



# Turkey's Involvement in the Libyan Conflict, the Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean and Drone Warfare

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## Introduction

Libya has been in crisis since the toppling of long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi more than a decade ago. The conflict, which began as a part of the Arab Spring in 2011, transformed into an internationalised civil war where foreign governments provided weapons, money, and even fighters to opposing sides on the ground. Today, peace is fragile, political polarisation is high, and the involvement of external actors remains an issue of discussion. Turkey has been one of the actors actively seeking to influence developments in Libya. Ankara's interventions, especially its military involvement, have raised questions about what Turkey's endgame in Libya is.

This Strategic Update discusses the key drivers of Turkey's policy toward Libya, including geopolitical considerations, economic interests, and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government's policy choices in the region. It highlights that Ankara has been able to shape the course of the conflict in line with its preferences, countering the influence of the rebel general, Khalifa Haftar, in the country. It identifies recent trends in Turkish foreign policy behaviour, namely a certain shift in Ankara's foreign policy approach from an emphasis on soft power and multilateralism in the early years of the AKP era to a more hawkish approach based on the projection of hard power—unilaterally, if necessary—as seen in several conflicts in Turkey's neighbourhood. It also looks at the way in which Ankara has projected hard power, focusing on the use of

unmanned aerial vehicles in Libya and beyond, and draws attention to broader debates concerning modern warfare and lethal autonomous weapons.

This Strategic Update argues that Ankara has pursued policies that aim to maintain and expand its influence in Libya and in the wider region. It highlights that it is essential that Turkey pursues effective multilateral diplomacy and bridge-building policies to contribute not only to the development of mutually beneficial ties with Libya, but also to international efforts to achieve long-term peace and stability. The Strategic Update concludes by underlining the importance of protecting the progress made since the 2020 ceasefire agreement for achieving sustainable peace in Libya.

### **Turkey's engagement with Libya and the geopolitics of the eastern Mediterranean**

Turkey's involvement in the Libyan conflict can be seen in the broader context of Turkey's pursuit of greater influence in the eastern Mediterranean and beyond. One of the drivers of Ankara's support for the UN-recognised Tripoli-based government in Libya, the Government of National Accord (GNA), was the desire to secure Turkey's geopolitical interests in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> Most notably, the deal signed in 2019 between the Turkish government and the GNA to demarcate maritime borders was more about solidifying Turkish claims

in the eastern Mediterranean than it was about Turkey's presence in the Libyan conflict. Specifically, the deal, which triggered protest from Greece, Cyprus, and Egypt, showed that Ankara regarded Libya as a strategic partner that could back up Turkish positions in the dispute over continental shelf entitlements and overlapping claims over exclusive economic zones in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup>

Libya has a long history of being strategically important in Ankara's formulation of foreign policy. In the 1980s, Libya was an attractive destination in Turkey's search for markets abroad, which was motivated by a shift toward export-oriented growth. Notably, Turkish Prime Minister Turgut Özal visited Libya to develop mutually beneficial ties. In the 1990s, successive Turkish governments sought to develop bilateral relations with Libya in line with their foreign policy agendas. A notable example was Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan's policy of building closer ties with the Islamic world, which led him to visit Libya as a part of his Africa tour in 1996 with an aim to develop economic and political relations (although his visit to Libya was a diplomatic fiasco).<sup>3</sup>

Although Ankara's relationship with Muammar Gaddafi had many ups and downs, Libya had an important place in the post-Cold War re-assessments of Turkish foreign policy that envisaged Turkey as an inter-civilisational powerhouse. By the end of the 1990s

and into the early 2000s, Turkish foreign policy makers often emphasised capitalising on the country's potential to shape regional and global politics. A notable example was the development of the Africa Action Plan (1998), which later paved the way to Turkey's policy of "Opening to Africa" (2005), through which Turkish foreign policy makers turned their attention to the whole of the African continent with the aim of boosting Turkey's global outreach.<sup>4</sup>

