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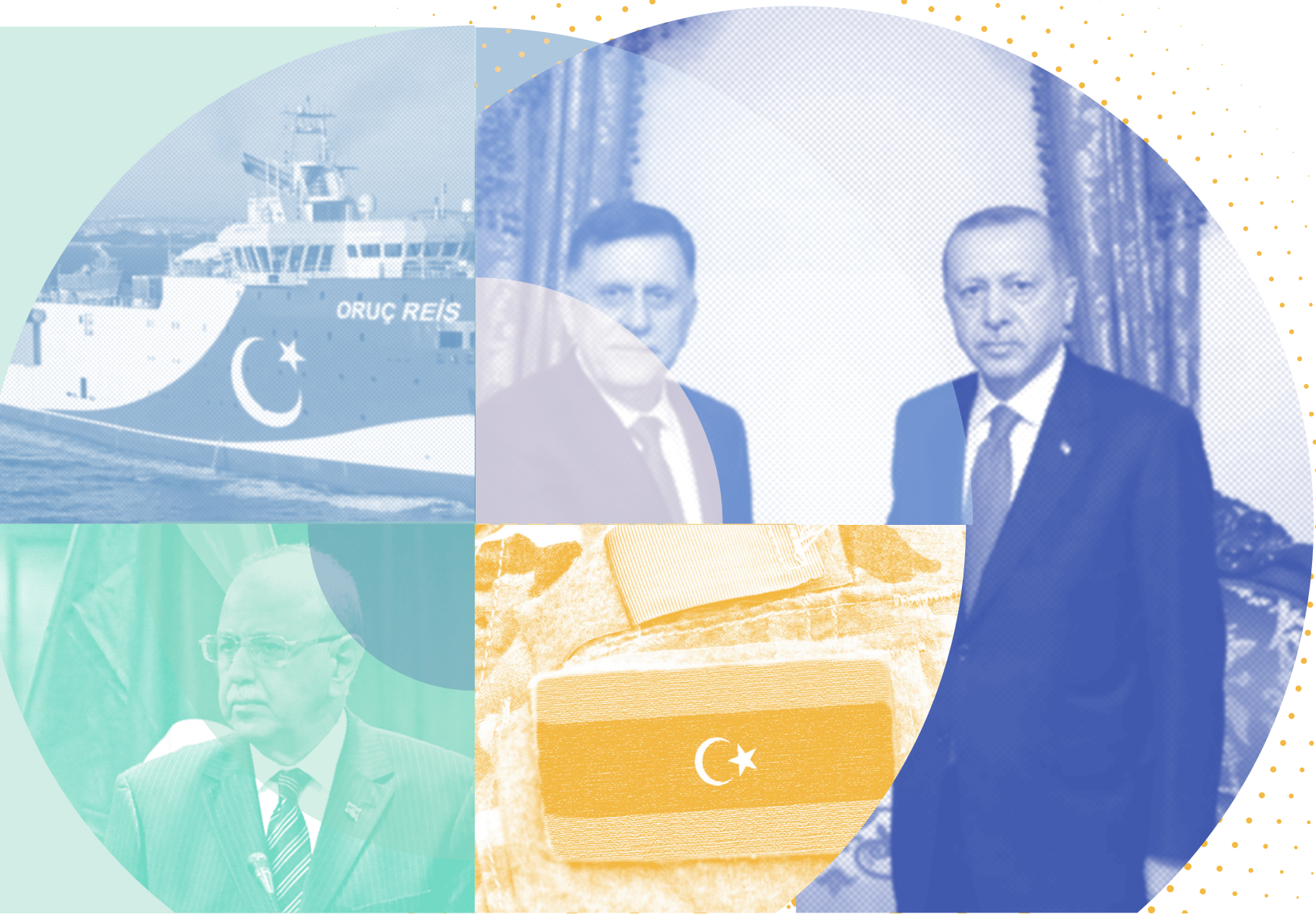
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The East Mediterranean and Regional Security: A Transatlantic Trialogue

WHY TURKEY INTERVENED IN LIBYA

Jalel Harchaoui



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Author: Jalel Harchaoui

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INTRODUCTION

Through a historical analysis of Turkey's military intervention in Libya, this essay identifies the various motivations, reasonings, and threat perceptions underlying Ankara's current Libya strategy.

