

Terrorism Monitor

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OMAN'S DELICATE DOMESTIC BALANCE

Brian M. Perkins

Oman's longstanding financial and governance model is being tested like never before as the country's economy continues to decline due to its historic reliance on oil, as well as the harsh economic impacts of COVID-19. These crises have hastened the need for reforms. Sultan Haitham's cousin and predecessor, Sultan Qaboos, ruled with absolute authority, but was beloved for transforming the country into a stable, more modern country and for his softer rule in comparison to other Gulf monarchs. Qaboos, despite his many achievements, established an unsustainable model desperately in need of an overhaul that will fundamentally alter ordinary Omanis' relationship with the state and will likely, in the short term, prove wildly unpopular.

Sultan Haitham had already assumed control of the country at a particularly challenging time in terms of heightened regional tensions and the country's economic downfall necessitating reforms long put off by Sultan

Qaboos, who avoided doing so for fear of short-term unrest. The COVID-19 outbreak and plummeting oil

prices, however, have only served to hasten the need for reform.

In response to oil prices and the COVID-19 outbreak, Sultan Haitham has cut government employees, including numerous officials that served Sultan Qaboos, and has ordered the government ministries and civilian government entities to reduce expenditures by 10 percent ([Al Jazeera](#), April 15). At the same time, the government will need to grapple with the high volume of jobs lost in the private sector.

Sultan Haitham is an adept political figure but, unlike Qaboos, does not have decades of goodwill from the people on his side, making the balance between reform and appeasement of the public a particularly challenging balance. While the country's economy is over reliant on oil, the population is heavily reliant on a bloated public sector with massive budget shortfalls and an aging workforce. Upwards of 45 percent of Omanis work for public entities and there has long been an expectation for the government to provide jobs—an expectation that is particularly thorny for the high number of unemployed youths. [1] In order to set the country on the right long-term path, Sultan Haitham will need to fundamentally alter this expectation and the relationship

between the state and society by downsizing the public sector and royal spending while fostering private sector growth. During the Arab Spring, protests in Oman focused primarily on jobs and political reforms, with Qaboos appeasing protesters by promising 50,000 public jobs, a move that only contributed to the underlying economic problems ([Al Jazeera](#), April 22, 2011).

A prolonged economic crash due to COVID-19 could limit the Sultan's ability to take a phased approach to controversial economic policies, which would, to an extent, mute the public response and likely unrest. A hastened approach is more likely to prompt widespread unrest or strikes, particularly among Omani youths, and make the balancing act even more challenging. Unlike Qaboos, however, Sultan Haitham should not shy away from reforms for fear of public unrest—which is an uncommon feature of Omani society—and should instead ensure the government response to any unrest peacefully addresses demands without taking a step backward. At the same time, the Sultan should continue to reduce lavish royal expenditures and empower the Majlis al-Shura—the country's only legislative body in which all members are democratically elected. Balancing controversial economic reform with long demanded political reform and increased public participation is key to Oman improving its economic outlook while remaining the politically stable nation the international community often relies on in the Gulf.

Notes

[1] National Centre for Statistics & Information, <https://data.gov.om/nyavlmf/labor-market>

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

TUNISIA'S PRECARIOUS POSITION AND THE BATTLE FOR WESTERN LIBYA

Brian M. Perkins

Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA) has made notable gains against Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army in Western Libya over the past week. The GNA has reportedly wrested control of several key towns, including Sabratha, Surman, al-Ajaylat, Regdalin, al-Jumayl, Zelten, and al-Essa, establishing a line of control between Tripoli and the Tunisian border ([Al Jazeera](#), April 14).

These gains mark a significant shift in the tide of the war and balance of power in western Libya and were made possible by significant Turkish involvement. Turkey has acted as a major force multiplier for Fayeze al-Sarraj's GNA and its allied forces in western Libya. Turkey's entry into the war in Libya initially drew condemnation from Tunisia, which warned of international meddling in the conflict.

Tunisia long attempted to remain neutral in its stance toward the warring parties in Libya. Tunisia publicly refused to allow Ankara to use the country as a supply line for its activities in Libya, though privately Turkish materials are likely still passing through Tunisia. Tunisia's public stance, however, appears to be somewhat shifting as the GNA, with Turkish support, is extending its control of territories in western Libya and reopening a link between Tunisia and Tripoli. Just days after the major GNA offensives, Tunisian President Kais Saied announced his full support for the GNA, while rebuking the Tunisian defense minister for calling GNA forces "militias," a statement that drew ire from Fayeze al-Sarraj ([Middle East Monitor](#), April 17).

