



Rivalry and Cooperation: Russia and Türkiye Navigate Libya's Geopolitical Labyrinth

Ali Bin Musa

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Russia and Türkiye Both Benefit From Cooperation and Competition in Libya:

Despite backing opposing sides in Libya, Moscow and Ankara have skillfully managed their priorities, expanded their influence, and marginalized Western and Arab actors.

Libyan Actors Often Leverage the Presence of a Multiplicity of Foreign Actors:

Libyan factions do not hesitate to reassess their external alliances when their interests clash with those of their backers.

Russian and Turkish Military Presence in Libya Perpetuates Political and Military Divisions:

While Russian and Turkish involvement has frozen hostilities since 2020, it continues to hinder a comprehensive peace settlement by obstructing efforts to expel foreign troops and mercenaries.

Moscow and Ankara Have Become More Politically Open to Former Rivals in Libya:

Both actors are working to rebuild ties with erstwhile domestic adversaries in Libya to strengthen their geopolitical and economic positions in the country.

KEYWORDS

Libya

Russia

Türkiye

Government of National Accord (GNA)

Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF)

Government of National Unity (GNU)

United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Copyright © 2025 The Middle East Council on Global Affairs

The Middle East Council on Global Affairs (ME Council) is an independent, non-profit policy research institution based in Doha, Qatar. The ME Council gratefully acknowledges the financial support of its donors, who value the independence of its scholarship. The analysis and policy recommendations presented in this and other Council publications are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the organization, its management, its donors, or its other scholars and affiliates.

Cover Image: A handout picture from the Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar's self-proclaimed Libyan National Army's General Command's Facebook page, shows him (C) during a reception ceremony attended by Russia's Deputy Defence Minister Yunus-bek Yevkurov (2R) at a Moscow military airfield on September 26, 2023. (Photo by GENERAL COMMAND OF THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY (LNA) / AFP)

Introduction

Russia and Türkiye have emerged as simultaneous geopolitical rivals and partners in conflicts across the Middle East, North Africa, the Caucasus, and Europe. Despite being on opposing sides in Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine, Moscow and Ankara have managed to maintain cooperation and effectively navigate these conflicts to their mutual advantage.

Notably, neither Türkiye's NATO membership nor its strategic economic and financial partnership with the EU have prevented the country from cooperating with Russia. In Indeed, Russo-Turkish relations have followed a complex pattern of collaboration and competition that persisted even after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 — and despite NATO members' view of Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security.”¹

“Since 2020, the Russian and Turkish military presence has contributed to the freezing of hostilities in Libya. Conversely however, it remains an obstacle to a lasting peace settlement.”

This relationship, which analysts have described as an “adversarial collaboration” between “bitter frenemies,” stems from post-Cold War shifts in their respective foreign policy visions, and a shared sense of exclusion by the West.² Moscow and Ankara have also been deeply concerned about U.S. attempts to alter the geopolitical status quo in regions sensitive to their own national security. In Türkiye, this concern has arisen in response to U.S. military actions such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq, support for Kurdish factions in Syria since 2014, while in Moscow, it stems from what it sees as U.S.-backed regime change efforts in several post-Soviet countries, especially Ukraine. Additionally, shifting security dynamics in the MENA region following the Arab uprisings,

including a reduction in direct U.S. involvement there, has fostered some collaboration despite the enduring strategic competition.

Nowhere is this dynamic more clearly on show than in Libya. More than a decade on from the overthrow and killing of Muammar Gaddafi, the compartmentalized relationship between Russia and Türkiye continues to shape the conflict. This has enabled both parties to expand their influence at the expense of Western and Arab actors in an arena vital to their respective geopolitical agendas. For Ankara, a presence in Libya offers important leverage in a long-running dispute with Greece over maritime boundaries and undersea gas riches, while for Moscow, Libya represents an invaluable strategic asset on NATO's southern flank in the Mediterranean and a vital gateway to Africa, where Russian influence continues to grow.

Since 2020, the Russian and Turkish military presence has contributed to the freezing of hostilities in Libya. Conversely however, it remains an obstacle to a lasting peace settlement, enabling foreign-backed domestic factions to resist peace efforts. This Issue Brief examines the rivalry and cooperation between Türkiye and Russia in Libya and the implications of this relationship for the country's political future.

