DOI: 10.55888/TUJID.2025.23

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Aid, Security and Diplomacy: A Framework for Evaluating Turkish Foreign Aid in War-Torn Countries*

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Submitted 15/12/2025 • **Accepted** 17/12/2025

Abstract

This study addresses a critical knowledge deficit regarding the impact of Türkiye's foreign aid on conflict dynamics and stability in war-torn regions. While the broader aid-conflict nexus is well-documented, Turkish interventions in insecure environments remain significantly underexplored. To bridge this gap, the research examines Türkiye's humanitarian engagement in Afghanistan (2001–2021) and Somalia (2011–2022). It proposes an alternative theoretical framework, arguing that Turkish aid functions as a violence dampener via three primary

* An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2nd International Humanitarian Aid Symposium, which was held at Ankara Yildirim Bayezit University on December 4-6, 2025, under the title "Turkish Aid in War-torn States: A Violence Dampener or a Violence Intensifier?"

Peer-review: Double blind peer-reviewed.
Plagiarism Check: Done - Turnitin

Yunus Ozturk (Corresponding Author), Emre Ozturk, (2025) Aid, Security and Diplomacy: A Framework for Evaluating Turkish Foreign Aid in War-Torn Countries *Turkish Journal of International Development (TUJID),2, 63- 92*

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causal pathways: (i) the mitigation of socio-economic grievances, (ii) the acquisition of "hearts and minds" among local populations, (iii) increasing the opportunity cost for individuals considering insurgent recruitment.

Türkiye's "humanitarian diplomacy" diverges from traditional donor models by integrating immediate relief, long-term development, and peace-building. This approach is characterized by a distinct implementation style involving direct, unilateral, in-kind assistance delivered by state-affiliated agencies. By operating in high-risk zones and leveraging historical and cultural affinities, Türkiye achieves a comparative advantage in securing local legitimacy. Consequently, Turkish aid proves less vulnerable to negative externalities, such as predation and sabotage, which often undermine aid effectiveness in conflict economies. Despite these advantages in violence mitigation, the study identifies internal challenges, including inefficient resource allocation and the duplication of efforts among Turkish actors. Ultimately, the findings suggest that culturally aligned and locally responsive aid serves as an effective policy instrument for fostering sustainable security in fragile states.

Keywords: Aid-conflict nexus, Humanitarian diplomacy, Insecure regions, Turkish aid, Violence dampener

Introduction

Despite Türkiye's expansive global humanitarian engagement with an operational presence spanning over 170 countries, Program Coordination Offices in more than 60 countries, and a significant humanitarian aid portfolio encompassing over 32,000 events and projects worldwide (Nalcacioglu et al., 2025), scholarly research examining the impact of Türkiye's foreign aid on beneficiary countries remains underexplored. This research deficit is particularly pronounced in understanding Turkish aid distribution within insecure regions. While extensive foreign aid literature has comprehensively addressed the complex relationship between aid and conflict dynamics, researches specifically analyzing Türkiye's humanitarian interventions remain notably insufficient.

This study, therefore, endeavors to bridge this critical knowledge gap by investigating how Turkish foreign aid influences conflict dynamics in recipient countries and evaluating its potential to enhance stability in conflict-ridden states. To this end, analyzing Türkiye's increasing humanitarian engagement in war-torn countries, the study offers an alternative theoretical framework for the aid-conflict dynamics nexus, arguing that Türkiye's provision of public goods and services abroad primarily functions as a *violence dampener* through: winning hearts and minds of would-be rebels, reducing existing grievances among local populations, and increasing the opportunity cost of participation in rebel/insurgent groups. To illustrate these mechanisms, the study examines Afghanistan and Somalia as typical cases (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), both characterized by protracted civil wars and complex multiparty political landscapes. These contexts provide critical insights, particularly given Türkiye's role as a significant donor, offering a unique opportunity to investigate the nuanced interactions between foreign aid and conflict dynamics.

The article is structured as follows: After briefly examining the concept of foreign aid, its historical development, and Türkiye's evolving aid strategy as a donor in the first three consecutive sections, the fourth section establishes the theoretical framework addressing the nexus between aid and conflict dynamics.

The following two sections present analyses of the Afghanistan and Somalia cases based on the proposed framework. The final section offers concluding remarks and implications derived from comparing these two war-torn countries.

Conceptual Clarification: What is Foreign Aid?

Foreign aid constitutes an important concept in the study of foreign policy, shaping economic, social, political, and security landscapes of nations across the world, particularly in insecure regions characterized by conflict and instability. As a prominent realist scholar, Hans Morgenthau, notes, "of the seeming and real innovations which the modern age has introduced into the practice of foreign policy, none has proven more baffling to both understanding and action than foreign aid" (Morgenthau, 1962: 301). Contemporary foreign aid, however, is substantially different from Morgenthau's Cold War conceptualization. Foreign aid has undergone a significant evolution from a strategic Cold War tool responding to geopolitical tensions surrounding the Soviet Union into a political commitment by wealthier states to assist less developed nations.

Like many social science concepts, no single definition of foreign aid exists that everyone agrees upon. In simplistic terms, foreign aid can be regarded as "an effort to use public [...] resources from one country to bring about sustained, beneficial change in another" (Lancaster, 2007: 10). In that sense, foreign aid can take the form of cash, in-kind resources (e.g., food, medicine, *etc.*), or debt relief. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), however, uses a narrower definition, termed "official development assistance (ODA)", defining it as government aid that promotes and specifically targets the economic development and welfare of developing countries. Consequently, ODA comprises transfers from developed countries to the least developed countries, excluding official assistance (OA), which encompasses concessional public transfers to countries other than low-income ones. Furthermore, ODA excludes military assistance, counter-terrorism funding, government-to-government subsidies, and private giving. The DAC, thus, provides guidelines specifying what types of aid qualify as foreign aid.

