Ottoman Revival: Explaining the Turkish Intervention in Libya

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Contents

Abstract:

On the 5th of January 2020, the first Turkish troops reached Tripoli beginning the Turkish military intervention in the war-torn country. Libya has been enduring a bloody civil war for over 10 years, failing to reach a compromise or an agreement that could restore the peace to the country. The chaos has attracted many actors to intervene in the oil-rich country, with Turkey being the most recent. The support that the Government of National Accords (GNA) received from Ankara was able to change the balance of power significantly on ground. The GNA, which was influenced significantly by Islamists, was challenged by its main rivel, the House of Representatives in Tobruk with the support of Army General Khalifa Haftar. However, the reasons behind Erdogan's move are still unexplored and ambiguous. This paper aims to provide a thorough analysis of the real reasons that pushed Erdogan to the Libyan conflict, which can be divided to multiple levels of analysis. At the state level, it will look into the political and economic interests of Turkey in Libya and the region. Second, this paper will discuss the role of Erdogan's leadership and his ambitions in pushing for the military intervention. Finally, it will discuss the role of the rivalry between Turkey and some of the regional players that might have led to the decision to intervene.

Introduction:

In early 2020, the ongoing civil war in Libya was further complicated with the involvement of a new strong player that was able to change the balance of power significantly. In January 2020, the Turkish General assembly gave mandate to the government for the intervention in Libya, which gave Erdogan the green light. Turkey, which has publicly supported the Islamist leaning Government of National Accords (GNA) in Tripoli, deployed troops and military personnel in Libya against the forces of House of Representatives led by General Khalifa Haftar. The GNA received direct military and financial support from the Turkish government, changing the outcome

to its favor. The Turkish air strikes caused serious damage to Haftar's force, halting their progress and occupying territories that have been previously under the control of the House of representatives. In addition to the heavy artillery, reports also revealed the presence of Syrian mercenaries who were recruited by the Turkish to fight in Libya. Turkey's intervention was vigorous and tough, demonstrating Turkey's hard power and hawkish firm approach. Their intervention has resulted in a complete power shift in the country. As a result, the Turkish move was met with significant controversy internationally, with many questioning the motives behind such decision. This paper aims at answering this question thoroughly, filling the gap in literature regarding this issue. What are the motives behind the Turkish intervention in Libya? It will look into the reasons behind this intervention on a multidimensional level. First, at the individual level, it will examine the role president Erdogan's personality and ambitions played a role in pushing Turkey into the war. This includes his political agenda and ambitions domestically, his Islamist ideology, as well as his Neo-Ottoman and ultranationalist tendencies. These traits have played a role in determining this important decision. Therefore, the first hypothesis in this paper is Erdogan's leadership has influenced the country's approach towards the civil war in Libya. The second level which this paper will examine is the state level, in which the rational actor model will be utilized to explain the intervention in Libya. The North African country has a considerable reserve of oil and other natural resources and is a considerable market for Turkish investments. Moreover, Libya is central to Turkey's ambitions in the East Mediterranean. Therefore, the second hypothesis is Turkey's economic interests have been an important determinant in its decision to intervene in the Libyan civil war. Finally, this paper will look into the regional and international level, in which it will examine the role of the rivalry between Turkey other active players in Middle Eastern and the East Mediterranean affairs. The EU, particularly France, as well as other important

actors, such as Egypt, the UAE have all been challenged by Turkey in the region in order to secure their own interests and Israel. So, Turkey's military intervention in Libya has been considered to be a defiance to the status quo which has sidelined Turkey and its readiness to use force when necessary. Thus, the third hypothesis of this paper is Turkey's rivalry with regional players has prompted Turkish intervention in Libya. In short, the paper tries to present a concrete, concise and clear analysis of the reasons behind Turkey's decision to intervene in the Libyan civil war. The next section of this paper will utilize existing literature on the matter to present a clear view of the status quo in Turkey and Libya before the analysis.

Literature review:

The Libyan Context:

The end of Gaddafi's rule caused a political quagmire for Liya. The deeply divided country broke into a bloody civil war that has not seen a definite solution yet. Without a unified vision and with raging inequalities, the state in Libya crumbled. Loyalists, opposition groups including Islamists, tribes, and terrorist organization all took advantage of the chaos in Libya to fulfill their goals. Post-conflict peacebuilding settlements and efforts to rebuild state institutions are relatively weak and face many obstacles (Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka, 2016). The author argues in her article that there are three main reasons to why Libya has not been able to resolve the conflict and still suffers from a civil war.

First, the militarization of the political sphere was a major obstacle. Militias have ravaged the country, fighting on different sides, varying in power and influence. These militias often have either ideological, territorial or tribal identities, and are supported by different key international players in the Libyan conflict. Salafi Jihadist terrorist organizations have also been active in the

war-torn country, mainly Al-Queda and ISIS. These armed groups have a huge influence on the political and military situation and are a major obstacle to ending the war.