Moscow and Ankara's Gambles in Post-Gaddafi Libya

Libya's was the first of the Arab uprisings to militarize. This led to a NATO intervention, authorized by the UN and the Arab League, to protect Libyan civilians, which then evolved into a military campaign to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi's authoritarian regime. Both Moscow and Ankara had reservations about UN Security Council Resolution 1973, the Western-backed resolution that authorized military intervention in Libya. Russia, a veto-wielding member, abstained, while Türkiye vocally opposed the intervention, before ultimately supporting regime change.

Beyond political and strategic considerations, economic interests heavily influenced the positions of both sides. In 2010, Libya had taken delivery of 12% of Russia's arms exports (worth \$10 billion) and fielded significant Russian investments in energy and infrastructure.³ Türkiye had even greater stakes, with \$20 billion in ongoing projects and 529 contracts worth \$27 billion between 1972 and 2011.⁴

“Although Moscow and Ankara both vocally supported the UN-sponsored Skhirat Agreement ... (GNA), they and other foreign powers continued to back warring factions, ultimately undermining the accord and deepening Libya's divisions.”

Following Gaddafi's overthrow in 2011, the decline in direct U.S. engagement, combined with the lack of a unified European agenda, created a vacuum in Libya that allowed other regional actors to play a greater role. Between 2012 and 2014, Ankara established good relations with the new transitional authorities. During the second Libyan civil war of mid-2014, Türkiye opposed the eastern-based military commander Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), facilitating sending arms shipments to his Islamist and revolutionary rivals and offering their fighters medical treatment in Turkish hospitals.⁵ Meanwhile, Moscow continued to condemn the NATO-led regime change, warning of state collapse—a stance it had long used to justify its support for the Assad regime in Syria.

Although Moscow and Ankara both vocally supported the UN-sponsored Skhirat Agreement in December 2015, which established the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA), they and other foreign powers continued to back warring factions, ultimately undermining the accord and deepening Libya's divisions.

While Türkiye's support for Tripoli-based authorities lacked a clear strategy, Russia took a systematic approach between 2015 and 2019, backing Haftar and his allied Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HOR) in two main ways: First, military assistance through state-linked private companies that offered consulting and maintenance for Soviet-era weapons, later expanded by the Wagner Group;⁶ and second, the printing of 9.7 billion Libyan dinars (approximately \$7 billion at the time) for the eastern authorities between 2016 and 2018, without the approval of the internationally recognized Central Bank in Tripoli.⁷ It is worth noting, however, that Russia maintained contact with the GNA despite its backing of Haftar.

The Battle for Tripoli and the Unveiling of Russian and Turkish Strategic Motives

Haftar's attempt to seize Tripoli by force between April 2019 and June 2020 provided Russia and Türkiye with opportunities for tactical cooperation, making geopolitical gains, and consolidating their military presence. Unlike Abu Dhabi, which fully backed Haftar's campaign, Moscow and Cairo shared early concerns about his potential failure and provided only diplomatic support. Alongside the U.S., Russia thwarted a ceasefire resolution sponsored by the UN and UK.⁸

Türkiye, the only country to intervene militarily on the side of the GNA, provided covert support with Bayraktar TB2 drones and Kirpi mine-resistant vehicles.⁹ While this helped retake the city of Gharyan, the primary aim was to stabilize the new front lines rather than secure a decisive GNA victory. Ankara's broader strategy was to leverage the GNA's precarious military situation to pressure it into making greater diplomatic concessions. Ankara even reduced its Bayraktar drone support at a critical moment, allowing the LAAF—backed by UAE-supplied Chinese drones¹⁰—to gain air superiority, although never enough to take the heart of Tripoli.

In September 2019, media reports indicated that Russian-backed Wagner mercenaries had joined LAAF forces on the front lines near the capital.¹¹ Backed by drones and logistical supplies from the UAE, they helped Haftar's forces make steady gains on its outskirts. However, Moscow's ultimate goal was not to install Haftar through a military victory, but rather to consolidate his position and secure its own leverage in any future peace process, a strategy aligning with Moscow's broader objective of increasing its influence in Libya, a Mediterranean country and thus one of prime strategic importance to NATO and European security.

The Wagner Group provided Russia with a cost-effective, deniable tool to expand its influence. Yet, despite Wagner's support for the LAAF, Russia continued to deal with the GNA. To protect its economic interests, Moscow maintained ties with various Libyan political factions, including "Gaddafists" who could help revive stalled economic projects and arms contracts.¹²

“Ankara's decision to support the GNA was primarily driven by geopolitical and economic interests, but ideologically, it aligned with the nationalist, rather than Islamist, expansionist agenda that is characteristic of current Turkish foreign policy.”

