

Libya Is Likely to Become a Proxy Battlefield Between Greece and Turkey

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has certainly opened up [pandora's box in Libya](#) that is now difficult for him to close after he made a series of gross miscalculations and aggression against Greece. This has triggered a crisis all across the Eastern Mediterranean. With Libya in a state of war since the NATO-jihadist alliance removed and murdered long-time ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, two prominent forces have emerged from the initial chaos, the Turkish-backed Government of National Accord [in coalition with the Muslim Brotherhood](#) who control the capital city of Tripoli, and the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar, who controls about 80% of the country and has the backing of the Libyan Parliament based in Tobruk. Alliances are beginning to form and play out as a proxy in Libya.

The Erdoğan-Tripoli deal to steal Greek maritime space to exploit gas and oil deposits has hit a major roadblock as hostilities continue to increase between Greece and Turkey. Not only has the U.S., Russia, the European Union and Israel denounced Turkey's moves in the Eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, Italy and France have all categorically supported Greece's position and have vowed to intervene to any Turkish aggression.

As part of the wider Eastern Mediterranean crisis, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [said yesterday](#) that Turkey is willing to use the military to steal oil and gas from Cyprus' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The comments come as today Cyprus, France and Italy will conduct the "CYP/FRA/IT 2019 naval exercise in the island's EEZ," demonstrating that Paris and Rome want a greater role and influence in the Eastern Mediterranean by cooperating with fellow EU states – Cyprus and Greece. The U.S. is also aiming to capitalize on pressuring Turkey for its strengthening relations with Russia in recent times, with [Congress likely to lift a 1987 arms embargo](#) against Cyprus today, which was already approved by the Senate in the middle of the year.

Meanwhile, the Turkish-Greek border has been intensified. Although Turkey violates Greek airspace [on a daily basis](#) resulting in an equal number of Greek jets chasing off Turkish warplanes, Tuesday was especially intense as 38 Greek jets surrounded and chased off over 20 Turkish jets, with a [Greek military source](#) saying "we had fun." This comes as Turkey announced it is willing to [use military force](#) against Greece to exploit oil and gas close to Greek islands. This resulted in a flurry of responses from the Greek government and military all announcing that they are not afraid to respond to any Turkish aggression.

Athens is also taking diplomatic and soft power steps to prevent Turkey from beginning a military confrontation with Greece. Athens has utilized the EU mechanisms to ensure backing against Turkish hostilities, with Ursula Von Der Leynen, the new President of the

European Commission, [saying on Monday](#):

“We are on your side [Greece], Turkey’s action in the Aegean is unacceptable, we will send a clear message to Turkey.”

Greece also took the step of expelling the GNA (Government of National Accord) Ambassador, prompting the way for the LNA to have European recognition as it is only openly backed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This expulsion of the GNA Ambassador saw the LNA’s Navy Chief Faraz al-Mahtawi [state on Greek television](#) that he will personally sink Turkish ships if they arrive in Libya after Erdoğan threatened to [militarily intervene](#) in the North African country.

And this is exactly where the Greek-Turkish battle will take place, through a proxy in Libya and not directly with each other. Mahtawi, a Philhellene who was trained at the Greek Naval School, engaged in race politics by saying in perfect Greek on television that Fayez el-Sarraj, the Prime Minister of the GNA, was “not a Libyan, but a Turk,” as his ancestry is Ottoman [Turkish colonists to Libya](#), while he also expressed his hope for Greek support.

With Greece, Egypt and Cyprus in [a military alliance](#), Athens is now expanding its military cooperation further. A move of particular strategic importance made by the Greek military leadership, was the [signing of a memorandum](#) of military cooperation between Greece and the UAE, which if we recall, is a key ally of Haftar and opposed to Turkey. This comes as reports are circulating that the UAE and Saudi Arabia are preparing an air operation in coordination with Haftar to defeat the GNA in Tripoli.

It also comes as Libyan Parliament representatives are arriving in Athens to hold discussions with the Greek government. If the Libyan representatives can convince Athens to recognize them, there is likely to be a domino effect of several EU states withdrawing their recognition of the GNA, isolating Turkey further who has not received any international support for the crisis it began in the Eastern Mediterranean. Even Russia, which has strengthened relations with Turkey to the annoyance of NATO, has continued its consistent policy of following international law, with Russian Ambassador Andrei Maslov to Greece [saying on Wednesday](#) that “the rules laid down by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea should be fundamental. There are no alternatives.” This of course is problematic as Turkey is one of only 15 UN members, out of 193, that has not signed it.

Although Turkey claims it is enacting international law, it has not specified which one. This has created a crisis all over the Eastern Mediterranean that is likely to spill over into Libya as Haftar’s forces continue to advance on Tripoli. Although it is unlikely Greece and Turkey will go to war, we can expect a proxy to emerge between the two rival countries with the battlefield being Libya.

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