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Rapid Assessment of Turkish Training Support to the Libyan Coastal Forces



**GLOBAL
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CONTACT POINT

Mark Micallef

Director, North Africa and Sahel
Observatory, Global Initiative Against

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INTRODUCTION

During 2021, the Libyan Navy, Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) and the General Authority for Coastal Security (GACS) started actively implementing the terms of framework agreements for capacity building and cooperation signed between Ankara and Tripoli in 2019. Under this cooperation drive, Turkey delivered both theoretical and technical training in Antalya, and Izmir, Turkey, as well as Libya itself, to officials from both entities.

Libyan interlocutors have continued to pursue opportunities for cooperation, including as recently as October 2021, when the recently re-appointed head of GACS, General Bashir Suleiman Bin-Nour, met a delegation from the Turkish Coast Guard during a visit to Ankara to discuss potential for training courses for GACS personnel, and the provision of maintenance support for vessels.

However, despite the above suggestions of Libyan interest in training, several challenges have emerged. Actual activity has diminished since the summer of 2021. Further, a pronounced split emerged within the Libyan Naval officer corps, with senior officers broadly unsatisfied with the calibre of Turkish training in comparison to that offered by European states. Junior officers, on the other hand, tended to view the training as an opportunity to advance their careers and build networks.

Dissatisfaction has also in other areas of the Turkey-Libya naval engagement. Frustration reportedly exists among Libyans around efforts by Ankara to push Turkish suppliers. There is also dissatisfaction with the level of communication with their Turkish counterparts by the LCG.

Finally, Turkey's training programme has been impacted by the hybridity of Libyan Naval forces and the influence of powerful, informal gatekeepers. One of the main said gatekeepers is the UN Sanctioned Zawiya LCG captain Abdulrahman Milad, known as al-Bija, an affiliated ally of the Stabilization Support Apparatus (SSA), who has leveraged his control over the Janzour Naval Academy since mid-2021 to influence which junior officers are selected for foreign training programmes. This intervention has changed training selection to patronage, impacting both the calibre of trainees and the ultimate impact of the training on operational capacity. More broadly, it has also further impeded the impact of the capacity building, all while influencing Libyan perceptions of Turkey's training.

Against this backdrop, this assessment profiles the background and scope of Turkish capacity building and training efforts of the LCG and the GACS. It also details the political and force challenges Turkey has faced in these efforts, which have salience more broadly for foreign training programmes targeting Libya's Naval and Coastguard forces.

This qualitative study harnesses the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC)'s standing network in Libya for targeted information. It relies on semi-structured interviews with key informants, including contacts within the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG), Libyan Navy, and General Authority for Coastal Security (GACS), as well as European and Libyan officials. Additionally, the GI-TOC conducted Arabic-language social media analysis to assess the dynamics within the force.

ORIGINS OF TURKISH TRAINING OF LCG, GACS & NAVY

Turkey has pursued multifaceted goals in Libya since the 2011 revolution. Attempts to protect and expand commercial interests, which were the primary concerns in the wake of the revolution, remain important, however, Turkey has increasingly looked to Libya as a means of expanding its broader influence and national security interests in North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean. To this end, it has sought to expand relations with key political actors in both western and eastern Libya.

Since 2021 it has militarily entrenched in airbases and military facilities in the country and built preferential relationships with key armed groups and individuals in Western Libya. It has also sought to build influence within Libyan state institutions, including the ministries of defence and interior. Turkish capacity building exercises targeting the Libyan navy, LCG and GACS should be seen as part of this effort. There is also a long-term component to these initiatives, with Turkey viewing the engagement with younger naval officers and non-commissioned officers as an effective means of both scouting the next generation of Libyan naval commanders and building influence with them.

The legal basis for Libyan-Turkish military and security cooperation is rooted in a Memorandum of Understanding signed in late 2012. The provisions of the MoU applied to a broad array of stakeholders, allowing officers, non-commissioned officers, cadets, and other personnel to receive training at military training facilities, units and social facilities of the other party. Owing to the fact Libya was a recipient rather than a provider of capacity building, this MoU formalized a cooperation that was asymmetric, largely involving Turkish capacity building of the Libyan MOD.

The fields of cooperation outlined in the 2012 agreement were extensive, with several colleges, academies and military schools explicitly highlighted as the main locales for Turkish-Libyan capacity building. Training and education courses were also to be provided by two Ministry of Interior Units: the Gendarmerie (Jandarma Genel Komutanlığı) and the Coast Guard (Sahil Güvenlik Komutanlığı).

