



Turkey's Military Bases Abroad

OE Watch Commentary: In the past decade, Turkey has built a robust military presence abroad, stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Horn of Africa to exert its influence and promote regional security. While the Turkish military has been actively engaged in Syria, it also maintains a presence in Iraq, Somalia, and Afghanistan as well as peacekeeping troops in the Balkans. The Turkish navy patrols the Black Sea, Aegean and Mediterranean seas to protect its territorial interests in surrounding waters and energy resources. The accompanying articles discuss the importance of these bases.

The first accompanying article lists the military bases Turkey established in the Middle East and Africa in recent years including in neighboring Iraq and Syria, the Persian Gulf, Red Sea (see: “A Turkish Military Base in the Red Sea,” in the February 2019 issue of *OE Watch*), Horn of Africa, and a new one they are considering in the Eastern Mediterranean. The article provides a number of reasons why Turkey established and deployed military to these overseas bases. First, these bases enable Turkey to “deploy sizeable air, ground and naval assets to strategically important regions far beyond its own borders and challenge its regional rivals” especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Second, they function as protectorates of Turkey’s interests and claims to natural resources. Third, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s “increasing perception of threat is an important factor for establishing bases” especially in Qatar and Somalia. Fourth, establishing bases in those regions where Turkey perceives threats, projects Turkey’s hard power to deter threats to its national security and interests. The article notes that maintaining some of these military bases could face challenges if Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the UAE close Red Sea and Persian Gulf access to Turkey.

The second article from Turkish think tank *Turksam* provides insights into naval and air bases that Turkey is considering establishing in Cyprus. The article states that Turkey has recently been proactive in protecting its rights and preventing threats to its national interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. As the article argues that, to remain relevant in the region, Turkey must establish naval and air bases in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, an entity only recognized by Turkey. This would enable Turkey to respond more rapidly to threats to its drilling ships engaged in natural gas discovery and drilling off the coast of Cyprus. Turkey is specifically looking at establishing an air base in Geçitkale and a naval base in Iskele, areas controlled by Turkish Cypriots. The Eastern Mediterranean has been a contentious region among littoral and other countries conducting natural gas exploration. (Also see: “Rising Tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean over Natural Gas,” in the December 2018 issue of *OE Watch* and “Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum Threatens Turkey,” in the March 2019 issue of *OE Watch*.) **End OE Watch Commentary (Gündüz)**

“...Overseas military bases in both the Middle East and Africa... [enable] Ankara to deploy sizeable air, ground and naval assets to strategically important regions far beyond its own borders and challenge its regional rivals...”

Source: Paul Iddon, “The significance of Turkey’s overseas military bases,” *ahvalnews.com*, 13 July 2019. <https://ahvalnews.com/turkish-military/significance-turkeys-overseas-military-bases>

Turkey has established several overseas military bases in both the Middle East and Africa in recent years. This enables Ankara to deploy sizeable air, ground and naval assets to strategically important regions far beyond its own borders and challenge its regional rivals – primarily Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) – in several key areas...

Turkey... has troops in neighboring Iraq and Syria as well as in the Persian Gulf, Red Sea and the Horn of Africa. In most of the countries where it currently stations forces Ankara has done so under agreements with the host governments.

Levent Özgül, a Turkish defense analyst, noted that Turkey has “formal expeditionary bases” in Qatar, Somalia, northern Cyprus and Sudan along with “informal activities in Tripoli, Libya” where Turkey supports and arms the Government of National Accord (GNA) against the UAE-backed Libyan National Army (LNA).

“The Qatar, Somalia and Sudan deployments and Libyan efforts are all against Saudi Arabia and the UAE,” Özgül told Ahval.

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Özgül said Cyprus was “the hottest spot” where Turkey has military forces. Turkey’s drilling of recently discovered natural gas off the coast of the southern Republic of Cyprus is opposed by the European Union, other regional countries...

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“Erdoğan’s increasing perception of threat is an important factor for establishing bases in Qatar and Somalia; but, beyond Erdoğan, Turkish military bases in Iraq and Syria is an outcome of deeper, long-term state policy against Kurdish nationalism,” Gürbüz told Ahval.

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“Turkey’s regional ambitions and the geo-strategic rivalry in the Red Sea is a key driver for the Erdoğan regime in shaping threat perception,” Gürbüz said.

“Turkey’s overseas naval and maritime installations are an essential part of Turkey’s efforts to expand its soft power influence as well as its hard power projection...”



Continued: Turkey's Military Bases Abroad

Source: Gökhan Güler, “KKTC’ye Hava ve Deniz Üssü (Air and Sea Base in TRNC),” *turksam.org*, 21 June 2019. <http://turksam.org/kkctcye-hava-ve-deniz-ussu>

The Turkish side has recently pursued a proactive policy to protect its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean... Recently... experts in the subject emphasized the necessity of urgently establishing a sea and air base in the TRNC.

The fact that the Turkish side has been proactively advocating for its rights in the Eastern Mediterranean for some time seems to have seriously disturbed some countries.

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Accordingly, it has been considered that the air base can be built in Geçitkale and the naval base can be built in İskele area. The establishment of a naval and air bases in the TRNC will not only eliminate supply problems, but will also enable [Turkey] to intervene immediately in case of any situation.



Topographic map in English of the Red Sea.

Source: Eric Gaba via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Red_Sea_topographic_map-en.svg, CC BY-SA 4.0