On January 2, 2020, the Turkish parliament approved an official intervention in Libya. A few weeks earlier, on November 27, 2019, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had convinced the Government of National Accord (GNA), the internationally recognized government in Tripoli, to sign a maritime memorandum with Ankara. The as-yet-ratified document declared a 16-nautical-mile-wide corridor from southwest Turkey to northeast Libya as an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) that ignores the rights of Greece.¹ In return, through a security memorandum, Turkey committed to defending Tripoli and launched an operation whose primary tactical objective was to put an end to the then-eight-month-long attack waged on the capital by the eastern Libyan-based rebel commander Khalifa Haftar's armed coalition.² By late spring 2020, the Turkish-backed forces aligned with the Tripoli government had forced Haftar's main brigades out of northwestern Libya.

The warlord's discomfiture elicited stark comments from several capitals. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), the principal booster of Haftar's military campaign since 2014, denounced Turkey's Libya move, saying

that Ankara "undermined efforts to reach a peaceful solution [there] and destabilized the entire region."³ France and Greece, too, issued a harsh condemnation, while neither Washington nor Moscow issued a firm statement.⁴

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The imperturbable frequency at which the Turks have sent military cargo flights and consolidated their assets in Libya after Haftar's defeat is a reminder that they have no intention to leave within the foreseeable future. It is therefore worthwhile to study

1 Abdullah Bozkurt, "Full text of Turkey-Libya maritime agreement revealed," *Nordic Monitor*, December 5, 2019.

2 Abdullah Bozkurt, "Full text of new Turkey, Libya sweeping security, military cooperation deal revealed," *Nordic Monitor*, December 14, 2019.

3 "UAE foreign minister: Israel deal paves way for comprehensive Middle East peace," *Arab News*, September 30, 2020.

4 On France's condemnation of Turkey's Libya intervention, see, Rym Momtaz, "Macron accuses Turkey of 'criminal responsibility' in Libya," *Politico Europe*, June 29, 2020. On France's pro-Haftar policy in Libya, see, Jalel Harchaoui, "La politique libyenne de la France et ses antécédents historiques," *Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, December 11, 2019. On Greece accusing Turkey of violating the sovereignty of Libya, see, "EU Foreign Chief Visits Greece-Turkey Border, Hears Greek Complaints," *The National Herald*, June 25, 2020.



the events and rationale that gave rise to Ankara's November 2019 memoranda.

Although their signing and the massive operation that followed were greatly facilitated by the destructive inefficacy of Haftar and his Emirati sponsor, their roots had developed over several years, if not decades.

THE 2020 INTERVENTION WAS NOT ENTIRELY NEW

The numerous declarations lately portraying Turkey as a disrupter within the Libyan theater can easily cause observers to forget that in February-March 2011, when popular uprisings broke out against Muammar Gaddafi, Ankara

was opposed to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its Gulf partners going to war against the Libyan autocrat's regime. Turkey's closeness to Gaddafi had first burgeoned when he backed Turkey's 1974 invasion of northern Cyprus,⁵ and economic activity between Libya and Turkey grew over the subsequent years. That growth accelerated after a diplomatic deal with the United States in 2003 helped lift international sanctions on Libya amid an era of high oil prices.⁶ Also, when Libya declared an EEZ in May 2009, and signaled that it was open to international agreements, Turkey's interest was piqued.⁷ By early 2011, Turkish companies had over \$20 billion of outstanding projects there, mostly in construction, engineering, and energy.⁸ These enormous economic interests suffice to explain why Turkey first tried to oppose the intervention.⁹

5 Alon Liel, *Turkey in the Middle East: Oil, Islam, and Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2001), p. 176.

6 Geoff Porter, "The Faulty Premise of Pre-emption," *New York Times*, July 31, 2004; and Bruce W. Jentleson and Christopher A. Whytock, "Who 'Won' Libya? The Force-Diplomacy Debate and Its Implications for Theory and Policy," *International Security*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2006), pp. 47-86.

7 Cihat Yayci, "Libya's Role and Effect on the Efforts to Limit the Maritime Jurisdictions in the East Mediterranean" (in Turkish), *Güvenlik Stratejileri Dergisi*, vol. 7, no. 14 (2011), pp. 17-41.

8 Graham Fuller, *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Leadership in the Middle East* (Vancouver: Bozorg, 2014), p. 197.

9 Birsan Erdogan, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Turkish Foreign Policy Discourse* (London: Palgrave Pivot, 2016), p. 32.

