

The Turkey-UAE race to the bottom in Libya: a prelude to escalation

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Introduction

In March, the health authorities in western Libya announced the first official case of Covid-19 in the country. While the world was enforcing a lockdown to prevent the spread of the virus, war-torn Libya renewed with heavy fighting in the capital. Despite the UNSMIL's¹ call for a lull in the fighting, the Libyan National Army (LNA) and its allies conducted shelling on Tripoli, targeting indistinctly residential neighbourhoods, hospitals and armed groups' locations. The Government of National Accord (GNA) answered LNA's shelling campaign by launching an offensive against several western cities. These operations could not have been executed without the support of both conflicting parties' main backers: Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The protracted conflict results from the competing parties' unwillingness to agree on conditions to resume political negotiations². But it is also a consequence of the ambitions of several countries, supplying extensive means to reach economic and political goals.

On April 4th, 2019, the LNA announced a lightning campaign against Tripoli. However, it encountered fierce resistance from pro-GNA armed groups. As weeks went by, frontlines entrenched in southern Tripoli. Upgraded military weaponry became essential for both parties to overcome the other. Six month after the beginning of the conflict, the UAE – LNA's long-time sponsor – started stumbling over Turkey's assistance to the GNA. Tripoli's government launched multiple coordinated operations against strategic Al-Watiyah base (west of Tripoli) and towards Abu Grein (east of Misrata)³. After a LNA counteroffensive, the GNA expelled its forces from a number of western coastal cities⁴. In April and May, combat operations remained intense as both GNA and LNA forces hurled significant military manoeuvres in southern Tripoli and Tarhuna. The provision of military equipment, drones, and foreign fighters fostered the conflict, leading Libya to a hazardous race to the bottom,

¹ UNSMIL for United Nations Support Mission in Libya.

² On April 27th, 2020, Khalifa Haftar announced "*the fall of the Political Agreement*" and accepted [in the name of the General Command of the Armed Forces] the will of the people to lead this transition. This declaration aims at countering the head of the House of Representatives (Aguila Saleh) and foreign countries' attempts to withdraw their support for the military intervention. On June 6th, the GNA for its part refused the political and ceasefire initiative by Egyptian President, Al-Sisi (« Full Text of Address by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar: The Political Agreement has Destroyed Our Country », *Al-Marsad*, 27 April 2020; « Libya's GNA Rejects Cairo Initiative Peace Plan: Reports », *Al-Arabiya*, 7 June 2020).

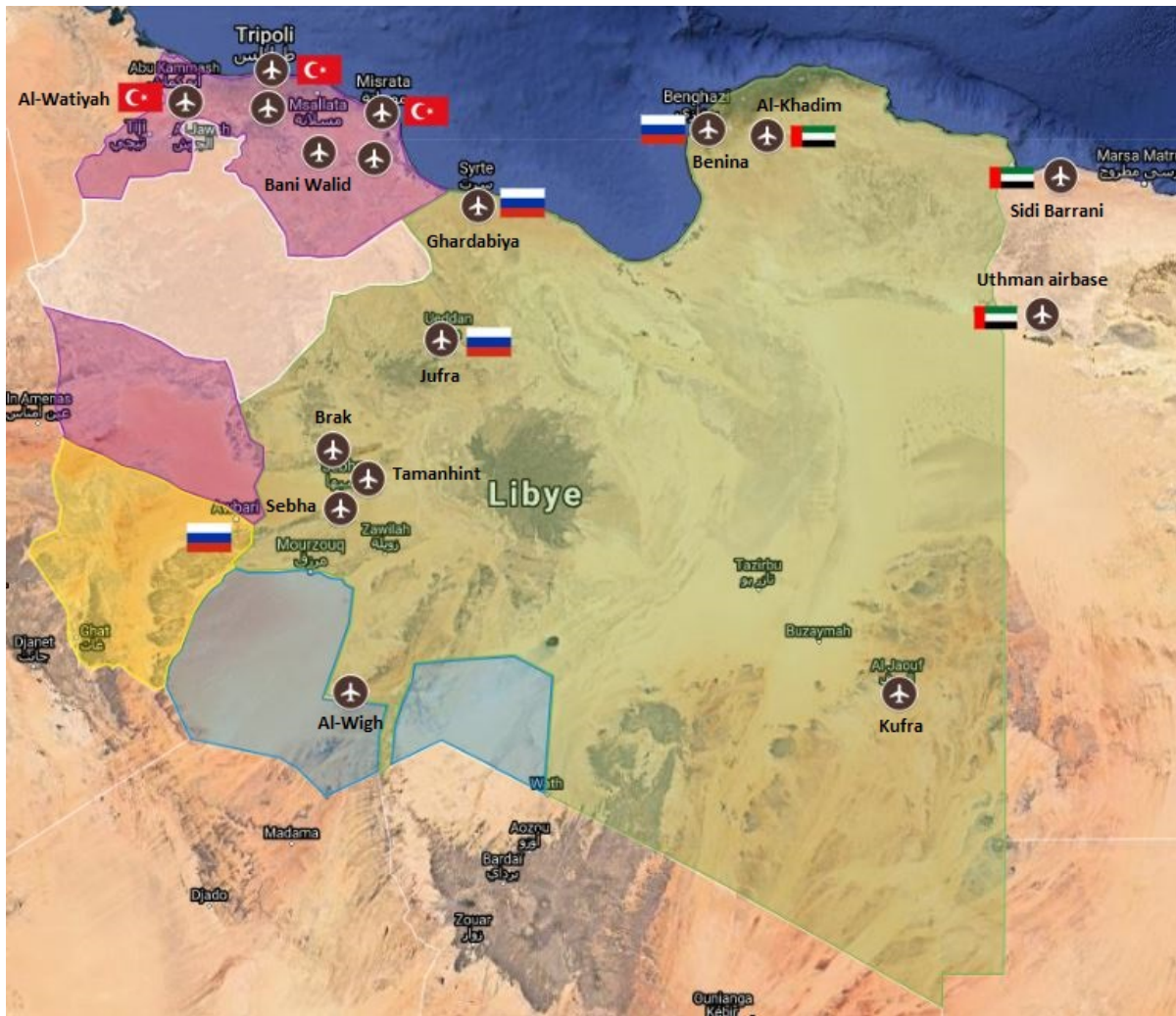
³ « The Anti ISIS Coalition – 25-31 March », [Eye on ISIS in Libya](#).

⁴ « Libya: Government Forces Control 8 Areas in 7 hours », *Middle East Monitor*, 16 April 2020.

and, ultimately, turning the civil war into a proxy one. By June, the GNA, with the support of Turkey, had taken over the Al-Watayah base, surrounding cities (Badr, Tiji, Al-Asabah) and Tarhuna, inflicting a major blow to the LNA offensive. From there, Turkey and the UAE started an endless race moving the conflict in the central city of Sirte, Muammar Qaddafi's birthplace. The city could be the scene of a show of force involving the deployment of heavy artillery, foreign fighters and naval manoeuvres off Sirte coast.

This research note aims to analyze the military support provided by Turkey and the UAE to their respective *protégés*, namely the LNA and the GNA. It complements the previous paper on the role and incentives of both countries to intervene in Libya⁵. Ankara and Abu Dhabi are fighting to promote their political conception and ensure their economic interests. More to that, Libya offers the possibility for the two countries to assert their regional influence, through diplomacy for the UAE and military action for Turkey. Ultimately, the note, which also explores Russia's increasing involvement in Libya, analyzes the consequences of the LNA's setbacks from a local and regional perspective.




⁵ Aude Thomas, « [Islamisme, livraisons d'armes, et désinformation : le rôle des puissances régionales dans le conflit libyen](#) », *Notes de la FRS*, n°43/2020, 26 mai 2020.