Following the AKP's rise to power in Turkey in the 2000s, which corresponds with the time when Libya normalised its relations with the West and discontinued its nuclear programme, bilateral relations between Turkey and Libya were greatly improved. In Tripoli in 2009, then Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, accompanied by a large group of business leaders and government ministers, highlighted that the Turkish government saw Libya as a "vital partner in Turkey's Opening to Africa strategy", underlined the importance of enhancing political and economic cooperation in the Mediterranean, and signed bilateral agreements covering a wide range of sectors.<sup>5</sup> In line with the AKP's pre-Arab Spring foreign policy agenda based on "zero problems with neighbours", the development of bilateral relations with Libya was often portrayed by Turkish foreign policy makers as a success story.<sup>6</sup>

In the wake of the uprising that began in Libya in February 2011, Turkish foreign policy makers were presented with a dilemma: whether to express support for the protesters at the risk of antagonising Gaddafi or to avoid vocal criticism of Gaddafi in case he managed to restore order. Initially, Ankara chose the latter, and Prime Minister Erdoğan publicly opposed a potential NATO intervention, asking: "What business does NATO have in Libya?"<sup>7</sup> This reluctance of the Turkish government to openly criticise Gaddafi was related to concern over the safe evacuation of a considerable number of Turkish nationals in conflict

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zones. Turkish policy makers were cautious about the adverse political consequences the Turkish government would potentially have faced in the domestic arena if Turkish nationals had been harmed in Libya. They also did not wish to jeopardise the mutually beneficial relationship they had built with Gaddafi before the Arab Spring.<sup>8</sup> After mounting international pressure, the weakening authority of the Gaddafi regime, the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution authorising all necessary measures to protect civilians (S/RES/1973(2011)), and the increasing inevitability of a military intervention, with or without Turkey, Ankara quickly changed its position in favour of NATO intervention in Libya to ensure “Libya belongs to Libyans”, and deployed forces to support the intervention.<sup>9</sup>

### *Turkey and Africa*

The policies pursued by Ankara since the beginning of the turmoil have arguably been designed to maintain its influence in Libya and the wider region. Having Libya’s backing is strategically important for Turkey’s wider aspirations of boosting its influence not only in the eastern Mediterranean but also in sub-Saharan Africa, where Turkey has been an increasingly prominent actor in recent years.<sup>10</sup>

There are strong economic motives behind Ankara’s involvement in Libya. The Turkish government has been particularly interested in re-securing the

pre-Arab Spring deals that it had with the Gaddafi regime in various sectors, including energy and construction. Libya attracts the interest of leading Turkish firms who seek to benefit from Ankara’s relations with Tripoli. On numerous occasions, Turkish business leaders have stated that Libya is Turkey’s gateway to Africa and that they welcome Ankara’s close relations with Tripoli.<sup>11</sup>

This can be seen in the broader context of emerging powers’ engagement with Africa. A consequence of the arrival, or increasing prominence, of new powers on the continent is that they shift the weight of economic engagement away from traditional North-South power configurations towards the South.<sup>12</sup> Emerging-power economic engagement typically differs from that of traditional Western powers (e.g., large-scale loans by emerging powers do not necessarily entail political conditionality) and provides African actors with more options to choose from when seeking economic partnerships. Indeed, this also means that the influence of traditional Western powers, who also have interests at stake, may be challenged. In this particular case, Libya has attracted the interest of not just regional actors but also larger emerging powers with global ambitions, namely China, which has expanded its economic presence in Libya in line with the objectives of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>13</sup> At the same time, large private firms in Turkey, supported by Ankara and taking advantage of the favourable



conditions created by the government's close relations with Tripoli, have been seeking to expand their operations in Libya.<sup>14</sup> There are signs that they are particularly interested developing and investing in strategic transport hubs, such as in the Libyan port city of Misrata, where their European counterparts (e.g., major French firms) have also been actively engaged.<sup>15</sup>

