

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLIGENCE IN ENSURING TÜRKİYE'S ENERGY SECURITY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

### TÜRKİYE'NİN DOĞU AKDENİZ'DE ENERJİ GÜVENLİĞİNİ SAĞLAMASINDA İSTİHBARATIN ÖNEMİ

**ÖZ** Doğu Akdeniz bölgesindeki hidrokarbon rezervleri için deniz yetki alanlarının nasıl paylaşılacağı konusunda kıyı devletleri arasında anlaşmazlıklar bulunmaktadır. Bu durum, tüm kıyıdaş ülkelerin enerji güvenliği için tehdit oluşturduğu gibi, Türkiye'yi de olumsuz etkilemektedir. Özellikle bölgedeki en büyük kıyıdaş devlet olan Türkiye, bölgedeki haklarını savunma eğilimindedir. Öte yandan, diğer devletlerin ikili anlaşmaları sonucunda bölgede yalnızlaşan Türkiye, özellikle Arap Baharı'ndan sonra daha da yalnızlaşmıştır. Bu noktada Türkiye'nin bölgede enerji güvenliğini ve haklarını savunmak için güçlü bir konumda olması gerekmektedir. Bu durumda istihbarat araçları ve hizmetleri önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Türkiye'nin bölgedeki enerji güvenliğinde istihbarat kapasitesinin önemi incelenmiştir. Doğu Akdeniz'de enerji güvenliğini tehdit eden unsurlar ve buna bağlı olarak istihbaratın önemi çalışmanın ilk bölümünü oluşturmuştur. Ardından Türk istihbaratının Libya ve Mısır'daki rolleri, ilk yerli istihbarat gemisinin önemi ve İskenderun Körfezi'nin güvenliğinin önemi incelenmiştir. Sonuç olarak, istihbaratın Türkiye'nin bölgede enerji güvenliğini sağlamada önemli bir rol oynadığı ve oynamaya devam edeceği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İstihbarat, Enerji Güvenliği, Doğu Akdeniz, Türkiye, MİT

**ABSTRACT** There are disagreements over how coastal states will share their maritime jurisdictions for hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean region. This situation not only poses a threat to the energy security of all riparian states, but also negatively affects Türkiye. In particular, Türkiye, the largest riparian state in the region, tends to defend its rights in the region. On the other hand, Türkiye, which became isolated in the region as a result of the bilateral agreements of other states, became even more isolated especially after the Arab Spring. At this point, Türkiye needs to be in a strong position to defend its energy security and rights in the region. In this case, intelligence tools and services play an important role. In this study, the importance of intelligence capacity in Türkiye's energy security in the region has been examined. The elements that threaten energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean and the importance of intelligence at this point formed the first part of the study. Then, the roles of Turkish intelligence in Libya and Egypt, the importance of the first domestic intelligence ship and the importance of the security of the Iskenderun Bay were studied. As a result, it has been found that intelligence has and will continue to play an important role in ensuring Türkiye's energy security in the region.

**Keywords:** Intelligence, Energy Security, Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye, MIT

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Cold War, there has been significant evolution in the changing security understanding of states. Although in the security understanding of the states the traditional threat of war still maintains its importance, security problems such as terrorism, migration, environment, and energy have also occupied a significant place (Özkan, 2010: 109). In this direction, the concept of security has gradually expanded until today, and it has become a vital position for states to continue their existence.

The most basic need to ensure security is intelligence. It is not possible to ensure the security of any person, facility, or vehicle without intelligence information. The basis of security is the need for intelligence. Accordingly, intelligence activities are one of the most important security instruments of a state. Intelligence in the security dimension is fields of activity that complement each other, such as state security, national security, and homeland security, which cannot be considered independent from each other. From this point of view, the intelligence production process comes into play within the framework of security needs. Intelligence and security activities have very close relations with each other. Therefore, intelligence is an integral part of security (Söylemez, 2019: 29).

In this respect, when it comes to the national and homeland security of a state, energy security is one of the most important survival strategies. As a matter of fact, energy security is considered a crucial issue in the context of international relations in recent years. Türkiye is located in a region where current problems are experienced, especially in the energy security issue. Türkiye's proximity to the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, and Eurasia, which are among the regions of the world rich in energy resources, provides some advantages in geopolitical and geostrategic fields. On the other hand, the fact that it is not a self-sufficient country in terms of energy resources and even its foreign-dependent position in this sense increases the importance of its geopolitical position for Türkiye (Çetinkaya, 2019: 209).