Eight months into the offensive on Tripoli, Türkiye, reportedly with the financial assistance of Qatar, openly intervened in support of the GNA.¹³ This was likely timed to exploit the GNA's failure to counter the steady advance of the LAAF, thus pushing the GNA to sign various security-related agreements—not only relating to Libya, but also to Turkish interests in the Mediterranean.

On January 2, 2020, the Turkish parliament approved a bill approving the deployment of troops to Libya.¹⁴ This legislation built on two

memoranda of understanding (MOUs) signed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and GNA head Fayez al-Sarraj on November 27, 2019—one on the delimitation of maritime borders, and the other on security and military cooperation.¹⁵ Under these MOUs, Ankara sent advanced air defense systems, warships, and thousands of Syrian fighters to support the GNA, decisively tipping the balance in its favor.

Erdoğan justified the intervention as a response to a request from the “legitimate government,” a claim that is contentious at best. Although the GNA was internationally recognized, it was never elected and had failed to secure the necessary vote of confidence from the HOR, as required by Article 13 of its founding agreement.¹⁶

Ankara's decision to support the GNA was primarily driven by geopolitical and economic interests, but ideologically, it aligned with the nationalist, rather than Islamist, expansionist agenda that is characteristic of current Turkish foreign policy. This agenda emphasizes assertively defending Turkish national interests in the Mediterranean, helping the ruling political coalition — composed of the Islamist-leaning Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the ultranationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) — rally domestic support for the intervention amid weak opposition. To this end, the “Blue Homeland” (Mavi Vatan) concept,¹⁷ introduced by Admiral Cem Gürdeniz in 2006,¹⁸ was further developed by Admiral Cihat Yaycı, who drafted the maritime framework for the Ankara-GNA agreement. Yaycı's ideas formed the basis of Türkiye's 2010 maritime demarcation proposal to Gaddafi and were later expanded upon.¹⁹

The maritime demarcation agreement between Türkiye and the GNA exacerbated political tensions with the EU. The agreement gained greater geopolitical significance for Ankara after Türkiye was excluded from the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, exacerbating its ongoing maritime demarcation dispute with Athens. While Greece follows the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea

(UNCLOS) for defining Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), Türkiye has not ratified UNCLOS, and claims access to broader zones of the continental shelf adjacent to the Greek islands—and gas-rich areas close to Libya.

Ankara and Moscow's Balancing Acts in Libya

After establishing a new balance on the front lines, Moscow and Ankara leveraged two factors to freeze and shape the conflict to their advantage. Firstly, their experience in Syria—through the Astana and Sochi processes and bilateral deals on the rebel-held northwestern region of Idlib—encouraged them to try a similar approach in Libya. Secondly, the limited U.S. engagement, European divisions (notably between Italy and France), and Türkiye's intense regional rivalries with both the UAE and Egypt at that time positioned Moscow as Ankara's most reliable partner, despite their competing interests and reciprocal criticism over the use of foreign fighters.

In a coordinated effort between Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin, Haftar and Sarraj were invited to ceasefire talks in Moscow on January 14, 2020. While Sarraj agreed, Haftar left without signing, continuing to bet on a UAE-backed military victory.²⁰ This was a classic case of foreign backers struggling to control allies on the ground, who may choose to advance their own agendas, especially in a context like Libya that involves multiple external actors.

Although the Moscow summit did not achieve its desired results, cooperation between Ankara and Moscow continued. Following the failure of the Berlin International Conference on January 19, 2020, Haftar was significantly weakened militarily, and his hopes of capturing Tripoli were dashed.²¹ Turkish air defense systems eliminated the LAAF's advantage in the skies over Tripoli and Misrata, and Turkish airstrikes destroyed the LAAF's long and unprotected supply lines. Meanwhile, the influx of thousands of Syrian fighters gave the

GNA forces a numerical advantage, allowing them to maintain control over the captured territories. The LAAF, in turn, faced growing disarray in its battlefield leadership. In April 2020, GNA-allied forces captured several towns along the western coast, and a month later, they seized the strategic al-Watiya air base near the Tunisian border.²²