### *Emphasis on hard power*

One can also examine Turkey's policy in Libya against the backdrop of wider changes in Ankara's foreign policy approach. There has arguably been a shift from an emphasis on soft power and multilateralism in the early years of the AKP era to a more hawkish approach based on increased use of military instruments in foreign policy and projection of hard power, unilaterally if necessary.<sup>16</sup> The Turkish government has not shied away from using military instruments to shape conflicts in its own neighbourhood, such as the civil wars in Libya and Syria and the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabagh. This can be contrasted with the "zero problems with neighbours" foreign policy approach earlier in the AKP era, when Turkish policy makers emphasised generating influence by non-coercive means through soft power and when many scholars described Turkey as a benign actor invested in raising its attractiveness in its neighbourhood.<sup>17</sup> This shift

also notably coincides with the AKP's concentration of power in the domestic arena, emphasis on greater autonomy in Turkish foreign policy, and recurrent tensions with Turkey's Western allies.

An evident example of this shift in the context of Turkey's policy in the eastern Mediterranean and in Libya is the way in which the Turkish government has formulated policies with reference to "Blue Homeland" (*Mavi Vatan*), a concept developed by naval commanders and associated with Turkish arguments regarding overlapping claims in the eastern Mediterranean. Framed as a defensive strategy, it calls for Ankara to adopt a muscular and assertive approach in Turkey's coastal waters to secure Turkey's geopolitical interests within its expansive maritime borders, i.e., its "Blue Homeland". The security-oriented approach represents a shift in that it is based on projection of hard power, regardless of any conflict it may create with Turkey's neighbours. As highlighted by key figures involved in the development of this naval strategy, Turkey's relationship with Libya plays a crucial role in securing geopolitical interests, which notably include control over hydrocarbon resources in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup> Among the clearest signs of the influence of this concept on foreign policy behaviour are the maritime demarcation and military cooperation agreements between Turkey and Libya (GNA) signed in 2019, which allowed Turkey to expand its military involvement in the Libyan conflict.

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Ankara’s use of military instruments also sparked debates in Turkish domestic politics. Opposition parties expressed reservations about Turkey’s direct military involvement in Libya and warned about potential consequences of making Turkey a party to the civil war. Specifically, they criticised the Turkish government for adventurism and for picking sides in the conflict, questioned whether military involvement was justified, and highlighted potential adverse consequences including prolonging the war in Libya.<sup>19</sup> Most notably, members of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), the main opposition party in the Turkish parliament’s foreign affairs committee, opposed the military cooperation agreement between the Turkish government and the GNA, referred to the ideological undertones of the AKP’s support for the GNA, and argued that the proposed military involvement was an attempt by the AKP to shore up its political ally in the region, as opposed to being a necessity for Turkish national security.<sup>20</sup> Subsequently in January 2020, all major opposition parties opposed the bill that authorised the government to deploy troops in Libya.<sup>21</sup>

#### *Power struggles in the Middle East and North Africa*

Ankara’s support for the GNA can be explained in the context of the policies that the AKP has followed in the region. Ankara’s increased military support came at a time when the GNA faced an imminent threat from General Haftar, who had launched a military offensive with the aim of capturing Tripoli. Propping up the GNA also meant countering the influence of other external powers who were backing General Haftar, such as Egypt and Russia. In that regard, ongoing power struggles and rivalries among actors in the region are worthy of analysis to provide a more complete explanation for actor positions.

An example of such power struggle can be seen in how Turkey and Egypt supported and armed opposing sides in Libya. Explaining the deterioration of Turkey's relations with Egypt requires analysis of the policies that the AKP government has pursued following the Arab uprisings. For various reasons, mostly ideological, Ankara sided with Islamists aligned with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt at the expense of cutting diplomatic ties with Cairo. Specifically, following the July 2013 coup d'état, Ankara sided with Egypt's ousted President, Mohamed Morsi, recognising him as the only legitimate leader of the country. Consequently, tensions were raised to the point of burning bridges with the new government in Cairo, who expelled Turkey's ambassador in November 2013. As of this writing, Turkey does not have an ambassador in Egypt, however there are signs that normalisation talks have started.<sup>22</sup> In the context of the Libyan war, the success of the GNA also meant that Ankara's interests would prevail over the interests of Cairo, who provided arms to General Haftar in his pursuit of dominance in Libya. Speaking at a funeral prayer in absentia for Morsi in Istanbul in June 2019, Turkish President Erdoğan referred to Morsi as "our martyr" and condemned Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi for being a "tyrant".<sup>23</sup> In a subsequent press conference, he explained that Turkey was providing arms to the GNA because the GNA lacked defensive

capabilities to defend itself against its rivals (referring to forces associated with Haftar backed by foreign powers including Egypt) and that the arms Turkey provided helped establish a balance of power in the conflict.<sup>24</sup>

