



Edited by Karim Mezran, Arturo Varvelli

FOREIGN ACTORS IN LIBYA'S CRISIS



Atlantic Council

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Introduction

Libya is going through a phase of political and institutional uncertainty with repercussions on a number of levels. This uncertainty is preventing the establishment of a security framework in the country, which has allowed militias to rule unchallenged. The absence of a single, functional central government has left borders porous and allowed transnational trafficking to thrive, including migration flows in the Mediterranean. The House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk in the east and the internationally recognized Presidential Council and Government of National Accord (PC/GNA) led by Fayez al-Serraj in Tripoli are at an impasse. A meeting in Abu Dhabi on May 2 between Serraj and General Khalifa Haftar, the military leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA), may have brought negotiations closer to a turning point. However, the meeting's political outcomes are far from clear and the situation remains worrisome.

The UN-led political reconciliation process, launched in December 2015 by an agreement in Skhirat, Morocco, appears to have lost momentum and to have been *de facto* side-lined by negotiations held in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Thus, the PC/GNA is still in a juridical limbo, waiting to be fully legitimized by the HoR. The HoR itself is split: part of it has set up a "legitimate" headquarters in Tripoli, while a minority remains in Tobruk and recently sanctioned to suspend the UN-led political process. Most of the country is still at the mercy of militias and the precarious alliances between them. A new UN envoy, Ghassan Salamé, should renew previous UN efforts by relaunching mediation efforts and working to contain external interference in Libyan affairs.

Still, describing the Libyan situation as a fight between the PC/GNA and the HoR would be an oversimplification. The two factions are themselves divided, so much so that it is becoming increasingly likely that none of them will be able to bring the country under its sole military control. Moreover, as of late, loyalties among the various factions or groups in Libya have considerably shifted. Divisions and bickering among local and international actors are likely destined to worsen, even as the Islamic State (ISIS) is less and less able to exert control on swathes of Libyan territory. The presence of ISIS in Sirte had attracted the attention of many local and international actors, pushing many to set aside their differences, albeit temporarily, in the fight against the terrorist group that concluded in late 2016.

From its start, the Libyan crisis has been shaped by external actors, so much so that foreign influences were crucial in fostering and channelling the revolt against Muammar Qaddafi's regime in 2011. Most of the regional and international actors involved deluded themselves into thinking they would be able to direct the revolution towards their respective preferred political outcomes. Over the last few years, there has been an utter disconnect in the actions of external powers and international aid and development policies agreed upon with the Libyan government, with external actors supporting different factions over others for personal gain. This disconnect has had a disruptive effect on Libya, greatly hampering the functioning of a central government while bolstering territorial and ideological loyalties.

External pressures have further strengthened over the last few months due to growing political and military activism from Russia, Egypt, and the UAE. Diplomatic actions by these countries achieved two conflicting results: on the one hand, they contributed to restarting negotiations that had reached a dead end; on the other hand, they strengthened Haftar *vis-à-vis* Serraj, bolstering his leading role in any future political scenario for the country. It is not surprising that these external actors carved out a key role for themselves following Western powers' abdication of a larger role in Libya. The US presidential transition,

President Trump's rhetoric, and elections in France and the United Kingdom contribute to explaining decreased diplomatic Western involvement in Libya.

To understand the process of "internationalization" of the Libyan crisis and its possible outputs, this report examines the role of international actors in the country and in the regional context. The analysis attempts to address the balance of power among the main local actors (militias, parties, municipalities, etc.) as mirroring the interests of global and regional powers. Against this background, the volume puts the Libyan crisis in a broader perspective and aims to contribute to the public debate on an issue that has become a priority on the international agenda. The report also aims to outline policy recommendations, particularly for the United States and the European Union.

The report is the outcome of a joint effort by ISPI and the Atlantic Council and draws from some of the most prominent international experts on Libya. In the first chapter, the report's editors, Karim Mezran and Arturo Varvelli, outline and summarize the most recent events in Libya. They analyze the deep political rifts and their causes in the country, both at the domestic and the international levels, and highlight the role of international actors in exacerbating, rather than scaling down, domestic animosity.

The second chapter delves deeper into the posture towards Libya of three of its neighboring countries: Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. Tarek Megerisi argues that Cairo has developed increased influence in Libya over time. While Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's interests are mainly rooted in economic and security issues, Haftar's pre-eminence in Libya has allowed Cairo to foster an ideological channel to direct such interests. For their parts, Tunisia and Algeria have, at times, attempted to present a united front to address common concerns stemming from the need to monitor their long desert borders with Libya and from the presence of jihadist groups. All three countries appear to lean towards a security-centric approach that, however, does not appear to be paying off.

Gulf countries have played crucial and conflicting roles in Libya as well. To some extent, Libya has been an international stage for the current crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Supporting diverging political goals, the two countries have attempted to export the developmental model typical of Gulf countries based on a rentier economy to Libya. However, as Saskia Van Genugten focuses in the third chapter of this volume, the two Gulf powers have radically different views of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamist forces, which have further fanned the flames of the domestic conflict.

Mattia Toaldo examines Europe's role in the Libyan conflict in the fourth chapter. Beginning with the 2011 military intervention against Qaddafi, European actors were divided over Europe, with France and the United Kingdom supporting the intervention and Italy and Germany less so. European actors have been more divided since the regime's fall. Despite this, since 2014, European countries have been able to coordinate their agendas by kick-starting and supporting the political process that resulted in the Skhirat agreement. Many open questions still plague political and diplomatic action in Libya by the European Union. But European leadership is needed if the international community seeks to stabilize Libya and address the issues that led to the conflict.

In the fifth chapter Andrea Beccaro highlights some of the reasons for Russia's increased involvement in Libya. Haftar's anti-Islamist agenda is LIKE Russia's, and his role as a "strongman" leading a divided country appeals to Moscow. Nevertheless, Russia has adopted a pragmatic approach and kept diplomatic channels open with al-Serraj and the internationally-recognized government in Tripoli. All this signals A preference for a diplomatic rather than military solution, which is tied to Russia's economic interests. Most likely, Russia hopes to be recognized as the guarantor of any political agreement with Haftar.

Meanwhile, the United States appears to be sitting on the fence. It may appear that the Donald Trump's administration is simply carrying out former President Barack Obama's policies by

supporting negotiations and the strengthening the PC/GNA. At the same time, Trump has not signalled any willingness to play an active role in Libya. In the final chapter of the report, Ben Fishman sketches out the likely path that Trump may follow. One way or another, the US administration is fated to take a stance in Libya: it can either do it by supporting European allies and the UN-led peace efforts, or it could be forced to intervene if conditions worsen to contain Russian ambitions.

To conclude, Mezran and Varvelli outline the steps that should be taken, especially by Western countries, to restart Libya's political process. The main goal should be to restore conditions on the ground for a dialogue that sets local actors on equal footing. Thus, it would be advisable to counteract pro-Haftar forces by bolstering the PC/GNA, beginning with economic assistance. A renewed attempt at peace may come through progressive economic recovery, supported by an increase in oil production and through the gradual stabilization of Tripoli and the rest of the country.

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1. Libyan Crisis: International Actors at Play

Karim Mezran, Arturo Varvelli

Different interpretations exist on how to address the Libyan crisis. Some scholars point at the fragile Libyan identity and ascribe the ungovernability of the country to its intrinsic fragmentation due to tribalism, localism, and regionalism. Another interpretation attributes the responsibility of the prolonged crisis to a process of political polarization between secular and Islamist forces. Both views are partial and incomplete as they leave out another important and perhaps more relevant factor, which concerns the international scenario and the crucial role of external actors in the Libyan theater.

In the international system, and particularly in the MENA region, the hierarchy of power and prestige has been changing rapidly and its continuous evolution represents a key driver of insecurity. The assertiveness of regional players and the increasingly influential role of Russia seem to be emblematic of the unpredictable nature of international political alignments, i.e. the status of alliances, partnerships, and informal cooperation. In light of this framework, the enlarged Mediterranean region constitutes the epicenter of global disorder and the Libyan crisis arises as one of its main manifestations.

In Libya, the interference of international powers and regional actors contributed to dividing the country and made it more difficult to undertake a true process of national reconciliation. Since the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime in October 2011, the country has experienced phases of conflict and détente. Despite recent attempts to reach a negotiated solution between competing groups and forces, today's Libya remains torn apart, with a Parliament in Tobruk and the UN-backed Presidential

Council (PC) led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj in Tripoli. However, neither side is actually able to govern, as they are both held “hostage” by the militias that putatively support their respective governments. General Khalifa Haftar’s Libyan National Army (LNA), which is more or less in control of Cyrenaica, backs Tobruk Parliament, while Misrata and Tripoli militias back the PC. In the past year, the PC has made several attempts at negotiating with Haftar on the condition that he accepts a role within the UN-backed government and limits his hegemonic ambitions over Libya. After meeting in Abu Dhabi on 2 May, neither al-Serraj nor Haftar offered any detail on a shared way forward for a political deal to unify the country. Media reports said that the two reached an agreement to resolve the stalemate through joint control of militias and to hold elections by March 2018. Nevertheless, many points in the agreement remain obscure and uncertain. The most important among them concerns the acceptance by Haftar of subjecting military power to civilian authority, as envisaged by article 8 of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in Skhirat in December 2015.

In this context, international and regional powers have repeatedly supported one Libyan contender or another according to their own interests. As a result, the conditions on the ground in Libya came to mirror the divisions at the international and regional level.

Local actors

Since the government led by al-Serraj took office in April 2016, Haftar has increasingly represented an obstacle to a reunification of the country under the LPA and contributed to paralyzing the internationally recognized Tobruk Parliament. The repeated rejection by the Tobruk Parliament of Serraj’s proposed Government of National Accord (GNA)¹ gave rise to a new

¹“Tobruk rejects vote of confidence in UN-backed ‘unity’ Libyan government”, *Middle East Eye*, 22 August 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libyas-tobruq-government-rejects-vote-confidence-un-backed-unity-government-1184491098>

phase of further divergence. Haftar's progressive replacement of various regularly elected mayors of Cyrenaica towns with faithful military personnel, seemed to be a clear strategy for taking full control of the region.

Against this background, Haftar was been able to gain a political role and the legitimacy such role requires by presenting himself as the leader in fighting Islamic terrorism and the emergence of radical groups in Libya. Haftar gathered around himself various groups concerned by the rise radicals in the country. His narrative leveraged the fight against "Islamists" in his attempt to join the international campaign against Islamic State (ISIS) and radicals in the region. Haftar appeared capable of coagulating around himself the consensus of the population, fearful of an extremist trend, especially in the city of Benghazi, and of countering the proselytism of the most radical groups. On the other hand, this attitude fostered a tactical convergence between radical militias and various political Islamist forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood, which, despite lacking ideological affinities, felt openly threatened.

In mid-September 2016, Haftar's LNA launched a military mission to take control of the four main oil ports in central Libya. The LNA occupied the oil terminals serving to export most of Libyan crude.

Nevertheless, Haftar's goal in taking control of the ports was military escalation – indeed, none of the armed groups fighting for control of the oil installations are capable of overcoming the others militarily – but rather to exert blackmailing power on the entire political process. The control of oil resources in Libya serves as a political weapon to exert influence over the Central Bank and the Libyan National Oil Company (LNOC) and condition the government's autonomy. This is the key to understand Haftar's delivery of infrastructure management of the ports to the LNOC, loyal to the al-Serraj government in Tripoli. Thus, Haftar could claim that his occupation of the oil installations was to the benefit of all Libyans. This constituted a political victory for Haftar, who could then demand a revision of the power

relations in the PC. Haftar is in fact demanding a commanding role that is not solely restricted to the Cyrenaica area. Exasperated by the ineffectiveness of the PC, a large part of the population beyond the Cyrenaica region began to view Haftar's role in potentially bringing security to the country more positively.

However, to reduce the country's problems to the confrontation between Haftar and Serraj would not be correct, as a number of other factors are currently affecting the Libyan scenario. Amongst these, recent military actions taken by the Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB) show a renewed mobilization of the radical front. The BDB are currently allied with former Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell, who has tried twice in the last few months – unsuccessfully – to overthrow Serraj's Presidential Council in Tripoli. The BDB are also close to the Libyan Gran Mufti al-Gharyani, who has always been distinguished by his radical views. The relationship between the BDB and the PC is complex and somewhat unclear, especially concerning the Oil Crescent. In March 2017, the BDB attempted to retake the oil installations from Haftar, demonstrating that while opposed to each other, the BDB and the PC do converge on the goal to push out Haftar. This military escalation, besides giving voice to forces and factions opposed to any kind of negotiation, further reduced the space for a political dialogue.

In a context of evolving and transforming alliances among the various factions, it is unlikely that a single faction could militarily prevail over the others and unify the country under its control. Similarly, despite the system of alliances that allowed Fayeze al-Serraj to become President, the PC does not seem to be in a position to control even the Tripolitania region in which it is based. A number of militias, such as those led by Haithem al-Tajouri, Abdul Ghani al-Kikli, Abdel Rauf Kara, or the Nawasi Brigade in Tripoli's Suq al-Jouma neighborhood, and several other Misrata militias in the capital, appear more and more to be acting independently from the PC. The security condition in Tripoli are increasingly deteriorating. Moreover, some of these militias have already rejected any possibility of an appeasement between Haftar and al-Serraj.

Other important forces hold different and at times unpredictable positions. The Military Council of Zintan in western Libya, once part of the “Dignity Operation” (the pro-Haftar military coalition), has recently distanced itself from the LNA accusing it to adopt a strategy, which would be in opposition to the aims and principles of the Libyan revolution. Zintanians are substantially taking a position of neutrality in the GNA-Haftar confrontation. In the South, political and ethnical fragmentation dominates. The historical tribal order was overturned and the Qadhafa tribe, which led the region during Qaddafi’s regime, suddenly left room to other groups. The disruption of the political and tribal order has provoked repeated waves of conflict among Tebu, Awlad Sulaiman, Warfalla, and Tuareg tribes², all involved in a competition aimed at controlling illicit trafficking. Tripoli authorities have sought to provide assistance, most significantly using Misrata’s Third Force as a pacifying element but they did not succeed, and the Fezzan region today is characterized by increasing fragmentation and further polarization between the two governments of Tripoli and Tobruk³.

External actors

Alongside internal actors, several international players assume a significant role in the dynamics of domestic conflict in Libya. First, the UN has been consistently involved in the country since the beginning of the Libyan revolt in 2011. In the Spring of that year, the NATO military intervention approved by the UN contributed to the ousting of the Qaddafi’s regime. Consequently,

² P. Cole and F. Mangan, *Policing Libya. Form and Function of Policing since the 2011 Revolution*, Peacework, no. 117, United States Institute for Peace, 2016, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PW117-Policing-Libya.pdf>

³ F. Wehrey, *Insecurity and governance Challenges in Southern Libya*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., 30 March 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/30/insecurity-and-governance-challenges-in-southern-libya-pub-68451>

the UN sustained the creation of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), established in September of the same year, as the primary international body to seek reconciliation between various revolutionary groups. Four years later, in December 2015, LPA was signed, which contains four main principles: ensuring the democratic rights of the Libyan people; the need for a consensual government based on the principle of the separation of powers; oversight and balance between government institutions; and respect for the Libyan judiciary and its independence. However, the UN initiative was hindered by increasing interventionism by rival countries in the region that, in light of instability and the spiral of violence between local groups, saw an opportunity to promote their own interests. On the other hand, the UN certainly cannot be considered blameless. The UN Special Envoy to Libya at that time, Bernardino León, while in the midst of negotiations on a power-sharing arrangement in the country, was simultaneously planning a lucrative arrangement with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to lead the Emirate's diplomatic academy. This act, leaked by the international press, negatively influenced the Libyan public opinion about the credibility and coherence of the UN negotiation efforts.

