



# IRSEM

INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE STRATÉGIQUE  
DE L'ÉCOLE MILITAIRE

November 2022

## TURKEY'S MULTI-SECTORIAL STRATEGY IN LIBYA

### A GATEWAY TO THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND AFRICA

**Sümbül Kaya, PhD**

*Research Fellow at IRSEM*

**REPORT – No. 100**



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### **To quote this publication**

*Sümbül Kaya, Turkey's multi-sectorial strategy in Libya: A gateway to the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa, Report 100, IRSEM, November 2022.*

### **Dépôt légal**

ISSN : 2268-3194

ISBN : 978-2-11-167781-4

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titation, the notion of commitment and its evolution, how youth socializes and integrates into society, and the rise of radicalism. In addition to its research activities, the “Defense and Society Team” also intends to promote defense issues within civil society, including in the academic field.

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## SUMMARY

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, and due to Libya's extremely fragile security and political situation, the country is plagued by permanent crises. Libya is also turning into an arena of power struggles and wars of influence between various actors, both national and foreign. Turkey counts among these actors and has adopted a diversified investment strategy, focusing mainly on the military, economic, political, social and educational sectors. Ultimately, Turkey's goal is to ensure that Ankara emerges as a dominant force once the conflict has been resolved. In addition to this investment strategy, Turkey sports a clear-cut state-building project for a prosperous economy; its details deserve to be clarified. What are the modalities of Turkey's actions in its quest for hegemony in Libya? How has Turkey positioned itself amid the restructuring of power in Libya?

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AKP: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi – Democracy and Progress Party  
CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi – Republican People’s Party  
UNCLOS: United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea  
DEVA Partisi: Demokrasi ve Atılım Partisi - Party for Development and Progress  
DP: Demokrat Parti – Democratic Party  
Gelecek Partisi: The Future Party  
GNU: Libya’s Government for National Unity  
HDP: Halkların Demokratik Partisi – People’s Democratic Party  
IYI or İYİ Parti: İyi Partisi – The Good Party  
MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi – Nationalist Movement Party  
SP: Saadet Partisi – Felicity Party  
TBMM: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclis – Grand National Assembly of Turkey

## INTRODUCTION

On August 27, 2022, violent clashes broke out between armed groups in Tripoli, Libya. They reflected the escalating tensions between eastern and western authorities, respectively represented by Fathi Bachagha, the Prime Minister appointed by the Libyan House of Representatives in Tobruk in February 2022, and Abdulhamid Dbeibah, Head of the Tripoli-based Government for National Unity (GNU).<sup>1</sup> This escalation of violence between the “777<sup>th</sup> Brigade” – a group affiliated to Libya’s General Staff, known for being close to Fathi Bachagha – and the “Union to Support Stability” affiliated to the Presidential Council, spread to the city center.<sup>2</sup> The strategy employed by the armed group representing Fathi Bashagha – which included Major General Osama al-Juwayli, who was previously dismissed by Dbeibah – consisted in encircling the capital. However, this attempt failed. According to certain analysts, this was due to the fact that “the unit commanders affiliated with Bashagha were late to organize the military operation and adopted a misguided military strategy, thereby preventing them from efficiently deploying their forces”.<sup>3</sup>

Turkish media claim that the violence occurring in Libya is indirectly aimed at Turkey:

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1. Let us remember that the country went through a second civil war from 2014 until the ceasefire in August 2020. Elections were supposed to be held on December 24, 2021, but Libya’s failing electoral process led the country into a new political crisis and power struggle. On February 5, 2021, Abdulhamid Dbeibah was elected as the transitional Prime Minister, thereby defeating fellow candidate Fathi Bachagha. Subsequently, in February 2022, Bachagha was elected Prime Minister by the Libyan House of Representatives. However, Abdulhamid Dbeibah refused to step down, arguing that his term of office ran until June 2022 and that he would only transfer power to an elected executive. Bashagha is supported by Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army, while Dbeibah remains recognized by the UN.

2. Erkan Talu, “[Fethi Başağa hakkında yakalama kararı](#)” [A decision to arrest Fathi Başağa], *Haber7*, August 29, 2022.

3. İslam Özkan, “[Libya’da tepişen filler ve ezilen çimenler](#)” [Libya: The clash of the elephants and the trampled grass], *Politikol*, September 1, 2022.



According to sources close to Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah, the attacks ordered by Tobruk are not only squandering the country's security and stability; they are also aimed at Turkey. It is thought that if project Bachagha-Haftar had succeeded, it would have led to the cancellation of all agreements with Turkey.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, according to the same media – which claim to rely on intelligence sources – France is allegedly behind this maneuver:

It was stated that France is at the root of the conflict and that its objective is to create ground for foreign intervention by dragging Libya into a new state of internal turmoil.<sup>5</sup>

According to other sources, Turkey played a role in putting a stop to the fight, since Turkish-built Bayraktar TB2s drones hit Osama Cüveyli's forces as they advanced towards the capital on Bashagha's orders.<sup>6</sup> The question arises: why would these clashes target Turkey on foreign soil?

The Libyan issue has become a matter of national security for Turkey, particularly due to the memorandum of understanding it signed with Libya on November 27, 2019, to create an exclusive economic zone. This agreement is disputed by the signatory countries of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as the zone covers important gas reserves. What's more, this agreement compromises the gas pipeline project signed between Cyprus, Israel and Greece. According to former Admiral Cihat Yayci, who is partly behind the Turkish-Libyan

4. Fetih Kökten, "[Trablus'taki çatışmada Fransa'nın parmağı mı var? Macron'un Cezayir ziyareti dikkat çekti](#)" [Is France involved in the Tripoli conflict? Macron's visit to Algeria attracts attention], *TGRT Haber*, August 29, 2022.

5. *Ibid.* Also refer to "[Fransa Libya'yı karıştırıyor](#)" [France stirs up trouble in Libya], *Turkiyegazetesi*, August 28, 2022.

6. Commander Osama Cüveyli is said to have told reporters that his "forces were hit by eighteen missiles. Three or four military vehicles were reportedly destroyed" (Fehim Taştekin, "[Trablus savaşları, Bayraktarlar ve MIT karargâhında ayar](#)" [Tripoli wars: The Bayraktar and framing at MIT headquarters], *Gazete duvar*, September 5, 2022).

agreement, this agreement would be vital for Turkey and would "add a legal dimension to its policy in the Eastern Mediterranean" while "invalidating the limits of the exclusive economic zone claimed by Greece and the Greek Cypriot administration".<sup>7</sup> This rhetoric of protecting Turkish interests in Libya also surfaces in the mandate that authorizes the deployment of Turkish troops in Libya, which was extended by 18 months by the two country's parliaments on June 21, 2022:

Turkey continues to provide strong support to protect Libya's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political unity, while establishing a permanent ceasefire in the country and deploying national efforts to promote political dialogue towards national reconciliation. [...] The political uncertainty [...] that emerged following Libya's failure to hold the elections scheduled for December 24, 2021, jeopardizes the peace established on the ground [...] and is a serious obstacle in terms of achieving permanent stability. [...] Risks and threats to the entire region, including Turkey, continue to emanate from Libya. What's more, if attacks against Libya's legitimate government were to resume, Turkey's interests in both the Mediterranean basin and North Africa would be affected.

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, and due to Libya's extremely fragile security and political situation, the country is plagued by permanent crises and is turning into a battlefield of power struggles and wars of influence between various actors, both national and foreign (including Egypt, France, Persian Gulf nations, Russia, England and Turkey). In this context, Turkey aims to become a dominant player by increasing its room for maneuver in various sectors of Libyan society. What are the forces that drive the form of domination that Turkey intends to establish in Libya? What are the modalities of Turkey's actions in its quest for hegemony? How has Turkey positioned itself amid the restructuring of power in Libya? We will show that Turkey is pursuing a multi-sectorial strategy of domination on the Libyan scene, mainly by investing in the military, economic,

7. Erkan Talu, "[Fethi Başağa hakkında yakalama kararı](#)" [A decision to arrest Fathi Başağa].

political and religious sectors, as well as through its drive to strengthen its soft power in the social and educational sectors. In parallel, it actively supports the launch of a broad state-building program to bring about a prosperous economy in Libya. By Turkey's multi-sectorial strategy, we are referring to the mobilization of different sectors of Libyan society. Limiting our study to Turkey's investment in the security (military) and economic sectors would prove insufficient to understand Turkey's concept of power;<sup>8</sup> the latter is characterized by a global mobilization of all resources, including the power of ideological and cultural influence, which it exerts through private actors and subcontractors (companies and think-tanks).

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8. Regarding the critique of the concept of power, see Guillaume Devin, "II. La définition de la puissance" [II. The definition of power], in Guillaume Devin (ed.), *Sociologie des relations internationales*, Paris, La Découverte, "Repères", 2018, p. 29-36.

## I. TURKEY'S PRESENCE IN LIBYA

### SIGNS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A NEW MILITARY DOCTRINE: THE "BLUE HOMELAND" (*MAVI VATAN*)

Since July 15, 2016, the Turkish Armed Forces have been deployed in age-old areas of intervention such as Iraq, as well as in new ones such as Syria and Libya. These various operations abroad go to show that, following the discourse that promoted Turkish soft power during the years when Ahmet Davutoğlu was influential in Turkish foreign policy, hard power now constitutes a central tool in Ankara's strategy. This trend is part of Turkey's internal revaluation of its military, which had lost its legitimacy after the attempted coup of July 2016.<sup>1</sup> These operations also indicate that Ankara is using the growing importance of the military in its foreign policy as a way of establishing itself as a key player in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and Africa. In a context of rising geopolitical tension, this is also a way of showing other regional and international powers that Turkey is willing to resolve to violence. We will see that, since the attempted coup of July 2016, Turkey's foreign policy has become increasingly militarized. This is partly achieved by relying on the "Blue Homeland" (*Mavi Vatan*) doctrine, as well as by increasing its commitment to operations conducted on an individual basis in the international arena – outside the scope NATO's protective umbrella – to strengthen its defense strategy and secure economic and political gains.

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1. Sümül Kaya, "De la politique à la guerre, le retour en grâce de l'armée turque après la tentative du coup d'État de juillet 2016" [From politics to war: The Turkish military's revival after the attempted coup of July 2016], *Annuaire français des relations internationales*, vol. 13, June 2022, p. 255-270.

## THE LIBYAN SHIFT AS A SIGN OF MILITARIZATION IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY

Turkey's military presence in Libya certainly illustrates Ankara's increasingly offensive regional strategy, one in which the military now plays a central role. In November 2019, Turkey signed a military and security cooperation agreement and a memorandum of understanding on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction zones with Fayeze El-Sarraj's Libyan Government for National Unity (GNU). According to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the strategic objectives underlying Turkey's presence in Libya are many: accessing fossil fuel resources; defending its economic interests in Libya, particularly in the construction sector; extending its influence in the Eastern Mediterranean in order to defend its energy-related interests, in reaction to the Eastmed agreement between Greece, Cyprus and Israel; and finally, providing ideological support to the government in Tripoli. The latter is close to the Muslim Brotherhood, despite the movement having lost much of its influence in Tunisia and being massively repressed in Egypt.