Second, the regional, ethnic, and tribal identities that have further generated distrust and division among the Libyan population. The three regions of Libya have always had cultural, socioeconomic and political differences. The geographic and demographic realities have fueled the division between the regions. For example, Cyrenaica, the oil rich region, have always expressed separatist tendencies due to the marginalization it witnessed under Gaddafi. The inequalities and differences between these regions have always jeopardized the unity of Libya and the existence of a strong national identity. In addition, the history of Libya is marked by tribal affiliation is a major component of Libyan social structure (Dinicu, 2020). Dinicu (2020) argues that tribalism plays an important role in the socioeconomic and political developments in the country and therefore, the divisions between these tribes fuels the conflict even more. Ethnic divisions, particularly in Fezzan, also have limited the capacity of the state to ensure peace. International actors have taken advantage of these divisions to support different sides in the conflict.

Finally, the absence of a centralized government that can exert effective control over the entirety of the country. From 2014, two competing centers of powers are active in Libya, each with its separate governing bodies. The General National Congress in Tripoli dominated by Islamists, and the other was the House of Representatives in Tobruk in the region of Cyrenaica. In 2015, the government of national accord (GNA) was formed under the sponsorship of the UN and held power in Tripoli with Islamist sympathies, while the House of Representatives remained in Tobruk and had the support of the national army under the leadership of Khalifa Haftar. Despite considerable support and the Sunni conservatism of the population, the Islamists have failed to rise to power in Libya (Trauthig, 2019). The author argues that the Islamists tried to gain legitimacy

and mobilize support, however, did not succeed. This contests the idea that the Arab world was "going Islamist" after 2011. The Islamists were able to establish influence however failed to translate it into complete political control. Militarization, internationalization, and the Islamists zero-sum approach instead of compromising with other forces limited their rise to power. Thus, between 2016 and 2021, the two ruling factions in the east and west tried diplomatically and through military combat to establish authority over the entirety of the country. However, they failed to unify the country under one government and a single national identity. This has attracted many international actors, including Turkey, to the conflict due to the importance of Libya.

Internationalization of the conflict has been a major aspect of the Libyan political sphere. Almost all domestic parties are involved, directly or indirectly, with international actors that managed to change the balance of power on the ground. International actors rallied behind domestic Libyan actors to ensure their national interests. Pedde (2017) describes the role of major international actors in the conflict and their motives in Libya. For instance, the major supporters of the Islamists in Tripoli were Qatar, and later Turkey, due to the ideological similarities and political agenda. On the other hand, the House of Representatives along-side general Khalifa Haftar, had strong anti-Islamist rhetoric and opposed any kind of Islamist influence in Libya. The general was supported by an array of international actors, such as Egypt, the UAE, and France. Russia also had a significant role in the conflict particularly with Haftar who is described as "Moscow's Man" (Souleimanov, 2019). International organizations such as NATO and the European Union have played a substantial role in the conflict and has significantly influenced its course (Adler-Nissen & Pouliot, 2014). However, alliances in this conflict have often shifted and changed based on the interest of the involved parties. The combinations of these factors have undermined the peace

process in Libya and has elongated the conflict. This complexity has gained more international attention and therefore further intervention, which eventually led to the Turkish involvement.

However, before discussing the Turkish intervention, it is important to point out the strategic importance of Libya, which has been recognized by all the stakeholders in the conflict. Souleimanov (2019) discusses the components that makes Libya important to almost all regional and international political players. First, its geographic location at the crossroads of the African Sahel, Europe and North Africa has given the country a great advantage. This proximity with Europe has made the European Union involved in the Libyan situation quite extensively (Gaub, 2014). Second, illegal migration from the Libyan coast to Europe has been a significant policy concern for the EU mainly which, and it has been working for decades to find a solution that would bring an end to this issue. Libya has become a major transit country for immigrants, mainly Africans, in their road to Europe. The EU is not capable of withstanding such wave of migration and therefore has raised this issue constantly. Moreover, the illicit activities that result from such situation, such as slavery and human trafficking, has gained the attention of not only the EU, but the whole world.

Second, the economic importance of Libya stems from its substantial reserve of oil. This particular importance is considered to be a major interest for almost all the countries that have been involved. Oil fields and refineries spear on across the coast which simplifies trade, and in the case of the EU, reduces the cost significantly. This has encouraged many companies to invest in Libyan oil. And third, a concern for countries, also mainly the EU, is the spread of terrorist jihadist groups which cause a direct threat to regional countries. The chaos in Libya has made the country vulnerable to extremist groups that have took advantage of the situation to conduct their activities. The presence of these groups on the doorstep of Europe has alarmed the European union due to possible terrorist

attacks that would target European states. These are the main factors that have given Libya wide international attention.