Through its military backing of the GNA, the Turkish government was effectively able to counter the influence of General Haftar, who was not able to accomplish what he had described as a "decisive battle" to capture the capital, Tripoli.<sup>25</sup> Turkish interventions, particularly in the war for Tripoli, arguably changed the power balance and conflict dynamics on the ground.<sup>26</sup> However, there are a number of challenges remaining for Ankara. The political situation in Libya is still fragile. Ankara seeks to maintain and develop mutually beneficial relations with Libyan actors who will lead Libya's post-war reconstruction. Considering internal political contestation among actors in Libya and the risk of instability that may arise from any escalation, it is reasonable to expect Ankara to be cautious of potential domestic changes of power configurations in Libya that may impact Turkish policies.

Moreover, the Turkish government has faced criticism of its military presence in Libya.<sup>27</sup> The presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries used by external powers in Libya is an issue of contention that has yet to be resolved. The conclusions of the Second Berlin Conference on Libya in 2021 called for the withdrawal of all

foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya without delay.<sup>28</sup> The Turkish government introduced a reservation noting that its military assistance has been based on a bilateral agreement with Libya and therefore cannot be compared to the military presence of other foreign powers, whom Turkey's minister of foreign affairs has described as "illegitimate".<sup>29</sup> He also said Turkey agrees that "many foreign fighters and mercenaries present in Libya" should withdraw, but underlined that "foreign mercenaries and legitimate presence there should not be confused".<sup>30</sup> All things considered, it remains to be seen how international politics and the political process in Libya will play out and what the implications might be for Ankara's presence and influence in Libya.

### **"Drone war" in Libya, Turkish drones, and killer robots**

Another interesting aspect of Turkey's involvement in Libya which is worthy of attention is its use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs), or drones. Delivering the keynote speech at the Air and Space Power Conference in July 2020, the United Kingdom Defence Secretary Ben Wallace talked about "the threats and opportunities we face in the new domains of warfare" and added, "we need to look at the lessons of others. Look how Turkey has been operating in Libya where it has used Bayraktar TB-2 UAVs since mid-2019 [...] Even if only half of these claims

are true the implications are game changing".<sup>31</sup> Reports on Turkey's use of drones in Syria and Libya and how these drones have been instrumental in achieving military objectives have attracted a lot of international attention. Many major international media outlets have highlighted how these drones "reshape battlefields" and discussed Turkey's growing drone industry.<sup>32</sup>

The use of drones in warfare is not something new. They have most notably been used by the United States in its "global war on terror" for carrying out lethal strikes or surveillance in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. What is arguably different now is that there are many new players and a more diverse group of powers—not just major powers but also smaller middle-powers such as Turkey, who invest in their own drone programmes and use these drones for military purposes both at home (e.g., in counter insurgency) and abroad (e.g., in military operations beyond their borders).

The UN's Special Representative for Libya reported in a 2019 interview that drones were used intensely in the Libyan conflict to carry out air strikes, "600 times on one side, 200-300 times on the other side", and described the conflict as "possibly the largest drone war theatre now in the world".<sup>33</sup> The UN's Panel of Experts on Libya, established pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1973 (2011), likewise referred to a "drone war" in Libya, detailed intense lethal exchanges carried out by different

types of drones, and noted various foreign powers who provided weapons technology to fighting groups.<sup>34</sup> Having the upper hand in the air arguably resulted in gains on the ground. This was most evident when General Haftar's campaign to capture Tripoli came to abrupt end after Turkey's military intervention on the side of the GNA and provision of sophisticated weapons, including combat drones with precision air strike capabilities, turned the tide in the conflict.<sup>35</sup>