The Turkish military intervention in Libya in 2020, which stemmed from the Turkish-Libyan military agreement, constituted a true turning point in Turkish operations abroad.<sup>2</sup> It is essential for us to analyze the situation in order to fully understand the transformation of Turkey's defense strategy. Let us remember that Turkish naval and land forces provided support to the Government of National Accord, which successfully repelled the Libyan National Army's attack, led by Khalifa Haftar. This was achieved through advanced air defense, including combat drones, and by targeting the Libyan National Army's supply lines, which were backed by major powers such as Russia, France, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. For Turkey, standing by Mustafa Fayeze al-Sarraj against Haftar also meant preserving its agreement with Libya regarding maritime jurisdiction zones and increasing its

2. Until 2015, Turkey did not unilaterally engage in cross-border military operations (except in Cyprus in 1974 and in Iraq against PKK bases starting in 1980, with permanent military bases having been set up since 1990), to the exception of peace operations within the frameworks of UN forces and NATO.

influence on the delicate issue of fossil fuel resource distribution in the region.

In Turkey, this military intervention abroad constitutes a divisive subject among partisan groups. On January 4, 2020, the resolution (*tezkere*) to send troops to Libya was put to a vote in Parliament; it was adopted with 325 votes, thereby uniting the Democracy and Progress Party (AKP) and the far right (MHP). The opposition (CHP, İYİ, Saadet and HDP) voted against the resolution, totaling 184 votes. The announced objectives of the Libyan resolution were "to take action against a variety of threats to national interests, eliminate attacks by illegitimate groups in Libya that pose a threat to Turkey's interests, take action against risks such as mass migration and ensure that humanitarian aid reaches the Libyan people." The extension of Turkey's presence in Libya for another 18 months was also put to a vote in Parliament on July 2, 2022. It too was adopted, thanks to the votes of the AKP, MHP and İYİ. Opposing parties (CHP, Saadet and HDP) voted against the motion. This explains Turkey's continued presence in Libya, the failure of the electoral process and the political uncertainty on the ground:

The political management and uncertainty issue - which arose in Libya after the elections scheduled for December 24, 2021 failed to be held - undermines the great sacrifices made to establish peace on the ground. What's more, it poses a serious obstacle for achieving permanent stability. This situation is of great concern for the security of both Libya and the entire region [...]. So far, concluding a permanent ceasefire and fostering political dialogue in Libya has not been possible. The same goes for the unification of the country's institutions, especially its military and security institutions. It is important to prevent conflicts from resuming in order to undertake military and political negotiations under the auspices of the UN. In the present context, risks and threats to the whole region, including Turkey, continue to emanate from Libya. Were attacks against the legitimate government to resume, Turkey's interests in both the Mediterranean basin and North Africa would be affected.<sup>3</sup>

3. "Tekirdag Deputy Mustafa Şentop's proposal for the ratification of the Memorandum of Understanding of Security and Military Cooperation between the Libyan Government of National Accord and the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Turkey's General

Thus, this resolution will enable Turkey to pursue various security and military activities in Libya and to:

- take all necessary measures within the framework of international law against a variety of threats and risks to Turkey's national interests,
- prevent attacks by illegitimate armed groups and terrorist organizations in Libya that may threaten Turkey's interests in Libya,
- control mass migration,
- maintain our national security against other possible risks,
- deliver the humanitarian aid needed by the Libyan people, thereby continuing the support requested by the former Libyan Government of National Accord, which the Government for National Unity later declared necessary,
- send armed forces to foreign countries to carry out operations and interventions outside Turkish borders.<sup>4</sup>

The Turkish President is therefore entitled to determine how these armed forces are utilized. Due to these provisions being relatively vague, any event in Libya may be considered a threat to Turkey's national security. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan specified that "different teams" would be sent to Libya, before adding that "the army would not serve as a combat force in Libya, but would ensure the coordination of different combat forces that are not part of the Turkish Armed Forces". The nature of the "different teams" mentioned by the President has stirred parliamentary and media debate in Turkey. In an interview aired on CNN Türk, President Erdoğan spoke of the Turkish military's mission in Libya: "There will be an operations center and we will have a lieutenant general in that operations center. They will manage this process on the ground gradually." He also clarified that "the purpose of the possible presence of elements in Libya is not to fight or wage war. It is to support the government by preventing events that could lead to humanitarian

Assembly website", <https://www5.tbmm.gov.tr/sirasayi/donem27/yil01/ss155.pdf>.

4. *Ibid.*

tragedies and destabilize the region. In fact, it is about preparing the Constitution as soon as possible".<sup>5</sup>

The multiplication of Turkish operations abroad may nevertheless lead tensions to arise within the army – as well as throughout Turkish society – regardless of their success, since these operations are held abroad, where Turkey's territorial integrity is not directly threatened. Ünal Çeviköz, Deputy of the Republican People's Party in Istanbul and spokesperson for the CHP Foreign Affairs Committee, spoke on behalf of the CHP regarding this resolution during the General Assembly of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, noting differences with the past:

Why are we in Libya today? There is a very clear answer for those who ask "Didn't Atatürk go to Libya too?": Mustafa Kemal was there to defend the homeland, to prepare the Libyan people to resist occupation and to bring them victory in Tobruk; that is the difference with the present situation.<sup>6</sup>

The CHP even sees the act of sending Turkish troops abroad as unconstitutional, based on Article 92 of its Constitution: the act of sending troops must be in accordance with and legitimized by international law. Thus, according to the CHP, "this resolution violates the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council".

Ladies and gentlemen, behold: the government's measures regarding this resolution bring further harm to our country's reputation. Adventurous policies are throwing our country to the wolves and subjecting us to illegal practices, the latest unfortunate example of which is the illegal search of a container ship. The government's perception of risk appears impossible to comprehend. It lacks the ability to eliminate the risks faced by our country and creates problems where there are none. In every

5. "[İlk Türk askeri birlikleri Libya'ya ulaştı! TSK, radar ve hava savunma sistemi de gönderdi](#)" [The first Turkish troops have reached Libya! TAF also sent a radar and an air defense system], *Son Dakika.com*, January 8, 2020.

6. Press release, "[CHP'nin dışişleri komisyon sözcüsü Çeviköz, Libya tezkeresi üzerine CHP grubu adına konuştu](#)" [CHP Foreign Committee Chairman Çeviköz speaks on behalf of the CHP group on the Libya decision], on the Republican People's Party website.

statement we have made regarding Libya, we have issued this warning: "Do not support or take sides with any of the parties involved in the conflict in Libya. Respect Libya's sovereignty and territorial integrity and do not interfere in the country's internal affairs".<sup>7</sup>

The Turkish President's goal of establishing Turkey as an influential player in the Middle East and the Mediterranean is certainly shared by the new military authorities, yet the adventurism of such a policy is being debated within Turkish society. What, then, is the AKP's strategy?

#### THE "BLUE HOMELAND" STRATEGY - MAVI VATAN

The Turkish presence in Libya reflects the implementation of a new military doctrine: the "Blue Homeland" (*Mavi Vatan*). The latter is founded upon three principles: militarizing foreign policy (through the army); defending Turkey from abroad, particularly by controlling its maritime borders on the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean; and setting up defense-related industries to implement this strategy. The Blue Homeland doctrine has led Turkey to take great strides towards developing its naval industry, conducting military maneuvers in its territorial waters, deploying its military forces in the Eastern Mediterranean and signing a maritime jurisdiction agreement with Libya.

This doctrine is nothing new, as Admiral Cem Gürdeniz had previously conceptualized it in 2006. It was particularly aimed at legitimizing certain foreign policy options that would bolster Turkey's strategic approach and allow it to emerge from the status quo that followed the Treaty of Lausanne. Nevertheless, Cem Gürdeniz's vision remained in the shadows, as Ahmet Davutoğlu's doctrine of strategic depth (*Stratejik Derinlik*) and absolute peace with Turkey's neighbors dominated the country's policies during the 2000s. Due to his affiliations to sovereignist (*ulusalçı*) circles, Cem Gürdeniz was imprisoned in the context

7. *Ibid.*

of the "*Balyoz*" (Sledgehammer) case<sup>8</sup> of 2010, yet continued to write from his prison cell. His concept has since gained in popularity and has guided President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's foreign and defense policy in a political context in which, in order to regain legitimacy, the ruling party has created an alliance with both the nationalist far right and the sovereignist movement.

This alliance in the political arena also reflects a shift in the power struggles that exist within the military. Though the different schools of thought within the military (Atlanticists, nationalists, sovereignists, Eurasianists, etc.) are not set in stone, with supporters crossing over from one side to another, we may posit that the existing political alliance between conservative, nationalist and sovereignist circles also permeates the army. The common ground between these different schools of thought (Eurasianists and Kemalists included) is founded upon a variety of factors: the anti-American view, fuelled by Washington's support for the PKK in Syria and the presence of Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen on American soil; criticism towards the policies implemented by European nations; and the desire to free Turkey from its single alliance system in order to multiply its partnerships with other international powers such as Russia. Though these doctrinal elements may help explain the military surge in Turkish foreign policy, they should not overshadow the other forms of logic at play here, particularly political, which also shed light on this evolution of the military's internal configuration. Admiral Cihat Yaycı's resignation – after being transferred to Turkey's General Staff by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in May 2020, without waiting until the following Supreme Military Council (YAS) – raised many questions. His exclusion coincides with the Turkish military's involvement in operations in Libya. What's more, Chief of Staff of the Turkish navy Cihat Yaycı counted among the creators of

8. The "*Balyoz*" (Sledgehammer) case came to light in 2010 and exclusively involved military personnel. Legal authorities claimed that they were planning attacks with the intention of having the country descend into chaos, thereby justifying military intervention. All of the accused were subsequently acquitted, as the prosecutors and judges in charge of the case were allegedly linked to the Gülen movement.

the Turkish-Libyan maritime agreement of December 2019. While it is possible that Cihat Yaycı was removed in order to limit the sovereignists' influence on the decision-making process, this move may also have been motivated by a will to curb the officer's ascendancy in the media, as he was beginning to overshadow the Minister of Defense himself. However, this departure does not call Ankara's new regional strategy into question; it only strengthens the hypothesis according to which the drive towards militarization in Turkish foreign policy will continue as we move forward. Moreover, if Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remains in power after the elections in June 2023, this trend will in fact become entrenched.

#### TURKISH-LIBYAN SECURITY AND MILITARY COOPERATION

The history of military cooperation between Libya and Turkey is longstanding. As early as 2014, the Turkish press reported that Libyan soldiers spent 14 weeks training at the Isparta Internal Security Training and Exercise Center in Turkey. The military and security cooperation agreement, signed in November 2019, allows Turkey to act not as a foreign force, but as "a stabilizing force" in Libya. In the words of presidential spokesperson İbrahim Kalın at the end of the international conference on Libya, held in Paris on November 12, 2021: "Our allies speak of this issue as if the real problem in Libya were Turkey's presence. Yet that is not the case. We, as a stabilizing force, are there to help the Libyan people. In virtue of the agreement between our two countries, we cannot accept that our soldiers on the ground be compared to other mercenaries".<sup>9</sup> Ömer Ceilk, spokesperson of the AKP party, portrayed Turkey's military presence as aid, stating that the Turkish Armed Forces were deployed upon request of the legitimate government for training purposes.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, Mesut Casin, an advisor to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, stressed that "Turkey did

9. "[Türkiye, Libya'ya yeni bir grup Suriyeli 'paralı asker' gönderdi](#)" [Turkey sends a new group of Syrian "mercenaries" to Libya], *Asharq al-Awsat*, November 20, 2021.

