

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

The Link between Libyan Civil War and the Eastern Mediterranean Issue in Turkish Foreign Policy: Balancing the Threat*

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Abstract

This article aims to determine the main motivation behind Türkiye's involvement in the Libyan Civil War as an active actor since 2019 which can be seen as a deviation from its traditional foreign policy. Türkiye has involved in the Libyan conflict following the establishment of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) which it believes threatens its vital interests in the region. In this study, this involvement is described in the context of Stephen M. Walt's balance of threat theory. It is argued that Türkiye's Libyan policy is essentially a balancing policy against the threat posed by the alliance against its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean region. It is further argued that maintaining stability in Libya led by the Government of National Accord (GNA) is a very important part of Türkiye's regional alliance policy.

Keywords

Balancing Policy, Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, Libyan Civil War, Government of National Accord, Balance of Threat Theory.

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Introduction

Türkiye's active foreign policy towards Libya in the 2010s may seem radical when traditional Turkish foreign policy is considered. The radicalism of the situation is that Türkiye is involved in the civil war in a country that does not share a border by obviously supporting one of the parties by all means. By the agreements Türkiye signed with the GNA on November 27, 2019 it was deemed appropriate to send soldiers to Libya on January 2, 2020 by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (*Resmi Gazete*, "03.01.2020" 1-2). Being involved in the civil war, Türkiye declared its position with the GNA and offered the requested military and technical assistance to the service of its ally. The military ammunition supplied by Türkiye and the technical support provided by Turkish military experts working in the region contributed significantly to the GNA's struggle against the Libyan National Army (LNA) affiliated with the Tobruk Government led by Khalifa Haftar during the civil war.

Traditionally, Türkiye has been involved in conflicts in countries with which it is not a neighbor, whether it has historical and cultural affiliation (such as Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan) or no such background (such as Korea, Somalia) only in the presence of international coalitions (such as UN, NATO, OSCE). The Syria and Iraq operations which it unilaterally engaged in by military means were carried out in the context of the concept of counter-terrorism. The only attempt that cannot be considered in this context is the Cyprus intervention in 1974. Türkiye declared that this operation was based on the 1959 Treaty of Guarantee. Since Türkiye's support to the GNA is different from these interventions, it is regarded in the literature as Türkiye's policy of expanding its regional sphere of influence (Adler-Nissen and Pouliot; Lindenstrauss et al.; Málnássy; Joffe; Janković). However, it is also accepted that Türkiye is being tried to be isolated (Pontera and Ruszel; Aydın and Dizdaroğlu; İşeri Bartan; Evaghorou; Taş) or to be surrounded (Özdemir) by its counterparts in the Eastern Mediterranean.

This study focuses on the following questions: What are the dynamics that push Türkiye to take an active stance in the civil war in a country that does not even share a border? Is there a meaningful relationship between the foreign policy pursued towards the GNA, with which the agreement on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas has been signed, and the Eastern

Mediterranean issue? How can it be explained that Libya is the ally Türkiye has chosen to act together on the Eastern Mediterranean issue?

It is claimed that Türkiye's Libya policy has created a military alliance and this alliance is a balancing (threat) policy for Türkiye. Regarding the Eastern Mediterranean problem, it is argued that the Libyan policy was built against the interlocutors' attempts to isolate Türkiye in the region. The main argument of the study is that there is a causality between the emergence of an anti-Türkiye alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean and the militarization of Türkiye's Libya policy. In this context, contrary to the common belief in the literature, Türkiye tries to protect its interests by allying with the GNA against the threat posed by the coalition rather than expanding its sphere of influence. For this reason, the threat that lies at the root of the Türkiye-GNA alliance needs to be examined. It is also argued that Türkiye's Libya policy can be explained in the context of Walt's claim that states have chosen to form alliances to balance the threats against them, that is, they balance the threat.

In the study, Türkiye-Libya relations are divided in three periods. The reason for making such a periodization is that although the Libyan events have shown a similar character from the beginning, Türkiye's attitude in the process has changed. Therefore, it is thought that the motivation source underlying this change cannot be explained in particular to Libya. Türkiye followed the traditional Arab Spring policy during the first two terms (until 2019); implemented a policy that included diplomatic and political support for a government with ideological, cultural, and religious affinity to take over the administration in Libya. In this period while a more passive policy was followed, Türkiye evaluated the Eastern Mediterranean problem as Greece and the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus (GCASC) oriented; it did not accept this issue as the main motivation in Libyan policy. Recently, a policy has been carried out in which Türkiye is actively involved in the civil war and provides both military and political support. The determining factor of this transformation has been the institutionalization of the anti-Türkiye alliance in the Eastern Mediterranean within the body of the EMGF and the policy of isolating Türkiye. The article claims that as a result of this process an increase in Walt's four threat components (aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions) has emerged

that has affected Türkiye's strategy and alliance policy. In the study, it was preferred to examine official sources such as the statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye and other countries, the minutes of the Parliament, and the discourse of decision-makers to reveal the changing strategies and priorities.

