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**IMPLICATIONS OF REALIST DEFENSIVE FOREIGN POLICY:
TOWARDS A TURKISH INTERVENTION IN LIBYA DURING
THE FIRST AND SECOND LIBYAN CRISES**

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IMPLICATIONS OF REALIST DEFENSIVE FOREIGN POLICY: TOWARDS A TURKISH INTERVENTION IN LIBYA DURING THE FIRST AND SECOND LIBYAN CRISES

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Abstract

Turkish foreign policy significantly shifted in the second decade of the AKP government, as signified by the adoption of the official ‘zero problems with neighbours’ policy in 2009. This shift was necessitated by the country’s quest to pursue an independent and autonomous foreign policy from the years of deep focus on Western partners. However, the dynamic regional challenges and pressing threats shaped Turkish intervention as a mediator or a military partner in the region. The intervention in Libya was important to the African continent and the EU and concretized the shifting Turkish defensive foreign policy orientation. Focusing on the main Libyan crises in this period, the first Libyan Crisis in 2011-2014 and the second Libyan Crisis in 2014 – 2020, the study critically analyses the shifting Turkish foreign policy towards Libya. In addition to securing Turkish interests in the Mediterranean, the intervention in Libya prevented the further escalation of the conflict, stabilized the UN-recognized government, and contributed significantly to the entry of the Turkish defence industrial complex into the African continent.

Keywords: Türkiye, Libya, Foreign Policy, Defensive Realism, First Libyan Crisis, Second Libyan Crisis

Introduction

The ever-changing political and security landscape has compelled Türkiye to reevaluate and adapt its foreign policy approach. Under the leaderships of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*), the country underwent significant structural changes to strike a balance between relations with Western countries and its Middle Eastern and African neighbours. Türkiye's initial focus on refining her relations with the West was, at first, considered a costly neglect of her neighbours (Baskan & Taşpınar, 2021, p.15). However, a closer evaluation of this refining reveals that the country had stronger ties with the West when the AKP initially took power. During the first decade of the AKP's rule, the country followed the path of the previous administrations. But, during the second decade, Türkiye foreign policy took a different trajectory, shifting towards fostering a broader relationship with neighboring countries. For instance, Türkiye formed close relations with Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Israel. Notably, Türkiye along with Iran and Iraq, shared a common interest in countering the activities of the PKK and its Iranian affiliate PJAK, as well as the aspirations of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) for an independent state (Haugom, 2019; Siccardi, 2021). The shift in Türkiye's foreign policy behaviour became particularly noticeable after 2011 and 2016, coinciding with regional developments, such as the Libyan civil wars, and culminating in Türkiye's regional intervention. As the regional security landscape evolved, Türkiye's foreign policy choices were increasingly influenced by the complexities and challenges arising from regional conflicts and dynamics (Kubicek, 2022; Lund, 2022).

Ahmet Davutoglu, who became Türkiye's Foreign Minister in 2009, was the leading figure that shaped Türkiye's foreign policy (Donelli, 2020). During his time in office in the AKP government, Ankara followed different policy paths and made bilateral relations changes in its strategy (Başkan, 2018). Davutoglu formulated "zero problems with neighbours" to improve ties with the neighbouring countries through trade and regional links (Kara & Sözen, 2016). In addition to MENA region ties, Türkiye also made close relations with other regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, the Balkans, and East Asia. Starting in 2002, in the context of African policy, Türkiye expanded its relations in the African continent, using soft power to influence its reach on African soil. During the 1980s, Turkish foreign policy was based on economic relationships; mainly, Türkiye was a trading state under Turgut Özal's tenure. By the end of the Cold War, policies based on caution, territorial integrity, and Westernization had been established. Following the 1990s, Türkiye's policies were based on assertiveness and multilateral policies, for example, the participation in the Gulf War in 1990, the Kurdish question, agreements with Israel, the Black Sea Forum, and the participation of peacekeeping

missions (Çakır & Akdağ, 2017).

Scholars have long described Turkish foreign policy dynamics and changes in the literature since its inception. Oran described three characteristics that influence Turkish foreign policy. They include the strategic importance of relations, cultural-historical factors, and domestic dimensions. Culturally, Türkiye is described as an Islamic Westernized country partly due to its geographical closeness to European Western and Middle East Islamic countries. Historically, the country was the centre of the Ottoman Empire, and those countries that were once ruled by the empire have significant traces of the Ottoman legacy influencing their close links to Türkiye. Strategically, many regional developments affect Türkiye in one way or another because of its geographical location between the continents of Asia and Europe (2002). The shift in Turkish policies towards Africa, Iran, Syria and the Arab-Israeli conflict provided Türkiye with an opportunity for an enhanced role as a mediator of regional conflicts (Murinson, 2012, p. 8).

Turkish policies shifted in the period after 2011 significantly from traditional non-interference to involvement in other countries; one may wonder what could have precipitated such a move. Türkiye began implementing a foreign policy that can be argued as a *realist defensive policy* by forging alliances with allies or engaging in battles with adversaries. A blend of both internal and external dynamic challenges and threats are believed to have contributed to this shift. These challenges and threats include the failed 2016 coup attempt, the Arab Spring uprisings, Islamic States of Iraq, and Syria (ISIS), Kurdish question and heightened border disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean with Greece. They all contributed to prompting Türkiye to pursue a security-focused foreign policy to uphold its national security and interests. The foreign policy re-orientation included the significant use of military force and coercive diplomatic strategies to assert Turkish autonomy. For instance, Türkiye militarily joined the Syrian conflict and its ties with Israel and Egypt deteriorated to an all-time low due to brinkmanship and coercive tactics to reassert her autonomy. Ankara's foreign policy shift was not without consequences especially with established powers in the region such as United States (US) and Russia as well as rival regional powers such as United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. In Libya, Türkiye faced regional armed competition from Egypt, Russia, and UAE on one side while defending the internationally recognized government of Libya. Türkiye had successfully balanced between the US and Russia in Syria intervention to solidify the shift from soft power to hard power oriented foreign policy (Dolatabadi & Rezaei, 2022; Kutlay & Önis, 2021; Mehmetcik & Çelik, 2022).