10. *Ibid.*

not want military influence in Libya, we do not need it".<sup>11</sup> How has Turkey's role evolved since the ceasefire in August 2020, following the Turkish army's military intervention to repel the attack led by Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army?

On the ground, the Turkish army is mainly involved in military training activities. According to the military and security cooperation agreement of 2019 and details provided by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Turkish army has three missions in Libya: military training, assistance and advisory activities, in accordance with the agreements signed between the two countries. Turkey and Libya signed another agreement on August 17, 2020, pertaining to military training, which encompasses: "joint military maneuvers, the security and defense industries, counter-terrorism, countering illegal migration, land, sea and air border security, countering narcoterrorism, anti-smuggling, improvised response operations for explosions and natural disasters, joint operations and the organizational restructuring of defense and security forces." Little public information is available regarding this cooperation. A media scandal revealed that 56 expert sergeants assigned to command the Libyan Task Force of the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) filed a collective complaint with the Presidency's Communications Center (CIMER). The soldiers in question, who claimed that their superiors had harassed them psychologically and physically, claimed that they even picked up Libyan soldiers' litter. The soldiers were put under disciplinary investigation and have since been dismissed. Those who returned to Turkey were subsequently expelled from the Turkish Armed Forces. A legal investigation<sup>12</sup> has also

11. Dorian Jones, "[Türkiye Libya'daki Askeri Varlığı Nedeniyle Baskı Altında](#)" [Turkey under pressure over its military presence in Libya], *Amerikaninsesi*, May 25, 2021.

12. What's more, a legal investigation was launched against the soldiers, upon authorization from the Ministry of National Defense, for violating the Military Penal Code. Soldiers accused of filing a joint complaint will be investigated and may face a prison sentence of up to three years.

been launched against them.<sup>13</sup> An administrative investigation accused the soldiers of “utilizing the same allegations in a cooperative and coordinated manner, filing a complaint with CIMER, displaying attitudes and behaviors aimed at intimidating their superiors, disrupting discipline within their unit and hindering the development of a military esprit de corps”.

One of the objectives of Turkey and Libya’s cooperation is training. The command of the Libyan Naval Forces seems to have received the most advanced level of training so far. Since August 25, 2020, the Libyan and Turkish Armed Forces have been cooperating at the Joint Maritime Training Center in the city of Al Khums. According to the official figures provided by Colonel Yetkin Koçaş, who is in charge of the forces in Libya, “more than 900 Libyan soldiers from 38 areas have received training” over two years. According to him, the main duty of the Al Khums Joint Maritime Training Center is to help train the command of the Libyan Naval Forces “according to modern, effective, professional and international standards in Libya.” For example, in June 2022, the Turkish navy helped trained personnel of Libyan warship Dawn, which traveled to Turkey to participate in the combined joint live-fire exercise dubbed Efes-2022.

Since September 30, 2020, the Turkish army has also been mobilized in Libya as part of these training activities. It is participating in command training at the Joint Land Training Center, located east of Tripoli, the Libyan capital. Within this framework, the Libyan Armed Forces received “urban operations training”.<sup>14</sup> Lt. Cüneyt Karabacak, who is assigned to the Joint Land Training Center, stated that the center hosts a variety of training activities, including basic military service, basic combat, urban operations, mountaineering, first aid, basic commando training and Turkish language training.<sup>15</sup> Within the framework of counter-terrorism,

13. Alican Uludağ, “Libya’da görevli 56 asker TSK’dan ihraç edildi” [56 soldiers serving in Libya dismissed from the Turkish Armed Forces], *DW*, December 14, 2021.

14. “Libya’da Mehmetçik’ten ilk iftar” [The first fast-breaking meal in Libya], *TGRT Haber*, April 3, 2022.

15. *Ibid.*

the two countries’ Armed Forces also held a joint operational training exercise focusing on residential areas.

As we have just seen, official military cooperation is limited to training. To strengthen its power in Libya, Turkey would need to further broaden the scope of its presence on the ground. Might there be less visible, perhaps even secret military activities underway?

#### OUTSOURCING TO SYRIAN MILITIAS

Tripoli has become fragmented and has fallen into the hands of hundreds of different militias. According to certain sources, Turkey is maintaining nearly 8,000 armed Syrians on the ground. Therefore, it would seem that, in addition to the thousands of fighters from the Syrian rebellion that were sent to Libya, teams belonging to private security company SADAT (Uluslararası Savunma Danışmanlık Şirketi) have also been deployed to participate in supervision activities. However, the company’s founder, former Military Officer Adnan Tanrıverdi, has denied this information. While the latter admits to his company’s presence in Libya, he does not acknowledge having played a role in the recruitment or routing of Syrian militias:

SADAT was in Libya to determine the needs of the Libyan Armed Forces on the ground and to evaluate the possibilities of providing consulting services, training and equipment. These negotiations led to a project to design and build sports facilities. It should also be noted that Adnan Tanrıverdi resigned from his position as an advisor to the President and as a member of the Security and Foreign Policy Council (Güvenlik ve Dış Politika Kurulu) on January 8, 2020, following widespread criticism of his statements at a conference during which the prospect of an “Islamic union with the Mahdi’s return to earth” was raised.

This statement was interpreted as a call for the return of Fethullah Gülen. The departure of SADAT’s founder thereby highlights the limits of his influence. It also reflects the fact that the army’s revalorization process is combined with the

re-institutionalization of decision-making, i.e. to the detriment of non-official actors.

The fact that militiamen are being transferred from one area of operations to another (from Syria to Libya) marks a new turn of events that deserves to be highlighted, especially since it also serves political goals. In fact, such practices allow the Turkish President and his party to outsource possible losses to actors outside the Turkish army. They also help mitigate the collateral political costs that come with soldiers' deaths, seeing as Turkey's intervention in Libya - which the war against the PKK does not justify - is disputed among the population. What's more, if losses become too great, part of the military command might oppose these operations. Thus, the partial outsourcing of military operations to militias and private actors - along with the increasing use of drones (which can also help limit the political costs of this type of intervention) - may well become one of the new levers for an increased Turkish presence abroad.

## II. TURKEY'S GROWING ROLE IN THE REGION

Following its post-2011 isolation and amid efforts to counter revolutions and restore authoritarian power, Turkey is seeking to establish itself as a major player in the region. Turkey's resounding return, including on the diplomatic front, must be put into perspective with the accelerated normalization of the country's relations with the Middle East. In recent months, a diplomatic back-and-forth took place between Ankara and the Gulf nations' capitals. Turkey is actively normalizing its relations with regional powers such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel, in addition to a tentative rapprochement with Egypt. However, the normalization of Turkey's relations with the Middle East remains limited to the economic realm, to the detriment of the political sphere.

### NORMALIZING RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST

Turkey's relations with the UAE were severed in 2016, when Turkey accused the Emirates of supporting and financing the attempted coup in July. For the first time in 15 years, on May 30, 2022, National Defense Minister Hulusi Akar and his counterpart Mohammed Ahmad Al Bowardi met to discuss bilateral and regional issues, focusing on cooperation in the context of military training and the defense industry. UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan noted that his country has much to gain from investing in Turkish ports, railroads and solar plants. The normalization of Turkey's relations with Saudi Arabia is predominantly founded upon economic motives. In March 2022, Turkey handed over the legal case concerning Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi - who was executed and butchered on Saudi consulate premises in Istanbul on October 2, 2018 - to Saudi Arabia. This legal transfer and the closure of the prosecution case unfroze the relations between the two countries, particularly the Saudi boycott of Turkish products that had been ongoing since September 2020. This unofficial boycott resulted



in a notable decrease in Turkish exports. According to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK), in 2020, “Turkey’s exports to Saudi Arabia decreased significantly compared to 2019, from 2.505 billion dollars to 1.79 billion dollars”.<sup>1</sup> Turkey’s rapprochement with Saudi Arabia and Egypt came with shows of good faith on Turkey’s behalf, including a restriction on media broadcasting by the Muslim Brotherhood based in Turkey. The Mekameleen and Al-Sharq television channels – affiliated to the Brotherhood, which is considered a “terrorist organization” by both States – have been forced to reduce their criticism toward the Egyptian government. Very recently, in April 2022, the Mekameleen TV channel announced the relocation of its studios to another country, which coincided with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s visit to Saudi Arabia.

The same is true of the gradual resumption of Turkey’s relations with Israel which, since 2010 and the *Mavi Marmara* affair, had become virtually non-existent. Their cooperation was limited to joint military exercises until 2013, in addition to intelligence exchanges in the context of counter-terrorism. This relational normalization process began in 2021. The war in Ukraine then led to an acceleration of diplomatic exchanges between President Erdoğan and Israeli President Isaac Herzog. In addition, President Herzog’s visit to Ankara in March 2022 marked another step towards the two countries’ reconciliation. The war in Ukraine acted as a reminder of the importance of diversifying one’s energy supplies, and Israel is a key player in the race for energy in the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, by drawing closer to Israel, Turkey also intends to defend its own energy-related interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, whilst countering the influence exerted by Greece and the Republic of Cyprus. It should be noted that, in the past, Turkey was excluded from the Eastmed agreement between Greece, Cyprus and Israel to build a 2,200 km undersea gas pipeline. As the Biden administration

1. “[Türkiye-Suudi Arabistan ticari ilişkilerinde beklenen ivme yakalanabilecek mi?](#)” [Will the trade relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia achieve their expected momentum?], *Cumhuriyet*, May 20, 2022.

refused to help finance this project, the latter’s feasibility was put into question. This explains why Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is hoping for a new pipeline project with Israel, one that transits through Turkey in order to bring Israeli gas into Europe.

Thus, launching negotiations with Israel on the topic of energy certainly counts among Ankara’s objectives. Nevertheless, the keystone of political normalization – i.e. the appointment of an ambassador – has not yet been laid. Moreover, Israel does not want to disrupt the international energy cooperation it has established with Greece, the Republic of Cyprus and Egypt in the Eastern Mediterranean over the past decade. On the other hand, the announcement of exploration and drilling activities – by international companies such as ENI, BP and Chevron – resuming in the Eastern Mediterranean may lead new tensions to arise in the region, thereby squandering the normalization efforts regarding Turkish-Israeli relations. The process of political normalization between the two countries is bound to be a delicate one, seeing as they are opposed on the Palestinian issue – despite the two countries having been able to set aside their differences and cooperate in the past. On May 29, 2022, the Turkish Foreign Minister declared that “the raid on the Al-Aqsa Mosque by Israeli parliamentarian Itamar Ben-Gvir and fanatical Jewish groups under the protection of the Israeli police is a clear violation of the status quo, which shows that Turkey is negotiating with Israel, but will not remain silent as it achieves its goals”.<sup>2</sup> Israel, on the other hand, blames President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for supporting and harboring Hamas militants, which it considers “a terrorist organization.” Certain Hamas leaders were expected to leave Turkey, yet this issue remains a source of tension for Israel. Turkey is unwilling to change its position on the Palestinian issue and does not seem ready to limit the activities of Hamas leaders within its borders.<sup>3</sup> Hence Israel’s will to engage with

2. “[Türkiye’den İsrail’e tepki: Statükonun açık bir ihlalidir](#)” [Turkey’s reaction to Israel: A blatant violation of the status quo], *Star*, May 29, 2022.

3. Ahmad Abu Amer, “[Türkiye-İsrail yaklaşması Hamas’ı korkutuyor](#)” [Turkey-Israel rapprochement alarms Hamas], *Al-Monitor*, March 15, 2022.