Turkey's arms industry has grown significantly over the past decade and the development of drones has been a niche area of focus. They have attracted wider interest after their deployment in Syria and Libya, possibly due to their effective use in battlefields and ability to counter the advances of Russian-backed forces. To give a specific example, Poland purchased Bayraktar TB2 drones, becoming the first NATO country to buy drones from Ankara.<sup>36</sup> During a visit to Turkey, the Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau referred to these drones as "battle-proven and effective" and said they would "strengthen capabilities of the Polish Army and contribute to the reinforcement of NATO's Eastern Flank".<sup>37</sup> Today, these drones are most notably used by Ukraine against Russian forces in the ongoing war which started in February 2022. They are also deployed by a diverse group of states around the world, including Azerbaijan, Ethiopia, and Morocco.

In his African tour in October 2021, President Erdoğan was quoted saying, "everywhere I go in Africa, everyone asks about UAVs".<sup>38</sup> There are some early signs to indicate that the interest in drones may potentially boost Ankara's leverage in its bilateral relations, especially in parts of the world where it aims to have a greater presence, such as in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that Ankara might generate some influence not only from drone exports but also from providing drone training and maintenance to countries who aim to improve their air capabilities.<sup>40</sup>

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Furthermore, there are wider political and possibly ethical implications related to the use of technology in warfare, particularly concerning the level of autonomy with which some weapons systems are programmed. The level of autonomy in lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS), broadly speaking, refers to the degree of human control over the actions or specific tasks the weapons systems undertake. “Killer robots”, i.e., fully autonomous weapons systems that can select targets and make kill decisions without human intervention, is an idea that has been around for some time and is linked to technological advancements such as the development of sophisticated artificially intelligent systems.<sup>41</sup> What is particularly noteworthy in the case of Libya is that some of the drones deployed reportedly displayed a high degree of autonomous capabilities.

Kargu UAV, developed by the Turkish company called STM, is one example. According to a promotional video posted by the company on YouTube, it comes with a “fire and forget” mode, which implies that after it is launched it can hunt for a target and engage autonomously.<sup>42</sup> It is a loitering munition, or “kamikaze drone”, meaning that it blows itself up to take out targets.<sup>43</sup> These are low-cost drones that can be launched in large numbers to carry out a “swarm attack”. A swarm of drones can easily overwhelm defensive capabilities and deliver significant damage. According to an executive of

the company, the production cost of a single drone is typically lower than that of a surface-to-air missile needed to take it down.<sup>44</sup> As the head of Turkey’s state body overseeing defence industry said, it doesn’t matter “if you lose one, two, three” as long as others find the target.<sup>45</sup>

According to a report by the UN’s Panel of Experts on Libya, logistics convoys and forces affiliated with General Haftar were “hunted down and remotely engaged by the unmanned combat aerial vehicles or the lethal autonomous weapons systems such as the STM Kargu-2”. The report said that “the lethal autonomous weapons systems were programmed to attack targets without requiring data connectivity between the operator and the munition: in effect, a true ‘fire, forget and find’ capability”.<sup>46</sup> If accurate, this implies that the kill decision was taken by the weapons system without requiring human involvement. The incident was reported in international media as what may be the first known case of a fully autonomous lethal drone attack on a human.<sup>47</sup>

The development of autonomous capabilities in weapons systems speaks to broader debates about the changes in how wars are fought and raises a series of challenging questions regarding the political and ethical implications of using artificially intelligent systems for military purposes. An important aspect of this debate concerns regulation and international law. Or, in other words, making laws on LAWS.<sup>48</sup> International

non-governmental organisations, such as the Stop Killer Robots coalition, have long been campaigning for new international law regulating autonomy in weapons systems and arguing that life-and-death decisions should not belong to robots.<sup>49</sup> Recent developments in this area notably include diplomatic talks on the review of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) and the international debate on banning autonomous weapons. However, so far this seems to be a challenging area for international regulation and the recent conference in Geneva in December 2021 ended without a consensus on a potential ban of killer robots.<sup>50</sup> As autonomous weapons are being developed and used by more powers around the world, it is likely that this debate will continue in the years to come.

