

13/11/2020

Cyprus, Israel, Greece: Agree to boost defense cooperation

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The defense ministers of Greece, Israel and Cyprus agreed Thursday to step up military cooperation which they said will keep their armed forces better prepared, help create more jobs and bolster security in a fraught region.

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said it was agreed during talks in Nicosia to “promote large-scale industry cooperation that will bolster our defense abilities and create thousands of jobs for all three economies.”

The three countries have forged close ties amid regional tension in the Eastern Mediterranean over offshore gas exploitation rights, and are partners in a project to bring gas from fields in Israeli and potentially other nations’ waters through an undersea pipeline to Europe’s mainland.

Greece’s Nikos Panagiotopoulos said Greek, Israeli and Cypriot armed forces are working to operate together more effectively through joint training programs, intelligence sharing and cyber-security.

Panagiotopoulos and Cyprus’ Charalambos Petrides said the three countries are looking to expand their partnership to include other countries such as the US whose presence in the eastern Mediterranean the Greek minister said “is of particular importance” for regional stability.

Greece and Cyprus are embroiled in a dispute with Turkey which has sent gas prospecting vessels into waters claimed by Greece and drilling ships into an area where Cyprus claims exclusive rights. The tension brought NATO allies Greece and Turkey close to open conflict in the summer and autumn but has since subsided.

Turkey insists that it’s fully within its rights to carry out such prospecting in those waters. It also claims to defend the rights of breakaway Turkish Cypriots to energy reserves around war-divided Cyprus. [AP]

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Cyprus-Turkey-Greece: Cavusoglu signals new Cyprus game plan

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Turkish FM Cavusoglu called for sovereign equality in divided Cyprus, adding that Ankara was ready for dialogue with Athens but also prepared for tension if Greece chose the latter.

Speaking during a plenary session on Tuesday 10/11/20 at the Conference of Ambassadors, **Cavusoglu** said “Turkish Cypriots will no longer sit at the negotiating table just to talk.”

“They clearly conveyed this message in the last elections,” Cavusoglu said, referring to the election of Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin **Tatar** who was openly endorsed by Ankara, the only capital that recognizes a separate administration on the northern part of the island.

Cavusoglu also called for equal footing between the two sides, Greek Cypriots in the Republic of Cyprus in the south and Turkish Cypriots in the north, favoring sovereign equality where political equality doesn’t exist.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has launched a new initiative to explore the possibility of convening an informal five-party meeting in the near future, which would include the two Cypriot sides, as well as the island’s guarantors Greece, Turkey, and Great Britain.

The foreign minister also told Turkish diplomats at home and abroad that Ankara wants to sort out its disputes with Greece through dialogue, saying the door would remain open for the two NATO allies for talks without preconditions.

[...]

But during the conference, where the theme this year was “Turkish Diplomacy at the Centenary of National Sovereignty: From Tradition to the Future,” **Cavusoglu noted that several Turkish proposals based on “reasonable diplomatic openings” were still pending with Greece as well as others in the region, especially regarding an equal sharing of hydrocarbon resources.**

“While the Greek prime minister penned letters in the newspapers of France, Germany, Britain trying to benefit from the public opinion of other countries, we addressed the Greek public with an article in a Greek newspaper. We said, you can choose either to live with tensions and escalation or we engage in diplomacy, dialogue and cooperation,” Cavusoglu said.

"The ball is in Greece's court. Fortunately, all paths are open for Turkey," Cavusoglu said.

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Cyprus: Podcast: Erdogan's Varosha picnic and the legal implications

cyprus-mail.com

The Cyprus News Digest, in collaboration with the Cyprus Mail, brings you an in-depth analysis of some of the latest developments in local and international – in audio form. Presented by Rosie Charalambous, this week

- As Tayyip Erdogan makes plans to picnic on the beach in fenced-off Varosha, we discuss the legal implications of infringing the buffer zone
- Activists from the End Corruption platform vow to continue their protests demanding concrete action from the government

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Turkey: Highlights from Turkish press commentaries 13 Nov 20

Commentaire de l'auteur

The following is a selection of highlights from Turkish commentaries published in the 13 November 2020 edition of Turkish newspapers and news websites available to BBC Monitoring.

Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal

Sabah (pro-government): "In the current situation, it is certain that Turkish and Russian troops will be on duty together at the joint control and monitoring centre with a location to be determined by Azerbaijan. However, in addition to the agreement signed by the Turkish and Russian defence ministers, the Russian delegation - which arrives in Ankara today - and the Turkish delegation will decide on the role of this joint peace force." (Commentary by Hilal Kapan)

Aydinlik (pro-China nationalist): "Azerbaijan won a victory. Armenian Prime Minister [Nikol] Pashinyan, who was brought to the power by the US, has admitted defeat. Now his rule hangs by a thread. He is hiding from his own people. [Azerbaijani President Ilham] Aliyev thanked two leaders: [Turkish President Recep Tayyip] Erdogan and [Russian President Vladimir] Putin. Turkish-Russian cooperation has brought about a victory. Those who promoted rivalry with Russia and Iran, saying 'Turkey is not at the table', are up a gum tree." (Commentary by Ismet Ozcelik)

Turkey-US relations

Turkiye (pro-government): "Now the opposition at home and the remnants of FETO [government-designated Fetullahist Terror Organisation] outside are anxiously waiting for [US president-elect Joe] Biden to impose sanctions on Turkey through the [Turkish state lender] Halkbank case... Because all they [want] is for the Turkish economy to sink and Erdogan to step down. However, Halkbank is a legal case not a political one." (Commentary by Cem Kucuk)

Cumhuriyet (secularist opposition): "[Erdogan], who aspired to coordinate and jointly [lead] imperialist projects in the Middle East, drew a reaction from the whole Arab world when he fulfilled his subcontracting function and tried to implement the Ottomanist-labelled Ikhvani [Muslim Brotherhood] policy... [However] Erdogan, who caused trouble with his showy protests against Israel, ultimately achieved the image of an incompetent, fanatic religious leader who made... unsuccessful, spectacular stands... Relations with the US will now be determined by the influence of this new image." (Commentary by Ali Sirmen)

Economy management

Hurriyet (pro-government): "President Erdogan will be more involved in the administration of the economy in the new period. In other words, Erdogan will be steering the ship... Law has become as important as the economy. One cannot exist without the other. Because capital is cautious. Only when legal assurances are given do local investors invest and foreign capital comes into the country." (Commentary by Abdulkadir Selvi)

T24 (independent news website): "You [Erdogan] cannot get anywhere simply by firing the son-in-law [resigned finance minister Berat Albayrak]. Because everyone in the country knows who the 'one man' is. Everyone knows who holds all the government's strings. The last word is with the [presidential] Palace! This is the reality of the one-man regime... And when we scratch the surface of what you say now, the old mentality smirks back. But it was that 'mentality' that plunged Turkey into a deadlock, including in the economy. At this point, it is pointless what you say. You cannot persuade people after such a personal record, because you are the problem!" (Commentary by Hasan Cemal)

13/11/2020

Israel, Lebanon: Resume Mediterranean Sea Border talks

www.oedigital.com

Commentaire de l'auteur

(Reporting by Reuters' Beirut bureau; Additional reporting by Ari Rabinovitch in Jerusalem and Michelle Nichols in New York; Editing by Toby Chopra)

Israel and Lebanon resumed U.S.-mediated talks on Wednesday on a dispute about their Mediterranean Sea border that has held up hydrocarbon exploration in the potentially gas-rich area, the Israeli energy minister, and Lebanon's state news agency said.

The longtime foes held three rounds of talks last month hosted by the United Nations at a peacekeeper base in southern Lebanon which the world body and the United States have described as "productive".

But sources had said that gaps between the sides remain large after they each presented contrasting maps outlining proposed borders that actually increased the size of the disputed area.