Turkey exclusively on topics that require little political commitment, such as renewable energy, water management and information technology, i.e. cooperation projects that will increase the volume of trade.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these developments, Turkey's goal of normalizing its relations with the Middle East remains difficult to attain, as many deep political differences still exist between Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt on the one hand, and Turkey on the other. Sensitive issues include Libya, Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean.

#### FAILING TO TRULY NORMALIZE RELATIONS WITH EGYPT

The stumbling point in Turkey's rapprochement with Egypt is the Libyan issue. Egyptian authorities perceive Turkey's presence in Libya as a threat to Egypt's security. Egypt's involvement in the Libyan crisis seems to be motivated by two main factors. Firstly, border protection is seen as imperative in the presence of armed groups and smugglers. The second factor is Turkey's military presence as part of its larger region-wide project, one that is perceived as a direct threat to Egypt's stability.

Egypt was led to intervene in Libya in 2011 in order to defend its borders and repatriate the thousands of Egyptian workers located in Libya.<sup>5</sup> Egypt subsequently set up an array of measures to strengthen security on its western border so as to avoid attacks by armed groups. The latter were originally linked to Al-Qaeda, before becoming affiliated to the Islamic State from 2014 onwards. Egyptian security services are particularly concerned about attacks carried out by Egyptians having joined these groups.<sup>6</sup> Examples include Hisham Ashmawy,<sup>7</sup> a former Egyptian Officer,

4. Murat Yeşiltaş, "[NATO'nun Genişlemesi ve Türkiye](#)" [NATO's expansion and Turkey], *Sabah*, May 28, 2022.

5. Interview with Ahmed Eleiba, Researcher at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo, October 23, 2021.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Khaled Mohamed, "[New details on Hisham Ashmawy, alleged terrorist behind Oasis Operation](#)", *Egypt Today*, October 30, 2017.

who founded an armed group in Libya that has pledged allegiance to Al-Qaeda, *Al-Mourabitoun*. Hisham Ashmawy is said to have been linked to the Libyan group dubbed the Shura Council of Mujahideen in Derna, which is composed of several Islamist groups, including Ansar al-Sharia.<sup>8</sup> It should also be noted that, according to Professor Ali Bensaad's analysis, "Egypt has not only mobilized its army and its security services to structure Haftar's military on the ground, it has also invested Cyrenaican society as a whole. Its multiple advisors are present in all sectors. Haftar has even adopted the Egyptian model of militarizing the economy." Haftar's army has therefore taken control of the economy by becoming the "main private company". Turkey's direct intervention is a response to the continued interference by the United Arab Emirates and Egypt, who have sided with Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Thus, Turkey's massive intervention followed those launched by the UAE and Egypt, not the other way around.

In January 2020, Turkey's intervention was condemned by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>9</sup> Egypt then mounted a pressure campaign within several international organizations, challenging the legality of this intervention.<sup>10</sup> In June, President Al Sissi announced that the city of Sirte constituted a red line. According to one of our interviewees,<sup>11</sup> "the Egyptian Parliament had agreed to an intervention at the time, while the Turks arrived with the jihadists and advanced towards the east, announcing that they would not stop before reaching Cairo [...]. This was not only a way of questioning Turkey's military support to the armed factions in the west; it was a warning to Turkey regarding its entire policy in the Eastern Mediterranean." The Turkish-Libyan cooperation is seen as a territorial expansion project: "in

8. Muhammad Al-Arabi, "[فيديو يكشف علاقة إرهابيي درنة بمطلوبين بصر](#)" [Video reveals relationship between Derna terrorists and persons wanted by Egypt], *Alrabiya*, February 13, 2018.

9. Al-Masry Al-Youm, "[Egypt condemns Turkish military intervention in Libya](#)", *Egypt Independent*, January 3, 2020.

10. Interview with Ahmed Eleiba, Researcher at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo, October 23, 2021.

11. Interview with an anonymous researcher.

our opinion, Turkey, like Iran, plans to expand in the region, particularly in areas that Egypt considers to fall within the realm of its own national security".<sup>12</sup> Turkish intervention is therefore presented as a threat to Egypt's security, due to the former's support for jihadist groups and the vast regional project towards which it is thought to be working ("The Turkish project in the Arab Region"). Ever since the overthrow of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi in June 2013, the project's aim is thought to have been "to weaken Egypt and destroy its national project, so as to create an opportunity for Turkey to implement its own project".<sup>13</sup> Turkish foreign policy, especially in Iraq and Syria (which is seen as an "occupation"<sup>14</sup>) and the *Mavi Vatan* doctrine are thereby perceived as a unified project, designed and planned over several years, comprising different phases and driven by a neo-Ottoman ideology. To achieve this goal, "the first method is to get within range of Egypt, particularly through Libya [...] the second method involves the Muslim Brotherhood."<sup>15</sup> In fact, one of our interviewees believes that, since 2011, "Turkey has not set any limits and has deepened its instrumentalization of the Brotherhood".<sup>16</sup>

According to Amr Al Shobaki, former Member of the Egyptian Parliament and author of numerous books on the Muslim Brotherhood, these differences go beyond mere regional power struggles:

There were problems under Nasser, including with Iran. Nasser was a socialist and opposed the United States and Turkey, which was a member of NATO. The situation is different now, due to the Islamist issue, the Muslim Brotherhood. In my opinion, this

12. Interview with Ahmed Eleiba, Researcher at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo, October 23, 2021.

13. *The Muslim Brotherhood, Sponsors of the organization and networks*, ECSS Report, 2021, p. 10.

14. Interview with Ahmed Eleiba, Cairo, October 23, 2021.

15. "The first method is to get within range of Egypt, particularly through Libya [...] the second method involves the Muslim Brotherhood" (*ibid.* p. 12).

16. Interview with Ahmed Eleiba, Researcher at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies, Cairo, October 23, 2021.

is the main reason; it is not the rivalries. [...] If Turkey were led by the Republican People's Party, the situation would be different in my opinion. Erdoğan's position is an ideological position, one that is in contradiction with his party. The AKP is a pragmatic party, its policy changes, it easily switches sides. Yet, at the same time, the AKP has an ideological side, as if it had reduced the Arab world to the Muslim Brotherhood. It does not see the political and cultural richness of the Arab world; it only sees the Muslim Brotherhood. It's a catastrophe.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, researcher Hisham Morad believes that "the first - and even the second and third - priority [for Egypt] is to fight political Islam in the region. It takes precedence over everything else; contain, curb, fight and limit political Islam as much as possible, especially the Muslim Brotherhood".

However, we must keep in mind the fact that Egypt once supported Marshal Haftar, whose armed forces include a substantial number of Madkhalist Salafist groups. For the Egyptian government, it is a matter of stability of its regime, by avoiding strong opposing forces being developed abroad:

For Egypt, the situation has moved from the military to the political realm. Yet the problem is still present. It requires other means of intervention. At one time, until mid-2020 (and the ceasefire agreement), it was more of a military issue. Now, another dimension has been breached: it is a political issue, yet the conflict remains active, because nothing has been settled and we run the risk of combat resuming. It's getting more complicated. Through politics and political action, Egypt is in fact fighting the same fight (through elections, etc.). How can we reduce the Islamist movement to a minority? Politics do not have the power to eliminate, but the military does. In politics, there are agreements, compromises. Egypt is trying to make sure that, even if the Islamists eventually participate, they will represent a minority, that there are other forces acting as counterweights, thereby reducing the Islamist movement to a minority. That's mostly what it's about...<sup>18</sup>

17. Interview with Amr al Sobaki, Cairo, October 24, 2021.

18. Interview with Hisham Morad, Cairo, October 24, 2022.

Thus, Cairo sees Libya as an extension of its domestic region, as stability in Libya is expected to lead to stability in Egypt.<sup>19</sup> What's more, the fight against the Muslim Brotherhood and all of its alleged affiliates makes Libya an essential pawn in the United Arab Emirates' counter-revolutionary strategy.

Following the latest clashes in the center of Tripoli on August 27, 2022, we are seeing strategic forces being rebuilt once again. Moreover, Turkey and Egypt are at odds over the Libyan issue. Very recently, the meeting of the Arab League's Foreign Ministers was held in Cairo. Nejla Mangouş, Foreign Minister of the Dbeibah government, attended the meeting and was asked to step down by the Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sami Shukri, as her term of office had expired. Thus, Egypt clearly supports Bachagha. According to Hediye Levent, one of the topics on the agenda of the Arab League's meeting in Cairo was "to develop a united Arab stance against Turkey's interference in the Arab world's internal affairs."<sup>20</sup> However, Turkey still intends to consolidate its economic investments in Libya, as the latter constitutes a gateway into the rest of Africa.

### III. TURKEY'S LONG-TERM PRESENCE, BEYOND THE MILITARY REALM

#### LIBYA AS A GATEWAY TO AFRICA?

Beyond its military presence, Turkey sees Libya as a gateway to the African continent. It is therefore seeking to strengthen its economic investments throughout the African continent: the volume of trade between Turkey and Africa rose from 5.4 billion dollars in 2003 to 34.5 billion dollars in 2021.<sup>1</sup> Turkish construction companies are also very active on the African continent and participate in a variety of construction projects. In parallel, Turkey is consolidating its diplomatic presence: since 2009, it has opened 39 new embassies throughout the continent. Certain Turkish institutions – such as the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) on the economic front, the Yunus Emre Institute (YEE) in the cultural sector and the Turkish Maarif Foundation (TMF) in the field of education – are key players in Turkey's networking endeavors in Africa. Libya constitutes a laboratory of experimentation for strengthening this Turkish presence in Africa. Murtaza Karanfil, Head Representative for Libya at the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSIAD) and Chairman of the Karanfil Group's Board of Directors, stated: "There is Africa – the intact continent that the whole world is looking at – and we can extend our domination on this continent through Libya. It will be easier for us to expand from Libya to Central, East and West Africa by deepening our four-century old relationship."<sup>2</sup> In order to consolidate its position in Libya, Turkey is relying on two factors: firstly, it is trying

19. Tarek Megerisi, "[Libya's global civil war](#)", Policy brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2019.

20. Hediye Levent, "[Libya hem böldü hem bölündü](#)" [Libya divides and is divided], *Evoensel*, September 8, 2022.

1. "[Afrika'da Türk rüzgarı! "Türkiye diğer ülkeleri geride bıraktı"](#)" [Turkish wind in Africa! "Turkey has left other countries behind"], *Star*, August 29, 2022.

2. Mehmet Kadir Kılınç, "[Karanfil Group Yönetim Kurulu Başkanı Murtaza Karanfil: Libya odaklı Afrika açılımı geliştirmeliyiz](#)" [Murtaza Karanfil, Chairman of the Karanfil Group's Board of Directors: We need to create an African initiative focusing on Libya], Anadolu Agency, August 12, 2022.

to sustain its economic investments, and secondly, it is trying to strengthen its political ties.

#### ESTABLISHING A LONG-TERM PRESENCE THROUGH TURKISH INVESTMENTS

According to the ICG,<sup>3</sup> Turkey's strategic ambitions – especially in economic matters – have largely influenced Turkish policy in Libya. In fact, on the very day the military intervention in Libya was announced (January 2, 2020), the MÜSIAD association announced that it wanted to increase exports to Libya by 50% over the next year – from 1.49 billion dollars in 2018 to 3 billion dollars in 2020.