Area control and foreign presence in Libya as of July 5th, 2020




Legend

Foreign presence / support

-  Russia (including PMC Wagner)
-  UAE
-  Turkey

Source: The author's using open source information

Area control

-  GNA forces
-  LNA forces
-  Tubu
-  Tuareg
-  Amazigh / Local armed groups

1. Turkey: exercising the full military capabilities spectrum in Libya

Turkey's role in Libya goes way back before Tripoli's offensive in 2019. Already in 2014, Ankara was providing support, through Misrata, to Islamist armed groups fighting Khalifa Haftar forces in Benghazi (2014-2017)⁶. However, this has reached an unprecedented level in recent months with Turkey officially announcing its support to the GNA last summer and

⁶ Michael Young, « [Into the Libya Vortex](#) », Carnegie Middle East Center, 14 January 2020.

supplying foreign fighters, upgraded military equipment, and deploying Turkish personnel to operate them. Ankara is willing to promote political Islam, embodied by the GNA, revive projects and extend its presence in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Prior to Ankara's intervention in Libya, GNA forces relied mainly on Manpads and small artillery to protect assets⁷. In June 2019, the Turkish President acknowledged the *"military cooperation agreement with Libya"*. He further declared: *"Egypt and the UAE's [Crown Prince] Mohammed bin Zayed are supporting Haftar's forces. They were very strong in terms of equipment and drones. Now there is a balance after the latest reprisals. We will update the security agreement we have with Libya"*⁸.



Satellite imagery of Bayraktar drones at Mitiga International Airport in February 2020. Source: Twitter Libyan citizen | 1 May 2020 ([link](#))

In May 2019, significant Turkish military support started to appear on social media. On May 18, 2019, Amazon cargo delivered a dozen of BMC Kirpi and Vuran armoured vehicles to the GNA at the Tripoli harbour⁹. Around the same time, Turkey provided the GNA with its first four drones and military personnel to operate them¹⁰.

Initially, the small fleet of Turkish drones and the lack of air defense systems hindered the GNA's attempts to overcome Emirati and Russian-manufactured military equipment provided to LNA forces. It is worth noting that Turkey's support remained light at the beginning of the campaign against Tripoli. In September 2019, the enhanced cooperation

⁷ Ben Fishman, Conor Hiney, « [What Turned the Battle for Tripoli?](#) », The Washington Institute, 6 May 2020.

⁸ Ragip Soylu, «Turkey Sold Arms and Equipment to UN-backed Libyan Government, Erdogan Confirms », *Middle East Eye*, 20 June 2019.

⁹ Defense Turk 18 May 2019 #Amazon, Ugandalı Gürsel 18 May 2019 #Kirpi, Eğitimci 19 May 2019 #Kirpi.

¹⁰ الشويهدى [Al-Shawihdy] 31 May 2019 #drones, SMM Libya 31 May 2019 #Turkish military expert.

and the presence of Wagner contractors “enabled the LNA to slowly grab parts of the city outskirts”¹¹. **Pro-GNA setbacks paved the way for a Turkish full-scale military intervention.**

In December 2019, the spectrum of Turkish support rose and extended significantly following the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the GNA¹². The controversial agreement – infringing upon Cyprus and Greece Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ) – encompasses an expansion of Turkey’s EEZ, granting Ankara rights to conduct further drills in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, and heightens security and military cooperation¹³. Following the agreement, journalistic and social media sources testified to a surge of military equipment provision to the government of Tripoli.

Drones are among the most significant game changers in the conflict. Turkish-manufactured Bayraktar TB2 drones have been located at the Mitiga International Airport (Tripoli), the Misrata International Airport, and, seemingly, Zuwara¹⁴. In July 2019, journalistic sources revealed that eight additional TB2 were purportedly delivered to the GNA at the Misrata airport¹⁵. They were transferred to Misrata to be assembled after the targeting of Mitiga operation room. It is worth noting that since May 2019, Misrata air academy infrastructures have been improved to accommodate newly arrived drones¹⁶. According to journalistic sources, 86 TB2 drones are operating in Libya¹⁷ and a dozen were downed this year¹⁸. Social media have also testified to the presence of Polish-manufactured UAV loitering munitions Warmate, Israeli-manufactured Harpy loitering munitions¹⁹ and Orbiter-3 drones²⁰. As to the latter, conflicting information has not allowed to identify the perpetrator/owner. In April 2020, pro-LNA and Turkish social media accounts reported that Turkey was operating TAI Anka-S drones from Tunisia’s Ramada airport²¹. French daily *Le Monde* confirmed the deployment of Anka-S drones in Libya without acknowledging their

¹¹ Jalel Harchaoui, “[The Libyan Civil War is about to Get Worse](#)”, *Foreign Policy*, 18 March 2020.

¹² The MoU was signed on November 27th, 2019. Following the agreement, social media sources revealed that the GNA’s Interior Ministry had ordered the transfer of several hundred millions to the Turkish SSTEK manufacturer.

¹³ The military cooperation includes the “*provision of training, consultancy, experience transfer, planning and material support*” (Abdullah Bozkurt, « Full Text of new Turkey, Libya Sweeping Security, Military Cooperation Deal Revealed », *NordicMonitor*, 14 December 2019).

¹⁴ « الإعلام الحربي: سلاح الجو يدمر مدرجا للطائرات المسييرة التركية في زوارة » [Military media: the Air Force destroys a runway for Turkish drones in Zuwara], *Libya24*, 7 May 2020.

¹⁵ « Favez Sarraj to Get Eight more Turkish Drones », *Africa Intelligence*, 4 July 2019; « More Turkish-Made Drones Delivered to Misrata for the GNA », *Al-Marsad*, 9 July 2019.

¹⁶ The UN Panel Expert on Libya S/2019/914, UNSC, 9 December 2019, p. 36.

¹⁷ Aykan Erdemir, Varsha Koduvayur, Philip Kowalski, « [Turkish Proxy Gains in Libya are no Cure for Ankara’s Growing Isolation](#) », *The National Interest*, 26 May 2020.

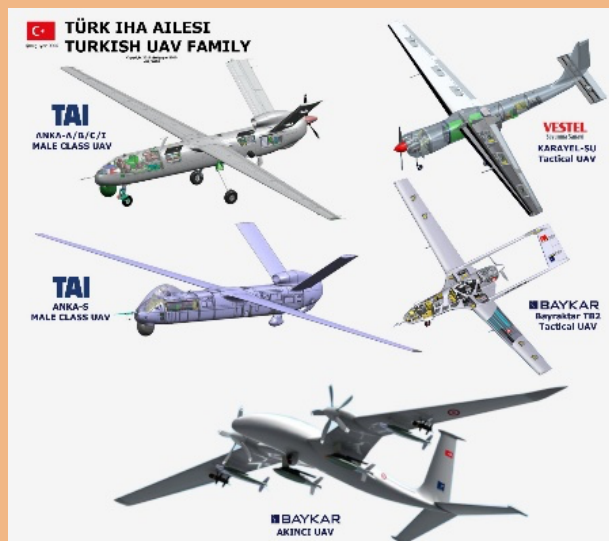
¹⁸ Arnaud Delalande, « Russian Jets in Libya: Why Haftar’s MiGs will ‘Change Nothing’ on the Ground », *Middle East Eye*, 26 May 2020.

¹⁹ Harry Boone 15 April 2020 #[Polish Warmate drone](#), Oded Berkowitz 14 May 2020 #[Polish Warmate drone](#), Rob Lee 6 April 2020 #[Harpy drone](#); « Turkish Forces Employ Israeli-Made Loitering Munition to Strike Libyan National Army (Photos) », *South Front*, 6 April 2020.