Despite variations in the definition, certain common aspects exist in foreign aid conceptualizations. First is the transfer of resources from relatively rich to poor countries. Second, aid aims to improve the human condition in the recipient

country, whether through humanitarian relief or including other activities such as promoting democracy, addressing global issues, and managing post-conflict situations as in the DAC framework. It is evident that foreign aid may serve multiple purposes: diplomatic and security interests, functioning as a tool for building alliances, supporting peacekeeping, and preventing conflicts; delivering humanitarian relief; promoting cultural and religious influence; supporting democratic governance, norms, and values; addressing global issues such as climate change and pandemics; and advancing development and poverty reduction by funding infrastructure, education, healthcare and other sectors to stimulate growth (Lancaster, 2007: 12-18).

Brief History of a Policy Tool: Foreign Aid

The origins of foreign aid date back to 1947 when the US implemented the Marshall Plan to support European countries against the expansion of the communist bloc led by the Soviet Union. In that sense, the aid provided by the US to its allies represented a realist response to geopolitical necessities, including the containment of the Soviet threat against the liberal world order (Lancaster, 2007: 212). By the 1970s, aid had already become an element in relations between wealthy and least-developed countries. The share of aid directed to the least developed nations grew significantly, as did the political advocacy for development aid within donor countries. International organizations such as the World Bank, the DAC of the OECD, and various UN bodies pressured wealthy countries to enhance both the quality and quantity of aid. The UN, for instance, adopted a resolution based on the Pearson Commission's report, which recommended that developed nations should dedicate 0.7% of their GDP to ODA (Clemens & Moss, 2007: 7). It is important to note that aid recipients did not only consist of least-developed countries; the developing nations also had their share in foreign aid. Especially during the 1980s and early 1990s, international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF offered conditional aid programs, which required the adoption of free-market reforms including the removal of tariff barriers and other protectionist measures, and the privatization of state-owned enterprises (Özcan et. al., 2024: 7).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, aid levels fell considerably due to economic difficulties in donor countries, skepticism about aid effectiveness, and the newly emerged international order without bipolar competition. This

decline triggered advocacy campaigns from development constituencies, leading to renewed aid support in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, further cemented the importance of aid for global security, as poverty reduction was considered linked to counterterrorism efforts (Lancaster, 2007: 214-15). This shift influenced the aid literature as well, which began examining whether the injection of aid in conflict-affected regions would positively impact conflict dynamics and promote stability. The so-called traditional donors, namely the US, Great Britain, France, Japan, Germany, and Norway, were not the only subjects of academic inquiry anymore, as new donors emerged. In that sense, the donor landscape includes traditional donors, who are OECD DAC members and whose aid adheres to established standards, and non-DAC donors whose aid policies reflect their specific contexts. Türkiye, as a donor country, belongs to the latter category.

Turkish Foreign Aid: Origins, Evolution and Distinction

Türkiye's history of foreign aid dates back to the beginning of the Cold War, when Türkiye received US aid as part of the Marshall Plan, which envisioned a restored Europe that could stand its ground against the Soviet threat. Initially, Türkiye entered the stage as a beneficiary country rather than a donor. Throughout the following decades, however, there were occasional calls for Türkiye not to remain a beneficiary country but to become a donor. The establishment of the DAC within the OECD in 1967, and the creation of Technical Cooperation Among Developing Countries (TCDC) as part of the South-South Cooperation, which gained momentum with the Non-Aligned Movement in 1978, contributed to the emergence of such considerations (İpek, 2024: 325). Nevertheless, Türkiye remained primarily a beneficiary country until the mid-1980s and focused on coordinating and managing the aid it received.

In 1985, Türkiye's Council of Ministers adopted a resolution assigning the State Planning Organization (DPT) responsibility for the administration of Türkiye's foreign aid, marking the first concrete step in institutionalizing aid and, thus, paving the way for Türkiye to become a donor country. Accordingly, Türkiye implemented its first foreign aid program in Sahel countries on the African continent, which were among the poorest nations. In 1987, the resolution was updated to also assign the DPT responsibility for planning and coordination of Türkiye's foreign aid and regulate aid financing. One year later, the Turkish

Agency for Cooperation (TAC) was established under the DPT, expanding Turkish aid to encompass all developing countries in need. This agency later became the Department of Bilateral Economic Relations and Technical Cooperation and implemented aid programs to developing countries through technical cooperation until 2003 (Gökgöz, 2015: 96-8).

The end of the Cold War saw the emergence of newly independent Turkic states in Central Asia, and newly independent Balkan states following the dissolution of Yugoslavia, with which Türkiye had cultural, religious, and historical ties. This provided an opportunity for Türkiye to improve its relations with these states, and foreign aid was considered a means to that end (İpek, 2024: 326). In 1992, therefore, a separate body called the Department of Economic, Cultural, Educational and Technical Cooperation (ETEKIB) was established under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to coordinate Türkiye's aid. ETEKIB was affiliated to the Prime Ministry in 1999, and, in 2001, rebranded as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA). Although Türkiye failed to utilize foreign aid to become a regional player in the 1990s due to economic difficulties and political instability, the 2000s saw an increase in Turkish aid following Türkiye's economic boom and the presence of political will.

The rise of Türkiye as a humanitarian donor in the 2000s represents a unique case where Türkiye's aid policy diverges significantly from both traditional and emerging donors. This distinctiveness in Turkish aid policy stems from its relatively different conceptualization of humanitarian assistance, its motivations, the way it implements aid, and its integration of humanitarian assistance into its foreign policy objectives. First of all, Türkiye's conceptualization of humanitarian assistance transcends the traditional boundaries of humanitarianism, which focuses on saving lives and making conditions better for those who suffer in areas affected by humanitarian crises. In other words, Türkiye adopts a broader conceptualization, integrating humanitarian, development, and peace-building efforts under the so-called 'humanitarian diplomacy' (Davutoğlu, 2013: 865-7), distinguishing it from traditional donors who usually make a distinction between humanitarian aid (immediate relief), and development aid (long-term support). Furthermore, although Türkiye reports humanitarian and development aid flows to the DAC of the OECD despite not being a member, it also advocates for this type of broader conceptualization internationally (Binder & Erten, 2013: 7). Second, unlike traditional donors who emphasize universal humanitarian principles like neutrality and impartiality, Türkiye usually frames its aid within