Therefore, the inability of Libya to establish a strong and capable state, and its economic and strategic importance, as explained above, had brought immense intervention, political and military, from actors across the region. One of the major players that have risen in 2019 and afterwards is Turkey. In the following section, this paper will examine Turkish foreign policy direction to try and make sense of Turkey's decision to enter the war through utilizing the existing literature on the topic.

Turkey's Foreign Policy: A Hawkish New Approach

In December 2019, Libyan conflict gained even more attention when Turkey decided to enter the war, supporting the GNA. Not only did it express political support, but also demonstrated its commitment through military intervention. Ankara clashed with the House of Representatives in Tobruk and fought direct battles with Haftar to gain restore and control more territories. This decision has caused many to question the motives and intentions of Ankara, not just in Libya but the region. To understand Turkey's decision, it is important to look at the Turkish foreign policy and its direction under the current ruling party. The Justice and Development Party, AKP, has held power in Turkey since 2002 as largest party in parliament, and therefore, was able to set Turkey's domestic and international policies. This section will examine the foreign policy agenda set under the AKP and its strongman Erdogan throughout its time in power, with a particular focus on the MENA region and the East Mediterranean. First, the MENA region had significant importance in the Turkish foreign policy. Özpek & Demirağ (2014) try to explain the reason behind Turkey's activism in the Middle East based on prominent international relations theories. According to realism, this activism can be linked to the global environment following the 9/11 attack and the

uncertainty it caused on the international scale. So, Turkey's activism is a response to this ambiguity in the international arena. Based on the constructivist approach, the Islamic identity of the AKP is an important contributor in determining Turkey's foreign policy towards the Middle East. The AKP is one of the major and most successful Islamist political parties in the region, that has been able to garner the support of a large proportion of the Turkish population. The cultural and historic ties between Turkey and the region have been used by the AKP to approach the region. Málnássy (2020) argues that Turkey has been using the cultural ties, particularly Islam, to strengthen relations with previous Ottoman territories in North Africa as well as the whole continent. And finally, the rational choice theory, which assumes AKP leaders to be rational actors, and the interest of Turkey lies in its active presence in the Middle East. This includes the economic and political gains that can be translated to more power for Ankara.

Özpek & Demirağ (2014) then elaborate on Turkey's active foreign policy in the Middle East before and after 2011. The focal argument of the paper is that before the Arab spring hit Syria, Turkey has been actively involved in the Middle East through economic and diplomatic ventures in order to influence the political sphere in the region. The main tools that Ankara relied on were trade deals, investments and political intervention through diplomacy and moderation. The government made sure to make use of its soft power to its full extent to establish its political influence in the Middle East. Hence, it did not resort to any form of military intervention or use of force despite the complicated political situation. At that time, Turkey had an active and strategic policy that is based on "zero problems with neighbors" (Kİrİşcİ & Kaptanoğlu, 2011). This meant that Ankara would focus on fostering friendly relations with its neighboring regions as part of its "strategic depth" policy, which is described as the shift in the focus of Turkey from the EU and focusing on its neighboring regions (Bieniek, 2015). This policy direction remained the major

determinant of Turkey's action with its neighbors. Not only did Ankara refrain from intervening in the geopolitical problems, but it also played a proactive role in ensuring that these regions remain stable and secure through diplomacy. It sought to maintain stability and security as a mean to safeguard its economic and political interest. Its peaceful approach to its neighbors was very clear before 2011. It acted as a moderator in order to solve some of the raging conflict at the time. For example, Ankara tried to mediate between Iran and the West, as well as between Syria and Israel. Keeping this diplomatic approach and refusing any sort of military intervention in the middle east were Turkey's major concerns.

Even when a military intervention was inevitable, Turkey refused to be a part of the combatting forces directly. In the case of Afghanistan in 2001 and Libya in 2011, Turkey only joined as a development-oriented force on ground rather than a combatting one. In other words, despite the presence of Turkish personnel in both interventions, they did not engage in any military actions, but were merely there in a mission to support the locals. This was the Turkish rationale throughout the interventions. In the case of Iraq, Turkey refused to join the coalition and embarked on a diplomatic mission to try and find solutions. In these interventions, Turkey intervened through international organizations as a mean to find solutions through the international system.

Özpek & Demirağ (2014) argue that this can be understood only by look at Ankara's relations with international regimes and actors, particularly those in the West. To elaborate, Turkey's policy of no problems with neighbors entitled it to stay out of military interventions in the region, however, remaining uninvolved in these interventions would risk sidelining Turkey and its exclusion from decision making process. Ankara does not have the necessary power to prevent such interventions, and at the same time, has to establish itself as an important player on the regional level. This explains Turkey's approach in the Middle East, in which it chose to channel its intervention

through international organizations and in post-conflict processes. In Africa, Turkey has also directed its attention, utilizing many methods to strengthen the diplomatic and economic ties (Málnássy, 2020).

