

TRAD - Türkiye Rusya Arařtırmaları Dergisi 3 (Yaz 2020)

TJORS - Turkish Journal of Russian Studies 3 (Summer 2020)

**Başlık / Title:** Russian-Turkish Involvement in the Civil War in Libya

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**Bu makaleye atf için:** Gökhan Tekir, Russian-Turkish Involvement in the Civil War in Libya, *Türkiye Rusya Arařtırmaları Dergisi* 3 (2020): 190-215.

**To cite this article:** Gökhan Tekir, Russian-Turkish Involvement in the Civil War in Libya, *Türkiye Rusya Arařtırmaları Dergisi* 3 (2020): 190-215.

**Makale Türü / Type of Article:** Arařtırma Makalesi / Research Article

**Yayın Geliř Tarihi / Submission Date:** 20.05.2020

**Yayına Kabul Tarihi / Acceptance Date:** 26.06.2020

**Yayın Tarihi / Date Published:** 30.06.2020

**Tarandıđı İndeksler / Abstracting & Indexing**

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Yazar: Gökhan TEKİR\*

## Libya'daki İç Savařa Rus ve Türk Müdahalesi

**Öz:** Muammer Kaddafi'nin devrilmesinden sonra Libya iç savařa sürüklendi. İki rakip hükümet Libya'nın kontrolü için ortaya çıktı: Mareşal Halife Haftar'ın liderliğini yaptığı Tobruk merkezli Libya Ulusal Ordusu (LUO) ve Başbakan Fayeze Sarraj'ın liderliğindeki Trablus merkezli Ulusal Mutabakat Hükümeti (UMH). Bu iç savař Mısır, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri (BAE), Fransa, Rusya ve Türkiye gibi ülkeleri de içine aldı. Halife Haftar 2019 Nisan'ından itibaren Trablus'u ele geçirmek amacıyla başlattığı hücum hareketlerini yoğunlařtırdı. Suriye iç savařında farklı taraflarda olan Rusya ve Türkiye Libya'da da farklı tarafları desteklemektedir. Rusya, Putin'in yakın çevresinden iřadamı Yevgeny Prigozhin'in sahibi olduđu özel askeri řirket Wagner üzerinden yürüttüğü operasyonlarla Haftar'ın ordusuna üstü kapalı olarak yardımda bulunmaktadır. Bu durum, Rusya'nın iç savařtaki barıř yapıcı rolünü muhafaza için Halife Haftar'ı gizlice desteklediğini göstermektedir. Türkiye gönderdiği askeri danışmanlarla ve Silahlı İnsansız Hava Araçları (SİHA) ile çatıřmaya direk müdahil olarak açıkça Sarraj hükümetine destek vermektedir. Türkiye böylece Libya'da daha açık bir pozisyon almıřtır. Sarraj hükümetiyle UMH'nin istemesi halinde Türkiye'nin asker göndermesine olanak veren bir askeri anlaşma imzalamıřtır. Ayrıca Türkiye UMH ile Dođu Akdeniz'de iki ülkenin münhasır ekonomik bölge alanlarını belirleyen bir deniz sınırı anlaşması imzalamıřtır. Böylece, Türkiye, vahři bir savař beyi olarak nitelendirdiği Halife Haftar ile müzakere yolunu kapatmıřtır. Bu bağlamda Rus ve Türk müdahalesinin enerji ve güvenlik boyutlarından bahsedilecektir. Bu çalışma Rusya ve Türkiye'nin Libya'daki pozisyonlarını, Rusya ve Türkiye'nin Libya'daki iç savařa dahil olma nedenlerini ve Libya'da taraf seçiminde belirleyici unsurları tartıřarak analiz etmeye çalışmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya, Türkiye, Libya, iç savař, Halife Haftar, Fayeze Sarraj

## Russian-Turkish Involvement in the Civil War in Libya

**Abstract:** After the ouster of Muammer Gaddafi, Libya plunged into a civil war. Two main competing governments emerged for control over Libya: Tobruk based Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Marshal Khalifa Haftar and Tripoli based Government of National Accord (GNA) led by the Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj. This civil war invited other countries' involvement such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), France, Russia, and Turkey. Khalifa Haftar's offensive, which started in April 2019, to capture Tripoli intensified the conflict. Fighting already in opposite sides on the civil war in Syria, Russia and Turkey also backed opposite sides of the civil war in Libya. Russia covertly provides assistance to Haftar's army by conducting its operations in Libya under the private military group Wagner owned by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessman affiliated with Vladimir Putin. This indicates Russia's efforts to hide its support to Khalifa Haftar to maintain its role as a peace broker in the civil war. Turkey openly supports al-Sarraj government by sending military advisors and involving directly in the conflict with its deployment of Unmanned Combat Aerial Vehicle (UCAV). Turkey, therefore, has a clear position in Libya. It signed a military cooperation with al-Sarraj government, which allows Turkey to send its military at the GNA's request. Moreover, it signed a maritime agreement with the GNA, which determined the exclusive economic zones of two countries in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, it

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closed any possibility of compromising with Khalifa Haftar, to whom it condemned as a vicious war lord. In this context, the security and energy dimensions of Russian and Turkish involvement will be mentioned. This paper tries to analyze Russian and Turkish positions in Libya, discussing the reasons why Russia and Turkey interfered in the civil war in Libya and offered their support to different parties.

**Keywords:** Russia, Turkey, Libya, civil war, Khalifa Haftar, Fayeze al-Sarraj

## **Introduction**

Besides Syria, Libya emerged as the second Mediterranean country where Turkish and Russians found themselves on the opposite sides. The civil war, erupted after the ouster of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, escalated by Khalifa Haftar's offensive in April 2019 to capture Tripoli, the capital of internationally recognized government headed by Fayeze al-Sarraj. Although the European Union (EU) foreign chief Federica Mogherini urged Haftar to stop his offensive and the French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with al-Sarraj on the phone, they offered no tangible support for his government. The United States of America (USA) also pulled its forces due to the escalating conflict.<sup>1</sup>

The abstinence of providing material support to Libya by these countries was one of the latest examples of the failure of efforts in stabilizing Libya. This power vacuum left by the Western powers in Libya opened the way of the interference of other powers such as Egypt, the UAE, and Russia. These countries' involvement strengthened Haftar vis-à-vis internationally recognized government of Libya.<sup>2</sup> For his latest offensive, Haftar received military equipment support from the UAE and mercenaries from Russia's private military company, Wagner.<sup>3</sup> Thus, through Wagner's support to Haftar, Russia stepped on the conflict in Libya.

Turkey's active involvement into the civil war in Libya on the side of al-Sarraj government, on the other hand, has blocked Haftar's hopes of capturing Tripoli. Two separate deals signed, a maritime delimitation deal and military cooperation deal, cemented Turkey's position in Libya. The maritime deal

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<sup>1</sup> "Haftar's Forces Continue Push into Tripoli as Libya Crisis Escalates," Accessed: 02.04.2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190407-libya-haftar-forces-air-strike-tripoli-gaddafi-usa>.