narratives of historical and cultural affinity, leveraging its Ottoman heritage and Muslim identity (Altunisik, 2023: 669; Binder & Erten, 2013: 2). This is especially the case for Turkish aid to Central Asia, the Balkans, the Middle East, and Africa. Third, Türkiye usually employs unilateral, in-kind assistance for its aid delivery, which is directly implemented by government agencies or other NGOs closely aligned with relevant state institutions. Most of its humanitarian projects, for instance, are implemented through its own employees, who are sent by the government to beneficiary countries (Binder & Erten, 2013: 10). Among such government agencies are TİKA, the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), Yunus Emre Foundation, and the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB); and among the NGOs are the Turkish Red Crescent, Türkiye Diyanet Foundation (TDV), and Turkish Maarif Foundation. This, too, starkly contrasts with traditional donors, who often channel funds through international organizations like the UN or independent NGOs. Fourth, Türkiye is willing to operate for its aid delivery in high-risk and conflict-ridden countries such as Somalia and Afghanistan, unlike traditional donors who are usually reluctant to direct engagement in conflict zones due to potential risks. This hands-on approach, while risky, provides Türkiye with a visible presence and firsthand insights, which contributes to its influence in such areas. Finally, interrelated with the former, Türkiye integrates its humanitarian efforts with its foreign policy goals and strategic interests, including establishing legitimate entry points to different countries, strengthening bilateral ties, contributing to regional stability, and aspiring to expand its regional and global influence. To that end, Türkiye has crafted a new language of humanitarian diplomacy that rejects hierarchical relationships in humanitarianism, presenting itself as an equal partner, thus framing its interactions as mutually beneficial (Altunisik, 2023: 669). While not outright rejecting universal principles like neutrality and impartiality, Türkiye's unique approach diverges from traditional donors' separation of aid from politics.

Aiding Peace or Violence? The Nexus Between Foreign Aid & Conflict

The relationship between foreign aid and conflict dynamics is multifaceted and contested. While some argue that foreign aid can mitigate conflict and foster peace and stability, others contend that it can inadvertently exacerbate violence or prolong instability. The relevant literature identifies a number of causal

mechanisms that either link increased aid to reduced violence, or documents instances where increased aid conversely contributes to heightened violence and instability, with the positive causal mechanisms failing in insecure regions. In this regard, this section investigates the relevant literature in order to provide an alternative theoretical framework for understanding whether foreign aid decreases or increases violence in settings already experiencing conflict and under what conditions.

Foreign Aid as Violence Dampener[1]

Several different models exist that explain the causal mechanism between aid and conflict, suggesting that increased aid results in decreased violence and, thus, enhanced security. One such model is the *hearts and minds* model, which assumes that the goods and services provided to local communities lead them to develop positive attitudes toward the government and reject the insurgency. Consequently, rebels or violent groups are weakened, which, in turn, promotes stability (Beath et al., 2012).

Another causal mechanism is the *information-sharing* model, which extends the hearts and minds model (Berman et al., 2011; Berman et al., 2013). This model assumes that local communities usually possess important local knowledge about the activities and plans of rebels. Development aid can, thus, incentivize local communities to share this precious information with the government and its allies, enabling that government to develop a suitable counterinsurgent strategy, and eventually reduce violence. This model has been applied in several scholarly works (e.g., Berman et al. (2013); Berman et al. (2011); Child (2014); Crost et al. (2016)) to establish a causal relationship between aid and conflict dynamics.

The *reduced grievances* mechanism is the third model. According to this model, in societies where minority groups, particularly ethnic ones, hold social and economic grievances as they perceive themselves as marginalized and neglected, targeted aid for these groups can help address inequalities and grievances, thereby reducing the risks of violence and insecurity (Azam, 2001; Azam & Mesnard, 2003).

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1 *The term 'violence dampener' is derived from Zürcher (2017)'s systemic review of the impact of aid on violence in countries affected by civil war, in which he pointed out to 'violence-dampening effect' of aid in war-torn countries.*

Table 1: Theoretical Models on the Nexus between Foreign Aid and Conflict Dynamics

Conceptual Framework	Theoretical Mechanism	Causal Pathway
Aid as a Violence Dampener	Hearts & Minds Model	Provision of aid fosters public support for the government → Decline in insurgent recruitment → Weakening of rebel forces → Increased political stability
	Information-Sharing Model	Aid serves as an incentive for local populations → Enhanced intelligence-sharing with state forces → Improved counterinsurgency operations →Reduction in violence
	Reduced Grievances Model	Targeted aid mitigates socio-economic marginalization → Reduction in political and ethnic grievances → Lower likelihood of insurgent mobilization and violence
	Opportunity Cost Model	Aid investment in employment and public goods → Decreased economic incentives for insurgent recruitment → Diminished armed mobilization → Reduction in conflict intensity
Aid as a Violence Intensifier	Sabotage Model	Aid challenges rebel governance structures → Insurgent retaliation against civilian beneficiaries → Targeting and obstruction of aid delivery → Escalation of violence
	Predation Model	Aid as a resource to capture → Rebel groups seize or impose taxes on aid supplies → Increased financial capacity for armed operations → Prolonged conflict duration

Source: Compiled by the authors. The arrows (→) in the table indicate causal chains in the respective theoretical models.

The last violence-dampener mechanism, called the *opportunity cost* model, has been widely applied in several scholarly works (e.g., Collier & Hoeffler (2004); Dasgupta et al. (2017); Hoelscher et al. (2012)). This mechanism posits that foreign aid provides public goods and creates employment opportunities, particularly for young men in war-torn countries with a large youth bulge. This, in turn, makes it harder for warlords or leaders of violent/rebel groups to recruit would-be fighters, eventually depleting their manpower and war-fighting capacity. Essentially, as recruitment becomes more costly for recruiters due to aid-provided public goods and services, fewer people join these groups, thereby creating a secure environment for all.