Based on this approach, the study consists of three parts. First, the general principles of Walt's balance of threat theory and its relevance to Türkiye's Libya policy are discussed. In the second part, the developments in the Eastern Mediterranean that form the basis of Türkiye's Libya policy were examined, and Türkiye's arguments and how the threat against Türkiye was institutionalized were evaluated through EMGF. In addition, in this section, the threat posed by the alliance is discussed in the context of Walt's four main components of the threat. In the third part, Türkiye's Libya policy is analyzed by focusing on the change depending on the developments originating from the Eastern Mediterranean. The study has been completed with the findings that it is possible to explain Türkiye's Libya policy through the Eastern Mediterranean issue in the context of the balance of threat theory and evaluations on the possibilities that this policy may reveal in the next period.

Theoretical Framework and Its Appropriateness

It is accepted that security expectations are the main determinants in the establishment of alliance relations between states. In particular, the advantages of defensive alliances include the reduced probability of being attacked (deterrence), more power in the event of an attack (defense), and preventing the alliance of the ally with the opponent (preclusion) (Snyder 110). In addition to this general evaluation, there are different approaches on the conditions under which states will make alliances.

Walt ("Alliance"; "Testing"; "Alliances in Theory"; *The Origins*; "Alliances, Threats"; "The Progressive") explained his balance of threat theory in his publications where he discussed how the US foreign policy orientation should be in the last period of the Cold War. Arguing that the traditional realist balance of power approach does not have sufficient explanatory power when examined over the cases, Walt claimed that the main determinant in the establishment of alliances is the balance of threats. While discussing the

appropriateness of the balance of threat theory, starting from how alliances are formed he explained that states come together as a way to deal with threats.

The claim that states' alliance relations are formed by choosing one of the "balancing" or "bandwagoning" strategies constitutes the starting point of the theory (Walt, "Alliance" 5-8). According to Kenneth N. Waltz (127), balancing is the most common among these strategies. The reason for this is explained by the statement that "secondary states, if they are free to choose, will rally on the weaker side because the stronger side threatens them". On the other hand, Walt opposes the proposition that the secondary power should be preferred over the stronger one since the balance of power theory focuses on power distribution. He emphasizes that another factor is decisive such that the balance of power approach cannot explain why so many states formed alliances against Germany which was in a weaker position in terms of capacity during the World Wars. In this context, he claims that the main determining factor for balancing is not power, but threat and the balance of threat theory will close this gap (Walt, "Testing" 280).

While the balance of power theory predicts that states become allies in response to power imbalances; the balance of threat theory claims that states seek allies when there is a threat imbalance, that is when a state or coalition is particularly dangerous (Walt, *The Origins* 264-265). The degree to which a state threatens others is directly related to the state's aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions (Walt, "Alliances in Theory" 4-5). Each of these elements constitutes components of threats. Aggregate power refers to the resources (population, industrial and military capability, technological capability, etc.) owned by a state or coalition. Proximity is seen as another threat source as a state's ability to reflect its power will decrease as distance increases. Coalitions with large offensive capability pose a threat to the weaker ones that can push states into alliances. Finally, the presence of actors thought to have offensive intentions triggers opposing coalitions regardless of the distribution of power. Walt does not prioritize any of these factors. He argues that some of them may come to the fore according to the event and time. At this point, the proposition is that states will form alliances when faced with threats, and they will do this with

less threatening actors due to rationality, except in exceptional cases (Walt, "Alliance" 8-13).

Balance of threat theory has formed the theoretical basis of a significant number of academic studies in the following period. When these studies are examined in general, Priess' article on the formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) comes to the fore first. Acting with the argument that the threat perception created by the Iranian Revolution in the countries of the region creates an alliance relationship, Priess discussed the impact of this threat on the formation of the GCC by considering the situations of the countries in question separately. Commenting on Priess' article Cooper argues that not only external threats but also internal threats should be taken into account in the formation of the GCC. For this reason, he calls Walt's theory the "state-centered" balance of threats theory and argues that going beyond this is more inclusive in understanding third-world alliance behaviors. Gause III also accepts the relevance of the balance of threat theory in his article on alliance behavior in the Gulf region but puts the arguments about the source of the threat to the test. It discusses the determinant of domestic and transnational political identity and culture in threat perceptions, especially by claiming that even Walt is not questioning enough about the source of the threat.

Rose and Dusen discussed the consequences of two Islamic revolutions in Sudan (1885 and 1989) on the foreign policy behaviors of neighboring countries Ethiopia and Egypt from the perspective of the balance of threat theory. While the threat perception triggered by the revolution in the countries of the region led to security competition, the links between the revolution and competition were analyzed. Wivel also used the balance of threat theory together with the balance of power theory in his article on Transatlantic relations in the post-Cold War period. Wivel interprets from the perspective of the balance of threat that while the Soviet threat, which no longer exists in the context of the changing conditions of the period, was expected to lead Europe to balance the US, this did not happen. He presented a different perspective with the interpretation that the advanced political integration of the EU took place to balance the unilateralism threat of the US. Vinayaraj, on the other hand, examines the reflection of the threat posed by India to Bangladesh through Walt's classification of threat sources