²⁰ Metin Gurcan, « Battle for Air Supremacy Heats up in Libya despite Covid-19 Outbreak », *Al-Monitor*, 6 April 2020.

²¹ ابن ليبيا السرتاوي [Ibn Libya Al-Sirtawi] 22 April 2020 #[Anka S](#), ليبيا وطني [Libya Watani] 19 April 2020 #[Anka](#), Akar Hakan 22 April 2020 #[Anka and TB2](#).

station base²². Other media sources reportedly mentioned the imminent deployment of Akinci drones in Libya in May and June 2020²³. However, the Akinci model is seemingly still undergoing tests and is expected to enter service only early next year.



Source : Twitter Miguyan2000 01/10/2018 ([link](#))

The **Bayraktar TB2** is an armed drone manufactured by Baykar Defense with a range of 150 km, a maximum payload of 55 kg, and an endurance of 20 hrs²⁴. It is therefore considered as a “tactical MALE” (Medium Altitude Long Endurance) by Baykar. It has been operated by the Turkish Land forces since 2014. Turkey has deployed radio repeaters in Misrata and Khoms and route segments have been used to increase TB2 operational range²⁵, bringing the Jufra airbase under the TB2 range. It is used to carry out strikes and as a spotter for artillery. TB2 drones are seemingly equipped with Yatagan 40mm laser-guided miniature missiles and MAM-L smart micro munitions²⁶.

The other unmanned aerial system used by Turkey in Libya is the **Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) Anka-S**, a true MALE armed drone operated since 2018 by the Turkish Air Force, which owns at least 10 aircraft. Its payload, of up to 250 kg, includes an array of sensors (electro-optical, SAR/GMTI) and munitions with two UMTAS missiles. The Anka-S is able to carry on beyond line of sight operations thanks to its satellite data link. As a traditional MALE system, the Anka-S drone “requires more exploitation and maintenance” and additional logistics to be deployed on short runways and routes²⁷.

Among their tactical achievements, these drones, employed potentially in coordination with electronic warfare capabilities, have reportedly executed suppression of enemy air defense operations, destroying several Russian surface-to-air Pantsir systems²⁸.

²² Frédéric Bobin, « En Libye, Khalifa Haftar accumule les revers en Tripolitaine », *Le Monde*, 18 mai 2020; Arnaud Delalande 20 May 2020 [#Anka S](#).

²³ Jalel Harchaoui 25 May 2020 [#Akinci](#). Bashir Alzawawi 21 June 2020 [#Akinci](#).

²⁴ « [Bayraktar TB2 Tactical UAV](#) », Army Technology. Performance information is provided on Baykar Defense's website: <https://baykardefense.com/uav-15.html>.

²⁵ Arnaud Delalande, « Libya: Drones Test Laboratory for A New Type of Air Warfare », *Air & Cosmos*, 15 November 2019.

²⁶ Libyan citizen 31 May 2020 [#Yatagan](#), Oded Berkowitz 13 May 2020 [#MAM-L](#).

²⁷ Arnaud Delalande, « Libya: Drones Test Laboratory for A New Type of Air Warfare », *op. cit.*; also see TAI Anka-S website: <https://www.tusas.com/uploads/2019/12/anka-unmanned-aerial-vehicle-flyer.pdf>

²⁸ HARM, « Lethal Stalkers: How Turkish Drones Are Neutralizing Haftar's Pantsirs in Libya (BDA) », T-Intelligence, 22 May 2020.

Ankara has developed its own domestic industry to circumvent complex regulatory measures regarding the drone market²⁹. Turkey has adopted an alternative approach to build its air capacity by manufacturing its own-armed drones. The deployment of drones in Syria and Libya has given Turkey a significant advantage over its adversaries while allowing it to position itself as a serious military exporter. In January 2019, Ukraine announced it would purchase 12 TB2 in a deal estimated to \$69 million. Pakistan and Qatar also expressed their interest for Turkish drones³⁰. In March 2020, Turkish Aerospace Industries was awarded a \$240 million contract by the Tunisian government to provide six Anka-S drones and three ground control stations and associated technologies³¹. Drones have become the “*crown jewel of the Turkish defense industry*” and represent a good way to renew Turkey air power, and make it a key player in the air domain³².

The equipment provided was used as a bargaining chip to obtain economic compensation from the GNA. As Turkey enhanced support to GNA forces, drones started to challenge the UAE/LNA air supremacy. Drones combined with air defense systems allowed the GNA to expand its battle space and thwart the LNA’s advance by targeting supply lines and strategic sites. They inflicted severe damage to LNA forces during GNA’s Peace Storm operation in the vicinity of the Al-Watayah airbase³³ and in southern Tripoli.

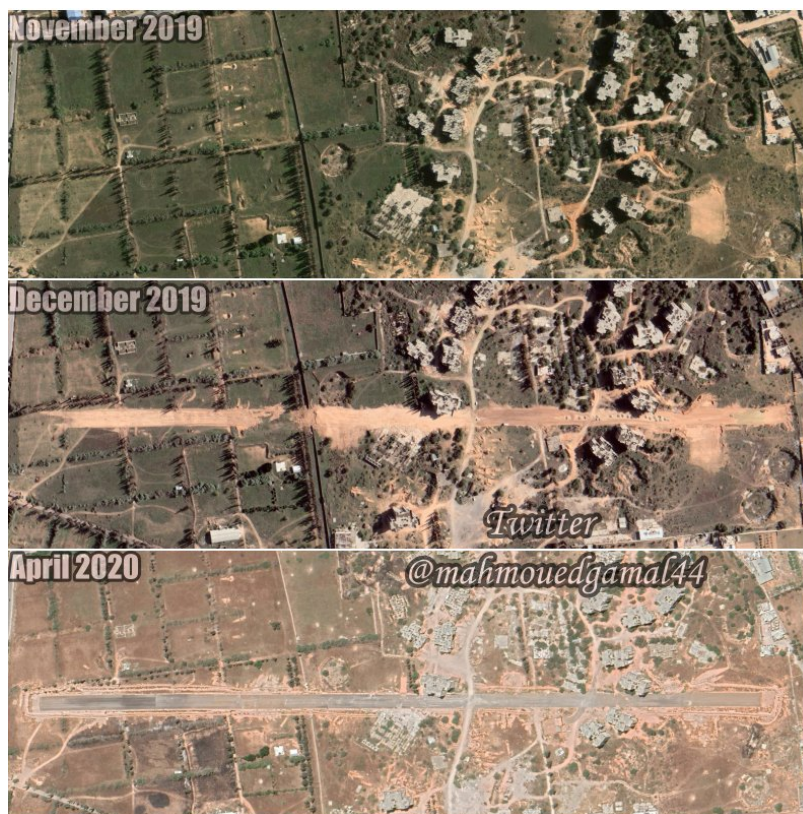
²⁹ The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) aims to prevent the proliferation of missiles and drones (Paul Iddon, « Turkey’s Effective Drone Campaign over Syria’s Idlib », *Ahval*, 10 March 2020).

³⁰ Abhilash Halappanavar, « The Turkish Quest for Drone Supremacy », *IndraStra*, 27 May 2020.

³¹ According to David Axe, « [Turkey is the Middle East’s Newest Drone Super Power](#) », *The National Interest*, 9 May 2020.

³² Waleed Safi, « Young Engineer has Married Erdogan’s Daughter and Made Turkey Regional Drone Superpower », *Information*, 7 May 2020.

³³ Jalel Harchaoui 19 March 2020 #[Attack Al-Watayah](#).



Building of an airstrip in Tripoli's Banana area.

