

Erdogan Opened a Pandora's Box in Libya that Will be Difficult to Close

By [Paul Antonopoulos](#)

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Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean are rapidly rising after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan met with a Libyan official of the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), based in the Libyan capital of Tripoli, in Ankara last week. They agreed on their own Economic Exclusive Zone that penetrates into Greek and Cypriot waters, in violation of the [United Nations Convention Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#) that [favors Cypriot and Greek claims](#), a major reason why Turkey is only one of 15 UN members, out of 193, that has not signed it. Although Turkey claims it is acting within international law to enter the oil and gas-rich Greek and Cypriot waters, it never references which international law. This leads to the simple question of why Turkey has not signed UNCLOS if international law supposedly favors their claim?

The Turkish-GNA provocation against Greece comes as only last month Pakistan and Turkey conducted naval exercises where Pakistan violated Greek and Cypriot air and maritime space several times [and](#) harassed Cypriot merchant ships. This demonstrates that Turkey is bolstering its alliances to force its complete hegemony over the Eastern Mediterranean. This is to expand their maritime space in violation of international law to exploit [the rich deposits](#) of gas and oil in the region.

However, Turkey has once again defied international law, remembering the illegal invasion of northern Cyprus and Syria among many. This has now opened up a new quagmire that Erdoğan has probably not expected. With the NATO destruction of Libya in 2011, in which both Greece and Turkey took a minor part in, the country has been plagued by tribalism, feudalism and Islamic radicalism, with two major forces emerging from the mess - the GNA [in coalition with the Muslim Brotherhood](#), and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar and based in eastern Libya. This is unsurprising since Turkey has a long history of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood.

Erdoğan has opened up a Pandora's box in Libya that will now surely backfire on him and see the dismantlement of the GNA. The GNA is now becoming increasingly isolated since Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt have sworn to back General Haftar with weapons and money. It is expected with the arrival of new funds and weapons, Haftar will continue his assault to take Tripoli that he began in March. One major reason for this new support for the LNA is that Greece, Cyprus and Egypt are in a strategic regional alliance to protect their respective EEZ against Turkish aggression.

Haftar has also controversially announced that he wants [relations with Israel](#). His desires for relations with Israel, a rarity among Muslim-majority countries, will surely bring Haftar more international recognition and legitimacy as a "reward," especially crucial as the majority of

the world recognizes the Tripoli government.

A delegation of U.S. diplomats recently asked Haftar to halt military operations, citing that it will supposedly allow Russia's military invasion of Libya. Haftar refused. Haftar's Secretary of State said that the United States is completely wrong, as Libya has become a huge arena for settling accounts among regional powers – and this is true if we consider that the Saudis, Emirates and Egyptians are backing the LNA, while the Turks and Qataris backs the GNA.

Rather than being in compliance with international law, Erdoğan signed with the GNA an illegal agreement to carve out the Eastern Mediterranean for its own plans. Greece has given the GNA time until today to retract their deal with Turkey. Although Greece on the international scene is a minor player, it does wield significant influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and will use NATO and EU mechanisms to convince member states to retract their recognition of the GNA, which will only further isolate Turkey as it has attempted to build an alliance to counter the [Greek-Cypriot-Egyptian military partnership](#).

In a rare occurrence, both the U.S. and [Russia](#) have criticized Turkey's aggression and escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean, with the US State Department describing the Turkish and GNA move as “unhelpful” and “provocative.”

It is unlikely this will make a difference as it is expected that the GNA will adamantly refuse to renounce its agreement with Turkey, which will push Greece to back the LNA and encourage NATO and EU members to do the same. At the very minimum, the Saudi-Emirati-Egyptian tripartite has used Turkey's aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean as an excuse to back the LNA, providing him with the money, weapons, intelligence and other resources to overcome the Turkish-backed GNA.

With Saif Gaddafi, the second son of Muammar Gaddafi, also announcing his support for Haftar, there is every potential that the internationally recognized GNA will have a multitude of pressure from NATO, the EU, the Saudi-Emirati-Egyptian alliance, and from Haftar and Gaddafi supporters. Erdoğan's desperate pursuit for regional hegemony was first received with applause domestically, but it appears he has now opened a Pandora's box in Libya that is now likely to backfire on him.

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Paul Antonopoulos is a Research Fellow at the Center for Syncretic Studies.

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