(aggregate power, proximity, offensive capability, and offensive intentions) and discusses the determinants of regional relations. The changing threat perceptions in the process were also examined from this point of view and a comprehensive case analysis was presented. Tarus and Crandal also examine the reflections of the threat posed by Russia on the foreign policy of Estonia which has a significant dependence on natural gas through the balance of threat theory. Likewise, the authors who examined the four sources of threat argued that Estonian energy policy is a balancing act for this threat. On the other hand, Bock, Henneberg, and Plank claim that Russian actions during the Ukraine Crisis can be explained from the perspective of the balance of threat theory. According to the article, Russia considers these developments as a threat of Western and NATO expansionism and thus carries out a policy to balance this threat. As a result, as is revealed from the literature review, the formation of an opposing alliance and the transformation of this alliance into a threat force the states to enter alliance relations with other states.

While evaluating Türkiye's Libya policy, it is thought that the balance of threat theory offers an appropriate theoretical framework. Türkiye-Libya relations (via the GNA) have created an alliance relationship as a result of mutual agreements since 2019. This alliance is not limited to Türkiye-Libya relations only and that the two actors are committed to acting together toward the Eastern Mediterranean problem. What constitutes this dimension of the alliance is argued by Türkiye that it is the policy of increasing the number of actors with which it can act together in the region and weakening the strategies of the actors on the opposite side. The movement started under the leadership of the GCASC and Greece and expanded to include Israel and Egypt in the 2010s and turned into an anti-Türkiye structure within the body of the EMGF. This alliance led to an increase in Walt's four main components of the threat. Türkiye's response to this structure was to pursue an increasingly militarized policy in the region, on the one hand, and to establish new alliance relations, as claimed in the balance of threat theory, on the other. In this context, the most suitable actor for Türkiye was the GNA, which needed Türkiye's support due to its disadvantaged position in the civil war, but the civil war in Libya required Türkiye's active participation in the process.

The Eastern Mediterranean Issue as a Source of Threat to Türkiye

The Eastern Mediterranean region is a conflict zone due to the conflicts in the policies of the border and cross-border countries regarding the region. The developments of the 21st century have also made the region the focal point of energy-centered conflicts. Many actors have adopted their policies on the extraction, transportation, and sharing of hydrocarbon deposits discovered in the region, and the disagreements on these issues have revealed the “new” Eastern Mediterranean problem. The basis of these problems is the absence of an agreement between the coastal states on the sharing of multilateral maritime jurisdiction areas (Başeren 1-3). The fact that the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea has not been signed by all regional countries is an important obstacle to solving the problem before the law.

Natural gas exploration activities started in the region in the 2000s. They were successful for the first time when Israel discovered a 280 billion cubic meter reserve in the Tamar field in 2009. In the following period, Israel, GCASC, and Egypt made more discoveries in 6 fields (Leviathan, Aphrodite, Zohr, Nur, Calypso, Galucus-1). Exploration and drilling activities involving many companies (ENI, BP, Noble, Exxon Mobile, Total, Novatek, Qatar Petroleum, etc.) have brought about a multinational process (Winrow 47-49). In the Eastern Mediterranean, where 2.83 trillion cubic meters of natural gas was discovered as of December 2020, the exploration, extraction, and production of this gas caused serious disagreements (Bowlus).

From the beginning of the process, Türkiye has taken an opposing stance to the developments. There are two main reasons for this. First, GCASC negotiates maritime jurisdiction delimitation agreements with coastal countries excluding Türkiye and grants licenses for exploration in its region. Türkiye argues that a multilateral approach is required due to the geographical characteristics of the region. Second, GCASC acts as the sole ruler of the whole island. GCASC signed exclusive economic zone (EEZ) agreements with Egypt (2003), Lebanon (2007), and Israel (2010). By adopting a law defining 13 oil exploration fields in February 2007. It made the first international tender for exploration in these areas. Finally, Noble Energy started drilling in the Aphrodite field on September 19, 2011. Türkiye argued that such decisions should not be taken without an agreement between the two parties (TRNC Public Information Office).

When it could not find what was waiting for, it signed a continental shelf delimitation agreement with the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) in September 2011, and in April 2012 the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) granted an exploration permit in the areas overlapping with the six exploration areas claimed by GCASC. (Aydın et al. 95-96). In the following process, the attempts of companies authorized by GCASC to enter these regions were prevented from time to time by Turkish warships and tensions were experienced (Reuters, *Turkish Blockade*).

The discoveries made in the regions under the jurisdiction of GCASC and Israel brought up the issue of transporting natural gas to European markets, and agreements were planned on various routes. Two important projects came to the fore in this process: the EastMed project and the delivery of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to the markets (Winrow 51).

Developments were seen as a threat by Türkiye and the actions taken were directed toward this threat. In this context, it should be noted that the threat to Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean has multiple dimensions. The first is the EEZ agreements made by GCASC with the coastal states since 2003 and the permissions granted for drilling activities in its region (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *30.01.2007*). This issue is accepted as a threat based on sovereignty. Türkiye, as the country with the longest coastline in the Mediterranean, is squeezed into an extremely limited EEZ area. This attitude is in opposition to Türkiye's basic Cyprus policy, which is determined to protect the sovereign rights of the Turkish Cypriots. Türkiye's main argument is that this regulation is against international law (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 9-10).