Foreign Aid as Violence Intensifier

In addition to the previously discussed mechanisms that explain aid's potential to create an environment conducive to conflict resolution by either improving government capabilities or addressing the root causes of conflicts, some other scholars critically argue that aid may encounter significant challenges when deployed in insecure regions (Zürcher, 2019; Zürcher, 2017; Wood & Molfino, 2016; Wood & Sullivan, 2015; Weintraub, 2016; Crost et al., 2014). This primarily occurs when rebels strategically attempt to counteract aid's positive impacts that threaten their political and financial position. Specifically, two key mechanisms emerge in such volatile environments: *sabotage* and *predation*.

Aid's potential to improve relations between local communities and the government, coupled with increased recruitment costs, directly threatens rebel groups' survival, compelling them to retaliate through targeted punishment and systematic aid program sabotage. Given that these attempts to undermine the stabilizing effect of aid invariably involve violent acts, the injection of aid potentially exacerbates violence and instability. Empirical evidence substantiates this dynamic. Wood and Sullivan (2015), for instance, demonstrate how humanitarian aid in conflict zones can lead to increased violence by rebel groups against civilians, supporting the sabotage mechanism. Weintraub (2016), on the other hand, synthesizes information-sharing and sabotage models, arguing that rebels strategically target civilians to disrupt critical information exchange between local communities and the government. Similarly, Crost et al. (2014) further corroborate this pattern through their investigation of a community-driven development aid program in the Philippines, which revealed that such aid triggered increased rebel attacks against civilians. These cases illuminate a critical paradox: aid intended to stabilize conflict zones may unintentionally escalate violence, ultimately increasing civilian casualties.

The predation model presents an alternative perspective, conceptualizing aid as a potential resource opportunity for rebels rather than a threat to be sabotaged. Unlike the sabotage mechanism, this model views aid as a conflict-fueling resource that rebels can exploit through coercive measures. Specifically, aid's lootable nature –encompassing resources such as fuel, food, and construction materials– creates strategic incentives for rebels to appropriate these goods, thus prolonging violent conflicts. Rebels can leverage aid resources through multiple strategies: direct use, sale, or taxation. In this regard, Narang

(2015) delineates two critical mechanisms of aid misappropriation that can finance rebel activities. First, by alleviating the responsibility of providing basic goods to their population, rebels can reallocate resources toward their violent operations. Second, rebels may strategically prolong violent conflicts to maintain ongoing aid taxation, and, thus, private wealth accumulation. Empirical research also substantiates this model's insights. Nunn and Qian (2014), for instance, demonstrate that the US' food aid paradoxically increased civil conflict durations, aligning with the predation model. Additional scholarship by Wood and Molfino (2016), Narang (2014), and Wood and Sullivan (2015) further reinforce this interpretation. Notably, these studies suggest that predation and sabotage models are not mutually exclusive strategies but potentially interconnected and mutually reinforcing mechanisms of rebel resource exploitation.

Missing Piece of Puzzle: Context & Conditions

As mentioned earlier, the impact of foreign aid on conflict dynamics is inherently complex, multifaceted, and context-dependent, making generalizations difficult. Findley (2018) and Findley et al. (2023), for instance, underscore that aid's effectiveness varies significantly across different stages of conflict, each presenting distinct challenges and potential intervention strategies for aid injection. A seminal study by de Ree & Nillesen (2009) examined the relationship between foreign aid and civil conflict risk in sub-Saharan Africa, focusing specifically on aid's potential to influence conflict onset and duration. The research yielded nuanced findings: while increased aid influx was associated with a decreased likelihood of conflict duration, it showed no significant impact on the probability of conflict initiation. This suggests that aid may be more effective in mitigating ongoing conflicts than preventing their onsets. Conversely, alternative research by Wood & Sullivan (2015) presents a more critical perspective: aid can potentially prolong conflicts by providing resources to warring parties, thereby reducing their incentives to negotiate a peaceful settlement. Similarly, Wood & Molfino (2016) further emphasizes the risk of aid misappropriation, highlighting how rebel groups might divert aid resources to sustain rather than alleviate an ongoing conflict.

The type of aid can also influence its impact on conflict dynamics. Zürcher (2017), for instance, identifies five different types of aid studied in the literature: (i) community-driven development programs, (ii) Commander's Emergency Response Programs (a US military-specific type of aid used as a tool for counterinsurgency), (iii) conditional cash transfer, (iv) employment programs,

and (v) humanitarian aid. Each of these aid types can have a different impact on conflict dynamics. Humanitarian aid, in particular, may be less likely to exacerbate conflict than development aid, as it is typically targeted toward meeting basic needs and is less likely to be diverted or misused by warring parties. However, the literature provides limited understanding of which aid types are more vulnerable to exploitation, or whether some types are less susceptible to sabotage than others (Zürcher, 2019: 6). This lack of empirical evidence makes it difficult to differentiate among aid types in terms of their impact on conflict dynamics.

The impact of aid on conflict dynamics is also influenced by a variety of contextual factors, such as the political environment, the quality of governance, the nature of the conflict, and the capacity of recipient institutions. Besley & Persson (2011), for instance, argue that countries with strong institutions provide the necessary checks and balances against predation, making the predation arguments less relevant for them. Accordingly, aid is more likely to exacerbate conflict when it is delivered to a weak, fragile, and/or failing state with weak governance and ineffective institutions.