The main purpose of this study is to explain the Turkish policy towards Libya in the

post-2011 era. It investigates the consequences of Libya's post-2011 crisis for Türkiye-Libya ties. The study also looks at the various dynamics in the region and their implications, such as Libyan foreign interventions, Eastern Mediterranean union formations, consortiums, and gas projects. Between 2011 and 2020, Libya witnessed a proliferation of armed militants, series of conflicts, civil wars, and foreign proxy battles. It became embroiled in a complex web of political, social, and military struggles throughout this tumultuous decade, with various internal and external actors vying for power and influence. This scenario had profound consequences for the country and posed regional and global challenges. Due to this, the situation posed a danger to Türkiye's regional interests, resulting in the change of direction of Türkiye's foreign policy in the region during this decade. The study focuses explicitly on Libya after the turmoil of the Arab Spring and the subsequent civil wars in 2011–2014 and 2014–2020. When military forces from several parties intervened in Libya, and the Libyan UN-backed Government asked for Ankara's help. Therefore, the study addresses this by exploring the intricacies of these conflicts and proxy battles, examining the underlying cause, critical players involved, and the resulting implication for Türkiye, Libya, and beyond.

Türkiye's foreign policy towards Libya has come into focus since the upheavals of the Arab Spring. This intensified in 2014, when the second Libyan civil war broke out, and in 2019, when military forces from multiple actors were deployed in Libya. For example, Özşahin and Çakmak conducted a discourse analysis of Turkish political elites' messages to audiences regarding their legitimacy and recognition to examine Türkiye's engagement in Libya. They found that local and foreign forces contributed to Türkiye's engagement in Libya (2022). Similarly, Kekilli and Öztürk examined Türkiye's intervention in the Libyan conflict; they argued that Türkiye's intervention in the conflict changed the tides of the conflict internally and externally (2020, pp. 53-62). Similarly, Kiraz (2023) examined Türkiye's presence in Libya since 2019, in contrast to Türkiye's usual non-participation stance. He claimed that Türkiye's activities towards Libya were influenced by the belief that the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum posed a threat to its regional interests. He claimed that Türkiye's intervention was to promote stability in Libya, as a stable Libya would benefit Türkiye's regional interests (2023, pp. 95-122).

Despite of the increase in recent research on Türkiye - Libya relations in the years of turbulence, a critical gap remains. The impact of the shift in Turkish foreign policy towards neighbours especially those on the African continent and the military intervention in Libya is yet to be adequately addressed. The coercive intervention significantly impacted Turkish Libya relations in ways that deserve in depth academic analysis and this study contributes towards

those efforts. A nuanced understanding of foreign policy implications of Turkish intervention in Libya will open important insights into the dynamics and regional consequences of the Mediterranean. By shedding light on this crucial time frame of the first Libyan Crisis in 2011-2014 and the second Libyan Crisis in 2014 – 2020, the study also aims to contribute a deeper understanding of the dynamics of conflicts, civil wars, and foreign intervention, ultimately providing valuable insights into policymakers, scholars, and practitioners working towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in Libya and similar contexts.

The study has the potential to influence policy and practise by giving insights into Turkish foreign policy dynamics, Libyan civil wars, regional dynamics, and the various factors involved. The study contributes to the academic knowledge on Turkish foreign policy towards Libya, Africa, and the MENA region at large. Furthermore, the study may serve as a model for future studies that use similar theoretical frameworks to investigate the structural causes of conflicts, how to make policies, and regional tensions in different contexts.

The research design employed for this study is an explanatory single-case study method, which enables a detailed examination of Türkiye's foreign policy towards Libya. The research has taken a qualitative and empirical single-case approach to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study. This technique allowed the researcher to provide a deeper explanation of Türkiye's foreign policy towards Libya, examining the unique elements and mechanisms driving the country's activities in Libya. The study also utilizes qualitative methods; Both primary empirical evidence and secondary data are used. Primary data was collected from the speeches and public statements from the president of Türkiye, the president of Libya, the president of Egypt, UN envoys and the foreign ministers of these countries. Secondary data was gathered from books, articles, strategic documents, and UN reports relevant to the study.

The study begins by appreciating the cultural-historical grounding of Türkiye -Libya relations before focusing on the dynamics of the relations between the two recent periods of crises 2011 – 2014 and 2014 – 2020 respectively. The study proceeds to discuss the impacts of the Turkish intervention in Libya, a first significant one on the African continent, before the conclusion.

I. Theoretical Framework and Emerging Defensive Realism Trends in Turkish Foreign Policy

Defensive realism is a strand of structural realism. Kenneth Waltz is one of the leading well-known proponents of this theory with his book *Theory of international politics in 1979*.

