

Video: Turkey's 'Neo-Ottoman' Project Shifts Focus From Syria to Libya

By [South Front](#)

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This week, massive Turkish military support has finally allowed the Government of National Accord to achieve some breakthrough in the battle against the Libyan National Army (LNA).

On May 18, GNA forces and members of Turkish-backed militant groups from Syria supported by Turkish special forces and unmanned combat aerial vehicles captured the Watiya Air Base in the northwestern part of the country. LNA troops urgently retreated from it after several days of clashes in the nearby area. They left behind a UAE-supplied Pantsir-S1, an Mi-35 military helicopter and a notable amount of ammunition. The LNA defense at the air base was undermined by a week-long bombardment campaign by artillery and combat drones of Turkish-backed forces.

Additionally, pro-Turkish sources claimed that drone strikes destroyed another Pantsir-S1 air defense system near Sirte and even a Russian-made Krasukha mobile electronic warfare system. According to Turkish reports, all this equipment is being supplied to the Libyan Army by the UAE. Turkish sources regularly report about successful drone strikes on Libyan convoys with dozens of battle tanks. Some of these 'military convoys' later appeared to be trucks filled with water-melons.

https://a4s8y4u2.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/video/IMR_19_05_2020_ENG.mp4

In any case, the months of Turkish military efforts, thousands of deployed Syrian militants and hundreds of armoured vehicles supplied to the GNA finally paid off. The Watiya Air Base was an operational base of the LNA used for the advance on the GNA-controlled city of Tripoli. If the LNA does not take back the airbase in the near future, its entire flank southwest of Tripoli may collapse. It will also lose all chances to encircle the city. According to pro-Turkish sources, the next target of the Turkish-led advance on LNA positions will be Tarhuna. Earlier this year, Turkish-backed forces already failed to capture the town. Therefore, they seek to take a revanche.

This will lead to a further escalation of the situation in northern Libya and force the UAE and Egypt, the main backers of the LNA, to increase their support to the army. The UAE-Egypt bloc could bank on at least limited diplomatic support from Russia. Until now, Moscow has preferred to avoid direct involvement in the conflict because it may damage the delicate balance of Russian and Turkish interests. Russian private military contractors that operate in Libya represent the economic interests of some Russian elite groups rather than the foreign policy interests of the Russian state.

Additionally, Turkey, which is supported by Qatar and some NATO member states, has

already announced its plans to begin oil and gas exploration off Libya's coast. Ankara has ceased to hide the true intentions and goals of its military operation in Libya. Thus, the internal political conflict turned into an open confrontation of external actors for the natural resources of Libya.

The interesting fact is that the increasing military activity of Turkey in Libya goes amid the decrease of such actions in Syria. Thousands of Turkish proxies have been sent from Syria to Libya. This limits Ankara's freedom of operations in the main Syrian hot point – Greater Idlib. In these conditions, Turkish statements about some mysterious battle against terrorism in Idlib look especially questionable. Indeed, in the current conditions, Ankara will be forced to cooperate with Idlib terrorists, first of all al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham even closer to maintain its influence in this part of Syria. The Hayat Tahrir al-Sham plan to create a local quasi-state in the controlled territory and expand its own financial base by tightening the grip on the economic and social life in the region will gain additional momentum.

As to the Turkish government, it seems that in the current difficult economic conditions President Recep Tayyip Erdogan decided to exchange his "Neo-Ottoman" foreign policy project for expanding in some not so rich regions of Syria for quite tangible additional income from the energy business in Libya.

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