The second source of threat is related to the production and transportation of gas discovered in the region. The fact that Türkiye was not included in the partnership formed under the leadership of GCASC, Israel, Egypt, and Greece to transport the gas to be extracted from the Leviathan and Aphrodite fields to European markets and that the rights of the Turkish Cypriots were ignored created a double threat. This situation completely contradicts Türkiye's policy of being an energy hub (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 48-49). When Turkish Foreign Policy literature of the 2000s and 2010s are examined, it should be noted that Türkiye's strategy to become an energy hub has an important place (Coşkun and Carlson; Roberts; Bilgin,

“Energy”, “Energy Policy”; Tagliapietra; Yılmaz and Sever-Mehmetoğlu; Yılmaz-Bozkuş; Erşen and Çelikpala). For this, increasing the number of supplier countries on the one hand and reinforcing its geopolitical importance by becoming an energy transit route on the other hand forms the basis of Türkiye’s energy policy (İşeri and Bartan 114-115).

The EMGF, which is considered to be the most obvious development triggering Türkiye’s threat perception, was established on January 15, 2019, by the energy ministers of GCASC, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Palestine, and Egypt. It has gained the character of an international organization controversially as of September 2020 (AA, “Doğu Akdeniz”). The infrastructure of EMGF was prepared in the negotiations that started between GCASC, Greece, and Israel. The main objective in the establishment of the Forum was “to ensure the establishment of a sustainable partnership between the actors by increasing the cooperation with the producing countries and the consumer and temporary parties in the region” (Reuters, “Eastern Mediterranean”). It has been stated that the forum is open to the participation of all regional states, provided that they comply with the management principles (DW, “EastMed”).

Coastal countries not included in the forum are Türkiye, Syria, Lebanon, and Libya. These states are known to conflict with forum members on various levels. In this context, it can be claimed that EMGF has a conscious membership logic. Therefore, it was not surprising that Türkiye perceived the forum as being against itself. Some of the statements made in various meetings of the Forum served to strengthen the perception of Türkiye. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Hami Aksoy said, “If the purpose of this forum was cooperation, Türkiye and Turkish Cypriots would have been invited as well. Formations established against Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots will not contribute to peace and cooperation in the region” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “QA-3”).

While anti-Türkiye discourses came to the fore in various meetings attended by forum members, it is seen in the common texts that Türkiye is mentioned as the country challenging the regional peace and security. For example, in the final declaration of the Greece-Egypt-GCASC summit on October 8, 2019, Türkiye was held responsible for the Cyprus problem, terrorist groups in Syria, sending foreign terrorist fighters to Libya, and militarizing

the problem by violating the Cyprus EEZ (Press and Information Office of Republic of Cyprus). By responding to all the mentioned issues one by one, Türkiye emphasized that these three countries led to a deadlock in the problems to be resolved through dialogue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “No: 292”).

Continuing its struggle with EMGF members since 2019, Türkiye faced a new competitive environment in the following period. In particular, the approaches of countries such as France and the UAE have reinforced the perception of threat. While these two states increased their cooperation initiatives with the Forum member countries, they also carried out activities in the region to put Türkiye under pressure by blaming Türkiye. While increasing its military and diplomatic support to Greece, France is trying to change the balance of power. France takes an anti-Türkiye stance in the Eastern Mediterranean. It also became a member of EMGF in March 2021, despite Türkiye’s attempts (*MiddleEastMonitor*, “France”). The UAE, which has been involved in the Eastern Mediterranean issue in recent years and has planned an investment of 100 million dollars in the EastMed project, has been offered EMGF membership by Israel, (*Newsbeazer*). The UAE expresses its anti-Türkiye attitude and defines itself as in an alliance. The open statement of Foreign Minister Enver Gargaş that they are taking positions against Greece, Egypt, France and Türkiye is one of the obvious indicators of this situation (MED Dialogues).

Türkiye condemns EMGF at every opportunity and from time to time blocks ships operating in disputed areas. In addition to this, Türkiye, which also carries out its exploration and drilling activities, strives to discover new reserves. On the one hand, Türkiye develops the inventory of ships to be used in exploration and drilling activities, on the other hand, it mobilizes domestic industry technologies in the development of seismic exploration and drilling vessels (TPAO). Türkiye also notified the continental shelf boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean region of Türkiye in a letter to the UN. Accordingly, while the continental shelf boundaries in the east are defined by coordinates, it has been declared that the midline is determined on the border with Egypt (UN, “Letter”). With the “Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Türkiye and the Government of National Accord of the State of Libya on the Limitation

of Maritime Jurisdiction in the Mediterranean” in November 2019, some of the western borders were designated and both the continental shelf and the EEZ boundary were determined (*Resmi Gazete*, “07.12.2019” 20-34).