## Conclusion

The political situation in Libya remains fragile and the policies of external actors are worthy of analysis. Against this background, this Strategic Update has aimed to explain various drivers of Turkish policy in Libya. It has identified geopolitical concerns, economic interests, and the foreign policy agenda of the AKP government as the key drivers behind Turkey's involvement. It has highlighted certain trends in Turkish foreign policy behaviour, namely an emphasis on the projection

of hard power and the use of military instruments to achieve foreign policy objectives. It has focused on Turkey's growing drone industry and how these drones have been used in conflicts that Turkey has been involved in, such as in Libya. While doing so, it has also touched on some broader debates on the use of autonomous weapons and how the conflict in Libya is relevant in the context of the changes in modern warfare.

Overall, the Turkish government has aimed to maintain and expand its influence in Libya and in the wider region. Turkey's interventions, particularly on the side of the GNA against Haftar's campaign to capture Tripoli, has allowed Ankara to have an impact on the power balance on the ground. It is important for Ankara to play a constructive role in the political process and pursue bridge-building policies that contribute to the restoration of long-term stability in Libya.

As the UN's under-secretary-general for political and peacebuilding affairs said, "Libya is now facing a new phase of political polarization, which risks dividing its institutions once again and reversing the gains achieved over the past two years".<sup>51</sup> Considering the risk of instability, it is essential that all actors avoid further escalation and protect the progress made since the 2020 ceasefire agreement in order to achieve long-term peace in Libya. ■

## Endnotes

- 1 A new unity government, the Government of National Unity, took office in March 2021 with an aim of unifying rival administrations in the east and the west.
- 2 See e.g., Sinan Ülgen and Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, "A Conflict Could Be Brewing in the Eastern Mediterranean. Here's How to Stop It", *The Washington Post*, 17 September 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/17/conflict-could-be-brewing-eastern-mediterranean-heres-how-stop-it/>; Galip Dalay, "Turkey, Europe, and the Eastern Mediterranean: Charting a way out of the current deadlock", *Brookings Doha Center*, 28 January 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/turkey-europe-and-the-eastern-mediterranean-charting-a-way-out-of-the-current-deadlock/>; Reuters, "U.N. registers Turkey-Libya maritime deal - Turkish ministry", 2 October 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-turkey-libya-un-idUKKBN26N0ZS>.
- 3 This visit did not go as expected – Necmettin Erbakan became a target of Muammar Gaddafi's fierce criticism of Turkish policies. See Stephen Kinzer, "Tirade by Qaddafi Stuns Turkey", *The New York Times*, 9 October 1996, p. A.6; Kemal Kirişçi, "Turkish Security and the Middle East", *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 1: 2, 1997.
- 4 See Numan Hazar, *Türkiye Afrika İlişkileri: Türkiye'nin Dost Kıtaya Açılım Stratejisi* [Turkey-Africa Relations: Turkey's Strategy of Opening to a Friendly Continent], (Ankara: Akçağ, 2016).
- 5 Quoted in *Sabah*, "Libya'ya tarihi ziyaret" [Historic visit to Libya], 24 November 2009, [https://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2009/11/24/erdoganel\\_mahmudi\\_gorusmesi\\_basladi](https://www.sabah.com.tr/siyaset/2009/11/24/erdoganel_mahmudi_gorusmesi_basladi).
- 6 See e.g., Ahmet Davutoğlu's speech at London School of Economics on 7 March 2013 for a self-assessment of his "zero problems" policy. Transcript available at: [https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h\\_e\\_ahmet-davutoglu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey\\_-in-the-university-of-london-school-of-economics.en.mfa](https://www.mfa.gov.tr/speech-delivered-by-h_e_ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-turkey_-in-the-university-of-london-school-of-economics.en.mfa).
- 7 *Hürriyet*, "NATO'nun Libya'da ne işi var?" ["What business does NATO have in Libya?"], 1 March 2011, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/nato-nun-libya-da-ne-isi-var-17150261>.
- 8 Buğra Süssler, *Turkey, the EU, and the Middle East: Foreign Policy Cooperation and the Arab Uprisings* (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 73-105.
- 9 *Cumhuriyet*, "Erdoğan: Operasyon işgale dönüşmemeli" [Erdoğan: The operation should not turn into an invasion], 21 March 2011, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/erdogan-operasyon-ismgale-donusmemeli-231692>.
- 10 Buğra Süssler and Chris Alden, "Turkey and African Agency: The Role of Islam and Commercialism in Turkey's Africa Policy", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, forthcoming.
- 11 TRT, "Türkiye'nin Libya'ya ihracatı 826 milyon dolara yükseldi" [Turkish exports to Libya increased to \$826m], 15 May 2021, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/ekonomi/turkiyenin-libyaya-ihracati-826-milyon-dolara-yukseldi-580957.html>.
- 12 Chris Alden, "Introduction", in Nicholas Kitchen, ed., *Emerging Powers in Africa* (London: LSE IDEAS, 2013), pp. 7-9.
- 13 Frederic Wahey and Sandy Kouame, "China's Balancing Act in Libya", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 10 May 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/10/china-s-balancing-act-in-libya-pub-81757>; Adel Abdel Ghafar and Anna L. Jacobs, "China in the Mediterranean: Implications of expanding