Source: Twitter, Libyan National Army 24 May 2020 ([link](#))

In November 2019, satellite imagery suggested that the construction of an airstrip (1 km long and 32 m wide) was in progress in Tripoli's Banana area³⁴. Such construction boosts the resilience of the GNA in the face of LNA airstrikes by multiplying launching airstrips. According to satellite imagery, work to clear the site started between late November and early December 2019, while the paving began in late December. It is worth noting that the construction started around the same time Turkey and the GNA signed the MoU³⁵.

In January 2020, while Turkey and Russia were pushing for a ceasefire, Ankara deployed several air defense systems, including an AN MPQ-64 Sentinel radar, MIM 23 Hawk medium-range surface-to-air missiles (SAM), ACV-30 Korkut self-propelled anti-aircraft gun (SPAAG) systems and the HISAR-A short-range SAM in and around Mitiga and Misrata airports³⁶. Besides, Turkey deployed two electronic warfare systems: one Milkar-3A3 V/UHF radio jamming system and one Koral land-based jamming system of surveillance and fire control radars, an equivalent of the notorious Russian Krasukha-2 system.

³⁴ Ahmed 11 May 2020 #[Airstrip Banana project](#).

³⁵ Joseph Trevithick, « Bizarre Airstrip is Being Built Right between Apartment Towers Near Libyan Capital », *The War Zone*, 30 December 2019.

³⁶ Julian Röpcke 17 January 2020 #[Korkut](#), سامح العروسي [Sameh Al-Aroussi] 17 January 2020 #[Korkut](#), Omar Lazio 20 January 2020 #[MIM 23 Hawk](#). « Turkish Troops Set up Air Defense Systems at Mitiga International Airport Near Tripoli: Reports », *South Front*, 17 January 2020; Ben Fishman, Conor Hiney, « [What Turned the Battle for Tripoli?](#) », *op. cit.*

The seizure of Sirte by the LNA on January 6th, 2020 might have prompted Ankara to increase its support. Turkish military deliveries and drone-oriented strategy proved effective. On May 17th, GNA forces seized the Al-Watiyah airbase after three attempts. According to Metin Gurcan, the LNA's Pantsir S-1 defense system failed to respond due to the interference of Turkish Koral radar jammers³⁷.

In June, LNA forces withdrew from Tarhuna – a strategic supply line –, allowing the GNA to capture the city. Turkey had seemingly anticipated the LNA's departure – suggesting talks on the matter between Turkey and Russia. A few days before, indeed, Ankara sent to Libya T-122 Sakarya multiple-launch rocket systems and T-155 Firtina self-propelled guns. Social media sources purportedly confirmed T-122 Sakarya deployment in Tarhuna³⁸. Ankara also provided vehicles and additional artillery in January 2020 including: FNSS ACV-15 armoured combat vehicles, Oerlikon GDF-002 anti-aircraft machine guns, 155mm howitzers, and Roketsan 300³⁹.

In addition, Ankara provided the GNA with a significant work force. Up to 6,000 Syrian fighters (Al-Mutasim Brigade, Suleiman Shah Brigade and Sultan Murad Division) were sent to Tripoli. According to *The Independent*, “the GNA was originally promised up to 9,000 fighters but had ‘recruiting challenges’”⁴⁰. In January 2020, a few days before the Berlin summit, President Erdogan declared: “in order for the legitimate government in Libya to remain standing and for stability to be established, we are now sending our soldiers to this country”⁴¹. Turkey deployed approximately 80 Turkish personnel in Tripoli with ten officers tasked with training cadets at the Mitiga military academy and 40 others to operate radar jamming systems.

In August 2019, Turkey established a command and control centre, “common to Turkish army and secret services (MIT)” in Tripoli⁴². To ensure the command and control of its air defense, Ankara was also planning to install an HERIKKS Air Defense Early Warning Command and Control System. The objective behind such a deployment is to create a layered area denial capability to protect the GNA's drones ground stations and launching airstrips. Turkey also planned to deploy other C3 systems, including the fire support automation systems ADOP-2000 to manage artillery fires as well as the tactical area communications system TASMUS to network Turkish-GNA operations⁴³. Nevertheless, no information was published confirming or denying the deployment of these two systems in Libya.

³⁷ Metin Gurcan, « Battle for Air Supremacy Heats up in Libya despite Covid-19 Outbreak », *op. cit.*

³⁸ « Turkey Deploys T-122 Sakarya and T-155 Firtina in Libya », *Global Defense Corp*, 31 May 2020; Turan Oguz 28 May 2020 #[T-122 Sakarya](#), Oded Berkowitz 30 January 2020 #[T-155 Firtina](#).

³⁹ تاقرفت نيوز [Taqrifat News] 31 March 2020 #[ACV-15](#), Oded Berkowitz 31 March 2020 #[ACV-15](#), Defense Mural 30 January 2020 #[Turkish military shipment](#), Mzahem Alsaloum 31 January 2020 #[Turkish military shipment](#), Babak Taghvaei 30 January 2020 #[Turkish military shipment](#).

⁴⁰ Bel Trew, Rajaai Bourhan, « Inside the Murky World of Libya's Mercenaries », *The Independent*, 16 June 2020.

⁴¹ Tuvan Gumrukcu, Ece Toksabay, « Erdogan Says Turkey Starting Troop Deployment to Libya », Reuters, 16 January 2020.

⁴² Marie Jégo, Madjid Zerrouky, « Libye : les visées turques de Recep Tayyip Erdogan en Tripolitaine », *Le Monde*, 23 June 2020.

⁴³ Metin Gurcan, « Could Fragile Cease-fire Lead to Peace in Libya? », *Al-Monitor*, 13 January 2020.

Beyond the Libya battlefield, in April, Turkey gave a foretaste of a potential direct involvement when a Turkish frigate fired a Standard MR SAM off Sabratha coast, aiming reportedly at a LNA drone⁴⁴. A few weeks later, 16 Turkish F-16 performed a mission with Turkish Naval Forces in the central Mediterranean⁴⁵. The Hellenistic Air Force departed from Crete airbases to intercept Turkish air fighters⁴⁶. On May 17th, social media reported the presence of a Turkish frigate near the Al-Mellitah oil and gas complex. Missiles were fired from the Turkish frigate in the direction of the Al-Watiyah airbase, reportedly downing a Wing Loong drone⁴⁷. **This show of force could be the signal of Turkey bargaining for additional economic benefits from the GNA.** It is worth noting that the Turkish Petroleum Corporation submitted an application to seek authorization from the GNA to explore the eastern Mediterranean⁴⁸. In May, a Turkish frigate was spotted patrolling near Misrata while an Italian vessel was conducting a mission. **European naval forces might have to deal with an increasing Turkish presence in the Mediterranean Sea**⁴⁹. On June 9th, a Turkish frigate and a Koral system were moved off / to Misrata, reportedly to provide air cover to GNA forces advancing towards Sirte⁵⁰. Other sources reported the deployment of the Koral system close to Sirte⁵¹. On June 11th, Turkish F-16 conducted another aerial operation off Libya coast⁵². Eventually, the deployment of S-125 air defense missiles in Sirte in July confirmed Turkey's ambition to extend control over the city⁵³.

Thus, Libya could witness a demonstration of the full extent of Turkey's military capabilities – as highlighted by the abovementioned series of manoeuvres – to deter any LNA/UAE's operation in Tripolitania and increase its military footprint further east – closer to the negotiated EEZ. However, Turkey's support to a future GNA offensive in the Oil Crescent – a long way from Tripoli – faces military shortfalls. First, its air power was weakened in 2016 when the Turkish government purged the Air Force in the aftermath of the attempted putsch (4,215 military personnel)⁵⁴. Moreover, Turkish forces lack air transport and bombing capabilities. Second, forward basing in Algeria, Tunisia and Libya is not a conceivable option for various reasons⁵⁵. Turkey's personnel shortage could be compensated by US cover support – if the Trump administration is willing to offer it – in an

⁴⁴ Mahmoud Gamal 1 April 2020 #[RIM-66 SAM](#).