While Haftar's military defeat appeared catastrophic, as Turkish drones destroyed precious Russian military assets,²³ certain red lines were respected. At Türkiye's behest, the advancing GNA forces allowed Wagner mercenaries to withdraw safely from the front lines, facilitating their airlift to LAAF-protected zones in eastern and central Libya.²⁴ Similarly, when GNA forces, with Turkish support, reached the outskirts of Sirte, an implicit Russian ultimatum—and later an explicit Egyptian one—forced them to a halt.²⁵

Consolidating Influence Under a Long Stalemate

In the five years since the defeat of the LAAF and its withdrawal from northwestern Libya, the territorial division between the western and eastern Libyan authorities has remained largely static. The new fault lines run from the coastal city of Sirte to the strategic Al-Jufra air base 160 miles south, and onwards to Ubari, over 350 miles further southwest, in the Fezzan region.

In the wake of the fighting, Moscow continued to consolidate its military presence by deploying advanced warplanes and repositioning Wagner fighters at the Qardabiya air base near Sirte, as well as at strategic bases throughout Fezzan, including in Al-Jufra, Brak, and Tamanhant, and at major oil fields in the south.²⁶ Conversely, Ankara has strengthened its presence at key military bases in western Libya, including the Mitiga air base in central Tripoli, the air force academy in Misrata, the naval base in Khoms, and the Al-Watiya air base. Türkiye has also trained and equipped new security forces and redeployed Syrian mercenaries at various locations.

These Russian and Turkish moves sparked little reaction from the first Trump administration (2017-2021), whose actions extended no further than media condemnations of the Wagner Group's activities in Libya via AFRICOM.²⁷ The EU, too, remained paralyzed, as evidenced by its inability to enforce the UN arms embargo through its naval operation, Irini.²⁸

“Despite their growing military presence on the ground, Russia and Türkiye recognize that a deeply divided Libya may ultimately not serve their interests. Their long-term goals—at least economically—depend on relative political stability and open trade access”

Despite their growing military presence on the ground, Russia and Türkiye recognize that a deeply divided Libya may ultimately not serve their interests. Their long-term goals—at least economically—depend on relative political stability and open trade access to both eastern and western Libya. The political economy of the Libyan conflict, where oil drives shared economic and political interests, reinforces this view; the LAAF control the largest oil fields, while the Tripoli-based authorities, through the central bank, control revenues. These dynamics make negotiated power-sharing arrangements advantageous for both Moscow and Ankara, while not necessarily incentivizing a full resolution to the conflict. Moreover, the involvement of numerous foreign players means no single power can easily dominate the others.

Thus, for nearly half a decade, Moscow and Ankara have cooperated to maintain the status quo under the August 2020 ceasefire. Moscow also outlined a political roadmap that aimed to marginalize Haftar in favor of HOR Speaker Aguila Saleh,²⁹ and despite opposition from the authorities in Tripoli, facilitated a meeting between Ahmed Maiteeq, a former

member of the Presidential Council of GNA and Khalifa Haftar's son, Khaled, in Sochi. This resulted in the lifting of Haftar's oil blockade; Moscow reportedly used Wagner mercenaries stationed at oil fields in southern Libya to achieve this.³⁰

In March 2021, UNSMIL efforts led to the appointment of the first unified government since 2014—the Government of National Unity (GNU) headed by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, a construction magnate-turned-politician who had ties to the Gaddafi regime. Dbeibah is accused of corruption related to his management of several companies controlled by his cousin, Ali Dbeibah, one of Gaddafi's most prominent cronies.³¹ Since the GNU's appointment, there have been many demands for the withdrawal of foreign fighters and mercenaries—estimated by the deputy head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in 2020 as numbering 20,000.³²

Ankara secured the GNU's commitment to honor previously signed agreements by leveraging its prior relationship with PM Dbeibah, which was reinforced by its extensive experience in Libya's construction sector. Notably, Dbeibah was the former chairman of the Libyan Investment and Development Company (LIDCO), the conglomerate behind some of the country's largest construction projects.³³ Furthermore, the continued perception of Haftar as a military threat has bolstered Ankara's position, leading to the Turkish parliament's 2022 vote to extend the deployment of Turkish troops in Libya.³⁴

Türkiye has twice demonstrated its commitment to protecting the GNU. Firstly, Turkish airstrikes thwarted Fathi Bashagha's 2022 coup attempt against the GNU.³⁵ The HOR had appointed Bashagha, a former GNA interior minister and Ankara's main ally during the Tripoli war, as head of the parallel Government of National Stability (GNS) in February 2022, after a brief rapprochement with Haftar, but he was dismissed in May 2023.