In the wake of the UN initiative's impasse, many international players officially joined the multilateral process but also started to compete with one another to gain in Libya. These actors may be grouped according to their commons interests.

A first group involves Egypt, the UAE and Russia. All these players have steadily supported the House of Representatives in Tobruk and likely provided General Haftar with weapons and air power in his efforts to drive other groups out of Benghazi and Eastern Libya⁴. Egypt has obvious strategic reasons to intervene in Libya. The broad Egyptian battle against all Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Cairo government

⁴ A. Delalande, "How Emirati air power turned Haftar's Libyan oil ports disaster to victory", *Middle East Eye*, 21 March 2017, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/how-did-libyan-national-army-manage-retake-oil-crescent-such-short-time-393617622>

accuses of being a terrorist organization, found its main ally in Haftar's ambitions. Cairo has an interest in exercising some form of control in Cyrenaica, not only because it is the most oil rich region in Libya, but in order to create a "buffer zone" against ISIS and other jihadist groups that could threaten stability in Egypt. For its part, the UAE is also interested in containing Islamist forces throughout the region. Over the last few years, Egypt and the UAE reportedly secretly launched two air strikes against Islamist-allied militias that were fighting for the control of Tripoli⁵. According to various sources, between May and June 2016, the UAE deployed airplanes and drones at Al-Khadim air field in Cyrenaica: UAE was involved in air strikes in Benghazi supporting pro-Haftar fighters⁶. As for Russia, the Kremlin seems to have a dual interest in Libya. Historically, from an economic point of view, Libya under the Qaddafi regime was a good buyer: about \$10 billion worth of contracts was signed with Qaddafi and included weapons sales and the construction of a rail link between Sirte and Benghazi. Today, from a strategic point of view, Russia sees Libya as an opportunity to expand its influence in the Mediterranean region.

These countries maintained a dual political position: on the one hand, they formally supported the UN-led negotiations and the PC led by al-Serraj; on the other, they unofficially supported Haftar's forces. This ambiguity led to an imbalance in favour of Haftar, which did not create the conditions for a successful negotiation. Haftar took advantage of the international rhetoric surrounding the fight against terrorism. The more international support he received, the farther away he moved from mediation.

The second group consists of countries like Turkey, Qatar and Sudan that have supported the rump Tripoli government of Khalifa Ghwell. These actors decided to throw their weight behind

⁵ D.D. Kirkpatrick and E. Schmitt, "Arab Nations Strike in Libya, Surprising U.S.", *The New York Times*, August 2014, https://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/26/world/africa/egypt-and-united-arab-emirates-said-to-have-secretly-carried-out-libya-airstrikes.html?_r=0

⁶ A. Delalande (2017).

the “revolutionary forces” in Libya, many of them possessing Islamist-leaning political agendas. In particular, they support the forces grouped under the Libya Dawn coalition. The government in Tobruk often accused these forces of being linked to more radical Islamist forces such as Ansar al-Sharia and al-Qaeda.

A third group includes Libya's Western neighbors, and particularly Tunisia and Algeria. Overcoming their reluctance in intervening, they are taking part in discussions over the future of Libya and the involvement of international actors in their efforts to stabilize the country. Tunisia and Algeria are largely motivated by their need to strengthen their engagement in countering internal radicalization and improving border controls⁷. Towards this goal, both governments have been willing to meet with representatives from different factions in Libya.

Finally, a fourth group consists of Western countries, especially Italy and the United States. Italy invested political capital both officially and unofficially by hosting summits, carrying on an intense diplomatic activity, and trying to bypass the conflict between Tobruk and Tripoli by directly addressing municipal representatives, members of civil society, local actors, and tribal leaders. Particularly in Southern Libya, Rome tried to mitigate the conflicts between opposite coalitions in the Fezzan region, while at the same time trying to increase support for al-Serraj's government. Rome aimed to support the PC by improving security conditions, especially in Tripoli. Rome pursued this diplomatic action given Italy's political, economic, commercial, and energy stakes in Libya – as shown by recent investments by oil giant ENI in the country – that are concentrated in Tripolitania. Moreover, Libya's coasts are the main departure point for migrants on their way to Italian soil. It is therefore in Italy's interest to maintain good relations with those in control of this part of the country by acting as a mediator and trying to facilitate a re-composition of the political and military situation in Libya.

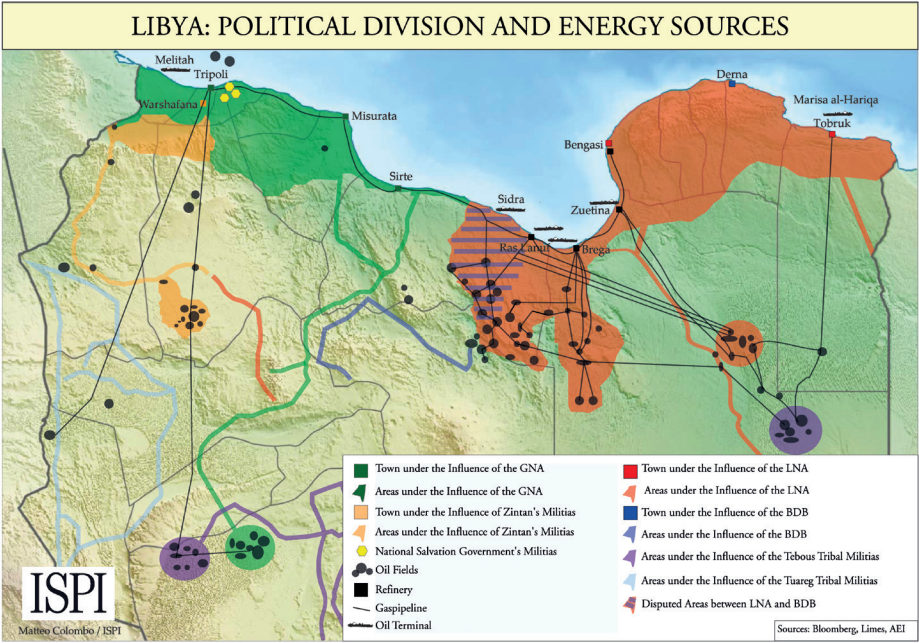
⁷ G. Jones *et al.*, *Rolling Back the Islamic State*, Research Reports, Rand corporation, http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1912.html

The United States has focused its engagement on counterterrorism. The US conducted airstrikes on ISIS targets in Libya beginning in 2015. US airstrikes were integral in pushing ISIS out of its stronghold in Sirte.

Italy and the US under the Obama administration held a series of preventive consultations on every prospective decision, often managing to set a path for European countries to follow. As a result, France, Germany, Italy, the UK, and the US set up an informal contact group and released periodical “joint statements” backing the UN mediation and al-Serraj. However, this apparent unanimous and official support to the UN mediation was never matched by an effective and common course of action. Support to Haftar from Egypt, the UAE, and Russia was joined by other influential external actors such as France. After the news about the killing of a few French military advisors in July 2016 during a pro-Haftar intelligence operation, France found it particularly difficult to re-balance its position on the Libyan crisis and thus French policy towards Libya was stalled. At the same time, the UK, which has been supportive of the UN-backed al-Serraj government, accepted that the LPA needs to be revised and that Haftar should to be given a greater role⁸. Furthermore a recent statement by US President Donald Trump declared that Libya is not a political priority for his administration. The Trump disengagement has a void of leadership that Haftar’s sponsors are trying to fill, as the talks in Abu Dhabi demonstrate.

It is clear that the Libyan crisis has grown beyond the boundaries of a domestic dispute between tribes, factions, and various groups. The conflict can only be understood and possibly resolved by inserting it into the wider regional and international framework. A first important step to reach a solution, therefore, is to clearly understand the dynamics of the actions and interests of the various international actors.

⁸ P. Wintour, “Boris Johnson throws weight behind Libya peace process”, *The Guardian*, 4 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/04/boris-johnson-libya-peace-process-tripoli>



2. Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia. Neighboring States - Diverging Approaches

Tarek Megerisi

Libya's neighbors have perhaps suffered the most from its post-revolutionary transformation. The once secure, if unpredictable, nation has since become a regional font of instability. Its vast desert borders manned only by cross-border communities with a long history of smuggling, the abundance of munitions following the 2011 revolutionary war, and the ability of non-state actors to move and operate freely have made the country a unique threat to the stability and security of its neighbors. This has been exacerbated by the collapse of its formal economy and the rise of criminality, which have damaged regional interests in Libya whilst empowering smuggling gangs. Although Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia face common threats, they have not always responded to them in the same manner; these nations are themselves in some form of flux and their approaches to Libya reflect each country's context. Moreover, independent attempts by Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia to insulate themselves from Libya's insecurity and protect their interests have in turn affected the dynamics of Libya's evolving civil-war on local and national levels, often in a destructive manner. As such, the response of Libya's neighbors has developed alongside the intractability of Libya's own conflict, slowly trending towards multilateral diplomacy as limited unilateral limited interventions prove insufficient.

Egypt

There is a saying in Maghrebi politics that when Egypt sneezes, Libya catches a cold. This is indicative of how Egyptian political developments are often reflected onto Libya's domestic affairs. Libya followed Egypt down the revolutionary road of the Arab Spring. Like its neighbor, it constructed a fragile democracy in the aftermath with the presence of an Islamist milieu that had long been persecuted by the prior regime. The dramatic and violent rise to power of Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was, in turn, one of the main triggers for the 2014 civil war in Libya; Islamists and revolutionaries saw the spectre of Sisi in the character, pronouncements, and actions¹ of strongman Khalifa Haftar and duly mobilized against him.

Although Egypt's interests in Libya are primarily grounded in economic and security concerns, the presence of Haftar has lent an ideological locus to Cairo through which to channel these interests. Since 2011 the Egyptian economy has been in a downward spiral that has been exacerbated by Libya's corresponding decline. Before the 2011 revolutions, there were roughly 2 million Egyptian laborers in Libya who sent back about \$33 million in remittances per year. Moreover, following the first Gulf War when sanctions were placed on Iraqi oil, Egypt developed a dependency on subsidized Libyan oil. The \$2 billion stabilization money granted to Cairo by the Libyan government of Ali Zeidan in April 2013, as well as the investments Libya already has in different sectors of the Egyptian economy that are estimated in the tens of billions of dollars², further demonstrates the importance of a stable Libya for the ailing Egyptian economy.

The roughly 700-mile-long desert border between the two countries that is cohabited by tribes on both sides represents a

¹ M. Eljarh, "A Coup Attempt in Tripoli", *Foreign Policy*, 19 May 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/19/a-coup-attempt-in-tripoli/>.

² M.-L. Gumuchian and G. Shennib "Analysis: Rich despite its troubles, Libya flashes cash for Egypt", Reuters, 16 April 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-egypt-idUSBRE93F0MA20130416>.

different kind of threat. Weapons and fighters have been smuggled across Libya into Egypt to support an ongoing jihadist insurgency in the Sinai. The emergence of Haftar and his Operation Dignity campaign against Islamists in 2014 coincided with a rapidly rising rate of terrorist attacks in Egypt. Haftar's familiarity with the old Qaddafi regime and his belief in strong-man military rule made him appealing to Egyptian elites as the ideal candidate to restore stability to Libya and protect their interests by avoiding a direct and costly intervention into Libya. Haftar's anti-Islamist ideology, which casts Islamism as a vehicle for terrorism and subsequently an existential threat to national security, also resonated with Sisi's own world view and gave Cairo an opportunity to project this perspective onto Libya's nuanced arena.

Egypt aggressively supported Haftar from the outset of Operation Dignity, which was launched in Libya's Eastern province of Cyrenaica. The Egyptian intelligence services helped reconstitute Libya's old intelligence personnel into a new service, focusing attention on border security and preventing weapons smuggling and the jihadist movement within the province. The Egyptian air force, along with the United Arab Emirates, directly intervened to attack Islamist militias³ and provide reconnaissance to Haftar's forces. Despite the presence of a UN arms embargo in force on Libya, Cairo and Abu Dhabi bolstered Haftar's forces, enabled the delivery of armoured vehicles from the United Arab Emirates (UAE)⁴, and even supplied aircraft and spare parts⁵ for Haftar's own decrepit air force. This support was crucial in allowing Haftar to maintain authority over the Operation Dignity coalition in its first two formative years as he

³ P. Kingsley *et al.*, "UAE and Egypt behind bombing raids against Libyan militias, say US Officials", *The Guardian*, 26 August 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/26/united-arab-emirates-bombing-raids-libyan-militias>

⁴ O. Nkala, "UAE donates armored personnel carriers, trucks to Libya", *Defense News*, 28 April 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense-news/2016/04/28/uae-donates-armored-personnel-carriers-trucks-libya/83654116/>

⁵ N. Linn, "Egypt's got plans for Libya", *War is Boring*, 5 December 2015, <http://warisboring.com/egypts-got-plans-for-libya/>

found it difficult to centralize control due to strained relations with other commanders. The beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts by the Islamic State (ISIS) in February 2015 led Egypt to push for a UN Security Council (UNSC) mandate for military intervention against terrorism in Libya and the lifting of the arms embargo to allow for further support for Haftar⁶. However, cautious posturing by Western powers⁷ resulted in the proposition being withdrawn as the UNSC pushed for a wider political solution in Libya. Sisi has continued to lobby for the lifting of the arms embargo, believing it would allow Haftar to militarily conquer the country. However, the expansion of Haftar's forces and their efficacy has plateaued and he remains unable to monopolize force in Cyrenaica or stop cross-border weapons smuggling, and other elements of the Egyptian administration are beginning to re-think their strategy.

Egypt's unqualified support to Haftar has only succeeded in hampering the possibility of a political solution to Libya's civil war and escalated an ongoing proxy war. After all, there is little incentive for Haftar to make concessions when he has unconditional support from international actors. He has often displayed disdain for the political process by largely refusing to meet with international actors. He has also made no secret through his public pronouncements of his contempt for politicians and his wish to have complete control over Libya's security apparatus⁸. Haftar is a divisive figure in Libya; many accuse him of harbouring ambitions to construct a military dictatorship - evidenced by his replacement of democratically elected local councils with

⁶ C. Stephen, "Egypt seeks UN backing for air strikes against ISIS in Libya", *The Guardian*, 17 February 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/egypt-seeks-backing-air-strikes-isis-libya>

⁷ T. El-Ghobashy and B. Faucon, "West Rebuffs Egypt Proposals for Military Intervention in Libya", *The Wall Street Journal*, 19 February 2015, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/west-rebuffs-egypt-proposals-for-military-intervention-in-libya-1424388828>

⁸ J. Irish, "Libya's Haftar Says Won't work with unity government until militias disbanded", Reuters, 20 May 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-haftar-idUSKCN0YB2FT>

military governors - and many more consider him a war-criminal for actions committed during the Chadian war in the 1980s and Operation Dignity's conduct since 2014. However, the politicians of the internationally recognised legislature, the House of Representatives (HoR), sit under his control in Tobruk and have tied their fates to his. This has led to a rift in Libyan politics that strung-out the yearlong negotiations leading to the December 2015 signing of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). During that time, the HoR appointed Haftar as commander-in-chief of Libya's armed forces. Since then, the HoR has refused to endorse the Government of National Accord (GNA) that was formed by the agreement and instead acted as a spoiler. In fact, Haftar's strategy throughout 2016 appeared to be to stall political progress through intransigence while he expanded his power and control to the point where he could demand that the LPA be amended to give him military control over the country without civilian oversight. Although Haftar had some successes with considerable help from Egypt – both in Benghazi and in the lucrative oil crescent – he remains unable to force such an agreement.