Tunisia has maintained open lines of communication with Sarraj and the GNA and, to a lesser extent, with Haftar. While Tunisia likely wants to continue to appear relatively neutral and pursue a track of noninterference, the GNA's expanding control in western Libya will likely necessitate a higher degree of communication and coordination, inherently placing Tunisia closer to Turkey. This coordination and information sharing is particularly important in terms of border security following the displacement of fighters and the GNA's control of the coastal roads connecting Tunisia and Tripoli following the offensive. Tunisia immediately established an emergency military plan to reinforce its border following the

GNA operations and intelligence officials are likely attempting to gather information on militant movements ([Asharrq Al-Aswat](#), April 15).

While the GNA's expanded control in the region could draw Tunisia more in alignment with the al-Sarraj's government, though likely only nominally, Turkey is still pursuing other avenues for goodwill in Tunisia, including by helping with the COVID-19 outbreak ([Middle East Monitor](#), March 26). On the military side, the conflict in Libya has underscored the need for Tunisia to transform its military—an avenue Turkey will continue to explore while being able to provide actual use cases.

Drawing Tunisia closer is of particular importance to Turkey sustaining its operational cover—Turkish vessels have used Tunisian ports in fake destination reports to cover for shipments directly into Libya ([Al Arabiya](#), March 26). In January, Tunisia signed a deal to purchase armored vehicles from Turkish manufacturer, BMC, and, in mid-March, TUSAS secured a deal to sell Tunisia six Anka-S drones ([Ahval](#), March 17). In addition to military hardware, what Tunisia is in particular need of is training regarding broadening and integrating its intelligence and concept of operations (CONOPS) capabilities, both of which Turkey has proven to be particularly adept at in recent years.

The GNA's opening of vital routes that connect Tunisia with Libya and the potential for more stable control of western Libya will necessitate closer, even if only in private, relations between Tunis and the Tripoli, and inherently Ankara. Meanwhile, Turkey is likely to continue pursuing efforts to draw Tunisia closer in order to leverage the country's strategic position to continue its operations. Tunisia, however, will need to maintain a veil of neutrality to avoid riling its own populace, which has shown disdain toward any cooperation with Turkey in Libya.

Brian M. Perkins is the Editor of Terrorism Monitor.

Arms from Yemen will Fuel Conflict in the Horn of Africa

Michael Horton

Arms trafficking via the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea has a long history. However, the wars in Yemen and the vast number of arms and materiel provided by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have ushered in a golden age for regional arms traffickers. The flow of weapons and materiel from Yemen to the Horn of Africa has increased over the last three years, as has the quality and variety of smuggled weapons ([The East African](#), September 2019). This comes at a time when the countries that make up the Horn of Africa face growing threats to their stability.

The illicit trade in weapons and materiel between Yemen and the Horn of Africa has rarely been more lucrative. Weapons and materiel of all types are readily available in Yemen's arms markets ([Terrorism Monitor](#), June 16, 2017). Almost all of these small and medium arms are less expensive in Yemen than in the countries that make up the Horn of Africa: Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Djibouti. However, only some of the weapons and materiel trafficked from Yemen remain in the Horn of Africa. Many of the smuggled weapons are sold on via middlemen who move the illicit goods to countries like Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic. The markup on weapons and materiel—especially more specialized equipment such as night vision devices, rangefinders and RPGs—increases exponentially as they move inland. [1]

The price difference between Yemen and the Horn of Africa has set up the kind of arbitrage that is irresistible to smugglers and those who finance them. For example, the Saudi manufactured G3 rifle supplied in large numbers to Saudi backed forces in Yemen can be purchased in a Yemeni arms market for \$500. In Somalia, the same rifle will sell for at least three times that amount. In Ethiopia, the rifle will sell for up to six times what it costs to purchase in Yemen. More advanced weapons like later variants of the RPG—widely available in Yemen—are sold for as much as ten times what they cost in Yemen. [2]

Low Risk and High Reward

At the Bab al-Mandeb strait, only 20 miles of water separate Yemen and Djibouti. Skiffs equipped with powerful outboard engines can cross from Yemen to Eritrea and Djibouti in hours in favorable weather. Larger vessels sailing from Yemen take only days to reach the extensive and thinly populated coasts of Puntland and Somalia. It is these desolate and largely uncontrolled coastlines that make the region ideal for arms traffickers and the illicit networks they operate within.