<sup>2</sup> Frederic C. Hof and Paolo Magri, "Introduction", in *Foreign Actors in Libya's Crisis*, ed. by Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli (Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2017), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Frud Bezhan, "U.S. Vacuum: How Libya Is Descending Into A Russia-Turkey Proxy War," Accessed: 03.04.2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/u-s-vacuum-how-libya-is-descending-into-a-russia-turkey-proxy-war-/30389900.html>.

enables Turkey to lay claim to a large part of Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>4</sup> The bilateral military cooperation deal allows Turkey to deploy at the behest of Tripoli's request.<sup>5</sup>

The two deals demonstrate the level of Turkish commitment to the maintenance of the government of al-Sarraj government, whose survival is key to the Turkish presence in the Eastern Mediterranean, sidelined by other powers such as Greece and Egypt. Although the large part of the country is under the control of Khalifa Haftar, the legitimate status of al-Sarraj government in international arena allows Turkey to claim the legality of bilateral agreements, made with the GNA. Therefore, Turkey wants to preserve Tripoli based al-Sarraj government in Libya at any cost.

On the other hand, Russia appears to side with Khalifa Haftar by offering support his endeavors to capture Tripoli. Russia's active stance in Syria, despite risking its relations with Turkey, raises concerns about another possibility of confrontation in Libya. Its participation in Libya is not similar to the open support to Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian conflict. Although Khalifa Haftar is receiving mercenaries from Russian private company Wagner, Russia officially distances itself from Haftar's side and maintains its contacts with al-Sarraj. This suggests that Russia has more limited interests in Libya. Its support to Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) aimed at bolstering its stance at the negotiation table. Turkey's growing assertiveness, however, has a danger of diminishing Haftar's control over Libya. Furthermore, the interference of the UAE and Egypt means that Russia is not the only power for influencing Haftar's decision. This diminishes Russia's role in controlling Haftar, who continues to rely on Egypt and the UAE. Thus, the involvement of many foreign states is a contributing factor of the prolongation of the Libyan conflict. Before discussing the civil war of Libya, the general framework of foreign intervention in civil wars, therefore, needs to be offered.

### **Foreign Intervention in Civil Wars**

Civil war is defined as *"armed combat within the boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity between parties subject to a common authority at the outset of the hostilities."*<sup>6</sup> The optimism in winning the war prompts rational actors to seek

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Johson, "Newly Aggressive Turkey Forges Alliance With Libya," Accessed: 03.04.2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/23/turkey-libya-alliance-aggressive-mediterranean/>.

<sup>5</sup> Zeynep Bilginsoy, "Turkish Parliament OKs Controversial Libya Military Deal," Accessed: 03.04.2020, <https://apnews.com/d9df4aa30f2303140b14fdf5485e0955>.

<sup>6</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

benefits in the conflict, leading them to rebel.<sup>7</sup> Foreign assistance to one side influences the course of civil wars. Foreign intervention to civil war occurs when an external state transfers resources such as funds, equipment, weapons, and personnel to a belligerent in a civil war. It improves its military capability and its survivability. Belligerents supported by two or more foreign states increase their survivability four times.<sup>8</sup> When the dissidents expect that foreign states will not offer aid to the incumbents, the optimism over their chances about the outcome of the civil war increases. Thus, they are likely to attempt to topple the government.

On the other hand, the incumbents could also invite foreign states to take part in the internecine conflict to attain protection. In this case, they give up some part of their state's sovereignty to a powerful state for protection against the other party in the civil war.<sup>9</sup> The involvement of foreign powers also affects the duration of the civil war. Lawson points out that the number of intervening powers is the key variable in determining the duration. While single-states' intervention leads to a quicker resolution to the conflict, the multi-state interventions cause prolongment of the civil wars as the number of states increases, it will be harder to reach a bargain, which will be accepted by the all states involved.<sup>10</sup>

The civil war in Libya invited the participation of many regional powers due to their desire to extend their influences over a country, characterized by a power vacuum. As the number of the states involved in the Libyan conflict increases, belligerents of the conflict keep on fighting because of constant supply of equipment and funds from different states.

### **The conflict in Libya**

The wave of protest that swept across the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 also shook the 42-year rule of Muammar Gaddafi. When Gaddafi threatened to annihilate the protesters, the international community, already been disturbed by violent images broadcasted by Qatar based Al-Jazeera, decided to take action. On 17 March 2011, the United Nations (UN) passed the Resolution 1973, which supposed a creation of a no-fly zone and taking all necessary steps to protect the civilians. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed the responsibility of enforcing the UN

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<sup>7</sup> David E. Cunningham, "Preventing Civil War", *World Politics*, 68 (2016): 310.

<sup>8</sup> Adam Lockyer, "Foreign Intervention and Warfare in Civil Wars", *Review of International Studies*, 37 (2011): 2339-2340.

<sup>9</sup> Cunningham, "Preventing Civil War", 318.

<sup>10</sup> Fred H. Lawson, "Foreign Military Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars Revisited", *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 3/2 (2019): 237.

decision. In August, the regime was destroyed and in October, Gaddafi was found and killed.<sup>11</sup>

Gaddafi's death, however, created a power vacuum that bred instability. The groups who started the protests only had one unifying aim: to overthrow Gaddafi.<sup>12</sup> Among these, no group was more legitimate than the other. The power competition led to the establishment of weak governments as the high government posts had to be filled by the compromise candidates not to upset balance of power among these groups.<sup>13</sup> The weak governments did not have the ability to collect arms from various militias or disband them. The instability in Libya, thus, increased due to the existence of the abundant militia groups.<sup>14</sup>

The return of Gaddafi era General Khalifa Haftar to Libya further deepened the polarization among the groups. Khalifa Haftar served in Libyan army under Gaddafi rule. He was captured in 1987 during the war between Libya and Chad by the Chadian armed forces. As a result, Gaddafi disowned him. Haftar started working for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In 1990, he was granted asylum in the USA. He lived in Virginia until he returned to Libya in 2011.<sup>15</sup> The militia fighters captured Tripoli in 2013 and pressured the General National Congress (GNC) to pass a law, which blocks the appointment of former Gaddafi officials to the posts of the new regime.<sup>16</sup> This resolution clearly aimed at preventing the rise of Haftar. In May 2014, Haftar launched Operation Dignity, officially depicted to eliminate Islamist militias. The groups affiliated with Operation Dignity captured Tripoli and dissolved the GNC. As a reaction to this loss, Misratan militias formed Dawn coalition. They managed to recapture Tripoli and seated remains of the GNC to the power.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently, Libya was divided into two rival governments. The Operation Dawn controlled Tripoli and western Libya whereas the Operation

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<sup>11</sup> Marcel Dirsus and Tim Eaton, *Instability in Libya: Assessing the Regional Impacts* (NATO Allied Command Transformation, 2019), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Jason Pack, *It's the Economy Stupid: How Libya's Civil War Is Rooted in Its Economic Structures* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2019), 8.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan M. Winer, *Origins of the Libyan Conflict and Options for Its Resolution* (Washington D.C.: The Middle East Institute, 2019), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Daveed Gartenstein-Ross and Nathaniel Barr, *Dignity and Dawn: Libya's Escalating Civil War* (Hague: ICCT Research Paper, 2015), 7.