⁴⁵ T.C. Millî Savunma Bakanlığı 17 April 2020 #[Turkish Naval Forces](#).

⁴⁶ « HAF F-16s Scrambled to Intercept Turkish Fighters », *Itamilradar*, 19 April 2020.

⁴⁷ Oded Berkowitz 18 May 2020 #[missiles fired](#).

⁴⁸ « الأناضول: البترول التركية تطلب إذنًا للتنقيب في ليبيا » [Anatolia: Turkish oil requests permission to explore Libya], Reuters, 14 May 2020.

⁴⁹ Andreas Mountzouroulias 25 May 2020 [Turkish frigate](#).

⁵⁰ Emadeddin Badi 9 June 2020 #[air defense system](#), OSINT Editor 9 June 2020 #[Turkish frigate](#).

⁵¹ Selami Haktan 9 June 2020 #[Koral system](#), Woland 10 June 2020 #[Koral system](#).

⁵² « Massive Turkish Aerial Operation off Libya (and More...) », *Itamilradar*, 11 June 2020.

⁵³ In addition to S-125, Turkey also purchased MARS-L I-band radars and P-180U radar from Kiyv to be deployed in Syria and Libya (Flynn Braun, « Turkey has Acquired S-125 SAMS and will Use them against Russia, Syria, and Libya », Free News, 18 May 2020; « Libya'da sıcak gelişme! Ukrayna'dan alınan S-125'ler aktif edildi » [Hot development in Libya! S-125s from Ukraine activated], Haber7, 5 July 2020.

⁵⁴ Abdullah Bozkurt, « Turkish Air Force Crippled after Mass Purge of Pilots by Erdoğan Government », *Nordic Monitor*, 8 January 2020.

⁵⁵ Metin Gurcan, « Turkey Gears up for Tougher Challenge in Libya as Conflict Heats up », *Al-Monitor*, 28 June 2020.

attempt to counter Russia's presence in Libya. Finally, Turkey is still expecting its first amphibious assault ship and is missing medium/high altitude air defense capabilities.

The Turkish presence in Libya can be expected to last, as illustrated by Turkish military deployments and diplomatic activities. According to Yeni Safak's report, Ankara is negotiating the implementation of two bases in Libya. Al-Watiyah is to become a "drone hub" and Misrata – a naval base to secure the supply chain from Turkey⁵⁶. Let us recall that two MIM-23 Hawk systems were deployed in July at the Al-Watiyah airbase before being targeted by an unidentified aircraft a few days later⁵⁷. Furthermore, on June 17th, a high-ranking delegation, including the Turkish Foreign Affairs and Treasury and Finance ministers as well as the head of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), met with GNA's Prime minister, Fayez Sarraj, Interior minister, Fathi Bashagha, and Foreign Affairs minister, Mohamed Taher Siala. They discussed "cooperation on security, investment, infrastructure and oil" as well as Turkish support "to rebuild the Libyan banking system" and energy exploration and oil transportation⁵⁸. A few weeks earlier, the Turkish private security company *Sadat* had won a tender in partnership with the Libyan *Security Side* company to train pro-GNA fighters⁵⁹.

2. The UAE's military venture in Libya

The UAE has provided the LNA with both material and direct support since 2014.

2.1. The UAE's failed campaign against Tripoli

The UAE's influence in Libya materialized in 2016 with the upgrading of military infrastructures in Cyrenaica and the subsequent delivery of military equipment. Satellite imagery collected between 2014 and 2017 by the UN panel on Libya highlighted the building up of hangars to shelter drones and aircraft and of an additional apron at the Al-Khadim base. In addition to aircraft, the UAE provided the LNA with various armoured vehicles and pickup trucks⁶⁰. In 2019, UAE shipments departing mostly from the UAE towards the Sidi Barrani base (Egypt), Benghazi and Al-Khadim (Libya) increased significantly as highlighted by the flight data collected by Gerjon⁶¹. The UAE became the first military provider for the LNA's military campaign against Tripoli. **Abu Dhabi's massive support highlights its fear to see an**

⁵⁶ It is worth noting that Turkish Naval Forces Commander Adm. Adnan Ozbal met with Libyan officials in Tripoli on June 30th («Turkey Tests Military Flights to Libya amid Reports of Establishing Bases », *Middle East Eye*, 12 June 2020; Enes Canli, Sarp Ozer, « Turkish Navy Commander Pays Visit to Libya », *Anadolu Agency*, 1 July 2020.

⁵⁷ Samir 4 July 2020 #MIM-23 Hawk.

⁵⁸ «Top Turkish Officials Visit Libyan Capital Tripoli », *Daily Sabah*, 17 June 2020; Bobby Ghosh, « Erdogan's Ambitions for Turkey in Libya are Growing », *Bloomberg Opinion*, 23 June 2020.

⁵⁹ « Comment l'opérateur militaire turc Sadat a transformé l'alliance Erdogan-Sarraj en opportunité de business », *Africa Intelligence*, 8 June 2020.

⁶⁰ The UN Panel Expert on Libya S/2017/466, UNSC, 1 June 2017, pp. 26-32, p. 43.

⁶¹ Gerjon | חריון 9 April 2020 #UAE flights.

Islamic regime emerge in its regional environment. Given Turkey's ambitions, it is unlikely that this concern will fade away.

At the beginning of combat operations in April 2019, both conflicting parties relied heavily on a small and aging air fleet. Drones rapidly entered the battle to compensate this deficiency in airpower. A few weeks later, first evidence of drones used by the LNA in southern Tripoli appeared on social media. According to Arnaud Delalande, recovered shrapnel of Blue Arrow-7 (BA 7) missiles in Tripoli's neighbourhoods and southern cities highlighted the deployment of Chinese-manufactured Wing Loong II drones⁶². **In 2019, drones – seemingly operated from the Jufra airbase – played a decisive role in the campaign against Tripoli, giving LNA forces air cover to advance northwards.**

The MALE Wing Loong is based on the old US-manufactured Predator drone and is a component of Middle East air forces, including Egypt's, the UAE's and Saudi Arabia's. Restrictive US export laws, as well as the far higher cost of the more capable General Atomics MQ-9, have helped Beijing's drone sales. Riyadh reportedly ordered 330 Wing Loong for a cost of more than \$10 billion⁶³. The Wing Loong/Chengdu Pterodactyl-I was developed by the Chengdu Aircraft Industry Group and first introduced in Libya in 2016. Its effectiveness was proven during combat and reconnaissance missions for the LNA, at that time entangled in fighting with Islamist armed groups in Benghazi. As many other MALEs, the Wing Loong takes benefit from a SATCOM link for Beyond Line of Sight (BLOS) operations. It can carry bombs, rockets or air-to-ground missiles with a maximum payload of 400 kg⁶⁴. Thus, the superiority of the capabilities of the Wing Loong compared to those of the TB2 provided the LNA with a significant tactical advantage at the beginning of the conflict.

