

Libya policy threatens Turkey, Russia alliance

Author:

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ANKARA: Experts say that the rift between Moscow and Ankara over policy differences in Libya may intensify following Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's decision to send troops to Libya at the request of the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA).

The presence of a senior Turkish delegation in Moscow on Monday to meet their Russian counterparts is considered an effort to avert a major bilateral crisis.

Although welcoming attempts for resolving the crisis in the North African country, Russia is against any interference in Libya's internal affairs by an outsider, the Russian president's press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, told reporters on Thursday.

"We have repeatedly reiterated Russia's stance on the Libyan crisis. Moscow is seeking a prompt resolution of the conflict and an end to the bloodshed in the country," Peskov said.

Konstantin Kosachev, chairman of the Federation Council's International Affairs Committee, wrote on his official Facebook page that Turkish military intervention in Libya could be the worst scenario.

Kosachev also criticized Erdogan's recent claims that the Kremlin-linked Wagner group is in Libya with 2,000 mercenaries supporting Gen. Khalifa Haftar's forces. Erdogan condemned the Russian presence in Libya, saying they had not been invited by the official government.

"To put it kindly, considering the level of our bilateral relations, it is not accurate to hear such statements from Ankara," Kosachev said.

The comments from the Kremlin side were made after Erdogan's announcement that he would submit a motion to the Parliament early next month to use Turkish troops in Libya.

Parliamentary approval is required for deploying Turkish troops although there is a military cooperation deal between both parties. The prospect of setting foot in Libya also boosts the nationalist narrative in Turkey.

Samuel Ramani, a geopolitical analyst and doctoral candidate at the University of Oxford, UK, points to the risk of an Ankara-Moscow confrontation ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Turkey on Jan. 8.

All eyes are now on this planned visit which will be dominated not only by the opening of the TurkStream natural gas pipeline, but also by developments

in Libya.

“Erdogan and Putin have consulted each other on carving out zones of influence in Libya to avoid conflict, but the potential for a clash is real,” Ramani told Arab News.

In Syria and Libya, Russia and Turkey are backing rival parties. Turkey supports Fayez Al-Serraj’s GNA in Tripoli, which controls the west of the country, while Russia is backing its rival, Haftar’s eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA).

According to Ramani, any confrontation between Ankara and Moscow would be unwelcome and have repercussions at a time when both powers are trying to reach a settlement on Idlib and Syrian refugee repatriation.

The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights recently claimed that Turkey-backed Syrian rebels have opened recruitment centers in northern Aleppo for dispatching young fighters to Libya through Turkey with a monthly salary of up to \$2,000.

According to a UN report last month, Turkey has already sent military supplies to the GNA in breach of the arms embargo.

In anticipation of more military engagement, the Turkish Red Crescent is also gearing up to open a branch in Libya in the first months of 2020.

Michael Tanchum, a senior associate fellow at the Austrian Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES), told Arab News that Russia does not want chaos in Libya, and the Kremlin would like to continue to use Turkey to keep NATO divided and off-balance.

“Erdogan’s best pitch to Putin is that if the GNA falls there will be more war and instability and that the Turkey-Russia partnership in managing Libya is a better option. Despite the previous flexibility that Russia has shown toward Turkey’s strategic ambitions, the Libya case may be different,” he said. “Sufficient weight needs to be given to the Russia-Egypt and Russia-UAE relationships when assessing Russia’s strategic calculus. All these factors are at play.”

The special representative of Putin for the Middle East and Africa, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Mikhail Bogdanov, met yesterday separately with the Libyan and Turkish ambassadors.

For Timur Akhmetov, a researcher at the Russian International Affairs Council, Russia is facing a dilemma where it should embrace Turkish demands for participation in Libyan affairs but keep Turkish participation not critical to Russian interests.

“The general trend now is that Turkey, while being isolated in the region, enforces its diplomatic stance with heavier reliance on hard power, but it doesn’t necessarily mean Ankara’s intrinsic inclination to hostilities; hard times demand desperate measures,” he told Arab News.

For Akhmetov, Russia would probably accept Turkish involvement to an extent where its role suits or facilitates Russian long-term interests such as stabilization of the conflict, securing economic assets or eventually making all major belligerent sides accept a final resolution.



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Algeria reviews security as Turkey readies Libya intervention
Turkish MPs to vote on Libya troop deployment

[Algeria reviews security as Turkey readies Libya intervention](#)

Author:

Sat, 2019-12-28 01:33

ALGIERS: Algeria's newly elected President Abdelmadjid Tebboune has chaired a rare meeting of the country's top security body to discuss contingency plans for a threatened Turkish military intervention in neighboring Libya.

The High Security Council met on Thursday and "discussed the situation in the

region, particularly on the borders with Libya and Mali,” the president’s office said in a statement.

“It decided on a battery of measures to boost the protection of our borders and national territory, and to revitalize Algeria’s role on the international stage, particularly concerning these two issues.”