<sup>15</sup> Grzegorz Kuczynsky, *Civil War in Libya Russian Policy and Its Goals* (Warsaw: Warsaw Institute, 2019), 12.

<sup>16</sup> Gartenstein-Ross and Barr, *Dignity and Dawn: Libya's Escalating Civil War*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Mikael Eriksson, "A Fratricidal Libya: Making Sense of a Conflict Complex", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 27/5 (2016): 822.

Dignity controlled Cyrenaica, comprised of Beida and Tobruk, and the parts of Benghazi. Yet, this division was not precise. Some militias declared their loyalty to the Operation Dignity while some militias from the east were with the Operation Dawn. Although Islamist militias were closely affiliated with the Operation Dawn, both groups employed Islamist and non-Islamist militias.<sup>18</sup> After overthrowing Gaddafi, the United Kingdom (UK), France, Italy, and the USA did very little to ameliorate the situation in Libya, besides offering a broad list of recommendations. The regional powers, on the other hand, focused on developing clients in Libya. Qatar and Turkey favored the Operation Dawn while Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan supported the Operation Dignity, furthering the division between two governments.<sup>19</sup>

This de-facto partition of Libya contributed to the proliferation of the jihadist activities. Ansar al-Sharia, which involved in the attack against the US embassy in Libya in September 2012, was one of the largest armed groups, operating there. As the imposition of Sharia created resentment and discontent among the population, Ansar al-Sharia was expelled from Benghazi and dissolved into small armed groups. The launch of the Operation Dignity by Haftar, however, refueled and revitalized the group since Haftar indiscriminately attacked all Islamist, labelling them as terrorists.<sup>20</sup> Then, the large segment of Ansar al-Sharia pledged allegiance the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL).<sup>21</sup> The spread of ISIL to Libya was a reflection of Libya's deteriorating security situation. Indeed, the fragmented political scape and abundance of armed militias attracted ISIL. ISIL leader Abu Bakr al-Hakim explained ISIL's interest to Libya: "*Libya was next to us and weapons were widespread there. So we went to Libya and established a training camp. We would train brothers there and at the same time we would work to smuggle weapons into Tunisia.*"<sup>22</sup> Initially, the ISIL set up bases in Benghazi and Derna in 2014 and spread to Sirte and Tripoli. In 2015, it declared the establishment of three provinces of the caliphate: in the east Wilayat al-Barkah, in the west Wilayat al-Trablus, and in the south Wilayat al-Fizan.<sup>23</sup>

The presence of ISIL was alarming for both North African countries and European countries. As al-Hakim suggested, Libya started to be used as a base

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<sup>18</sup> Daniel P. Serwer, *Libya's Escalating Civil War* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2015), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Winer, *Origins of the Libyan Conflict and Options for Its Resolution*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Nicola Pedde, "The Libyan Conflict and Its Controversial Roots", *European View*, 16 (2017): 98.

<sup>21</sup> Eriksson, "A Fratricidal Libya", 826.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron Y. Zelin, *The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya* (Washington D.C.: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2018), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Eriksson, "A Fratricidal Libya", 826.



for ISIL to spread the violence to North Africa and Europe. In a video message broadcasted in 2015, ISIL leadership urged Tunisians to go to Libya to be trained.<sup>24</sup> In February 2015, 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians were kidnapped and beheaded.<sup>25</sup> The attacks in Germany in December 2016, and in the UK in May 2017 were carried out by the militants affiliated with ISIL in Libya.<sup>26</sup>

Besides terrorism, Libya has evolved into a transit country for international migration. Migrant smuggling became the most profitable source of revenue for the militias. The lack of governmental authority enabled the militias to smuggle people from sub-Sahara and North Africa without hindrance.<sup>27</sup> In 2016, 363,348 migrants arrived at Europe by sea, 181,436 arrived at Italy. 90 percent of migrants were from Libya.<sup>28</sup>

The rise of ISIL and increasing migration prompted the international community to provide stability. The most important object was to provide political stability in Libya. In December 2015, the UN brought representatives from rival governments and brokered a deal based on respecting democratic principles, independent judiciary, human rights, and separation of powers. In February 2016, the Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj, was nominated by Libya's Presidential Council and backed by the UN.<sup>29</sup>

The appointment of the UN backed national unity government was far from uniting Libya. The Shikrat agreement, which set up the GNA government states that: "The term of the Government of National Accord shall be one year as of the date of granting it a vote of confidence by the House of Representatives."<sup>30</sup> Thus, its validity depends on the consent of The House of Representative (HoR) based in Tobruk. Khalifa Haftar, who is the leader of armed forces of Tobruk declared that the UN backed GNA does not have any

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<sup>24</sup> Zelin, *The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> "ISIL Video Shows Christian Egyptians Beheaded in Libya," Accessed: 04.04.2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2015/02/isil-video-execution-egyptian-christian-hostages-libya-150215193050277.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Zelin, *The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya*, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Tuesday Reitano and Mark Shaw, *The Politics of Power, Protection, Identity and Illicit Trade* (New York: United Nations University Centre for Policy Research, 2017), 8.

<sup>28</sup> *Migration Crisis Operational Framework (MCOF)* (Tripoli: The International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017), 23.

<sup>29</sup> "Political Developments in Libya and Prospects of Stability," Accessed: 19.04.2020, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/603959/EPRS\\_BRI\(2017\)603959\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/603959/EPRS_BRI(2017)603959_EN.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> "Libyan Political Agreement," Accessed: 19.04.2020, [https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Libyan Political Agreement - ENG .pdf](https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/Libyan%20Political%20Agreement%20-%20ENG.pdf).

legitimacy, arguing that its term expired.<sup>31</sup> Finally, Haftar started an offensive to capture Tripoli and end the GNA in April 2019. The start of this attack was also chosen carefully. The offensive started when the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres visited Libya.<sup>32</sup> This shows Haftar's disregard of the UN as well as the UN's lack of weight in backing the internationally recognized government. Thus, the new phase of the civil war in Libya, in which Russia also taken a stance, has started.