The Egyptian administration is a far from harmonious entity; with the presidency, army, intelligence services, and Foreign Ministry all host various personalities attempting to guide national policy on Libya. Many of these perspectives are shaped by their various Libyan interlocutors, including old Qaddafi regime members who possesses considerable influence over security personnel. Yet Haftar's advances from the east have been stalled by the militias of Misrata and other anti-Haftar militias such as the Benghazi Defence Brigades, and three years on he remains unable to guarantee the security and stability of Cyrenaica which Egypt prizes. The worsening crises within Libya has given rise to a new momentum for peace talks and political unity, which Cairo is now trying to guide whilst continuing to lobby for a lifting of the arms embargo. In December 2016, Egypt hosted a number of Libyan delegations for meetings that resulted in the Cairo

Declaration⁹, which outlined five amendments to the LPA. The amendments centred around giving civilian oversight of the military to the HoR with Haftar as Commander-in-Chief. Including Haftar in an official capacity in the UN approved LPA framework, Cairo believes, will allow for the arms embargo to be lifted and give Haftar the presence and capability to dominate Libya. However, the declaration only hardened the political stalemate, as the opposing members to the HoR demanded they approve the GNA before any amendments were discussed. In January 2017, delegations from the High Council of State, a consultative body based in Tripoli, and the UN Special Representative Martin Kobler travelled to Cairo. The meeting resulted in a joint communique with the Algerian Minister for Maghreb Affairs and the Tunisian Foreign Secretary promoting the LPA and a unified political and military future for Libya. Later that month, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Hassan Shoukry travelled to Tunis to discuss Libyan affairs with President Beji Caid Essebsi.

However, this renewed interest in diplomacy did not dampen official Egyptian support for Haftar. He continued to travel to Cairo and liaise with Lieutenant General Mahmoud Hegazy, head of the Egyptian Committee on Libya that provides him with strategic support. Egypt also exerted significant influence to bring Haftar and GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj to Cairo in February 2017, which resulted in embarrassment when Haftar refused to publicly meet with Serraj. Egypt maintains that Haftar and Serraj met in private, along with HoR Speaker Aguila Saleh, but refused to make any trilateral pronouncements or deals. Still, following the meeting Egypt issued a statement¹⁰ outlining its vision for a diplomatic solution to negotiate amendments to the LPA that could then lead to Presidential and Parliamentary elections,

⁹ Official Page of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement 14 December 2016, Facebook, https://web.facebook.com/MFAEgyptEnglish/posts/1738791303115118?_rdc=1&_rdr

¹⁰ Official Page of the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement 15 February 2017, Facebook, https://web.facebook.com/MFAEgypt/posts/1376557589082850?_rdc=1&_rdr

indicating that Haftar could run for President. Cairo hoped to reassert itself as a regional power broker, enhance the position of Haftar by ensuring any deal occurred under its auspices, and reach an agreement before the Arab League summit in March that could receive regional endorsement. When the latter failed to materialize, Cairo nevertheless continued to engage in regional efforts. The meeting between Serraj and Haftar in early May in Abu Dhabi is a further sign however, that contrary to the trilateral unbiased approach outlined in Tunis, Egypt still hopes to use diplomacy as a means to provide Haftar a position of control.

Tunisia

Tunisia's relationship with Libya revolves around the vulnerable border region, which serves not only as the main point of formal trade between the two nations, but also cultivates a smuggling economy. In the pre-revolutionary days, this focused around bringing subsidized Libyan goods such as flour, sugar, and petrol to Tunisian markets. Although petrol still remains the primary commodity smuggled along the border, weapons, drugs, and terrorists have since been added to the mix. Tunisia's own mishandling of the security situation has contributed to a phenomenon whereby terrorist groups and smuggling gangs have become inextricably linked in the region¹¹. Even as the Tunisian state struggles to contain the rise of security threats, it is damaging the livelihoods of the border communities who in turn find themselves pushed into an alliance of convenience with jihadist groups who can provide where the state fails.

The collapse of Tunisia's border security and security services following the 2011 revolution contributed, alongside Libya's own instability and diminished security, to a rapid growth in terrorist activities as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) migrated westward and targeted Tunisian military establishments.

¹¹ *Tunisia's Borders (II): Terrorism and regional polarisation*, International Crisis Group, 21 October 2014, Tunis/Brussels.

The general porosity of the Libyan border and the freedom that jihadists had to regroup, train, and plot in Libya before returning to Tunisia to execute attacks fed this growth in both countries. For example, the leader of Ansar al-Sharia in Tunis Abu Iyadh regularly visited Derna in Eastern Libya; it is estimated around a thousand supporters crossed into Libya to train and take part in fighting¹² alongside Ansar al-Sharia Libya. Several thousand other potential jihadists have left Tunisia to fight abroad since 2011¹³. In August 2013, Tunisia declared its border with Libya a military buffer zone in order to try to prevent the smuggling of weapons and people that was feeding AQIM and contributing to increasing numbers of casualties in the Tunisian military. Tunis also recruited heavily to the Gendarmerie and deployed the forces in greater numbers to the region despite inadequate training. This sparked a phenomenon of semi-permanent protests in the Eastern region of Tunisia and border towns like Ben Guerdane, which continue today. The local economy lacks the ability to provide jobs in these regions, and the heavy-handed approach to petty smuggling employed by the still inexperienced gendarmerie exacerbated tensions and lent an increasingly militant edge to larger smuggling operations.

After Tunisia's new constitution was announced in January 2014, many Islamist groups felt unrepresented and grew cynical of the political system, believing that head of the Islamist Ennahda party Rachid Ghannouchi capitulated to secular politicians during the constitutional drafting and approval process. This also fed into Tunisia's terrorist problem, as Islamists who considered the political process was illegitimate strengthened ties with more extremist organizations. The social arms of many of these Islamist organizations allowed them to further become a part of the social fabric in Eastern Tunisia, as they were viewed as providing the social services that the government could not.

Following the high-profile terrorist attacks at the Bardo

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ S. Souli, "Border Control: Tunisia attempts to stop terrorism with a wall", *Vice news*, 17 November 2015, https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/border-control-tunisia-attempts-to-stop-terrorism-with-a-wall-v22n11.

Museum in Tunis and a beach resort in Sousse in 2015 – both perpetrators of the respective attacks were allegedly trained in Libya – Tunisia once again stepped up its border security and announced the building of a border wall. The first phase of the initiative was started in June 2015 and involving a 140 mile sandbagged trench from the crossing at Ras Ajdir to the Dahiba crossing in Tatouine. A second phase in 2016 was meant to usher in electronic monitoring systems, however Tunisia lacked both the funding and the equipment to institute such measures. Moreover, the border wall was more symbolic than practical and is likely to be insufficient at dealing with the high number of Tunisian returnees from conflict in Libya and Syria; it has simultaneously exacerbated tensions in the border region and hampered the economic prospects and trade for populations on both sides of the border.

Formal trade between Tunisia and Libya, which has fluctuated in the post-revolutionary period, accounts for roughly a third of Tunisia's gross domestic product. The shadow economy of smuggled goods, meanwhile, makes up nearly 50% of all bilateral trade¹⁴ with Libya. Tunisian extremist organizations embedded in the Eastern region are using fuel smuggling to finance their activities and the mutual needs of Tunisian and Libyan extremists and smugglers. The state approach to-date has done little to dampen the problem and in-fact encouraged the spread of weapons, as smugglers require weaponry to protect themselves. The loss of customs revenue also damages Tunisia economically. Local corruption, an unwillingness to lower tariffs, and price differences with Libya are all contributory factors to the smuggling problem. The value of this illicit trade has empowered Libyan militias who provide security around refineries and other oil installations, as well as for important thoroughfares; these militias profit immensely from the smuggling to the detriment of the Libyan state.

In late 2016, Tunisia's border municipalities struck an

¹⁴ M. Nashed, "Tunisia's borders open ground for smuggling", 22 September 2014, *Al-Monitor*, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/09/tunisia-border-smuggling-security-threat.html>

agreement with the Libyan Western Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) and other local Libyan municipalities that they hoped would stop large scale smuggling, appease local protestors, and provide them with control over cross-border traffic. The deal allowed Tunisians to carry no more than 150 litres of petrol in addition to fuel tanks in vehicles. However, the chief of the Libyan side of the Ras Ajdir border checkpoint called the deal humiliating and refused to endorse it. The deal was also attacked by the head of Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC) Mustafa Sanallah when he announced an investigation into fuel smuggling to Tunisia and Europe that he claimed costs Libya 25 million LYD a month. Sanallah lamented the effect this had on Libyan militias, claiming that the Western PFG's Nasr Brigade and its commander Mohammed Kashlaf had been empowered off the back of corruption and were using the Zawiyah refinery to run smuggling operations¹⁵. This led to the creation of the Libyan Fuel and Gas Crisis Committee, which launched an operation in April 2017 to seize vehicles used by smugglers and close down their distribution centers. According to the committee, their campaign "achieved great results, and limited the percentage of fuel smuggling in a considerable proportion"¹⁶, and by 20 April 20 fresh protests had erupted in Ben Guerdane against these measures¹⁷. This has led to simmering animosity between the two countries that could result in a scenario whereby the absence of fuel smuggling forces smugglers towards other types of contraband and empowers extremist organizations to further destabilize both sides of the border.

¹⁵ S. Zaptia, "Sanalla publicly names Western PFG head Mohammed Kashlaf in fuel smuggling accusation", *Libya Herald*, 4 January 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/04/sanalla-publicly-names-western-pfg-head-mohamed-kashlaf-in-fuel-smuggling-accusation/>

¹⁶ A. Assad, "Fuel and Gas Crisis Committee confirms success of anti-fuel-smuggling campaign", *Libya Observer*, 1 April 2017, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/fuel-and-gas-crisis-committee-confirms-success-anti-fuel-smuggling-campaign>

¹⁷ S. Al Harathy, "Tunisians Close border roads to protest Libyan crackdown on fuel smuggling", *Libya Observer*, 21 April 2017, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/tunisians-close-border-road-protest-libyan-crackdown-fuel-smuggling>

Tunisia lacks the geopolitical prominence or leverage to solicit any deep change in Libya. However, a consistent feature of Tunisia's Libya policy has been to attempt to harness other actors into a unified diplomatic approach in recognition of the fact that Libya's stability is of paramount importance for Tunisia's long-term economic and political stability. The longer the instability continues across Tunisia's Eastern border, the greater the risks the country faces from smuggling and terrorist organizations.

Tunisia has become a focal point for Libyan politics and diplomacy. Tunisia has hosted many relocated embassy staff from different nations and NGOs who continue to work on Libya since 2014. Tunisia also supported the signing of the UN-backed LPA in 2015. As the stalemate between the political factions of the GNA in Tripoli and the HoR in the east have worsened, Tunisia has attempted to rally international support for new talks aimed at amending the LPA. Tunisia, through its foreign ministry and Arab League Special Envoy Salaheddine Jamali, hosted a two-day summit in February 2017 with Algeria and Egypt. The summit, which attempted to channel respective regional diplomatic efforts into a combined approach, culminated in the Tunis Declaration¹⁸. This was something of a coup for Tunisian diplomacy, as the declaration rejected military intervention and external interference in Libya and called for the preservation of a unified set of Libyan institutions. It notably gained the qualified endorsement of Libyan Islamist factions such as Abdul-Hakim Belhaj's el-Watan party. The declaration was also a clear attack on Egyptian policy in Libya, which has interfered militarily in the country and supported a parallel set of institutions in Cyrenaica. However, it remains to be seen whether Tunisia can orchestrate a regional approach to peace in Libya or if Egypt and Algeria are merely them paying Tunis lip service.

¹⁸ N. Ali, "Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt declare a five-point initiative to resolve the Libyan crisis", *Middle East Observer*, 21 February 2017, <https://www.middleeastobserver.org/2017/02/21/tunisia-algeria-egypt-declare-a-five-point-initiative-to-resolve-the-libyan-crisis/>

Algeria

Algeria's foreign policy principles of non-intervention, respecting state sovereignty, and resolutely defending against anything that may threaten the country's internal stability have all been on display in its approach to post-revolutionary Libya. Algeria opposed the NATO intervention of 2011, claiming it to be a breach of Libya's sovereignty. Algiers instead gave its support to calls from the African union and others for a diplomatic resolution to the revolution. Algeria also harbored some of Qaddafi's family in the immediate aftermath of the revolution and delayed recognition of Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) after the UN General Assembly vote to grant Libya's seat to the revolutionary body. This abnormally undiplomatic approach by Algiers can be considered the result of the shock the administration felt at the rapid demise of Qaddafi's Libya, a wish to insulate Algeria from a domestic Arab Spring, and a lack of faith in the NTC to stabilize Libya given persistent infighting. However, the straining of ties between Algeria and Libya cost Algiers, which was labelled as an anti-revolutionary Qaddafi supporter by the NTC.

Since then, however, Algeria has rehabilitated its image by refusing to become embroiled in the international proxy war that has defined Libya's post-revolutionary existence. It remains deeply concerned by the lack of state-control in Libya and the rise of terrorism and smuggling cartels in fear that these phenomena could destabilize Algeria itself. As such, the Algerian state is committed to pursuing a long-term strategy for stabilizing Libya by encouraging Libyans to use diplomacy to end the civil-war and return to state-building. Algeria's own internal political currents underscore this strategy. Algeria not only wishes to regain prominence on a global stage as a regional power-broker, but individual players in Algeria's political class also wish to use Libya as a stepping-stone amidst the political re-reorganizing taking place as Algerian President Abdulaziz Bouteflika's health grows ever more fragile.

In the immediate aftermath of the Libyan revolution, Algeria was focused on two main threats: the expanded presence of AQIM, who could expand in Libya's unstable uncontrolled environment; and the threat of agitation from the Touareg tribe that exists in the border region between Libya, Algeria, and Mali. The Touareg were heavily recruited by Qaddafi into his Islamic Legion, a pan-Arabist paramilitary force, with the lure of citizenship and other benefits. Following the revolution, many well-trained, armed, and experienced fighters returned home and fear spread that they could stoke-up nationalist sentiment and push for independence. Although Algeria's own Touareg community remained pacified, Mali instead became a theatre for instability.

There exists an understanding in Algeria that low-level smuggling should be tolerated in order to maintain the quality of life of cross-border tribes. With new smuggling markets available following Libya's collapse, Algiers had to tread a steady line between stopping arms flows and avoiding fomenting discord by disrupting usual activities. The presence of AQIM further complicated this, as Algeria feared that the group's growing presence in Tunisia and its collaboration with smugglers could turn Tunisia into a launching pad for terrorist attacks in Algeria itself. Algeria witnessed an increase in cross border terrorist attacks in 2012 from AQIM and a splinter group – the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa. It responded with attempts to orchestrate security coordination with Tunisia and Libya, and in January 2013 it attended a tripartite meeting in Ghadames, Libya on security matters. However, these attempts to coordinate security efforts were weakened by Libya's political problems and the unprofessional nature of its militias. Despite their awareness of these growing problems, the attack by al-Qaeda linked militants on a gas facility near In Amenas in Algeria only days after the Tripartite meeting took authorities by surprise. The deaths of 35 hostages embarrassed Algeria on the world stage and prompted a much more dramatic approach to protecting the country from Libya's spreading anarchy.

