to humanitarianism. It is willing to put its aid workers, teachers, doctors, and volunteers in harm’s way as part of their

mission. “We don’t just unload aid at the airport and leave the scene,” AFAD Director General Fuat Oktay said in 2015.<sup>26</sup>

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This has opened up a wide chasm with the DAC-centered approach of the West. Of the 40 members of the Western-backed Good Humanitarian Donorship Initiative, only four (South Korea, Japan, Mexico, and Brazil) are non-Western, which means its aim of the “development of consensus around a comprehensive agenda for good humanitarian donor policy” will remain elusive. As Binder and Meier conclude, this growing disconnect between emerging state humanitarianism and Western humanitarianism threatens to undo decades of painstaking work to create coordinated and well-informed policies. “Without dialogue, non-Western donors may systematically repeat the errors that traditional donors made in the past.”<sup>27</sup> As the ranks of humanitarian actors become more non-Western, the substantive nature of humanitarian diplomacy and assistance may change. This makes it imperative for the two groups to coordinate on setting principles and operative approaches. As

Egeland puts it: “The emerging and de facto economic powers outside of the Western hemisphere must be engaged to promote and protect humanitarian operations.”<sup>28</sup>

Just as important, it may be that there is an opportunity to learn from non-Western powers. A practical and engaged learning from non-Western countries may yield lessons and opportunities especially as humanitarianism moves into unfamiliar terrain and complex situations. As Egeland puts it: “The danger is that humanitarianism, a universal imperative and shared intercultural system of principles, become so Westernized in its funding, staffing, organizational structure, and political profile, that it risks long-term adversity in many non-Western settings.”

The problem, then, is how to separate the wheat from the chaff in engaging non-Western humanitarianism. How can existing humanitarian actors ensure that engagement with emerging non-Western actors is leading to *better* policies and outcomes rather than entrenching new regressive and repressive forms of aid? The problem arises because of the assumption that authoritarian states like Russia and China, which do not hold themselves to account in their domestic politics, are unlikely to be held to account in their foreign politics. Alongside this, other major powers like India and Japan, despite their democratic credentials domestically, are too burdened by great power concerns

to be trusted with defining a people-centered humanitarianism. There is a need for *credible* non-Western actors to emerge who can serve both to innovate and to represent an increasingly complex field. Here it is necessary to switch to the second frame of reference.

## Middle Powers and Humanitarianism

Both Turkey and South Korea as new humanitarian actors share the feature of being democratic middle powers in the international system. Middle powers are the 20 or so countries that rank immediately below the eight countries generally acknowledged as established or new great powers (in today's world: the United States, China, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, and India). They consist of the states with rankings roughly in the 10<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> range across a range of capability indicators. This group includes Brazil and South Korea at the high end of the capabilities scale to Malaysia and South Africa at the lower end. Those firmly in the center of the category include Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, and Australia, along with EU-middle powers like Poland and Spain. Middle powers, on this view, belong to the set of all "primary states" in the world system when contrasted to the "secondary states" category to which the other 160-odd states belong.

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Democratic middle powers have several advantages as entrepreneurs in the international system in an area like humanitarianism. One, most obvious, is that they are not great powers and thus bring a unpretentious sensibility to their role. For instance, Binder notes that India finds the term "emerging donor" beneath its dignity as a presumptive great power. But Turkey warmly embraces the term as signaling its rising global significance.<sup>29</sup> Middle powers are willing to accept that they are one of many actors and this creates a capacity for consensus-based leadership. Middle powers also enjoy a strong hand in wielding influence in discrete areas in which they have task-specific capabilities- either by acting as catalyst, facilitator, or manager. This generates a pro-active diplomacy that has been variously described as "niche diplomacy"<sup>30</sup> or "middle power activism".<sup>31</sup> It is because of these systemic incentives to engage in consensus-building, rule-creation, norm entrepreneurship, and multilateralism that the "new humanitarianism" of a country like Turkey should be taken seriously. New principles of

humanitarianism emanating from Beijing, New Delhi, or Moscow are inherently non-credible, both because these states are positionally located as great powers where the national interest and the global interest are less likely to converge (especially acute for Beijing and Moscow since their national interests are not defined through democratic politics) and because followership is unlikely to emerge from their regional rivals in any case.

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 peace.

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By contrast, a credible humanitarianism is a natural behavior for middle powers like Turkey. Substantively, middle power populations, acting through democratic politics, have repeatedly generated foreign policies that put a premium on good international citizenship. This perhaps explains why three of the four non-Western states that belong to the Good Donorship Initiative are middle powers and the fourth, Japan, variously seeks

to define a middle power-like foreign policy.<sup>32</sup> Procedurally, middle powers have the unique ability to broker coalitions and achieve consensus in cases where great power approaches fail. President Bush's ill-fated "core group" (U.S., Japan, India, and Australia) that was announced to deal with the 2004 Asian tsunami was abandoned after just eight days in the face of pressure from states that wanted the effort centered on the UN.

By contrast, middle powers can easily assemble similar core groups in dealing with crises in their regions (Turkey in the case of Syria, South Africa in the case of Zimbabwe, Indonesia in the case of the Asian tsunami) without raising similar concerns. Such actions require the "soft" capabilities, such as coalition-building and network leadership,<sup>33</sup> that are middle powers' strengths. They fit into the peace-building and conflict-mediation role that comports with middle power interests and ideals. They also manifest a cosmopolitan moral dimension to foreign policy that middle powers often take as central to their self-identity. In particular, humanitarian diplomacy commands widespread normative consent within the international system; creates opportunities for good international citizenship, multipolarity, and institution-building by middle powers; and may be important to promoting peace. In other words, middle powers like Turkey are natural humanitarian actors.