Another form of soft power is economic activity, particularly trade, which Turkey has been invested in greatly. Kİrİşcİ & Kaptanoğlu (2011) discuss how Turkey had shifted towards politics of trade with its neighboring regions which became a major factor determining its foreign policy. The reason behind this policy towards Turkey's neighbors was due to the obstacles that prevent Turkey's accession to the EU. So, instead of an EU-centric policy, Ankara moved towards its neighbors through enormous economic expansion and large investments. For instance, trade and tourism increased dramatically under the AKP. In Syria, Egypt and Iraq, Turkey was involved in large construction and infrastructure projects. Millions of dollars-worth of investments soon were established in Middle Eastern countries, as well as other neighboring regions. Turkey was becoming one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and it was contributing to further economic growth in the neighboring regions.

Economic liberalization accelerated by globalization, as well as reaching out to other markets, in particular Ankara's neighbors and the Middle East, was a key factor in the economic boom that Ankara had witnessed. One of the tools that Turkey used in its economic liberalization policy was its visa policy in which it eased visa restrictions on most neighboring countries as a mean to expand its economic and political outreach. This was a significant measure in which Ankara embarked on an open-door policy as a way to challenge the EU that still imposed visa requirements on Turkish citizens. However, regardless of the Turkish intent, this policy has led to a significant increase in economic activity between the middle east and Turkey and has strengthened relations. In short,

Turkey's focus in the MENA region and its neighbors has been that of economic focus based on peaceful measures.

This was the case until the Arab Spring reached to Syria and set the country off to a bloody civil war. In the second part of their argument, Özpek & Demirağ (2014) argue that when the civil war hit in Syria in 2011, Ankara has chosen a tougher approach towards the Middle East and its neighbors. This is apparent in the Turkish hawkish measures it pursued against the regime in Syria. It no longer acted as the moderator and the passive participant through multinational organization, but an active actor in regional affairs. Turkey retaliated against the spillovers of the Syrian civil war by targeting the regime forces, and as Assad failed to present a feasible solution tensions started mounting between the two countries. As the crisis in Syria evolved and became more violent, claiming the lives of Turkish civilians, Turkey demonstrated extreme disregard and force against the Syrian regime. This was the changing point in Turkey's foreign policy in the region leading up to the Libyan conflict.

Another aspect of Turkish foreign policy worth mentioning is its interest in the East Mediterranean. The crisis in the East Mediterranean has been gaining wider attention in recent years. The region is said to hold a considerable reserve of oil and gas which has led to a fierce competition between stakeholders. Not just the countries in the region, but also Europeans, whom have been rallying behind their allies to secure their interests. Among these competitors, Turkey has rose to be a significant actor in the East Mediterranean and has been involved immensely in the recent crisis. Its power play and show of force in the region has set alarm among the international community. Turkey has challenged Egypt, Greece, Cyprus and France for further influence in the region. Stocker (2012) mentions how the strained relations in the region has aggravated the crisis. Turkey specifically, has had a history of strained relations with its neighbors, particularly Greece and

Cyprus. Challenging the Europeans has bought support to these countries from the rest of EU, particularly France (Poula & Dana, 2020). However, Turkey's new approach has been relentless in securing tis interests. In addition, its ambitions in Libya have also been made clear when Erdogan released his plan of delineating the maritime boarders between Turkey and Libya to expand Turkish hold and power.

To sum up, Turkey's peaceful economic foreign policy that dominated the rhetoric of the AKP, was disrupted by its new tough and militaristic approach in the region, which is translated by its intervention in Libya. After the methodology section, the Turkish intervention will be laid out, to which it will try and provide a concrete interpretation of this intervention.

Methodology:

This paper utilizes one main IR theory for the analysis, which is realism. Realism looks into state as the primary actor and as unitary actors that are driven by their own self-interest. This is reinforced by the anarchic form of the international system. As a result, states compete to maximize their benefits and secure their interests. Thus, Turkey's involvement in Libya falls under its efforts to secure its interests and its national security.

The paper will look into three main levels of analysis: the state level, individual level and the regional and international level. When analyzing Turkey's move and corresponding to aforementioned levels, the paper will utilize two main foreign policy models. The first is the rational actor model which considers state to be unitary and rational actors in which they aim at maximizing their interests. This coincides with the state level, in which the Turkish intervention in Libya will be viewed as a rational decision. The second model will be the personality trait model,

which will mainly look into Erdogan's personality and his ambitions in Turkey. These tools will help provide a better and concrete analysis of the event of the Turkish intervention in Libya.