The UAE's support to the LNA increased gradually as its proxy came across brutal opposition in southern Tripoli. The UAE provided massive aerial support to the LNA in order to compensate the weaknesses of the later on the ground. According to Jalel Harchaoui, *"the UAE carried out more than 900 air strikes in the greater Tripoli area last year using Chinese combat drones and, occasionally, French-made fighter jets"*⁶⁵. The LNA employs several other drones: the MALE CH-4B Rainbow, built by the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC), a competitor of the Wing Loong. Jordan sold six CH-4B to the LNA in June 2019. The *"CH-4 has a [...] payload of 345 kg in addition to its electro-optical turret and synthetic aperture radar"* and an endurance of up to 40 hrs⁶⁶. The Wing Loong and the CH-4 are stationed at the Al-Khadim airbase. As the Jordanian military's complaints and the Iraqi fleet's low availability suggest, the CH-4 suffers from poor reliability and capability shortfalls due to technology standards lagging in many aspects behind Western ones, particularly regarding the propulsion, unsuited for warm climate. It remains unclear whether the Wing Loong experiences the same problems but its low cost and the similar technological

⁶² Arnaud Delalande, « Libya: Drones Test Laboratory for A New Type of Air Warfare », *op. cit.*

⁶³ David Axe, « [Why is China Providing Drones to Fuel Libya's Civil War?](#) », *The National Interest*, 29 January 2020.

⁶⁴ Arnaud Delalande, « Libya: Drones Test Laboratory for A New Type of Air Warfare », *op. cit.*

⁶⁵ Oliver Imhof, « Libya: a Year of Living Dangerously », *Airwars*, 6 April 2020.

⁶⁶ « Jordanian UAVs Apparently Sold to Libya », *Defense Web*, 7 April 2020.

generation suggest it could⁶⁷. According to the UN Panel Expert on Libya, LNA forces have also relied on Orlan-10 drones, Mohadjer variant, Yabhon-HMD⁶⁸ and Israeli-manufactured drones to conduct ISR missions⁶⁹. Fighter jets deployed at the Al-Khadim airbase and Sidi Barrani were also used to conduct airstrikes on GNA strategic infrastructures. Among significant incidents reported were the alleged UAE bombing of the migrant centre in July 2019 and of the cadet military academy in Tripoli in January 2020⁷⁰. According to Airwars data, the recorded 2,034 air and artillery strikes for both parties have caused the death of 324 to 458 civilians and the wounding of 576 to 850 others since April 4th, 2019⁷¹.

Ankara's support to the GNA prompted Abu Dhabi to boost military shipping to LNA forces to hold the upper hand in the conflict. In January 2020, social media analyst Gerjon recorded 108 flights operated by the UAE to Egypt and Libya⁷².

The predominance of drones in combat operations has led both conflicting parties to use missile and artillery air defense systems to counter them. The UAE provided the LNA with such capabilities in order to protect supply lines located in southern Tripoli. The defense architecture relies mainly on Russian-manufactured weaponry. In 2018, the UAE delivered Pantsir S-1 air defense systems. The Emirati model is different from the Russian one as it is mounted on the German-built MAN SX 45 truck⁷³. In May 2020, the GNA, with the support of Turkey, targeted approximately nine Pantsir systems in Al-Watiyah, Sirte, Al-Washka, Suq Al-Ahad and Tarhuna⁷⁴. It is worth noting that pro-GNA armed groups, following the seizure of the base, found a Pantsir manual in Arabic. A video was published on social media purportedly showing Emirati personnel training LNA counterparts on the use of Pantsir system⁷⁵. **The damage inflicted to the LNA's defense suggests potential difficulties in operating the Russian system. More to that, it highlights the inability of UAE/LNA forces to integrate the use of such military equipment during ground manoeuvres.**

Chinese technology represents a significant share of LNA's weaponry. Over the past years, **China has emerged as a major military supplier (small arms and light weapons and high-tech weapons) to African countries**⁷⁶. According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, China has *"made major inroads in the drone market and has become the world's*

⁶⁷ « [Chinese Military Equipment Lacks Quality, Say Experts](#) », ANI, 5 November 2019.

⁶⁸ The UN Panel Expert on Libya S/2019/914, UNSC, 9 December 2019, p.38.

⁶⁹ Abu Dhabi has reportedly obtained from Israel the shipping of Israeli-manufactured drones to support LNA forces (Julie Kebbi, « Dans l'Ouest libyen, Haftar accumule les défaites », *L'Orient Le Jour*, 15 avril 2020).

⁷⁰ Declan Walsh, « Airstrike Kills Dozens of Migrants at Detention Center in Libya », *The New York Times*, 3 July 2019; « Libya: Tripoli Military School Hit by Deadly Airstrike », *DW*, 5 January 2020.

⁷¹ Oliver Imhof, « Libya: a Year of Living Dangerously », *op. cit.*

⁷² Gerjon 23 February 2020 [#UAE flights](#).

⁷³ H. I. Sutton, « One of Russia's Most Advanced Missiles Systems Captured In Libya », *Forbes*, 19 May 2020.

⁷⁴ Oded Berkowitz 20 May 2020 [#Pantsir](#).

⁷⁵ Emadeddin Badi 8 June 2020 [#Emirati training](#).

⁷⁶ China accounts for 13 % of arms export to Africa. According to Alexandra Kuimova, a researcher with SIPRI, Beijing *"is generally growing as an arms exporter and shows similar patterns as Russia in a way of giving weapons with less political conditions"* (« [Russian Arms Exports to Africa: Moscow's Long-Term Strategy](#) », Press Release, 30 May 2020).

*largest supplier of drones for military use*⁷⁷. Pro-LNA fighters were spotted with anti-UAV DHI-UAV-D-1000JHV2 and DZ-03 guns while pro-GNA fighters were seen in possession of Jiangsu Digital Eagle QR-07S3⁷⁸. In both cases, anti-UAV guns were manufactured in China. It appears that the UAE is relying on Chinese-manufactured equipment to support the LNA. The GNA has discovered several Chinese-manufactured weapons and ammunition such as FN-6 Manpads and GP6 laser-guided 155 mm artillery projectiles⁷⁹.

In May, despite the UAE's military deliveries, the GNA forces seized western cities, prompting the withdrawal of the LNA and foreign fighters. A number of Pantsir systems were installed further south in Nasmah and Mizdah in addition to those in Bani Walid and Tarhuna⁸⁰. The redeployment of assets suggested that the LNA forces and their allies were **paving their way out from Tripolitania towards Jufra (main command and control centre) while also securing roads leading to Fezzan**. On June 4th and 5th, pro-LNA forces pulled out from Tarhuna, facilitating its seizure by pro-GNA armed groups. LNA units reportedly dispatched to Jufra and Ajdabiya while others went south to secure the Sharara oilfield⁸¹. While advancing towards Tarhuna, GNA forces recovered important quantities of weapons and ammunition (FN-6 Manpads, 9M 133 Kornet, T-72 mines, MI-35 and AW109/AW139 helicopters, T-55 and T-62 tanks)⁸².

Since then, several elements have confirmed the UAE's continuous support to LNA forces through the provision of military equipment and foreign fighters. First, recorded flights coming from the UAE and Syria towards Egypt (Sidi Barrani and Ganaklis) and Libya (Al-Khadim and Benina Airport). Second, construction work at Benina Airport (Libya) since April 2020 and at the Uthman Air Base (Egypt) in June 2020. Last month, satellite imagery recorded several aircraft, including Ilyushin Il-76 – most certainly carrying military equipment – stationed at the Al-Khadim base⁸³. **These flights suggest that foreign sponsors are reinforcing LNA capabilities against a feared GNA-Turkish offensive against Sirte.**

The failed LNA campaign in Tripolitania forced the UAE to step aside as a main actor and pushed Russia into the limelight. The UAE remains the main sponsor – with the unofficial blessing of Russia and France – as highlighted by the abovementioned flights with Russia

⁷⁷ "China exported 10 UCAVs to two countries in 2009-2013, but over 2014-2018 it exported 153 to 13 countries, including several African countries" (Gisela Grieger, Eulalia Claros, «China's Growing Role as a Security Actor in Africa », European Parliamentary Research Service, October 2019, p. 10).