Fields outlined as priorities included military logistics, medicine, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and counterpiracy. The MoU did not specifically aim to tackle maritime-related activities, but rather was intended to lay the groundwork for a broader institutional cooperation between the defence and security structures in the two countries, address Libyan needs, outline modalities of cooperation, administrative frameworks, and payment mechanisms.

The MoU led to some training and capacity building initiatives between 2013 and 2019.¹ The initiatives remained fairly discrete, with an estimated 3 000 personnel trained between 2014 and 2019.² Mostly, training involved land forces, such as police units linked to the General Purpose Force. While the history of that programme stands outside the mandate of this assessment, it is important

¹ Tom Westcott, 'Libyan soldiers start military training in Turkey,' Libya Herald, 7 December 2013, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2013/12/libyan-soldiers-start-military-training-in-turkey/>

² Engin Yüksel, 'Turkey's interventions in its near abroad: The case of Libya,' CRU Policy Brief, Clingendael, September 2021, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/Policy_brief_Turkeys_interventions_near_%20abroad_The_case_of_Libya.pdf

to stress that part of the reason for its failure was both poor selection criteria for participants and an apparent focus by Turkish authorities on the commercial opportunities linked to supply of police equipment over training impact.³ As will be detailed below, these deficiencies remain salient during present training of Navy, LCG and GACS personnel.

Turkish-Libyan cooperation deepened in 2019, with Turkey intervening semi-openly to support the Government of National Accord (GNA), via the sharing of intelligence and the dispatch of military personnel, Syrian mercenaries, drones, aerial defence weaponry and electronic warfare systems. Ankara's intervention effectively halted and reversed an offensive by the commander of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), Khalifa Haftar, and cemented Turkey as a major actor within the country, especially Western Libya.

Prior to the intervention, Ankara signed two MOUs with the GNA, one on maritime demarcation and the other on defence and security cooperation. The 2019 MOU on defence and security cooperation builds on that signed in 2012, adding further layers of cooperation. It provides a legal basis for intelligence-sharing, with parties meant to cooperate and develop strategic engagement in relevant to their respective national security threats, such as aviation and maritime security.

The latter MoU expanded the scope for operational collaboration, providing a basis for deployment of equipment and personnel on either party's requests, and expands the number of ministries covered via institutional collaboration. This explains why Turkey's military cooperation with the GNA, and subsequently, the Government of National Unity (GNU), has been with several institutional counterparts, including the Ministries of Interior, Defence, intelligence apparatus, select armed groups and particular individual military zones in Western Libya.

Such cooperation was often predicated on engagement with key Libyan gatekeepers, including GNA's Minister of Defence Salaheddin Namroush, Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha, the head of the Joint Military Zone Usama al-Juwaili, and militia commanders such as Mahmoud Ben Rajab and head of the 444 Brigade, Mahmoud Hamza. These were the figures that Ankara initially relied on for its intervention, and their institutional links enabled Turkey to kickstart its capacity building efforts.

The MoU and the institutional engagement it enables is just part of Turkey's power projection and influence development in Western Libya. It has also put in place forces at, allowing Ankara to consolidate its footprint in the al-Wattiya military airbase, in the Misrata and Mitiga airports, and secured a presence in the port of al-Khoms, east of Tripoli.

Evolution of Training Initiatives Post-2020

Between 2012 and 2019, most of Turkey's capacity building efforts in Libya focused on land forces. Since 2020, this changed, with Turkey increasingly focusing on Libyan maritime security. In part, this appears to be aimed at assisting Libya in managing maritime challenges, irregular migration, as well as the trafficking of drugs and arms. However, as with Turkey's initiatives with land forces, efforts to

³ Aron Lund, 'The Turkish Intervention in Libya', Försvarsdepartementet, March 2022.35.

establish institutional inroads with Libya's Navy, LCG and GACS are also geared towards building influence and connections within these institutions, as well as securing contracts for Turkish companies.

Plans for Turkish maritime capacity building solidified in 2020, during the twilight of GNA era. The key Libyan interlocutors to cementing the relationship were gatekeepers that held an institutional position – namely the then defence and interior ministers, Namroush, and Bashagha. On the Turkish side, one of the key individuals advising the Turkish Presidency on plans for security sector reform was Emrah Kekili. Prior to 2019, Kekili had conducted mappings of Libyan security institutions as part of his work at a think tank, the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı, SETA).

According to information collected, the Navy, LCG or GACS have not conducted any internal needs-assessment of their own during this planning phase. Rather, it appears that Kekili's prior assessments from before 2019 of the state of Libya's Navy, LCG and GACS formed the basis of Turkish-Libyan capacity building efforts.