Algeria's security concerns regarding Libya are tied up with its own economic problems. During the Arab Spring, President Bouteflika sought to dampen any local agitations by financing subsidies, government jobs, and public sector pay-raises through the national oil revenue. However true economic reform has proven hard to enact, and Algiers has been forced to spend large amounts on security. Given the inexperienced nature of Tunisia's security services, the unpredictable militia-centric security in Libya, and the feebleness of Mali and Mauritania, Algiers feels as if it is alone as a bulwark against regional instability. To make matters worse, Algeria suffered from a flight of international workers after the In Amenas attack and a downturn in global oil prices a year later. Following the attack, Algeria militarised its border with Libya by deploying thirty to forty thousand troops, tanks, armoured vehicles and airpower¹⁹. This is an expensive deployment aimed at stopping weapons smuggling and closing the thoroughfare for jihadis traveling between Libya and Algeria as well as Morocco and Libya. The threat of a resurgent AQIM following the defeat of ISIS in Libya's Sirte could further threaten Algiers, which is unlikely to lessen its border-security. In fact, a study of journals published by the Algerian security services since 2014 shows a growing trend towards command and control, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance technologies²⁰. This demonstrates an effort by Algeria to develop long-term approaches to insulating itself from regional instability.

Given the long-term threat potential from Libya, Algeria is in turn looking for a long-term solution. This contrasts with the strategies of Egypt and Tunisia which, for their own reasons, remain focused on addressing immediate issues and short-term goals. Algeria has a long familiarity with Libya; it understands

¹⁹ M. Matarese, "Algeria emerges as quiet mediator in quest for peace in Libya", *Middle East Eye*, 1 February 2016, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/algeria-headline-here-1589175727>.

²⁰ B. Khalod, "Evolving Approaches in Algerian security cooperation", Combating Terrorism Centre, 29 June 2015, <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/evolving-approaches-in-algerian-security-cooperation>

the country's dynamics and has maintained channels of communication with all its key factions. Moreover, Algiers has links with Libya's political Islamists from the country's own civil war in the 1990s, and feels as though it is in a position to counsel Haftar; his war on Islamists is in some ways reminiscent of Algiers' own troubles twenty years ago and they fear he is making the same mistakes. Algeria understands that its strength lies in its diplomacy and it possesses a position of respect across the factional divides in Libya due to its consistent impartiality and focus on stability rather than projection of political preferences. The country is seeking to use that to its advantage to reach a truly inclusive political deal, as it believes that mimicking Egypt's approach may alleviate problems in the short-term but ultimately create an environment for long-term instability and further Libya's polarization.

This general policy of pursuing diplomacy where possible could be evidenced in the key role Algeria played by hosting the talks that led to the LPA. The pantomime rivalry between Algeria and Morocco meant that the talks alternated between the two countries, although Algiers viewed Morocco's involvement as a nuisance. Even as the LPA faltered throughout 2016, Algeria hosted a wide array of Libyan factions, including security actors outside of the UN-led political process. In October 2016, Algiers started a new initiative led by Minister for Maghreb Affairs Abdelkader Messahel based on an "inclusive inter-Libyan dialogue which leads to a solution to the crisis and to national reconciliation"²¹. The GNA's Serraj visited Algeria for talks, whose visit was followed over the next few months by visits from all the main players in Libya, including Haftar and HoR Head Aguila Saleh. Although admittedly an element of domestic politicking existed surrounding this initiative – Messahel sought to one-up the foreign minister and Algeria more broadly aimed to prevent

²¹ K. Hanly, "Op-Ed: Algeria becoming more involved in attempts to solve the Libyan crisis", *Digital Journal*, 19 December 2016, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/op-ed-algeria-becoming-more-involved-in-attempts-to-solve-libyan-crisis/article/482031>

Egypt from pushing its solution and dominating Libya – this does not detract from the genuine and concerted effort of Algeria to form a political solution that could steady Libya's volatility.

Messahel sought to endow this initiative with international gravitas by inviting head of the UN Support Mission in Libya Martin Kobler to Algiers to endorse the efforts. In February 2017, Algeria held a bilateral summit with Russia focused on counterterrorism and used the opportunity to garner Russian support for a common position on the necessity to “restore Libyan statehood through organizing a truly national dialogue that would involve all without exception [...]”²². This was a diplomatic coup for Algeria as Russia has become an indispensable ally to Haftar; and Algeria may be able to leverage its historic relation with the Kremlin to manipulate Haftar into negotiations and start to build international consensus for its initiative. Messahel continued his efforts in April by traveling to Libya and preaching a consistent message of diplomacy and reconciliation during meetings with all political and security power centers. His broad approach and consistent message that dialogue “has to bring together Libyans and has to take place in Libya and not abroad. Only Libyans can build their country's future”²³ distinguished Algeria's attempts at diplomacy from those of Egypt.

The region in 2017 has witnessed a trend towards pushing for a diplomatic resolution to end Libya's civil war. At present Egypt and the UAE's approach may be grabbing all the headlines, however Algeria is quietly laying the groundwork for a long-term inclusive initiative. It appears confident that it can pick up the pieces of an Egyptian diplomatic failure and re-assert itself as North Africa's diplomatic power-broker.

²² “Algeria supports Russia's efforts towards forming a broad anti-terror front – Lavrov”, 29 February 2017, TASS – Russian News Agency, <http://tass.com/politics/859780>

²³ “Algeria's Messahel continues Libya trip with Serraj, Swehli, Zintan and Misrata meeting”, 21 April 2017, *Libya Herald*, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/04/21/algeris-messahel-continues-libya-trip-with-serraj-sewehli-zintan-and-misrata-meeting/>

Conclusion

The inability of Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria to adequately reckon with the scale of Libya's post-revolutionary decay left the countries ill-equipped to deal with the resulting regional problems. As a result, the reactionary, short-term counter-measures these countries deployed failed to protect their interests or defend their vulnerabilities. Moreover, they often resulted in empowering non-state actors in Libya at the cost of state-building and either failed to arrest, or actively facilitated, Libya's atomization and resultant civil war. However, the recent trend towards a diplomatic solution suggests a new phase in regional policy has begun. It remains to be seen whether Egypt's Haftar-first solution, Algeria's big-tent approach, or Tunisia's attempt to join the two into a regional program, will triumph.

3. The Gulf States: Channeling Regional Ambitions in Different Directions

Saskia Van Genugten

Of the flurry of external actors trying to steer the future of post-Qaddafi Libya, the Gulf States can be considered newcomers. Gifted with natural and financial resources, lean decision-making processes, and external security guarantees, these states have demonstrated the ability and ambition to influence – though not yet dictate – the outcome of Libya’s political transition. Their embroilment in conflict-ridden Libya (and elsewhere in the region) seems to indicate these states’ growing aspirations as regional powers as well as an eagerness to provide business opportunities to their respective “national champions”. The determination of some Gulf States to assert influence in Libya also hints at the seriousness with which they perceive specific threats to regional stability, while their ability to take up such a significant role in Libya partly reflects the weaknesses and divisions amongst other external powers involved in the country.

This chapter aims to explain the Gulf States’ foreign policy behavior in Libya. To do so, it starts with an assessment of the Gulf’s general foreign policy objectives in the region. The chapter then analyzes how these objectives have evolved post-2011 due to changes in underlying threat perceptions and developments in Libya’s ongoing political transition. The analysis addresses in particular the early days in which Gulf States collectively called for action against the Qaddafi regime, and later days when the same states found themselves on opposite sides of the conflict over Libya’s future. Mirroring activity in the Libyan arena, the analysis focuses predominantly on Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Saudi Arabia.

Foreign policies of the Gulf: the fundamentals

Unsurprisingly, individual Gulf States have their own, somewhat unique foreign and security policies. Differences tend to be based on a large variety of factors, including population size, level of wealth, geographical location, and threat perceptions. Saudi Arabia traditionally functions as the main regional anchor, though Qatar and the UAE have emerged as heavyweights in regional politics and security matters. Together with Kuwait, Bahrain and Oman, these Gulf States use the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to consult and coordinate on diplomatic and security issues in times that their national objectives align¹. Yemen, the second largest state in the region in terms of population and by far the poorest on the Arabian Peninsula, is not a member of the GCC.

In recent decades, the rapid economic development of Doha, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai, bolstered by the oil and gas boom of 2002-2008, allowed Qatar and the UAE to play a more active role in international affairs. The political-economy tenets of these states are not very dissimilar to those of Libya itself, as they possess large oil and natural gas reserves and have very small populations. But in contrast to those who governed Libya, Gulf leaders have set their respective countries on a steep path of economic and human development. At the same time, Qatar and the UAE have tied the interests of major global companies, governments, and expatriate communities to their own progress.

Qatar and the UAE, relative newcomers in the international arena, are still building up a clear foreign policy “image”. Before 2011, the UAE, with the emirate of Dubai in the lead, began profiling itself as the frontrunner of economic diversification, launching airliners such as Emirates and Etihad, port facilities operator DP World and construction companies such as Emaar. After 2011, the UAE became also known for its staunch anti-Muslim Brotherhood and anti-terrorism policies. Prior to

¹ See for example M. Legrenzi, *The GCC and the international relations of the Gulf: diplomacy, security and economic coordination in a changing Middle East*, New York, I.B. Tauris, 2015.

2011, Qatar had invested in an international image as an honest broker for regional conflicts². While partly motivated by public relations considerations, Doha mediated conflicts in Yemen, Lebanon, Darfur, Djibouti and Eritrea³. Doha also notably did not shy away from contacts with organizations off-limits to the West. At the same time, with the establishment of the television network *Al Jazeera*, Qatar filled a niche in international broadcasting, demonstrating its appreciation for the power of narratives. Yet post-2011, Qatar's narrative would almost overnight become one of siding with the opposition, including in Libya, thereby eroding the country's image as a neutral mediator.

An additional factor in Gulf States' foreign policy behavior is the presence of an external security umbrella in the region. The US and several European states have military installations and infrastructures scattered around the Arabian Peninsula, the most important ones being the US Navy's Fifth Fleet in Bahrain, Prince Sultan Airbase in Saudi Arabia, Camp Arifjan in Kuwait, and Qatar's Al Udeid Air Base. This constellation has allowed Gulf States to engage in active military roles abroad without worrying much about security threats closer to home. This security umbrella was a key factor that enabled Qatar and the UAE to participate in the NATO operation in 2011 that enforced a no-fly zone in Libya.

Reacting to a changing regional context

The regional developments of the past six years have left strong marks on Gulf foreign policies. First of all, they exacerbated already existing fears that the Western security umbrella was

² L. Khatib, "Qatar's foreign policy: the limits of pragmatism", *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 2, 2013, pp. 417-431.

³ S. Barakat, *The Qatari Spring: Qatar's emerging role in peacemaking*, LSE Kuwait Programme on Development, Governance and Globalisation in the Gulf States, 24 July 2012; and K. Coates Ulrichsen, *Qatar and the Arab Spring: policy drivers and regional implications*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 2014.

potentially less solid than assumed. Former US President Barack Obama sent mixed signals to the Arab Gulf States with talk of a pivot to Asia and more leniency towards Iran. Gulf monarchies saw their traditional security partners rapidly abandon support for Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak and enthusiastically embrace calls for democracy, diversity, and dignity across the Arab world. The subsequent crisis of confidence between the Gulf States and their traditional security allies triggered on the one hand a search for a diversification of external security partners, most importantly Russia, and on the other hand the expansion of the Gulf's own military capabilities.

Secondly, amid a shakeup of the regional balance of power in the Middle East, was Egypt, Syria, and Iraq could no longer fulfill their roles as key regional security actors. In the eyes of most of the Gulf monarchies, subsequent developments confirmed Iran's hegemonic inclination and its willingness to exacerbate sectarian tensions to destabilize the region. Iran's involvement in Iraq was an early indication of this trend, but Gulf States also noticed Iranian interference in Syria, Bahrain, and Yemen⁴. The conclusion of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the lifting of multilateral sanctions on Iran served to increase Gulf suspicions around Iran's regional strategy. Saudi Arabia, the key decision-maker with regard to dealing with the "Iran-threat" in Yemen, Bahrain, Syria, and Iraq, left files of lesser priority, such as Libya, largely to its smaller neighbors⁵.

Thirdly, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood has strongly divided regional elites, which has had strong implications for Libya. Even before 2011, the UAE advocated a liberal environment for business and society and invested substantial resources in countering the Muslim Brotherhood, which it views as a threat to its development model based on tourism and cultural openness. Qatar instead believed the Muslim Brotherhood and

⁴ On growing sectarianism in the region, see F. Wehrey, *Sectarian politics in the Gulf: from the Iraq War to the Arab Uprisings*, Columbia University Press, 2013.

⁵ See for example R. Rieger, *In search of stability: Saudi Arabia and the Arab Spring*, Gulf Research Center Papers, 2014.

other Islamists would ultimately prevail in North Africa, including in Libya, and did not view the strengthening of the group elsewhere as a threat at home. Therefore, Doha decided to throw its weight behind the revolutionary forces in the region, many of whom had Islamist-leaning political agendas. With the West wary of engaging too closely with such forces, Qatar carved a niche for itself as the prime interlocutor⁶.

The Gulf States and toppling Qaddafi: pushing the Agenda

All of the Gulf States were happy to see Qaddafi depart from the scene, but anti-Qaddafi sentiments ran particularly high among the leaders of Saudi Arabia. From the moment the Libyan army officer had overthrown the Sanussi monarchy in 1969, he declared his ambition to fight the remaining conservative Arab monarchies. In 2004, the Libyan leader stood accused of direct involvement in an assassination plot targeting the then Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah. In 2006, headlines quoted Qaddafi as telling the Saudis, “you are propelled by fibs towards the grave and you were made by Britain and protected by the US”⁷. Footage of Arab League summits shows several of these embarrassing moments in the history of Arab solidarity, with Qaddafi repeatedly lashing out at King Abdullah as “a British product and American ally” and accusing him of having brought the Americans to occupy Iraq⁸.

In 2011, the Gulf States were among the first to call for an international intervention in Libya. Their unity was slightly odd, as different policy approaches and threat perceptions were already

⁶ A.F. Cooper and B. Momani, “Qatar and expanded contours of small state diplomacy”, *The International Spectator*, vol. 46, no. 3, 2011, pp. 113-128.

⁷ A. Darwish, “Muammar Gaddafi accuses Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah of lying at Arab summit”, *The Telegraph*, 30 March 2009.

⁸ “Saudi King Abdullah vs Gaddafi”, You Tube Video, uploaded 6 June 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYY_ws6axKo

discernable in the Gulf States' general reactions to the Arab uprisings. Qatar rushed in as the voice of opposition movements, with *Al Jazeera* taking an indispensable role in propelling the uprisings. Yemen, Bahrain, and Oman witnessed trouble at home and focused their energy inwards. Saudi Arabia urged for stability and supported the ruling families in Bahrain and Oman. The UAE followed Riyadh's lead, though at the same time expressed concerns about the potential rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region. Still, the geographical distance and the genuine dislike of Qaddafi created an opportunity to show GCC unity.