⁷⁸ Oded Berkowitz 1 April 2020 #DHI anti-UAV gun, Woland 4 May 2020 #DZ-03 anti-UAV gun, Oded Berkowitz 19 February 2020 #Jiangsu anti-UAV gun. For detailed information on DHI, DZ-03, Jiangsu anti-UAV gun models read: <https://www.dahuasecurity.com/asset/upload/uploads/soft/20181122/DHI-UAV-D-1000JHV2-datashet.pdf>; <http://www.uav-defender.com/ProductAtlas/fenlei2/57.html>; <https://www.digitaleagle-uav.com/QR-07S3-Portable-drone-jammer-pd6892290.html>

⁷⁹ N.R. Jenzen-Jones, «Chinese GP6 Guided Artillery Projectiles in Libya», *Armament Research*, 18 September 2019; Guns, Ganders, and Goats 4 June 2020 #Chinese Manpads.

⁸⁰ Jalel Harchaoui 25 May 2020 #Pantsir.

⁸¹ Libyan National Army 11 June 2020 #LNA units Fezzan.

⁸² Matthew Borie 4 June 2020 #FN-6 Manpads, Oded Berkowitz 4 June 2020 #FN-6 and Kornet, Oded Berkowitz 4 June 2020 #Helicopters and tanks, Frederic Gras 4 June 2020 #T-72 mines. A list of LNA military equipment seized by the GNA between the 2nd and 6th of June was gathered by [TSKmap](#).

⁸³ Gerjon | חריון 29 June 2020 #UAE flights, Gerjon | חריון 27 June 2020 #Benina Airport, Gerjon | חריון 26 June 2020 #Uthman Air Base, Gerjon | חריון 25 June 2020 #Ganaklis Air Base, Gerjon | חריון 24 June 2020 #Al-Khadim, Gerjon | חריון 1 July 2020 #Syrian aircraft.

now leading operations. Recent Russian manoeuvres and deployments suggest that Moscow is uncovering its support in order to deter further Turkish progress eastwards while also securing oil interests in the Oil Crescent and Fezzan region.

2.2. Russia's support to LNA forces: from the shadow to the limelight

Over the past years, Russia's support to the LNA has been gradual – from printing Libyan dinars to providing mercenaries and military equipment dispatched through Egypt and Syria. Since February 2020, the Russian Air Force has operated up to eight sorties per day – all sorties departing from Latakia (Syria)⁸⁴. On June 4th, a social media source revealed that a Russian flag cargo had transited through the Bosphorus, seemingly to deliver weapons to the LNA via the Benghazi port⁸⁵. A week later, a Russian cargo was denied authorization to land in Egypt/Libya (final destination was not available). Social media sources asserted that the United States had compelled Egypt to reduce its support to Russia⁸⁶. **Moscow's growing influence in Libya should be interpreted as a new chapter in the Libyan conflict.**

LNA/UAE defeats revealed the UAE's deficiencies in supporting a military campaign, thus propelling Russia into the limelight. The LNA's territorial losses led to military and strategic rearrangements. Moscow's support in Libya is linked to oil resources and the possibility of setting another base in the Mediterranean Sea. In May, Wagner contractors pulled out from southern Tripoli to the city of Bani Walid from where they moved to the Jufra airbase. Around the same time, 14 Mig-29 and Su-24 fighter jets and Buk missile systems were deployed to the Jufra airbase⁸⁷. One could interpret Russia's covert involvement in Tripoli's campaign so far as a lack of faith in Haftar's ability to conquer the capital and a pragmatic move should the military campaign turn sour. In March 2020, General S. Townsend, heading US AFRICOM, warned about Russia's destabilizing actions in Libya and potential anti-access and area denial capabilities. AFRICOM testified to the presence of a Spoon rest – a Russian-made mobile early warning radar system⁸⁸. General Townsend also referred to the presence of Wagner, a semi-state security force allegedly used by Russian oligarchs and the Kremlin to obtain contracts in turmoil African countries. Later in May, AFRICOM provided imagery of Russian fighters in Libya⁸⁹. US concern about Russia's footprint in Libya was further evidenced when AFRICOM reaffirmed its partnership with Tunisia and discussed ways to address mutual security by deploying the Security Force Assistant Brigade – *“a small training unit as part of a military assistance program [that] in no way implies combat military forces”*⁹⁰.

⁸⁴ « Dozens of Russian Flights to Libya », *Itamilradar*, 30 June 2020.

⁸⁵ Yörük Işık 4 June 2020 #[Russian flag vessel](#).

⁸⁶ LiveuMap MiddleEast, 11 June 2020 #[Russian air cargo](#).

⁸⁷ Aishwarya Rakesh, « Buk Missile Systems to Shield Haftar Army Base from Turkish F-16s », *Defense World*, 2 June 2020.

⁸⁸ « New Evidence of Russian Aircraft Active in Libyan Airspace », U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 18 June 2020.

⁸⁹ AFRICOM further evidenced “Russian interference” in June by publishing a video of Russian aircraft allegedly heading to Libya (US Africom 26 May 2020 #[MIG-29 aircraft](#), US Africom 5 June 2020 #[Russian aircraft](#)).

⁹⁰ « AFRICOM Commander Reaffirms Bilateral Partnership with Tunisia », U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 29 May 2020; AFRICOM 30 May 2020 #[Tunisia partnership](#).

Russia's support to the LNA could knock over Ankara's ambition. Six Russian Pantsir systems arrived in Sirte while SCUD-B missiles were seemingly moved from Benghazi to Sirte. However, the latter could be part of a communication campaign⁹¹. In addition, Wagner mercenaries were spotted in several locations in the Oil Crescent and southern Libya. On June 26th, the National Oil Corporation declared it was “*deeply concerned by the presence of Russian and other foreign mercenaries inside Sharara oilfield*”⁹². Tribes have expressed their concern over the presence of a foreign actor in the region and confirmed “Russian movements” “*between Sharara, El Feel and other deposits in the area*”⁹³. Russia has also transferred hundreds of Syrian fighters to Libya to secure coveted oilfields and take part in combat operations⁹⁴.

Foreign presence in the southern region bears the potential to heighten tensions between local tribes and populations. A meeting in Zuwara between US high-rank officials (the AFRICOM Commander and the US Ambassador to Libya) and GNA Prime Minister Fayez Sarraj highlighted the United States' concern over the Kremlin's intents in Libya⁹⁵. **Thus, the conflict could take another turn and reach the southern region with major powers (Russia and the US) stepping up their support to their respective protégés and allies in the conflict.**

Conclusion: looking at future national dynamics in Libya

Turkey's, the UAE's and Russia's military involvement in Libya has followed similar patterns of gradual escalation. The first phase consisted in providing their respective protégés with weapons and logistical support. The second phase saw foreign backers offering direct assistance, mostly mercenaries and combat air support, to the GNA and the LNA, entangled in southern Tripoli. During the siege of Tripoli, regional powers demonstrated their ability to conduct a drone-based support operation using low cost aircraft. Eventually, as the level of military capabilities increased for both parties, the third phase witnessed the deployment of air defense and electronic warfare systems. These deliveries aim at denying or at least thwarting the adversary's air support.

Turkey's and the GNA's recent successes in Tripolitania have boosted their ambition to extend the territorial control of Tripoli's government over Sirte and Jufra. Thus, an escalation of violence and a show of force in the Oil Crescent is to be expected as Sirte was declared a red line for Moscow and Cairo. In the meantime, **the GNA would need to consolidate its control and the implementation of a security architecture in conquered cities to avoid destabilisation.** Security operations targeting fuel smugglers and illegal migrants are being

⁹¹ « Why Egypt may not be Going to War in Libya », *Mada Masr*, 4 July 2020.