The threats that are claimed to be the source of Türkiye’s alliance with the GNA in this study are threats originating from the Eastern Mediterranean. The developments in the region and the alliance that Türkiye thinks has been formed against itself are the main sources of threat in this sense. In this context, GCASC has started to act together with other regional countries such as Greece, Israel, and Egypt. This alliance has been institutionalized as EMGF and accuses Türkiye of acting against international law in the region and carries out a policy of isolating it in the region thanks to newly established external links (Çubukçuoğlu). Türkiye, which preferred a more moderate foreign policy at the beginning of the process, has taken steps to strengthen its presence in the region since 2017 because of the energy resources discovered in the region and the attitudes of the interlocutor countries that ignore the Cyprus problem. The complexity of the issue and the establishment of the EMGF led Türkiye to follow a balancing threat policy. To understand this behavior, it would be useful to consider the threat posed by the alliance in the context of Walt’s four components.

At the beginning of the process, while the actors with which Türkiye competed were Greece and GCASC, two important actors of the region such as Egypt and Israel were added to these states in the following period. The EU also joined the alliance by supporting GCASC for the possibility of overcoming its energy dependency, and by resorting to the threat of imposing sanctions on Türkiye (*Euronews*). In addition, international energy companies have also sided with GCASC and contributed to the emergence of a situation to the detriment of Türkiye. In the period following Türkiye’s becoming an active party to the civil war in Libya, the UAE and France also had significant effects on the balance of power with their pro-alliance attitudes. This situation also needs to be included in the analysis considering the ongoing process of establishing mutual alliances. France, with its new defense agreements with Greece (*GreekCityTimes*), and the UAE, with the financial support, carry out policies to increase the impact of the alliance. Ultimately, Türkiye faced an alliance that had the potential to be much more effective than the “aggregate power” of the GCASC and Greece.

The fact that Israel and Egypt, Türkiye's neighbors over the Mediterranean, are in the alliance alongside GCASC and Greece, triggers the "proximity" component. Türkiye, which argues that maritime jurisdiction areas should be limited with a multilateral agreement, remained alone in this process. This has led to the strengthening of the threat against it. On the other hand, Türkiye's recent militarization of its regional policy and the deterrence of this policy have faced limitations. The military exercises carried out by the opposing alliance in the region (such as Medusa-8, Medusa-9, and Eunomia), new arms agreements (France24) and the external support of the countries in the region have increased the "offensive capability" of this alliance. As the last component, "offensive intentions" has been the main motivation for Türkiye's balancing policy against the threat. The statements of EMGF members that Türkiye is a threat to peace in the region and that it should be put under pressure (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs) have been one of the main indicators of the aggression of intentions. In addition, France and the UAE taking a similar stance and being a part of the alliance against Türkiye caused Türkiye to continue to worry in the post-2019 period.

As a result, all four components of threat in Walt's theory can be observed in the emerging alliance. Based on the theory, it is expected that Türkiye should follow alliance-building policies for balancing. Türkiye, which is only in alliance with the TRNC, has tried to follow a rational foreign policy in the context of choosing the most suitable ally. Having troubled relations with Israel since 2010 and with Egypt since 2013, Türkiye's disagreement with Syria, one of the other regional states, since the beginning of the civil war, and also its non-close relationship with Lebanon, limited its alternative ally options. At this point, it preferred to establish close relations with Libya, but the chaos and civil war in Libya forced Türkiye to join the civil war on the side of the GNA.

Türkiye's Libya Policy in the Context of Balancing the Threat

There is a relationship between Türkiye and Libya that feeds on the long-term historical past. After the NATO intervention against Gaddafi in 2011, these relations have transformed by adding new dimensions. After the intervention that Türkiye initially opposed, instability in Libya started and it still continues. Türkiye's policy in this process has transformed over time.

The support given by ideological affinity has evolved into direct involvement in the civil war in the post-2019 period. This process can be analyzed in three periods in terms of its relation to the Eastern Mediterranean issue.

2011-2014 Period: Ideological Approachment Period

When the conflicts started in Libya, Türkiye followed a policy of neutrality and prioritized the removal of Turkish workers from the country and securing its investments (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “No: 54”). Türkiye initially opposed the idea of intervention, but it changed its stance on the condition that the Libyan people decide on the government in the post-intervention period (*DW*, “Türkiye’nin”). In the post-Gaddafi period, Türkiye sided with the National Transitional Council. It continued its policy under the headings of financial support, financing reconstruction projects, training of law enforcement officers, and technical assistance. At this point, it would be appropriate to consider Türkiye’s policy as a policy of influence rather than an alliance policy.

In this process, Türkiye carried out its policies to support the coming to power of the Muslim Brotherhood and other political Islamist parties. However, the Liberals won in the June 2014 elections. The debates on the legitimacy of the election and the increasing security problems led the House of Representatives to convene in Tobruk, while the National General Congress rejected this decision, called for foreign intervention, and extended its mandate (Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka 231-232). At the end, civil war started in Libya. Instead of being a party, Türkiye has followed a policy that includes all actors. As Special Representative Emrullah İşler met with all actors in the cities of Tripoli, Tobruk, and Misrata in October 2014 and called for dialogue to end the conflicts (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “No: 325”).