This theory holds that the ordering principle, anarchy, and power define the nature of the international global system. Defensive realists say that the structure of the international system makes states behave in a certain way. This nature of the international arena makes states expand their power and security under certain conditions. For example, under anarchy, if a state increases its security, the security of the other states decreases. This creates a security dilemma that causes states to worry about one another's intentions. Waltz argues that states should refrain from trying to maximize their power because efforts to acquire more can backfire. The rationale is that aggression and expansion will create a security dilemma which reduces the states' efforts for security maximization. The international system rarely provides incentives for expansion, for the defensive realists' other factors, including the balance of offence-defence, geography, domestic difficulties, and imperial coalitions, may create incentives for expansion. According to Waltz, there are only two basic political ordering principal hierarchy and anarchy. It is either a unit of authority or subordination (hierarchy or they do not (anarchy)); the international system is anarchic, not hierarchic; thus, anarchy is the absence of a central authority and the dispersal of capabilities. He claims that States should not look for hegemony; instead, they should not allow other states to gain power at their expense. Defensive realists also claim that the state's primary goal should be maintaining its security and peace (Waltz, 1979).

Over the past decade, the geopolitical landscape in the Middle East and North Africa has been characterised by instability and volatility. Surrounding Türkiye are countries and regions engulfed in various conflicts that threaten its national security. Regional players like Russia have competed with Türkiye in crucial areas such as Black Sea, Caucasus, Libya, and Syria. On the other hand, Türkiye also competes with other regional players, such as Saudi Arabia, supported by the UAE, Egypt, and Bahrain, with backing from the US and Israel. The Iran-led axis, Hezbollah, and the Assad regime in Syria constitute yet another rival force in the region. Additionally, the creation of the Eastern Mediterranean gas forum (East Med) by countries such as Greece, Israel, Egypt, and the Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus without Türkiye has also collided with Türkiye's interests. Despite this complex power struggle, Türkiye has collaborated with Qatar to oppose the Axis in areas like Libya, the Mediterranean, and the Gulf (Altunışık & Marın, 2011).

The instability in the Middle East and North Africa, notably the civil wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen, has had profound humanitarian consequences. The initial promise of the Arab Spring in 2011 was overshadowed by the devastating conflicts, leading to the loss of lives and mass migrations to Europe and neighbouring countries. Moreover, the emergence of failed states in these regions and Iraq provided a breeding ground for extremist groups, further

exacerbating the challenges faced by Türkiye due to the region's instabilities, state fragility and state failure scenarios.

Amidst these dynamics, the Middle East has witnessed a shifting focus of Great Power competition. China, Russia, and regional middle Powers in the Middle East have stepped in to fill the void left by the US's gradual withdrawal from the region and the EU's limited engagement beyond its concerns over refugee inflows. Furthermore, the end of the Arab Spring, the Palestinian question, emerging non-state actors, regional conflicts, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Europe's tensions with Russia, have added to the complexities. Consequently, Türkiye has been compelled to recalibrate its foreign policy to address the challenges posed by these competing hierarchies in the middle East and Europe, as well as the ongoing unrest in North Africa and the repercussions of the Arab Spring (Resnick, 2023).

These complex power struggles and conflicts in its neighbourhood have greatly influenced decisions regarding Türkiye national security and foreign policy. To protect its interests and stability, Türkiye has had to negotiate a challenging and constantly shifting environment due to the geopolitical instability of the region and the emergence of new parties seeking influence. As a result, Türkiye's long-term security and interests depended on formulating effective tactics in the context of the Libyan civil wars and the region at large.

II. Türkiye - Libya Relations: A Background

Türkiye, a middle power with growing economic capabilities, has emerged as a regional player in the Middle East. Moreover, Türkiye assumes a pivotal role in world affairs as evidenced by its active involvement in multilateral organizations such as the UN, the Organization for Islamic Corporation (OIC), D-8 countries, the African Union (AU), NATO, and the Organization of Turkic States. Additionally, together with BRICS countries they advocate for a novel international order based on strategic autonomy (Málnássy, 2020).

Türkiye and the Libyan people have deep relations dating back centuries with rich historical and cultural bonds. For example, the Ottoman Empire ruled Libya for 400 years until 1912, when they relinquished it to the Italians in return for restoring the Aegean Islands in peace negotiations that resulted a treaty in Ouchy on October, 18, 1912 (Orazi, 2017, p. 12). Strong relations existed between the Libyan people and the Ottoman Empire, which also thrived after the creation of the Turkish Republic. Due to these warm relations, Türkiye regards Libya as one of its closest Arab countries. Libya is also home to some ethnic Turkish populations from the Ottoman era (Süsler, 2022).

Libya gained its independence on 24 December 1951, Türkiye recognised Libya immediately and was among the first countries to support her at the UN. Türkiye took the initiative to help Libya thrive in all aspects, particularly in the field of economy and security (Telci, 2020). Türkiye opened its first official consulate in Benghazi on 1st January, 1953 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Türkiye, 2022).

The relations between Ankara and Tripoli have grown over the subsequent years. In the 1980s, during Turgut Özal's tenure as president and prime minister, Türkiye had an open policy towards North African countries, notably Libya making the relations grow. The closeness between Libya and Türkiye can also be seen during the war of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in which Gaddafi backed Türkiye. For instance, Gaddafi saw the Cyprus peace operation as Muslim defence and Jihad, as a result, he offered Türkiye material, moral and military support (Üstün, 2020, p. 127). In a similar vein, Türkiye also helped Libya in 2003 with the removal of sanctions. These sanctions were imposed on Libya after it failed to cooperate with relevant investigations into the terrorist attacks on Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 and France's Union de Transports Aériens (UTA) Flight over Nigeria in 1989. Following these occurrences, the security council met on September 12, 2003, to discuss the issue, and with a positive majority of thirteen votes and two absentees from France and the United States, Resolution 1506 was approved, After Libya took responsibility for the acts and decided for the payments of compensation to the victims' families hence removal of the sanctions. Furthermore, the two countries have had relations in several fields, the two foremost being economy and energy. Libya provided cheap energy and tourists to Türkiye while Turkish companies invested in the Libyan economy (Özşahin & Çakmak, 2022; UN, 2003).