Turkish Aid in Conflict-Ridden States: Afghan and Somali Cases

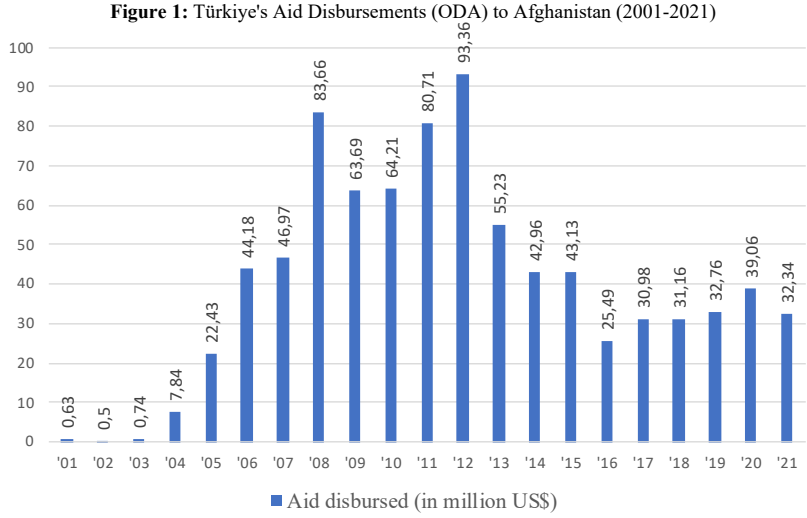
As briefly outlined in the introduction, the impact of Türkiye's humanitarian engagement on conflict dynamics can be better understood through examining its operations in war-torn countries. This section, therefore, analyzes two typical cases representing Türkiye's approach to foreign aid in conflict settings: (i) the Afghan case since the early 2000s, when Türkiye became a part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and (ii) its humanitarian engagement, along with peace and state building efforts, in Somalia since the early 2010s. Spanning different time periods, institutional contexts, and regional settings, these cases may provide a comprehensive view of Türkiye's foreign aid strategy.

The Afghan Case (2001-2021)

Afghanistan, with its valuable strategic location in the southern part of Central Asia, has been the scene of interventions and power struggles by both local

and international actors throughout history. The four-decade-long conflict and foreign interventions beginning with the Soviet Union's intervention in 1979 and escalating with the 2001 US intervention against the Taliban caused significant loss of life and created a catastrophic humanitarian crisis affecting the lives of millions, thus necessitating emergency relief. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), despite the 2021 political transition, Afghanistan continues to face consequences of protracted conflict, poverty, and climate-induced crises (OCHA, 2023). While hostilities have decreased since the transition, the humanitarian crisis has worsened due to suspended bilateral development cooperation that the Kabul government previously relied upon, and the return of Afghan refugees. In this context from 2001 to 2021, Türkiye ranked among the top donor countries contributing to humanitarian relief efforts in Afghanistan.

Figure 1: Türkiye's Aid Disbursements (ODA) to Afghanistan (2001-2021)



Source: OECD Data Explorer[2] (compiled by the authors).

The Türkiye-Afghanistan relationship has deep historical roots, with diplomatic

2 *Unless stated otherwise, all figures regarding Türkiye's aid disbursements to Afghanistan are derived from the OECD's Data Explorer's "DAC2A: Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions" section, accessible at https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?fs[0]=Topic%2C1%7CDevelopment%23DEV%23%7COfficial%20Development%20Assistance%20%28ODA%29%23DEV_ODA%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&bp=true&snb=26&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_DAC2%40DF_DAC2A&df[ag]=OECD.DCD.FSD&df[vs]=1.2*

ties established in the early 1920s when Afghanistan became the second country to recognize the newly founded Republic of Türkiye, establishing a historical foundation of friendship and cooperation. Türkiye has made significant contributions to Afghanistan in both development and humanitarian assistance, particularly since the early 2000s when it joined the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under NATO, with the stipulation that Turkish troops would not participate in explicit counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations. Although not a DAC member, Türkiye voluntarily provides annual reports to the OECD. According to DAC data, Türkiye disbursed over 840 million US$ in ODA to Afghanistan between 2001 and 2021, spanning the NATO-led mission until the Taliban regained control of Kabul. As Figure 1 shows, Türkiye's ODA gained momentum in 2004, consistently exceeding 60 million US$ annually and peaking at 93.96 million US$ in 2012. Türkiye's ODA declined in subsequent years, primarily due to security environment changes when ISAF handed over security responsibilities to Afghan forces and was disbanded in 2014. Nevertheless, Türkiye maintained steady aid disbursement averaging 30 million US$ annually until 2021, positioning it among the few countries meeting and occasionally exceeding its aid commitments.

Türkiye's development aid to Afghanistan is coordinated primarily through TİKA, which has operated in the country since 1992, but established its first Program Coordination Office in 2004, followed by offices in Mazar-i Sharif (2007) and Herat (2016). Among the countries in which TİKA operates, Afghanistan hosts more TİKA Program Coordination Offices (three) than any other recipient country, with the legal foundation for their activities established through a January 2006 protocol between the two governments (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, 2024: 22). To date, TİKA has implemented more than 1500 projects in Afghanistan, with approximately 800 focusing on education and health. Over the past 20 years, TİKA has constructed numerous educational facilities across Afghanistan, creating modern learning environments for thousands of students. Continuing these efforts even after the 2021 political transition, TİKA built the Mahjube Hirevi Primary School in the Khalid bin Valid district of Mazar-i-Sharif province with eight classrooms accommodating 1500 children, including female students (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, 2024: 94). In healthcare, Türkiye operates two fully equipped hospitals, two clinics, and two mobile clinics serving 650,000 patients annually. Moreover, TİKA implements projects

to improve health infrastructure, equipping existing hospitals and healthcare centers with modern technology (Reliefweb, 2024).

Alongside development aid, Türkiye also provides Afghanistan with humanitarian assistance, coordinated primarily through AFAD and the Turkish Red Crescent. AFAD, for instance, launched the "Goodness Train" campaign to collect aid materials with NGO support and send them to Afghanistan via railway. As of January 2025, a total of 21 train expeditions have delivered more than 10 thousand tons of humanitarian aid (Güler, 2025). Türkiye has also responded promptly to natural disasters in Afghanistan. In 2024, for instance, Türkiye sent 20 tons of emergency aid, and 650 tons of humanitarian aid following floods in the Baghlan province (Rahmati, 2024). Similarly, the Turkish Red Crescent has spent over 18 million US$ on emergency and humanitarian aid across Afghanistan between 1995 and 2023, typically coordinating with other state-affiliated institutions like TİKA (Dışişleri Bakanlığı, 2025). Türkiye thus supports Afghanistan through both long-term development projects and emergency humanitarian assistance, reflecting Türkiye's broader conceptualization of humanitarian assistance in both content and implementation.