In this period, there was no significant relationship between Türkiye’s Libyan policy and the Eastern Mediterranean problem, and the Eastern Mediterranean issue was evaluated in terms of Greece and GCASC. These countries, on the other hand, have not yet started to pursue an alliance policy. On the contrary, the Muslim Brotherhood’s close relations with Türkiye, especially in Egypt in the post-Mubarak period, the abolition of the gas delivery application with Israel and the termination of the EEZ agreement with GCASC (Grigoriadis 130), responded to Türkiye’s expectations.

2015-2019 Period: Political/Economic/Diplomatic Support Period

In December 2015, Türkiye took a position alongside the government of reconciliation, which was accepted as the legitimate representative of Libya in the Libyan Political Treaty, and provided political, economic, and diplomatic support to the GNA led by Fayeż al-Sarrac. However, the Tobruk government did not recognize the GNA, and conflicts continued (Kekilli 160-162). In this process, the fact that Egypt, UAE, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia sided with the Tobruk Government led to the regionalization of the issue (Lacher 153). While the tendency of Turkish foreign policy to establish relations with actors with ideological affinity continues to be seen, the emphasis on the Eastern Mediterranean has been much less in question. However, while tension was observed in Libya-centered policies, the addressees of this were Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. Standing by the GNA, Türkiye did not add military tools to its policy. It preferred to provide economic, political, and diplomatic support.

During this period, new natural gas discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean, bilateral (Egypt and GCASC) or trilateral (Greece, Greek Cypriot, and Israeli) negotiations, the increasing interest of the EU and some European countries (Italy and France), and international energy companies in the region have been the significant developments. These have led to the formation of an environment that threatens the interests of Türkiye which is against the process with various arguments. Türkiye's reaction was to use military vehicles when necessary to start its research and drilling activities, to prevent the activities carried out in the sovereignty and jurisdiction of its own and the Turkish Cypriots. Therefore, as of the period before 2019, Türkiye has not established a link between its Libya policy and the Eastern Mediterranean issue yet.

The Period After 2019: Direct/Military Intervention Period

The process in which Türkiye tried to balance the emerging threat with its Libya policy started in 2019. The conflicts between the Tripoli and Tobruk governments reached their peak in 2019 and Haftar started the Tripoli attack on April 4, 2019. The attacks resulted in the GNA repelling the attack and liberating Tripoli. Türkiye-GNA relations, on the other hand, were maintained at a high level and political, economic, and military

support was maximized. According to various claims, members of the Free Syrian Army also participated in the struggle and played an active role in the victory of the GNA (Joffé 685). The ceasefire agreement was realized with the proposal of Türkiye and Russia on January 12, 2020, and then new arrangements were decided at the conference held in Berlin (UN, The Berlin”). However, it was not possible to implement the Berlin decisions.

Türkiye’s involvement in the conflicts after the Tripoli attacks initiated by Haftar on April 4, 2019, led to significant changes in the course of the conflicts. Haftar’s forces, which made intense progress especially in April and May, were stopped at the end of May. Many media outlets claimed that Türkiye shipped a significant amount of military equipment to support the GNA (*AlMarsad*). LNA Spokesperson Ahmed al-Mismari also continued these allegations and drew attention to Türkiye’s support for the GNA (*AlJazeera*, “Libya”).

Although Türkiye does not accept the allegations that it provides military support to the GNA, it has not officially denied this. But since the end of 2019, it has started developing its relations with GNA through bilateral agreements. The first of these was the agreement limiting the maritime jurisdiction areas, while the other was the security and military cooperation agreement. Based on the second agreement, the GNA requested military assistance from Türkiye and this request was approved by the Turkish Grand National Assembly on January 2, 2020. Following this process, Türkiye both took part in the ceasefire negotiations with Russia and conveyed its technical and military support to the GNA forces. Türkiye has appointed a Lieutenant General in Libya; air defense systems, technological weapons, signal jammers, and much military equipment have been delivered to Libyan territory (*BBCNewsTürkçe*). In particular, unmanned aerial vehicles contributed to the GNA in the field (*AlJazeera*, *Largest Drone*). While there were allegations that Türkiye would establish an air, land, and naval base in Libya, the “Vatiyye Military Air Base”, which was allegedly under Türkiye’s control, was shot down by the LNA in July. Spokesperson Khaled al Mahjoub announced that similar attacks may continue and that they are at war with Türkiye (*MiddleEastEye*). The process continued until the ceasefire declaration on August 21. Afterward, the negotiations continued, and it was decided to take the country to the elections at the end of the

year by establishing a temporary unity government in March 2021 (*DW*, “Libya’da”).

In this period when alliance formations emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean, Türkiye reinforced its position on the side of the GNA and provided all kinds of assistance including military support. In the same period, EMGF was established. Determining its main objectives as the resolution of energy-centered issues in the region, the Forum described Türkiye’s claims as unfair and endeavored to isolate Türkiye. While Türkiye rejected these attempts, it also tried to create new options for itself. At this point, it started the period of direct involvement with the GNA in the civil war. In this context, the Türkiye-GNA alliance was formed against the EMGF alliance and the defense of the GNA became Türkiye’s priority. Ultimately, Türkiye institutionalized this alliance with two international agreements.