Secondly, that same month 2023, Turkish drones targeted anti-Dbeibah armed groups in Zawiya linked to powerful Bouzriba family, who had coordinated with Haftar in an effort to replicate Bashagha's attacks on the GNU. To avoid social tensions in the city, the GNU framed the strikes as operations against smugglers.³⁶ In both cases, those targeted—who had been part of the Turkish-backed 2019 anti-Haftar military coalition—accused Ankara of involvement.³⁷

“Both Moscow and Ankara understand that achieving their long-term strategic goals will require a unified and legitimate Libyan government.”

As geopolitical realignments have unfolded between Türkiye, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and later Egypt, Ankara has gradually normalized relations with the eastern Libyan authorities. Ironically, Türkiye has had longstanding financial ties with Haftar's sons, reportedly acting as the intermediary for funds seized by Saddam Haftar from the Benghazi branch of the Central Bank and redirected elsewhere.³⁸ It has also engaged in scrap metal trade with the Haftars, and played a crucial role as the financial middleman for illicit oil transactions and fuel-for-crude oil swap schemes.³⁹

Despite past complications, Türkiye's remarkable relief effort after Hurricane Daniel struck Derna in September 2023, causing a catastrophic dam collapse, seems to have marked a turning point in its relationship with eastern Libya.⁴⁰ It may also have paved the way for securing new reconstruction contracts,⁴¹ the return of Turkish Airlines to Benghazi, and discussions about opening a consulate there.

Indeed, Ankara has continued to mend its relations with eastern Libya, where Turkish companies are now actively involved in reconstruction projects under the supervision of Haftar's son, Belqasim, the general manager of the Derna and the Affected Cities and Areas Reconstruction Fund. Belqasim has assumed a diplomatic role similar to that of a foreign minister, using the fund, which receives substantial financial allocations and operates with immunity from financial oversight, as a front to gain access to key Arab and foreign capitals. Ankara's eagerness to expand its commercial interests appears to be motivating it to act as a mediator between rival Libyan factions.⁴²

Russia, on the other hand, preoccupied with the Ukraine war since early 2022, has continued to deny the presence of Wagner fighters in Libya and kept a low military profile. Since the death of Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Russian Ministry of Defense has taken closer control of the work of Wagner forces in Libya, which have become known as the “Africa Corps.”⁴³

The fall of its ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria has also forced Moscow to find ways to compensate for its losses through investment and expansion elsewhere. While its Hmeimim base in Syria remains intact, there have been reports that Russia has been transferring equipment and weapons from Syria to areas controlled by the LAAF, particularly along the Libya-Sudan-Chad border.⁴⁴ This coincides with Moscow's recent apparent moves to use Belarus as a new “legitimate” channel to support Haftar.⁴⁵

Like Ankara, Moscow too has sought to mend ties with the “opposing side” in Libya. The Russian embassy reopened to Tripoli last year, led by a new ambassador who is fluent in Arabic. In a 2024 interview, he stated that Russian “elements,” not forces, were cooperating with the LAAF, suggesting a shift toward a more formal presence.⁴⁶ The delivery of weapons by Russian ships through the port of Tobruk in April and June 2024 reinforced the message that the Russian presence has become more overt.⁴⁷

Both Moscow and Ankara understand that achieving their long-term strategic goals will require a unified and legitimate Libyan government. The Turkish Foreign Ministry has even highlighted the challenges related to “legitimacy” in implementing the agreements it has signed with Tripoli.⁴⁸ However, this acknowledgment came after Ankara had already secured its military presence in Libya through until early 2026.⁴⁹

Since Donald Trump returned to office in January, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) has shown an increased interest in strengthening ties with military leaders in both the east and west of Libya, with the goal of furthering efforts to unify the country’s military forces.⁵⁰ These modest efforts have fueled speculation that Western countries may be training and equipping a joint Libyan force to counter Russian influence. However, unless they are accompanied by the withdrawal of all other foreign forces—including Turkish ones—such initiatives are unlikely to gain support from those domestic forces who view Türkiye’s military presence as a threat.