The 2012 MOU formed the legal basis for Turkish engagement, while the operational framework was based on the 2019 MOU, which outlined cooperation to be between the Turkish Ministry of Defence and the Libyan Navy. According to GI-TOC contacts, this agreement established the Turkish Interior Ministry as the primary coordinator for maritime capacity building, interacting primarily through its counterpart Ministry in Libya.

Turkey's initial objective, as communicated to Libyan defence and interior counterparts, was to train 6 000 Libyan personnel, drawn from Navy, LCG and GACS. GI-TOC contacts indicate a longer-term objective was to train 10 000 personnel, a force that could subsequently assume control over Libya's maritime waters and provide a partner for Turkey in Libya. In this sense, it is useful to view Turkey's engagement as part of longer terms strategy which, for instance, seeks to enforce the second MOU it signed with the GNA in 2019 which focused on the demarcation of the maritime Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundary line between Turkey and Libya.⁴

Despite both sides planning for capacity building to start rapidly in the wake of the MoU's signature, substantial delays paused most training initiatives, with only one event known to have been held in 2020. In part delays were due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to lockdowns in Turkey and Libya that slowed administrative and coordination efforts. Moreover, in March 2021 the GNA was

⁴ The agreement was controversial, with Turkey claiming a portion of the territorial waters claimed by Greece's claimed territorial waters and can be seen as an attempt to rewrite the exclusive economic zones of the Mediterranean, giving Turkey a significant say in transnational gas exploration and pipeline construction through the Eastern Mediterranean. Libyan politicians who signed the agreement did not consider this would embroil Libya in the Eastern Mediterranean's contested maritime claims and were mostly incentivized by the prospect of Turkish security assistance to address the ongoing conflict with the LAAF. Currently, the Turko-Libyan EEZ's envisioned delimitations are from Turkey's southern Mediterranean shore to Libya's northeast coast, with the latter falling under Haftar-controlled territory.

replaced by the GNU, under Dabaiba. The change in government led to the replacement of a number of key gatekeepers who had been key to prior capacity building efforts.

Despite concerns, however, the political continuity of training initiatives was ensured by Dabaiba's assumption of the Prime Ministerial as well as the Defence Minister role, as Ankara had had a decades-long pre-existing relationship with him and his family stretching to the Gadaffi era.

Meanwhile, Libya's political fractiousness also constrained Turkish training efforts, especially, control by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces over Eastern Libya, as well as the antagonism of LAAF commander Khalifa Haftar towards Dabaiba. This meant that Turkey's footprint for security assistance was restricted to forces in Western Libya.

Turkey initially attempted to surmount this split by engaging mainly with the Libyan Ministry of Interior under Khaled Mazen, which was initially perceived as able to influence both Eastern and Western maritime units as it nominally unified them under a single payroll. This proved to be a miscalculation, as Haftar-aligned MOI units in Eastern Libya did not engage with Mazen or with Turkish capacity building.

More recently, the new Libyan Coast Security Director – General Bashir Sliman Bin-Nour - has reportedly conducted some outreach to the Eastern branch of the GACS, meeting officers from Tobruk, Sousse, Benghazi and Ajdabiya to discuss the trainings that Turkey could deliver. However, at the time of writing, nothing was reported to have come from these meetings.

It was not possible to obtain exact figures for the number of training events carried out by year and recipient institution, in large part because information on different training programmes under the umbrella of the Turkish effort appears to be highly fragmented and siloed. However, a European security source closely monitoring Turkey's activities in Libya, reported that since 2020, Turkey is believed to have delivered more than 50 trainings, with some 20, delivered in 2021 and another 17 believed to have been delivered by the end of May 2022.

By December 2021 Turkey claimed that 900 Libyan personnel had been trained at a facility in al-Khums (see below) where they received 75 different types of training since the 2019 MOU.⁵ According to information collected for this assessment, this is likely an exaggerated figure. Nonetheless, in so far as maritime personnel is concerned, GI-TOC sources within the Libyan Ministry of Interior and Defence reported that between 300 and 350 Libyan GACS graduates had been trained, and 100 LCG and Navy personnel at the end of April.

In sum, between 2019 and 2022, Ankara has not focused on fundamentally altering the security landscape in western Libya through its training programme, and instead sought to adapt to it. Turkey's security assistance to maritime units has been ad-hoc and focused on discrete training modules.