### **Russia's Participation in the Libyan Conflict**

To analyze Russian involvement in the Libyan conflict, the summary of the general framework of the Russian policy toward the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) must be examined. The relations with the MENA countries and the Soviet Union were characterized in the context of the Cold War. The MENA countries used the Soviet option to strengthen their stance in their negotiations with the Western countries whereas the Soviet Union wanted to promote its ideological and material influence over these countries. Moreover, the MENA region became important market for the Soviet weapons' export.<sup>33</sup> Aswan Dam in Egypt, several industrial complexes in Syria, metallurgy plants in Algeria, sea ports in Yemen, and various industrial plants in Libya and Tunisia demonstrate the Soviet Union's economic and political impact over these countries.<sup>34</sup>

The Russian Federation, the successor of the Soviet Union, did not continue this legacy in 1990s. In 1994, Arab countries accounted for 1% of Russian exports, %1.5 of its imports. The total volume of commercial activities fell to 0.9% in 1994. Between 1980-1993 only Russian weapon export amounted \$55 billion to the MENA countries, \$24 billion fell to Iraq, \$11 billion fell to Syria, and \$7 billion to Libya.<sup>35</sup>

The tenure of Yevgeni Primakov as the foreign minister in 1997 and 1998, however, propelled Russia to pursue more active policy in the MENA. He put forward a doctrine that assumes a world consisting of several poles. Despite

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<sup>31</sup> "Q&A: What's Happening in Libya?," Accessed 19.04.2020,

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/qa-happening-libya-171220114305008.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Matteo Capasso et al., *Libya Country Report* (Berlin: Europe's External Action and the Duel Challenges of Limited Statehood and Contested Orders (EU-LISTCO, 2020), 25.

<sup>33</sup> Laszlo Poti, *Russian Policies Toward the MENA Region* (Barcelona: MENARA, 2018), 4.

<sup>34</sup> Vladilen Gusarov, *Arabskiye Strany Zapadnoy Azii i Severnoy Afriki* (Moscow: Institut Izucheniya Izrailiya i Blizhnego Vostoka, 1997), 20.

<sup>35</sup> Gusarov, *Arabskiye Strany Zapadnoy Azii i Severnoy Afriki*, 20.

its dominant status, he argues against American polarity.<sup>36</sup> He endeavored to delay US military action in Iraq, sent his special envoys to the MENA countries, tried to restore old Syrian-Russia friendship. Russia's lack of material power at that time, however, prevented Russia from enhancing its status in the region.<sup>37</sup> Yet, the general tenets of the Russian foreign policy reflect Primakov's vision of multipolarity of the world politics. In the Foreign Policy Concept document, which reflects the Russian foreign policy goals and objectives, the multipolar character of the world politics is emphasized. It also mentions the decline of the Western powers, underlining the emergence of new power centers.<sup>38</sup> Russia strives to be one of the new power centers. Thus, one of the aspects of Russia's Middle East is its relations with the Western countries. Especially, Putin's second term, Russia's relations with the West turned into a confrontation. In his speech at Munich Conference in 2007, he emphasized the negative consequences of US unilateral interventions and Western economic system: *"The increasing social tension in depressed regions inevitably results in the growth of radicalism, extremism, feeds terrorism and local conflicts. And if all this happens in, shall we say, a region such as the Middle East where there is increasingly the sense that the world at large is unfair, then there is the risk of global destabilisation."*<sup>39</sup>

Despite US victory of the Cold War, Putin and Primakov thought Russia can balance the USA in the Middle East. Anna Borshchevskaya argues that an integral part of Putin's policies in the Middle East is anti-Americanism.<sup>40</sup> Restraining US influence over the MENA is, thus, one of the elements of the Russian strategy.

Vladimir Putin's presidency witnessed rising economic and political interests in the MENA region after the economic development due to increased oil prices. The characteristics of Russian policy in MENA during Putin rule are "pragmatism, a non-ideological approach to partners and

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<sup>36</sup> Ariel Cohen, *The 'Primakov Doctrine': Russia's Zero-Sum Game with the United States* (Washington D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1997), 3.

<sup>37</sup> Odad Eran, "Russia in the Middle East: The Yeltsin Era and Beyond", in *Russia Between East and West Russian Foreign Policy on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century* (London and Portland: Frank Cass, 2003), 164–65.

<sup>38</sup> "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," Accessed: 05.06. 2017, [http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign\\_policy/official\\_documents/-/asset\\_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/2542248](http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/2542248).

<sup>39</sup> "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," Accessed: 14.04.2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

<sup>40</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Foundations of Russian Policy in the Middle East", in *Russia in the Middle East*, ed. by Theodore Karasik and Stephen Blank (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 31.

interlocutors and selective opportunism.”<sup>41</sup> The non-ideological approach enables Russia to partner with all state and non-state actors in the Middle East. For instance, Russia established friendly ties with both Israel and Iran. Nevertheless, this approach is limited as it created some contradictory policies. For instance, due to pressure of Israel, Russia reportedly cancelled its sale of the S-300 missiles to Iran.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, Russia’s balancing position in the Middle East has its own limits.

Besides trying to balance the USA, in the MENA Russia seeks to contain Islamic radicalism, establish military bases, protect its friends, expand Russia’s reach on the countries’ energy, arms, and other sectors. Thus, the principal goals of Russia are geopolitical.<sup>43</sup> To realize these goals, Putin toured MENA countries, declaring that establishing relations with MENA countries was one of the main priorities of Russia.<sup>44</sup> He forgave the debts of MENA countries and made arms deals on credit.<sup>45</sup>

The engagement with Gaddafi’s Libya was a good demonstration of Russia’s re-engagement efforts in the region. In 2008, Vladimir Putin visited Libya officially. In this official visit, he forgave Libya’s debt worth of billion dollars in exchange of signing several economic, technical, and political agreements.<sup>46</sup> In 2010, Russia and Libya signed arms deal worth of \$1.8 billion.<sup>47</sup> Russia also sought to enter into Libyan gas market by collaborating with Italian gas company ENI.<sup>48</sup>

The protests that led to overthrowing of the prolonged dictatorships in the MENA region initially led to contradictory policies for Russia. The Libyan case was an example of Russia’s confounding response. Russia supported limited international sanctions on Muammar Gaddafi when he started to use violence against the protesters.<sup>49</sup> The President Dmitri Medvedev supported the UN Resolution 1970, promulgated on 23 February 2010. He issued an

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<sup>41</sup> Ekaterina Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya, the East-West Dimension and the Role of the OSCE", in *The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges*, ed. by Andrea Dessi and Ettore Greco (Rome: Nuova Cultura, 2018), 89.

<sup>42</sup> James Sladden et al. *Russian Strategy in the Middle East* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2017), 6.

<sup>43</sup> Dmitri Trenin, *Russia in the Middle East: Moscow's Objectives, Priorities, and Policy Drivers* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2016), 1.

<sup>44</sup> Nikolay Kozhanov, *Russian Policy Across the Middle East Motivations and Methods* (London: Chatham House, 2018), 4.

<sup>45</sup> Blank, "The Foundations of Russian Policy in the Middle East", 33.

<sup>46</sup> Poti, *Russian Policies Toward the MENA Region*, 5.

<sup>47</sup> Bukola A. Oyeniyi, *The History of Libya* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2019), xxix.

<sup>48</sup> Blank, "The Foundations of Russian Policy in the Middle East", 33.

