

Libyan parliament ratifies maritime deal with Türkiye, heightening war danger in Eastern Mediterranean

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On October 20, Libya's eastern-based House of Representatives, located in the region controlled by General Khalifa Haftar, unanimously ratified the "Memorandum of Understanding on the Delimitation of Maritime Jurisdiction Areas in the Mediterranean" signed with Türkiye in 2019. It revoked the boycott decisions it had adopted against Ankara in 2020. With the approval of the Haftar faction, following that of Tripoli, the memorandum has for the first time been recognized by both of Libya's rival administrations.

The memorandum draws an adjoining maritime jurisdiction zone between Türkiye's southwestern coast and Libya's northeastern coast. It disregards the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claims of Greek islands such as Crete, Rhodes, Kasos and Karpathos. A Turkish-Libyan corridor is inserted between the areas claimed by Greece on the one side and Cyprus and Egypt on the other. The EEZ in question contains offshore oil and natural gas reserves estimated to be worth hundreds of billions of dollars.

The about-face by the Haftar faction, which for years declared the memorandum "illegitimate," provoked sharp reactions from Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, the European Union (EU), Israel and Egypt, all of which regard the agreement as damaging to their interests. Athens took the issue to the United Nations Security Council, and the EU's 27 member states issued a joint statement of condemnation.

The Turkish media has hailed the ratification as a "diplomatic victory," while Athens and Brussels present it as a "violation of international law."

The dispute over maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean is part of a struggle between the imperialist and regional powers for control over energy resources, pipelines, electricity and data cables, and strategic sea lanes. This struggle is forging new links between the fronts of a global war that is developing through the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, Israel's genocide in Gaza and the US-Israeli assault on Iran.

Under conditions in which the wars against Russia and Iran have raised the importance of energy resources and routes, it is pitting Türkiye against its NATO ally Greece and other

European powers. It is also intensifying Ankara's rivalry and tensions with Israel.

The Greek Foreign Ministry declared, "This decision does not change the fact that the memorandum remains illegal, null and void... Greece has already informed its partners and allies and will take all appropriate action to safeguard its sovereign rights."

In a joint statement on October 20, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa said they "deeply regret" the ratification. "This agreement infringes upon the sovereign rights of third states," they declared, adding that it does not comply with the Law of the Sea and is null and void. "We reaffirm our solidarity with Greece and Cyprus," the statement continued.

The following day, a statement issued by EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas on behalf of all 27 member states reiterated that the memorandum "is null and void and cannot produce any legal consequences for third States." According to the Greek press, the statement also leaves the door open to restrictive measures against Ankara.

The Israeli Foreign Ministry said it "strongly condemns" the decision. It claimed that the agreement "infringes upon the sovereign rights of our close allies in the region," adding, "Regretfully, once again, we see Turkey working to destabilize the eastern Mediterranean region."

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry described the memorandum as "absolutely null and void" and without legal effect, announcing that it reserved the right to take the necessary measures. Despite its recent rapprochement with Ankara, the regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has forged an energy alliance with Greece and Cyprus.

In the United States, Republican Senator Rick Scott denounced the ratification on October 20 as "yet another illegal and thuggish move by Erdogan." He declared, "If Erdogan won't act like an ally, he shouldn't enjoy the benefits of NATO." For now, this does not reflect the approach of US President Donald Trump, who regards Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as a critical ally and "friend" based on broader

cooperation in the Middle East.

The first direct consequence of the memorandum is being felt in the Great Sea Interconnector (GSI) project, planned to link the electricity grids of Greece, Cyprus and Israel. The EU has allocated a €657 million grant to the cable line, with costs reported to be approaching €3 billion. The French conglomerate Nexans is building it, while the French investment group Meridiam has acquired a majority stake in the project company. Part of the route between Crete and Cyprus passes through the continental shelf claimed by Türkiye. In 2024, offshore survey work was halted after Turkish warships were deployed to the area.