⁵ News2Sea, Libyan Navy becomes professional with the training and consultancy of the TAF, 18 December 2021, <https://www.news2sea.com/libyan-navy-becomes-professional-with-the-training-and-consultancy-of-the-taf/>

There has been little focus on efforts to improve the management or oversight of the Navy, LCG and GACS.

TRAINING SELECTION AND PROCESS

Training provided by Turkey to the Libyan Navy, LCG and GACS is available to both enlisted personnel and officers. In 12 training events publicized, the vast majority of participants and trainers were male. Females are known to have benefitted from only one training, offered on 07 April 2021 in Antalya, Turkey to Libyan Coast Guard staff. In that instance, all trainers and trainees were female. This is consistent with information collected by the GI-TOC on the distribution of trainees.

To date, trainees have only been drawn from Navy, LCG and GACS personnel affiliated with the Tripoli based GNU. Selection of trainees for courses occurs within each of the participating forces. Enlisted personnel and non-commissioned officers must be between 18 and 25 years, while the age range for accepted officers is substantially larger, encompassing personnel between 22 and 40. Prior to selection, both enlisted personnel and officers must undergo a physical fitness test. Those who meet selection criteria have their applications forwarded from their respective services to superior officers within either the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defence, where final selection is made.

Alongside the formal process, selection is also reported to be highly dependent on cronyism and personalistic factors, with key gatekeepers (most notably al-Bija via the Janzour Naval Academy, see below) exerting substantial influence on the selection process.

For training offered to the LCG and GACS to date, there is no evidence of formed units being trained en-masse. However, this may be about to change as Navy units on board Libyan ships and special forces teams are slated to receive trainings in Turkey in June 2022, according to information collected.

Most courses involve relatively small numbers of trainees, with GI-TOC interviews and open-source research indicate that the number of personnel trained per event ordinarily ranges from 12 to 20. Some trainings do involve larger numbers of personnel, with two instances identified in which roughly 30 Libyan personnel were visually confirmed to have been in attendance.

Such small trainings should be read as positive from a pedagogic point of view, offering a greater opportunity for skills transfer and functional learning by attendees compared to extremely large courses. However, the small per-class numbers also slows the rate at which Turkey can achieve its goal of training 6 000 or 10 000 personnel.

Training locations, pedagogy and length

Turkish training occurs at facilities in Turkey and in Libya. GI-TOC interviewees reported that students who distinguish themselves in trainings in Libya are generally those chosen to be sent to on to Turkish institutions for further training. However, the number of trainings in Turkey is reportedly

decreasing. According to GI-TOC interviewees, the decline is due primarily to the costs associated with conducting capacity building in Turkey, which Ankara is reportedly seeking to limit.

In Turkey, most training offered to the LCG and GACS has occurred at the Coast Guard Training and Education Command in Antalya, Turkey, the headquarters and main training facility of the Turkish Coast Guard. There has also been some training provided at the Foça Naval Base in Izmir.

In Libya, Turkish training is based around al-Khoms, Tajoura and Tripoli. In al-Khoms, the Joint Maritime Training Centre, 100 km east of Tripoli, was created by the Turkish Armed Forces' Libya Task Group Command and is a residential training facility, where Turkey has established a permanent naval presence at this facility. This is the main focal point of Turkish-delivered training.

Overseen by a Turkish Army Colonel, this is the busiest facility. However, this is likely a gross exaggeration (see below). Information collected for this assessment also indicates that the facility is not providing training at present to LCG personnel.



Al-Khoms Joint Maritime Training Centre. Source: News2Sea.com

Turkish training for the LCG and GACS also occurs at the Tajoura GACS base, 20 kilometres west of Tripoli's centre. GI-TOC interviewees have indicated that training is not residential in Tajoura, with cadets arriving in the morning and leaving around 18 00 in the evening. One GI-TOC interviewee stressed that within the Libyan Navy, this 'commuter' approach was not seen as a way to run a serious training programme.

Specialized training is also provided at the Training Institute of the General Directorate of Security Operations of the Libyan Ministry of Interior, another facility located in Tajoura. This is a facility where both land-based and maritime-based units receive theoretical training, overseen by Turkish

personnel. Maritime units trained in this facility are predominantly affiliated with GACS, and courses are primarily delivered in classrooms, with the presence of Libyan MOI officials.⁶

Finally, in Misrata, theoretical Turkish capacity building is also provided at the LCG base in city's port. The port has emerged as one of the major epicentres for Turkish-Misratan cooperation, with Turkey's major other footprint in the city being centred in the northern part of the city's airbase (which houses a joint operation room, drones, Turkish personnel, and Turkish-aligned Syrian mercenaries). In addition to permanent or semi-permanent training sites in al-Khoms and Tajoura, Turkey is also operating mobile training teams . Open-source research by the GI-TOC has identified several instances in which non-classroom training was conducted in Tripoli.