Turkey's Intervention in Libya: An IR approach

On the 2nd of January 2020, Turkish Grand National Assembly voted in favor of a bill that approved the deployment of Turkish military personnel and the direct intervention in Libya supporting the GNA. The official deployment of Turkish military began on January 5th, with intelligence agents arriving first in the country. The Turkish military fought fierce battles with the forces of General Haftar, relying on air strikes and heavy defense systems, as well as the Turkish naval force. Operation Peace Storm was a significant military success for the GNA, and Turkey, which saw enormous territorial gains for the GNA. The military intervention saw the ultimate shift in the balance of power on ground and important gains for the GNA and the Islamist camp. This section will provide a thorough analysis on the reasons behind such decision by Ankara. It will look into the three levels of analysis to explain the Turkish intervention in Libya. The first section will look into Erdogan's personality and traits, and his role in pushing Turkey to intervene in Libya. The second section will deal with the state level economic motives behind the intervention. And finally, the third will look into the political motives manifested through the rivalry with regional and international power. The first section will utilize the personality model, whereas the latter two will use the rational actor model.

Erdoganism:

The 15 years in which the AKP under Erdogan has been in power are everything but conventional. Erdogan has been one of the most controversial figures in the world due to his leadership style and increased authoritarianism. It has become impossible to dissociate Turkish policies, domestic or foreign, and Erdogan. Thus, to understand the intervention in Libya, it is detrimental that we look

into Erdogan's agenda, personality and ambitions in Turkey and abroad. Exploring the personality of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the strongman in Turkey, is essential in explaining the policy decision to intervene in Libya. This section draws its influence from the personality model to study foreign policy.

Erdogan's political rhetoric, or "Erdoganism" has become an important political phenomenon that has come to dominate Turkey's political arena. Yilmaz & Bashirov (2018) describe this political ideology and argue that it has become the main political discourse in the country. The authors identify some of the main features of Erdoganism that are central to understanding Erdogan and his complex leadership personality.

First, Erdogan has been an extreme hardline Islamist and supporter of political Islam. Islamist ideology refers to the integration of Islamic teachings and values into the political sphere. Throughout his political career and activism, Erdogan has showcased his Islamist leanings and defended its provisions. He rose to prominence in Turkish politics following his election as the mayor of Istanbul running for the Islamist Welfare party. And despite his opponents' underestimation, he established himself as a capable and active leader. However, Islamism in Turkey has faced many challenges since the establishment of the Turkish republic. It is considered to be a threat to the secular state, the basis of the Turkish republic. Secularism has held precedence in Turkish society and politics since its inception, with its elites controlling almost all aspects of the state (Park, 2018). Thus, most Islamist parties which Erdogan has been a member of throughout his political activism have either been banned or forced out of power by the army and state. Erdogan himself had been imprisoned and banned from politics due to his Islamist ideology. Thus, in 2002, Erdogan alongside Islamist reformists formed the Justice and Development Party, AKP, as an alternative. The leaders acknowledged that an Islamist Party would not win the support of

the majority, so instead the AKP was established as a democratic conservative party, under Islamic values and norms (Shukri & Hossain, 2017). Originally, the party did not wish to Islamize Turkish society, however, only to uphold the Islamic faith within a secular state. The party appealed to the Turkish electorate and succeeded in winning the 2002 election in a landslide victory. After reversing the ban, Erdogan was able to run in the 2003 by-elections and secured a seat in the parliament. Thus, as party leader, Erdogan was appointed as prime minister. Since that time, Erdogan has ruled Turkey, holding a tight grip over Turkish politics. And so, the shift towards further Islamization of Turkish society began.

Political Islam provides an Islamic approach to modern socioeconomic and political issues. The AKP, particularly in later years, has become the face of successful political Islam, and Erdogan its champion figure. Erdogan has enacted conservative policies related to family and society that have pushed Turkish society towards further Islamization (Yavuz & Öztürk, 2019). For instance, Erdogan reversed a secular provision which dictated that women who wore headscarves were banned from working in governmental institutions. Therefore, Erdogan was reshaping the Turkish identity as one that is inseparable from religious identity, which had been denied under secular rule. Furthermore, political Islam is also influenced by the national context and utilizes it to appeal to the population (Yilmaz & Bashirov, 2018). In the case of Erdogan and the AKP, the historic role of Turkey as the successor of the Ottoman empire, has also been an important tool for power. Erdogan has glorified the Ottoman empire and aims to revive its legacy. This has become known as Neo-Ottomanism. Erdogan has exploited the history and cultural influence the Ottomans had over regional countries, mainly in the MENA region, for further political and economic power (Málnássy, 2020). His political and economic ambitions, whether domestic or international, have been explicit. He is restoring the once mighty role of Turkey in the region.

In the case of Libya, both Islamism and Neo-Ottomanism can explain why Erdogan was keen on intervening militarily in the civil war. The Libyan GNA, which has UN backing, has clearly stated its Islamist leanings. It has also received support from many of the Islamist elites in Libya. As such, Erdogan's ideological link to the GNA has definitely been a contributor to Erdogan's decision. The president has supported various Islamist factions throughout the region in different countries, including Egypt, Tunisia and Qatar. The rise of political Islam, particularly after the Arab spring, has been an important phenomenon (Trauthig, 2019), which Erdogan made sure to make use of. Thus, supporting the GNA has been pushed by an ideological rhetoric to defend political Islam. Furthermore, Libya had been ruled by the Ottomans, which complements Erdogan's neo-Ottoman ideology.