After American insistence helped convince Turkey to renounce using its veto and join the NATO operation, the Justice and Development Party-led (AKP) government came to appreciate the aura and ideological advantage it possessed in post-Gaddafi Libya.¹⁰ Its brand of modernist, semi-democratic Islamic populism is, in several regards, akin to that of the Muslim Brotherhood. Between 2011 and 2013, the Egyptian and Syrian crises brought Qatar and Turkey closer together, as both propped up Islamist currents there. Libyan Islamists also played a role in Syria at that time, working with Doha and Ankara on undermining the Bashar al-Assad government.¹¹ Those connections have remained ever since, and Erdogan, despite his ideological versatility during the last decade, hasn't ceased to support reformist, bottom-up Sunni Islam in Arab countries. This, however, is not to say that strengthening the Muslim Brotherhood is a Turkish objective unto itself. Rather, it is the other way around. In order to advance its geopolitical agenda in the region, Ankara instrumentalizes its sway over, and proximity to, Islamist networks in Arab countries like Libya.

Although the Muslim Brotherhood was never very popular in Libya, the 2011 war against Gaddafi catapulted a number of proponents of political Islam into positions of power. Separately, deep historical ties bind Libya's west coast to Turkey.

IN ORDER TO ADVANCE ITS GEOPOLITICAL AGENDA IN THE REGION, ANKARA INSTRUMENTALIZES ITS SWAY OVER, AND PROXIMITY TO, ISLAMIST NETWORKS IN ARAB COUNTRIES LIKE LIBYA.

The rise of Abu Dhabi as a major regional actor in 2013 was yet another factor for Qatari-Turkish collaboration. Indeed, in the years following the Arab Uprisings, the UAE along with several other U.S. allies, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, France, and Jordan, ramped up their hostility to the notion that citizen initiative and activism should be tolerated in the Middle East and North Africa, regardless of whether that reformist thrust against traditional authoritarianism involves extremist or moderate methods.

In Libya, Turkey's support for a motley spectrum of Islamist and revolutionary forces took on a military dimension in the second half

¹⁰ Paris failed to invite Ankara to its March 19, 2011, Summit on Libya. On March 22, Turkey threatened to use its veto as a NATO member and thus prevent the consensus necessary to unify the various individual Libya interventions into one NATO operation. On March 24, Ankara finally gave in to U.S. pressure and embraced the no-fly zone on Libya. See, Ian Traynor, "Turkey and France clash over Libya air campaign," *The Guardian*, March 24, 2011; and Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, "Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya," *European Journal of International Relations*, January 29, 2014.

¹¹ On Libyan-Turkish coordination in backing the anti-Assad rebellion, see Jalel Harchaoui, "Libya's Looming Contest for the Central Bank," *War On The Rocks*, April 1, 2019. On Libyan-Turkish-Qatari coordination in backing the anti-Assad rebellion, see, Rania Abouzeid, *No Turning Back: Life, Loss, and Hope in Wartime Syria* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2018), pp. 161-4; and Christopher Phillips, *The Battle For Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press), p. 137.



Turkish Defense Minister Akar receives Libyan chief of general staff al-Haddad in October 2020. (msb.gov.tr)

of 2014 when Haftar's campaign against all Islamist groups in Benghazi started showing signs of resilience. Ankara's interference in those years wasn't massive, nor did it reflect a systematic policy. It manifested mainly with Ankara's *laissez-faire* attitude, which turned a blind eye whenever Libyan actors based in Turkey shipped weapons to Islamist brigades committed to fighting Haftar's armed coalition.¹²

In the two years leading up to Haftar's April 2019 offensive against Tripoli, interference emanating from Turkey diminished. In that period, when the hardline revolutionaries and radical Islamists weren't killed, they were arrested or forced to leave the country by more centrist militias in Tripolitania.¹³ As a result, the Libyan figures living in Turkey were now more in passive exile than plotting

any new moves.¹⁴ The Turkish state itself had neither a clear Libya policy, nor a workable point of entry. For instance, in November 2018, a few days before the peace conference that took place in Palermo, Italy, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar visited GNA officials in Tripoli and presented them with maritime maps meant to highlight Greece's alleged attempts to encroach upon Libya's continental shelf.¹⁵ He was ignored. The Tripoli authorities deemed it out of the question to enter any form of maritime arrangement that would alienate Greece, Cyprus, and, perhaps, the entire European Union.