Gulf States took up leading roles in the diplomatic efforts shaping the international community's reaction to the conflict in Libya. While France and the UK led the "Libya file" in Western forums and the UN Security Council, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE did so in the Arab and Islamic forums. In early March 2011, the GCC met in Abu Dhabi and issued a statement demanding that "the Security Council take the steps necessary to protect civilians, including a no-fly zone in Libya". The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Arab League, of which Qatar held the rotating presidency at that time, issued similar calls for action. Reflecting the concerns of some of the members of the Arab League, a rejection of foreign ground operations was added and incorporated into UN Security Council Resolution 1973¹⁰.

Qatar and the UAE also hosted two of the first three meetings of the International Contact Group on Libya. And while in March 2011 France was the first to recognize Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC), Qatar followed soon after as the first Arab state to do so following the successful conclusion of an agreement allowing Doha to market oil exports from NTC-administered territory. The UAE recognized the NTC in June, and other Gulf States followed when the UN General Assembly

⁹ "Statement by the GCC Concerning Libya", *AFP Report*, 7 March 2011.

¹⁰ Update Report No. 1: Libya, Security Council Report, 14 March 2011, <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/update-report/lookup-c-glKWLeM-TTsG-b-6621881.php>

decided to seat the NTC as Libya's representative during its 66th plenary session.

The US and European states very much welcomed this new regional involvement in security matters and endorsed the idea of "Arab solutions for Arab problems"¹¹. Cooperation with the Gulf alleviated some of the pressure on cash-strapped European defense budgets, provided desired regional buy-in, and demonstrated the relevance of NATO's 2004 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in which Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates participated¹². US President Barack Obama notably said that without the Qatari Emir's leadership, "we would not have been able, I think, to shape the kind of broad-based international coalition that includes not only our NATO members but also includes Arab states"¹³.

A competitive edge: cash, contacts and quick decisions

The Gulf States did not only pledge political support, but also provided operational support for the enforcement of the no-fly zone and helped those fighting against the regime in several other ways. To participate in the official NATO campaign, Qatar sent six Mirage fighter jets and the UAE, which initially had only pledged humanitarian assistance, decided soon after to contribute six F-16 Fighting Falcon and six Mirage 2000 fighter jets. The Qataris later on stated that they had provided ground support as well, or at least had directly tied militias to their payroll.

¹¹ This was often mentioned by Qatar's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim al Thani, see for example D. Henriksen and A.K. Larssen (eds.), *Political Rationale and International Consequences of the War in Libya*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 119.

¹² In 2011, the UAE became the first Arab country to appoint an Ambassador and open a mission at NATO's Headquarters. Qatar accredited its Ambassador to Belgium to also lead the mission to NATO in 2016.

¹³ D. Zhdannikov, R.E. Doherty and M. Abbas, "Special Report – Qatar's big Libya adventure", Reuters, 9 June 2011.

The Qatari chief-of-staff – probably bragging – mentioned that “the numbers of Qataris on the ground were hundreds in every region. Training and communications had been in Qatari hands”¹⁴. Riyadh was highly supportive of the no-fly zone, but sent no jets or other military assets, rather prioritizing regional files involving Iranian influence.

The Gulf States had the advantage of possessing good contacts with Libyan opposition figures. While the Libyan communities in the respective Gulf countries are small in terms of numbers, they include many influential and affluent individuals. Several of them became important members of the NTC. Chairman Mahmoud Jibril was a frequent visitor to the Gulf, NTC interim Prime Minister Abdurrahim el-Keib was an Abu Dhabi-based professor, and NTC member Aref Ali Nayed had set up an office of his Kalam Research Center in Dubai and led a Tripoli Taskforce and a Libya Stabilization Team largely from there. Nayed, an Islamic scholar drawn to Sufism, was appointed Libya's ambassador to the UAE in August 2011 and would remain in that post until October 2016.

Qatar, meanwhile, had hosted a number of individual Muslim Brotherhood members over time, many of whom had come to Doha in the second half of the twentieth century to avoid prosecution in Syria or Egypt. Most remarkably, Qatar had a strong connection to NTC commander and former emir of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) Abdel Hakim Belhadj, who became the head of the Tripoli Military Council. Qatar had made acquaintances with Belhadj when Doha facilitated an Islamist rehabilitation and de-radicalization program in Libya, organized by Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam. In 2009, the program saw the LIFG leadership renounce violence, followed by the release of more than 200 imprisoned fighters. Doha also enjoyed good contacts with the Libyan clerk Ali Al Sallabi, who had lived in exile in Qatar and whose brother was part of the 17 February

¹⁴ I. Black, “Qatar admits sending hundreds of troops to support Libya rebels”, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2011.

Martyrs' Brigade, which subsequently became one of the better equipped militias in Libya.

In addition to relations with influential Libyans in exile, the Gulf States also had the ability to provide financial (unconditional and bilateral) aid and material support to those fighting in Libya in a rapid and flexible way. After 2011, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar quickly became the biggest foreign aid donors to North Africa¹⁵. Most of the aid went to Egypt, but it also reached those the Gulf States had decided to back in Libya. In the initial phases of the conflict, Qatar was the main aid provider, delivering logistical support, cars, communication equipment and other material. But even less affluent Oman provided some support that was channeled to their fellow Abadi Muslims residing in the mountains of Nafusa¹⁶. According to UN reports, some of the aid provided by Gulf States violated the UN sanctions that were set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1970 and amended by subsequent resolutions¹⁷.

Exporting the Gulf development model?

When internal struggles over governance erupted in Libya, the Gulf States, which had been united in their negative views of Qaddafi, developed clashing ideas about who should lead in Libya. Nonetheless, it is important to note that their ultimate objective remained the same and aligned with those of other international actors and most Libyans themselves: a desire for stability and a lucrative environment for investments. As a UAE businessman was quoted as saying in 2012, "We have been told very clearly: the

¹⁵ L. Watanabe, "Gulf States' engagement in North Africa: the role of foreign aid", in Khalid S. Almezaini and Jean-Marc Rickli (eds.), *The small Gulf states: foreign and security policies before and after the Arab Spring*, Routledge, 2017, pp. 168-181.

¹⁶ K. Zurutusa, "Libya's Ibadi Muslims survived Qaddafi but now face the new threat of Islamic State", *VICE News*, 22 March 2016.

¹⁷ See the final reports of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) concerning Libya.

authorities are encouraging UAE and Qatar companies. They want to give them business opportunities, so we want to take advantage of this [...]. Our strategy is to become a very dominant player in Libya; we were a minor player in Libya [before the war]"¹⁸.

Hoping to gain good-will and privileges, Gulf States supported those factions they believed would ultimately lead the way in Libya. Financial and material support were key to creating such good-will, but so were technical assistance programs aimed at strengthening relationships. For example, the Dubai-based Mohamed bin Rashid School of Government provided extensive training to Libyan public sector leaders. The UAE's Etisalat Academy also assisted the Libyan telecom sector and the Qatar Fund for Development provided assistance to the electricity sector. Such technical assistance programs often reflected Gulf interests in strategic sectors, including oil and gas, banking and finance, telecommunications, and infrastructure development.

Projects and deals completed just before and right after 2011 showed indeed the vast potential for international companies, including those from the Gulf, to engage in business in Libya. To get a head start, Qatar made its recognition of the NTC dependent on a commitment that it could market Libyan oil. In 2012, Doha's largest state-owned bank, the Qatar National Bank, bought a 49% stake in Libya's Bank of Commerce and Development. Other joint ventures already existed between subsidiaries of the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and the Libyan Development and Investment Company, as well as between QIA and Libya's Economic and Social Development Fund. One of those joint venture, Al Libya-Al Qatary, ran a project to develop the waterfront in Tripoli's Jansour area, which would bring Gulf-style luxury living and five-star hospitality to Libya's shores. A similar gated community project, Palm City, was the outcome of a joint venture with a Kuwaiti company and was finished before the war broke out. It would become the residence of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) staffers and other internationals.

¹⁸ F. Neuhoof, "Libya opens door to UAE oil companies", *The National*, 6 January 2012.

Diverging threat perceptions and a return to violence

The hope of creating a Dubai or Doha on the Mediterranean faded quickly as fighting intensified between Libyan factions. The Gulf States' reaction to the emerging conflict was exacerbated by developments in neighboring countries. Libya was judged as critical mainly because of its potentially destabilizing impact on Egypt, which had long been higher on the priority list. Saudi Arabia and the UAE were highly concerned about the 2012 election of Mohamed Morsi as Egyptian President, while Qatar had welcomed the victory of the Muslim Brotherhood. Not only did Riyadh dislike the political views of the Brotherhood and feared its promotion at home, it also suspected that this change could weaken the US-Saudi-Egypt security triangle that had historically proven an effective counterweight to Iran's ambitions. The Gulf States were also wary of Morsi's Egypt turning overtly anti-Israel, which could trigger a regional escalation against Gulf interests.

Therefore, from the Gulf perspective in 2012-2014, events in Libya were overshadowed by those in Egypt. Qatar had provided ample support to Morsi's Egypt, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE became the staunchest backers of the military establishment and cheered the ouster of President Morsi in 20113 and the rise of General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi as his successor. This episode in Egypt prompted an escalation of intra-GCC tensions that also affected Libya. Within the GCC, where Saudi Arabia remains the leading power, Qatar's support for the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was judged as a step too far. Exacerbating the level of animosity, Qatar provided ample media space to the Egyptian-born, Doha-based cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who publicly criticized several other Gulf States. The situation escalated in March 2014, when Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE recalled their ambassadors from Doha. The diplomatic discord lasted for eight months and constituted an unprecedented episode in the history of the GCC.

The 2014 diplomatic standoff between Qatar and other Gulf States coincided with an escalation of violence in Libya. In May

2014, Khalifa Haftar and his “Libyan National Army” launched Operation Dignity aimed at rooting out “terrorism” in Benghazi, which received support from Egypt and the UAE. Haftar had emerged as a military strongman in east Libya. Once part of Qaddafi’s establishment, he was cast aside at the end of the 1980s, went in exile in the US and had returned during the revolution with a strong anti-Islamist agenda. In June, the General National Congress (GNC) refused to accept the outcome of the election for a new House of Representatives (HoR), which ultimately resulted in the division of Libya’s national authorities in two rival camps. Qatar, together with Turkey and others supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, threw its weight behind the remaining parts of the GNC and the newly established Libya Dawn coalition. The UAE and Egypt backed the Tobruk and Bayda-based authorities, which supported Haftar and Operation Dignity, as well as their supporters in the western part of the country, such as the Zintani. Egypt had declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization at the end of 2013, and Saudi Arabia, followed by the UAE, adopted the same policy line and endorsed the narrative that the fight against Libya Dawn and Islamists was a battle against international terrorism. Egypt and the UAE reportedly engaged in joint airstrikes against Daesh and two months later, in November 2014, saw their respective diplomatic missions attacked¹⁹. By mid-2017, it was clear that instead of having toned down their stances, these powers became increasingly resolute in their commitment to eradicate what they view as Islamist extremism and terrorism.

The change in Saudi leadership in January 2015 altered the dynamics. While the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia had largely agreed on their anti-Muslim Brotherhood stances, the new Saudi King, Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, started prioritizing the anti-Iran agenda, focusing specifically on the war in Yemen. Initially, the new king seemed to encourage Qatar and the UAE,

¹⁹ “Egypt, UAE carried out Tripoli air strikes: U.S. officials”, Reuters, 25 August 2014.

as well as opposing Libyan factions, to work constructively towards a solution for their feuding in Libya. But tensions between Saudi Arabia and Qatar escalated once again and in June 2017, Riyadh, Abu Dhabi and Bahrain, but also Cairo, severed diplomatic ties with Doha. This time, the pressure included also the blocking of Qatari news outlets and a full travel ban. This heightening of the intra-GCC feud is likely to have consequences for the situation in Libya as well, as it comes at a time of political and military gains for Haftar and the LNA, while Egypt's military is increasingly directly involved in Libya.

Gulf States also differ somewhat in the alternative world views promulgated. For example, Saudi Arabia, by supporting Salafi groups following the teachings of Saudi cleric Rabia bin Hadi al-Madkhali, seems to have promoted a new type of religious ideology as an alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine. At home in Saudi Arabia, Madkhali views have been instrumental in countering the ideas of both the Muslim Brotherhood as well as jihadi groups, as the Madkhali tends to leave the ruling political authorities unchallenged.²⁰ The Saudis may believe that same model could take root in Libya. Indeed, although it has not taken up a leading role in Libya, Riyadh has dispatched Salafi clerics to eastern Libya with the consent of Haftar's forces. Yet the fact that such clerics have been received with unease shows that, despite all the international attempts to shape Libya, many Libyans tend to remain wary of foreign interference beyond the reception of unconditional aid.

Pushing for peace: multilateral forums vs bilateral channels

Despite their support for different factions in the conflict, the Gulf States have an interest in a diplomatic solution to the Libyan crisis that will reestablish long-term stability and allow for the resumption of Gulf development projects on the

²⁰ F. Wehrey, *Quiet no more?*, Carnegie Middle East Center, 13 October 2016.

Mediterranean. The Gulf States have expressed general support for the UN-facilitated dialogue that led to the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in late 2015 and the establishment of the Presidency Council of the Government of National Accord (GNA). However, skeptical about the efficiency of such multilateral channels alone, the Gulf States tend to explore, in parallel, bilateral and regional initiatives with the objective of steering the UN-led process in the direction that is their most desirable path to stability.

The Gulf countries and Egypt have invested in trying to build bridges between Libya's largest tribes, as they believe that they have a competitive edge over the UN and the West with regard to understanding tribal dynamics and related mediation mechanisms. And while the UAE has backed Haftar and made clear its position that he must be included in Libya's national governance, Abu Dhabi may also have been using its leverage to convince Haftar to take up a role within the framework set by the LPA. Haftar and the head of the GNA Fayez al-Serraj met in Abu Dhabi in May 2017 and held preliminary discussions regarding amendments to the LPA, including a change in the Presidency Council that could create a position for Haftar. However, the subsequent fighting between Haftar's forces and others shows that any such workable political solution and true reconciliation between the main actors on the ground is most likely still far away.

Conclusion

Since 2011, the Gulf States have drastically stepped up their regional involvement in foreign and security policies, including in Libya. They have engaged in military action and have provided political, financial, humanitarian, and technical support to different groups on the ground. Such Arab involvement in Libya has on the one hand added the necessary legitimacy and resources to regional interventions, such as the 2011 intervention. On the other hand, newcomers have also brought different

and diverging ideas of what shape and direction a future Libya should take. While initially united in toppling Qaddafi, the Gulf States most involved in Libya - Qatar and the UAE - soon after drafted opposing visions for the future of the country that did not necessarily align with those of more traditional external powers involved in Libya.

Key divergences between the Gulf actors took place with regard to the role of Islamist forces in politics. Qatar partnered most solidly with Turkey to back the Muslim Brotherhood, former LIFG fighters, the GNC and the Libya Dawn Coalition. In Doha's opinion, Islamist forces would ultimately prevail in a more democratic Middle East and North Africa and would not pose a particular threat to the monarchies on the Arabian Peninsula itself. The UAE, instead, sees the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamists forces as a threat to its own development model, which relies on tourism and business. Abu Dhabi therefore decided to throw its weight initially behind those politicians with a liberal economic agenda and later on behind those that shared in its anti-Islamist agenda, thereby backing Haftar and his Operation Dignity. By doing so, the UAE found its strongest partner in Sisi's Egypt, whose main objective is to prevent negative spillovers from Libya.