In 2010, an uprising in Tunisia spread through the Arab world and the Middle East. By 2011, the uprising broke out in Libya, demanding Gaddafi step down. Muammar Gaddafi refused to step down, making the protests violent, leading to the loss of lives and NATO intervention. After Gaddafi was overthrown, Libya was divided east and west between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libya's army (LNA). A transitional council was appointed to lead Libya to a roadmap for stability and holding elections (Kardaş, 2020).

During the Libyan revolution in 2011, Türkiye played a constructive role in avoiding conflict and engaging in dialogue with the Gaddafi regime. Türkiye immediately recognised the appointed Council as the sole authorized body responsible for the Libyan citizens. The country was also the first to appoint an ambassador to Libya on September 2, 2011. This was after the National Transitional Council mainly controlled Tripoli. During the Gaddafi era, Türkiye had considerable assets in Libya worth US\$ 20 billion (Köse & Öztürk, 2020).

A. Türkiye's Foreign Policy towards Libya during the First Libyan Crisis

The revolution of 2011 significantly impacted Turkish foreign policy due to the widespread political changes that swept the entire region, including popular uprisings, regime changes, authoritarian resurgence, proxy wars, and the rise of extremist groups. This instability seriously threatened the stability of the region (Öniş, 2012). According to Bayet, The Arab Spring happened simultaneously across the region in different countries such as Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Yemen and had also threatened to sweep over the Gulf states “with unusual bravery, persistence, and sacrifice, these non-violent rebels withstand the brutal violence of the adversarial regimes” (Bayet, 2017, p. 10). The consequences of the Arab Spring for Türkiye were far-reaching, affecting its interests in countries such as Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Qatar, and Syria. In a similar vein, Türkiye's relations with Gulf states also reached an all-time low during this period.

Türkiye avoided the same policy it had followed towards the Egyptian uprising, this was because it sided with the forces that brought Mohamed Morsi to power, and the following events proved to be among the most brutal in the Middle East, culminating in bloodshed and a military coup that ousted Morsi and its interests were hurt. In response to these events, Türkiye opted for a diplomatic approach to resolve the crisis in Libya. It sought to avoid repeating the same policy it had followed in Egypt and Tunisia. Through diplomatic channels, Türkiye hoped to mitigate the impact of the Arab Spring on its foreign policy and maintain stability in the region (Aras & Sevgi, 2012).

In the context of the democratic uprising in Tunisia, Türkiye extended its support, but this act had ramifications for Türkiye itself. In subsequent events, Türkiye opposed NATO's intervention in Libya due to its strong ties with the Gaddafi regime, instead advocating for a neutral and constructive approach to resolving the crisis. However, international pressure on President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to support measures to safeguard civilians led Türkiye to shift its position. President Erdoğan tried to persuade Muamar Gaddafi to heed the demands of the Libyan people, but these overtures were ultimately unsuccessful. Consequently, Türkiye's policy towards the Libyan uprising transformed (Hosen, 2019).

Against this backdrop, Resolution 1973 was approved by the UN on March 17th, 2011, by a vote of 10 to none with five absentees. The resolution was adopted using various means to protect civilians from attacks such as regional measures, organizations, and other necessary measures while prohibiting foreign occupation that could undermine Libya's sovereignty. Türkiye supported the UN resolution and NATO intervention, which resulted in the imposition

of a no-fly zone and ultimately led to the death of Muamar Gaddafi brutally (Aras & Yorulmazlar, 2016).

Following the downfall of the Gaddafi regime, elections were conducted in 2012 to chart a course out of the crisis. In these elections, the National Congress was victorious. Türkiye, in turn, recognized the Transitional Council, which came into being after the elections, and implemented several initiatives aimed at promoting constructive dialogue and facilitating the peace process. For example, Türkiye's actions included appointing a new ambassador to Libya in the same year, becoming among the first countries to do so (Demirel, 2021).

Before the Libyan revolution, the bilateral relationship between the two countries was based on a win-win solution. During the Gaddafi era, relations between Türkiye and Libya were strong. Gaddafi ruled Libya for 40 years, during which the ties between them improved and strengthened. For example, between 2000 and 2010, Türkiye had good economic relations with Libya. Turkish businesspeople had invested billions of dollars into the Libya economy, particularly in construction projects. Reports show that about 200 Turkish-owned companies participated in 304 projects, with 25,000 employed Turkish citizens (Ferhat, 2019). The total value of those projects was estimated at US\$ 20 billion (Ali, 2021, p. 5). Similarly, Libya had good economic relations with Türkiye. It was exporting petrol and gas to Türkiye. Equally important Libyan tourists frequently visit Turkish Mediterranean beaches. By the end of that decade, the economic agreements between the two countries were based on many fields, such as energy, construction, tourism, banking, etc. Considering these massive investments and the length of relations, Türkiye wanted to play a constructive role in Libya.

B. Turkish Foreign Policy towards Libya during the Second Libyan Crisis

The Arab Spring has created two axes among the powerful countries in the region: the pro-change and the pro-status quo. The UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Egypt, and Israel were pro-status quo, i.e., those who defended the old order, while Türkiye and Qatar were pro-change. Türkiye, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran are big Islamic states that impact the region. Some of these countries taking sides in the conflict simultaneously seemed worrying for the Libyans and the international community since such a conflict's outcome has an unprecedented impact on the region's status (Kardaş, 2020).