Beyond development and humanitarian aid through civil state institutions and NGOs, Türkiye also took part in the US-led reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. The Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRT) formed the backbone of post-2001 reconstruction efforts, combining military officers, diplomats, and experts, thus blurring the lines between military and civilian roles. As an ISAF member since the beginning, Türkiye coordinated the Wardak and the Jawzjan PRTs. While other PRTs, particularly US-administered ones, were military-led with non-civilian characteristics, Türkiye adopted a distinct approach. This is because Turkish authorities decided to implement civilian diplomat-led PRTs rather than military-led ones, on the grounds that this facilitates interactions with local people and authorities through shared ties and values (Kaya, 2013: 24). In this vein, the first Turkish PRT was established in Wardak –one of the poorest provinces in Afghanistan– in November 2006. Working closely with TİKA, the Wardak PRT concentrated on education, health, and agriculture, completing over 200 projects including constructing and restoring mosques, schools, hospitals, social complexes, and other infrastructure projects (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025). Following the Wardak PRT's success,

Türkiye established its second PRT in Jawzjan in July 2010, directed by a civilian coordinator from Türkiye's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and staffed with civilians from various Turkish ministries and TİKA.

The effectiveness of aid to Afghanistan is often criticized on several grounds. First, it is argued that the total aid volume was inadequate to address humanitarian demands in a country affected by both ongoing conflicts and climate-induced crises such as drought (International Crisis Group, 2011: 3). Second, interrelated with the former, a significant discrepancy existed between donors' commitments and actual disbursements (Waldman, 2008), with only half of committed aid delivered between 2001 and 2011 (International Crisis Group, 2011: 3). While this may be true for most donors, Türkiye's performance was comparatively better, as DAC data indicates, Türkiye consistently met or occasionally exceeded its commitments. Third, there was also the allocation issue, meaning that a substantial portion of aid was usually directed toward security sector support rather than long-term development or capacity building (Atmar & Goodhand, 2002). This issue became particularly relevant for the post-2001 period when the Taliban-led insurgency reached its peak.

Regarding aid's impact on conflict dynamics in Afghanistan, which constitutes the main departure point of this paper, several key points stand out. First, it is true that aid to Afghanistan, particularly from the US, was often subordinated to short-term counterinsurgency objectives through military-led PRTs, but this often failed to build local trust (Waldman, 2008; International Crisis Group, 2011). However, this is not the case with Türkiye's aid as it differentiated the civilian role from the military one in its aid injection, thus being successful in winning the hearts and minds of the local people. As Mohammad Halim Fidai, the Governor of Wardak between 2008 and 2015, stated, "What lies at the foundation of Türkiye's successful [aid] model is Türkiye's closeness to the cultural values of the Afghan people and Türkiye's harmonization with the Afghan national development strategy", while also adding that "Turkish [aid] projects in Afghanistan receive great support from the Afghan people" (Turkish Coalition of America, 2010). This goes to show that Türkiye's advantage stemmed from its historical, cultural, and religious ties with Afghanistan. Second, it is argued that conditional aid –requiring human rights compliance or supporting counterinsurgency goals– compromised perceived neutrality and thus hindered access to populations

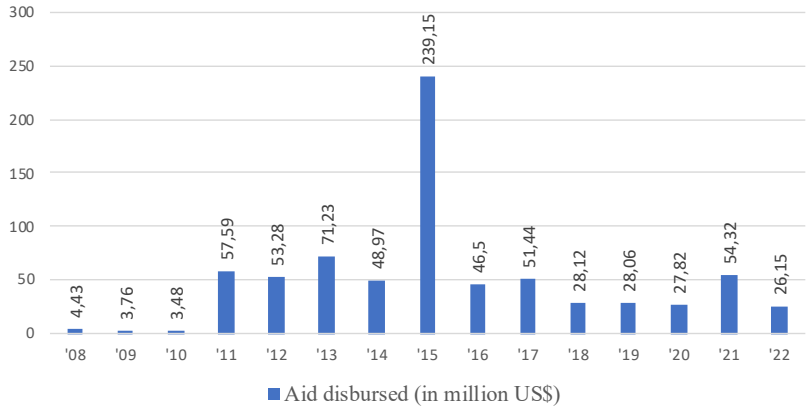
in insecure areas outside government control (Sopko, 2021). Again, this is less relevant to Türkiye's aid, as Turkish aid was unconditional and responsive to local needs. Unlike Western donors' aid, usually misaligned with Afghan needs and outstripped the government's capacity to manage, the Turkish approach, combined with civilian-led programs and cultural/historical ties, enabled it to access insecure regions, potentially facilitating information/intelligence sharing and winning local support, as suggested by the information-sharing and hearts and minds models. (Sopko, 2021). Third, aid influx in a country with weak institutional capacity often generated corruption at all levels through bribes, patronage networks, and payments to insurgent groups in order to ensure security for projects, with armed groups extracting customs duties from aid convoys. In Eastern Afghanistan, for instance, armed groups levied customs duty from aid convoys crossing the country (International Crisis Group, 2011: 4), aligning with the predation model. Though examples of sabotage incidents occurred, such as the April 2013 kidnapping of Turkish truck driver Kerim Yesil, whose truck delivering humanitarian aid was ambushed and set on fire by Taliban fighters. Yeşil was released unharmed three months later following the negotiations led by the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MİT) (Anadolu Agency, 2013). Although such incidents demonstrate when and how aid exacerbates conflicts rather than mitigates them, it can be argued that Türkiye's aid experienced fewer such disruptions compared to Western donors. Research shows that aid looting in Afghanistan functioned as a mechanism where aid inadvertently sustained conflict, particularly in Southern Afghanistan, where the US, the UK, Canada, Denmark, and other Western donors operated (Ali Aqa, 2021). Eastern Afghanistan, Türkiye's operational area, performed significantly better in that regard, indicating Türkiye's delicate approach bore fruit and was effective. It should also be noted that Türkiye's ISAF participation without engaging in explicit counterinsurgency operations lessened Taliban's threat perception. The same also counts for the Afghan people, as Fidai stated, "Turkish troops serving in Afghanistan are welcomed and are not regarded as a hostile force throughout the country" (Turkish Coalition of America, 2010). This, combined with its Muslim identity, which is seen as a common denominator among Afghan groups (Sims et al., 2012: 180), enabled Türkiye to conduct aid operations with comparative ease compared to other Western donors.