Conclusion

Given the perpetual state of internal division and foreign interference in Libya, UNSMIL’s mediation is unlikely to lead to the full implementation of the ceasefire agreement signed in October 2020—least of all the withdrawal of foreign troops and mercenaries. Turkish and Russian military troops are likely to remain in the country for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, domestic actors will continue to exploit the involvement of foreign ones. When their interests conflict with those of their Russian or Turkish backers, Libyan parties will maneuver and reassess those alliances, engaging with other players.

Haftar’s defeat in Tripoli was not necessarily a setback for Russia or its influence. Moscow’s primary goal—securing a foothold in the Mediterranean—remains attainable, though it will not be easy. This goal has become more critical to Moscow following the fall of Assad, while Moscow is accordingly working to expand its influence in Africa. Its efforts to achieve its secondary goals, such as restoring its role as an arms supplier and potential reconstruction partner, do not appear to have been as successful as those of Türkiye.

Conversely, Ankara’s influence is mainly limited to western Libya; however, this does not hinder it from achieving its strategic aims—particularly those of maintaining a presence near oil- and gas-rich parts of the Mediterranean and preserving its diverse economic and commercial interests even in East Libya.

ENDNOTES

1. "Washington Summit Declaration," NATO, Press Release, July 10, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/4j45u6um>.
2. Galip Dalay, "Turkey and Russia are Bitter Frenemies," *Foreign Policy*, May 28, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/m2xvn9m7>; Güney Yıldız, *Turkish-Russian Adversarial Collaboration in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh*, SWP Comment 2021/C 22, (Berlin, Germany: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [German Institute for International and Security Affairs], March 24, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.18449/2021C22>; Yeghia Tashjian, *The Russian-Turkish 'Co-opetition' in Times of Regional Crisis*, (Beirut, Lebanon: Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, March 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/mt-vmxrf>.
3. Alexei Anishchuk, "Gaddafi Fall Cost Russia Tens of Blns in Arms Deals," *Reuters*, November 2, 2011, <https://tinyurl.com/zazhdmnd>.
4. "İnşaat Sektörü Analizi: Arap Baharı, Borç Krizi ve Aşırı Isınan Ekonomiler [Construction Sector Analysis: Arab Spring, Debt Crisis and Overheating Economies]," *Turkish Contractors Union*, July 2011, 14-15, <https://tinyurl.com/mrysa77n>.
5. "Ansar al-Sharia Leader 'Almost Certainly' Killed in Libya," *Middle East Eye*, February 13, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/ywyu9k66>.
6. Maria Tsvetkova, "Exclusive: Russian Private Security Firm Says It Had Armed Men in East Libya," *Reuters*, March 13, 2017, <https://tinyurl.com/yc88dxum>.
7. Abdulkader Assad, "Libya's Parallel Central Bank Admits Printing 9.7 Billion Dinar Banknotes in Russia," *The Libya Observer*, November 20, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/4zd5b3aj>.
8. Michelle Nichols, "U.S., Russia Say Cannot Support a U.N. Call for Libya Truce: Diplomats," *Reuters*, April 19, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/5c6s4anv>.
9. Darek Liam, "Libya: Turkey Delivers BMC Kirpi 4x4 Armoured Vehicle to GNA," *Military Africa*, May 18, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/y74sefir>.
10. "UAE Implicated in Lethal Drone Strike in Libya," *BBC*, August 28, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53917791>.
11. Samer Al-Atrush and Stepan Kravchenko, "Putin-Linked Mercenaries Are Fighting on Libya's Front Lines," *Bloomberg*, September 25, 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/yc7295r6>.