The next round of talks will be held in December, a joint statement from the United States and the U.N. Special Coordinator for Lebanon said, as did Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz in a separate communique. They did not provide further details about Wednesday's discussions.

Israel already pumps gas from huge offshore fields but Lebanon, which has yet to find commercial gas reserves in its own waters, is desperate for cash from foreign donors as it faces the worst economic crisis since its 1975-1990 civil war.

The meetings are the culmination of three years of diplomacy by Washington, and follow a series of deals under which three Arab nations - the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan - agreed to establish full relations with Israel.

Lebanon has said its talks are strictly limited to their disputed boundary.

13/11/2020

Libya: Oxford Analytica: Libyan talks have a long hard road ahead

dailybrief.oxan.com

The political track of talks to end the Libyan civil war started this week, with positive headlines soon following

The UN announced yesterday that the Libyan warring sides would immediately reopen the main coastal road that links the west of the country to the east, clearing landmines and withdrawing fighters from the city of Sirte. The announcement comes a day after participants in the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), which began this week, agreed a roadmap for elections to take place within 18 months. The apparent rapid progress in talks obscures the fact that key questions remain, such who will be in the transitional government that oversees elections. The forum is part of a three-pronged peace process that also includes military and economic tracks. Criticism overshadowed its opening, including complaints that the participant list is not representative,

What next

For now, two key foreign meddlers in Libya, Turkey and Russia, appear not to oppose the LPDF and the wider UN process. However, their view of the forum and its success is linked to how the separate military and economic tracks will fare. Domestic resentment of the forum -- particularly from elements aligned with eastern military commander Khalifa Haftar, with influential media outlets capable of stirring public opinion -- could undermine its legitimacy and ultimately prevent a genuine agreement. The challenge for the UN is to ensure a successful forum while mitigating such criticisms.

Subsidiary Impacts

- The LPDF's outcome will affect the other simultaneous tracks, military and economic.
- A successful process leading to fresh elections will help fill the legitimacy deficit which has long hobbled institutional progress.
- The LPDF is a key credibility test for the UN mission in Libya, which has struggled for years to build a viable peace process.

Analysis

Internationally, there are high hopes for the UN-sponsored LPDF, which began in the Tunisian capital on November 9 following a round of preparatory online discussions.

The forum brings together 75 Libyans to agree on a unified transitional government framework intended to lead to new elections within what the UN hopes will be the shortest possible time-frame. Diplomats cite the recent lull in fighting, progress in ending an eight-month oil blockade and the reopening of internal air routes as causes for optimism as the talks begin (see LIBYA: Turning tide of war has wide repercussions - June 10, 2020).

Three-part mechanism

The LPDF is one of three components of the reshaped peace process that emerged from the Berlin conference at the beginning of 2020 and takes place alongside parallel military and economic tracks.

On October 23, the military track brought about the signing of a permanent ceasefire between the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA), which is recognised by the UN, and Khalifa Haftar's eastern-based Libyan Arab Armed Forces, or Libyan National Army (LNA) as it is generally known.

The military dialogue track is crucial to the outcome of the talks

All three tracks are designed to complement one another, but since power is largely concentrated in the hands of armed factions aligned with elements that either benefit from the economic status quo or want to up-end it in order to gain from it, the LPDF political track is perceived by many Libyans as the least important of the three.

Next government

The LPDF will design the structure of the next phase of government -- one that will pave the way for elections -- and that is an important remit.

Hence the controversy over the participant list: critics across the political spectrum claim it is not representative. Few Libyans can agree on who or what does count as representative. The debate about whether elected representatives or armed actors should take precedence has hampered discussions since civil war erupted in 2014. Following Haftar's failed offensive to capture Tripoli between April 2019 and June 2020, the debate about 'representativeness' is further aggravated by grievances.

The LPDF has participants from across Libya, including representatives of the main political currents, business people, tribal notables and civil society figures. Supporters of former Libyan leader Muammar al-Qadhafi are also taking part.