- Sino-North Africa relations", *The Brookings Institution*, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/china-in-the-mediterranean-implications-of-expanding-sino-north-africa-relations/>.
- 14 TRT, "Türkiye'nin Libya'ya ihracatı 826 milyon dolara yükseldi" [Turkish exports to Libya increased to \$826m], 15 May 2021, <https://www.trthaber.com/haber/ekonomi/turkiyenin-libyaya-ihracati-826-milyon-dolara-yukseldi-580957.html>.
  - 15 *Milliyet*, "'Süveyş kanalındaki kaza Libya'nın Türkiye için önemi ortaya koydu'" ["The Suez Canal blockage shows the importance of Libya for Turkey"], 30 March 2021, <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/yerel-haberler/istanbul/merkez/suveys-kanalindaki-kaza-libyanin-turkiye-icin-6469348>; Africa Intelligence, "With Bolloré out of the picture, Turkey's Albayrak eager for Misrata port concession". 5 March 2021, [https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa\\_business/2021/03/05/with-bollore-out-of-the-picture-turkey-s-albayrak-eager-for-misrata-port-concession.109648157-eve](https://www.africaintelligence.com/north-africa_business/2021/03/05/with-bollore-out-of-the-picture-turkey-s-albayrak-eager-for-misrata-port-concession.109648157-eve); The Libya Observer. "Misrata Free Zone inks MoU with Turkish giant Yildirim", 28 June 2021, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/economy/misrata-free-zone-inks-mou-turkish-giant-yildirim>; Albayrak Group. 2021. "Grubumuz Afrika'da yeni yatırımlara hazırlanıyor" [Our group prepares for new investments in Africa]. 9 July. 2021. Available at: <https://www.albayrak.com.tr/grubumuz-afrikada-yeni-yatirimlara-hazirlaniyor/>; Ayse Betül Bal, "Turkey's planned logistics base in Libya to revitalize region", *Daily Sabah*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.dailysabah.com/business/economy/turkeys-planned-logistics-base-in-libya-to-revitalize-region>.
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# Turkey's Involvement in the Libyan Conflict, the Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean and Drone Warfare

**BUĞRA SÜSLER**

Dr Buğra Süsler's Strategic Update explains Turkish foreign policy-making around a fragile Libya, highlighting its impact on power dynamics in the North Africa and the Middle East, as well as opening a gateway to sub-Saharan Africa. The paper addresses Turkey's regional economic and political motives, the AKP's increasingly hawkish use of hard power—especially the diplomatic and ethical implications of the Turkish military's specialisation in drone warfare—and Ankara's desire to maintain mutually beneficial relations with Libyan power-brokers key to post-civil war reconstruction.

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