The training provided by Turkey to Libyan maritime forces predominantly consists of in-career modules, meant to provide in-depth training on specific subjects to experienced personnel. A non-exhaustive list of modules obtained by the GI-TOC includes boarding and searching ships; personal protection; combating smuggling; engine maintenance; radar operations; operating and piloting small vessels; underwater warfare training; coastal security training; and explosive ordinance.

However, Turkey is also providing modules that tackle entry-level skills, including basics of navigation and maritime art, navigation, and the theory and practice of search and rescue. This reflects a Turkish assessment that the hybridization of the Libyan Navy, LCG and GACS in the decade since the revolution has led to significant skills basic gaps among both enlisted personnel and officers.

Little information could be obtained on training pedagogy (such as syllabi, instructor qualifications, teaching qualifications and approaches, etc), limiting efforts to assess this aspect of the training. GI-TOC interviews and open-source analysis suggests, however, that training is heavy on theory lecture courses, with limited active learning, and practical modules.

Based on information collected, the length of the courses ranges from anywhere from two weeks to two months, depending on the subject. In a limited number of cases, GI-TOC interviewees suggested that longer courses are offered, with some reportedly lasting up to six months.

According to information collected, trainers are typically drawn from among Turkish military and Coast Guard instructors. Contractors are not normally involved, however, according to a well-placed key informant, representatives of the Turkish ship and boat manufacturer ARES has been involved in providing training, likely to promote their hardware (see below).

Finally, most training provided by Turkey involves direct skills instruction. However, in a very limited number of instances, Turkey has reportedly offered training-of-trainers in diving and maritime rescue. The limited nature of this type of training poses a challenge for Turkish naval and coastal security

⁶ Facebook page for the Training Institute of the General Directorate of Security Operations for the Ministry of Interior, Libya: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100077311147392>

forces, impeding efforts to build up dedicated training capacity within the institutions in key competencies.

CRACKS IN THE TURKISH PROGRAMME

Turkish capacity building for the Libyan Navy, LCG and GACS has been challenged by a number of issues, which threaten to impact the longer-term strategic goals of the engagement. Some of these challenges are related to systemic issues within the Libyan maritime sector. Other challenges relate to disparities in Libyan perceptions of the efficiency of Turkish capacity-building, and scepticism over Turkey's broader goals in the country.

Maritime security sector dysfunctions blunt impact of training

The main strategic challenge is that fractured and hybridized nature of security forces in Libya substantially undermined both the feasibility and impact of training. Most of the naval points for which the LCG is responsible, for example, are controlled by armed groups. In eastern Libya the LCG is functionally part of the LAAF, which has control over 26 of the 51 naval checkpoints along the coast. The LCG in Misrata is under the Navy command in Misrata and controls the main naval checkpoints around Misrata including Zliten. The LCG in al-Khoms and Tajoura reports to Misrata. However, the LCG in Tajoura shares the base with Bashir Khalfallah "al-Bugra's" armed group.

In Tripoli it is the Nawasi Brigade that exerts substantial influence over the LCG. In Zawiya, the LCG is famously under the control of the UN Sanctioned coastguard captain, al-Bija, while the LCG in Zuwara is not openly controlled by an armed group, but the Zuwara military council has substantial influence on it. Hence, only a handful of the naval points and LCG units are effectively under the control of the General Navy command in Tripoli. The Navy command in Tripoli, however, wants to show that it is strong and in control and therefore endorses all the LCG units, who in return benefit from its legitimacy and communicate and respond to the Navy command for administrative purposes.

The armed groups and individuals which have risen to prominence within Libya's maritime sector have amassed so much influence overtime that they are now positioned to act as gatekeepers for capacity buildings provided by foreign stakeholders, with selection of trainees highly influenced by connections to armed groups, rather than by merit or qualifications. It is now impacting which trainees can access Turkish-provided training courses. As a result, armed actors are using access to Turkish training to further build influence within the GACS, Navy and GACS, functionally subverting efforts to build professional, unitary organizations.

The most egregious current example involves the Janzour Naval Academy. The facility, founded under the Gaddafi regime, was closed in 2013, in the wake of the revolution, reopening only in 2021. Since that point the Libyan Navy has reportedly paid around LYD 1 million (Euro € 200 000) on teaching equipment, furniture, projectors, and laboratory equipment. The Academy is the only academic institution in western Libya that has the authority and mandate to train new navy recruits, as well as providing some continuous and in-career training.⁷ So far, there has been no record of any

⁷ Temporarily the Abu Sitta Naval Base was used to provide training after the revolution but this function is now exclusively the remit of the academy since its restitution to the Navy and subsequent refurbishment in 2021.

cadets graduating from the academy, but there are reportedly 80-120 students enrolled and being trained.