Second, Erdoganism has been identified by increasing authoritarianism. Erdogan has been criticized immensely for his violent and tough crackdown against any form of opposition and freedoms. Civil liberties such as freedom of speech and assembly have been extremely violated, and severe breaches of human rights have been recorded. The regime has cracked down violently against protestors who march against the AKP, most famously during the 2013 Gezi Protests in Istanbul where 8 protestors were killed. The 2016 coup attempt aggravated the situation and led to further anxiety within the regime. Erdogan has been making sure that all those who pose a threat to his rule are removed. Public servants, judges, military officials and journalists have been imprisoned and prosecuted in the aftermath of the coup. Moreover, electoral authoritarianism has manifested itself in elections that are not free nor fair (Esen & Gumuscu, 2016). The elections in 2015 set a precedent in Turkish politics, after the AKP refused to give up power following their failure to gain the majority needed in parliament. Instead, President Erdogan ordered new elections in which the AKP was able to regain a slight majority. The 2017 referendum, which changed the

system from a parliamentary to a presidential one, epitomizes authoritarianism under President Erdogan. He has constitutionally established his role as the ultimate leader of the Turkish republic. Opposition parties and leaders have also suffered from the president's authoritarian tendencies. He has banned opposition parties, prosecuted their leaders and even labeled some as terrorist organizations. Even mere university students who protested against the government's decision to appoint a new rector close to the AKP in 2021, were labeled as terrorists. Indeed, Turkey's shift to authoritarianism has been severe. In addition, using populism has also been a tool utilized by the regime by appealing to the population directly as an anti-establishment party. These features of Erdogan's rule have caused even further criticism and opposition to emerge, domestically and internationally. International criticism, particularly due to human rights violations, has also impacted his image. The EU, for instance, has been keen on pointing out political misconduct, which has led to tense relations between the two actors.

Not only has Erdogan's political behavior been criticized, but so have his economic policies, particularly since the 2018 crisis. Erdogan has been blamed for the financial crisis that has hit the country and manifested in the record devaluation of the Turkish lira and inflation. For instance, Erdogan has been able to dominate the monetary and fiscal policies of the country. The president was able to consolidate his power significantly, by gaining complete control over major governmental institutions, particularly the central bank. As the country was facing high inflation, high interest rates were needed to curb the rise in prices. However, Erdogan's views on interest rates, influenced by Islamic teachings, have prompted him to call it the "mother and father of all evils". Thus, as the president's call for lower interest rates prevails, inflation still surges.

Support for the president, as a result, has dropped significantly. Various opinion polls demonstrate a drop in the support for the president. Opposition parties and members are capitalizing on his

economic failure and sociopolitical authoritarianism to score points on the president. Thus, the Turkish intervention in Libya can be seen as a result of the aforementioned circumstances. Amidst increasing pressure domestically and internationally, President Erdogan hopes to demonstrate that he remains the powerful leader of Turkey. His power play in the region serves this purpose as well, and demonstrates his influence and tough rhetoric. Furthermore, with elections coming up in 2023, the victory in Libya can be seen as an image booster among the Turkish population. It appeals to the nationalist rhetoric of a strong and capable Turkey, that is able to shift the balance of power. Moreover, it yields significant economic benefits to Turkey, which Erdogan hopes to ease the economic crisis and gain the support of large corporations. It is also a reminder to the international community that Turkey, under Erdogan's leadership, has become an important regional player, a message mainly sent to the EU. In short, Erdogan's leadership and his ambitions have determined the country's intervention in Libya.

Turkey: A Rational Business Partner:

The rational actor model has become one of the most prominent models to explain foreign policy events. This model assumes that states are rational actors that aim to maximize the benefits and minimize the losses. As such, the optimal decision is made through cost-benefit analysis. The ultimate decision is made following a reasonable process, given the information available at the moment. The Turkish intervention in Libya can thus be explained as a rational decision by the Turkish government that has the best possible outcome at hand. In other words, the decision was determined by the economic interests that it yielded to Turkey.