While the world's navies patrol the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, these waters are home to some of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. They also support large numbers of artisanal and commercial fishermen. Smugglers use shipping traffic and fishing activity as an effective screen for their activities.

While skiffs are used to move illicit goods—including small weapons, materiel, and “custom orders”—to the lightly patrolled coasts of Djibouti and Eritrea, most weapons are smuggled on larger vessels to Somalia. [3] Somalia and the semi-autonomous region of Puntland are the easiest and most cost-effective places to offload cargo. Despite its proximity to Yemen, smugglers tend to avoid the unrecognized Republic of Somaliland's coast due to Somaliland's effective coast guard and civilian patrols. [4]

Instead, smugglers exploit Somalia's vast uncontrolled coastline. Vessels, which are most often loaded with legitimate cargo in addition to illicit cargo, moor off the coast of Somalia where skiffs meet them and offload the illicit cargo and move it to shore. The vessels then continue on to official ports with their legitimate cargo.

Fueling instability

Only a small percentage of the weapons offloaded in Somalia and Puntland remain. While there is some uptake of weapons by Somalia's indigenous terrorist and insurgent groups, namely al-Shabaab, most of the weapons and materiel are destined for other parts of Africa where prices are even higher. Small boats transport smuggled weapons up and down the coast of Somalia and Puntland to points where they can be moved overland via road and, occasionally, via camel caravans. [5]

The two primary markets for these weapons are South Sudan and Ethiopia. South Sudan is mired in a civil war

and Ethiopia faces increasing ethnic tensions. Both countries offer abundant opportunities for arms traffickers.

Ethiopia previously maintained relatively tight control over its lengthy border with Somalia. However, in the last year, there has been a marked decline in the number of patrols along this border. This is now being exploited by arms traffickers who are able to move large cargoes via the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. From there, weapons and materiel are sold on to middlemen who market them to ethnically aligned groups operating in southern Ethiopia.

Weapons and materiel destined for South Sudan are most often moved via northern Kenya where government control is spotty. Where control does exist, well-connected and well-funded traffickers often bribe government and military officials. As well as being an end-use destination for weapons, South Sudan is also an arms trafficking hub in and of itself. From South Sudan, weapons and materiel, some of which originates in Yemen, are sold on to dealers and armed groups in neighboring countries like the Central African Republic and Uganda. Some Yemeni sourced weapons are also moved farther down the African coast to Tanzania and Mozambique via well-established smuggling routes.

Outlook

While there are indications that Yemen's wars are winding down, the weapons and materiel supplied to all sides in the conflict will continue to flow out of the country for years to come. Despite instability in places like Somalia, there has often been a dearth of arms and materiel due to what have been effective arms embargoes by the international community. If left unchecked, the trade in illicit weapons and materiel from Yemen will further fuel instability in countries like Somalia, Ethiopia, and numerous other African countries.

Michael Horton is a Fellow for Arabian affairs at the Jamestown Foundation

Notes

[1] Author interview with an adviser to the Ethiopian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 2019.

[2] Author interview with a former Yemeni government official, January 2020.

[3] Many arms merchants operating out of Yemen or with Yemen based partners accept “custom orders” for specific weapons, parts for weapons systems, and ammunition.

[4] Author interview with the commander of the Somaliland Coast Guard, September 2019.

[5] Author interview with a Mogadishu based security analyst September 2019; author interview with Somaliland intelligence official, September 2019.

Al-Qaeda’s South Asian Branch Gravitating Toward Kashmir

Rafid Jaboori

Almost six years after al-Qaeda in Indian Subcontinent’s (AQIS) formation as the regional subsidiary of the infamous transnational jihadist group, the organization is reportedly shifting its violent campaign to Kashmir and India. On March 21, in one of its key Urdu language magazines, AQIS claimed that the group would change the title of its long-running publication *Nawa-i Afghan Jihad* to *Nawa-i Gazawatul Hind*, signaling the geographical shift, mostly justifying the objectives behind its name and formation. The publication also devoted a whole chapter on jihad in Kashmir, announcing that the region will be the epicenter of AQIS’ jihadist campaign. Swiftly hosting all its propaganda materials on a web portal with the domain name of *Gazawatul Hind*, AQIS cleared the air about its aggressive future Indian-centric strategy.