Officially, the state controls the Academy. However, functionally, the facility is controlled by al-Bija), who in the middle of 2021 took over the facility from the 55th Brigade under Muammar al-Dhawi, which now forms the bulk of the component of the SSA based in al-Mayya. Al-Bija presented himself to the Navy's chain of command as a mediator who secured the transfer of the building back into the hands of the state, thereby cementing his role there. As noted in previous reporting, al-Bija is an SSA affiliate, since he forms part of the Zawiya-based Busriba network, which in turn forms the nucleus of the Western Branch of the SSA.⁸

Al-Bija functions as a central gatekeeper at the academy, mainly exerting control over who is accepted into it, and thus, the younger officer corps of the navy. However, due to his personal military and political network, al-Bija has also emerged as a key gatekeeper for enrolment of LCG and Navy recruits into Turkish training programmes. GI-TOC interviews point to Milad's green light being a prerequisite for an institutional approval for any LCG or Navy recruit's enrolment into Turkish capacity building activities.

An interviewed cadet who went through the process, said he met with Bija on 25 January 2022 at the Janzour Naval Accademy. The young prospect had been recommended by the Navy branch in Zuwara. He was given the contact details of people he should speak to at the academy. Bija was not specifically mentioned but it was understood that the application needed to go through him.

The meeting went ahead as planned and the cadet was accepted as part of a residential course in al-Khums which started in March but was suspended multiple times due to COVID-19 infection. To date there is no indication that Bija derives this influence from a direct relationship with Turkish interlocutors, even though this cannot be excluded. Rather it is his influence on the Naval Academy's board of approval for trainees that makes the coastguard captain a gatekeeper even in this scenario.

These dynamics underscore that the impact of Turkish training will be blunted due to a skewing in those selected for training, which are unlikely to be based mainly on merit or institutional needs. When viewed more holistically, the strategic error Turkey has made in designing its security assistance efforts as ad-hoc support to Libya's maritime sector has been to further the informal influence of actors who are not vested in Libyan stability. This devalues

Divided Perceptions of Training Benefits among Libyan actors

GI-TOC interviews with officials from Libya's GACS, Navy and LCG personnel indicate a generational split in the perception of Turkish training. The older Libyan military and policing cadre does not consider Turkish expertise in the realm of maritime security as credible when compared with the experience of other western stakeholders. Younger generation, including trainees and security

⁸ The Stabilization Support Apparatus is a unit technically under the Presidential Council. Functionally, it is a collaborative of armed groups in Tripoli, Wershefana, and Zawiya. While primarily a land-based entity, the SSA has developed some autonomous maritime capacity, which it primarily uses to interdict migrant vessels. For more information, see *Rapid Assessment of the Stabilization Support Apparatus*, delivered by the GI-TOC to the EUTF in May 2022.

personnel, did not generally share this view and were far more prone to consider the long-term benefits of engaging with Turkish-provided capacity building.

This dynamic has motivated young people to sign up for the different Turkish capacity building programmes provided to the LCG, Navy and GACS using their networks. Their motives differ, between those that expect the training to act as a career catalyst, and others who hope that the networks built during training would afford them influence overtime given Turkey's expected long-term presence in Western Libya.

However, among the older cadre of Libya's military and policing sectors, Turkish capacity building is generally not held in high regard, and many do not expect Ankara to remain in Libya in the long run. Based on interviews conducted, the position of the older generation has started fostering disillusioning among some of the younger cohorts taking part in the training. Some of the younger officers interviewed said they expected to rise in prominence within the ranks of Libya's maritime sector but reported instead facing an "older mentality" that does not regard Turkish training as prestigious.

Since the more experienced officers – along with certain key gatekeepers in Western Libya – are influential in respect to where individual Libyan graduates would be posted post-training, this training is not translating into a career propeller for the independent younger cadre. This, in turn, is leading to a devaluation of Ankara's effort in the eyes of aspiring trainees, which so far have been their most enthusiastic pool of recruits.

Rising Libyan dissatisfaction and scepticism of Turkish goals

Libyan officials and other key informants interviewed for this assessment also pointed to rising dissatisfaction within Libya's maritime security and defence sector with Turkey's approach. In large part this is owing to Ankara's attempt to leverage influence and training initiatives for economic gain.

