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Turkey Intervenes in Libya

Turkey is deploying troops in Libya in support of the embattled Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj. GNA was formed in 2016 as part of the UN-led political agreement forged in December 2015 among contending factions in the Libyan civil war. Within a year, however, the agreement collapsed due to differences that emerged between the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) and the GNA operating from Tripoli. Since then, with the backing of the Libyan National Army led by General Khalifa Haftar, the HoR has been contesting the GNA's rule. In this internal struggle, HoR and General Haftar are being supported by Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, while GNA has Turkey and Qatar in its corner.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan shaking hands with Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya Fayeze al-Sarraj. Source: EURACTIV.COM

Turkey signed a deal with GNA in November 2019 on military and security cooperation as well as on demarcating the maritime boundaries between the two countries in the Mediterranean Sea. On 3 January 2020, the Turkish parliament authorised the government to send troops to Libya, which process has begun. Erdogan has clarified that Turkish troops are being deployed in Libya “not to fight but to support the legitimate government and avoid a humanitarian tragedy.” Two

factors have triggered Turkey's military intervention in Libya. The first is the imperative of securing the country's economic interests in Libya, where Turkish companies had invested several billions of dollars before the ouster of Muammar Qaddafi by European forces in February 2011. Turkey is estimated to have USD 15 billion in unpaid contractual obligations in Libya. A second, more oblique, factor is the expansion of Turkey's footprints in the Middle East and Mediterranean in a bid to retrace the path blazed by the Ottoman Empire.

Turkey's military intervention in Libya has generated adverse reactions from its rivals in the region. Israel, Greece and Cyprus have issued a critical statement about Turkey's deployment of troops. Egypt, which shares a 1200-km long border with Libya and is fearful of the Libyan civil war spilling across the border, has reacted more strongly. It has termed Turkey's intervention as a “national security” issue and asserted its determination to defeat such efforts aimed at controlling its Libyan neighbour. Turkey has been working with Russia in recent days to broker a ceasefire between the two Libyan factions, followed by a broader political settlement.

The Soleimani Killing and its Repercussions for JCPOA



Source: Al Jazeera

The crisis caused by the killing of General Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in a US drone attack and Iran's response in the form of a barrage of missiles targeted at military bases used by US forces in Iraq has de-escalated. However, the already tenuous state of the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has become more precarious.

Foreign Minister Javad Zarif has declared that Iran will no longer adhere to agreed limitations on the number of operational centrifuges enriching uranium. Ever since Donald Trump withdrew from the JCPOA in May 2018, Iran has been walking back step by step on the commitments it undertook as part of that deal. It has resumed operations at the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant (FEP); enriched uranium beyond the agreed upon limit of 3.67 per cent; and breached the 300 kg limit on the total amount of enriched uranium it can hold. Iran has also resiled from the commitment of not conducting research and development on advanced centrifuges. Finally, Iran's ballistic missile activities continue to be a point of contention with Western countries.

Iran has, however, repeatedly stated that as and when its P5+1 interlocutors begin to implement their reciprocal commitments in full measure — including those relating to removal of restrictions on oil exports, it will begin to abide by its nuclear-related commitments. Iran has also reiterated its continuing adherence to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency inspections in place. Even as Trump insists that he will not allow Iran to acquire or possess nuclear weapons, the gradual unravelling of the JCPOA points to greater regional turmoil including further instances of horizontal proliferation.

Russia-Iran Tango in the Persian Gulf

From 27 to 30 December 2019, the Russian, Chinese and Iranian navies held a joint exercise in the waters of the Gulf of Oman and the northern Indian Ocean. Named "Marine Security Belt", the exercise saw the participation of three Russian warships, a Chinese guided-missile destroyer, and vessels from the Iranian Navy as well as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The declared



Rear-Admiral Hossein Khanzadi speaking to reporters, with Chinese and Russian Navy destroyers as backdrop. Source: irna.ir.

objective of the exercise was to share experiences in the fight against terrorism and piracy.

At the same time, Iran also sought to demonstrate the evolution of its navy from a coastal to a brown water force as well as enhance the visibility of its presence in the northern Indian Ocean. The joint exercise with the navies of China and Russia highlighted the fact that Iran does not stand isolated in the international arena but has powerful friends.