12. "Russia Says Gaddafi's Son Should Play Role in Libyan Politics – RIA," *Reuters*, December 25, 2018, <https://tinyurl.com/bde4xpee>; "Russia: Gaddafi Loyalists Should Participate in Libyan Dialogue," *Middle East Monitor*, January 5, 2021, <https://tinyurl.com/2k8e3cy4>.
13. International Crisis Group, *Turkey Wades into Libya's Troubled Waters*, Europe Report N°257, (Brussels, Belgium: International Crisis Group, April 30, 2020), 13, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/257-turkey-libya-troubled-waters.pdf>.
14. "Turkey's Parliament Approves Military Deployment to Libya," *Al Jazeera*, January 2, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/bd-hurmv7>.
15. Ibid.
16. United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), "Libyan Political Agreement," Article 13, 9, signed on December 17, 2015, <https://tinyurl.com/43cy6nuy>.
17. "Mavi Vatan," or "Blue Homeland," has become a common phrase in Turkish politics, most often used as shorthand for Ankara's maritime claims in the eastern Mediterranean.
18. Karim Faheem, "Amid Mediterranean tensions, retired Turkish admiral grabs the spotlight touting supremacy at sea," *The Washington post*, September 27, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/turkey-greece-blue-homeland/2020/09/26/15cf7afe-fc3b-11ea-830c-a160b331ca62_story.html.
19. Cihat Yayı, "Türkiye-Libya Arasında İmzalanan Münhasır Ekonomik Bölge Andlaşmasının Sonuç ve Etkileri," [Results and Effects of the Exclusive Economic Zone Agreement Signed Between Türkiye and Libya], *kriter*, January 1, 2020, <https://kriterdergi.com/dosya/turkiye-ve-libya-arasindaki-anlasmanin-sonuc-ve-etkileri>.
20. "Libya Conflict: Hafta 'Leaves' Moscow Ceasefire Talks Without Deal," *BBC*, January 14, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/5w3krbmd>.
21. Barbara Bibbo, "Berlin Conference: Another Failure in the Libya Crisis," *Middle East Eye*, February 3, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/yc4xva7t>.
22. Patrick Wintour, "UN-backed Libyan Forces Take Key Airbase from Rebel General," *The Guardian*, May 18, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/43vr9w42>.
23. Seth J. Frantzman, "How Did Turkish UAVs Outmaneuver Russia's Pantsir Air Defense in Libya: Lessons and Ramifications," *Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis (MECRA)*, May 27, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/3wnsv648>.
24. "Hundreds More Russian Mercenaries Flee Western Libya: GNA Forces," *Al Jazeera*, May 25, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/ycwneqbm>.
25. Samy Magdy and Andrew Wilks, "Egyptian President Says Libyan City Sirte a 'Red Line,'" *Associated Press*, June 20, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/y3rv7d99>.
26. Joseph S. Bermudez Jr. and Brian Katz, *Moscow's Next Front: Russia's Expanding Military Footprint in Libya*, Commentary, (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 17, 2020), <https://tinyurl.com/vahyv3k>.
27. "Russia, Wagner Group Complicating Libyan Ceasefire Efforts," U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, July 15, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/2kv4j55y>.
28. Yigal Chazan, "Why Libya's Arms Embargo is Failing," *The Arab Weekly*, August 17, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/37rp2u2d>.
29. "Trimming Turkey's Wings: Ankara and Cairo Fight for Influence in Africa and East Med," *Mada Masr*, August 25, 2020, <https://www.madamasr.com/en/2020/08/25/feature/politics/trimming-turkeys-wings-ankara-and-cairo-fight-for-influence-in-africa-and-east-med/>; Dario Cristiani, *A Ceasefire with Feet of Clay: The Potential Spoilers of Peace in Libya*, (Rome, Italy: Istituto Affari Internazionali, November 21, 2020), <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/c05/ceasefire-feet-clay-potential-spoilers-peace-libya>.

