

Erdoğan's Adventurism in Syria and Libya Has Left Turkey Weaker and Isolated

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Oil and Energy](#)

*Still featured on the Turkish [Ministry of Affairs website](#) is the “Zero Problems With Our Neighbors” policy that was launched in 2010 with the aim of diffusing Turkey’s many issues with all of its neighbors. However, less than a year into the launch of the new policy, it was quickly abandoned as Turkey decided to support jihadist groups, including [Al-Qaeda](#) and [ISIS](#), against Syria despite Turkish **President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan** once calling Syrian **President Bashar al-Assad** as his “[brother](#).”*

The Syrian War provided the opportunity for Erdoğan’s grandeur imaginations of a [Neo-Ottoman Empire](#), leading him to quickly abandon Turkey’s “Zero Problems” policy. Today, Turkey has more problems than it had before intervening in the war. Not only has Assad survived the Turkish-backed onslaught (without discounting the role of Western imperialists, Arab dictatorships and Israel), but today there are millions of Syrian refugees in Turkey, terrorist attacks have drastically increased in the country, and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), recognized as a terrorist organization by Ankara, has reemerged in Syria after Assad kicked them out of the country. By supporting the war against Syria, Erdoğan created the very conditions for the PKK to return to Syria under the banner of the People’s Protection Units (YPG). By trying to remove Assad, Erdoğan actually strengthened the PKK and their influence, creating more problems for Turkey, but also justifying the illegal occupation of vast areas of northern Syria.

The Turkish economy has reached [a critical crisis](#), partially because of the Syrian war, with the [unemployment rate](#) at approximately 14%. Billions of dollars has been invested into destroying Syria, and the only return has been [ISIS-supplied oil](#) for Erdoğan’s son Bilal to profit from. However, Erdoğan has masterfully utilized irrational and fragile Turkish hyper ultranationalism to cover the effects his war against Syria has created in his own country; demographically, economically and security-wise, all for little gain except within his own family. To keep the country united despite the spiralling economic and security problems, Erdoğan has resorted to uniting the country against the one more common enemy – Greece.

There is a reason why Turkish media is [ranked among the lowest in the world in terms of freedom](#) – it is Erdoğan’s media. He has also masterfully used the media to manipulate his own people with lies and inaccuracies to claim Greek islands and maritime space, despite international law determining these areas as Greece’s territory. The oil and gas rich Aegean Sea is now being claimed by Turkey despite the [UN Charter Law of the Sea](#) favoring Greece – the reason why Turkey is 1 out of 15 countries out of 193 UN members not to sign it. Despite this reality, Erdoğan tells Turkish people through the tightly controlled media that under international law they can claim sovereignty over some Greek territories. It is for this reason that Turkey publishes maps that have Greek [islands like Kastelorizo completely](#)

[missing](#) and other islands like Crete moved from their actual position

With Erdoğan failing to defeat the PKK or remove Assad in Syria, he still insists on his grand project of neo-Ottomanism by wanting to steal Greek maritime space, turning to the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated National Government of Accords (GNA) in Libya's Tripoli, headed by Fayeze al-Sarraj, an ethnic Turk himself, as are many of the top people in the government, [to divide Greek maritime space](#) between themselves. However, Erdoğan grossly miscalculated and is now in a much weaker position than he was in late November when he began the provocation against Greece. Not only has no country supported his plans to steal Greek maritime space, but in a rare instance, the U.S., Russia and the EU all condemned Turkey's provocative move.

General Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA), in opposition to the GNA, used the Erdoğan-Sarraj aggression against Greece to restart his offensive against the Turkish-backed government and in only a matter of days reached 6 kilometers from Tripoli city center. Much of Haftar's top military personnel were trained in Greek military schools and he utilized the Turkish aggression to his advantage to gain a European ally. Not only has Greece now backed Haftar, but it is expected that when Haftar visits Greece in the coming days, many other European and NATO countries will begin to unrecognize Sarraj. On Monday, I wrote that [Italy had to reverse its backing of Sarraj](#) to protect their interests in Libya. Since then, Italy is now distancing itself from Sarraj with Haftar [due to arrive in Rome](#).

Erdoğan's adventurism with Sarraj against Greece has only isolated Turkey further and legitimized Haftar's push into Tripoli. The only ally Erdoğan has in the Eastern Mediterranean was Sarraj, but it is likely he will lose power with Haftar's offensive on Tripoli. With Egypt promising to respond to Turkey in Libya if it intervenes, can Turkey really afford to be at war with Syria, Libya and Egypt at the same time as its economic crisis continues to worsen?

Turkey has never been more isolated, alone and frustrated by losing in Idlib and Libya, and this is set to get worse in 2020. Greece-Cyprus-Israel will sign a pipeline deal on January 2 in Athens that completely bypasses Turkey in the so-called 'disputed' waters, and Greece-Cyprus-Egypt-France will discuss Mediterranean issues on January 4-5 in Cairo. For all the military posturing and rhetorical aggression, Erdoğan's adventurism has only left his country diplomatically isolated, economically struggling and less secure domestically, a gross miscalculation that he will unlikely reverse in pursuit of regional dominance.

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