In fact, there is a widespread perception within the Libyan Navy and LCG that Turkey's capacity building has an economic ulterior motive, aiming to shift maritime defence and security procurement to favour Turkish companies. Some officers feel that the Turkish navy uses joint training exercises to try to showcase their engineering and maritime products to persuade the Libyan navy to use their companies.

According to information collected there is substance to this perception. In fact, this effort is also seeing Turkey employ Libyan lobbyists who are insisting procurement shifts as much as the Turkish navy at both Libya's military and the political levels. Separately, another example flagged by key informants, relates to maritime engines, with Turkish naval officials heavily pressuring Libyan counterparts to switch to Turkish manufactured engines for their vessels. The pressure has included direct contacts with a Naval procurement committee in which at least one committee member is alleged to have been approached with a bribe.

So far, Libyan officials have pushed back on this, with engineers opposing the switch on the basis of the technical superiority of European and US hardware and servicing and the unjustifiable cost of cancelling and switching over from long term contracts which include the purchasing of spare parts.

This effort to influence procurement has been reported by multiple interviewees to be leading to friction with Libyan Naval officers, who see a shift towards Turkish as potentially negatively impacting the Libyan navy for years.

At the same time, this sentiment is not universal, with some officers feeling Turkey is “owed” something for helping western forces push back and defeat the advance of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) on the capital between 2019 and 2020.

However, Libyan scepticism of Turkish goals goes beyond annoyance over attempted profiteering. GI-TOC interviews also underscored a concern among Libyan naval officials that Turkey’s objective is not building Libyan naval capacity, but rather building a naval architecture in Libya that will answer to Ankara and enable the control the country’s maritime waters on its behalf. This allows Turkey to exert control over shipping, counter-smuggling, and counter-migration.

Direct Turkish engagement in Libyan territorial waters has noticeably increased over the last two years. At least five Turkish naval and coast guard vessels have operated off the Libyan coast since 2020, including the “Gaziantep”, “TCG Gökova”, “TCG Göksu”, “TCG Gediz” and “TCG Yaray Kudret Güngör”. These units operate under the aegis of the Turkish Task Group Command, which provides support and training to Libya under the Military and Security Cooperation MoU of November 2019.

In some instances, Turkey has intervened directly on maritime rescue matters. For example, the “Gaziantep” navy frigate, is known to have worked with the LCG unit in al-Khoms, including through at least three joint-interventions of migrant vessels in 2021.

In addition to the engagement with Turkish state forces, another element of concern raised by interviewed Navy officials relates to Turkey’s reported attempts to build the capacity of Libyan militias close to it. In particular, during research for this assessment, multiple sources reported that Mahmoud Bin Rajab, an influential Islamist commander from Zawiya, is attempting to establish a new maritime force based at Della Port in Zawiya and the Janzour Naval Port, where Turkish-linked Syrian mercenaries are based.

So far, limited information has been available on this initiative, save that the force is reportedly small, involving a few former sailors from Della port in Zawiya who have access to speedboats. The mandate is reportedly to protect the Libyan coast, not to intervene migration. Bin Rajab’s is very close to Ankara and has been one of their primary Libyan interfaces during the Tripoli war of 2019-2022. Furthermore, he has been responsible for the stay of Syrian mercenaries financed by Ankara to the west of the capital and which have maintained a presence in the region since 2019.

The force represents a potential flashpoint for conflict within Zawiya and the West Coast more broadly, especially if this maritime unit starts intervening on migration issues, challenging the Zawiya refinery coastguard and the SSA. Bin Rajab is the primary antagonist of the Busriba network, which heads the Western flank of the SSA.

This development does not bode well for future scenarios where SSA assets could come in contact with assets of this new force established by Bin Rajab in the Dilla Port, which sits just six kms east of

the Misfat point at the Zawiya Refinery, controlled by al-Bija, and 20 kilometres west of the al-Mayya port, controlled by Muammar ad-Dhawi and the al-Mayya branch of the SSA.

In general, interviews with key informants indicate that there is a view among Naval officers that Turkish training is not serious and is more a cover for more targeted work with its own assets within these institutions and friendly militiamen such as Bin Rajab. The feasibility and impact of Bin Rajab's initiative are, at present, unclear, as is the extent of Turkish support of it. However, for Turkey, the perception among Naval officers that it is aimed primarily at securing its interests, such as the maritime MoU of 2019 redefining the marine boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean, power projection and financial goals, undermine the programme's credibility.