The Somali Case (2011-2022)

Türkiye's high-profile humanitarian intervention since the 2011 famine had made Somalia a unique case illustrating Türkiye's foreign aid approach to conflict settings. Although Somalia hosts multiple actors with varying, at times conflicting, interests and goals (e.g., Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations to name a few), only Türkiye's humanitarian engagement has received particular attention and praise from both Somalis and the international community (Ali, 2011). Emphasizing humanitarian assistance, developmental aid, capacity building and technical assistance through direct aid delivery by the Turkish personnel on the ground, the "Turkish model" contrasts with other "traditional donors" whose assistance is often criticized for being too slow, overly bureaucratic, and isolated (Sazak & Woods, 2017a; Wasuge, 2016). Although humanitarianism primarily motivated these efforts, Türkiye's foreign aid to war-torn Somalia reflects its broader foreign policy perspective, in which Türkiye aims to bolster its image as a rising power through projecting influence beyond its immediate neighboring regions and securing business opportunities abroad, along with shared religious, historical, and cultural affinity (Bilgic & Nascimento, 2014; Cannon, 2016; Özkan, 2010; Tank, 2013).

Even though Türkiye -Somalia relations gained prominence in 2011 when then-Prime Minister Erdogan visited Somalia during a devastating famine that peaked during Ramadan, the relationship between two countries dates back to the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century when the Ottomans assisted Somalis to fend off Ethiopian and Portuguese invaders. By the 17th century, most coastal towns came under control by local sultanates (e.g., the Adal Sultanate), having nominal links to the Ottoman Sultan. Moreover, during World War I, the Ottomans supported the Somali rebellion against Britain by providing arms to local forces. While relations largely ceased during the early republic and Cold War eras, Somalia was the only African country where Türkiye established an embassy (1971), which remained operational until the Somali civil war began in 1991, characterized by two-decade-long clan conflicts along ethnic lines and religious fundamentalism. Relations resumed after President Sheikh Sharif of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) visited Türkiye in 2009, marking growing interest among Turkish political and business leaders (Donelli, 2021: 78–80; International Crisis Group, 2012: 2–3).

Figure 2: Türkiye's Aid (ODA) Disbursements to Somalia (2008-2022)



Source: OECD Data Explorer3 (compiled by the authors).

From 2011 to 2013, Turkish aid was largely humanitarian assistance providing food, medicine, and basic supplies to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in and around Mogadishu. Beginning in 2013, however, Turkish aid shifted toward capacity-building and technical assistance programs, supporting state-building efforts to legitimize the TFG and counter al-Shabaab extremism through improved security and basic social service provision in health, education, construction, and security sectors. As Figure 2 shows, the year 2015 saw a huge aid influx to Somalia when Erdogan visited the country after his initial 2011 visit. This visit coincided with improved domestic security due to al-Shabaab's diminished fighting capacity as well as increased Turkish business interest in Somalia. After 2015, Türkiye began implementing its second stage of capacity-building and technical assistance programs, a collaboration phase transferring administration and responsibilities of these programs to Somali counterparts. Although Somalia remains the largest recipient country of Turkish foreign aid, the total volume of assistance has changed over time (see Figure 2), particularly after 2015 when Türkiye began focusing on collaboration with Somalia in its capacity-building programs (Sazak & Woods, 2017b: 175-180). In recent years,

3 *Unless stated otherwise, all figures regarding Türkiye's aid disbursements to Somalia are derived from the OECD's Data Explorer's "DAC2A: Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions" section, accessible at https://data-explorer.oecd.org/vis?fs[0]=Topic%2C1%7CDevelopment%23DEV%23%7COfficial%20Development%20Assistance%20%28ODA%29%23DEV_ODA%23&pg=0&fc=Topic&bp=true&snb=26&df[ds]=dsDisseminateFinalDMZ&df[id]=DSD_DAC2%40DF_DAC2A&df[ag]=OECD.DCD.FSD&df[vs]=1.2*

Somalia has signed major cooperation agreements with Türkiye in the fields of maritime, defense, oil, and gas (Baez, 2024), illustrating that Türkiye's engagement through foreign aid over the years has yielded positive results in Somalia.

Somalia's fragile situation stems primarily from a two-decade-long internal conflict beginning with the Barre Regime's collapse in 1991 and intensifying with the gradual withdrawal of UN missions (e.g., UNITAF, UNOSOM I-II), particularly after the Battle of Mogadishu in 1993. The lack of state control created conditions for several Islamic NGOs to emerge, providing basic needs and social services to war-torn Somalia during the second half of the 1990s. This governance deficit ultimately led to the rise of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) in the early 2000s, prompting Ethiopian intervention in Somalia, particularly against al-Shabaab, which had disagreements with the ICU in 2006. Although the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) played a significant role in containing this fragility since the late 2000s, internal conflicts resulted in the division of Somalia into three separate state entities: (i) southern Somalia around Mogadishu controlled by the Somali Federal Government (SFG), the sole internationally recognized central authority in Somalia, (ii) Somaliland, a de-facto independent state in the northwestern area on the coast of the Gulf of Aden, and (iii) Puntland, an informal semi-autonomous ethno-state founded on the unity of Harti clan (Donelli, 2021: 80–81; Wheeler et al., 2015: 10–13).

The prolonged conflict has not only created an ongoing humanitarian crisis, forcing millions to flee their homes and requiring urgent humanitarian assistance, but also left state institutions underdeveloped, with insecurity persisting even in and around the capital. In this failed state context, Türkiye initiated its humanitarian assistance and later capacity-building and technical assistance programs through governmental and non-governmental organizations, including the Turkish Red Crescent (Kızılay), TDV, the Health Ministry, AFAD, YTB, the Office of Public Diplomacy (KDK) along with Turkish NGOs such as the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), all coordinated by TİKA. Although these organizations initially operated with minimal personnel working closely with local people, their operations, staff, and funding expanded over time as Türkiye's engagement deepened in Somalia (International Crisis Group, 2012: 3–5; Özkan, 2014: 35–46).