But the frontal assault by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) on Tripoli in April 2019 acted as a systemic shock that would change everyone's outlook. That same month, the UAE, eager to offset the LNA's frailty on the

12 On weapons shipments from Turkey to Misrata and its allies in Benghazi, see, Frederic Wehrey, *This War is Out of Our Hands* (Washington: New America, 2020), p. 19; United Nations Panel of Experts on Libya, *Letter dated 4 March 2016 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council*, UN Security Council, 2016, p. 32; and Jonathan Schanzer, "Turkey's Secret Proxy War in Libya?," *The National Interest*, March 17, 2015.

13 Frederic Wehrey and Emadeddin Badi, "Libya's Coming Forever War: Why Backing One Militia Against Another Is Not The Solution," *War On The Rocks*, May 15, 2019.

14 Author interviews with several members of the Libyan diaspora figures in Istanbul, December 2018.

15 "Turkish defense minister accuses Greece of violating Libyan continental shelf," *Kathimerini*, November 12, 2018.



In November of 2019, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya Fayez Al Sarraj meet in Istanbul to sign a maritime memorandum of understanding. (facebook.com/trpresidency)

ground, initiated a substantial campaign of air strikes on the greater Tripoli area.¹⁶ The Emirati bombs helped contain the GNA's forces, but never managed to propel Haftar into the heart of the capital.

Turkey, seeing no meaningful institution on the international stage decry the UAE's military intervention, responded by imitating it. After making sure Tripoli would fund the effort, Ankara deployed Bayraktar TB2 drones and several dozen Turkish officers to operate them on behalf of the GNA.¹⁷ Starting in September 2019, the Wagner Group, a Kremlin-linked mercenary company, sent hundreds of Russian fighters to the frontline south of Tripoli to assist Haftar's coalition in attacking the GNA-aligned forces.

In October 2019, owing to a combination of technical and politically motivated reasons, Turkey's clandestine mission in Libya ceased altogether for several weeks. It resumed only after a friendless, existentially threatened

Tripoli signed the maritime memorandum it had declined to consider several times over the preceding months. Once the signature was obtained, Erdogan rolled out a much more comprehensive, more overt military intervention in Tripolitania.

AFTER THE TRIPOLI BATTLE WAS WON

Since the Turkish-backed GNA expelled Haftar's armed coalition from northwestern Libya in June 2020, the territorial divide between the two main camps has been static. The fault line goes from the city of Sirte, located in the middle of Libya's littoral, to Jufrah Airbase 260 kilometers to the south; this line essentially separates the southwestern part of the country from its northwest. The lull since June has in large part been attributable to continued work by Wagner, coordinating tightly with the UAE.

¹⁶ Tom Kington, "UAE allegedly using Chinese drones for deadly airstrikes in Libya," *Defense News*, May 2, 2019; and Jalel Harchaoui, "The Libyan Civil War Is About to Get Worse," *Foreign Policy*, March 18, 2020.

¹⁷ On Ankara's interest in being paid \$350 million in 2019, see, Raja Abdulrahim, "Foreign Backing Brings Militias in Libya to a Stalemate—and No Further," *Wall Street Journal*, October 1, 2019.

Both the Russians and the Emiratis continued interfering and sending equipment.¹⁸ As part of that effort to dissuade Turkish-backed forces from venturing into the east or the south, the Russians even introduced a dozen fighter jets piloted by mercenaries.¹⁹

Seemingly unfazed, Turkey used the multi-month pause since June to entrench its presence in northwest Libya. Turkish assets are now substantial and include two full-blown, permanent military bases and about 3,000 Syrian mercenaries.²⁰ On the financial front, Ankara has shown an acute interest in Tripoli's coffers. This was manifest when, in August 2020, it signed an undisclosed agreement with the dollar-rich Central Bank of Libya.²¹ The same anxiousness to collect economic dividends helps explain Turkey's temporary dovishness toward (1) Russia, knowing that Moscow did pressure Haftar into lifting his nine-month-long blockade on oil exports, and (2) the UN's attempts to bring about the formation of a new government of national unity that would be accepted across Libya.²² The Turks' thinking assumes that such an arrangement would allow for an indirect sharing of the country's resources.

THE OTHER MAJOR DRIVER BEHIND TURKEY'S RELATIVE WILLINGNESS TO SEE THE UN SUCCEED IN THIS DELICATE UNDERTAKING IS ITS MARITIME CAMPAIGN IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN.