Driven by a differentiation in threat prioritization, the Gulf States' behavior in Libya reflects the intra-GCC friction that built up in the years after 2011, peaked in 2014-2015 and which flared up again in June 2017. Riyadh, Abu Dhabi, but also Cairo and Manama are trying to rein in Qatar's "adventurism" by challenging its pro-Muslim Brotherhood stances and Doha's relatively good relations with Iran. Increasingly, GCC unity will not necessarily emerge from compromise, but rather through alignment on anti-extremism, anti-terrorism, and an anti-Iran agenda, at times enforced by the more powerful states in the region.

Despite all this, ultimately, the Gulf States have an interest in finding a workable political solution in Libya and have undertaken actions in that direction. The Abu Dhabi meeting between Serraj and Haftar in May can be viewed as an acknowledgment

by Serraj that, for his own political survival, somehow he will need to placate Haftar by giving him a place in the governance of Libya. At the same time, it indicates that Haftar, in order to retain his support base, will need to be satisfied with a position that places him within the UN-endorsed legitimate framework of governance, at least for now.

Currently, the pendulum seems to be swinging to Haftar's anti-Islamist side. Given the prevalence of the anti-extremism agenda on the world stage, those Gulf States backing Haftar have seen global leaders, including in the US and in Russia, more susceptible to their own positions. US President Donald Trump has indicated that he does not see a direct role for the US in Libya, but prefers to empower Saudi Arabia and its allies to find "Arab solutions for Arab problems". For any such solution to be sustainable, a convergence is required among Gulf capitals, as well as in Cairo, of the threat perceptions of the conflict in Libya and the ways to address them.

4. Europe: Carving Out a New Role

Mattia Toaldo

The largely uninformed consensus among Libyan and European public opinions is that the European Union and its major member states have neglected Libya after having helped to overthrow Muammar al-Qaddafi. While it is true that there was a sharp drop in interest in most capitals after the end of the civil war in 2011, it would be inaccurate to overlook the rise in European actions since at least mid-2014.

Paradoxically, the intervention in Libya in 2011 is seen by the same consensus as mostly a European, and particularly Franco-British, endeavor. However, this is not entirely accurate: while the United States chose a relatively low profile, its contribution was militarily essential in the NATO intervention in Libya. A view of Operation Unified Protector as merely a European war also neglects the Qatari and Emirati role in the armed confrontation and the political cover given by the League of Arab States. Ultimately, the prevailing and uninformed narrative is that European countries first played a major role in overthrowing Qaddafi and then abandoned Libya to its fate.

The Arab contribution to the war should instead be kept in mind when trying to understand the break-up of Libyan institutions and the renewed civil war of the summer of 2014. During the 2011 intervention, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates nurtured relations with different Libyan actors that found themselves on opposing sides in the summer of 2014. Most of the Libyan interlocutors of the UAE were in Operation Dignity against Islamist forces headed by General Khalifa Haftar. Most of those who received political and military support from Qatar in 2011 joined the Libya Dawn coalition, which conquered Tripoli in

July-August of 2014 and eventually set up a parallel executive, namely the National Salvation Government.

Europeans were largely absent in the lead up to the 2014 conflict but became heavily engaged with the political process thereafter. While diplomatic activity occurred and aid programs were carried out in Tripoli, and while conferences of Friends of Libya¹ were organized regularly to plan for European support to the post-Qaddafi governments, little was done in terms of high-level political mediation and construction of a system of incentives and disincentives to avoid violence and institutional collapse. Until the murder of the US ambassador Christopher Stevens on 11 September 2012, the general assessment was that things in Libya were going relatively well. This feeling was reinforced by the parliamentary elections held on 7 July of that year, which saw both a high turnout and a bad result for Islamist parties in the share of seats assigned to political parties. Even after the murder of the ambassador in Benghazi, the European political disengagement from Libya continued as exemplified by the difficulties the EU delegation and the Border Assistance Mission experienced in carving out physical space for their activities in Tripoli.

Europe became politically more engaged with Libya after almost all European embassies had to evacuate Tripoli following the eruption of violence in July and August 2014. Europe first appointed Spanish diplomat Bernardino León as EU Special Envoy to Libya in 2014. Later that year, León became the UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Libya.

From the summer of 2014 when he assumed office in Tunis (the UN mission had been evacuated along with most embassies), León became the architect of a political process that eventually led to the signing of the Skhirat agreement in December 2015, in which Europe played a strong role. Both the EU and its five largest member states (the United Kingdom, France, Germany,

¹ Known also as International Contact Group on Libya, this format included the US, European countries, and members of the Arab League. After the fall of Qaddafi in 2011 this group became the forum for coordination of donors to Libya.

Italy, and Spain) put pressure on the Libyan parties to reach an agreement, hosted meetings, and created sticks and carrots to promote unity and de-escalation.

Ultimately, the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) was mostly the result of the willingness of some Libyan factions, particularly within the two rival parliaments and in the city of Misrata, to reach a political settlement. Nevertheless, significant pressure from the European side helped to push the parties together and lead to the signing of the agreement. The failure of the agreement to effectively establish a single government for Libya led Europeans to rethink their strategy in the summer of 2016 and push for reforms to the agreement.

EU member states showed little disagreement on the political strategy in favor of a consensual dispensation, the rejection of any military solution, and the importance of preserving and reinforcing UN leadership and mediation. More divergences existed on concrete military support for the different Libyan factions; the UK and Italy largely supported the Presidency Council established by the LPA and France provided key support to Haftar in the first half of 2016. By the end of 2016, political attention to Libya had already waned. Though the British and the Italian foreign ministers continued to visit Libya well into 2017, the collapse of the credibility of the UN Special Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in the summer of 2016² left Europeans without a common forum. Meanwhile, the exit of the UK from the European Union and a series of national elections in France, the UK, Germany, and Italy gave few incentives for unity and focus on Libya.

² On 21 July 2016, then UN Special Envoy Martin Kobler met with Ibrahim Jadhran, leader of the Central Petroleum Facilities Guards that had been blockading most of the country's oil production for over a year and were demanding payment to reopen the taps. However, production was not restarted and Jadran was later ousted by a military offensive led by Khalifa Haftar in September of that year. This led to a campaign of delegitimization against Kobler, who was accused of having taken sides if not, according to conspiracy theories, engaged in monetary transactions with Jadran.

This chapter begins by describing the main elements of common EU policy that were devised in reaction to the escalation of summer 2014. It then looks at the build-up of the Libyan Political Agreement and the role played by Bernardino León first as EU and then as UN Special Envoy. A third section focuses on the challenge of reforming the LPA while upholding its role as the only game in town. Finally, the chapter draws lessons learned and describes the future challenges for Europe in Libya.

The main elements of EU action after 2014

The Libyan escalation in May-June of 2014 coincided with the appointment of Federica Mogherini as EU High Representative for Foreign Policy. Because of her nationality (Italy is heavily involved in Libya) and her personal leanings, Libya became included more often than in the past on the agenda of EU meetings. The Euro-Mediterranean countries (France, Italy, Spain) possessed the greatest interest in Libya, however the UK and other countries such as the Netherlands had assistance and capacity-building programs in the country and a relatively high interest in the issue.

Differences of views among European countries on the Libyan crisis were mostly aired in closed-doors meetings. It is no secret that while other member states and the EU external action service called for a condemnation of violence when Haftar's Dignity Operation was launched in May 2014, France initially did not oppose the operation. Still, all in all, Europeans agreed on emphasizing the political process and supporting the UN-led mediation. This led to joint diplomatic initiatives and efforts implemented by the EU members that should not be underestimated. The EU and its member states gave the lead to the UN and to Bernardino León, organizing when necessary meetings of regional powers on Libya as in the case of Spain in October 2014. This was an important message to the Libyan factions: the only negotiations track was the UN track. In turn, León outsourced to the EU one of the numerous parallel tracks of the political process.

The EU-led “municipal track” of the Libyan Political Dialogue, the process that eventually led to the agreement in Skhirat, included the mayors of some of the major Libyan cities. This track met no more than two or three times but it laid the groundwork for one of the most longstanding features of peace-making in Libya after 2014, namely local ceasefires. The first meeting of the Libyan municipalities in Brussels on 22 March 2015 was an important ice-breaker as it brought together some of the same cities that had been fighting each other during the summer and the fall of 2014. The first joint statement of the municipal track³ included some of the elements that would become the heart of many local ceasefires signed during the spring of 2015 and which ultimately paved the ground for the Skhirat agreement. Municipalities convened by the EU discussed the liberation of prisoners, the reopening of airports, the return of the Internally Displaced (IDPs) and vowed to stop the fighting.

Before and after the signing of the LPA, the EU put in place three policies that shaped the international approach to the Libyan crisis until at least mid-2016. First, after a proposal by León, the EU approved individual sanctions for three individuals considered “spoilers” of the agreement: Khalifa Ghwell, the Prime Minister of the rump National Salvation Government; Nouri Abusahmain, the Speaker of the resurrected General National Congress also known as the “Tripoli parliament” created by Libya Dawn; Aguila Saleh, one of Haftar’s main allies and Speaker of the House of Representatives in the east that obstructed the discussion of the LPA in the parliamentary body.

In the EU also, in coordination with the UN and with decisive US support, approved measures on oil exports and on economic institutions that were aimed at preserving Libyan economic unity in the face of the growing political and institutional rift. According to the policy, Libyan oil could be sold only through the National

³ “Libyan Municipalities, Local Councils Reps Meet in Brussels Within Political Dialogue Framework”, posted by Libyan Embassy, 25 March 2015, <http://english.libyanembassy.org/?p=8233>

Oil Company (NOC) in Tripoli, which quickly showed allegiance to the Presidency Council once it became the UN-recognised government. The NOC was one of the three main economic institutions on which the EU focused its actions, alongside the Libyan Investment Authority (Libya's \$67 billion worth sovereign wealth fund) and the Central Bank. The latter had a particularly important role as it collected all of Libya's oil revenues and paid the salaries of all civil servants, including the militiamen who fought on opposing sides. Ring-fencing by the EU and the US successfully isolated the "war treasury" from the different factions on the ground in Libya. Moreover, it created an incentive for an agreement, as it was clear that only a government borne out of the UN-backed political agreement would have control over the resources.

The ring-fencing of economic institutions by the US and the EU and under UN Security Council Resolutions frustrated attempts to claim the mantle of fully legitimacy by the interim government of Abdullah al-Thinni, which moved to Beyda after its evacuation from Tripoli in the summer of 2014⁴. While it remained the recognised government until the signing of the Skhirat agreement in December 2015, the executive led by Thinni was the object of what a European diplomat called a policy of "recognition without support". The aim of this policy was to create an incentive for the parties to strike a power-sharing agreement in order to enjoy full international support and control over the economic resources of the country.

⁴ Abdullah al-Thinni was Libya's Prime Minister prior to the 2014 elections was again reappointed after those elections only to be forced to leave Tripoli shortly thereafter. His government was moved to Beyda where it remained the internationally recognized government of Libya until the signing of the Skhirat agreement. Since the move to Beyda, al-Thinni's government effectively became the political arm of Haftar's Dignity Operation.

The León illusion

The UN-led political process was the heart of the EU policy after the beginning of the crisis in May-June 2014. Yet Bernardino León's mediation effectively started in October 2014 when he first met with delegations from different Libyan factions. His initial goal was to make the newly elected House of Representatives (HoR) more inclusive. The new parliament was the result of the elections held in June amid low turnout (it was estimated that about one fifth of eligible voters had actually cast ballots) and only days before the Libya Dawn coalition unleashed a major offensive on Tripoli that led to the evacuation first of the Libyan government and then of the UN and most European embassies. According to the amended Constitutional Declaration, the HoR was supposed to meet in Benghazi. However, this was unthinkable as the city was one of the main battlegrounds of the fight between Haftar's Operation Dignity and a coalition of Islamists called the Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council. Tobruk, in the far east of Libya, was chosen as the seat of the parliament, a decision that was contested by many parliamentarians close to Islamist parties or from Western Libya who considered Tobruk as part of Haftar's heartland.

León's initial task was to create the necessary agreement for the return of these boycotters to the HoR. But in the meantime, members of the defunct General National Congress (GNC), the dissolved parliament, had resurrected the assembly and filed a lawsuit claiming that the amendment to the Constitutional Declaration that had created the HoR had been approved without the necessary quorum. In November 2014, the Constitutional Court in Tripoli ruled that the amendment was effectively void, further deepening the institutional crisis.

The verdict of the Constitutional Court created another European rift. France pushed for the EU rejection of the verdict, but in the end the EU position became one of wait and see: Europe was officially "studying" the verdict, a study that was never completed. In the end, León's mandate shifted dramatically

and he was ultimately tasked with striking a comprehensive political agreement with what were effectively two rival parliaments in Tobruk and Tripoli respectively. Amid continuous stop and go negotiations and continued fighting in different parts of the country, 2014 ended without any significant breakthroughs by León.

January 2015 marked several important changes: General Haftar became the official head of the armed forces elected by HoR while the majority of stakeholders in the important western city of Misrata shifted positions in favor of León's mediation and decided to join talks he convened in Geneva despite the opposition of the GNC. This marked an important division within Libya Dawn. To date, most of the factions in Western Libya have expressed allegiance to the PC, while some armed groups, particularly within Misrata, support the remnants of the GNC and of the rump National Salvation Government. The shift in attitudes in Misrata also led to the signature of numerous local ceasefires that were still in place at the beginning of the summer of 2017 and brought relative stabilization of western Libya.

Yet not all was good at the beginning of 2015. The Islamic State (ISIS) had established its first bridgehead in Libya in the summer of 2014 and by the beginning of the following year it had expanded to both Benghazi and Tripoli where it had claimed some bombings against abandoned embassies. In mid-February, ISIS escalated by beheading 21 Egyptian Copts and publishing a gruesome video on internet, claiming its willingness to attack Europe. Despite some Italian hesitations regarding a military response against ISIS, Europeans converged with the US in supporting continuation of the political process and pushing back against Egyptian, Emirati, and Jordanian attempts to lift the UN arms embargo on Libya on the grounds that only a united government would be effective in fighting terrorism.

A few months later, the first drafts of what later became the LPA emerged and delegations from the two parliaments began to meet more or less regularly in Morocco (although it took them until the summer, in Berlin, to actually meet in the same

room). Nevertheless, León started to spread optimism among Europeans that an agreement was around the corner. This started a frenzy in European capitals about “the day after” the agreement with some extensive planning about stabilization efforts, a multinational military mission to guarantee the security of government buildings in Tripoli (the Libyan International Assistance Mission, which was later aborted), and talks about the need to respond to requests for military assistance against ISIS by the future unity government.

Over summer 2015, Libyans met in Berlin surrounded by European leaders who were ever more convinced that an agreement was imminent, a feeling strengthened by León’s statements. But a finalized agreement failed to materialize then because the GNC dragged its feet. During the fall, the delegations that participated in the political dialogue selected the until then unknown MP Fayez al-Serraj as President to lead the future Presidency Council, while expanding this body to nine members to reflect the different factions involved in the negotiations. Yet, the approval of the agreement by the HoR and the GNC lagged behind.

Meanwhile, ISIS had established in June and July its first real “province” (i.e. territorial control) outside of Syria and Iraq in the central Libyan city of Sirte. This raised even further European concerns and added pressure on León to finalize an agreement giving birth to a Libyan government – the assumption being that this government would immediately authorize a foreign intervention against ISIS while allowing EU ships to fight people smugglers on shore.