Following Muamar Gaddafi's death, the situation in Libya has been characterized by occasional outbreaks of violence. Elections were held to provide a route out of the crisis in an attempt to plan a path to a peace settlement (Melcangi & Mezran, 2022). However, because of

the election outcomes and the fragmentation of Libya's political factions, two distinct centres of power emerged in 2012 and 2014. One on the western side led by Fayeze Al-Siraj, and the other on the eastern side led by Khalifa Haftar; One is based in Tobruk (Libyan National Army, LNA), and the other is based in Tripoli (the Government of National Accord, GNA) (Hwang & Hoon Song, 2022). This situation of Libya disturbed the world community. It is against this backdrop that various regional actors have been divided in their support for these two factions. For instance, Türkiye, Italy, and Qatar backed the GNA, while the LNA has received support from countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, France, Russia, and Egypt. The conflict has had significant implications for Turkish interests in the region, as the nation allegedly lost US\$15 billion in unpaid deals and had huge losses on its investments during the Libyan civil wars. In light of its implications as a regional power, Türkiye felt compelled to engage in the war, especially given that Libya and Türkiye share a maritime boundary across the Mediterranean Sea. Its interests are believed to be focused on the creation of stability in the Libyan state because this would benefit Türkiye's political and economic situation as well as Libya's (Mohamed, 2020).

Türkiye's policy towards the Arab Spring until 2012 was based on the traditional non-involvement logic of interdependence. At the same time, Türkiye was expanding its regional power and safeguarding its economic interests in general. Türkiye is an economic powerhouse in the region with a vast population of 84 million people and has many interests that need attention on many fronts, such as the one in Libya and other Middle Eastern countries. However, Türkiye experienced some domestic challenges following the 2013 period. For example, a coup attempt in 2016 created problems for the government. The domestic factors coupled with Syria's civil war, ISIS, PKK insurgency and MENA region conflicts constituted a serious security concern for Türkiye. Due to this, it had to change its strategic planning (Çakır & Akdağ, 2017). Libya's peace process has undergone several stages. Martin Kobler the UN envoy to Libya said that:

"Urge all sides in the conflict to exercise patience and restraint and to seek solutions via peaceful discourse" (UN, 2017).

Despite the failure of several attempts, Martin Kobler (2015-2017), succeeded in the continuation of the negotiations. On the 17th of December 2015, an agreement was reached between political figures. Türkiye considered the government of accord the suitable one, and in Jan 2016, Türkiye hosted Al-Siraj in Ankara by then foreign minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Around the same time, On May 30, 2016, foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu visited Libya to take Turkish policy to the next phase. Türkiye tried to mediate the peace process and permanent

settlement through its policies at the national general conference. For example, it received the president of the national congress, Nuri Abu Sahmin, in Ankara at almost the same time as al-Siraj was received in Jan 2016. However, it failed due to Abu Sahmin's refusal to accept the national reconciliation government (Hosen, 2019).

The vacuum created by the gradual withdrawal of the US and European powers from the middle east motivated regional powers such as the UAE, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye to take part in initiatives regarding the volatile region. They started intervening in conflict-prone countries such as Yemen, Libya, Syria, and Somalia. Qatar, for instance, has had ties to the Libyan Islamists since 2010. Türkiye also got engaged in the Libyan, Egyptian and Syrian crises. In 2011 and 2013, the Egyptian and Syrian problems brought Qatar and Türkiye together. Studies have shown that Islamist Libyan insurgent groups took part in the Syrian crisis. This close connection can be seen in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) blockade of Qatar, in which Ankara opposed siding with Qatar (Harchaoui, 2020).

Ever since the 2011 uprising, Libya has evolved into a geopolitical battleground for regional and global power struggles. Foreign actors and the Libyan sides accuse the other of utilizing foreign fighters and receiving military assistance. For example, Türkiye's involvement in Libya has created some opposition from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Similarly, the authorities in Ankara believe the UAE and its allies have been spreading false accusations against Türkiye, claiming to support Islamic militants, a case that Türkiye refutes. Egypt also raised concerns towards Türkiye's involvement in Libya; it claims it has the right to dictate the security concerns of Libya as it has porous border with Libya which Islamic militants and terrorists can easily pass over the border. Egypt's President Abel Fattah El-Sisi said that:

“Libya is a transit point for illegal immigration; our national security is tied to Libya.

We could have intervened, but we respected the situation in Libya” (Shay, 2019, p. 6).

Cairo also seeks to gain economic advantage from a stable Libya as its interests were hurt by the conflict. For instance, hundreds of thousands of Egyptian youngsters who were employed in Libya were forced to leave their employment as a result of the fighting and returned to Egypt. Similarly, Türkiye expresses frustration towards the EU and the US for leaning towards the Haftar side. Türkiye saw its policies towards the region, particularly the Libyan crisis, that the cost of non-interference and a neutral stance on Libya outweighed the intervention risks. This was because of several factors rising in the region, such as geopolitical tension, energy connections and gas drilling games, economic interests, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Turkish intervention in Libya can be considered defensive and a counter-geopolitical siege. Türkiye saw the Haftar coalition as a threat due to their broader strategy of excluding Türkiye

in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye also wanted to stop the conflict in Libya and proceed with a road map for the country (Merzan & Miller, 2017).

In a speech, President Erdoğan said:

Last year's putschist efforts in Libya to remove the legitimate government of national agreement resulted in nothing but agony for the country. The international community has been unable to hold the putschists or their supporters accountable for the massacres, human rights violations, and especially the mass graves in the city of Tarhuna. The only nation that has actively reacted against and backed Libya's democratically elected government has been Türkiye. We hope broad and thorough discourse among Libyans can lead to the establishment of a long-lasting political settlement in that country (Erdoğan, 2020).

