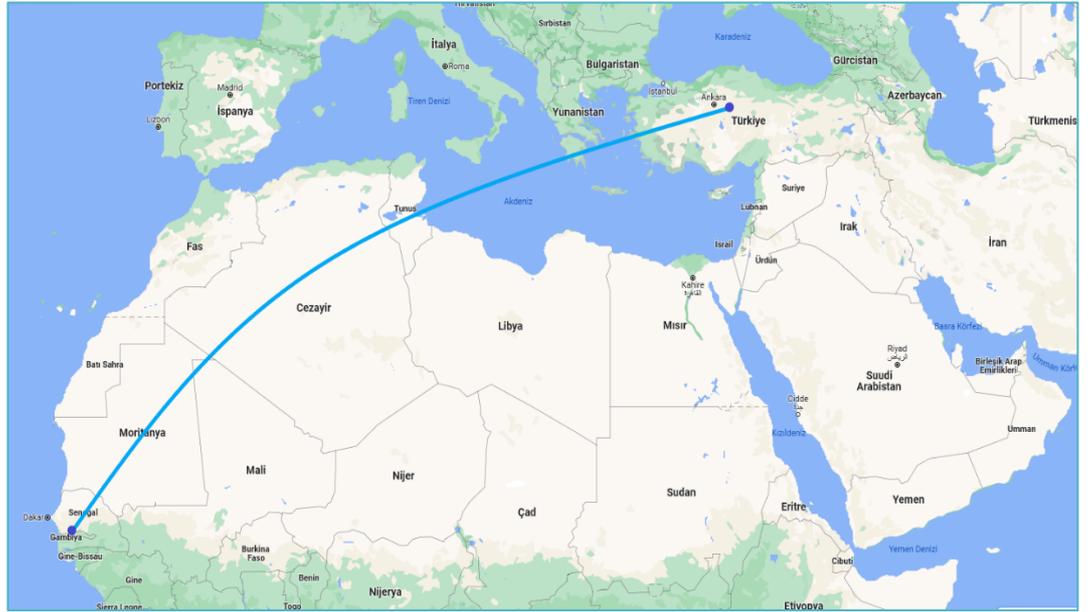


An Overview of Turkey and The Gambia Relations

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Overview

The Republic of The Gambia is situated on the western coast of the African continent, dubbed the "smiling coast of Africa". Relations between Turkey and the Gambia go back to the sixties. Turkey did not establish relations immediately with The Gambia after gaining independence from colonial Britain in 1965. The two governments would not pay close attention to bilateral agreements and partnerships until the late 1980s. Starting from the late 1980s to the present, the two countries have strengthened their cooperation in the areas of defense, security, health, education, energy, science, and technology.

Since 1965, Turkey and The Gambia have supported each other's foreign policies on numerous international occasions and in international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). For example, during the 1980s, when Bulgaria's communist leadership pushed assimilation practices on its Turkish minority, The Gambia stood

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with Turkey in the international arena. In the Cyprus issue, The Gambia has always backed the Turkish Cypriots, who have been fighting for their right to self-determination as a sovereign society. The nations' diplomatic ties were recently demonstrated in 2020 when Turkey supported its fellow OIC member during the Gambia versus Myanmar trial when The Gambia brought a Genocide lawsuit against Myanmar. The diplomatic and foreign policy camaraderie between the two countries developed into a military partnership in the preceding years.

In 1989, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, the late president of The Gambia, made an official visit to Turkey upon the invitation of the Turkish government. Towards the end of 1999, a delegation consisting of the 2nd President of the Council of Higher Education, the Rectors of Gazi and Ankara Universities, as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering of the Eastern Mediterranean University, visited the Gambia to meet their counterparts in augmenting efforts in the area of higher education and research. This visit also included a military delegation that focused on defense and security. From this point onwards, mutual high-level visits between the two countries have increasingly continued. In this context, the former President of the Gambia, Mr. Yahya Jammeh, made an official visit to Turkey in 2014, in response to the invitation of the President of the Republic of Turkey.

Defense and Security Cooperation

For the past three decades, it has been observed that The Gambia and Turkey's defense and security relations exhibited growth manifested in the engagements between the two countries. On a visit to Turkey in 1988, under the framework of defense and security, The Gambian Foreign Minister signed a defense cooperation agreement with Turkey on military training and education. This agreement was put in writing during the visit of the then head of state, Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara, to Turkey in the summer of 1989. This agreement, signed in 1990, entailed decisions to facilitate defense cooperation on military training and education.