The fall of 2015 was marked by what seemed a lethal attack on the process when the British outlets *The Guardian* and *The Middle East Eye* published a series of emails between Bernardino León and UAE officials that hinted at the subordination of the UN strategy to the political goals of the Gulf country⁵. This was

⁵ M. Toaldo, “The political fallout of Leon-gate”, *Middle East Eye*, 6 November 2015, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/columns/political-fallout-leon-gate-1546407627>

further reinforced by the appointment of León as director of the UAE diplomatic academy. The credibility of the UN process seemed in tatters, and the hardliners of both the GNC and the HoR created a parallel “Libyan-Libyan dialogue” that met in Malta. Hosting such a meeting was seen as a way to generally further dialogue by the EU member state, however other member states saw it as a way to undermine the UN process, the only track that they thought could deliver anything useful.

León's successor came into office in mid-November. The German diplomat Martin Kobler wanted to rethink the approach of the LPA by broadening the base of support for the agreement and organizing a Libyan equivalent of the Loya Girga in Afghanistan that had brought together tribal leaders⁶. But none of the major European capitals had any patience left and all pushed back against efforts to reform the process at the 11th hour. Time to reach an agreement was over and the Libyan stakeholders who had invested in the LPA and who now suffered the competition from the “Libyan-Libyan dialogue” were keen to sign as soon as possible. Meanwhile, concern of ISIS in Paris and London increased the from the French and UK defence establishments to find a solution to Libya's crisis as soon as possible, either by political means or through direct foreign intervention against jihadists.

Thus, even though the LPA was born prematurely in December 2015, it initially seemed that it would progress forward despite challenges it faced. The signature of the agreement in Skhirat was preceded by a Rome meeting between the US Secretary of State and European and Arab foreign ministers. The Rome statement⁷ expressed support for the upcoming unity government and established the principle of non-recognition of parallel governments.

⁶ The Afghan Loya Girga is an assembly of more than 2,000 tribal elders held under the 2003 constitution. For more on this see Afghanistan's Loya Jirga: Q&A, 24 November 2013, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-25024163>

⁷ France Diplomatie, Ministerial Meeting for Libya - Joint Communiqué (Rome, Italy - 13.12.15), <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/libya/events/2015/article/ministerial-meeting-for-libya-joint-communique-rome-italy-13-12-15>

Because the rival Libyan two parliaments had not voted the agreement, the LPA was effectively signed by individual MPs from the HoR and the GNC alongside some mayors and members of the civil society. UN Security Council Resolution 2259 approved shortly before Christmas 2015 gave official sanction to the process and is to date one of the few legal documents legitimising EU recognition of the Presidency Council⁸.

The LPA created a complex system in which a collective presidency (the PC) acted as head of state while a cabinet, the Government of National Accord (GNA), had to be approved by the HoR. The GNC was meant to become the High Council of State with consultative powers and a role in co-appointing with the HoR holders of major offices. However the HoR never approved the LPA in a formal constitutional amendment. It stood in opposition to Article 8, which stipulated putting all military leadership, including that of Haftar, under civilian control. The PC was soon boycotted by the most pro-Haftar members of the HoR, and the list of proposed GNA ministers was rejected twice by the HoR in January and in August 2016.

Meanwhile, earlier that year France began giving decisive military support to Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), which allowed the renegade general to gain control of most of Benghazi and ultimately transform from a marginalized outcast into a key stakeholder who, in the words of all major EU foreign ministers from the spring on, could not be excluded from the implementation of the agreement.⁹

By the summer of 2016 it was clear that implementation of the LPA was not going according to plans and that Haftar and his followers would not accept integration into the process without significant changes to the power structure established by the agreement. In September, shortly after the HoR rejected the second list of ministers of the GNA, Haftar's LNA quickly conquered the

⁸ <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/2259>

⁹ "French Foreign Minister: Al-Serraj government must include Khalifa Haftar", *Libyan Express*, 5 October 2016, <http://www.libyanexpress.com/french-foreign-minister-al-serraj-government-must-include-khalifa-haftar/>

terminals of the so-called Oil Crescent east of Sirte where the vast majority of Libyan oil is either produced or transits. Haftar seized the installations from the Petroleum Facilities Guards of Ibrahim Jadhran who was nominally loyal to the Presidency Council but had requested payments in order to reopen the oil taps. Haftar's "liberation" and the swift reopening of the terminals boosted his credentials with many European capitals, which became ever more convinced that a reform of the LPA was needed.

Reforming the LPA?

Haftar's takeover of the oil terminals created serious cracks in the coalition that had supported the LPA. Absent Jadran's Petroleum Facilities Guards, who were Serraj's main eastern backers, Serraj's effectiveness in government was questioned on a daily basis and many Europeans started to have second thoughts regarding his leadership.

If this weren't enough, Martin Kobler's credibility with the Libyan factions was tarnished by the optics of his warm meeting with Jadran just weeks before the warlord was defeated by Haftar. Meanwhile, European diplomats privately questioned whether he actually had a strategy moving forward. From September on, the centrality of the UN track became a diplomatic fiction. Regional powers, particularly Algeria and Egypt, started their own negotiations while paying lip service to the UN process.

After the second parliamentary rejection of the GNA and Haftar's takeover of the oil terminals, the international and domestic framework that had produced for the LPA was shattered. Reforming the LPA seemed a necessity, and France and the UK prioritized the inclusion of.

Meanwhile, the UK vote in June 2016 to exit the EU had created the case for an autonomous British foreign policy, somehow visibly distinct from that of its EU partners. The British, with support from the US Special Envoy to Libya Jonathan Winer, started to view the only way to incorporate Haftar into the system created by the LPA was to cooperate with key regional partners

– such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt – who could deliver the general. A “grand bargain” – as it came to be called in diplomatic circles – to reform the LPA and reach an agreement between the major Libyan actors, would have Saudi Arabia’s blessing

For its part, France role in Libya was decreasing. In July 2016, members of the French special operation forces were killed in Benghazi. The French government, in a need to demonstrate its commitment in the fight against radical Islamists after an attack in by ISIS in Nice, admitted the French military support to Haftar, framing it as part of counterterrorism efforts¹⁰. This led to anti-French demonstrations in Tripoli and a cooling of relations with Serraj. The reopening of the French embassy in the capital, which seemed imminent, was postponed.

The Italian Embassy was the first and only EU embassy to reopen in Tripoli in January 2017. The Italian government headed by Paolo Gentiloni moved along three lines. First, Italy pushed back against opening the Pandora box of a revised LPA, particularly in the absence of a clear plan on how to reform it. Second, Italians were opposed to starting an open-ended government crisis by questioning Serraj without having a substitute. Third, Rome was the capital with the highest distrust of Kobler and intensified its bilateral relations with Serraj in order to support the government in Tripoli work.

Ultimately, despite all these divisions, Europeans seem committed to an inclusive political process (almost any ambassador, minister or special envoy has met with Haftar) while focusing on implementing programs with the government in Tripoli. As for the United States, the Trump administration disengaged from Libya. Many European capitals tried to cooperate with regional powers on the political process but, apart from the British, none had much hope that this would yield a solution.

¹⁰ “France admits special forces soldiers killed in Libya”, RFI, 20 July 2016, <http://en.rfi.fr/africa/20160720-france-admits-special-forces-soldiers-killed-libya>

Challenges for the future and lessons learned

It has become almost banal to say that Europeans are divided on foreign policy. Yet, Libya after 2014 demonstrates that a common European policy can exist and lead to a significant political result. Despite the huge limits in its implementation, the Libyan Political Agreement is the only case of a conflict in the Middle East and North Africa with a UN-backed agreement. Violence in western Libya was much lower in 2016 than it had been in 2014, despite the occasional and deadly flare-ups. ISIS' territorial presence was eradicated in December 2016 and the terror group Ansar al-Sharia disbanded in May 2017. If it weren't for European pressure, few of these results would have been achieved.

Most importantly, European disunity pales when compared to the deep divisions within Middle Eastern powers, a trend that seems to worsen by the day and in which the Libyan war of 2011 had an important role (consider the UAE-Qatar rift described at the beginning of this chapter). Libya's neighbors Algeria and Egypt also display differences in approaches to the Libyan political process. Europe's relations with all these regional partners could be tested in the future should these divisions continue.

It is an open secret that, after its exit from the European Union, the UK will seek a greater, more visible role in the solution of the Libyan crisis and that in doing this it will prioritize its ties with regional powers, particularly the Egyptian-UAE-Saudi axis to the detriment of its old European allies.

In light of the new American emphasis on narrowly-defined counter-terrorism (and its convergence with the Egyptian-Gulf axis), Europeans will be tempted to prioritize the building of the Libyan army and counterterrorism over working on an increasingly difficult political solution. Because of Haftar's insistence that a new army be built starting from his own LNA, the divergence between military and political goals is destined to grow.

The events of the last year help us to draw three lessons for future European actions in Libya and beyond.

First, Europeans should not underestimate politics over policy and technocratic quick fixes. In the run-up to the LPA and its immediate aftermath, many efforts were placed on “quick wins” for the Serraj government and on European demands to the same government: particularly with regards to Europeans intervention against ISIS and authorization for the EU naval operation Sophia to operate in Libyan waters¹¹. In the end, Europeans had to recognise that the focus had to be on expanding the political base of support for the agreement itself.

Second, the focus on politics should not mean seeking an unlikely and risky grand bargain at the expense of stability and de-escalation. In the region, ill-conceived negotiations often lead to military escalation when they weaken moderates and embolden radicals. For all the jubilation in some European capitals about the Egyptian-UAE track and its success in arranging a meeting between Haftar and Serraj in May 2017, this has led to more fighting on the ground and a strengthening of radicals in both Tripoli and Misrata. This is hardly a desirable outcome if a grand bargain cannot deliver a functioning agreement.

Third, Europe should not pretend that limited counterterrorism efforts will not have deep political consequences. French support to Haftar in Benghazi precisely when he was opposing the LPA led to limited positive results on the ground: extremists in the city have still to be completely defeated one and half years later while forces loyal to the PC eradicated ISIS in much less time. But French military support to Haftar gave him key political strength in a decisive moment, empowering the main spoiler of the agreement and giving him an aura of victory.

The EU and its member states can be criticized for many mistakes in Libya; for the sake of brevity, this chapter has not dealt with policy on migration. But at the end of the day, among all external actors, Europe is the one best placed to help Libya reach

¹¹ Started in 2015, Operation EUNAVFORMED or Sophia aims to fight human smugglers in the Mediterranean region, https://eeas.europa.eu/csdp-missions-operations/eunavfor-med_en

a number of essential goals: establish an economic agreement to share resources; work on national and local reconciliation; and promote stabilization and de-escalation. Elections throughout 2017 in the European countries most interested in Libya – France, the UK, Germany, and Italy – will reveal whether the necessary political will exists to make a new contribution to peace and stability in the North African country.

5. Russia: Looking for a Warm Sea

Andrea Beccaro

In the framing of the “internationalization” of the Libyan crisis, Russia is a key actor to consider. Accordingly, this chapter is divided into three sections describing the economic, political, and military relations between Russia and Libya over the last two years. The first section examines Russian economic and political interests in Libya and its regional and local allies. The second section focuses the new Russian military doctrine and its role in Moscow’s involvement in Libya. The third section analyzes the Russia role in Libya and its shortcomings.

Two different yet crucial aspects have influenced the Russian policy toward the MENA region and, consequently, toward Libya. First, since the end of the Cold War, Russia has consistently sought to re-position itself as a peer of the United States and NATO. In April 2005, Putin said that “the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century”¹. Such a statement masked a will to restore the previous balance of power. For example, the latest version of the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, published on 1 December 2016, states that one of Russia’s major objectives is to “consolidate the Russian Federation’s position as a center of influence in today’s world”².

¹ “Putin address to nation: Excerpts”, BBC News, 25 April 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4481455.stm>

² “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016)”, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 1 December 2016, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248

In order to achieve these goals, during the last two decades Russia has tried to weaken NATO, the United States, and the European Union by waging local and small wars, notably in Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014.

Secondly, Russia's response to the Arab Spring diverged significantly from the US and the EU responses. Initially, Moscow welcomed the popular demands for political reform in North Africa. While Russia criticized the Western military operation in Libya in 2011 and warned of an outbreak of conflict, it nevertheless supported UN Security Council Resolution 1970 that authorized non-military sanctions and an arms embargo on Libya³. On 17 March 2011, Russia abstained but did not veto Resolution 1973⁴, which imposed no-fly zones in Libya and "authorized Member States [...] to take all necessary measures to protect civilians"⁵.

However Russia's reaction rapidly became more critical as a result of the Western military intervention and the threat of the spread of Islamist extremism.

Russia's changing perception gave rise, on the one hand, to the development of military ideas that Western scholars have labeled as "hybrid warfare". On the other hand, they encouraged Moscow to implement a more active foreign policy in the region based on military, diplomatic, and economic means in order to counterbalance Western influence. According to Irina Zvyagelskaya, Russian strategic interest in the MENA region is "preventing any destabilization that is capable of approaching Russian frontiers", such as military threats, civil war in the states located in close

³ G. Anderson and M. Bell, "Italy, Russia Hit Hardest by Embargoes on Libya", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 9 March 2011.

⁴ A.K. Larssen, "Russia: The Principle of Non-Intervention and the Libya Case", in D. Henriksen, A.K. Larssen (ed.), *Political Rationale and International Consequences of the War in Libya*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016.

⁵ "Security Council Approves 'No-Fly Zone' over Libya, Authorizing 'All Necessary Measures' to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favour with 5 Abstentions", Security Council, United Nations, 17 March 2011, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>

proximity, and terrorist acts⁶. Indeed, Russia, which faces a threat from Islamist terrorism in the Caucasus region, is consequently concerned with fighting terrorism abroad in order to reduce the risk of internal instability. In addition to these geopolitical and security concerns, according to Roland Dannreuther, domestic political factors played a role because “conflict in the Middle East highlighted the perceived flaws of the imposition of Western liberal democracy”⁷. Russia’s response to Arab Spring therefore demonstrated an ideational and ideological dimension.

Moreover, Russian involvement in Libya⁸ must be understood in the framework both of the Russian historical geopolitical goal to gain access to warm water ports⁹, and in Syria, where a military campaign has also allowed Russia full control over the Tartus naval facility and the Khmeimin air base near Latakia and has expanded its Anti Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) strategy¹⁰. The operations in Syria have strengthened Russian links to Iran and caused local actors to rethink Russia’s role in the region¹¹.

Russia’s economic and political interests in Libya

While Russian involvement in the Middle East dates back to the XIX century, its involvement in Libya is much more recent.

⁶ I. Zvyagelskay, “Russia, the New Protagonist in the Middle East”, in A. Ferrari (ed.), *Putin’s Russia: Really Back?*, Milano, ISPI, 2016, p. 73.

⁷ R. Dannreuther, “Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution”, *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2015, pp. 77-94.

⁸ O. Kessler and B. Zilberman, “Russia’s Charm Offensive in North Africa. Its Growing Economic and Military Influence in the Region”, *Foreign Affairs*, 3 April 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-africa/2017-04-03/russia-s-charm-offensive-north-africa>

⁹ S. Kotkin, “Russia’s Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern”, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 3, 2016, pp. 2-9.

¹⁰ http://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russian%20A2AD%20AUGUST%202016_1.pdf

¹¹ A.J. Hossein and M. Mousavipour, “Russia, Turkey, and Iran: Moving Towards Strategic Synergy in the Middle East?”, *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2015, pp. 141-155.