Türkiye provided military and intelligence support to the GNA camp. This provision of aid has resulted in a shift in the conflict in favour of the Government of National Accord. For example, one of the most crucial aspects of the war was the Turkish deployment of the Bayraktar TB2 drones in the conflict. The GNA captured many towns, pushing the Haftar forces towards the eastern side near Sirte city, which houses the Al-Jufra airbase. One of the major turning points was the capture of Al-Watiya airbase and Tarhuna, which led to the demoralization of the LNA fighters and foreign actors. With the intervention of Türkiye in Libya, the GNA became stronger. Similarly, Türkiye's policies towards Libya had played significant roles in Libya, leading to broader changes in the geopolitical landscape. In a similar vein, the intervention affected the regional dynamics. For example, it brought balance to the region, helped GNA hold the capital city and its other areas, and made Türkiye protect its interests (Cheterian, 2023; Telci, 2020).

Türkiye's involvement in the Libyan conflict is also part of a broader policy of geostrategic ambitions through which Türkiye seeks to build its national security both at home and abroad. This policy is anchored on the Turkish Blue Homeland (Mavi Vatan) doctrine, a naval strategy introduced by Ramazan Gürdeniz in 2006 designed to safeguard Türkiye's geopolitical interests. The principle gained prominence in 2019 after the Turkish Navy conducted drills and searches in the eastern Mediterranean (Vreÿ & Blaine, 2023). To this end, on November 27, 2019, Türkiye signed a maritime boundary agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) that extends from southwest Türkiye to northeast Libya. The deal, passed by the Turkish parliament on 5 December, enlarged Türkiye's continental shelf by a third and granted Türkiye access to extensive regional gas and oil resources. Türkiye subsequently applied to the United Nations (UN), and the deal was registered

under Article 102 of the UN charter with the secretariat of the United Nations charter (Group, 2020).

After the deal between Türkiye and the GNA was signed, it triggered protests from Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus and Greece, saying that the agreement was preaching international law and cutting the interests of the Mediterranean states. The Eastern Tobruk-based camp of Commander Khalifa Haftar also rejected the deal. On the other hand, Greece claimed that the agreement would affect the presence of its island of Crete, which lies between Libya and Turkish waters. Greece observed that the agreement interfered with its exclusive economic zone (EEZ), outlined within the UNCLOS-III convention (Joffé, 2020). The event also caused diplomatic reactions and problems. Greece expelled the Libyan ambassador, and the EU condemned the deal. On 12 April 2021, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Libyan counterpart Abdul Hamid Dbeibah renewed their commitment to the 2019 Maritime boundaries agreement. Dbeibah has been to balance the tensions with the Greek and Turkish sides regarding the Maritime agreement. It was found that Dbeibah wanted to balance the sides but saw the Agreement served the interests of Türkiye and Libya. Following the Agreements, Dbeibah also formed a joint Libyan-Greek committee that would calm the tensions and help the Libyans' and neighbours' best interests. Libya is a country that has abundant minerals that should be utilized. Since the civil war erupted, the oil and gas production sectors have been affected, and good relations with solid regional countries could help overcome such problems. Libya sees Türkiye as a reliable partner in this context, and both countries' policies must be protected (Aljazeera, 2021a).

Türkiye wants to control its possession, policies and interests in Cyprus, the Aegean, the Levant, and Syria and to protect the blue homeland doctrine. Türkiye also saw the formation of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (East Med) by countries such as Greece, Israel, Egypt, and Greek Cypriot administration of Southern Cyprus as a national security threat. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that Türkiye would do whatever is necessary against any plans of East Med geopolitical projects. In this regard, Ankara sealed the maritime boundary and military cooperation with Libya in 2019 November. On January 20, Türkiye passed a vote for a one-year mandate to deploy troops in Libya after the GNA had asked for help. With the Turkish experience in other crises like the Qatar crisis, Syria, Somalia, and Azerbaijan, the GNA had a strong position (Quamar, 2020).

Various factors motivated Türkiye to intervene in Libya and do maritime boundaries with it. In this article, four aspects are covered. The first one is the UNCLOS rules concerning the EEZ and continental shelf deals of neighbouring countries such as Greece, Cyprus (with

Egypt 2003), Lebanon (2010) and Israel (2007) maritime boundaries would hamper Türkiye's EEZ. Secondly, the exclusion of Türkiye from the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, which is an association of countries in the Eastern Mediterranean region, such as Egypt, Greek Cypriot administration of southern Cyprus, Israel, and Greece. These four coastal states wanted to form a consortium to create a pipeline project to export gas discovered in the region to Europe without the consent of Türkiye. The deals passed by these neighbours would hamper Turkish interests in the area. By signing the maritime agreement with Libya, Ankara wanted its neighbours to know that any regional policy that could exclude a big country like Türkiye would not last (Grigoriadis, 2022). Türkiye wanted to protect its national security, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Türkiye is a vast country with a giant landmass, and Türkiye saw that such a policy was not at the interest of its own. The Third factor is economic reasons. Turkish companies and businessmen had invested hugely in the Gaddafi regime and had an outstanding payment in Libya because Ankara wanted to protect its interest. Similarly, Türkiye is also interested in Libya's vast oil and gas resources (Lindenstrauss et al., 2019). Fourth is geopolitical reasons. During and after the Arab Spring, Ankara had increasingly gained ambitions in a regional context. Türkiye competed indirectly with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and their partners on one side and an Iran-led block on the other. In addition, Türkiye had also tried to maintain a balance between the US and Russia in Syria.