Al-Qaeda’s South Asian affiliate is making inroads into Kashmir and India with this shift in focus, reinvigorating the so-called *Gazawatul Hind* campaign, or ‘final battle against India,’ referring to events leading to the Islamic apocalyptic war referenced in a *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad. The discernable intention to gravitate toward the Kashmir theater and to shift to a more Indian-centric campaign came amid the United States-Taliban peace deal to end the more than 18-year conflict in Afghanistan. Operational ties between al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan remain a contentious issue. Over the past couple of decades the Taliban regime, officially titled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, sheltered al-Qaeda’s leadership and foot soldiers. However, the Taliban has now agreed under the peace deal signed in Doha (Qatar) on February 29 to prevent any group or individual, including “al-Qaeda from using the soil of Afghanistan to threaten the security of the United States and its allies” ([Department of State](#), February 29).

Afghanistan: AQIS’ Graveyard

A cursory look at the military offensive that inflicted a heavy toll on AQIS over the last few years can conclude that Afghanistan is no longer the primary haven for al-Qaeda or its South Asian affiliate. The potential end of

Taliban protection for the group maybe the reason AQIS is shifting the center of its operations. Al-Qaeda's South Asian branch suffered heavily in Afghanistan due to constant military operations against it. Despite the so-called Taliban safety net, AQIS lost several top leaders on Afghan soil. Multiple military operations targeting AQIS leaders in Ghazni in 2017 resulted in the death of multiple senior AQIS operatives, such as Harkat-ul Jihad-al Islami (HuJI) leader Qari Saifullah Akhtar and AQIS's second-in-command, Omar Khetab ([India Today](#), December 07, 2017; [Salam Times](#) January 10, 2017). In March 2019, a military offensive in the Giro district of southeastern Ghazni province killed over 30 AQIS militants, including several suicide bombers. AQIS commander Qari Arif ran the militant compound destroyed by the airstrikes. While the Ghazni district of Afghanistan had significant AQIS-related incidents in the last several years, on September 23, 2019, a joint U.S.-Afghan raid on a Taliban compound in the Musa Qala district of Helmand province killed six senior-ranking AQIS leaders and operatives, including the emir, Asim Omar, and Raihan, a trusted messenger to Ayman al-Zawahiri. The Musa Qala operation also witnessed the death of senior leaders in charge of Helmand province ([Dawn](#), October 8, 2019).

Anticipating the future turn of events in Afghanistan and the fast-changing situation on the ground for the Taliban post-peace deal, al-Qaeda's central command issued a statement on March 12 through its official al-Sahab media and social media platforms (e.g. Telegram and RocketChat), urging its fighters to display commitment toward the U.S.-Taliban deal. The statement underscored the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan rather than the 'peace' aspect of the agreement, calling it a "humiliating defeat for the U.S. and its allies." Like its parent organization, AQIS also welcomed the U.S.-Taliban deal as a victory. AQIS urged the Afghan populace to support the Taliban in its quest to establish an Islamic Caliphate under Sharia law.

Kashmir Again: A Déjà Vu Moment

The latest move by AQIS to focus on Kashmir and India is reminiscent of the post-Afghan Soviet war situation in the 1980s when large numbers of foreign mujahideen returned to their respective countries, including Pakistan. Several of the Afghan war veterans were relocated to Pakistan-administered Kashmir and elsewhere in the subcontinent to engage in anti-Indian jihad.

The pressure to adhere or respect the Taliban's commitment with the United States notwithstanding, AQIS perhaps sees a window of opportunity to exploit the deteriorating situation in Kashmir and the newfound sectarian schism in India due to the government's alleged 'anti-Muslim Ummah' policies (referencing the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019). Despite the group's inconsequential presence in the region, AQIS wants to find a haven possibly in and around the Kashmir region, which is under the loose control of Pakistan, and by coopting local jihadist formations and sympathizers.