With its broad definition, energy security is the supply of energy at a reliable and affordable price by ensuring continuity and resource diversity, consuming it in the most efficient way and environmentally friendly, and accessing energy resources from reliable routes that are not under threat (Sevim, 2012: 4386). In order to ensure this security, NATO focuses on issues such as the establishment of the energy infrastructure, the creation of a stable energy supply, and the protection of transportation facilities and energy transmission routes. The EU draws attention to the situation of energy dependency and emphasizes issues such as the supply of stable and sufficient energy for the EU citizens and economy (Yılmaz and Kalkan, 2017: 172). From the perspective of Türkiye, the Eastern Mediterranean basin, which has rich hydrocarbon deposits, as well as oil and natural gas pipelines play an important role in ensuring energy security.

Developed states use strong intelligence services to ensure their security and therefore their energy security. Accordingly, the National Intelligence Organization (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, MIT), Türkiye's number one intelligence service, makes a significant contribution to ensure Türkiye's national security. MIT defines the relationship between intelligence and security as follows:

“State intelligence is all the intelligence provided by state bodies in order to achieve the national goals set by national policy in order to ensure the integrity of the state, the security of the regime. In other words, it is the intelligence that provides the necessary information for the creation of national security policies and is produced with the cooperation and coordination of all relevant state intelligence agencies.” (Milli İstihbarat Teşkilatı, 2009).

In the light of this information, it should be noted that there is an inseparable connection between energy security, which is one of the most important sub-branches of national security, and intelligence. In addition, Türkiye's geopolitics is an element that increases the importance of energy

security. It is located near the Middle East oils. Thus, these oils are delivered to the world via Türkiye through pipelines and maritime transport. On the other hand, for Türkiye, which has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, the hydrocarbon reserves that can be obtained from this region are also very important. Although Türkiye is dependent on foreign countries for the majority of its energy needs, it has the power to balance this situation thanks to its geopolitical importance. However, instability is looming. In the Eastern Mediterranean region, there is a great disagreement between the coastal states about how to share their jurisdiction and therefore energy resources. Instability in this region poses a significant threat to energy security. Accordingly, this study examines and focuses the question of what the importance of intelligence is to ensure Türkiye's energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean.

## **2.THREATS TO TÜRKİYE'S ENERGY SECURITY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

The most important threat to energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean is the inability to determine how to share maritime jurisdictions. In this regard, there are disputes among the coastal states. The ideal approach to be followed in determining the maritime jurisdiction areas in the region that has the appearance of a semi-closed basin is a delimitation treaty with the participation of all coastal states. However, there is no such regulation, and the states of the region determine their maritime jurisdiction by bilateral treaties (Kepecioglu, 2008: 15-16). Cyprus signed Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreements with Egypt in 2003, Lebanon in 2007, and Israel in 2010 in order to share its maritime jurisdiction (Yaycı, 2020). Greece has signed an EEZ agreement with Egypt in 2020 (UN, 2020).

Moreover, Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus decided to establish an Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum in October 2018. Pursuant to this decision; it has been stated that the forum, which will be headquartered in Cairo, will cover all countries producing "EastMed gas" (meaning the countries producing gas in the Eastern Mediterranean) and importing countries and transit countries (Kökyay, 2021: 224). As of 2022, Cyprus, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, and Palestine are members of the forum. In addition, the United States of America, the World Bank Forum, and the European Union are observer members (EMGF, 2022). Türkiye describes this forum as an entity that aims to exclude and isolate itself from the energy equation in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye states that in this formation and bilateral agreements, it is accepted as the sole representative of the island despite the special status of Cyprus and the rights of the Turkish Cypriots are not respected (MFA, 2020).

The continental shelf in the Eastern Mediterranean and the area of the EEZ that Türkiye can declare on it, which is the country with the longest coastline in the region, is claimed by the Turkish authorities as approximately 189,000 km<sup>2</sup> (TGB, 2020). If the initiatives of Cyprus and Greece yield results, the area left for Türkiye will decrease to 41,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, the rights of Turkish Cypriots on the island are ignored. Türkiye has informed the relevant parties that it will not accept these initiatives, which amount to being squeezed into a narrow area off the coast of the Gulf of Antalya.

## **3. THE IMPORTANCE OF INTELLIGENCE IN ENSURING ENERGY SECURITY IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

As mentioned, Türkiye seems to be isolated in the region. In this climate, Türkiye needs to follow the right strategies to ensure energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Intelligence, by its nature, plays an important role in the implementation of these right strategies. Intelligence has an important role for Türkiye to discover areas with hydrocarbon reserves, developing bilateral relations with the states of the region, and get rid of isolation. As President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has

mentioned, the gains in the Eastern Mediterranean as a result of the efforts of Turkish intelligence services strengthen Türkiye's hand in bargaining (SDE, 2020).