While economic relations between the two countries are long-standing, the war has given Turkey the opportunity to invest in new sectors in Libya. In 2010, Turkey constituted Libya's second source of imports behind Italy, accounting for 9.44% of all Libyan imports<sup>4</sup> (2.21 billion dollars). At that time, Turkey's exports were not particularly diversified and boasted relatively low added value, consisting mostly of metals/iron (manufactured goods and raw materials, around 32%), machinery and miscellaneous equipment (around 20%), plastic products (7.3%), and furniture (6.3%). Between 2014 and 2017, Turkish exports decreased substantially in value and volume, from 2.06 billion dollars to 880 million dollars, while imports of Libyan products (mainly oil and gold) remained relatively stable. This led to a shift in the trade balance between the two countries – which, nevertheless, remained favorable to Turkey – and lost nearly a third of its total value over three years (from 1.811 billion dollars

3. International Crisis Group, *Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters*, Europe & Central Asia Report No. 257, April 30, 2020 [last consulted on October 15, 2021].

4. Figures from the OEC website: <https://oec.world/en/profile/country/tur>. The World Bank lists Turkey as Libya's main source of imports (1.872 million US dollars, i.e. 10.59%). “[Libya Trade Summary](#)”, World Bank WITS database, 2010.

in 2014 to 632 million dollars in 2017<sup>5</sup>). 2018 marked the start of a build in momentum, with a recorded 1.498 billion dollars in exports, followed by 1.9 billion dollars in 2019, 1.6 billion dollars in 2020 and 2.5 billion dollars in 2021. This increase coincided with a diversification of the country's exports: today, Turkey mainly exports chemical products (13.3%), furniture and forest products (11.9%), as well as jewelry (11.2%), agricultural products (10%) and ready-to-wear clothing (9.9%).<sup>6</sup> Steel and metals account for only 11% of its exports. In 2021, Turkey's exports to Libya reached a record 2.5 billion dollars. This represents 1.06% of Turkey's total exports<sup>7</sup> and 14% of all Libyan imports, i.e. its second largest source behind China.<sup>8</sup> The volume of bilateral trade between Turkey and Libya has reached 4.5 billion dollars.<sup>9</sup> This upward trend seems to be here to stay, as Turkish authorities announced a new record in exports in March 2022.<sup>10</sup> Libya is already Turkey's second largest African client – a continent throughout which Turkey has been expanding its network for some twenty years now.<sup>11</sup>

5. “[Türkiye-Libya Economic and Trade Relations](#)”, *Economy of Libya (2017)*, TÜİK, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

6. “[Türkiye'nin Libya'ya ihracatı yılın ilk iki ayında 456,7 milyon dolara ulaştı](#)” [Turkey's exports to Libya reached 456.7 million dollars during the first two months of the year], *Sondakika*, March 7, 2022.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *OECD*, Libya.

9. “[Türkiye'den kritik Libya kararı](#)” [Turkey's critical decision regarding Libya], *Yeniakit*, August 10, 2022.

10. “[Turkish exports to Libya surge 58% January-April](#)”, *Daily Sabah*, May 16, 2021.

11. Over a twenty year period, trade has gone from less than 5 billion dollars to over 25 billion dollars (21.89 billion euros). Most significantly, Turkish Airlines is expanding rapidly and has become one of the leading airlines in Africa, covering no less than 61 destinations. What's more, Turkey now has 43 embassies in Africa, compared to 12 some 20 years ago. See for example: Jean Marcou, “[La Turquie, une nouvelle puissance africaine](#)” [Turkey, a New African Power], *Orient XXI*, January 17, 2022.

Libya thereby represents an outlet for Turkish products, as well as an important market for its construction companies,<sup>12</sup> which were already present before the war. Meanwhile, the Libyan government estimates that its reconstruction market is worth at least 111 billion dollars.<sup>13</sup> In 2011, Turkish companies owned more than 20 billion dollars in construction, engineering and energy contracts throughout the country. However, most of these contracts remained unpaid due to the revolution<sup>14</sup> and the departure of Turkish companies and workers from Libya. What's more, Turkish companies had reportedly invested nearly 2 billion dollars in equipment for these stalled projects. From the onset of its support for Sarraj's government in April 2019, Turkey sought compensation and guarantees, even creating a joint Turkish-Libyan working group to address the issue of compensation for pre-2011 Turkish investors.<sup>15</sup> Measures seem to have been implemented to encourage Turkish companies to resume projects that were left unfinished due to the war.

#### WHO ARE THE ECONOMIC ACTORS ON LIBYAN SOIL?

Through its Chairman Murtaza Karanfil, the Libyan Department of the Foreign Economic Relations Board (DEIK) truly plays a key role. This economic organization was founded to accompany and assist Turkey's economic, commercial, industrial and financial relations with foreign countries and international communities.<sup>16</sup> The Board is not a new institution, as it dates back to 1985 and was formerly affiliated to the Ministry

12. ["Turkish contractors want to return to Libya, resume projects once peace restored"](#), *Daily Sabah*, December 24, 2019.

13. Sami Zaptia, ["US\\$ 111 bn cost of Libya's reconstruction over next 10 years"](#), *Libya Herald*, September 11, 2021.

14. Jalel Harchaoui, ["Why Turkey Intervened in Libya"](#), in Tolga Demiryol et al., *The Eastern Mediterranean and Regional Security. A Transatlantic Dialogue*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Philadelphia, December 7, 2020, p. 41-51.

15. ["Turkey seeks to increase exports to Libya"](#), *Asharq al-Awsat*, January 2, 2020. Also refer to: [Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters](#), *op. cit.*

16. Refer to the official website: <https://www.deik.org.tr/>.

of Economy in 2014, making it a tool for business diplomacy. Murtaza Karanfil, a businessman from the city of Mardin, is the Head of the Karanfil Group. In 2020, the latter boasted a turnover of 90 million dollars. The group's activities in Libya – as well as Algeria and other African countries – are highly heterogeneous and spread across 16 sectors of activity: construction, medicine, design, furniture, transport, publishing, law, food, maintenance, aircraft sales and purchases, defense and security technologies, etc.

For further details, refer to the table below:

**Table 1**

KARANFİL GROUP	International maritime transport, especially in Libya and all Middle Eastern countries. It features an international transport network connecting the continents through its sea, air and road transport services.
KARANFİL GROUP GAZİANTEP	<i>Idem.</i>
KARANFİL GROUP KONYA	<i>Idem.</i>
CLOVE GIDA	The sale, export and import of consumer goods, food products, beverages and agricultural products.
KARANFİL CONSTRUCTION	Construction project management, consulting services in engineering, building protection (interior and exterior), as well as furniture design and management.
BABİL GROUP	The company operates across many sectors, including textiles, food, health, industry and foreign trade.
POLİGON 34	Modern shooting ranges with a variety of security measures.
SAS HAVACILIK	Chartering various products and jet rentals.
KARANFİL MINING	Mining exploration. Exploration activities and projects for precious and base metals.

İSTANBUL FEN BİLİMLERİ MEDENİYET OKULLARI (İFBM)	Education, schools. İFBM schools feature 3 different campuses in Istanbul (Kartal, Sancaktepe and Çekmeköy), hosting kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.
ETKİ OKULLARI	Schools.
KAMPÜS FIT LIFE	Sports centers.
KAMPÜSARAY YURTLARI	Student residences for males.
KARANFİL AIR	Aviation services including maintenance, transportation and aircraft sales and purchases.
KARANFİL GIDA	Distribution, export and import of branded fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) including food, beverages and agricultural products.
KARANFİL LAW	Legal services.
KARANFİL MEDICAL	Medicine.
KARANFİL MOBİLYA VEDEKORASYON	Design and furniture.
KG KARANFİL YAYINLARI	Publishing.

In February 2011, the group inaugurated one of the largest concrete plants in Libya, representing a total investment of 50 million dollars.<sup>17</sup> Murtaza Karanfil is also the Chairman of the Turkish Libyan Businessmen's Association (TULİB) – founded in 2011 to stimulate regional development and to exchange information and business opportunities – and the Head Representative for Libya at the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSIAD). He has all the makings of a self-made man: he first worked at his uncle's office – who was a doctor in Istanbul – in the business district of Laleli, before setting up a textile company (Ahkam Tekstil) in 1995. His company started exporting products to Libya and the latter became his main field of investment:

17. [“Turkey's Karanfil Group establishes Libya's largest concrete factory”](#), *Daily Sabah*, February 22, 2022.

We have plans to invest in the fields of iron, steel and building materials. We also plan to develop our activities in the field of procurement. In the near future, we will enter the concrete block manufacturing market. If Libya becomes stable, we will add the defense industry to our list of investments. In the long term, we plan to invest in the petrochemical sector as well.<sup>18</sup>

Murtaza Karanfil is not the only person to be investing in Libya: the Albayrak Group, headed by President Erdoğan's son-in-law, is also particularly active.<sup>19</sup> In fact, it has taken over the contracts for Tripoli airport. The construction of Tripoli airport had originally been awarded to a consortium formed by Turkish construction company TAV, as well as Brazil's Odebrecht and Lebanon's CCC in 2007 – a project valued at 3 billion dollars. Rönesans Holding, another Turkish company, had initially been considered for the airport's reconstruction. In August 2021, the Libyan Ministry of Transport finally awarded the construction of a terminal at Tripoli International Airport to the Albayrak Group. What's more, in July 2021, the group obtained the necessary approval from the Libyan Airports Authority (LLA) to take part in the Misrata airport reconstruction project.

Among the many Turkish construction companies operating in Libya, Doğuş, Güriş, Enka, Nurol İnşaat, Metiş, Tekser and Yüksel İnşaat count among the most active.<sup>20</sup> For example, Doğuş had undertaken a university campus project in the city of Sirte prior to the war. In 2011, it had to leave 900 million dollars' worth of equipment and machinery behind. The company was awarded the construction project for the library and administrative buildings of Al Thaddl University in Sirte. Enka İnşaat has undertaken 5 projects in Libya, including: the transformation of the Tripoli International Fair building into the Tripoli Chamber of

18. [“Mardin'den yola çıktı kıtaları aştı”](#) [He started his path in Mardin then travelled the continents], *Hurriyet*, August 13, 2020.

19. Kerim Ülker, [“Albayrak, Libya'nın en önemli havalimanıyla ilgileniyor”](#) [Albayrak is interested in Libya's main airport], *Dünya*, October 9, 2021.

20. [“Libya'da Faaliyet Gösteren Türk Firmaları”](#) [Companies reporting activities in Libya], *Guide des carrières internationales*, September 13, 2020.

Commerce and Industry, the Ubari 640 MW simple cycle power plant project, the project for the new town of Ras Lanuf, Sirte Bay hotel and conference center, as well as private residences in the context of the Harawa Project. Nurol İnşaat is involved in several university reconstruction projects, such as Al Fateh University in Tripoli, alongside fellow company Yüksel İnşaat. Çalık Enerji and Aksa Energy, as well as Karadeniz Holding Karpowership, have reportedly been approached by the Libyan government to submit studies on the electricity network in Libya.

ENKA is one of the most active Turkish companies in the energy sector. It has already signed (on January 6, 2021) an agreement for the construction of two power plants in collaboration with Siemens; one in Misrata and another in Tripoli.<sup>21</sup> This project represents an investment of nearly 200 million euros. The company has announced – via its website – that it is hiring workers to be expatriated to Libya, with monthly salaries ranging from 3,000 to 4,000 euros. Turkish company Rönesans Holding is set to build the three power plants included in the agreement signed during Dbeibah's visit to Turkey. Originally founded in St. Petersburg by Turkish citizen Erman Ilıcak in 1993,<sup>22</sup> the now Ankara-based company operates throughout 28 countries and counts 75,000 employees.