In addition, due to the involvement of moderate Islamist parties in the region's political development during the past ten years, coupled with the failed coup attempt in Türkiye in 2016 and the subsequent changes made after Tayyip Erdoğan was elected as the president of Türkiye increased these objectives. Türkiye has sent its troops several times to neighbouring countries, such as four times northern Syria, Greek Cypriot administration of southern Cyprus, and Libya. Similarly, Türkiye also sent drilling ships with boat guns to protect its interests. Türkiye has shaped its overseas bases subsequently, such as the military bases in Somalia, Azerbaijan, Qatar and Afghanistan (Gallia et al., 2019).

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said that.

“the agreement we made with our neighbour Libya about maritime jurisdiction in the Mediterranean has safeguarded both nations' interests and future” (Aljazeera, 2021b).

Figure 1: Türkiye and Libya Maritime boundary

Source: Anadolu Agency 2020)

III. Implications of Libyan Crisis Interventions on Turkish Foreign Policy

The Libyan conflict has attracted a lot of international attention, with numerous parties actively managing the crisis. Türkiye's participation has aided the GNA in defending its territories and preventing a problem in the Tripoli region provoked by Haftar's forces. This intervention restored a balance of power in the conflict; Haftar's forces were stalled and ultimately forced to retreat, preventing them from seizing control of the country. The Turkish side has provided the GNA with military weapons and expertise, including aircraft defence equipment, mid-range missiles, Bayraktar drones, Turkish special advisors, Syrian fighters, and advanced intelligence capabilities, which were delivered to the airports of Misrata and Tripoli. Although the conflict in Libya has been on and off, as of the time of writing, the fighting has ceased following a series of negotiations and peace talks. For instance, on 19 January 2020, a diplomatic gathering was called to discuss the situation in Libya. Subsequently, after peace talks, UN Resolution 2510 was approved, with the support of various international actors in Libya, including Türkiye, Egypt, UAE, and Russia. This resolution followed several unsuccessful peace talks before the fighting ended in June 2020 (Al-Fawwaz & Abualkanam, 2021).

Following the ceasefire and halt to the fighting, Libya needs reconstruction and peacebuilding initiatives. This reconstruction of Libya presents a momentous prospect for Turkish businesses and corporations. Before the Gaddafi regime's collapse, Türkiye had massive economic relations affected by the war in Libya. There were many unpaid contracts with Libya, it could protect these interests through the intervention. Following good links with

GNA, many accords were established between the GNA and Türkiye, encompassing construction, finance, and energy. For example, On 15 October, a delegation of Libyan businesspeople convened in Istanbul, Türkiye, to revitalize economic relations between the two nations. Over 200 manufacturers and exporters from Libya and 100 companies from Türkiye participated in the business meeting. Similarly, in August 2020, Türkiye entered into an undisclosed agreement with Libya's Central Bank. This agreement may benefit Türkiye as the Libyan central Bank holds significant reserves of US dollars, which Türkiye could use to stabilize its struggling currency (Ergocun, 2020).

Türkiye has strategically expanded its power across the Eastern Mediterranean by intervening in Tripoli. By signing a maritime agreement with Libya, Türkiye expanded its continental shelf and established arrangements with the GNA for a long-term presence in the region, including constructing an air facility at al-Watiya and a navy station in the port of Misrata. Furthermore, Türkiye's access to significant oil projects in Libya will serve its interests well. For instance, on 20 May 2020, the Turkish Petroleum Corporation declared its intention to pursue oil exploration in areas where licenses had been granted under the Libyan deals. To address these matters, a delegation of high-ranking officials, including the foreign minister and the director of intelligence, Hakan Fidan, travelled to Libya on 17 June 2020. In addition, Türkiye's presence in Libya could provide it with leverage over Europe, mainly as Türkiye has applied to join the EU. This could give Türkiye more significant influence over events in Libya, North Africa, and the Middle East (Mens, 2022).

Türkiye may also gain considerable advantages from the intervention by getting closer access to the Sahel region, given Libya's geographical proximity to the Sahel, including Mali, Niger, Tunisia, and Algeria. Türkiye has been developing a comprehensive strategy to establish a strategic foothold in these countries through diplomatic and trade means to expand its ties with the African continent. The recent victory of the GNA represents a significant opportunity for Türkiye to extend its influence and gain a strategic advantage to access these countries more efficiently. Considering the projected population growth in Africa in the next five decades, Türkiye's long-term prospects for economic and political engagement in the region will grow.

In the context of migration, Türkiye also has the capacity to contribute significantly and play a role in shaping the discourse and actions surrounding migration in Europe. Türkiye can play a card similar to the Syrian migration issue with Europe. As a transit point for many unauthorized migrants entering Europe, Libya has faced mounting pressure to address its vulnerability to traffickers and smugglers. For example, since the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the influx of illegal immigrants into Europe has surged, leading to a catastrophic number of

fatalities in 2016, as 180,000 illicit migrants crossed Europe. Against this backdrop, Europe and Italy have signed strategic documents calling for reconstructing and restoring Libya's sovereignty to curb the influence of traffickers and smugglers. If Libya becomes stable in the hands of the GNA, it will help Türkiye have a say in the region's migration issues on the one hand. On the other hand, Türkiye can exert significant leverage over Libya's hydrocarbons, which Europe desperately needs. Therefore, Türkiye's involvement in the Libyan issue can potentially shape the dynamics of relations between Europe and Libya and its leverage over Europe (Ceccorulli, 2021).