In particular, democracy is the key factor that makes middle powers like Turkey credible in a way that Iran, say, is not. Turkey, along with South Korea, Indonesia, and South Africa, are emblematic of new democratic non-Western middle powers that will define the humanitarian agenda.<sup>34</sup> As democratic states, they have a credibility as humanitarian actors, yet they do not bring a High Liberal cosmopolitanism to their work, instead bringing a distinctive Global South sensibility that respects state institutions, maintains the integrity of nationality laws, and links humanitarian work with the quest for regionally-owned political solutions. In Mogadishu in 2011, Erdoğan did not seek to snub or shame the West but rather to uphold its values: “The tragedy in Somalia is testing modern values. What we want to emphasize is that contemporary world should successfully pass this test to prove that Western values are not hollow rhetoric,” he said.<sup>35</sup> It is notable that just three days after his visit, the first British cabinet-level official to visit the country for 18 years—International Development Secretary Andrew Mitchell—arrived with promises of additional aid and a stronger effort. As Tank writes about Turkey’s role in Somalia: “[T]he guiding vision is one of establishing Turkey as an emerging center of power with an alternative global vision of how to conduct international affairs.”<sup>36</sup>

Turkey thus is both a quintessential emerging power and a quintessential

new middle power that is using humanitarianism to build its “national brand”. In articulating the motivation to be a global leader in reshaping world order through humanitarianism, Ankara has emphasized both its comity with UN General Assembly sentiments (thus emphasizing its representativeness) and its great power-like power capabilities (thus emphasizing its capabilities).<sup>37</sup> The middle power ambitions of Turkey are articulated by Çevik, a political science professor at Ankara University, who writes:

Through these institutions and organizations, Turkey is not only trying to establish herself as a humanitarian assistance provider, but also as mediator in regional conflicts by operating with regional partners and gradually building trust through local partners. One can argue that Turkey is providing an example of niche diplomacy through humanitarian value-based policies. Indeed, Turkey’s humanitarian rhetoric and value-based policy resembles the notion of ‘niche diplomacy’ that is commonly associated with middle powers. Goodwill supporting good works and performing good deeds pay off in terms of international prestige where a country is rewarded for its goodness.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, Turkey is able to promote a broader political agenda through its humanitarianism linked to the normative goals of good international citizenship by itself and a more cooperative, rules-based, and inclusive world order for others. As Hasimi puts it: “Rather than disputing or rejecting the relationship, Turkey has claimed to relocate the connection between politics

and aid activities in a way that allows the relationship to become part of the discussion in forming a responsive new international order.<sup>39</sup>

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The case of Turkey's humanitarian diplomacy and assistance contributes to a rethink of the nature of humanitarianism, emphasizing the centrality of states to this field as well as the ways that it cannot and should not be divorced from the complex political and developmental context in which it arises.

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The middle power lens implies that we should expect some distinctive traits to emerge from the new humanitarianism. One is a preference for regional approaches and regional institutions as the center of humanitarian response in place of the UN system or a globalized DAC.<sup>40</sup> Turkey has shown in its work with the OIC and the İstanbul Initiative that institutionalization will be directed not at global institutions but at regional ones. A second dimension likely to emerge from new middle powers is an emphasis on sovereignty-respecting and state-centered humanitarianism that emphasizes state-to-state relationships (departing from the “people-centered” sensibility of existing humanitarian principles). In this new approach, both

donors and beneficiaries will be organized through the offices of states. In the wake of the 2004 Asian tsunami, for instance, Germany suggested that its aid to victims in Indonesia would be dependent on the resolution of ethnic conflicts, which Asian countries criticized. Turkey's emphasis on good neighbors' policies as part of promoting peace in Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Egypt suggests that the high-tide of interventionist humanitarianism is over. Again, this jibes with the emerging emphasis on *national ownership* in all aid activities.

Returning then to the distinctive humanitarianism of all non-Western countries mapped by Binder and Meier, it is likely that only some of this will translate into enduring change. In addition to the aspects mentioned above, the broadening of humanitarianism to include development and peacebuilding is likely to continue given that it jibes with emerging best practices within the aid community under the concept of *resilience*.

Turkey is important then, because it is emblematic of what to look for in the emerging new humanitarianism. Alongside its spending on the Syrian humanitarian crisis, Ankara has worked assiduously to broker the political deal to end the crisis, using its influence over Russia (main supplier of arms) and Iran (main supplier of manpower) to force leaders there to accept the humanitarian nature of the crisis and broker a

political solution. In this and other ways, as a Japanese researcher writes, “Turkey has actively adopted the liberal understanding of middle power under the AKP government.”<sup>41</sup>

Theoretically, the case of Turkey’s humanitarian diplomacy and assistance contributes to a rethink of the nature of humanitarianism, emphasizing the centrality of states to this field as well as the ways that it cannot and should not be divorced from the complex political and developmental context in which it arises. The case of Turkey is also an important data point for middle power theory insofar as it provides grist for the mill in asking why it makes sense for a non-Western middle power to behave in this way.

Practically, Ankara’s inclination to “act first, ask questions later” is a policy

disposition that will likely continue in the near future in dealing with regional humanitarian needs. Humanitarian actors need to understand that the UN-centered and OECD-centered humanitarian systems are no longer the only games in town. Humanitarianism is decentralizing and a new consensus is needed to redefine best practice and then put it into effect. Cevik, who is the most articulate observer of Turkey’s new humanitarianism concludes: “It is probably not realistic to expect that all these issues be taken care of in a limited time. However coming to terms with the nation’s actual capacity and the expectations raised by the political narrative can be highly productive in terms of humanitarian diplomacy efforts and where the nation stands in terms of power.”<sup>42</sup>

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