In the 1990s, at the infancy of bilateral relations between the two countries, the Commander of the then Gambia National Gendarmerie visited Turkey for 10 days as an official guest of the Commander-in-Chief of Gendarmerie of the Republic of Turkey. A delegation consisting of the Undersecretary of the Ministry of National Defense of The Gambia, the Commander of the National Army, and the Commander of the National Guard paid a one-week visit to Turkey.

It is obvious that the relationship between Turkey and the Gambia is obviously multi-faceted. However, military relations are the most dominant. The Gambia is a country with which Turkey has established the most intense military relations in sub-Saharan Africa, and vice versa, over the past three decades. The Gambian military and naval officers, together with military instructors, trained a considerable number of newly recruited soldiers and officer cadets at The Gambia Armed Forces Training School (GAFTS) in Fajara, The Gambia. During this period, the Turkish government supported the recruitment program and other further partnerships in the areas of logistics and military hardware procurement as stipulated in the military cooperation agreement signed in 1990.

Recognizing its strategic potential, the ministries of both countries signed a defense and security cooperation agreement, which allowed for and encompassed the training of military and naval officers in the Turkish military and naval academies and the Turkish Army War College. A Turkish military advisor is present in The Gambia under the framework of defense and security.

Likewise, the opening of the office of the Defense Attaché of The Gambia Armed Forces in Ankara in 2017 was pitched towards strengthening bilateral ties between the two governments. The military advisor functions as a liaison officer between The Gambia Armed Forces and the Turkish Army. The office of the advisor is a highly respected one and who is accorded access to The Gambia Minister of Defense, Chief of Defense Staff, and Force Commanders of The Gambia Armed Forces.

It is significant to highlight that, the training cooperation was not only limited to training in The Gambia but also, over the years, close to 300 Gambian officers and men underwent various military training and education at all levels and domains in The Republic of Turkey. The Gambia's thriving defense sector has also been a customer of Turkey's defense industry over

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the years, and this cooperation in defense procurement is projected to be voluminous in the coming years as The Gambia's defense sector is undergoing a transformation stage.

The renewal of its inventory and some of the military hardware needed to fulfill its mandate for a quota expansion in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions are the drivers of the Gambia's appetite for military hardware. On these grounds, the Chief of Defense Staff of the GAF and his delegation have been frequenting the International Defense Industry Fair (IDEF), which is biannually held in Turkey, to familiarize themselves with the Turkish defense sector. During the 2019 IDEF, negotiations were initiated to purchase "Katmerciler" Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) vehicles, which will be used as a key component in the Gambia Army's motorized parts for peace-keeping operations.

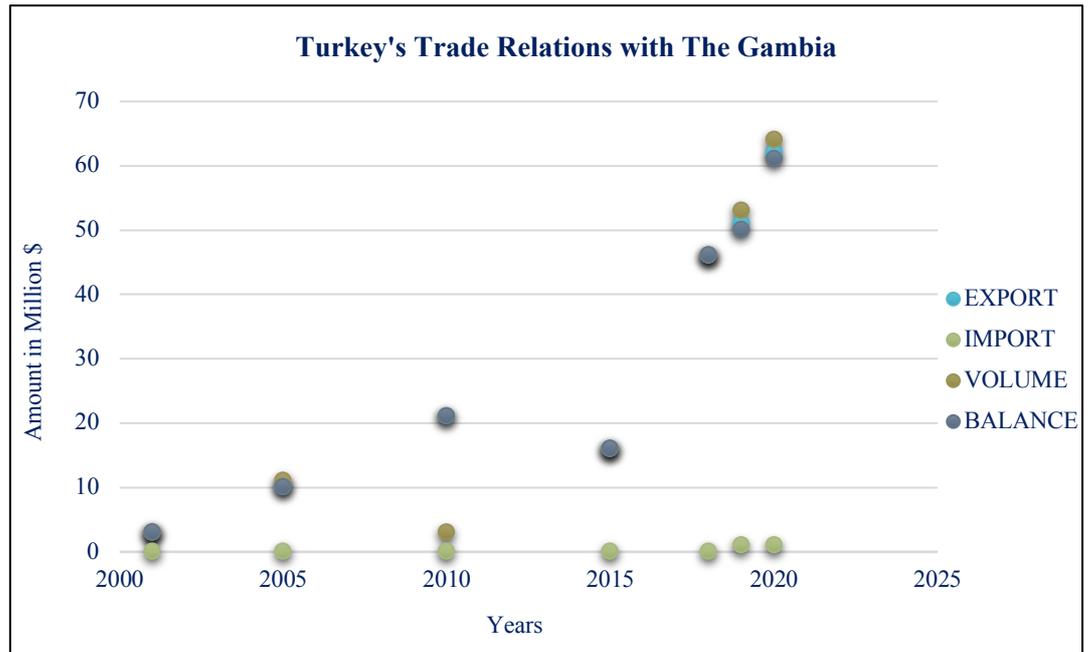
At the time of this writing, an agreement was signed between the two countries for the purchase of the 9-person anti-mine APCs. The deal is not just an ordinary military acquisition, but it also serves as a notch up for the Turkish Defense Industry in the African market and is extensively a booster for an overarching Turkish strategy geared towards being a significant player in Africa.