The March 2020 issue of AQIS' magazine, *Nawa-i Afghan Jihad*, was dedicated to the Taliban's recent achievements and featured an article titled "Kandahar (Afghanistan) to Doda (Kashmir): The Season of Hopes." The issue elaborated on al-Qaeda's intention and endeavors to strengthen its foothold in Kashmir. [1] The author of that article, Mohammed Shakir Trali—apparently a Kashmir national from the Tral area—gave hints about the changing situation and how al-Qaeda plans to sustain its efforts to propagate Islam and jihad for the oppressed Muslims of the region. The issue reiterated AQIS' commitment and fealty to Taliban chief Haibatullah Akhundzada and the Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan for the success of ongoing jihad in South Asia. Trali also mentioned how AQIS succeeded in regrouping and mobilizing different militant factions under its banner in Kashmir. He pointed toward militants belonging to Pakistani terrorist groups Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e Muhammad ([Nawa-i-Ghazwa-hind](#), March).

Indeed, AQIS' Kashmir affiliate Ansar Gazwatul Hind (AGH), which emerged in mid-2017, is in disarray with most of its top leaders having been killed by Indian security forces in 2019. These leaders include Zakir Musa, his successor Abdul Hameed Lelhari, and the group's spokesman Shabir Ahmad Malik ([Hindustan Times](#), June 27, 2019; [Daily Excelsior](#), October 24, 2019; [Greater Kashmir](#), May 24, 2019). Indian security forces most recently killed three AQIS-AGH militants on February 19 in Tral, and two others on March 9, in Sophian ([Kashmir Life](#), February 19; [Daily Pioneer](#), March 10).

Like AQIS, the AGH made a statement in tandem with al-Qaeda in early March praising the Taliban for imposing the deal on "the crusader's" in Afghanistan (or the Khorasan region), which have "signed the final document of their defeat." Optimistically, the statement also took the opportunity to incite Indian Muslims "not to

tolerate the atrocity and oppression of Hindu polytheist groups." The AGH's eulogy for its recently killed commanders released by the group's official media organization, al-Hurr, noted the time was ripe for "hope and revolution," referring to the recent peace deal signed between the Taliban and the United States and Hindu-Muslim unrest in India ([News18](#), March 3).

If peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan progress toward the right direction, al-Qaeda might struggle to maintain a foothold in the country, severely compromising its ability to operate in the region. With a dwindling support base in Pakistan, AQIS is struggling to make an impact as the upholder of jihadist tradition in South Asia. The only hope for AQIS' survival is reviving operations in Kashmir in order to stay relevant in a landscape featuring rival jihadist groups such as Islamic State's regional provinces, primarily the Indian and Pakistani chapters. However, AQIS wanting to shift operations to Kashmir and India while holding an insignificant foothold in the region may prove to be the organization's Achilles' heel.

Animesh Roul is the executive director of the New Delhi-based policy research group Society for the Study of Peace and Conflict. He specializes in counterterrorism, radical Islam, terror financing, and armed conflict and violence in South Asia.

Notes

[1] "Kandahar (Afghanistan) to Doda (Kashmir): The Season of Hopes," *Nawa-i Afgan Jihad*, March 2020, pp114-115. Retrieved from <https://www.nawaighazwae-hind.com/?p=1601>

Turkey's Drone Blitz Over Idlib

Can Kasapoglu

Introduction

Between February 27 and March 5, Turkey conducted Operation Spring Shield to halt the Syrian Arab Army's blitz offensive in Idlib and to press Moscow into brokering a ceasefire. Due to the grave risks involved in operating in the Syrian airspace, Turkish military planners opted for using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) as the principal airpower asset. While the Turkish Armed Forces scored a large number of kills on the Baathist regime's combat units, the unmanned systems' success in eliminating Syria's Russian-manufactured surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems deserve the utmost attention. Within a week, Turkey's UAVs destroyed a total of eight Pantsir and Buk air defenses ([Yeni Safak](#), March 4).

Turkey's Indigenous Drones in Action

The Turkish military used two primary unmanned aerial systems in its Idlib campaign, the Bayraktar TB-2 and ANKA-S. In terms of concept of operations (CONOPS), Ankara's drone inventory came with pros and cons. On the positive side, first and foremost, the indigenous design and production capability provided a certain degree of *marge de manoeuvre* for the Turkish administration. It is worth noting that in the past, several Turkish administrations' persistent efforts to procure the MQ-1 Predator and MQ-9 Reaper UAVs were unsuccessful due to the objection of the U.S. Congress ([Hurriyet](#), August 10, 2015).

Second, both the Bayraktar TB-2 and ANKA-S enjoy 24-hour endurance in their missions, which marks a good standard for the medium-altitude long-endurance (MALE) class ([Baykar](#), April 9; [The Undersecretariat for Defense Industries](#), April 9). This enabled adequate loitering time over target areas.