Nexans has now applied to Athens to resume work with a French-flagged survey vessel. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan said Ankara would not object to the surveys but wanted “a written notification, not just an oral one.” This would be a de facto recognition of Türkiye’s claims in the area.

Erdoğan suggested that Europe “buy electricity from us rather than transporting it from a distance of 2,000 kilometers.” Greek Foreign Minister Giorgos Gerapetritis replied that permission was being requested “only from Greece.” Athens is preparing to issue a new NAVTEX for the survey work in early November.

The Haftar faction’s turn toward Ankara points to a fragile accommodation in Libya. The country was torn apart by civil war after the 2011 NATO war against the regime of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and has remained divided between Tripoli and the eastern administration.

Long backed by Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia and France, the Haftar leadership has deepened its military and economic ties with Türkiye over the past two years. In July, an agreement was signed under which Türkiye will build military facilities and surveillance systems for Haftar’s forces, and in August Fidan visited Benghazi.

The Libyan decision comes as tensions between Türkiye and Israel and Greece are worsening, a by-product of the imperialist war in the Black Sea and the Middle East. Israel, Greece and Cyprus have signed a “trilateral military cooperation work plan” for 2026. Greece is purchasing some €3 billion worth of Israeli weapons systems to form the core of its “Achilles Shield” air defense system.

On August 18, Israeli warplanes struck an air base in Syria, where Israel claimed Turkish troops were preparing to deploy. Defense Minister Israel Katz warned Erdoğan against “dangerous adventures” in Syria. Tensions are also rising in the Aegean. Ankara responded to Athens’ militarization of islands close to the Turkish coast by redeploying the 51st Commando Brigade, comprising 2,000 troops, to Söke, opposite the island of Samos.

The day before the Libyan vote, Erdoğan declared that Türkiye is “surrounded by a ring of fire.” Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he hoped to avoid “a head-on confrontation” with Türkiye, but that Israel was preparing for

“multiple scenarios.”

Ankara is seeking to advance its own regional interests, in line with Washington, through the Mecca Joint Defense Agreement signed with Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, which is expected to come before the Turkish parliament next week. That this agreement places Türkiye side by side with Israel in supporting the Saudi kingdom’s war against the Houthi Ansar Allah movement in Yemen underscores the contradictory character of the growing rivalry between these two US allies.

Ankara also continues to allow oil from Azerbaijan to flow to Israel through Turkish territory and permits US-NATO bases in the country to be used to Israel’s benefit in its war against the Palestinians and Iran.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Ministry of National Defense announced that a multilateral “Badr Memorandum of Understanding” was signed in Doha on October 21 between the defense ministries of Türkiye, Qatar, Indonesia and Pakistan. According to the ministry, the memorandum aims “to promote cooperation in the field of military production” and “to strengthen the military capabilities of the four countries.”

The region is tending to divide into rival blocs: the Israel-Greece-Cyprus axis on the one side, and Türkiye’s alliances extending to the Gulf and South Asia on the other. All these blocs to one degree or another act in line with the imperialist powers’ aim of establishing complete control over the oil-rich Middle East, while chasing their own share of the plunder. This trajectory, fueled by the deepening crisis of the capitalist system, raises the danger that tensions between regional powers will turn into armed conflict.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International warned in its 2020 statement, such conflicts cannot be resolved peacefully under capitalism. Workers and youth in Türkiye, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel and Libya must reject being pitted against one another for the interests of their own ruling classes, which are tied to imperialism. All these governments are seeking to make the working class pay for war and rearmament through inflation, austerity and poverty wages.

Workers throughout the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East must respond to the social assault and war by uniting in a common struggle with their class brothers and sisters in Europe and internationally, who are beginning to move against the same problems. This struggle must be based on the perspective of the United Socialist States of the Middle East and Europe. It means building sections of the ICFI in every country of the region.



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