<sup>49</sup> Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya", 91.

executive order, which prohibited arms export to Libya. It also prohibits training service to Libyan personnel, technical and financial assistance, and the recruitment of Russian mercenaries.<sup>50</sup> While participating sanctions against Gaddafi regime, Russia opposed military intervention, warning that an intervention could lead to a large scale conflict.<sup>51</sup> However, as a permanent member of the United Security Council, Russia did not use its veto power on the Resolution 1973, which assumed taking all necessary measures to stop Gaddafi on 17 March 2011.<sup>52</sup> Russian diplomats argued that the Western powers abused the Resolution to overthrow Gaddafi.<sup>53</sup> It is unlikely that the Russian diplomats failed to see the consequences of the Resolution. At that time, Gaddafi must have been seen as a lost cause by the Russian officials so Russia also participated in the process which led to his demise, considering that in post-Gaddafi Libya it may benefit from the political and economic situation.

Yet, Russia suffered economic losses. Russia's total economic loss approximated \$10 billion. \$1.4 billion arms export deal signed with Gaddafi was cancelled. Another planned sale of helicopters to Libya, which valued \$1 billion failed after Gaddafi's fall. Due to disruption of supplies, the head of the Russian Technologies State Corporation Sergey Chemezov estimated the loss of Russia in Libya amounted to \$4 billion. Another lost project was \$2.2 billion railway deal made in 2006 between Putin and Gaddafi. Furthermore, the total loss of Gazprom's operations was estimated as \$361 million. The project of building a large energy and metallurgical complex was also endangered due to the civil war.<sup>54</sup>

Russia's disillusionment in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi had consequences in its Syrian policy, prompting Russia to adopt a tougher stance in protecting Bashar al-Assad. It prevented the UN from promulgating a resolution similar to Libyan case by using its veto powers several times. Stepanova argues that if Libyan precedence had not existed, Russia would have taken a softer approach concerning implementing sanctions to Assad regime.<sup>55</sup> The response of Russia in Syria and Libya demonstrates Russia's

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<sup>50</sup> "Executive Order on Sanctions against Libya," Accessed 24.04.2020, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/10558#sel=1:4:HRk,1:45:nyn>.

<sup>51</sup> Andrea Beccaro, "Russia: Looking for a Warm Sea", in *Foreign Actors in Libya's Crisis* (Milano: Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2017), 74.

<sup>52</sup> Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya", 91.

<sup>53</sup> Kozhanov, *Russian Policy Across the Middle East Motivations and Methods*, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Sergey Voznesensky, "Poteri Rossii Iz-Za Revolyutsii v Livii," Accessed 20.04.2020, <https://topwar.ru/5312-poteri-rossii-iz-za-revolyuicii-v-livii.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya", 93.

reactive stance concerning the developments in the MENA region. Russia's moves in the Middle East are responses to the challenges that it faces rather than active steps to shape the political and economic developments in the MENA region.<sup>56</sup>

After the fall of Gaddafi, Russia tried to position itself according to changing political landscape of Libya. U.S. disengagement from the region helped Russia to extend its influence. Yet, its role in Libya remained limited until Haftar declared war against Tripoli based government in 2015. It supported the implementation of the Shikrat Agreement which set up the GNA formally, but it also supported Haftar's initiatives of seizing power for himself in Libya. The main supporters of Haftar were, however, the UAE and Egypt. Haftar also enjoyed tacit encouragement of France. The main factor, which enabled Haftar to receive these powers' support was his declared fight against Islamist radicalism.<sup>57</sup> Haftar's self-declared mission to annihilate Islamist terror provides its backers a legitimate cause to justify his actions. Haftar's attempts to seize power, thus, were presented as counterterrorism moves. Haftar's war against Islamist terrorism is also compatible with the Russian policy of fighting with Islamist terror in Russia and abroad. However, Haftar's achievements against Islamist terror were not illustrious. Despite Haftar's assertion of fighting with Islamists, ISIL was driven out by Misratan militias, to whom Haftar considers Islamist terrorists.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, since 2015, Russia's diplomatic engagement with Haftar intensified. Haftar met with the Russian ministers several times. It was alleged that Russia and the LNA signed 2 billion arms deal in exchange of allowing Russia to establish a military facility in Cyrenaica.<sup>59</sup> Beccaro also argues that Russia's growing interest to Libya should be understood in the framework of the traditional Russian foreign goal to reach warm ports.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, Stepanova contends that while explaining Russian involvement in Libya, claims such as establishing arms deals in Gaddafi rule or building a naval base are exaggerations.<sup>61</sup> Russia's diplomatic engagements with Tripoli based GNA demonstrate that the latter claim is more plausible. Russia did not cut its diplomatic ties with the GNA. The Defense Minister of Libya met with the

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<sup>56</sup> Kozhanov, *Russian Policy Across the Middle East Motivations and Methods*, 6.

<sup>57</sup> Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya", 94.

<sup>58</sup> Mohammed Lagha, "Libya Declares "Liberation" of Sirte from Islamic State," Accessed 24.04.2020, <https://www.dpa-international.com/topic/libya-declares-liberation-sirte-islamic-state-urn%3Anewsml%3Adpa.com%3A20090101%3A161218-99-579485>.

<sup>59</sup> Kuczynsky, *Civil War in Libya Russian Policy and Its Goals*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Beccaro, "Russia: Looking for a Warm Sea", 75.

<sup>61</sup> Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya", 95.

Russian Ambassador to Libya, Ivan Molotkov in 2016 to discuss a possible military cooperation. The Prime Minister al-Sarraj made an official visit to Moscow in 2017.<sup>62</sup> Russia even established contacts with Misratan militias. As they liberated Sirte from ISIL, their profile increased in the eyes of Moscow. A Misrata delegation visited Moscow.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Russia tries to build relationships with all groups in Libya despite the fact that its main actor remained Haftar.

Russia's diplomatic moves in Libya show that Russia wants to be in the negotiation table while structuring Libya's political future. Haftar's presence allows Russia to gain a seat. Ramani comments that Russia did not believe that Haftar could control the whole Libya, but his offensive helps Russia to bolster its status in diplomatic negotiations. In the best possible outcome, Russia hopes to gain Gaddafi-era privileges in the area that Haftar controls.<sup>64</sup> Although its support does not reach to the level of the support it shows to Assad in the civil war in Syria, Russia's favor in the Libyan conflict tilted towards Haftar.

For Haftar's latest offensive to capture Tripoli, which started in April 2019, Russia provided mercenaries through private military group Wagner. Wagner is a private military company, owned by Yevgeni Prigozhin, who relates to Vladimir Putin. It is headed by former GRU general Dmitri Utkin. It conducted operations firstly during the civil war in Ukraine and then the one in Syria.<sup>65</sup> Wagner has also actively been participating in the civil war in Libya. The correspondence with Prigozhin reports that a Russian Armed Forces group, headed by former Lieutenant General Andrei Kholzakov is operating in Libya. In this report, Haftar asks Kholzakov to provide the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) for the detection of the armed forces.<sup>66</sup> In November 2019, Sergei Rybakov denied the reports which indicate Russia's involvement. Moreover, Prigozhin denies his links to the Wagner group.<sup>67</sup> However, the UN report accessed by several news agencies on May 6, 2020, stated that

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<sup>62</sup> Kuczynsky, *Civil War in Libya Russian Policy and Its Goals*, 16.

<sup>63</sup> Stepanova, "Russia's Approach to the Conflict in Libya", 102.