Third, throughout its Syria expeditions since 2016, the Turkish military has fostered the integration between tactical land-based fire support (artillery and multiple-launch rocket systems) and UAVs. On a separate note, interestingly, the Russians have gone through the same lessons-learned in light of the experience gained in Syria. Today, Orlan-10 UAVs are integrated into several 152mm artillery formations in the Russian doctrinal order of battle ([Jane's](#), April 9).

The primary con of Ankara's drone inventory is the need to overcome troublesome payload limitations.

Going 'Smart' in Munitions for Unmanned Systems

Simply put, the Bayraktar TB-2 has a combat payload of 55kg, while the TUSAS company's ANKA-S, the SAT-COM (satellite communications) capable variant of the ANKA family, can carry 200kg maximum payload ([The Undersecretariat for Defense Industries](#), April 9). [1] Given the shortfalls regarding the sheer firepower that these platforms can unleash at a time, the Turkish military had to address the issue with pinpoint accuracy. Roketsan, yet another key actor of Turkey's burgeoning defense eco-system, comes into play at this stage.

In their combat missions, both UAVs carried Roketsan-made MAM-L and MAM-C smart munitions. The MAM-L, weighing 22 kilograms, has a range of 8 kilometers but can be extended to some 14 kilometers with an inertial navigation system/global positioning system support and offers different warhead options including armor-piercing tandem, high-explosive, and thermobaric solutions. [2] The MAM-C is a smaller smart bomb, weighing only 6.5 kilograms, suitable for a softer target set. [3] Notably, on March 5, Turkey's main procurement body, the Undersecretariat for Defense Industries, posted a MAM-L video on its official Twitter account, highlighting that it was the primary munitions used in the Idlib campaign. [4]

A New Operational Art for the Turkish Military

Although Roketsan's smart munitions' performance was adequate to get the job done, Turkish military planners were still confronted with two primary issues.

Turkish drones had to operate within the engagement envelopes of the Syrian Pantsir SAM systems. The baseline Russian Pantsir system is centered on a robust design philosophy that brings together different fires, mobility, and mission flexibility. A self-propelled battery carries up to 12 57E6 missiles and two 30mm 2A38M anti-aircraft artillery. The standard 57E6 missile has a maximum range of 20km and maximum altitude of 15km, while the auto-cannons can cover 4km range and 3km altitude. [5] A recent upgrade, which was unveiled at the Army 2019 exhibition in Kubinka, has extended the interceptors missiles' range up to 30km and effective maximum altitude to 18km, although it is unknown if the Russian Federation transferred the latest variant to the Syrian Arab Air Defense Force. [6]

Given the technical characteristics of the Pantsir family of SAM systems, it was impossible for the Turkish Bayraktar TB-2 and ANKA-S to launch the MAM-L smart munitions from outside of the kill zones.

Furthermore, the Syrian Arab Air Force posed a grave threat to the Turkish unmanned systems too. After all, the brief air warfare history has not favored drones against manned aircraft, even if the latter is obsolete. Back in 2002, for example, an Iraqi Mig-25, dating back to the late 1960s Soviet technology, intercepted a U.S. Predator UAV ([YouTube.com](#), 2017). It was only back in 2018 that a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper UAV shot down another drone in air-to-air combat ([Popular Mechanics](#), 2018). Unmanned systems are not yet capable air-to-air combat assets.

Turkey leveraged two major capabilities to protect the Bayraktar TB-2s and ANKA-S over the dangerous Syrian skies.

First, the Turkish military used intensive electronic warfare (EW) cover to blind the Syrian air defenses. The KORAL remains the leading indigenous EW asset in this respect ([Yeni Safak](#), March 4). Produced by ASELSAN, the system is primarily designed for suppression of enemy air defenses (SEAD) missions. [7] The KORAL has an effective range of some 200km, which offered enough electromagnetic projection deep into northern Syria when operated from the Turkish territory ([Yeni Safak](#), October 9, 2019).

Second, the Turkish Air Force showcased a high-tech strike complex of Boeing 737 Barış Kartalı (the Peace Eagle) airborne early warning and control aircraft, F-16 fighter jets, and AMRAAM beyond visual range air-to-air missiles. This network-centric trilogy enabled the downing of the Syrian Arab Air Force's Su-24s, which were scrambled several times to intercept Turkish drones, without entering Syrian airspace ([Aksam](#), March 3).