The other major driver behind Turkey's relative willingness to see the UN succeed in this delicate undertaking is its maritime campaign in the Eastern Mediterranean. In that regard, Ankara views as imperative and strategic the survival of an internationally recognized government in Libya that is friendly to it. By the same token, Ankara also needs to prevent a *de jure* partition of the country. Despite the modicum of restraint shown by Turkey, its proclivity for hard power

18 On Russian activity after June 2020, see, Omar al-Hawari, "Tensions rise in Libya's Sirte as the city becomes central to the conflict," *The Middle East Directions Programme Blog*, October 12, 2020; Jared Malsin, "U.A.E. Boosted Arms Transfers to Libya to Salvage Warlord's Campaign, U.N. Panel Finds," *Wall Street Journal*, September 29, 2020. On Emirati activity after June 2020, see, Jared Malsin, "Russia Reinforces Foothold in Libya as Militia Leader Retreats," *Wall Street Journal*, June 29, 2020.

19 Thomas Newdick and Joseph Trevithick, "Two Russian MiG-29s Have Crashed In Libya According To Top American Intel Official," *The Drive*, September 11, 2020; Paul Iddon, "Who's Flying Those MiG-29s In Libya And Why Does It Matter?," *Forbes*, June 29, 2020; and Thomas Grove and Jared Malsin, "Russian Warplanes in Libya Signal New Risky Phase of Conflict," *Wall Street Journal*, May 29, 2020.

20 Rough estimate compiled by the author based on telephone interviews with an array of eyewitnesses in the Tripoli and Misrata areas, October 2020. As of August 2020, the U.S. Department of Defense assessed the number of Turkish-backed Syrian fighters to be around 5,000. *East Africa Counterterrorism Operation North And West Africa Counterterrorism Operation: Lead Inspector General Report To The United States Congress*, p. 6.

21 "Turkish central bank signs MoU with Libyan central bank," *Reuters*, August 31, 2020. For more insight into the Libyan Central Bank's foreign-exchange reserves, see, Jalel Harchaoui, "Libya's Monetary Crisis," *Lawfare*, January 10, 2018.

22 Frédéric Bobin, "En Libye, un cessez-le-feu en attendant un hypothétique accord politique," *Le Monde*, October 24, 2020; and Angus McDowall, "Libya talks pause without naming transitional government," *Reuters*, November 16, 2020.



Turkey's seismic research vessel Oruç Reis. (Twitter/MTAGeneIMd)

and obstinate determination to maintain a permanent military mission may compromise its political objectives with the UN and vis-à-vis some moderate Libyan currents.

One reason Turkey is unlikely to accept reducing its military entrenchment in Tripolitania is related to lands beyond Libya's borders. By securing a footprint in northwest Libya, Ankara is in the process of slowly acquiring a passageway into the Sahel and the rest of Africa.²³ Indeed, the African market's paramount importance will only keep growing over the coming decades for Turkey's construction companies and export-oriented manufacturers.

THE STAKES FOR TURKEY IN LIBYA AND IN THE SEA

The brief overview above has delineated the principal goals fueling Turkey's Libya adventure: (1) assertiveness on the water; (2) commercial interests on Libyan soil, including in the energy sector; and (3) political and commercial ambitions in the remainder of Africa.

The maritime ambitions of Turkey require additional nuances. Its recent gas-survey sorties in the Eastern Mediterranean—aggressive gestures that multiplied after the GNA's Tripoli victory—are in fact not primarily about gas reserves.²⁴ The motivation behind them has more to do with territorial sovereignty and other political stakes void of direct economic windfalls. To understand why

23 Fehim Tastekin, "Turkey's militarized Africa opening fuels influence wars," *Al-Monitor*, August 31, 2020; and Barin Kayaoglu, "Libya is only small part of Turkey's ambitious Africa overture," *Al-Monitor*, January 27, 2020.

24 Zenonas Tziarras in Diego Cupolo, "Turkey resumes energy research in disputed waters," *Al-Monitor*, October 14, 2020; "Turkey's East Med Drilling Campaign: Politics By Other Means," *MEES*, October 9, 2020.

this is, one needs to gain more perspective on how Turkey sees the Eastern Mediterranean and how, quite crucially, Libya fits into its geopolitical calculus.

