Ukraine strikes a Russian military convoy at the shores of Benghazi, sinking corvette Mercury

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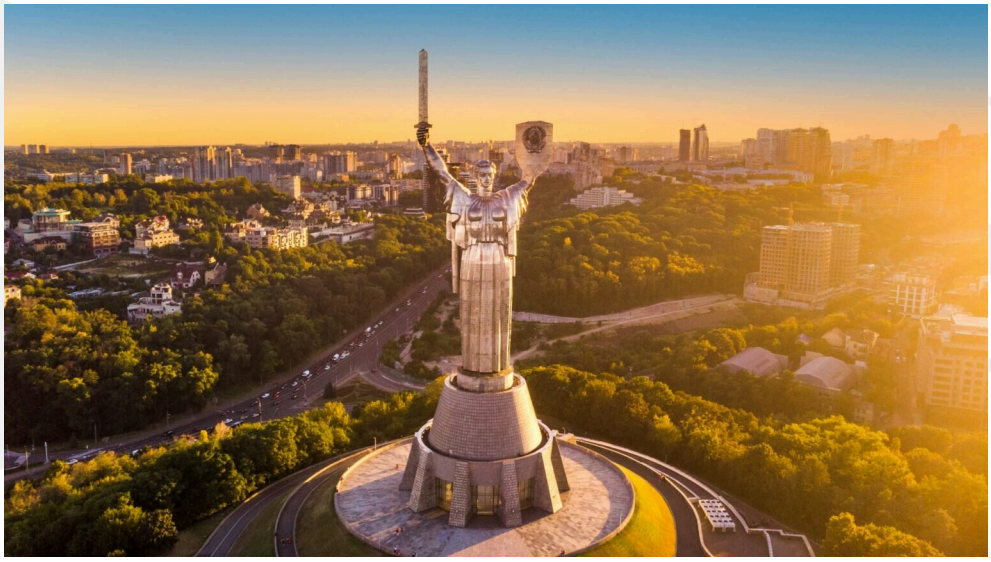


Photo by Glib Albovsky on Unsplash

As it was confirmed on Tuesday by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine is behind the attack on the 2 supply vessels and 1 corvette around the port city of Benghazi. According to Ukraine's own statement, the night-time raid was conducted by unmanned naval drones, which were allegedly launched from the coast of West Libya. However, as the scale of the Ukrainian presence and military capabilities remains unknown, it is difficult to determine Ukraine's long-term plans in the region.

Africa Corps in danger?

Since the fall of the Assad regime in Syria in 2024, the Russian MoD and its affiliated private military companies in Africa have been forced to move their base of logistical operations to East Libya. This region functions under the effective control of Khalifa Haftar, a leader of the Libyan National Army

and of the rival Government of National Stability, which opposes the UN-recognized government in Tripoli. Consequently, this has made Khalifa a major regional powerhouse who has grown dependent on the support of the foreign beneficiaries from Russia and the UAE, who have been willing to bankroll his ambitions to become sole ruler of Libya. However, despite Russia's historic presence in Libya since the times of Gaddafi, the current presence has a more pragmatic side and is mainly centred on the need for the Russian state to have a logistical station to supply its troops in the Sahel region.

This is a strategic weakness that is becoming especially important for Moscow due to the rising intensity of Islamist insurgencies led by JNIM in the Sahel. It makes Russia's ability to support loyal regimes in the infamous coup belt even harder, if not impossible, from a long-term perspective. It also creates more incentives for NATO and especially Turkey, which for years backed the Tripoli-based government.

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