These private companies and their endeavors are supported by the Turkish State. At times, particularly in the case of the Albayrak Group, the separation between Turkey's public and private sectors appears relatively loose. For example, Turkey's Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSIAD) opened an office in Tripoli on May 17, 2022. The ceremony was attended by Libyan Minister of Economy and Trade Mohammed al-Huveyc, Turkish Ambassador Kenan Yılmaz and

21. On the company's social networks: [https://instagram.com/p/CJssXREB-Z/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link...](https://instagram.com/p/CJssXREB-Z/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link...)

22. Seni Nora, "La Turquie en Libye à l'ère Biden" [Turkey in Libya in the Biden Era], *Hérodote*, 182, 2021, p. 149-162.

MÜSIAD President Mahmut Asmalı.<sup>23</sup> The Turkish State is also active at the institutional level. For example, in February 2022, the Libyan press reported on preparations for an agreement pertaining to the return of Turkish workers to Libya,<sup>24</sup> led by Dr. Adel Al-Aqbi, Director of the Turkish International Cooperation Department (part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and the Libyan Ministry of Labor. Turkey's economic interests are therefore no longer exclusively limited to the West.

#### ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH BUSINESS IN THE EAST AND SOUTH

Turkey is also trying to establish itself in the south and east of the country, where China and Egypt<sup>25</sup> have already founded business relationships. In the south, Turkey is investing in the health sector in particular. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the two countries' Ministries of Health in August 2021, introducing the joint management of hospitals, staff training and an agreement for Turkey to supply equipment and medicine.<sup>26</sup> Recently, Salem Al-Zadma, the Deputy Prime Minister of Fathi Bachagha's Libyan government, spoke with the Turkish ambassador to Libya, Kanaan Yılmaz, regarding "the

23. Ebu Bekir Aşkın, "[Libya Başbakanı Dibeybe, Türkiye'nin zor anlarda her zaman Libya'nın yanında olduğunu belirtti](#)" [Libyan Prime Minister Dibeybe said that Turkey always stands by Libya in difficult times], *Haberler*, May 17, 2022.

24. "إعداد مذكرة تفاهم بين ليبيا وتركيا في مجال القوى العاملة" [Preparing a memorandum of understanding between Turkey and Libya regarding labor], *Al Wasat*, February 20, 2022.

25. Contracts were signed between the Dbeibah government and ten major Egyptian companies for the construction of shopping malls, schools and hospitals, according to *Al Quds Al Arabi* newspaper. See "ليبيا: «اختراقات» متبادلة مصرية تركية في المنطقتين الشرقية والغربية" [Egyptian and Turkish breakthroughs in the Eastern and Western regions], *Al Quds Al Arabi*, May 5, 2022, and: "استياء مصري من الانفتاح التركي على معسكر شرق ليبيا" [Egyptian dissatisfaction towards Turkish business settling into the east of Libya], *Al Arabi Al jadeed*, February 1, 2022.

26. "أبو جناح يدعو إلى الاستفادة من الخبرات التركية في تحسين الخدمات الطبية بالجنوب" [Abu Janah calls upon Turkish expertise to improve medical services in the south], *Al Wasat*, February 23, 2022.



importance of Turkey's role in achieving stability and development in the southern regions".<sup>27</sup>

In the east, Turkey is keen to support industrial projects. In October 2021, the Libyan government launched a plan to rekindle the country's industrial sector, including a cooperation agreement with Libya's project management organization for Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) regarding the rehabilitation of factories. This plan is set to comprise over 2,000 projects. In February 2022, the Turkish Consul General in Misrata, Gurkan Gurmigler, met with the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Industry and Minerals for Public Affairs, Production Affairs and Industrial Zones, Mustafa Al-Sammo, in order to provide support for several projects, based on "Turkey's pioneering experience in the field of small and medium industry development".<sup>28</sup>

In January 2021, and for the first time since the Turkish consulate in Benghazi closed in 2014, the Turkish ambassador to Libya, Kanaan Yilmaz, visited the east twice, accompanied by a delegation of Turkish businessmen. He met with representatives from Benghazi's Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture and with Libyan businessmen. These visits took place after Libyan parliamentarians (Tobruk House of Representatives) travelled to Ankara in December to discuss – among other topics – the reopening of projects that had suddenly been stalled in 2011. In Benghazi, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency is expected to invest in the city's reconstruction. Turkey is in fact competing with China in Benghazi, as the latter has been awarded a variety of reconstruction projects.<sup>29</sup> Almost 30% of the city was destroyed, including the city center, the main public

27. «يلماز» يُعرب عن تفاؤله بمباشرة حكومة «باشاغا» عملها من المنطقة الجنوبية. [Yilmaz expresses optimism about the establishment of the Bachagha government operating out of the southern region], *Ean Libya*, March 29, 2022.

28. «الصناعة: خطة لتدشين 2000 مشروع صناعي بأجزاء ليبيا». [Industry: A plan to launch 2,000 industrial projects throughout Libya], *Al Wasat*, February 2, 2022.

29. «يُفقد من الشركة الصينية للإنشاءات المحدودة يبحث مع بلدية بنغازي استكمال عدد من المشاريع المُتوقفة». [Chinese construction company delegation discusses the completion of a number of stalled projects with the municipality of Benghazi], Libyan News Agency, November 27, 2021.

service infrastructure and part of the airport. Historical sites were also affected, such as the Ikhribish lighthouse, Al-Manar palace and the Souq al-Hout neighborhood.

Libya's geographical position makes it a strategic location for Turkish companies seeking to set up in North Africa and throughout the rest of the continent. With this in mind, Turkey is currently building a maritime logistics platform in Misrata,<sup>30</sup> allowing transport times from Turkey to Central Africa to be reduced from 45 days to 10 days at the most.

Finally, Turkey is investing in transport infrastructure and aims to boost the flow of people entering Turkey. This explains why flights between Benghazi and Istanbul – initially operated by Libyan Airlines<sup>31</sup> – resumed in May 2022 after several months of discussion.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, a Misrata-Izmir-Istanbul ferry line<sup>33</sup> was launched in April 2019. What's more, the future Hatay Sea Bus (HADO) project, which is scheduled to begin partial deployment during the summer of 2022, is set to connect Hatay and Antakia in Turkey with Gazimağusa (Famagusta) in Northern Cyprus and Misrata in Libya.<sup>34</sup> In May 2022, the Hasanoglu Group announced that it would set up a new shipping line operating between Iskenderun and Misrata twice a month.<sup>35</sup>

30. «رئيس مجلس الأعمال التركي الليبي لـ«العربي الجديد»: محطة مصراتة لا تتنافس قناة السويس» [Chairman of the Turkish-Libyan Business Council to *Al Araby Al Jadeed*: The Misrata logistics hub is not intended to compete with the Suez Canal], *Al Araby Al Jadeed*, June 14, 2021.

31. «الخطوط الليبية تستأنف رحلاتها الجوية من بنغازي إلى إسطنبول التركية غد الخميس». [Libyan Airlines will resume flights from Benghazi to Istanbul, Turkey, tomorrow (Thursday)], Libyan News Agency, 11 May 2022.

32. «السفير التركي: مستعدون لفتح القنصلية واستئناف الرحلات إلى بنغازي شرط توافر الظروف». [Turkish Ambassador: we are ready to open the consulate and resume flights to Benghazi, if conditions allow it], *Al Wasat*, January 29, 2022.

33. «مع استئناف الرحلات البحرية بين إزمير ومصراتة.. تركيا تتوقع صادرات إلى ليبيا بملياري دولار نهاية العام». [As cruises resume between Izmir and Misrata, Turkey expects exports to Libya to reach two billion dollars by the end of the year], *Al Wasat*, September 22, 2021.

34. «New touristic sea route to connect Turkey to Israel, Lebanon, Libya», *Daily Sabah*, March 20, 2022.

35. «New Turkey-Misrata shipping line launched», *Libya Herald*, May 11, 2022.

Turkey's incursion into the Libyan economy in both the east and west further consolidates Turkish power in Libya. However, the oil sector holds fast. Let us remember that in 2007, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) had begun oil exploration activities in Libya. These activities were suspended in 2014 and have not yet resumed. According to analyst Mühdan Sağlam, the Libyan government prefers to work with Italian company ENI rather than with Turkey. Thus, the Turkish-Libyan partnership has its limitations.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, on July 12, 2022, the appointment of Ferhat bin Khdara – Chairman of the Libyan National Oil Corporation (NOC) – as Haftar's Economic Advisor – thereby replacing Mustafa Sanallah – does not constitute a favorable turn of events for Turkey. His appointment is also seen as an alliance between Haftar and Dbeibah over oil. What is Turkey's position within this arena of volatile alliances and misalliances?

36. Mühdan Sağlam, "[Libya petrolerinde Türkiye'nin adı yok](#)" [No Turkish names in Libyan oil], *Gazete duvar*, June 3, 2021.

#### IV. TURKEY: PEACE MEDIATOR OR INTERVENTIONIST?

The 2021 elections were supposed to bring several essential processes to fruition in Libya, such as the preparation of a new Constitution and the unification of the country's military and civilian organizations under one roof. Following the failure of the electoral process in December 2021, the country is now going through a political crisis: the two main parties are rallying their troops and holding on to their current positions, thereby reinforcing the power struggle between them. Abdulhamid Dbeibah, who was elected as the transitional Prime Minister by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum,<sup>1</sup> refused to concede his position to Fathi Bachagha, who was elected Prime Minister by the Libyan House of Representatives in February 2022. Turkey has links with both of these figures, but how does it position itself in the context of their confrontation?