The economic benefits that Turkey can obtain as a result of the intervention are significant. Thus, it can be attributed to these economic benefits that Turkey chose to intervene. Ever since 2018,

Turkey has been undergoing a severe economic and financial crisis that has led to significant socioeconomic grievances (Orhangazi & Yeldan, 2021). The Turkish Lira has been devaluating at a rate unwitnessed before and inflation is skyrocketing. The economic crisis has been caused by the increasing deficit in current account, due to Turkey's reliance on capital inflows. The previous inflow of capital has been used to finance construction projects. However, this capital accumulation has been financed through borrowing in foreign currencies. In 2018, the turmoil began following an increase in inflation that was accompanied by a significant devaluation of the currency. The situation was further aggravated by the low interest rates and high credit which led to higher inflation. The government in Turkey, mainly President Erdogan, has championed a policy of low interest rates, refusing to raise them to curb inflation. Inflation rates have been above 15% since 2018. With inflation rates diminishing the value of money, the Turkish economy slid into recession. Unemployment also increased as a result of the slow economic activity. In addition, the deficit in the account balance was also exacerbated by the collapse of tourism as a result of the 2020 COVID19 pandemic. Many corporations also defaulted on paying their loan settlements that are in foreign currencies due to the decrease in the value of the lira. The recession's impact was severe and affected the Turkish population significantly. Thus, the Turkish intervention in Libya can be seen as a channel for Turkish economic revival. Erdogan has promised that Turkish companies are willing to play an important role in the reconstruction of the country. The Turkish government has also promised to invest in developmental projects, primarily infrastructure and oil. The Turkey-Libya Council of the Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey has indicated that there is a potential for investment worth $120 Billion, that Turkey can fill (Aslanhan, 2020). These investments could ensure a large and significant return for these companies, which could help ameliorate the economic situation back home. Furthermore, Libya has one of the largest oil

reserves in the world, currently at 48 billion barrels. Oil has been the major source of wealth for the country and investing in this sector generates large revenues. Turkey has been keen on investing in this sector and securing its role in the future of the oil sector in Libya. Turkey's ambitions in exploiting the Mediterranean's resources have been made clear, particularly following the announcement of a plan to connect the two countries' maritime zones, thereby increasing Turkey's maritime borders. This would allow Ankara to exploit the resources present within this zone. Thus, the economic benefits yielded from investing in Libya may have been a central motive behind the military intervention.

Turkey vs The World:

Political motives have played an important role in pushing Ankara to intervene in Libya. Similar to the previous section, the intervention can also be seen as an outcome of political interest. Particularly, the persisting rivalry between Turkey and other regional and international actors can be seen as a significant contributor to the decision to intervene militarily. The regional actors include Egypt, the UAE, Russia and the EU, mainly France. These countries have been involved in an ongoing rivalry over influence and authority in the region. This has become known as the East Mediterranean conflict. The region of the East Mediterranean is known to hold rich hydrocarbon resources, which has caused conflict between the multiple stakeholders. Influence over regional countries has been a tool to showcase political power. Turkey's intervention in Libya epitomizes the use of power for influence which it hopes could balance off other regional actors.

Perhaps Egypt has been one of the main rivals of Turkey, particularly when it comes to curbing the Turkish influence in the MENA region. Egypt's desire to reclaim its former role as a regional leader and powerhouse has put it at odds with Turkish expansionism. Turkey has been growing in

economic and political influence in the Middle East, through soft and recently hard power (Özpek & Demirağ, 2014). Egypt has expressed its concern over this rise in Turkish power on multiple occasions. This tension between the two countries can be traced back to 2013, after President Sisi's successful coup that ousted Mohamad Morsi (Al-Anani, 2020). Morsi was a member of the Islamist party, the Muslim Brotherhood, which Turkey supports. President Sisi's strong opposition to political Islam has not been received well by his Turkish counterpart. Thus, as tension rises between the two regional powers, new security alliances are being formed to ensure the balance. Egypt distrusts Turkey's support for an Islamist party, which is a major threat to the regime. The rivalry between Turkey and Egypt has not only been political and ideological, but also economic and cultural (Al-Anani, 2020). The resources of the Mediterranean have been a major source of conflict between the regional countries, and Turkey and Egypt are a perfect example. Egypt has opposed Turkish ambitions to increase its share of the resources. As a result, Egypt has been forming security and economic alliances with other regional actors to challenge the Turkish expansion. In Libya, before the military intervention, Egypt supported Haftar whereas Turkey had publicly supported the GNA. With Libya's location relative to Egypt, the Turkish support for the rival party has been a source of anxiety.

Another regional rival that has opposed Turkey is the United Arab Emirates. The rivalry stems from the ideological differences manifested in their political systems. Turkey is Islamist and democratic, whereas the UAE represents a moderate regime under authoritarian rule (Bianco & Aydıntaşbaş, 2021). The authoritarian gulf monarchies have opposed political Islam vigorously, whereas Turkey showcases the authoritarian monarchies as a destabilizing force. Thus, both regimes represent an ideological threat to the other. This rivalry has been translated into various forms of political challenge, mainly by supporting different sides in various regional conflicts, as

is the case with Egypt. The countries have challenged each other in Libya, Syria, Somalia and the East Mediterranean. Following the Arab spring, they have been put on opposing sides in almost all conflicts, guided by their ideological differences. Neo-Ottoman sentiment and the rise of Turkish influence also alarmed the monarchies in the gulf. Turkey's strategic alliance with Qatar has also been a source of alarm. More recently, Turkey is being conceived by the Emirates as the most significant rival, surpassing Iran (Bianco & Aydıntaşbaş, 2021). As for Libya, the UAE's support for Haftar has been manifested through military and financial support to the general, to limit the power of Islamists.