Criticisms

The most strident critics of the LPDF are from the Haftar-aligned camp and its allied media outlets. They include groups like the 'Supreme Council of Tribes' and Aref Nayed, a former Libyan ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) who has publicly declared his ambition to be president.

Their main grievance is a claim -- rejected by the UN -- that the political Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, and its allies are over-represented in the forum. Media outlets linked to such critics -- some of whom have some of the highest audience engagement levels in Libya -- have pushed this claim heavily in recent weeks. Accusing political opponents of belonging to the Brotherhood, even when they do not, has been a common and potent tactic in Libya since 2011.

Furthermore, figures from the Amazigh minority have accused the UN of failing to ensure they have a voice at the LPDF, while other critics complain that several of the participants are from the Libyan diaspora. A more general concern is that too many of the attendees do not carry enough weight either within their own communities and constituencies or on the national stage to be effective in building support for the process.

Foreign views

Apart from domestic criticism of the forum, there are worries that the many foreign states with stakes in Libya's conflict may not want it to succeed.

Turkish President Erdogan previously claimed that the LPDF lacked "buy-in", but Ankara now appears better disposed towards it, as does Moscow. Even so, Western diplomats have been concerned that Turkey and Russia might seek to undermine the UN process with a joint political initiative that would signal they are ready to cooperate on Libya despite backing rival camps.

While Egypt has been supportive of the military track, the position of the UAE -- long a major backer of Haftar -- is more opaque (see UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: Libya policy is risky - April 2, 2020 and (see EGYPT: Cairo will retrench to 'buffer' aim in Libya - June 25, 2020).

Claims by its Libyan allies that the LPDF is tilted in favour of the Brotherhood will shape the UAE's perceptions of the process.

The road ahead

The forum opened with some debate about which figures might be part of a new unity government. Earlier proposals to bring House of Representatives head Aguila Saleh, GNA interior minister Fathi Bashaga and High State Council head Khaled al-Mishri together as a governing triumvirate seem to have run aground.

Haftar is only interested in talks insofar as he thinks he can benefit from them

A scenario where the LPDF does not break the stalemate between the GNA and its eastern rival would benefit Haftar, who is dismissive of dialogue processes, having torpedoed the last effort with his April 2019 offensive. He appears more invested in the ongoing military and economic tracks, but only as long as he believes he can benefit from them (see LIBYA: Haftar's ambitions may intensify war - January 31, 2017) and (see LIBYA: Haftar will obstruct political solution - March 11, 2016).

If the LPDF fails, the impact will be felt on the other two tracks, and not only in how their outcomes gain greater legitimacy. It will risk undermining popular support for the entire process, and ordinary Libyans may feel their chance of being represented in a new transitional framework has been wasted. In such a case, the risk of a return to armed conflict will be high.

HIGHLIGHTS

Turkey will continue to stand against efforts to confine it to territorial waters in the Aegean and around the Gulf of Antalya in the Eastern Mediterranean, Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said. France is after roles that exceed its strength and is out of its depth," he added.

Greece's extended airspace claim not in line with international law, US State Dept. says
The Greek Foreign Ministry criticized the new Navtex, saying the recently announced activity of the Oruc Reis research vessel "is in violation of international law and undermines peace and stability in the region." Turkey dismissed the statement as "null and void."

European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly has opened an investigation into Frontex following reports that the EU border agency is supporting Greece to push refugees back to the open sea

Minister for Energy and Natural Resources Fatih Donmez, in a presentation to parliament's Planning and Budget Commission, said, "By fairly and equitably making a determination as to maritime jurisdiction zones in the Eastern Mediterranean basin in accordance with our rights under international law, and for the purpose of protecting our sovereign rights within our continental shelf, with Turkish Cypriots as equal partners on the island, we will continue to decisively carry out exploration and drilling operations in this region and in the Black Sea without compromising on our legitimate rights with a view to guaranteeing our claims and interests over hydrocarbon resources."

Libya's warring sides agreed to hold elections within 18 months, according to the head of the U.N. Support Mission in the country.

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