⁹² National Oil Corporation 26 June 2020 #[Russian mercenaries](#).

⁹³ « Libya: Here is the Draft of the Agreement for the Reopening of Oil Wells », *Agenzia Nova*, 30 June 2020.

⁹⁴ Richard Spencer, « Russia Orders in Mercenaries for Key Battle over Libyan Oilfields », *The Australian*, 7 July 2020; « Russian Mercenaries Enter Libyan Oil Field, as more Mercenaries Arrive from Syria », *Daily Sabah*, 6 July 2020.

⁹⁵ « U.S. Africa Command Supports Department of State, U.S. Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland Meeting in Libya », U.S. Africa Command Public Affairs, 23 June 2020.

conducted in Zawiya, Sabratha and Zuwara⁹⁶. **Preventing retaliation and looting will be an upmost challenge for the GNA's Interior Ministry.** Incidents have already been reported in April during the capture of western coastal cities, namely Sabratha and Surman, and recently in Tarhuna. According to UNSMIL, eight mass graves were discovered, the majority of them in Tarhuna. Following this revelation, a committee was established by the GNA's Justice Ministry to investigate "*all alleged cases of unlawful deaths*"⁹⁷. In addition, tensions between local Tripoli armed groups and Syrian fighters have emerged over the control of infrastructures and private properties⁹⁸. **The cohabitation could prove problematic in the near future and lead to clashes within the capital.**

As for the LNA coalition in Cyrenaica, it appears that **military officials and foreign supporters have tightened relations around Haftar for now.** Despite recent setbacks, there is still no credible alternative to Haftar. **In Fezzan, local allegiance could rapidly shift over as illustrated by the short-lived opening of the Sharara oil field.** Several LNA units were sent to the nearest city, Ubari, to deter armed groups from supporting the GNA and to close the oil field. In June, a pro-GNA Tebu armed group was formed in Murzuq with the aim of expelling LNA units from the region and securing oil fields⁹⁹. A few days later, LNA units were seemingly sent to the city¹⁰⁰. Thus, several cities in Fezzan have many grievances against northern authorities and few incentives to stay loyal to Haftar. The scale up of Russian support to the LNA has temporarily secured the cohesion in eastern Libya. However, Khalifa Haftar's days are numbered. The impetuous marshal has drained its backers' energy and hopes to extend control over Tripolitania. Russia, the UAE and Egypt consider the Tripoli offensive a military failure. The protracted conflict and recent defeats are driving Egypt and Russia to reconsider potential candidates to replace Haftar. Aguila Saleh met LNA military leaders, among which Abdul-Razek Al-Nadhuri, Saqr Al-Jaroushi, Muhammad Al-Senusi and Khairi Al-Tamimi – with the "*notable absence of Haftar*"¹⁰¹. To be accepted by the tribes in Cyrenaica, the candidate should be foreign to the main tribes (Obeidat, Awaqir, etc.) in order to balance local power in the region. Senior military officials belonging to the Furjani tribe (like Khalifa Haftar) or a former Gaddafist could be suitable candidates to support Aguila Saleh.

To conclude, national dynamics are deeply intertwined with the strategic gambits of regional and major powers in Libya. Regional backers, as well as EU countries, will

⁹⁶ Ibn Libya Sirtawi 23 June 2020 [#fuel smugglers](#), شبكة رصد [Shabka Rassd] 21 June 2020 [#illegal migrants](#), Ibrahim Qasouda 21 June 2020 [#fuel smugglers](#).

⁹⁷ Abdulkader Assad, « Libya's Interior Ministry Nabs Thieves Robbing Houses in Liberated Neighborhoods », *Libya Observer*, 9 June 2020; Libyan Crimes Watch 7 June 2020 [#Looting Tarhuna](#), UNSMIL 11 June 2020 [#Mass graves](#).

⁹⁸ ابن ليبيا السرتاوي [Ibn Libya Al-Sartawi] 11 June 2020 [#Syrian fighters](#), تاقرفت نيوز [Taqaarifat News], 10 June 2020 [#Syrian fighters](#). [Lindsey Snell: السوريون يفضلون الإقامة في منازل الليبيين بطرابلس "الينديسي سنيل": المرتزقة. Syrian mercenaries prefer to live in Libyan homes in Tripoli], *Libya24*, 12 June 2020.

⁹⁹ In August 2019, violent clashes erupted between Tebu inhabitants and LNA forces. Fighting and LNA airstrikes targeting Murzuq caused the death of 90 civilians and the wounding of 200 others (« OCHA Libya: Communal Violence in Murzuq - Flash Update (As of 14 August 2019) », *Relief Web*, 15 August 2019).

¹⁰⁰ Aymen Blhol 16 June 2020 [#LNA units Murzuq](#).

¹⁰¹ « Libya .. Aqila Saleh Meets with Military Leaders in the Absence of Haftar and the Continued Progress of the Reconciliation Forces », *Eg24 News*, 29 May 2020.

demonstrate force and/or pressure international organizations to take action to secure their sphere of influence and interests.

Egypt has recently orchestrated a show of force near the Libyan border to express its hostility to further Turkish/GNA advance to Jufra and Sirte. President Al-Sisi has warned against such attempts and called upon the Arab League to gather¹⁰². If a full-scale operation remains a possibility, diplomatic efforts will most probably limit the campaign to the level of a “*defensive, limited and gradual*” intervention¹⁰³. In July, Egyptian military officials gathered in Egypt’s western region bordering Libya for the launching of the *Hassam 2020 exercise*, involving all components of the armed forces. The drill is a response to forthcoming Turkish naval manoeuvres in the Mediterranean Sea.

The United States and the European Union appear to be divided on the Libyan conflict. France – who supports the GNA officially and the LNA unofficially – seems to be rather isolated. It has requested NATO to investigate an incident in the Mediterranean Sea between French and Turkish warships and recently pulled out from NATO *Sea Guardian operation*¹⁰⁴. Italy has come closer to the GNA and Turkey. Italian Foreign Affairs minister travelled to Libya to meet with Prime Minister Fayed Sarraj. Rome has also sent a demining team as part of the bilateral mission of assistance and support to clear Tripoli’s southern neighbourhoods¹⁰⁵. Libya is not a strategic interest for the US, which explains the “*leading from behind*” posture adopted since 2011. The US AFRICOM has voiced concern over Russia’s growing influence in the country. Any direct US involvement in Libya seems unlikely. Diplomatic pressure and indirect support could be used to undermine or support actors involved in the conflict.

Further escalation will depend on the ability of Russia and Turkey to reach an agreement and reassure the main parties involved. The UAE could prove difficult to rally. As for now intermittent combat operations are being conducted in the Oil Crescent. The main parties involved have stepped up their support and reinforced their footprint in the vicinity of Sirte by dispatching troops and air defense systems. **The city of Sirte, after witnessing the fall of Qaddafi’s regime and the rise and collapse of the Islamic State, could become the epicentre of foreign rivalry and the marking out of Russia’s (Cyrenaica) and Turkey’s (Tripolitania) spheres of influence.**

¹⁰² « Egypt Calls for Arab League Emergency Meeting on Libya », *Egypt Today*, 19 June 2020.

¹⁰³ Yezid Sayigh, « Is Cairo Going to War? », Carnegie Middle East Center, 22 June 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Robin Emmott, John Irish, « NATO to Investigate Mediterranean Incident between French, Turkish Warships », Reuters, 18 June 2020; and Xavier Vavasseur, « France Pulls Out of NATO Operation Sea Guardian amid Tensions with Turkey », *Naval News*, 3 July 2020.

¹⁰⁵ Italy in Libya 18 June 2020 #[demining activities](#).