##### ANKARA'S POLICY: MORE PRAGMATIC THAN IDEOLOGICAL?

Turkey came onto the Libyan scene by supporting the government in Tripoli, which included Fathi Bachagha. During the civil war, Bachagha was Minister of the Interior for the Tripoli-based government in the west and worked hand-in-hand with Turkey. At the time, Bachagha opposed Haftar and was seen as being Turkey's man. After the international community sparked the movement towards elections – which were supposed to be held on December 24, 2021 – in Libya, Turkey sided with Prime Minister Dbeibah, who was appointed to lead the country towards elections.<sup>2</sup> When the Libyan House of Representatives elected Bachagha as Prime Minister, Turkey did not clearly side with

1. This forum was set up by the international community to organize elections in Libya.

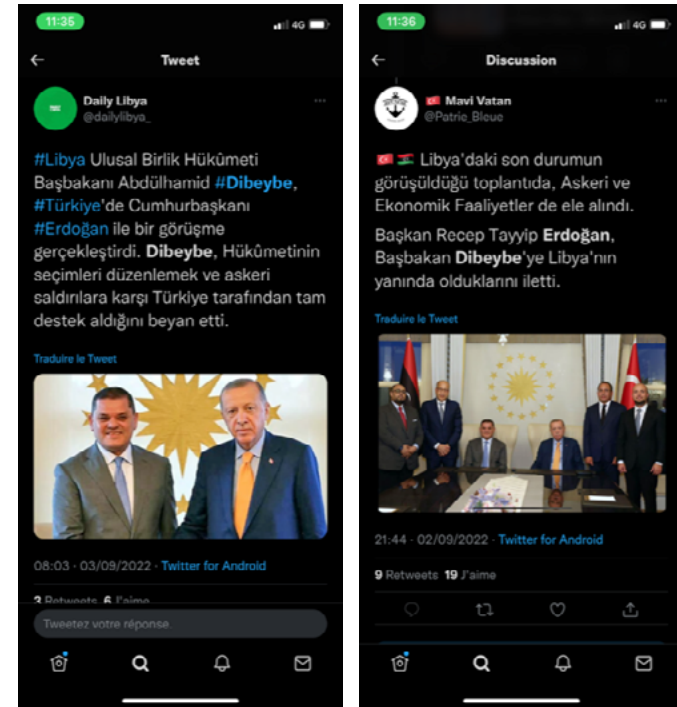
2. Zeynep Güranlı, "[Libya'da sil baştan](#)" [Starting from scratch in Libya], *Dünya*, February 17, 2022.

one of the two active Prime Ministers. However, in the run-up to Libya's aborted December 2021 elections, Bachagha, who was a candidate, approached Egypt and France, met with Haftar and distanced himself from Turkey. According to Turkish journalist Zeynep Gürcanli, the AKP government has always kept close ties to politicians in Libya's Misrata region, where "tribalism prevails over political opinions, ethnic or religious conflicts..."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it should be noted that Bachagha and Dbeibah are originally from Misrata, an area featuring a high concentration of Libyans of Ottoman Turkish descent. Faced with Dbeibah's refusal to concede his position and his opponent's inability to lead the country towards elections, Bachagha tried to enter Tripoli several times in order to claim his seat as Prime Minister, without success. Following Bachagha's attempt to encircle Tripoli with his troops at the end of August 2022, and in the face of escalating violence, Turkey seemed obligated to make a choice, as its interests were perceived as being threatened. Up until August 2021, Turkey had not really chosen a side and remained neutral. In an attempt to take on a mediating role, President Erdoğan met with the two men on various occasions. Following Bachagha's attempt to return to Tripoli in August 2021, however, Turkey found itself in a delicate position and the two rivals were invited to Istanbul for mediation sessions. Has Turkey taken an official stance? How will it enforce its position as a self-appointed mediator in this conflict?

In early September 2022, Dbeibah, Bachagha and a three-person presidential council travelled to Turkey. Certain sources suggest that Turkey sided with Dbeibah, although no official statement has confirmed this information. The officials' silence following these meetings gave rise to interpretations, based on mere photos of the meeting with Dbeibah; sources assert that President Erdoğan supports Dbeibah, based on two photos that have been circulating in the press. In contrast, no photos were leaked to the Turkish press after the meeting with Bachagha. The second photo below shows a meeting held at the Turkish Intelligence Service (MIT) on September 1, 2022 between Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu,

3. *Ibid.*

Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, and MIT President Hakan Fidan. Bachagha was also received by MIT, but no photos were released.



Dbeibah went to Turkey in company of the Governor of the Central Bank of Libya, the Ministers of State for Cabinet Affairs, Communication and Political Affairs and the Advisor to the Governor of the Central Bank. This was intended to show that Dbeibah is still in control of the country's finances and that "the politico-military strategy is supported by financial operations".<sup>4</sup>

He was also able to show the rest of the world that he has not lost Turkey's support. In the wake of these meetings, he underlined:

4. Fehim Taştekin, "Trablus savaşları, Bayraktarlar ve MİT kararlarında ayar" [Tripoli wars: The Bayraktar and framing at MIT headquarters], *Gazete duvar*, September 5, 2022.

The importance of Turkey's role in promoting international efforts to advance and support the elections as an international priority; as it considers the events that took place last week in the capital, Tripoli, as an attempt to seize power through conspiracies and force, and that Libya has no alternative but to hold elections.<sup>5</sup>

Erdoğan insists that the conflict must be resolved peacefully, despite not having managed to reconcile the two parties: he stressed “the need to preserve the security and safety of Tripoli from all military operations,” and the fact that “change can only take place through elections.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, he has reaffirmed his support for and his cooperation with Libya in all economic, security and military arenas and considers the clashes in Tripoli as attacks.<sup>7</sup> Erdoğan thereby has shown that Dbeibah still enjoys his support. On the other hand, Bachagha – who has moved closer to France and Egypt – simply mentions positive exchanges. However, it is plain to see that these exchanges have not led either side to withdraw as of yet. Analyst Fehim Taştekin proposes two scenarios for overcoming the crisis: the first consists in Erdoğan being in favor of Dbeibah making room for Bachagha and members of his cabinet;<sup>8</sup> the second entails both men stepping down and elections being held in order to form a new government. For the time being, this second solution does not seem to be part of the discussion. Yet Turkey's influence on these two main actors in the conflict should not be overestimated either, since both are backed by other supporters (Qatar for Dbeibah, Egypt and France for Bachagha). What's more, other actors – such as Marshal Haftar – are also involved in the political crisis. The latter denies any involvement in the latest clashes in Tripoli, which occurred in August 2022. He is making his way through the game of power

5. Mohamed Ahmed, “[Dbeibah invites Erdogan to attend Libyan-Turkish Forum as they discuss relations in Istanbul](#)”, *The Libya Observer*, September 3, 2022.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. Fehim Taştekin, “[Trablus savaşları, Bayraktarlar ve MİT karargâhında ayar](#)” [Tripoli wars: The Bayraktar and framing at MIT headquarters].

relations from an isolated standpoint, approaching Bachagha on some occasions and Dbeibah on others.

The Libyan scene is also home to other players, particularly local militias and their constant fluctuations. Ankara boasts a network linked to armed factions and groups on Libyan soil, one that it has consolidated since 2011.<sup>9</sup> For example, Salah Eddine al-Namrush, the GNA's former Defense Minister, had worked closely with Ankara during the second half of the LNA offensive, from April 2019 to June 2020. Salah Eddine al-Namrush has visited Turkey several times<sup>10</sup> and signed Libya's military cooperation agreement with Turkey. In August 2021, he was appointed as Commander of a military zone in which Turkey's main base is located. Turkey also has ties to the current Governor of the Central Bank of Libya, Sadiq al-Kabir, a former revolutionary who is close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Sadiq al-Kabir was appointed thanks to the support of Abdurrazag Mukhtar Abdulgader, an influential figure in the Muslim Brotherhood, who later became Libya's ambassador to Turkey.<sup>11</sup> What's more, Sadiq al-Kabir's security is reportedly ensured by the Radaa militia (see Table 2).

9. Emadeddin Badi, “[To advance its own interests, Turkey should now help stabilize Libya](#)”, *War on the Rock*, May 24, 2021.

10. Jalel Harchaoui, “[Security Sector Reform in Libya: Avoiding the Risks of Politicisation](#)”, in Andrea Cellino and Annalisa Perteghella (ed.), *Conflicts, Pandemics and Peacebuilding. New Perspectives on Security Sector Reform in the MENA Region*, Ledizioni LediPublishing, 2020, p. 44-64.

11. Jalel Harchaoui, “[Libya's looming contest for the central bank](#)”, *War on the rock*, April 1, 2019.

Table 2

Bachagha	Dbeibah
The 777 <sup>th</sup> Brigade (headed by Heytham al-Tacuri)	The Stability Support Force affiliated to the Presidential Council (headed by Abdülğani al-Kikli)
Former members of the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (Osama Cüveyli, former Head of the Military Intelligence Department)	Radaa, aka Special Deterrence Forces (headed by Salafist Abdurrauf Kara)
The Halbus Brigade from Misrata	The Imad el Tripoli forces from Zintan
The Hittin Brigade and the Marsa Brigade	The 52 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade from Zawiya
The Abu Zreba forces from the city of Zawiya, west of Tripoli	The 610 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
	The 301 <sup>st</sup> Battalion from Misrata

Turkey's policy regarding Libya appears to be more pragmatic than ideological. In 2019, its military intervention alongside Fayez al-Sarraj was seen as ideological support for the Muslim Brotherhood. Like Abdelhakim Belhadj – who once held Tripoli with an iron fist before fleeing to Turkey, and who has since returned to Libya<sup>12</sup> – most leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood have transited through Turkey. However, Turkey's alleged ideological support requires a more nuanced analysis. Turkey has not systematically seen eye to eye with Muslim Brotherhood Leader Mohammad Savan. For example, the latter<sup>13</sup> considered Bachagha – and not Dbeibah – as the legitimate Prime Minister of Libya, which differed from Turkey's position on the matter. Turkey's policy in Libya is not strictly aligned with that of the Muslim Brotherhood. What's more, Erdoğan's rapprochement with the Gulf nations has led him to distance himself from this movement.

12. "[Belhaj's return coordinated with Dbeibah, sources say](#)", *The Libya Update*, April 23, 2022.

13. Dbeibah issued a warrant for Savan's arrest.

## THE SETA-BINA PARTNERSHIP: A STATE BUILDING PROJECT FOR A PROSPEROUS ECONOMY?

All actors outside of Libya are currently pointing a finger at the instability of Libyan politics and at the fragility and duality of its state apparatus. Amr el Shobaki, former Egyptian MP and former Head of the Arab European Unit, told us that the problem does not reside in organizing the elections, but in enforcing their results:

In my opinion, the problem does not reside in holding the elections on December 24. The essential, major problem is the prospect of enforcing the results of these elections. In my opinion, this is the problem. Exchanges were held between Libyans in Geneva regarding the choice of government. But do we have the strength of a united state, a legal system, a police force and an undivided army to enforce the results of the elections? Is the international community prepared to intervene to enforce the results of the elections? In my opinion, the challenge is not the elections themselves. If we are not ready, if we do not have a regional, international and local consensus to ensure that the results of the elections are respected, in my opinion, there is no point in holding them in the first place, as it would only divide the country further. Look at Iraq – where the state is weak – and the reactions of its political forces after losing the election. In the context of a democratic transition, if we do not have a concrete state apparatus, strong and clear-cut state institutions that inspire respect and confidence in their integrity, the elections will be a disaster. It will divide the country even further and everyone will accuse other forces of rigging the elections [...].<sup>14</sup>

This concern regarding the formation of the Libyan State is also central to Turkey's policy on Libya. The Turkish pro-government think-tank SETA wrote a report in partnership with Libyan think-tank BINA<sup>15</sup> that proposes a state-building project

14. Interview with Amr el Shobaki, former Egyptian MP and former Head of the Arab European Unit at the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, Cairo, October 24, 2021.

15. BINA is a state-building program that was launched to support fragile and conflict-stricken countries. It is a joint initiative of the Libyan Program for Reintegration and Development (LPRD), the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Center

for a prosperous economy (cf. the report titled *Countering violent extremism in Libya*<sup>16</sup>). This report provides a series of proposals – some of which are very broad, while others are very specific – on a range of themes: women, employment, youth, education,<sup>17</sup> etc. The report proposes a model called the “Community-Oriented Resilience CVE Model (How to Unite)”. In addition to calling for advanced economic measures, this report also proposes a bottom-up approach to state building: “A top-down approach to state building in Libya, one that prioritizes the security sector, may be effective in the short term, but it may not be effective in addressing the underlying factors and grievances that lead to violent extremism”.<sup>18</sup>

The report offers advice on strengthening Libyans’ sense of national belonging:

First and foremost, Libyan state building should focus on strengthening the existing social, cultural and religious ties between the Libyan people. Improving the overall understanding of their collective past and historical consciousness, through education and the formulation and dissemination of collective narratives, is crucial. New history textbooks, collective celebrations, public performances and the institutionalization of national holidays are important to underscore the existing ties among the Libyan people. Emphasizing national heroes such as Omar Mukhtar

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for Islamic Countries (SESRIC). Its main objective is to help Libya and its people overcome the challenges they face in building a strong and prosperous new state. The program was launched following consultations with Libyan, Turkish and international experts, think-tanks and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). There are three main areas that Libya needs to address as a priority: Security Sector Reform (SSR), Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Public Administration Reform (PAR). Refer to BINA’s website: <https://binaprogram.org/bbi/>.