As for Europe, the wide range of political, economic and cultural differences have led to aggravated tensions between the two actors. Turkey's record of human rights violations and increased authoritarianism have worried the EU extensively. These concerns have made Turkey's hopes of accession to the Union even harder. The conflict in the Mediterranean also demonstrates the fragility of relations between Turkey and the EU. The maritime boarders' issue has come to dominate the political landscape. The major source of tensions stems from the Greek-Turkish dispute over territorial waters and maritime delineation and the subsequent economic zone (Dalay, 2021). The complexity of maritime boarders in the case of Turkey and Greece renders the conflict in the East Mediterranean even harder to resolve. The EU is keen on defending the rights of all its members. France has had a leading role in representing the interests of the EU and standing firm against Turkey's ambition (Poula & Dana, 2020). France has also supported Haftar in Libya, fighting against Islamists. The recent episode of dire relations between France and Turkey over Islam and religion caused further tension.

In all these cases, Turkey has been placed at odds with most regional players. However, Turkey holds on to its rights in the East Mediterranean and in the region and carries on with its ambitious plans. As such, as a result of this regional pressure, the Turkish intervention in Libya can be seen as a result of these rivalries. More specifically, the intervention is Turkey's method to establish itself as a regional powerhouse and reassure its position. The demonstration of hard power is a reminder to other parties that Turkey is not a power to be reckoned with. Despite the lack of international support that the GNA had, and its weak position at the moment, Turkey supported the government and changed the course of the war. This is a direct challenge to all regional actors. Furthermore, the subsequent economic and political ventures that Turkey undertook in Libya reinforce this argument, mainly its maritime plan. As such, the military intervention in Libya can be explained as Turkey's motive to restore political influence and power in the region.

Conclusion:

The Turkish military intervention in Libya in 2020 has been a significant event that had many ramifications. However, the reasons which have pushed Ankara to undergo such a venture, and intervene militarily on the side of GNA, have been quite obscure. This paper, which aims at disclosing the Turkish motives behind such a decision, utilizes foreign policy tools to present a concrete analysis.

As such, on an individual level, and making use of the personality model, the decision to intervene in Libya can be understood by uncovering Erdogan's ambitions and personality. Indeed, Erdoganism has become the major political ideology of the Turkish regime under the AKP. It is mainly characterized by its strong association with political Islam and increased Authoritarianism. First, the GNA has been Islamist leaning since its formation. Therefore, the ideological link

between the GNA and Erdogan might explain the reason behind the decision to intervene in Libya. Another explanation could be that Erdogan used the intervention as an image booster due to the decline in public support. Erdogan has been facing major career-threatening challenges, including economic troubles and domestic and international criticism. Therefore, Erdogan wanted to score a win for Turkey to try and regain the Turkish people's support.

On the state level, and applying the rational actor model, the economic benefits that are expected to be generated by the economic cooperation between Turkey and Libya are significant. Turkish investors are pouring into Libya, aware of the economic benefits. Turkey has been suffering from a crippling economic crisis that has weakened its economy and caused socioeconomic grievances. Therefore, as a rational actor, intervening in Libya is economically beneficial for Turkey, which might pose as a solid justification for the intervention in Libya. Moreover, at a regional and international level, and as a rational actor, this paper argues that the rivalries with the various stakeholders in the region has pushed Turkey to intervene to reaffirm its power and influence. Mainly with Egypt and the UAE, Turkey has challenged the two regional powers. Both are strong opponents of political Islam and Turkey's increased power in the region. The EU has also shared the former's anxiety over Turkey's power in the region, mainly in the East Mediterranean. The conflict has highlighted major issues of conflict when it comes to maritime boarders. Thus, the intervention in Libya can be seen as a result of the immense pressure and isolation Turkey is witnessing, and as a powerplay to reaffirm its role as a regional power.

These three motives might explain this event that has regional and national implications. The systematic approach which this paper utilizes, under defined foreign policy models, provides a beneficial addition to the already little literature done on the topic. Little literature is done on the

matter due to the recent occurrence of the event. The need for further scientific research in the field is an additional advantage. Further research should look into the matter through the lens of other prominent IR theories. Moreover, utilizing other foreign policy models, such as bureaucratic or organizational process models, is also helpful to look into in future research.

In conclusion, understanding the Turkish intervention in Libya is important to understand the political implications of such an event. The state, individual and international levels, all provide significant explanations to understand the motives behind Turkish intervention. The latest Libyan talks in Geneva, resulted in a new government, and the direct military role of Turkey officially ending. However, the role that this intervention played and is expected to play in the Libyan political future is undeniable. It is therefore essential that the impact of this intervention is examined to get a better look at Libyan politics.

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