Where Do We Go from Here?

Turkey's *la belle époque* in drone warfare is yet to come, probably starting within this decade. Heavier systems with larger payloads and more advanced features will enter in service soon. The *Akinci* (Raider) remains the most noteworthy asset of the next generation Turkish unmanned airpower. Produced by Baykar, the *Akinci* has a payload of 1,350kg, equipping the platform with heavier munitions, such as MK-82 and MK-83 bombs—which were modernized to joint direct attack munitions class by Turkey's Tubitak SAGE—SOM-A indigenous air-ground cruise missile with some 250km effective range

and the indigenous air-to-air missiles Gökdoğan and Bozdoğan. [8] [9] The Akinci will utilize more artificial intelligence-based capabilities which will boost its autonomy. [10]

TUSAS' Aksungur remains another noteworthy unmanned aerial system awaiting entry into service. The UAV will bring new horizons to the Turkish Navy's anti-submarine warfare capabilities thanks to its sonobuoy pod and magnetic anomaly detector (MAD) boom. [11]

Turkey does, however, still need to address key areas in unmanned systems. Above all, the Turkish Air Force needs to replace its Israeli-made loitering munitions with indigenous systems. One should keep in mind that Israel's raids in Syria revealed the success of anti-radiation kamikaze drones (Harop/Harpy 2) in destroying SAM systems. Besides, some Turkish writings drew attention to the very need to acquire precision-guided land-based fire support munitions to foster the emerging UAV-artillery complex CONOPS. [12]

At the end of the day, the Idlib campaign, especially the Turkish UAVs' hunt for the Syrian Pantsirs, once more revealed that Turkey now remains a robust drone power with new technologies, concepts, and a burgeoning military-strategic cultural character prioritizing unmanned systems in fighting wars.

Dr. Can Kasapoglu is the director of the defense and security program at the Istanbul-based think-tank EDAM and a fellow with the German research institute SWP. Dr. Kasapoglu holds a M.Sci. degree from the Turkish Military Academy and a Ph.D. from the Turkish War College. Dr. Can Kasapoglu was an Eisenhower fellow at the NATO Defense College in Rome and a visiting scholar at the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence in Tallinn. His works can be followed @Edam-Defense

Notes

[1] Baykar, <https://baykardefence.com/uav-15.html>, Accessed on: April 4, 2020.

[2] Roketsan, <https://www.roketsan.com.tr/en/product/mam-c-smart-micro-munition/>, Accessed on: April 4, 2020.

[3] Roketsan, <https://www.roketsan.com.tr/en/product/mam-l-smart-micro-munition/>, Accessed on: April 4, 2020.

[4] The Undersecretariat for Defense Industries, Official Twitter Account, <https://twitter.com/SavunmaSanayii/>

[status/1235547985175556096](https://www.roketsan.com.tr/en/status/1235547985175556096), Accessed on: April 9, 2020.

[5] Rosoboronexport, <http://roe.ru/eng/catalog/air-defense-systems/air-defense-systems-and-mounts/pantsir-s1/>, Accessed on: April 9, 2020.

[6] Jane's, <https://www.janes.com/article/89584/army-2019-russia-unveils-pantsir-s1m-sam-vehicle>, Accessed on: April 10, 2020.

[7] ASELSAN, https://www.aselsan.com.tr/KO-RALENG_1218.pdf, Accessed April 9, 2020

[8] Tubitak SAGE, <http://www.sage.tubitak.gov.tr/en/urunler/wing-assisted-guidance-kit-kgk>, Accessed on: April 5, 2020.

[9] Roketsan, <https://www.roketsan.com.tr/en/product/som-stand-off-missile/>, Accessed on: April 4, 2020.

[10] Baykar, <https://baykardefence.com/uav-14.html>, Accessed on: April 5, 2020.

[11] Tusas, <https://www.tusas.com/uploads/2019/12/aksungur-flyer.pdf>, Accessed on: April 10, 2020.

[12] Arda Mevlütoğlu, "Bahar Kalkanı Harekâtı'na Dair Gözlemler 1: Türk Tipi Keşif – Taarruz Kompleksi mi?", March 2020, <https://www.siyahgribeyaz.com/2020/03/bahar-kalkan-harekatna-dair-gozlemler-1.html?spref=tw>, Accessed on: April 10, 2020.