### 3.1. The Role of Turkish Intelligence in Libya

The Arab Spring, which started in 2010, had a profound impact on Libya as a result of its spread to many Arab countries. In this regard, in February 2011, opposition forces in Libya rebelled against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, who ruled the country for 42 years. As a response, Gaddafi tried to suppress these uprisings by violating human rights. As a result, NATO intervened in Libya due to the United Nations Security Council authorized the military intervention on March 17, 2011 (Kuperman, 2013: 191). After NATO's intervention, the Gaddafi regime came to an end, nonetheless, the civil war in Libya did not end.

Following this, a new era has begun for the UN-supported National Transitional Council -after the Government of National Accord (GNA)- established in Tripoli. The interim government decided to hold elections in July 2012, and while it was expected that this process would be passed comfortably, it did not occur in this way. As a result of the internal turmoil, pro-Gaddafi, General Haftar reported that he did not recognize the Tripoli government in 2014. Thus, a second civil war began in Libya (Karakaya and Çelik, 2021: 183).

General Haftar gained strength thanks to support of the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Russia, France, and Saudi Arabia (Fasanotti, 2019). Türkiye has been in cooperation with the UN-supported Government of National Accord since the beginning and has been involved in proxy war in Libya. Thanks to Türkiye's close relations and support to Libya GNA, an EEZ agreement was signed between the two countries on 27 November 2019. This agreement was registered by the UN on 11 December 2019 (UN, 2019).

However, Haftar has become increasingly powerful thanks to the support of Gaddafi's supporters and powerful states. In 2014, under the name of Operation Dignity, he took control of 90 percent of the country within six years (BBC, 2020). As a result of Haftar's going towards Tripoli, in January 2020, Türkiye approved the Libya motion in the national assembly upon the Libya GNA's support request and sent troops to the region (Hürriyet, 2020). After the passage of the Libya resolution, expert cadres from the Turkish Armed Forces and the MIT were involved in the operation. With the support of the Turkish army and intelligence, Haftar suffered a heavy defeat and the Libyan GNA made significant gains (BBC, 2020).

Thus, the Government of National Accord, which was on the verge of losing the civil war, survived thanks to Türkiye's support. In this way, Türkiye prevented Haftar's desire to control the entire country and cancel the EEZ agreement (Euronews, 2020). Turkish intelligence played a critical role in this process. Intelligence played an important role in the Libyan GNA's seizure of strategic places (TCCB, 2020). MIT senior officials and former MIT head Hakan Fidan took part in almost all meetings and meetings related to Libya (Cumhuriyet, 2021). Regarding the issue, Erdoğan said, "The support provided by MIT in stopping the putschist Haftar's advance in Libya has a game-changer role." In addition, Erdoğan emphasized MIT's achievements and said, "The gains we have achieved in conflict zones enable our country to have a strong position in the diplomatic field and to defend our national interests more effectively" (TCCB, 2020). Finally, Erdoğan criticized the weak and foreign intelligence-based Turkish intelligence in the past, stating that the conditions and needs require Türkiye to strengthen this institution again (Anadolu Ajansı, 2020a).

### 3.2. Launches of First Intelligence-Gathering Ship

Türkiye is willing to use its intelligence capabilities to the fullest in order to ensure energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean. Accordingly, TCG Ufuk (A-591), Türkiye's first intelligence ship, was put into service with a ceremony held at Istanbul Maritime Shipyard in Tuzla, Istanbul on January 14, 2022 (NTV, 2022).

It is stated that the ship, which is stated to be 70% domestic capital, will carry out important activities in the Eastern Mediterranean (STM, 2022). Another important point of the ship is that both the Turkish army and the MIT have the opportunity to work together. The Turkish authorities have stated that the ship will collect important information for the MIT and that they will produce even more important projects thanks to this information and experience. Thus, it is expected that Türkiye will increase its intelligence power at the sea. Also, it is anticipated that the ship will provide important inputs for electronic warfare systems and make significant contributions to the Turkish intelligence by being supported by cyber security (Milliyet, 2022). In addition, the fact that the ship's being domestic makes an important contribution to independent and national intelligence and plays an important role in reducing the external dependence of the Turkish intelligence (Hürriyet, 2022).