16. Talha Köse and Bilgehan Öztürk, *Countering Violent Extremism In Libya: A Peacebuilding Perspective*, SETA-BINA, 2020.

17. For example, regarding education, it is stated that “*Special programs and policies should be aimed at attracting youths from tribal areas towards secondary and higher education. Special dormitories should be built and funded to attract students from tribal areas towards secondary education. This would help contribute to building a sense of collective identity*”.

18. Talha Köse and Bilgehan Öztürk, *Countering Violent Extremism In Libya: A Peacebuilding Perspective*, p. 146.

or Awqaf, an institution that disseminates the moderate Libyan understanding of Islam, is crucial when it comes to fostering a sense of collective belonging and a collective consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

This emphasis on the place of religion and reforming religious institutions is a way of confronting radical Islamism, particularly Madkhali Salafism: “Religion is the most important common ground in Libyan society. It is therefore crucial to prevent mosques and other religious institutions from becoming places where extremist, oppressive and polarizing messages are disseminated. The religious common ground within Libyan society will play a key role in the state-building process.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, the report considers the creation and institutionalization of control mechanisms in the religious realm, based on the Turkish model for managing religion, as a pillar for state building:

The moderate interpretation of the Maliki-Sufi tradition was once at the heart of Libya’s national identity and social fabric. Mosques should be regulated and their needs should be covered either by the central government or by local authorities. Imams and preachers should undergo special training in order to qualify. Imams and other religious institution officials should be certified and appointed by Awqaf to prevent the infiltration of extremist actors.<sup>21</sup>

In another report co-signed by SETA and BINA on the reform of the security sector,<sup>22</sup> it is explained and stressed that:

The goal is not to impose a Western/liberal agenda of reform. Instead, it aims to work alongside partnering governments and civil society to develop a security sector that reflects local norms, history and tradition, one that is economically sustainable, operationally effective and meets basic international democratic standards regarding the governance of the security sector.<sup>23</sup>

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 208-209.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

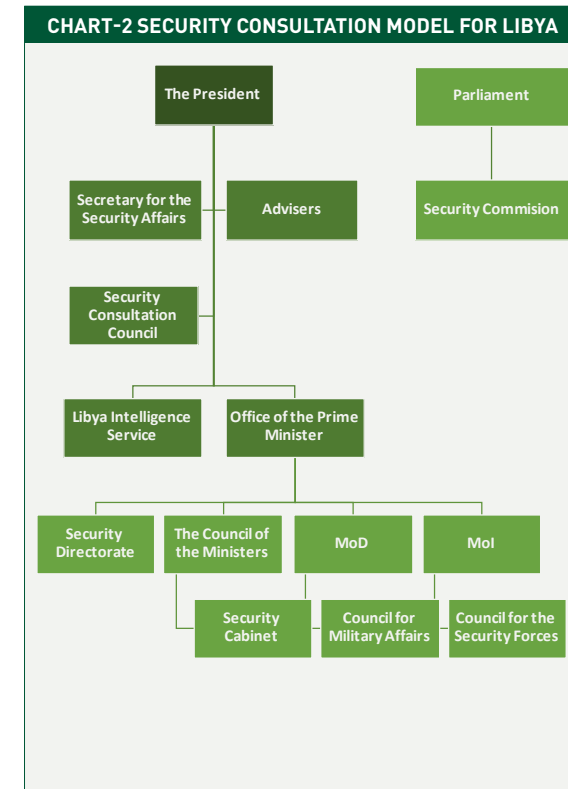
22. Murat Aslan, *Security sector reform for Libya a crucial step towards state building*, SETA-BINA, 2019.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

The report points at “the avoidance of local realities” as one of the causes underlying the failure of liberal state-building projects. The report provides organizational charts and frameworks for the Ministry of Defense as well as for the police, intelligence and armed forces.

The report uses the draft Constitution as a starting point for anticipating the “most supported and therefore most likely institutions”. In this sense, the draft Constitution identifies the President as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces (Article 106). The Council of Ministers is responsible for implementing general policy, including security, and for maintaining national security (Article 117/2). The Council also has the power to establish, dissolve and integrate institutions, which facilitates security reform by creating new security organizations and regulations (Article 117/6, 7). Ratifying the Constitution would therefore help clarify which strategic bodies are responsible for security, as well as the responsibilities of specific institutions. [...] If the Constitution is approved by the public, armed groups will have to be either transformed or demobilized (Article 177) [*Security sector reform for Libya a crucial step towards state building*, p. 117].

Despite there having been no concrete, large-scale actions to resolve the current situation as of yet, the think-tank’s report reflects the fact that Turkey intends to influence Libya’s model of state and institutions. It is also worth noting that only few government-affiliated think-tanks have broached the subject (except in 2011-2012) and that Turkey appears to be something of an exception in this respect. Turkey’s assistance to Libya’s security focuses on supporting the country’s institutions and strengthening the State. Despite its military cooperation agreements with Libya, Turkey seems to be aware that its influence will be limited if it is restricted to providing military advice and training. Therefore, pro-government think-tanks have already produced very precise reports on institutional reforms, which do not appear to be a mere mirror image of Turkey’s institutional framework, since local realities are taken into account.



Source: *Security sector reform for Libya a crucial step towards state building*, p. 119.

## CONCLUSION

This study illustrates Turkey's strong will to impose its presence on the Libyan scene. Its investments are military, economic, diplomatic and political. Yet Turkey's project also consists in imposing its influence in other areas, such as social matters and education, and participating in the formation of the Libyan State. Through this multi-sectorial strategy, Turkey intends to establish itself as a dominant force in Libya. This approach also constitutes a laboratory to test out Turkey's African investment project. This aspect of Turkey's project has surfaced in various public speeches issued by Turkish actors involved in Libya. These include Murtaza Karanfil, who has invited both countries to sign new cooperation agreements to this end:

There is important new work being done on educational and social practices, experience sharing in the context of vocational and technical education, as well as on joint research activities between the two countries. Ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to live prosperously constitutes a step that will further bolster the deep-rooted relations between our country and Libya, which have existed since the Ottoman period.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Turkey seeks to reach out to all sectors of Libyan society and create a solid basis for its presence on the ground.

As we have seen, the decision to send troops to Libya is not supported by Turkish society as a whole. In part of Turkish society, it is commonly accepted that the homeland must be defended and protected. Yet the defense of the "Blue Homeland", by deploying soldiers in distant territories, is not widely accepted. The Turkish government's opposition (CHP, HDP and Saadet Partisi) refused to sign the resolution allowing the deployment of Turkish soldiers in Libya.

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1. Mehmet Kadir Kılınç, "Karanfil Group Yönetim Kurulu Başkanı Murtaza Karanfil: Libya odaklı Afrika açılımı geliştirmeliyiz" [Murtaza Karanfil, Chairman of the Karanfil Group's Board of Directors: We need to create an African initiative focusing on Libya], Anadolu Agency, August 12, 2022.

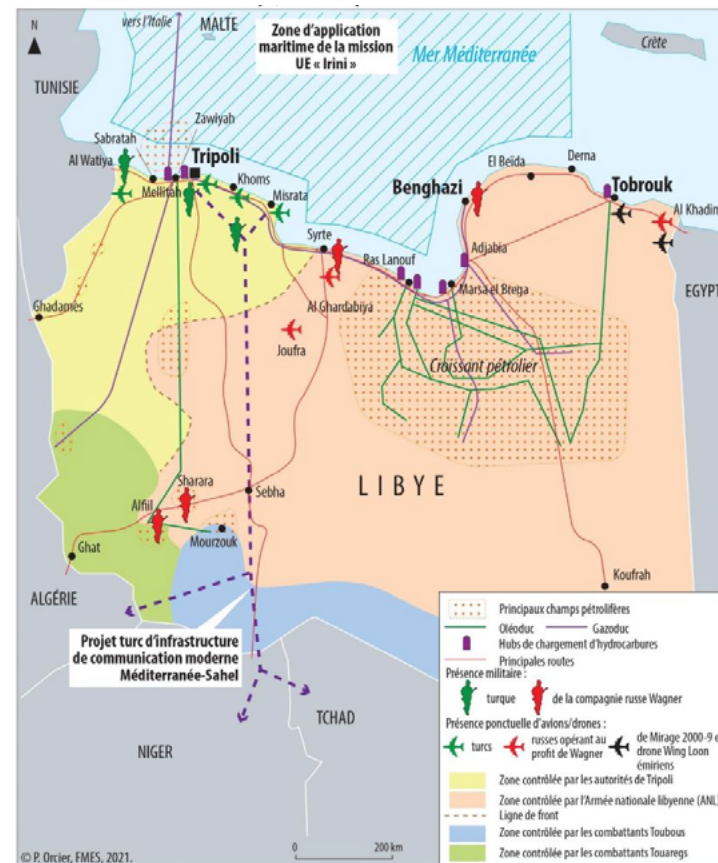


The next elections – planned for June 2023 – will be an important step in determining whether this trend towards the militarization of Turkey’s foreign policy will continue. Given President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s personalization of political power and the ties he has forged with Libya, Turkey will seek to strengthen its position regardless of the person in power in Libya (be it Abdulhamid Dbeibah or Fathi Bachagha). On the Turkish opposition’s side, a memorandum of understanding was signed between six opposition party leaders (CHP, DEVA Partisi, Demokrat Partisi, Gelecek Partisi, İyi Partisi and Saadet Partisi) to promote the country’s return to a strengthened parliamentary system – were they to win the upcoming elections. While this alliance among the opposition remains in favor of strengthening the defense industry and the armed forces as a deterrent, it has condemned the extent of Erdoğan’s militarized foreign policy, by refusing “to make our foreign policy and foreign relations a matter of domestic politics.” Moreover, members of the opposition refused Erdoğan’s motion to send troops to Libya (CHP, İyi Partisi and Saadet Partisi). However, this does not mean that they are in favor of Turkey’s complete withdrawal from Libya.

*The author would like to thank Marion Sorant, Research Assistant at IRSEM, for her help.*

ANNEX

Libya, ten years after the 2011 revolution



Source: Map of military presence in 2021, <https://fmes-france.org/la-turquie-en-libye/>.

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# TURKEY'S MULTI-SECTORIAL STRATEGY IN LIBYA

## A GATEWAY TO THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND AFRICA

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Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, and due to Libya's extremely fragile security and political situation, the country is plagued by permanent crises. Libya is also turning into an arena of power struggles and wars of influence between various actors, both national and foreign. Turkey counts among these actors and has adopted a diversified investment strategy, focusing mainly on the military, economic, political, social and educational sectors. Ultimately, Turkey's goal is to ensure that Ankara emerges as a dominant force once the conflict has been resolved. In addition to this investment strategy, Turkey sports a clear-cut state-building project for a prosperous economy, the details of which deserve to be clarified. What are the modalities of Turkey's actions in its quest for hegemony in Libya? How has Turkey positioned itself amid the restructuring of power in Libya?