The relationship of these agreements with the Eastern Mediterranean has been frequently and officially announced by the decision-makers. In the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs dated December 1, 2019, it was announced that Türkiye and Libya showed that they will not allow “fait accompli” with this agreement, explaining that Türkiye’s calls to its interlocutors regarding the limitation of jurisdiction within the framework of equity were not answered. In this process, Türkiye’s approach has been explained many times in the discussions on the decisions taken in the Parliament regarding Libya. In the negotiations on the delimitation of maritime jurisdiction areas with Libya on December 5, 2019, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) Deputy İsmail Özdemir, Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, described the developments as unlawful and stated that “the agenda that Greece tried to put into effect with the Greek Cypriot Administration of Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, and other regional countries” could come to an end thanks to the Memorandum. (*TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, “05.12.2019”). In the negotiations for the ratification of the Security Agreement, then Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Deputy and Chairman of the 75th Term UN General Assembly Volkan Bozkır said, “Today we show the unity and solidarity that our Supreme Assembly has always shown for the effective protection and safeguarding of our country’s interests in the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. I believe that they will reveal it once again”, drawing attention

to the connection between the agreement and the Eastern Mediterranean issue (*TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, “21.12.2019”).

This issue was frequently mentioned in the negotiations of the resolution to send troops to Libya. MHP Group Deputy Chairman Erkan Akçay emphasized the importance of the agreement to protect Türkiye’s rights and interests in the Eastern Mediterranean in his speech in which he stated that “an alliance of evil has been established against Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean”. Former Minister of National Defense and AK Party Deputy İsmet Yılmaz also described the memorandums as “a very important response to Greece and the countries that support it, who want to condemn Türkiye to the Gulf of Antalya”. Libya Special Representative and AK Party Deputy Emrullah İşler, on the other hand, pointed out the relationship between Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean policy, stating that ensuring unity, solidarity, and integrity in Libya is complementary to the steps of “following Türkiye’s national interests in the Eastern Mediterranean” (*TBMM Tutanak Dergisi*, “02.01.2020”).

In the ministry statement dated January 9, 2020, it was stated that contrary to the allegations that Türkiye was acting with an expansionist understanding, the agreements that Türkiye signed with the legitimate government of Libya in accordance with international law were “response to the parties trying to ignore Türkiye and the Turkish Cypriots in the Eastern Mediterranean”. On May 11, 2020, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Egypt, UAE, France, and GCASC, declared their condemnation of Türkiye’s intervention in the Libyan Civil War and its activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and referred to the memorandums (Hellenic Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In the response of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to this declaration, it was declared that these states took advantage of the chaos in Libya and engaged in unlawful activities. It has been declared that the countries participating in the declaration constitute the front against Türkiye, Libya, and the TRNC. In the same text, this alliance was defined as the “alliance of evil” and it was emphasized that this alliance constituted the main axis of Türkiye’s struggle (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “QA-33”).

Since 2019, Türkiye has sided with the GNA in the Libyan Civil War and has increased this support by including its military vehicles. While the conflicts in Libya have continued since 2014, Türkiye’s only recent support

has been made possible when it started to evaluate Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean problem together, as can be understood from the official discourses. The alliance has directed Türkiye to balance the threat and Türkiye has started to act together with the GNA, which already has good relations but whose power is in danger due to the internal problems. While the Libyan alliance provided Türkiye with a new area of action in the Eastern Mediterranean, it created an opportunity to carry Türkiye's arguments on a legal basis especially regarding the limitation of maritime jurisdiction areas.

Conclusion

In this study, Türkiye's foreign policy towards Libya since 2019 has been analyzed in the context of the balance of threat theory. The Libyan policy was designed as a response to the alliance that was established against Türkiye in the Eastern Mediterranean. This alliance was institutionalized through the EMGF and created an Eastern Mediterranean projection without Türkiye. Four components of threat in Walt's theory were observed in the development of the issue. Based on the theory, it is seen that Türkiye pursues alliance-building policies to balance the threat. The main result of the study is that Türkiye's main priority is to protect its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean which it believes are under threat.

Adding legal instruments to its militarized foreign policy in the region with the agreement signed with Libya, Türkiye strives to help the GNA gain control. Otherwise, it will mean that Türkiye's gains will be lost. Therefore, Türkiye considers its Libya policy and its interests originating from the Eastern Mediterranean together and maintains its insistence on its Libya policy. Struggling for Libya's stabilization under the leadership of the GNA, Türkiye is trying to create a favorable arrangement in the Eastern Mediterranean thanks to the GNA.