### 3.3. The Turkish Intelligence for Normalization: Turkish-Egyptian Relations

With the Arab Spring events spreading to Egypt, Türkiye had openly demonstrated that it stands by the Egyptian people and supported them. Thus, it called for the state leader Hosni Mubarak to hold democratic elections and criticized his violent response to the protests. After the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, Türkiye had demonstrated in its foreign policy that it supported the popular uprisings against Egypt and the democratic administration that would come with the will of the people with high-level visits to Egypt (Güvenç, 2021: 365).

In the process that developed with the election of Mohammed Morsi as President on June 30, 2012, the relations between Türkiye and Egypt reached their peak, and official visits and trade agreements between the two countries showed the extent of these relations (Yılmaz, 2020: 15). This situation led to rapprochement in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this period, with the naval exercises hosted by a country alternately every year in the Eastern Mediterranean, it was tried to give the message to the Greek and Southern Cyprus Administration that a formation in the region that did not include Egypt-Türkiye would not conclude (Demirci, 2019).

Nevertheless, the military coup carried out in Egypt on 3 July 2013 under the leadership of General Commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, seriously affected the relations between Türkiye and Egypt. Türkiye, together with the civil society and its opposition, reacted sharply to the military coup against Morsi in Egypt and condemned the coup. Egypt reduced the level of diplomatic relations with Türkiye against this reaction, and the practices carried out by the principle of reciprocity increased the tension between the two countries. This tension has significantly affected the commercial, military, and political relations between the two countries (Güvenç, 2021: 366). Thus, after the coup, military, and diplomatic activities between the two countries were suspended (Demirci, 2019).

However, Egypt is a significant country in the Eastern Mediterranean for Türkiye. From a geopolitical point of view, the two countries have the widest coastal length in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition, the coasts of Türkiye and Egypt are largely parallel to each other. At this point, it is critical for the energy security of the two countries to conclude a maritime delimitation agreement. Realizing this importance, the parties entered the normalization phase. Although it is not possible to give an exact date, it is possible to state that Türkiye entered normalization work with the countries in the region in 2020, and the most important pillar of this is Egypt. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, in a ŞENER M. B. (2022). The Importance of Intelligence in Ensuring Türkiye's Energy Security in the Eastern Mediterranean, DA&MS SAYI 2,29-38.

statement he made in August 2020, announced that talks were held between the intelligence services of Türkiye and Egypt. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu also noted that there are some initiatives in terms of normalization with Egypt and even stated that he had a face-to-face meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Samih Shukri during the Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting in 2020 and offered to work on a roadmap to normalize relations (BBC, 2021).

As a result of the efforts of the intelligence services of the two countries, the normalization efforts gained momentum in 2021. Egypt's respect for the Turkish continental shelf by determining the east of the 28th meridian as its field of activity in the tender for researching energy resources in the region was one of the developments that could change the dynamics in the region (Anadolu Ajansı, 2021). Thus, although Egypt signed a maritime authorization agreement with Greece in the Eastern Mediterranean, it does not engage in hydrocarbon exploration activities in the continental shelf areas declared by Türkiye (BBC, 2021). Following this, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu emphasized a collaboration, saying, "According to the course of our relations as the two countries with the longest land and coasts in the Eastern Mediterranean, we can negotiate the maritime jurisdiction areas with Egypt and sign an agreement in the future" (Anadolu Ajansı, 2021). The role of Turkish intelligence in the normalization of relations is major. Normalized relations also have contributed significantly to Türkiye's energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean, and it is likely to continue in the future.

### 3.4. The Role of Intelligence in Iskenderun Gulf Traffic

The Gulf of Iskenderun, located at the easternmost tip of the Eastern Mediterranean, is the gateway to the sea of the Kirkuk Yumurtalık and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipelines. The Kirkuk-Yumurtalık line, which was put into service in 1977, has a daily carrying capacity of 1.4 million barrels. BTC, which entered service in 2006, has a carrying capacity of 1.2 million barrels per day (Özgen, 2018: 104-105).

In addition, new projects that will increase the amount of energy exported from the Iskenderun Bay and thus the tanker traffic in the region are also on the agenda. One of the projects is the Samsun-Ceyhan line, which has been planned to have an oil carrying capacity of 1 million barrels per day at the first stage, and then 1.5 million barrels per day. Also, the transportation of Iraqi natural gas to Ceyhan via pipeline and exporting it as LNG is under evaluation. In line with this purpose, infrastructure constructions are continuing in Ceyhan. One of the constructions is a pier with a length of 2300 meters, suitable for berthing large tonnage supertankers. In this context, Iskenderun Bay has a critical role in ensuring energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean (Özgen, 2018: 105).