The Bayraktar unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) developed by the Turkish defence industry have demonstrated their remarkable capabilities, bolstering Türkiye's worldwide defence industry. These drones, previously deployed in the Syrian war, have acquired significant experience, rendering them more agile in executing operations in Libya. In late 2019, the LNA appeared to have an advantage in the conflict. They were receiving help from the Russian mercenaries, UAE military Hardware, Saudi Arabia's financial backing and France diplomatically. However, the deployment of Bayraktar drones to the GNA on the field added pace to the conflict. Initially, the GNA needed to have performed the drones adequately but due to technical issues, including communication systems, speed, range of operations, and insufficient pilot training they could not utilize properly (Soyaltin-Colella & Demiryol, 2023).

In response, the GNA side sent pilots for training in Türkiye, resulting in subsequent drone upgrades and an increased range of operations. In January 2020, the Bayraktar drones demonstrated their effectiveness on the battlefield, with the GNA utilizing them to destroy 11 air defence systems, tanks, and 44 military cars. In the spring of 2020, the tide of the conflict shifted significantly when Bayraktar drones and Turkish warships provided critical support to the GNA in capturing the Al-Watiya airbase, effectively ending the LNA's Tripoli offensive. This scenario became popular in the news worldwide; for instance, In the spring of 2020, the Bayraktar drones were featured in videos that captured the destruction of Russian air defence systems, which rapidly became viral on various media platforms. These videos, along with other related posts, have been widely disseminated by several well-known media outlets, such as the Washington Post, Aljazeera, The Guardian, and the Economist, all of which highlighted the exceptional performance of these Turkish drones. This victory proved pivotal in allowing the GNA to retake almost all of Western Libya, compelling the LNA and its international allies to the negotiating table (Donelli, 2023).

The success of these drones provided military and diplomatic advantages to Türkiye. For instance, many countries have displayed interest in procuring military assets from Türkiye,

bolstering its international status. As of 2022, 19 countries have acquired the Bayraktar drones, resulting in Türkiye's military exports reaching US\$3 billion in 2021, attributable primarily to the Libya intervention. The proliferation of Turkish military equipment, particularly the Bayraktar drones, among developing countries has enhanced Türkiye's reputation as a reliable supplier of military equipment and further consolidated its position as a formidable military power in the region (Rossiter & Cannon, 2022).

Türkiye encountered a series of challenges in the intervention of Libya. Türkiye's transfer of weapons and soldiers to Libya found to violate the UN arms embargo, causing a negative perception of Türkiye on the international stage. The Secretary General of the UN, Antonio Guterres, emphasized that external involvement in the conflict would only exacerbate the situation and hinder a peaceful and comprehensive political resolution. Additionally, Türkiye's maritime agreement with Libya was censured by several entities, including the European Union, Arab league, and NATO, for breaching the International Law of the Sea. Furthermore, Türkiye's intervention resulted in the loss of lives of some of its soldiers, leading to domestic criticism.

The Turkish intervention also caused the country's already strained relations with the regional countries to worsen. Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia all supported the LNA. Due to this, regional geopolitical tensions have risen, which may impact Türkiye's more extensive security and economic interest. In conclusion, there have been many obstacles brought by Türkiye's engagement in Libya, including logistical issues, geopolitical conflicts, and international backlash. These difficulties underline the complexity of regional conflicts and the demand for a sophisticated method of formulating foreign policy (Algarni, 2021).

Conclusion

The present study sheds light on Türkiye's policy towards Libya in the post-2011 era, exploring the consequences of Libya's crisis on Türkiye – Libya relations and Libyan civil wars during 2011-2014 and 2014-2020. The region's ever-changing political and security context compelled Türkiye to reassess and adjust its foreign policy strategy in the face of the Arab Spring and regional developments, which posed a significant threat to Turkish interests due to its widespread political changes and regime shifts.

Türkiye's approach to the Libyan crisis differed from its previous actions in neighbouring countries like Egypt and Tunisia. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan initially chose a diplomatic path to resolve the Libyan crisis in 2011, avoiding direct military intervention. Later, after Gaddafi refused to heed the advice, Türkiye joined other partners including NATO

leading to the intervention. While having some success, the NATO operation in Libya also brought about critical challenges and repercussions for regional and international security dynamics. The ongoing violence and instability in Libya after the intervention highlighted the unfinished business of NATO's involvement, leading to concerns about exceeding its UN mandate and seeking regime change instead of protecting civilians. The Libyan civil war had considerable ramifications for Türkiye's and NATO member's interest, resulting in significant economic losses and instability in the Mediterranean region. Eventually, Türkiye intervened in the Libyan crisis in 2020 to support the internationally recognized GNA. This intervention was driven by a combination of factors, including regional security threats, economic investments, and GNA's invitation, which compelled Türkiye to rearrange its grand strategy objectives. Through the intervention, Türkiye established strong ties with Libyan authorities, contributing to peace and stability in the region. The maritime agreement signed with Libya expanded Türkiye's influence in the Eastern Mediterranean, and the establishment of military facilities in Libya solidified its position as a robust regional power on the world stage. Moreover, Türkiye's intervention allowed it to gain closer access to the Sahel region, providing opportunities for strategic advantages and a role in shaping migration discourse in Europe. However, the intervention also brought challenges, including violating the UN arms embargo and relations with regional countries supporting the LNA, such as Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. This has increased geopolitical tensions that may impact Türkiye's broader security and economic interest. In light of these scenarios, Türkiye's involvement in Libya emphasizes the need for a sophisticated approach to formulating foreign policy, considering the intricacies of regional conflicts and the potential implications of such interventions on the international stage.

In conclusion, the study emphasizes the importance of Libya in Türkiye's foreign policy landscape, highlighting how the evolving political and security context has shaped and influenced Türkiye's actions towards the country. As the region continues to experience uncertainty and challenges, Türkiye's policy towards Libya will remain subject to adaptation and strategic recalibration to safeguard its interests and maintain stability.

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