Examining Türkiye's policy in the context of the balance of threat theory provides a functional infrastructure for Türkiye's possible alliance policies in the next period. As in the case of Libya, it would not be surprising that Türkiye would seek to develop its own alliance in the future. Constructive messages by Türkiye especially towards Egypt (*TRTWorld*) can be considered as a part of this strategy. These messages resulted in the start of mutual negotiations as of March 2021 (*AA*, "Dışişleri"). In addition to this, it can be

said that there is an increasing tendency to make the maritime jurisdiction delimitation agreement with Libya similar to Israel. Retired Rear Admiral Cihat Yaycı, who is also considered as the drafter of the Libyan agreement, included the details of the possible agreement in an article they prepared with Zeynep Ceyhan and discussed the advantages of this agreement for both sides. This possibility seems important as it will cause Türkiye's theses to find a response in another coastal country.

Furthermore, the discovery of a common mechanism in Libya with the EU members such as Italy and Malta is considered as a possibility, although Italy has concerns (*LibyaHerald*). In this process, the new military cooperation agreement signed between Italy and the GNA can be seen as an important development. The Minister of Defense of the GNA announced this agreement by saying "Agreements to develop bilateral cooperation, which started with the Turkish and Qatari allies, have also been made with Italy" (*MiddleEastMonitor*, "Libya's"). It is again a strong possibility that the common stance on Libya will affect the EU's policy towards Türkiye regarding the Eastern Mediterranean issue.

Türkiye is pursuing a strategy of starting negotiations in which its expectations will be taken into account in the Eastern Mediterranean issue, with the possibility of its Libya policy yielding results. For this reason, Türkiye attaches importance to the Türkiye-Greece talks at NATO. Minister of National Defense Hulusi Akar made a statement after the Greek side did not participate in the technical talks planned to be held on November 30, 2020: "We are not the ones who increase the tension and escalate the events. We try to do our best to solve our problems by talking and negotiating. Unfortunately, our neighbor stubbornly refrains from talking and negotiating on this issue, and is looking for solutions at other doors," and stated that Greece had closed its diplomatic channels (Ministry of National Defense). At this point, it should be noted that Greece mostly takes initiatives with the EU and carries out a strategy of making sanctions decisions against Türkiye.

The process regarding the Eastern Mediterranean issue continues in a tense nature as of March 2021. While Türkiye continues its balancing policy towards the threat, the alliance policies of other states continue to expand. In this context, possible developments such as new discoveries that Türkiye

may make in the region, negotiations with the EU and NATO, and possible new relations with other regional countries are considered possibilities that have the potential to be effective in the transformation of the process and therefore the strategies.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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Türk Dış Politikasında Libya İç Savaşı ve Doğu Akdeniz Meselesi Arasındaki Bağ: Tehdidin Dengelenmesi*

Sami Kiraz**

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türkiye'nin geleneksel dış politikasından bir farklılaşma olarak görülebilecek olan 2019 yılından itibaren Libya İç Savaşı'na aktif bir taraf olarak dahil olmasının arkasında yatan motivasyonu tespit etmektir. Çalışmada Türkiye'nin 2011 yılından itibaren benzer bir nitelik gösteren Libya çatışmalarına ancak Doğu Akdeniz'de hayati çıkarlarını tehdit ettiğine inandığı Doğu Akdeniz Gaz Forumu'nun kurulmasından sonra dahil olduğu iddia edilmektedir. Bu dönüşüm çalışmada, Walt'un tehdit dengesi kuramı bağlamında açıklanmakta ve Türkiye'nin Libya politikasının esasında Doğu Akdeniz bölgesinde kendisine karşı oluşan ittifakın yarattığı tehdide yönelik bir dengeleme politikası olduğu savunulmaktadır. Ayrıca, Ulusal Mutabakat Hükümeti öncülüğündeki Libya'da istikrarın sağlanmasının, Türkiye tarafından bölgede kendi ittifak politikasının çok önemli bir parçası olarak görüldüğü de çalışmanın temel bulgularındandır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Dengeleme Politikası, Doğu Akdeniz Gaz Forumu, Libya İç Savaşı, Ulusal Mutabakat Hükümeti, Tehdit Dengesi Kuramı.

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Связь между гражданской войной в Ливии и проблемой Восточного Средиземноморья во внешней политике Турции: уравнивание угрозы*

Сами Кираз**

Аннотация

Данная статья направлена на выявление основной мотивации участия Турции в качестве одной из активных сторон в гражданской войне в Ливии с 2019 года, что можно рассматривать как отклонение от традиционной внешней политики страны. Турция вмешалась в ливийский конфликт после создания Восточно-средиземноморского газового форума (EMGF), который, по ее мнению, угрожает ее жизненно важным интересам в регионе. В данном исследовании участие Турции описывается в контексте теории баланса угроз Стивена М. Уолта. Утверждается, что ливийская политика Турции, по сути, является политикой балансирования против угрозы, исходящей от альянса, против ее интересов в регионе Восточного Средиземноморья. Далее утверждается, что поддержание стабильности в Ливии во главе с Правительством национального согласия (ПНС) является очень важной частью политики регионального альянса Турции.

Ключевые слова

Балансирующая политика, Восточно-средиземноморский газовый форум, гражданская война в Ливии, Правительство национального согласия, теория баланса угроз.

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