Despite Türkiye's non-colonial past in Africa and an emphasis on its human-centered foreign aid with an equitable partnership in both business and trade,

which generated optimism and received praise from the African nations (Bilgic & Nascimento, 2014), the "Ankara consensus" nevertheless encountered several criticisms from both African and international actors. Essentially, Türkiye has conceptualized its foreign aid policy as "humanitarian diplomacy" –an idealized form of diplomacy predominantly focused on human welfare. Yet, it is often perceived as an opaque concept that insufficiently explains Turkish foreign aid policy. Specifically, while the concept emphasizes the human-centric dimension of Turkish diplomacy, it fails to capture the underlying dimensions of international prestige, status-seeking, and strategic business and trade interests on the continent. Conversely, excessive emphasis on these dimensions may potentially compromise Türkiye's image as a benevolent actor in Somalia, as such emphasis engenders a perception that Türkiye exploits African vulnerabilities to advance its geopolitical standing. More importantly, its practical implementation remains largely contingent on ground realities, transcending mere discourse and rhetoric (Akpınar, 2013: 746-751).

First of all, in comparison to other international actors such as Norway, Türkiye still has significant limitations in its comprehensive understanding of Somalia. Although historical links with East Africa extend to the Ottoman Empire in the 16th century, meaningful bilateral relations only emerged recently, particularly after Erdogan's landmark official visit in 2011. Such a diplomatic neglect throughout the 20th century resulted in a profound knowledge and expertise deficit about East Africa and Somalia in particular (Akpınar, 2013: 747), undermining policy-making processes at the highest political levels and thus resulting in potentially misguided interventions.

Nevertheless, Türkiye's foreign aid approach significantly diverges from that of traditional donors (e.g., USA, UK, Norway) and newcomers (e.g., China, India) by being active in the field through its own personnel with state institutions and NGOs, in contrast to Western counterparts who largely operate from their offices in Nairobi and at the heavily secured airport in Mogadishu. While this direct engagement offers legitimacy and facilitates first-hand local knowledge acquisition in conflict-affected states like Somalia (see information-sharing model in Table 1), the unilateral intervention has often provoked criticisms from international actors, alleging that Türkiye circumvents official channels and evades international oversight, which potentially facilitate systemic corruption among Somali officials for personnel wealth accumulation (Cannon, 2016).

Furthermore, despite the fact that multiple Turkish NGOs since the 1990s

have operated in Somalia to provide basic needs and social services (e.g., IHH), a significant organizational challenge emerges from their limited coordination with state institutions, resulting in inefficient resource allocation and duplication of project implementations. Nonetheless, these NGOs, along with state institutions, demonstrate capacity to mitigate existing social and economic grievances among Somalis, thereby reducing the incentives for youth recruitment by rebel groups like al-Shabaab in the war economy (see reduced grievances & opportunity cost models in Table 1). Notwithstanding its potential shortcomings like corruption as a conflict-perpetuating factor and risks to aid workers' lives in the field, this direct and unilateral, often uncoordinated, approach demonstrates effectiveness in securing aid delivery to final beneficiaries without substantial illegal interruptions, unfair distributions, and a corrosive war economy associated with sabotage and predation models (Akpınar, 2013: 146–148; Wheeler et al., 2015: 13–16).

Conclusion

The relevant literature claims that foreign aid in (some) conflict settings may exacerbate existing conflicts rather than alleviate violence on the ground, which is in direct contrast with conventional expectations. This study, however, demonstrates that Turkish foreign aid to war-torn states like Afghanistan and Somalia reduces internal violence and fosters a conducive environment for sustainable peace and security mainly through three mechanisms. First, by providing basic needs and social services to the needy through its humanitarian aid while improving state institutions through its capacity-building and technical assistance, Turkish aid addresses existing social, economic, and political grievances that are primarily exploited by rebel groups for recruitment of would-be rebels against government forces. Second, as Türkiye's humanitarian diplomacy encompasses geopolitical interests and international recognition as a rising power as well as potential business and trade opportunities in aided countries, thus creating alternative livelihoods and occupations for even lay people, the Turkish model seems to increase the opportunity cost of joining rebel/insurgent groups. Lastly, all these efforts, including humanitarian aid, technical assistance, capacity building, *et cetera,* help win the hearts and minds of local people, which eventually confers Türkiye's legitimacy to embark on sustainable peace initiatives by bringing all stakeholders to the negotiation table. Türkiye's historical, cultural, and religious ties with the recipient countries also put it in an advantageous position in this regard.

It is important to note that compared to traditional donors and newcomers, the Turkish model is unique in its implementation approach. Türkiye delivers aid directly and unilaterally through its own personnel without coordinating with other stakeholders in the field, including Turkish NGOs. While such a unique approach has been criticized for fostering systemic corruption and patronage networks, particularly among recipient countries' officials, it also enables Türkiye to acquire first-hand local knowledge about who is who in the field, which eventually enhances Türkiye's operational effectiveness in recipient countries. For instance, unlike Western donors' aid convoys that frequently face assaults from rebel groups seeking economic gain, Turkish aid remains relatively immune to such attacks due to its direct engagement with local people. That being said, this model proves self-defeating as its unilateral nature impedes Türkiye from collaborating with other actors in the field, even Turkish NGOs. As a result, limited resources are likely to be utilized inefficiently and devoted to duplicating projects that are already undertaken by other actors.

Ethics Statement

This study did not include human participants and therefore did not require ethical approval.

Use of Generative AI

During the writing phase, the authors used Claude (Sonnet 4.5) to assist in refining sentences without altering the manuscript's conceptual content and logical structure. The authors take full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Each author contributed equally to the study and the manuscript.

Funding Information

No external funding was received for this research.

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