<sup>64</sup> Samuel Ramani, "Russia's Strategy in Libya," Accessed: 03.05.2020, <https://rusi.org/commentary/russias-strategy-libya>.

<sup>65</sup> Sergey Sukhankin, "'Continuing War by Other Means': The Case of Wagner, Russia's Premier Private Military Company in the Middle East", in *Russia in the Middle East* (Washington D.C.: The Jamestown Foundation, 2018), 300.

<sup>66</sup> Roman Badadin et al, "Shef i Povar. Chast' Chetvertaya. Rassledovaniye o Tom, Kak Rossiya Uchastvuyet v Grazhdanskoy Voyne v Livii", Accessed: 04.05.2020, <https://www.proekt.media/investigation/prigozhin-libya/>.

<sup>67</sup> "Russia Denies Sending Mercenaries to Libya", Accessed 03.05.2020, <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/russia-denies-sending-mercenaries-to-libya.748143>.

Wagner has 800-1200 military contractors operating in Libya.<sup>68</sup> Besides Haftar, Wagner established contacts with Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of the fallen dictator. Saif al-Islam Gaddafi met with Wagner employees in Libya in early 2019. A report shows that a private television channel broadcasting in Egypt, started to be funded by Wagner to support Saif al-Islam. Wagner also created 12 Facebook groups to promote Saif al-Islam.<sup>69</sup> It is reported on *Bloomberg* that Saif al-Islam is a rival for Haftar. He plans to collect militias who is currently siding with Haftar, should Haftar succeeds to capture Tripoli or not. Thus, he and the Russian representatives revived relations through Wagner. Two Russian officials were arrested by the GNA in Tripoli for the charge of interfering elections for the benefit of Saif al-Islam and espionage.<sup>70</sup>

The Russian maneuvers in Libya, therefore, indicate the signs of confusion instead of the signs of a great strategic plan. Although Primakov Doctrine guided Russia to a more active policy in the MENA, Russia encountered many obstacles in the implementation. Even in Syria, where Russian achievements are the most conspicuous to detect, Russia has tried to preserve its gains inherited from the Soviet Union. This endeavor was only accomplished by the participation of Iran and Hezbollah. Syria, almost destroyed by the ongoing civil war, needed \$250 billion, which corresponds four times of Syria's GDP in 2010. Russia even continues to sell weapons to Assad, and there is a question that how Assad will pay them.<sup>71</sup> In Libya, Russia's interests are also damaged by the Arab Spring. Being sidelined after the fall of Gaddafi, Russia tried to gain leverage in a turmoil that Libya experiences. Russia keeps its ties with the GNA, while maintaining its support to Haftar. However, this balancing has its limits. The report of mercenaries fighting on the side of Haftar caused the Interior Minister of the GNA to condemn Moscow's moves. In November 2019, he said in an interview to *Bloomberg*: "*The Russians have intervened to pour fuel on the fire and enhance the crisis rather than finding a*

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<sup>68</sup> "UN Monitors Say Mercenaries From Russia's Wagner Group Fighting In Libya," Accessed: 09.05.2020, <https://www.rferl.org/a/wagner-un-russia-libya/30598355.html>.

<sup>69</sup> Badadin et al., "Shef i Povar. Chast' Chetvertaya. Rassledovaniye o Tom, Kak Rossiya Uchastvuyet v Grazhdanskoy Voynе v Livii", 2019.

<sup>70</sup> Samer Al-Atrush, "How a Russian Plan to Restore Qaddafi's Regime Backfired," Accessed: 06.05.2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-03-20/how-a-russian-plan-to-restore-qaddafi-s-libyan-regime-backfired>.

<sup>71</sup> Rajan Menon, "Don't Believe the Hype. Russia Is Losing in the Middle East—and Around the World," Accessed 29.11.2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/11/18/vladimir-putin-russia-losing-power-middle-east-central-asia-africa-eastern-europe/>.



solution."<sup>72</sup> Despite its backing, Russia seems not to trust Haftar completely. His background as a former CIA agent or his advanced age might be the reasons of the distrust. Therefore, Russia also placed a bet on Saif al-Islam Gaddafi recently. All these developments show confusion about following the right course of policy in Libya. Another factor which complicates Russia's course in Libya is Turkey's recent interference. Turkey's active participation into the civil war in Libya on the side of the GNA compromised Haftar's territorial gains against the GNA.

### **Turkish Involvement in the Libyan Conflict**

In Libya, Turkey acted according to the changing geopolitical environment. Turkey had close economic relations with Gaddafi regime. By the end of 2010, 200 Turkish firms participated in infrastructure developments in Libya. Their investments totaled approximately \$200 billion.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, initially, Turkey opposed NATO intervention, which aims to topple Gaddafi. The Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan opposed the intervention in Libya when the allegations of NATO intervention emerged.<sup>74</sup> However, when Turkey saw that the regime change was imminent, it changed its policy. Subsequently, the intervention was commanded in NATO's İzmir base, located in Turkey's Western Anatolia.<sup>75</sup>

Turkey engaged in political process in Libya after the NATO intervention. Its priorities were territorial integrity of Libya, the principle of the Libyan people's rights of using natural Libya's natural resources, and indivisibility of Libya's natural resources.<sup>76</sup> After the start of the civil war in 2014, Turkey with Qatar supported the Operation Dawn forces whereas Egypt and the UAE backed the Operation Dignity led by Haftar. Thus, the civil war in Libya evolved into a proxy war between these forces.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Samer Al-Atrush, "Libya Urges U.S. to Help End Conflict as Russian Role Grows," Accessed 04.05.2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-11-09/tripoli-urges-u-s-to-help-end-war-as-russian-role-grows>.

<sup>73</sup> "Türkiye ve Libya Ekonomik-Ticari İliřkiler Bilgi Notu," Accessed 05.05.2020, <http://trabulus.be.mfa.gov.tr/Mission/ShowInfoNote/157183>.

<sup>74</sup> "'NATO'nun Libya'da Ne İři Var,'" Accessed 08.05.2020, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/natonun-libyada-ne-isi-var,6VO1xU5PmkGhAGJtyRD3qA>.

<sup>75</sup> "Komuta NATO'da, Hava Üssü İzmir'de," Accessed 07.05.2020, <https://www.cnnturk.com/2011/dunya/03/25/komuta.natoda.hava.ussu.izmirde/611062.0/index.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Tankut Öztaş and Ferhat Polat, *Turkey - Libya Relations: Economic and Strategic Imperatives* (İstanbul: TrtWorld Research Center, 2020), 16.

<sup>77</sup> Gartenstein-Ross and Barr, *Dignity and Dawn: Libya's Escalating Civil War*, 8.

