

# Turkey's Libyan Gamble Is a Shrewd Geostrategic Move

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*Turkey's recent maritime and military deals with the UN-recognized authorities in Libya are shrewd geostrategic moves intended to ensure that Ankara remains the dominant player in the Eastern Mediterranean in the face of a concerted effort by its rivals to undermine its influence with a game-changing pipeline that could set the stage for an anti-Turkish alliance if it's successfully completed.*

## The State Of Play

Energy geopolitics are driving Turkey's recent [maritime](#) and [military](#) deals with the UN-recognized authorities in Libya as Ankara wants to avoid the formation of an anti-Turkish alliance that's in the process of being created around the game-changing Greece-"Israel"-Cyprus ([GRISCY](#)) pipeline that it's rivals plan to construct. The Anatolian nation has been [gradually moving closer](#) towards Russia, China, and Iran in the aftermath of the failed US-backed coup attempt against President Erdogan in summer 2016, which in turn pushed America to encourage its regional partners to unite in confronting what they collectively regard as their shared threat. "[Israel](#)", it should be noted, is on extremely close terms with both [Russia](#) and [China](#) nowadays, but it has no qualms about advancing its interests at their Turkish partner's expense, though this isn't predicted to negatively impact on its relations with either of them in spite of GRISCY being a clear competitor of Russia's Turkish and Balkan Stream pipelines.

## The GRISCY Game-Changer

The embodiment of the US-backed Greek-"Israeli"-Cypriot alliance is GRISCY, which plans to connect the self-professed "Jewish State's" offshore gas deposits with those two Hellenic nations en route to the EU as part of Brussels' energy diversification plans. In preparation for this eventuality, all three of them have been intensifying their relations with one another, especially in the [military domain](#), but their strategy hit a snag with Turkey's bold outreaches to Libya in recent weeks. Ankara is taking advantage of its unresolved maritime issues with Greece to lay claim to a broad swath of territory that in theory would make it Libya's offshore neighbor per the agreement that the two just reached. Understanding that the UN-recognized Libyan authorities in Tripoli are at risk of being unseated by General Haftar's foreign-backed forces that are reportedly being aided by Egypt, the GCC (minus Qatar), and even Russia according to some accounts, it's readying emergency military support to them in the form of vehicles, equipment, and weapons.

Just like "Israel's" GRISCY likely won't harm its relations with Russia, nor will Turkey's support of General Haftar's foes negatively impact on its ties with Moscow either, as it's expected that even very close partners will occasionally compete with one another in the

[emerging Multipolar World Order](#). Still, the optics are interesting precisely because of just how complex the situation is becoming, especially since Greece is on the path to becoming the US' preferred regional partner in the Eastern Mediterranean apart from "Israel" of course after Athens [reinvigorated its alliance](#) with the US and even reportedly declared that it's [ready to host American forces](#) if they're removed from Turkey's Incirlik airbase like Ankara has threatened in the event that Washington sanctions it for purchasing Russia's S-400s. Although there's still some trust remaining between the US and Turkey at the leadership levels as evidenced by President Erdogan's close working relations with his American counterpart, their respective permanent bureaucracies ("deep states") feel differently about one another and are preparing for a prolonged period of rivalry.

## **On The Path To Proxy Conflict**

The moves that Turkey has undertaken with Russia recently, in parallel with the reaction that the US has had by strengthening its military ties with Greece in response, are pushing Turkish-American ties on the path of proxy conflict, one that might very well break out in the Eastern Mediterranean after Athens vehemently condemned Ankara's latest deals with Tripoli for infringing on its territorial integrity. The situation is so dangerous precisely because Turkey and Greece have everything to lose in the long term depending on the outcome of their latest dispute. Left unchallenged in the military sense, then Turkey's bold claims to the broad swath of the Eastern Mediterranean would make GRISCSY impossible without its participation, which by default neutralizes the entire anti-Turkish intentions of the project and the trilateral American-backed military alliance that's forming around it. Adding another layer of intrigue to everything is that Ankara's claims can be rendered null and void if the UN-recognized "Government of National Accord" (GNA) in Tripoli falls to General Haftar, who doesn't recognize the recently agreed maritime deal.

## **Scenario Forecasting**

Short of an intra-NATO war between Greece and Turkey (which certainly isn't an impossibility), the only other way to resolve this issue is for General Haftar to come out on top in the latest stage of the ongoing Libyan Civil War, thus meaning that Ankara's long-term security interests are indirectly dependent on the outcome of that proxy conflict and is why it's promised military support to the GNA short of actual combat troops (though it can be speculated that Turkish special forces might possibly be active on the ground and it [left open the possibility](#) of dispatching conventional ones if asked). Much has been made about the ethics of Turkey's support for the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated government there and the legality of its Eastern Mediterranean claims, but the "politically inconvenient" fact of International Relations is that "might (still) makes right", so everything ultimately depends on whether Turkish military support can secure the continued existence of the GNA and whether or not Ankara can physically defend its maritime claims in the event that Athens militarily resists it (with likely support of an unpredictable nature from the US and "Israel").

The US wants to avoid an open conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean because that would make it impossible to ever enter into a rapprochement with Turkey sometime in the future seeing as how Washington is likely to support Athens in that scenario, though Greece also knows that American foreign policy has a clear interest in securing non-Russian gas supplies to the EU through non-Turkish-influenced GRISCSY so it might be wagering that it can draw its ally into the conflict if it decides to militarily defend its claims there. As for "Israel" and Russia, they'll probably sit it out since neither would want to get directly involved, but it can be argued that Moscow has an interest in Ankara winning (so as to complicate GRISCSY's

construction) whereas Tel Aviv would obviously want Athens to emerge victorious instead. Time is of the essence since General Haftar has announced that he's making [another final push](#) to capture Tripoli so Turkey might find itself caught up in "mission creep", while from the Greek angle, the longer that Turkey's maritime claims remain militarily uncontested, the more likely it is that a "new normal" will set in whereby the international community begins to tacitly take them for granted.

## Concluding Thoughts

Everything is unfolding extremely fast ever since Turkey clinched its maritime and military deals with Libya, so there's a distinct possibility that something might proverbially "go wrong" and that this could potentially become the world's next crisis if the situation gets out of control. General Haftar's latest advance on Tripoli and Turkey's efforts to thwart its success is one of the key variables that could determine the outcome of that dimension of this larger proxy conflict, though an eye should also be kept on Greece since it's extremely perturbed that Turkey laid claim to a broad swath of what it regards as its own maritime territory. Smaller states have a tendency, whether intentionally or not, of dragging larger ones into their local conflicts, and the dynamics are just too dangerous in this instance to overlook the possibility of the US getting involved (be it against its will or not) in a hot war between Greece and Turkey. It's anyone's guess how this developing imbroglio will end, but one way or another, it's bound to have clear winners and losers by the time it's all said and done.

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