



Turkey's colonisation of Somalia
Erdogan's Byzantine policy

Frederick Lauritzen

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Somalia is now a Turkish colony. On 21st February 2024 , the Somali government gave full authority over its territorial waters to Turkey. The agreement will last ten years. In exchange Turkey will receive 30 percent of revenue from Somalia's Exclusive Economic Zone. Turkey agreed to repair and upgrade the Somali navy.

Somalia is asking for help over the question of piracy off its coast. [Historically, when a country intervenes to solve piracy in a specific area, that zone becomes a colony.](#) Most of the Eastern Mediterranean came under Roman control because of the anti-piracy war. It remained Roman for following seven hundred years. Somalia is striving for autonomy while giving up its sovereignty.

Turkey never had a prominent role in Somalia's history. President Erdogan's first visit to Egypt in 12 years on 14th February 2024 shows renewed interest in North Africa and the Horn of Africa. It reveals the importance of the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and



Somalia. The reason is India. Prime Minister Modi in October 2023 had indicated [the commercial route between India, United Arab Emirates, Israel, and Greece](#). Turkey's role in this commercial route was marginal. The response was a diplomatic effort to engage directly with the maritime routes Turkey needs to access the Indian Ocean: precisely Egypt (Suez Canal), the Red Sea and Somalia. Turkey's interest in the Indian Ocean is also revealed by recent investment in the Maldives, whose president wants to reduce Indian influence on his country.

When Ottoman Turkey took over Egypt and Yemen in 1517, the Portuguese had already established a colony in the Cape of Good Hope in 1488 and knew the port of Mogadishu on the route from India to Portugal in 1497. [Portugal had effectively reduced the importance of the route to India via the Ottoman and Safavid empires \(Turkey and Iran\)](#).

Erdogan is rediscovering Byzantine rather than Turkish history. Indeed, when Constantinople (now Istanbul) was capital of the Roman empire (330-1453), the route towards India was through the Red Sea and Ethiopia (including the Horn of Africa). It was a maritime route which was well known and became legendary. It inspired the Portuguese exploration voyages many centuries later. The importance of this sea trade may be seen in the Byzantine Naval Code (Rhodian Sea Law) which not only discussed the law of the sea but also questions of cargo insurance. It was later included in the Byzantine law code, the *Basilika* of 892 (an updated version of Justinian's Codex translated into Greek).

The Byzantine maritime tradition left an impressive legacy in the Turkish language which mostly uses byzantine Greek nautical terms as well as fish names. Some ancient Turkish nautical terms derived from byzantine Greek recorded already in the fifteenth century:

balamar (rope) < παλαμᾶριον (cable)
beksimet / baksimat (biscuit) < παξαμίδιον (biscuit)
dalyan / talyan (fishing station) < ἀλιάνειον (fishing station)
fener (lighthouse) < φανάριον (light house)
iğripar / iğribar (type of ship) < γριπάριον (type of ship)
kadirga (galley) < κατέργον (type of ship)
kalafat (caulker) < from καλαφάτης (caulker)



liman (port) < λιμάνι / λιμένιον (port)
organ (rope) < ὄργανον (tackle)
pereme (ferry) < πέραμα (ferryboat, crossing)
poyraz (north wind) < βορρᾶς (north wind)
sandal (type of boat) < σανδάλιον (type of boat)
skele (ladder, gangplank) < σκάλα (ladder, gangplank)
talaz (storm) < θάλασσα (sea)
yali (sea shore) < αἰγιαλός (sandy shore)

The Byzantine Sea Law also was the model used by the first Muslim legislators when they decided to codify their maritime laws in the seventh century.

Is Turkey turning away from the Road and Belt Initiative? Do the Chinese prefer to reach Europe and the Mediterranean through its new vassal, Russia? Has Central Asia been put aside? One major consideration is that the Silk Road Economic Belt crosses more than five countries before reaching Turkey. [China could easily prefer crossing the Russian Federation to reach Europe.](#) There would be only two customs checks (China into Russia and Belarus into Poland). The alternative route would require political stability in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Iran before crossing the Caucasus into Turkey.

Erdogan has turned to the sea. He has focused on the horn of Africa just as the Byzantines had done in the sixth century. They had brought the secret of silk making along this route. It seems that the geopolitical precedent to look at is found in Constantinople.