The statement did not elaborate on the measures to be taken but said the council would meet again “periodically and whenever necessary.”

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Thursday opened the way for direct military intervention in Libya, announcing a parliamentary vote in early January on sending troops to support the UN-recognized Tripoli government against the forces of Gen. Khalifa Haftar.

The same day, Libya’s Government of National Accord said it may officially seek Turkish military support in the face of Haftar’s months-long offensive to seize Tripoli.

Turkey and its regional ally Qatar have already supplied an array of weapons to the Tripoli government, including drones, but is now threatening a sharp escalation.

In Mali and adjacent countries of the sprawling Sahel region, France has a 4,500-member force which has been fighting militants since 2013. Forty-one soldiers have died.

Last month, 13 French soldiers were killed in a helicopter crash in the north of Mali as they hunted militants – the biggest single-day loss for the French military in nearly four decades.

The Pentagon is looking into reducing or even withdrawing US troops from the region, including those supporting the French operation, the New York Times reported on Tuesday.



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Hundreds of thousands turn out to mourn Algeria's powerful army chief
Algerians protest despite day of mourning for army chief

[Activists reject candidates for new Lebanon government](#)

Sat, 2019-12-28 01:22

BEIRUT: Activists have rejected candidates being considered for Lebanon's new government after their names were leaked on social media.

A recession, massive street protests and a political crisis have created chaos in the country and the man tasked with forming a new government and resolving these problems is Hassan Diab, who is prime minister-designate.

But the identities of candidates being considered for ministerial jobs have been leaked online and protesters are questioning whether they are truly independent of the ruling elite, which has been one of the targets of demonstrators' anger and frustration.

President Michel Aoun has promised the Lebanese people that a new government

will be their New Year's Eve present, meeting Diab for a second time on Friday. Diab wants a government consisting of 18 specialists.

Ziad Abdul Samad, an NGO specialist and civil society activist, said the leaked names showed disrespect to the people who had taken to the streets to condemn corruption and mismanagement.

"The most obvious proof was the provocative names that were discussed by the prime minister-designate and the representatives of Hezbollah and the Amal Movement in order to get their blessing," he told Arab News. "This will raise tension in the streets, especially with the absence of solutions to economic problems."

Public affairs expert and activist Walid Fakhreddin said the civil movement was still ongoing at a political level and not necessarily in the streets, especially because of the holiday season and bad weather.

FASTFACT

A recession, massive street protests and a political crisis have created chaos in the country.

He criticized Diab's performance, saying the prime-minister designate had not expressed his vision for the structure of the new government. "Even the names leaked appear to have their own agendas ... we are on the brink of an economic disaster and Lebanon does not have the luxury of time," he told Arab News.

There were no divisions in the civil society movement, he added, but different points of view. "One that wants to continue the protests with the same pace and another that wants to wait for facts and results before formulating its stance."

Riad El-Solh and Martyrs squares in Beirut were almost empty of protesters except for those clearing tents of rainwater or those setting up tents in place of ones that had been destroyed by a storm.

Brig. Gen. Imad Othman, general-director of Lebanon's Internal Security Forces, said after a meeting with Aoun that police spent 70 days on the streets with demonstrators and that 295 officers were injured in clashes with protesters.

"The army that has a mission to fight the enemy finds itself facing a painful situation, and bearing this responsibility emanates from its keenness to protect public peace, and prevent discord," he added.

Diab faces significant hurdles, including a boycott by influential political blocs that refused to nominate him because of the backing he received from the Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, the Amal party and their allies.

The Future Movement has refused to take part in the new government, while

Lebanon's Sunni authority Dar El-Fatwa has not declared its position on Diab's nomination.

Political declarations indicate that those who pledged to accept Diab's condition of an independent and specialist government comprising a limited number of ministers have backed down on their promise.

A decrease in the intensity of street demonstrations may have also led the political elite to believe it can contain the effects of a crisis that led to Saad Hariri's resignation as prime minister two months ago.



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Sat, 2019-12-28 01:13

CAIRO: When Ibrahim Shams and his graphic designer wife Noha El-Taher were decorating their baby daughter's room, they wanted to add a traditional

touch, a kilim rug.

But the ones available were outdated in their designs and mostly made in China using cheap fabrics.

Spotting a gap in the market for a traditional craft suited to the modern palate, the pair decided to start their own business: Kiliim, a social enterprise and lifestyle brand to revive and sustain the local craft of the flat-weaving technique.

The origins of kilim are contested. Some claim it is a pharaonic craft, while others attribute it to the Ottoman Empire.

“There’s a small village in the Nile Delta, Fowwa, which was very, very famous for kilim,” said Shams. “With the decline in tourism, the industry began to fade.”

The pair started traveling to Fowwa and meeting with weavers, and settled on one workshop that had the most “positive” people.