ANKARA'S MARITIME PURSUITS, FOR INSTANCE, ARE IN LARGE PART DRIVEN BY A MAXIMALIST SENSE OF SOVEREIGNTY AND INTANGIBLES, SUCH AS IDENTITY, NATIONAL PRIDE, AND THIRST FOR PRESTIGE ABROAD.

The naval doctrine dubbed “Blue Homeland” that inspired Ankara’s November 2019 memorandum with Tripoli was first articulated 13 years earlier, long before the last decade’s natural-gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean. The doctrine’s main author is Admiral Cem Gürdeniz, a figure better characterized by his staunch nationalism and secularism than any sympathy for the AKP’s own ideology.²⁵ After Erdogan’s party lost its parliamentary majority in 2015 owing to the rise of a pro-Kurdish grouping, the Turkish president struck an alliance with several nationalist organizations.²⁶ The most powerful one is veteran political leader and former Deputy Prime Minister Devlet Bahçeli’s far-right party, which emphasizes national

security and nurtures strong anti-Western views. Despite philosophical differences, Erdogan and Bahçeli promote a worldview dominated by the belief that the Turkish state is under threat, hence a reflex toward preemptive expansionism.²⁷ Giving free rein to ultranationalists has helped Erdogan maintain his grip on power. In the process, the ultranationalists became the key engine behind Ankara’s militaristic foreign policy that has been on display since 2018. A few of its tenets are rooted in rationality, discipline, and pragmatism as far as seizing the geoeconomic rewards that U.S. apathy and the growing international anarchy offer. Yet, other aspects of present-day Turkey’s aggressive revisionism go beyond strict *realpolitik*. Ankara’s maritime pursuits, for instance, are in large part driven by a maximalist sense of sovereignty and intangibles, such as identity, national pride, and thirst for prestige abroad.

The current imbroglio over the competing EEZs in the East Mediterranean has roots tracing back to the 20th century, and sometimes further into what has been a centuries-old rivalry. Some of them are linked to Turco-Greek grudges of the Cold War era. Initially, the crises between the two nations—such as the Istanbul pogrom in 1955 or the killing spree targeting Turks in Cyprus after the latter became an independent state in 1960—featured no maritime dimension. Then, after Turkey invaded the northern part of Cyprus in 1974, Ankara began issuing maritime claims with regard to the Aegean Sea. Such grievances are arguably a reflection of the fact that modern-day Greece controls an extraordinary number of small islands in the eastern half of the Aegean, a peculiar geography that puts Turkey at a structural disadvantage.

25 Matthieu Caillaud, “Qu’est-ce que la « patrie bleue » ? Une conversation avec l’idéologue de la doctrine géopolitique turque ?,” *Le Grand Continent*, October 26, 2020.

26 Gonul Tol, “Viewpoint: Why Turkey is flexing its muscles abroad,” *BBC News*, October 15, 2020.

27 Ariane Bonzon, “En Turquie, la « Patrie bleue » révèle l’alliance des islamistes et des nationalistes,” *Slate France*, September 25, 2020.



The Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum has contributed to tensions in the region. (sis.gov.eg)

Distinct from Turkey's resentment vis-à-vis Greece about the Aegean Sea, the unresolved Cyprus crisis itself has important maritime facets, too. The waters surrounding the divided island are indeed crippled with tensions as a result of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' unrecognized status and Ankara's continued military involvement there.

In the two cases above, the Turco-Cypriot crisis and the Turco-Greek crisis, the relevant parties are expected to resolve their respective issue of overlapping EEZs through bilateral negotiation on the basis of international law or, if no agreement can be reached, by referral to international courts. In reality, Ankara resists both paths and, instead, clamors for a special ad-hoc arrangement. While Ankara officially declares a willingness to go to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, it insists on a wholesale approach, encompassing several issues at once—arguably a way of undermining Greece's case from the outset.²⁸ All of this means that the overall problem is profound and complex. Turkey's arguments can hardly be dismissed altogether, nor are they likely to be resolved through one simple concession by Greece, assuming that the latter is prepared to do so.

The quantity of natural gas discovered by Turkey's international competitors since 2011 hasn't been very large, but it has helped galvanize their solidarity against Turkey while reigniting all the old, unresolved issues.²⁹ In 2019, Cairo inaugurated the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum to which it invited Italy, the Republic of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. One of the Forum's main goals is to utilize Egypt's liquified natural gas facilities for the purpose of streamlining the transportation of natural gas from the area into Europe. The endeavor not only excludes energy-poor Turkey, but it also undermines its long-standing aspiration to become a vital transit platform for foreign gas to Europe.