The security dimension of the relationship between the two countries is not limited to the military. The Turkish Police Academy and the police forces of the Gambia enjoy close working and training relations as well as partnerships in training. In addition, the two police forces collaborate on training in areas such as counterterrorism, airport security, traffic safety, and other related security issues. These foregoing training ties will be steadily amplified due to the upcoming Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) summit in Banjul in 2022. On this background, VIP protection and other security-related training were conducted for this event.

Trade and Economic Cooperation

Among its objectives is strengthening bilateral, regional, and multilateral trade corporations to enhance the benefits of trade. The Gambia's Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment aims at building and strengthening bilateral trade relations. And in doing so, in the latter part of 1990, the Turkish government and its Gambian counterpart signed agreements on trade, which came into effect in 2000 when engagements in imports and exports started.

Exports from Turkey to The Gambia for the past two decades have been characterized by a sharp increase compared to previous decades. In the spirit of commercial and economic growth, the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) mechanism was established. Under this framework, the first meeting of the Turkey-The Gambia meeting was held in 2014 in Banjul, the capital of The Gambia.



“The Gambian tourism sector aims to benefit from the vast knowledge and experience of its Turkish equivalent.”

In 2010, the bilateral trade volume between Turkey and the Gambia reached 21 million USD compared to 3 million USD in 2001. The highest level of bilateral trade was reached in 2020, with a total volume estimated to be 64 million USD and this figure is projected to rise through 2025. Turkey's trade volume with the Gambia remains lower than its trade volume with the majority of its trading partners. The trade volume is mainly Turkey's exports to The Gambia.

Tourism

The tourism industry in The Gambia accounts for 25–30% of the country's GDP. It is a key economic factor in the country, so bilateral collaboration is deemed necessary to help its growth. As a result, in 2012, the two countries agreed to cooperate in the tourism sector and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The agreement aims to recognize the importance of tourism as a driver of economic growth and a method of strengthening relationships and mutual understanding between the two nations' peoples.

“Cooperation with Turkey to meet these infrastructure and energy needs will go a long way toward establishing a conducive environment for Turkish investors.”



Banjul, the capital city of The Gambia.

Image credit: Pixabay.

The Turkish government has undertaken capacity-building training in the tourism and hospitality areas in preparation for the future OIC summit in 2022 and bilateral tourist cooperation. In collaboration with the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA), a course on "Current Approaches in Tourism Education" was held in Banjul. As the Gambian tourist sector recovers from the COVID-19 outbreak, more of this collaboration is expected to develop in the near future.

According to the former Gambian tourism minister, Fatou Mass Jobe, because the Turkish tourism sector is mostly centered on a range of historical monuments and beach resorts, the minister acknowledged that there are some similarities between the tourism products of both The Gambia and Turkey, but "there is enormous divergence" in terms of benefits. The Gambian tourism sector aims to benefit from the vast knowledge and experience of its Turkish equivalent.

Conclusion

The Gambia since independence in 1965 to date has forged bilateral relations with countries mostly of similar values based on mutual growth and interest. Relationship with Turkey go as far as the 1990s although back then only the defense and security dimension of the relationship gained more attention as The Gambia was in the process of building its new army.