Especially after September 11, terrorist acts targeting oil and LNG tankers have become one of the priority topics of energy security. The reason why terrorist organizations target tankers is that the cargo carried has explosive properties and oil and natural gas are seen as strategic energy sources. For example, the execution of a suicide attack with an explosive-laden boat on the French-flagged tanker Limburg, sailing in the Gulf of Aden, on October 6, 2002, is one of the most striking examples of these terrorist acts. More than 90 thousand barrels of crude oil spilled into the sea in the attack, where one person among the ship's crew lost his life (Özgen, 2018: 106). Since the maritime transport lines departing from Iskenderun Bay are one of the sea areas with the highest tanker traffic in the world, it is thought that terrorist organizations may organize suicide attacks like Limburg in the region. Therefore, it can be said that the main threat to tankers departing from Iskenderun Bay is terrorism (Özgen, 2018: 107).

In order to ensure the security of countries against terrorist organizations, it is necessary to use the intelligence effectively. Because it is possible to say that one of the main purposes of intelligence is

to develop effective policies and methods to combat terrorist organizations at the national and international levels. In this context, intelligence determines and evaluates the capabilities, strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities, targets, policies, and strategies of terrorist organizations to enable decision-makers to make the most accurate decisions possible to determine the necessary strategies and policies (Beşe and Seren, 2011: 124-126). For Türkiye, the Iskenderun region is a significant threat because it is in a region very close to the areas where the PKK terrorist organization carries out its actions (Anadolu Ajansı, 2020b). At this point, Turkish intelligence plays an important role in ensuring the energy security of this region against terrorist elements.

In addition, tankers have been targeted in armed conflicts since the early days when oil began to be transported through sea. There may be different purposes in targeting tankers. If the adversary is foreign-dependent in terms of energy resources, the aim is to paralyze the economic life and military action by blocking energy imports, and thus discourage or delay the political goal of the other party. If the adversary is an exporter, the aim is to prevent or at least reduce the revenue generated. The most striking example of targeting tankers in this regard is the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. During the war, a total of 359 tankers were attacked, 38 in 1984, 33 in 1985, 90 in 1986, 134 in 1987, and 64 in 1988 (Özgen, 2013: 107). The material size of the losses incurred as a result of the attacks is in the order of billions of dollars for both sides. Similarly, it is considered that tankers departing from Iskenderun Bay may be targeted in an armed conflict where Türkiye will take part. This also applies to armed conflicts in which Türkiye is not involved but the countries of the region are a party. Therefore, it can be said that another threat to energy security for tanker traffic departing from Iskenderun Bay is armed conflicts that may affect freedom of navigation (Özgen, 2013: 107). It should be noted against such a situation, it is essential that the Turkish intelligence services and vehicles be fully equipped to ensure energy security at sea.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The post-Arab Spring developments in Türkiye have not progressed as expected. In addition to the weak relations with the countries of the region, relations with many Arab countries have come to a standstill. In this context, Egypt and Libya gained importance in the Eastern Mediterranean. Nonetheless, while the right strategies were followed in Libya, the same results could not be achieved in Egypt.

The efforts of the Turkish intelligence service in Libya made Türkiye follow a correct and successful strategy. In Egypt, on the other hand, although the relations came to a standstill, as a result of the bilateral negotiations by the Turkish intelligence, they entered the normalization process. Thus, Turkish intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean brought important gains to Türkiye.

In addition, Türkiye's increasing its intelligence power at sea by producing a domestic and national intelligence ship makes an important contribution to ensuring energy security. This also strengthens the influence and role of the Turkish intelligence service. As seen in the study, a significant part of the energy is transferred and transported through sea. At this point, the intelligence capability at sea is of critical importance.

Also, one of the areas where terrorist organizations carry out the most actions is tanker ships and is in areas very close to the areas where PKK is active in Türkiye. Since intelligence is critical in the fight against terrorism, Turkish authorities should act sensitive in these areas and work in coordination with the necessary intelligence elements. In addition, since the Gulf of Iskenderun is one of the strategic areas for energy security in the event of a war, its importance increases even more. Because it is seen that intelligence is significant in the fight against conflict elements, it is concluded that intelligence is important for taking the right steps at this point.

Since Türkiye's defense industry and intelligence units were not domestic, great importance has been attached to domestic intelligence in order not to be dependent on foreign intelligence. As seen in the study, Turkish authorities have frequently referred to this situation and emphasized the importance of developing national intelligence. Thus, it aimed to reduce the dependency on foreign intelligence by equipping the MIT with domestic intelligence facilities. This initiative is vital in ensuring Türkiye's energy security, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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