30. Torrey Clark and Samer Al-Atrush, "Russia Welcomes Libya Deal on Oil Exports, Revenue Distribution," *Bloomberg*, September 19, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/wrypasnv>.
31. Tarek Megerisi, "Fuelled by Corruption and Nepotism, Libya Finds Itself Trapped in Political Anarchy," *Al Majalla*, July 3, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/4vf6eb7a>.
32. Stephanie Williams, "Opening Remarks During Third Virtual Meeting of the Second Round of the LPDF," transcript of speech delivered at the UNSMIL Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, December 2, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/52mmhn6v>.
33. Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project, *Libyans Who Looted Gaddafi's Graft-Ridden Development Fund Banked at Credit Suisse*, Suisse Secrets Investigation, (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), February 24, 2022), <https://tinyurl.com/4jszsz3d>.
34. "Turkey Extends Libya Troop Deployment for Another 18 Months," *Daily Sabah*, June 21, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/bddnwe27>.
35. "Clashes Rock Outskirts of Tripoli as Questions Rise about Turkey's Role in Libya," *The Arab Weekly*, September 4, 2022, <https://tinyurl.com/4crfaftb>.
36. Monia Ghanmi, "Istahdafat Mawaqi' Muhharribin.. Ghārāt Jawiyyah Jadīdah Gharb Libiyā [Airstrikes Target Smuggler Locations... New Airstrikes in Western Libya]," *Al Arabiya*, May 28, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/n8nah69d>.
37. Nisreen Suleiman, "Libiyā: jadal tuthīruhu ḍarabāt jawwiyya tabannathā ḥukūmat al-waḥda al-waṭaniyya fī iṭār 'amaliyya 'askariyya ḍidd tahreeb al-wuqūd [Libya: Controversy Raised by Airstrikes Adopted by the Government of National Unity as Part of a Military Operation Against Fuel Smuggling]," *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, May 26, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/d58fvxhf>.
38. United Nation Security Council, "Letter Dated 5 September 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011) Addressed to the President of the Security Council," UN Document, S/2018/812, (September 5, 2018), 10, <https://tinyurl.com/4mudube5>.
39. "Haftar, his Son Saddam and the Gold Smuggling," *Libya Tribune*, October 12, 2020, <https://tinyurl.com/mvffm8ed>.
40. Ali Bin Musa, "Türkiye Leverages Derna Relief to Reconcile with Eastern Libya," *Afkār* (blog), Middle East Council on Global Affairs, October 5, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/22zvewz7>.
41. Safa Alharathy, "Haftar's Fund Inks Turkish Deals for Benghazi, Suluq," *The Libya Observer*, October 24, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mtc8vy95>.
42. Oguzhan Sari, "Turkish National Defense Ministry Hosts Libyan Military Joint Commission Delegation," *Anadolu Agency*, November 28, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkish-national-defense-ministry-hosts-libyan-military-joint-commission-delegation/3407669>.
43. John A. Lechner and Sergey Eledinov, "Is Africa Corps a Rebranded Wagner Group?," *Foreign Policy*, February 7, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/02/07/africa-corps-wagner-group-russia-africa-burkina-faso/>.
44. "Russia Shifts Focus to Libya Following Setbacks in Syria," *Military Africa*, February 2, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/3s4e2vtt>.
45. "Libya: Haftar Strengthens Axis with Belarus and Relaunches Military Cooperation with Moscow," *Agenzia Nova*, February 20, 2025, <https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/libia-haftar-rafforza-lasse-con-la-bielorussia-e-rilancia-la-cooperazione-militare-con-mosca/>.
46. Al Jazeera Mubasher, "Maṭāmi' al-Gharb wa-Rūsiyā fī Libiyā.. Mubāshar ma' al-Safīr al-Rūsī [The West and Russia's Ambitions in Libya... Live with the Russian Ambassador]," YouTube, June 10, 2024, 10:09 p.m., <https://tinyurl.com/nhdrzxls>.
47. "Libya: Two Russian Military Ships on a 'Courtesy Visit' to Tobruk," *Nova News*, June 18, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/2ah3pxx2>.
48. Levent Kenez, "Turkish Foreign Ministry Acknowledges Legitimacy Problems in Agreements with Libya," *Nordic Monitor*, November 15, 2024, <https://tinyurl.com/mppnwvxk>.
49. Handan Kazancı, "Turkish Parliament Approves Motion to Extend Mandate of Troops in Libya for 24 Months," *Anadolu Agency*, November 30, 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/32zxj68>.
50. Abdulkader Assad, "AFRICOM Reviews in Tripoli and Benghazi Efforts to Unify Libya's Military Institution," *The Libya Observer*, February 5, 2025, <https://tinyurl.com/md8kctn5>.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Ali Bin Musa is a junior visiting fellow at the Middle East Council on Global Affairs. Graduated from the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies in Qatar, with a master's degree in political science and international relations. His research interests include democratic transition, state formation, political history, and foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa region. Previously, he worked as a research assistant at the Doha Institute and served as an editor and translator at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.



The author thanks the peer reviewer, as well as Dalia Ghanem, Tanner Manely, Mohammad Abu Hawash, and the ME Council communications team for their assistance throughout this project.

ABOUT THE MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

The Middle East Council on Global Affairs (ME Council) is an independent, non-profit policy research institution based in Doha, Qatar. The ME Council produces policy-relevant research, convenes meetings and dialogues, and engages policy actors on geopolitical and socioeconomic issues facing the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The ME Council serves as a bridge between the MENA region and the rest of the world, providing a regional perspective on global policy issues and establishing partnerships with other leading research centers and development organizations across the MENA region and the world.



MIDDLE EAST COUNCIL ON GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Burj Al Mana 3rd floor, Street 850, Zone 60, Doha, Qatar

www.mecouncil.org