“Everyone was very negative about the craft, saying that 10-15 years from now, there would be no weavers left,” said Shams.

Kiliim was launched in 2016 with four weavers who were all born and raised in the village and had inherited the craft from their fathers and grandfathers.

Kiliim partners with the craftsmen, rather than hiring them as employees. Each weaver is paid for what they produce, with the workshop owned by the chief craftsman.

A year after launching, Kiliim won the social enterprise track at the MIT Arab Start-up Competition, taking home \$50,000.

Back in 2003, there were some 2,000 kilim weavers. Now there are fewer than 300, according to Shams. Much of the weavers’ livelihood depended on tourism.

At its peak, Egypt’s tourism sector accounted for 11 percent of its gross domestic product in 2010, prior to the Jan. 25 revolution in 2011. But with the unrest that followed, the number of tourists swiftly declined.



“They usually sold them (kilims) to touristic areas in Sharm El-Sheikh and Hurghada as souvenirs that symbolize the country and heritage of Egypt,” said Shams.

“We saw another opportunity that the weavers had missed – the designs, the materials and the overall finished product weren’t trendy anymore,” he added.

“They knew a certain pattern and style, and it was the lack of innovation and the recession that led to their decline.”

With her background in design, El-Taher used her skills to create new patterns and better branding for the trade and the village. The weavers were a little reluctant at first with the new designs, but eventually came around.

“In the beginning everything was a little tough. Everything was funded from our own savings,” said Shams.

“It was very, very tough in the beginning. It’s an online business, but many people like to come and try out the rug and see it physically, so that was challenge in the very beginning.”

There was a reluctance to buy the rug before seeing it in person, so the couple began to offer a free home trial service.

“They can select from different designs, and we send them to their house and see which one fits best,” said Shams.

This led to an 80 percent conversion rate from trial to purchase, and cut out the need for a physical store in the first few years.

They plan to open their first brick-and-mortar store in the first quarter of 2020. Plans to digitize the trial experience by offering a virtual simulator are also in the works.

“We also want to start a school to teach the craft to those who want to learn, followed by an internship program to shadow the weavers with an opportunity to the join the team,” said Shams.

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[Synchronized Israeli attacks on Jordan, King Abdullah](#)

Sat, 2019-12-28 01:15

AMMAN: A series of anti-Jordanian articles appeared almost simultaneously in the Israeli media targeting Jordan and revealing deep Israeli anger and hatred for the Jordanian monarch. The articles appear to be based on a single source and they all reached the same conclusion.

The independent daily Haaretz revealed that "Israel has big plans for Jordan, but they don't include King Abdullah II." The paper said that "a long list of articles by right-wing commentators, PR hacks for the government, were published over the past month in media (Caroline Glick in Israel Hayom, Aryeh Eldad in Maariv, Motti Karpel in Makor Rishon and others), raised similar arguments and identical conclusions."

Smadar Perry a respected writer on Arab affairs for the widest circulating daily Yediot Aharonot told Arab News that Israelis are "divided and some are acting in a crazy way." She said that while the anti-Jordan idea was born long before the latest anti-Israeli positions of Jordan, things are spinning out of control because of the elections. "These (anti-Jordan) ideas have been with us before, but because of the elections people will hear many crazy ideas." Israel's Herut party under former Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, which represented the core of what is now the Israeli Likud party was famous for an expansionist slogan that said: "The Jordan has two banks; this one is our and the other one too."

Perry told Arab News that the head of the Likud, Benjamin Netanyahu, only cares about himself. "Half of the Israelis don't know what they want regarding Jordan, but they know they want Bibi (Netanyahu) and he is focused on the elections. He wants to win and he doesn't care about Jordan." Perry said that only the military people are doing their job and are trying to make some sense in Israeli foreign policy.

Anees Sweidan, director of the Arab Affairs Department in the PLO, told Arab News that Palestine and Jordan are one in all political issues. "The incitement against Jordan reflects the chaos that Israel under the corrupt Netanyahu is experiencing." Sweidan said that Jordan is being made to pay the political price for its consistent support to Palestine and rejection of the Israeli attempts to annex the Jordan Valley."

Hani Al-Masri, director general of the Masarat think tank in Ramallah, told Arab News that there are multiple reasons for the Israeli attacks on Jordan. "It is connected to Jordan's recent statements and falls within the anti-Arab one-upmanship that has become the hallmark of Israeli elections both internal and national." AlMasri said that Jordan's strong opposition to the Israeli annexation plans is denying right-wing Israelis their dream" that Jordan will one day become Palestine."

Monjed Jado, publisher of the Palestine News Network and an observer of the Israeli political scene, told Arab News that right-wing Israelis are angry. "They were angry with the insistence of Jordan to have the two enclaves returned, but they were disappointed with the Americans whom they expected to put pressure on the King to be more supportive of Israel's desires."



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Benjamin Netanyahu wins party vote in boost ahead of Israeli election