This proxy war in Libya should be evaluated in the context of the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics which is changed by the discovery of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. According to data of U.S. Geological Survey, the Levant basin contains 122 trillion cubic feet recoverable natural gas resources.<sup>78</sup> The conflict in the distribution of the natural gas and the transportation to the consumers are the main challenges which prevented the complete utilization of the proven gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Eastern Mediterranean includes the conflict areas such as the division in Cyprus, the civil war in Syria, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The competition over resource allocation intensified these existed conflicts because "competition over the rights to tap those resources is compounding existing tensions over sovereignty and maritime borders."<sup>79</sup> For Turkey, the rights of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) are indispensable. Therefore, it contested unilateral licensing and delimitating gas resources around the island of Cyprus. Turkey made its own agreement with the TRNC in 2011. The Greek Cypriot Administration, on the other hand, developed bilateral agreements with Israel, Egypt, and Lebanon.<sup>80</sup> This trilateral alliance held several summits in which they planned to develop East-Med project, which is supposed to transport gas to Europe through Egypt, Israel, Cyprus, and Greece, aiming to reduce Europe's dependency on Russia.<sup>81</sup> In January 2019, Israel, Greece, the Greek Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority founded the Eastern Mediterranean Forum for coordination of energy policies and establishing a common energy market among the participant countries.<sup>82</sup> This forum was elevated into regional cooperation institution. The energy ministers of the participant countries are working to promulgate a constitution of this institution for a better and closer coordination.<sup>83</sup> The establishment of these regional alliances indicates that

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<sup>78</sup> "Natural Gas Potential Assessed in Eastern Mediterranean," Accessed 19.11.2019, <https://archive.usgs.gov/archive/sites/www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp-ID=2435.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Y. M. Zhukov, "Trouble in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea: The Coming Dash for Gas," Accessed 04.05. 2020, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/cyprus/2013-03-%0A20/trouble-eastern-mediterranean-sea>.

<sup>80</sup> Enes Güzel, *Turkey and the Energy Equation of the Eastern Mediterranean* (İstanbul: TrtWorld Research Center, 2019), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Janiki Cingoli, *The New Energy Resources in the Centre- East Mediterranean: Potential Current and Future Geo-Strategic Consequences* (Rome: Istituto Affari Internazionali, 2016), 4.

<sup>82</sup> Nael M. Shama, "Gas and Conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean," Accessed: 05.05.2020, <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/gas-and-conflict-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/>.

<sup>83</sup> "East Mediterranean Gas Forum Transformed into a Regional Organization," Accessed: 03.05.2020, [http://www.energy-sea.gov.il/English-Site/Lobby/Articles/Pages/East Mediterranean Gas Forum transformed into a regional organization.aspx](http://www.energy-sea.gov.il/English-Site/Lobby/Articles/Pages/East%20Mediterranean%20Gas%20Forum%20transformed%20into%20a%20regional%20organization.aspx)

Turkey is being sidelined from the process of the development of the Eastern Mediterranean energy resources.

Being isolated in the Eastern Mediterranean, the GNA, despite its disadvantageous position in the civil war, remained the only ally for Turkey. For the GNA, being deprived of the support of the Western countries, Turkey is a viable patron to combat with Haftar's forces, supported by Egypt and the UAE, as Turkey's competitors in the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, Turkey's support to the GNA became more assertive. President Erdoğan confirmed Turkey's military support to the GNA in a press conference, stating that "Turkey would mobilise all available resources to disappoint those who want to turn Libya into a new Syria."<sup>84</sup> In November 2019, Turkey and Libya signed a military deal. This deal was ratified in December 2019. According to this agreement, Turkey could deploy troops in Libya when the GNA requested.<sup>85</sup>

Along with the military deal, Turkey also signed a maritime deal with the GNA for delimitation of maritime borders. This deal sets up 18.6 miles of a continental shelf between Turkey and Libya.<sup>86</sup> It enables Turkey to assert its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitics.

Map 1: Maritime borders according to Turkey-Libya Maritime Agreement



Source: <https://investigativejournal.org/erdogans-libyan-adventure-turkey-russia-gas-pipelines-and-missiles/>. Accessed: 07.05.2020

<sup>84</sup> Öztaş and Polat, *Turkey - Libya Relations: Economic and Strategic Imperatives*, 27.

<sup>85</sup> "Turkey's Parliament Ratifies Security Accord with Libya: Report," Accessed 05.05.2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-military/turkeys-parliament-ratifies-security-accord-with-libya-report-idUSKBN1YP0DA>.

<sup>86</sup> Ali Bakeer, "Turkish-Libyan Alliance in Eastern Mediterranean: A Game Changer?," Accessed 06.05.2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/12/10/turkish-libyan-alliance-in-eastern-mediterranean-a-game-changer>

Turkey-Libya deal overturns the efforts of Egypt, Greece, and Israel to isolate Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. It blocks the attempts of isolating and disregarding Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean because through this maritime deal any gas discovered and drilled cannot be transported to Europe without considering Turkey's interests. As anticipated, Greece and Egypt raised their objections. Haftar also promised to tear up the deal.<sup>87</sup> The GNA's survival has, therefore, become very critical for Turkey's rights over the sources of the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey needs to protect the GNA at any cost. Thus, it stepped up its involvement in the civil war in Libya.

To prevent the fall of Tripoli, Turkey has increased its armed support to the GNA. It deployed drones, armored vehicles, and rockets. It sent technicians to operate these vehicles and train the Libyans. It installed air defense systems at Tripoli airport. Two Turkish warships started to provide cover for the GNA forces.<sup>88</sup> It is also alleged that Turkey is sending Syrian militants to Libya.<sup>89</sup> So far Turkey has succeeded in protecting the GNA in Libya as a political actor despite Haftar's persistent attempts to capture Tripoli. However, despite this intense intervention, Haftar also remained as another power center in Libya. Thus, Libya continues to be divided into two blocks: The GNA backed by Turkey and the LNA supported by Egypt, the UAE, and Russia.

### **The Diplomatic Overtures of Russia and Turkey**

Besides Syria, Libya is another area where the uncomfortable relationship between Russia and Turkey is being tested. The President Erdoğan directly pointed out Russia's involvement, accusing its activities: "*Russia is there with 2,000 Wagner (fighters). Is the official government inviting them? No.*"<sup>90</sup> However, displeased with Russia's actions, Russia is the only country that Turkey may tempt to lessen its support to Haftar as Russia's stakes in losing Libya are not bigger than Egypt or the UAE. Egypt offers support Haftar to sideline Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean whereas The UAE and Turkey had remained at

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<sup>87</sup> Nikoletta Kritikou, "Haftar 'agrees' to Tear up Libya-Turkey Maritime Deal: Greece," Accessed 06.05.2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/01/17/libya-s-haftar-holds-talks-in-athens-ahead-of-berlin-summit>.

<sup>88</sup> *Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters* (Brussels: International Crisis Group,2020), 23.

<sup>89</sup> Anchal Vohra, "It's Syrian vs. Syrian in Libya," Accessed: 05.05.2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/05/libya-civil-conflict-syrian-mercenaries-turkey-russia-gna-haftar/>.