In sum, the last 10-to-15 years saw the cohesion amongst Ankara's rivals grow in the Eastern Mediterranean. This gives Turkey very real reasons to fear becoming trapped into a narrow strip of sea off its southern coast. Within that context, the Tripoli government is the only internationally recognized government nearby that it can invoke as embracing its interpretation of territorial waters conventions. If that interpretation is defended with relentless action over a sustained period of time, Ankara's thinking

²⁸ On Ankara's insistence that "all problems should be addressed as a whole," see, Petros Siousiouras and Georgios Chrysochou, "The Aegean Dispute in the Context of Contemporary Judicial Decisions on Maritime Delimitation", *Laws*, vol. 3 (2014), p. 43.


²⁹ The recently discovered gas fields include Egypt's Zohr, Israel's Tamar and Leviathan, and Cyprus's Aphrodite. See, Pier Paolo Raimondi, "The new energy geopolitics of 'East Med,'" *Aspenia Online*, October 5, 2020.

goes, Athens will eventually give in and accept a redrawing of the maritime jurisdiction zones in the Aegean.

At present, Greece is a long way from such a capitulation, as both France and the UAE strongly support it, including militarily. For instance, both French and Emirati warplanes participated in Greece's military exercises in late summer 2020.³⁰ In fact, on a regional level, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed is emerging as the leader of the pushback against Turkey. In Libya specifically, although economic and geostrategic considerations do matter to the UAE, the latter's top concern—overriding all others—has been ideology. By ensuring the survival of a government, whose pluralistic character lets the Muslim Brotherhood exert a degree of influence on the national governance of a wealthy North African country, Ankara reinforces its ideological prestige in the eyes of various constituencies across much of the region and beyond. Erdogan's style of rule is authoritarian, but that form of authoritarianism is somewhat looser, less vertical, and more diffuse than Mohammed bin Zayed's own preferred model. The added political uncertainty associated with the kind of bottom-up dynamic that Erdogan encourages across the Arab World is regarded by the UAE as a threat to the survival of the Emirati regime.³¹ Eradicating it in Libya has been an important Emirati goal since 2011.

CONCLUSION

Support for the Muslim Brotherhood, although an indubitable reality on a tactical level, wasn't per se a primary motivation behind the Turks' decision to go to Libya. In fact, ultranationalism played a greater role as that decision's ideological engine than political Islam did. In all cases, the thinking underlying Ankara's foreign policy isn't as pragmatic as some of its advocates proclaim. They argue that it is producing "coercive diplomacy," or a dynamic that will compel Turkey's rivals into acquiescing to a new geostrategic configuration and, ultimately, accepting a negotiated settlement that is viable and satisfactory to Ankara.³² Things may end up going in that direction, but at the time of writing, no concrete clues indicate that they will. Ankara's Libya play—although not a failure thus far—still hasn't secured any of its strategic goals.

Meanwhile, Turkey's ever-intensifying urge to assert itself abroad in a cantankerous manner serves a domestic purpose for its leaders. Erdogan and his associates have a strong incentive to deflect the Turkish public's attention from a hard-currency debt crisis that has slipped out of control, halved the dollar value of the lira in two years, and hurt the real economy. This means that only an unequivocal, crushing defeat can uproot the Turkish juggernaut from Libya within the next few years.³³ 

About the Author

Jalel Harchaoui is a Senior Fellow at the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

30 "France joins military exercises in east Mediterranean," *Reuters*, August 26, 2020. For open-source pictures of an Emirati fighter jet participating in those same exercises, see, twitter.com/g_mastropavlos/status/1299026750836543488?s=20.

31 Soubrier Emma, "Les Émirats arabes unis à la conquête du monde?," *Politique étrangère*, March 12, 2020, p. 64; and Gregory Gause, "What the Qatar crisis shows about the Middle East," *Washington Post - Monkey Cage*, June 27, 2017.

32 Saban Kardas, "Understanding Turkey's Coercive Diplomacy," *German Marshall Fund of the United States - On Turkey*, August 13, 2020.

33 Sinan Ulgen, "A Weak Economy Won't Stop Turkey's Activist Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, October 6, 2020.

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