The joint exercise also appears to have been aimed at building synergy between Iran's Hormuz Peace Endeavour and Russia's proposal of a collective security concept in the Persian Gulf – an aspect that the Foreign Ministers of the two countries highlighted within days of each other. On the day the exercise began, Foreign Minister Javad Zarif declared that Iran is ready to work with neighbours for securing the Persian Gulf through the mechanism of the Hormuz Peace Endeavour and highlighted the ongoing joint exercise with China and Russia as an indication of Iran's commitment to secure the vital waterways of the region. Four days later, as the exercise was winding down on 30 December, Sergey Lavrov drew an explicit connection between Iran's Hormuz Peace Endeavour and the Russian proposal of a collective security concept for the Persian Gulf by stating that they are “correlated ... complementary and aimed at the same constructive, peaceful goals.” The Russian proposal, first unveiled in August 2019, envisages “the creation of a security and cooperation organization in the Persian Gulf that would include in addition to the Gulf countries Russia, China, the United States, the EU, India and other stakeholders as observers or associated members.”

Indonesia and China Square Off in the South China Sea

Tension is once again rising in the South China Sea. Chinese fishing boats, accompanied by Chinese Coast Guard vessels, have forced their way into the Natuna Sea. Indonesia claims these as its territorial waters by virtue of its ownership of the Natuna archipelago. China, for its part, has begun to assert “sovereign rights and jurisdiction” in these waters flowing from its forcible annexation of the nearby Spratly islands.



Source: <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/indonesia-renames-its-portion-of-the-s-china-sea>

The Natuna archipelago is significant for both economic and strategic reasons. Its waters are estimated to contain significant reserves of oil and gas, and the islands are located astride sea lanes passing through the Malacca Straits.

In response to the Chinese intrusion and claims, the Indonesian armed forces have deployed four F-16 fighter aircraft and eight naval ships in the Natuna archipelago, placed them on high alert, and tasked them to patrol the area and drive out the intruding Chinese vessels. They are also activating a Maritime Information Centre in the archipelago to track and intercept foreign vessels violating the country's Exclusive Economic Zone. In addition, the Indonesian government has called upon its fishing fleets to converge on the archipelago to highlight the country's claims.

Unfazed by this response, China has upped the ante by despatching two more Coast Guard vessels to the area. At the same time, it has called for a bilateral dialogue on the issue. Indonesia is, however, not inclined to negotiate since that would imply the existence of a dispute where none exists. In the Indonesian view, China's nine-dash-line is a unilateral assertion that has no legal basis under UNCLOS. China, as is known, had brazenly dismissed the 2016 ruling of the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague rejecting its claims in the South China Sea as "illegal, null and void". With neither side giving way, tensions between Chinese and Indonesian forces remains a distinct possibility.

Japan to Undertake Intelligence-Gathering Mission in the Middle East

With tensions escalating in the Middle East, Japan has discussed policy options that go beyond diplomatic engagement. On 27 December 2019, the Japanese Cabinet approved a plan to despatch a Self-Defence Force (SDF) intelligence-gathering mission to the Middle East. Last week, the Ministry of Defence issued the dispatch order for the mission. The military and intelligence mission is being accompanied by a diplomatic push from Prime Minister Shinzo Abe who is visiting Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Oman from 11-15 January 2020 with the aim of easing tensions and securing stable energy supplies.



Source: Middle East Monitor

The objective of the SDF mission is to guarantee the safety of Japan-related commercial ships. The area to be covered by the SDF mission includes the Gulf of Oman, northern Arabian Sea, and the Gulf of Aden. P-3C maritime patrol planes are scheduled to start their mission on 20 January 2020, while the Takanami destroyer will begin operations in February. Information gathered during this 11 month-mission is expected to be

shared with Japan-related vessel operators as well as the United States. This mission is in line with the October 2019 statement by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide that, instead of joining a US-led maritime security initiative, Japan would prefer despatching SDF vessels to collect information.

Safety of navigation around the Strait of Hormuz is critical for Japan's energy security. In 2017, 87 per cent of Japan's imported oil was sourced from the Middle East and around 80 per cent of this was transported by tanker through the Strait of Hormuz. Threats to vessels carrying Japanese oil imports have increased in recent months. In June 2019, two vessels, one of which was operated by the Japanese shipping company Kokuka Sangyo, was attacked near the Strait of Hormuz. The incident took place even as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was on a historic visit to Iran, the first such visit by a Japanese Prime Minister in more than four decades.