<sup>90</sup> Ahmet S. Yayla, "Erdogan's Libyan Adventure: Turkey, Russia, Gas Pipelines and Missiles," Accessed: 07.05.2020, <https://investigativejournal.org/erdogans-libyan-adventure-turkey-russia-gas-pipelines-and-missiles/>.

odds since the Arab Spring. Turkey have become a safe haven for the Muslim Brotherhood members, considered as terrorists by both countries. The UAE provides money support to YPG, a group in the Northern Syria designated as a terrorist group by Turkey.<sup>91</sup> This shows a widening chasm between two sides. Furthermore, Egypt considers its long 1,100 km border with Libya as a vulnerability. Haftar, who has an anti-Jihadist and anti-Muslim brotherhood stance, has become a natural ally for Egypt.<sup>92</sup> The recent successes of the GNA with the military assistance of Turkey prompted Egypt to take a more active position. The President Sisi warns of a military action if the GNA attacks Sirte.<sup>93</sup> The UAE, on the other hand, provided Haftar with military aircrafts and carriers. It built facilities, which are capable of hosting advanced jets. It also elevates Haftar's image by creating television stations and websites.<sup>94</sup> These countries' strong anti-Turkish and anti-Muslim brotherhood stance in the Eastern Mediterranean requires them to perpetuate their support to Haftar.

Russia, on the other hand, proved itself as a flexible player in Libya. It preserved its various contacts with different actors of the civil war. A political settlement in which Russia's interests are protected would relieve Russia from extending its already burdened resources to Libya. In January 2020, the President Erdoğan and the President Putin issued a ceasefire statement, which calls all parties to stop military engagements and search for political solution.<sup>95</sup> This ceasefire call can be seen as a repetition of these two countries' arrangements in the civil war in Syria. In Syria, especially, in the western part of country, Russia and Turkey claimed sphere of influences to ameliorate the conflict between Assad forces and opposition forces. However, their influence in manipulating the conflict in Libya is smaller. In a meeting the seven-point agreement was only signed by al-Sarraj. Haftar refused to sign it. At another conference in Berlin, only through the pressure of Egypt, Haftar agreed to participate UN mediated talks. In February, the parties failed to reach an agreement. Haftar insisted on the surrender of Tripoli, the withdrawal of Turkish forces, and handover of key military bases. The GNA demanded the

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<sup>91</sup> Birol Baskan, "Turkey and the UAE: A Strange Crisis," Accessed: 07.05.2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-and-uae-strange-crisis>.

<sup>92</sup> Dirus and Eaton, *Instability in Libya*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> "Egypt's Sisi Says Turkey/Qatar-Backed Assault on Libya's Sirte Is "Red Line"", Accessed: 24.06.2020, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2020/06/21/egypt-sisi-libya-turkey-sirte/>

<sup>94</sup> Tarek Megerisi, *Libya's Global Civil War* (London: European Council of Foreign Relations, 2019), 7.

<sup>95</sup> *Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters*, 14.

withdrawal of Haftar's forces.<sup>96</sup> This process shows Russia's limits in controlling Haftar. Although Russia supplies mercenaries to Haftar, Haftar's main patrons are Egypt and the UAE, which have more influence over Haftar's actions in continuing his offensive.

Yet, Turkey and Russia's interests could coincide although they support different sides in Libya. Turkey has bet on the survival of the GNA for its geopolitical goals since its involvement in the gas deals of the Eastern Mediterranean very much depends of the validity of the maritime deal made with the GNA. Therefore, it tries to prevent the fall of the GNA at any cost. Russia, on the other hand, could be satisfied by being included in arms and construction deals through lucrative contracts, which could be provided by the GNA. Turkey's influence over the GNA might help Russia to acquire these concessions so that Russia might compensate some part of its losses in Libya after the fall of Gaddafi.

Hence, Russia and Turkey sought to establish themselves as peace brokering parties in Libya. The announcements of the Presidents Erdoğan and Putin demonstrate that they also wanted to divide Libya into the sphere of influence as they come together to manage the conflict in Syria. However, so far, their influence in finding a political solution in Libya have been more limited than their peace brokering role in Syria. The relative success of Astana deal in Syria is unlikely to repeat in Libya as the conflicting interests of Turkey and Egypt and the UAE over the Eastern Mediterranean are mingled in the Libyan civil war. Russia and Turkey cannot exclude other countries in bringing a lasting political solution to the country no matter how direct or indirect their interests are.

### **Conclusion**

The ouster of dictator Gaddafi did not bring stability to Libya. It became a fighting ground for several tribes, militias, terrorists, and armed groups. The USA and the Western countries, which initiated the attack on Gaddafi's regime have done little after his fall, creating a power vacuum in Libya. The return of Gaddafi era Marshal Khalifa Haftar to Libya further exacerbated the tense situation. Soon, the conflict in Libya evolved into a proxy war in which regional powers such as Turkey, Egypt, the UAE have contested. Libya has been divided into two governments: Tripoli based government and Tobruk based government. Turkey and Qatar have supported the former, whereas Egypt and the UAE have backed the latter. These governments loosely

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<sup>96</sup> *Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters*, 15.

controlled their respective areas, opening opportunities for terrorist groups to find safe heavens to breed.

One of the players who interfered in the Libyan conflict is Russia. Russia emerged one of the biggest losers of the demise of Gaddafi. It lost a Soviet era ally and lucrative contracts. Nevertheless, the withdrawal of the Western powers has enabled Russia to heighten its role especially after 2014. Its interference in Libya is mainly related to its self-perception of a great power and the desire to balance the USA. Although it has mainly offered its support to Haftar, Russia has maintained contacts with other groups in Libya. Wagner, the private military company, is the tool to provide mercenaries to Haftar's forces, allowing Russia to distance itself from association with Haftar officially.

Turkey's involvement, on the other hand, in the civil war is vital for its geopolitical interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. It was isolated by other countries in the Eastern Mediterranean over the distribution and transportation of the recently discovered natural gas. Only the GNA was willing to make a maritime deal, which enabled Turkey to assert its rights. Thus, Turkey's Eastern Mediterranean rights are tied to the survival of the GNA. In order to maintain its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey stepped up its involvement by providing armed support and military advisor teams. Turkey has, hitherto, managed to prevent Tripoli from falling into Haftar's forces.

Despite the recent territorial gains, the GNA is still far from conquering Haftar's strongholds in Benghazi and Tobruk. Egypt and the UAE, which want to prevent the expansion of Turkish sphere of influence, will inevitably increase their support to check the GNA's territorial advancement instead of acquiescing it. Egyptian President Sisi's threat of Egypt military action confirms Egypt's perseverance in protecting its interests in Libya. Thus, it is highly likely that the Libyan conflict will continue. The prolonged conflict is giving way the partition of Libya. The partition of Libya would jeopardize the maritime deal between Turkey and Libya as the government of the eastern part of Libya would take an anti-Turkish stance. Identifying Russia's interests in Libya is, therefore, important for Turkey. If Russia is assured that its basic goals in Libya such as the recognition of its status in Libya and the partial compensation of its economic losses, are met by the GNA, Turkey might divert Russia's support from Haftar completely. Gaining Russia support to the GNA could be a huge win for Turkey, which wants to keep Libya intact under the GNA, at the table for negotiations on the future of Libya.

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