Finally, in 2022, Turkey has not started any new training and is only completing training that was committed to before November 2021. There is no new agreement on training and has stopped negotiations on next series of training. According to information collected, Turkish authorities are waiting to see the outcome of the tussle for power between GNS and the GNU before committing resources to further cooperation and training. Although this is perhaps an understandable strategy, it is adding to the scepticism among some Navy officers, who see the wait and see approach as further evidence of Turkey's cynicism.

When seen together, these elements have impacted the perceived legitimacy of Ankara's maritime capacity building efforts within Western Libya and, arguably, pose a substantial challenge to its longer-term strategic efforts to building influence among maritime forces in the medium to long term.

CONCLUSION

Turkish training of Libya's maritime security and defence represents a sustained, ambitious attempt to build the capacity of the Libyan Navy, LCG and GACS. While the number of trainees remains limited, especially in comparison to Turkey's goals, it nonetheless represents an infusion of skills to organizations which, since 2011, have broadly seen their skills, operational capacity, and training capacity decline. Through training, Turkey is attempting to better the ability of the Navy, LCG and GACS to address key maritime challenges, illegal migration, drug trafficking and armed weapons smuggling. However, as elaborated in this Rapid Assessment, there are a number of deficiencies within Turkey's training programme and a series of red flags for the EU to consider in its positioning vis a vis this initiative.

First, Turkey's approach to training is seemingly predicated on a Turkish assessment of needs for the Libyan Navy, LCG and GACS. There is little indication that an equivalent assessment by Libyan actors has been conducted or has fed into the training design. Simply, this is a Turkey-owned process for Libyans, not a Libyan-owned process supported by Turkey. This raises the risk that trainings offered may miss key needs on the part of Libyan forces, while building skills and capacities which have only limited relevance to the present day-to-day needs of the force.

Second, a key gap in Turkey's conceptualization of its security assistance blueprint is its limited engagement in training-of-trainers. This is a highly salient issue in the Libyan contemporary landscape, particularly since the Janzour Naval Academy has now reopened, reviving a Naval training system that has been largely defunct for a decade. For this facility, and others, there is a need for trainers with up-to-date expertise. Turkish approaches do not appear focused on this, which in turn substantially impedes broader professionalization efforts for the Navy and LCG.

Third, Turkey's assumptions in providing training appears to be that the operational challenges facing the Navy, LCG and GACS hinge on skill deficits. Such deficits are, undoubtedly, an issue. However, the issues in Libya's maritime sector are more structural and systemic, and an exclusive focus on technical solutions will not yield dividends overtime because the institutional – rather than the individual – absorption of capacity is limited. Modular, tactical, and theoretical training provided by Turkey cannot compensate for this gap, which requires a broader institutional reform to achieve success.

Fourth, armed groups gatekeepers have positioned themselves to gain influence from the capacity building effort. Ankara's assumption appears to be that, by partnering with a wider set of official state institutions (LCG, GACS and Navy), it can limit the extent to which informal gatekeepers can influence and benefit its capacity building effort. However, as the example of the Janzour Naval Academy illustrates, institutional partnerships alone cannot offset actors' informal influence over processes of security assistance. Rather, armed group actors appear to have leveraged their influence over access to the Turkish training programme to further their own influence within the Navy and LCG, further weakening the hierarchic structures and professionalism of those forces.

Fifth, Turkey's training efforts have been hobbled by its attempt to leverage institutional inroads and influence within Libya's Navy, LCG and GACS to alter their procurement to accommodate contractual

cooperation with Turkish companies. This view among Libyan officials is reinforced by the rumour that Ankara switched training to Libya to save costs and mitigate against a scenario where there is no return on investment from the training. Internal splits within Libya's maritime officials have emerged as a result, with senior officers viewing both Turkish capacity building and Ankara's broader goals in Libya with scepticism.

Sixth, Turkey's training efforts have been impacted by the broader political instability within Libya. The current competition between Dabaiba's GNU and the rival Bashagha-led GNS, has halted negotiations on the next series of training.

Lastly, based on interviews carried out for this assessment, as well as ongoing monitoring, so far there is no evidence that Turkey has attempted to exert influence over irregular migratory flows. Notwithstanding, there is no question that Ankara is already in a position to do so through its various assets among armed groups as well as within the Libyan maritime security apparatus. In this respect, Bin Rajab's maritime project will be a development to watch in coming months. In spite of the challenges that its capacity building programme faces, overall, if and when it is restarted, the engagement will further the consolidation Ankara's influence over this sector, maintaining this latent strategic bargaining chip in Turkey's broader regional positioning in respect to the EU and member states.