Commercial and diplomatic exchanges between Libya and the then Soviet Union were minimal throughout the period of monarchical rule in Libya (1951-1961); only in 1963 was the first bilateral trade agreement concluded. After Qaddafi seized power, the Soviet Union moved quickly to strengthen its position in Libya and almost immediately recognized the revolutionary government. From that point forward, Libya purchased considerable Soviet military equipment, [...] including a \$1 billion package in 1974-1975¹². During the 1970s and 1980s, Libya acquired advanced weaponry to such an extent “that its fifty-five-thousand-strong armed forces were reported [...] to have the highest ratio of military equipment to manpower in the world”¹³. This huge number of weapons played a crucial role during the 2011 revolution and the following civil war, allowing several militias to heavily arm themselves. It should also be noted that, between 1973 and 1992, over 11,000 Soviet troops were stationed in Libya and advised the government on defense and security. Furthermore, almost all senior Libyan commandants were trained in the Soviet Union; the same was true between 2004 and 2011. As a result, the Libyan National Army (LNA) of Khalifa Haftar almost entirely relies on Soviet training and weapons, making Russia an ideal candidate to train and support the force¹⁴. This also explains the role and influence that Russia has leveraged in Libya and over Haftar. Even though the relationship cooled after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Libya still owed Russia approximately \$4 billion for earlier arms sales.

Arms and energy comprise the core of relationships between Russia and Libya. Tatneft, the Russian oil and gas company, and Gazprom, the state-controlled gas company, were awarded in 2007 blocks of Exploration and Production Sharing Agreements

¹² R. Bruge St John, *Libya from Colony to Revolution*, Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 2012, p. 144.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 180-181.

¹⁴ Y. Barmin, “Will Russian arms soon start flowing to Libya?”, *Al Monitor*, 1 June 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/05/russia-military-ties-former-allies-libya.html>

in Libya. In 2008, Putin became the first Russian president to visit Tripoli, where he signed numerous contracts for economic, technical, and military cooperation supposedly worth \$10 billion¹⁵. In 2010, Libya made a major investment in the Russian firm Rusal, the world's largest aluminum producer, and Russia agreed to a \$1.8 billion arms deal with Libya¹⁶. Following the Arab Spring and the removal of Qaddafi, those deals, along with the project led by the Russian infrastructure company Russian Railways (RZhD) for a 554 km railway line between Benghazi and Sirte, were not carried out¹⁷.

On the political side, Russia seems to be following a more balanced, practical, and pragmatic approach by treating all players in the Libyan political space as equal competitors. Russian policy takes into the account that Libya is currently divided without a central and effective government. Its diplomatic absence in the country – in 2017 Moscow said it has no plans to reopen its embassy in Libya – could be viewed as an effort to “keep a foot in both camps”. Indeed, Russia “seems to be pursuing a strategy that acknowledges the *de facto* partition of the country, promising both political and military support for Haftar's battle in the east while signing contracts for oil and discussing business opportunities in commodities trading and future construction projects with the institutions in Tripoli”¹⁸. Yet it has remained important for Russia to develop ties with a strong ally in Libya. As a result, Russia's strategy in Libya's politics reflects three lines of policy. The first is related to the support given to Haftar and his Libyan National Army. Russia's goal may be to identify a reliable local ally that replicates the way in which Moscow has developed strong local allies in the Syrian political and military

¹⁵ T. Schumacher and C. Nitoiu, “Russia's Foreign Policy Towards North Africa in the Wake of the Arab Spring”, *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2015, pp. 97-104.

¹⁶ R. Bruge St John (2012), p. 276.

¹⁷ T. Schumacher and C. Nitoiu (2015).

¹⁸ K. Mezran and M. Toaldo, “Libya Can't Save Itself”, *Foreign Policy*, 23 March 2017 <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/03/23/can-trump-arrest-libyas-downward-spiral-civil-war-united-states/>

situation. The second line is focused on the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) of Fayeze al-Serraj. The third line includes engagement with regional allies, such as Algeria and Egypt.

The regional dimension

Russia is able to rely on various regional allies in North Africa. Morocco's King Mohammed VI visited Moscow in both 2016 and 2017 in an effort to boost economic relations between the two countries. Moreover, Moscow is trying to use its influence on the Polisario issue. In March Russia welcomed a delegation from the Polisario Front stressing the need to intensify the efforts of the international community to achieve an equitable settlement¹⁹. Algeria, meanwhile, is a key Russian ally; Algiers was one of the closest Soviet allies during the Cold War, Russia occasionally trains Algerian counterterrorist forces, and Russia has increased its arms supplies to Algeria, which imports almost 80% of its equipment from Russia²⁰.

The most valuable regional ally for Russia in the Libyan context is Egypt. While Cairo is a long-term ally of the United States, Russia was successfully leveraged the turbulence between the United States and Egypt following the Arab Spring in order to gain a new position with Cairo. In 2014, Egypt and Russia signed their first major arms agreement²¹ since the end of the Cold War, and, from that point forward, Sisi and Putin have kept a regular schedule of meetings, and military ties between the two countries have expanded. In October 2016, Russia and Egypt undertook a training exercise in the desert area of Alam

¹⁹ H.M. Lamin, "How Polisario Front hopes to partner with Russia in Western Sahara", *Al Monitor*, 11 April 2017, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/04/western-sahara-polisario-sell-russia-moscow-visit.html>

²⁰ T. Schumacher and C. Nitoiu (2015).

²¹ "El-Sisi, Putin stress close ties, near arms deal", *Abramonline*, 12 August 2014, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/108273/Egypt/0/ElSisi-Putin-stress-close-ties-near-arms-deal.aspx>

El-Khadem. The manoeuvres involved 500 Russian paratroopers in an exercise to liberate buildings from terrorists²². In summer 2017, Egypt will receive the first batch of an order of 46 the Kamov Ka-52K attack helicopters from Moscow. This renewed political relationship between Russia and Egypt constitutes a key element for Russian involvement in Libya. Given Cairo's ties with Haftar, this relationship enables Moscow to reach Haftar and to some extent influence his military and political role. Indeed, a meeting in 2015 between Putin and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi²³, in which Cairo and Moscow agreed on a free trade zone and to foster military cooperation in the fight against terrorism, served as a key step in strengthening Russia's position in the region and paving the way to ties with Haftar.

The local dimension

Russia's decision to bolster General Haftar is consistent with Moscow's strategy of cultivating a local ally familiar with Russian/Soviet weaponry and training. This facilitates the provision of arms and collaboration with Russian Special Forces as well as the sending of arms. Russia has therefore prioritized the "unity of what remains of the army (especially Haftar's Libyan National Army) as the nucleus of a future military" rather than the unity of the Libyan government²⁴. This political choice was arguably the result of Russian concerns about the role of Islamist militias in Tripoli and the increasing role of the Islamic State in the region at the time; Haftar presents himself as a bulwark against Islamist terror organizations.

²² "Egypt, Russia to hold joint military exercises in mid-October", Reuters, 12 October 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-russia-military-idUSKCN12C2E0>

²³ "Egypt to join Russia-led Eurasian free trade zone", RT *Question More*, 10 February 2015, <https://www.rt.com/business/230987-egypt-russia-free-trade/>

²⁴ *The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset*, International Crisis Group, 4 November 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libyan-political-agreement-time-reset>

Russia's counterterror concerns were demonstrated when in February 2015, the head of Russia's mission to the UN Vladimir Churkin said Moscow was considering backing the Haftar-allied House of Representatives in Tobruk with weapons and, if necessary, imposing a naval blockade on Libya – in addition to the existing UN embargo – to prevent the delivery of weapons to jihadists by sea. The embargo issue was raised again in mid-May 2016 by the Government of National Accord, which, in light of the expanding threat presented by the Islamic State, requested it be exempted from the UN arms embargo. Russian Ambassador to Libya Ivan Molotov said²⁵ that Moscow would be ready to supply the legitimate Libyan government with weapons as soon as the arms embargo was lifted. However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that the GNA was not legitimate without the approval of Tobruk's House of Representatives. Lavrov hinted that unless Tripoli included Haftar and the Libyan National Army in the political process, Russia would resist the lifting of the embargo²⁶.

Russia continued to expand its relationship with Haftar and his forces. In October 2015, Haftar said Russia and "other friendly states" had promised to collaborate with him to form a national army to deal with "challenges and threats faced by Libya"²⁷. Haftar visited Moscow in June 2016, and, although he did not meet Putin, he met key decision-makers close to the president, including Secretary of the Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev²⁸. Later in September, after Haftar's forces took control of Libya's key Ras Lanuf and Sidra oil terminals, Libyan Ambassador to

²⁵ Y. Barmin (2016).

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ K. Hanly, "Op-Ed: Army chief Haftar pledges loyalty to Libyan HoR if it rejects LPA", *Digital Journal*, 20 October 2015, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/politics/op-ed-army-chief-haftar-pledges-loyalty-to-libyan-hor-if-it-rejects-lpa/article/447048>.

²⁸ Y. Barmin, "Is General Hifter becoming Putin's man in Libya?", *Al Monitor*, 6 July 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/07/general-hifter-libya-visit-moscow-russia-putin.html>.

Saudi Arabia and Haftar's Special Representative requested small arms and military equipment from Russia. A month later, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov said that Russia would be ready to fight terrorism in Libya should there be a formal request by the local government, although he did not specify which government. Rumors emerged²⁹ about Russian personnel already present in Libya, and in November 2016, Haftar paid a visit to Moscow and met senior figures including Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Following these meetings, it was suggested that Haftar was brokering a deal with Russia in which he might receive military and training support from Moscow in return for the use of the naval base in Benghazi³⁰. Further meetings with the Russians continued to add to such speculation. In January 2017, Haftar visited the Russian aircraft carrier, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, which was positioned off the Libyan coast after being deployed in Syria and engaged in a video conference with Shoigu. At the same time, the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Valery Gerasimov reportedly visited Tobruk. It was also reported that during the meeting on the aircraft carrier, Haftar signed a contract with Moscow for the delivery of military equipment. At the moment, it is impossible to verify the claim, but it should be noted that, although Russia has sent arms to various regional allies involved in Libya, including as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and even Algeria, it cannot openly provide arms to Haftar while the UN arms embargo is in place. Still, evidence of a Russian arms shipment to Libya emerged in February 2017 when pictures revealing a MiG-23 Flogger with Russian insignia

²⁹ A. Assad, "Russian experts are supporting Haftar's forces via Egyptian-Emirati assistance", *The Libya Observer*, 8 November 2016, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/russian-experts-are-supporting-haftar%E2%80%99s-forces-egyptian-emirati-assistance>.

³⁰ Y. Barmin, "Hifter in Moscow: Russia's shifting interests in Libya", *Al Monitor*, 7 December 2016, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/12/general-hifter-moscow-new-political-front-libya.html#ixzz4hEu9H9eM>.

at the al-Abraq air base, which is under control of Haftar's forces, emerged on social media. The plane may have been sent in parts to make it easier to smuggle into the country³¹.

During the same timeframe it built up relations with Haftar, Moscow was also supporting the international efforts to stabilize Libya and the GNA of Serraj in Tripoli. This demonstrates that Russia is willing to cultivate numerous allies as it seeks to play a key role in Libya. Russia expressed support for the UN-backed negotiations effort from the beginning. On 13 December 2015, Russia took part in a meeting in Rome between 17 countries and 15 Libyan groups with the aim to "support the implementation of the political agreement and underline [the] firm commitment to providing the Government of National Accord with full political backing and technical, economic, security and counterterrorism assistance"³². Moreover, days later, Russia sided with the Libyan Political Agreement that was signed in Skhirat, Morocco that established a Presidential Council, led by Serraj, and its cabinet, the GNA.

Russia has continued to maintain some relations with the GNA. In October 2016, Serraj met an envoy from the Russian foreign ministry in Tripoli. During the meeting, Russian Ambassador Ivan Molotkov informed his counterpart of an idea to organize, under the supervision of Russia, an international meeting to try to solve Libyan instability. Russia appeared to be attempting to replicate and assume the same diplomatic role it had developed in Syria, where it organized the Astana peace talks between the Syrian government and most of the conflicting rebels. Serraj is also said to have discussed some kind of military collaboration with the Russian envoy during this meeting.

³¹ A. Delalande, "It Looks Like Russia Gave a Fighter Jet to Libya's Warlord. MiG-23 bolsters Gen. Khalifa Haftar's air arm", *War Is Boring*, 1 March 2017, <http://warisboring.com/it-looks-like-russia-gave-a-fighter-jet-to-libyas-warlord/#.x5cd15tyu>

³² "Powers back unity government in Libya to deter Islamic State", Reuters, 13 December 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-idUSKBN0TV0S920151213>

It is beyond question that the relationship between Russia and Haftar has been stronger and steadier than that between Russia and Serraj. However, Putin has always considered Serraj and Tripoli potential partners, as Moscow has never ruled out one actor in order to support its enemy. In light of this, the Russian government hosted Serraj in Moscow in March 2017. This meeting was likely linked to both a recent deal signed between Russia's Rosneft and Libya's National Oil Corporation³³, which established a joint working committee to explore cooperation in various oil fields (including exploration and production), and a failed meeting between Serraj and Haftar in Cairo a month before. The meeting seems to have marked a closer relationship between Moscow and Tripoli, as, in April, a Russian delegation headed by the Russian Deputy Foreign Minister and the Minister of Industry met with Serraj in Tripoli³⁴. While Russia has been using these meetings to strengthen its economic links with Libya, Serraj may leverage the renewed friendship with Russia to attempt to lift the UN embargo on Libya in order to gain access to arms to better secure the GNA's position.

Russian military doctrine and Libya

In order to examine the links between Russian military doctrine and its involvement in Libya, it is important to bear in mind the most recent Russian military operations in Ukraine and Syria. Although the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria differ from that of Libyan situation, Russia's involvement there could signal a possible path for Moscow in Libya, as well as the limitations of Russian military forces.

³³ "Russian and Libyan state oil giants sign deal", *The New Arab*, 22 February 2017, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/2/21/russian-and-libyan-state-oil-giants-sign-deal>

³⁴ A. Assad, "Russian delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister arrives in Tripoli" *The Libya Observer*, 25 April 2017, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/russian-delegation-headed-deputy-foreign-minister-arrives-tripoli>

Hybrid warfare

The labeling of Russian military operations in Ukraine and Crimea in 2014 by some Western scholars as “hybrid warfare” is misleading because this is not a Russian military concept³⁵. The misunderstanding comes from an article published in Russian by General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov on 26 February 2013. The article has been interpreted by some as proposing “a new Russian way of warfare that blends conventional and unconventional warfare with aspects of national power”, that is, hybrid warfare³⁶. However, Gerasimov does not offer either any doctrinal advice or a new grand strategy. The article explains his view of the nature and operational environment of future war in the light of recent conflicts and Western military operations. Gerasimov describes, from a Russian point of view, the way in which the United States spread its influence in key geopolitical areas through “the installment of a political opposition through state propaganda (e.g., CNN, BBC), the Internet and social media, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)”, rather than through over military operations. “As the security situation deteriorates”, he continues, “separatist movements can be stoked and strengthened, and undeclared special operations, conventional, and private military forces (defense contractors) can be introduced to battle the government”³⁷.

In Russia's engagement in Libya, the notion of hybrid warfare is confusing and cannot be considered the “definitive doctrine” for Russian power projection there³⁸. Russia's operation in Crimea combined a covert military operation based on ambiguity, disinformation, and the element of surprise. The annexation was completed by a more conventional military invasion with

³⁵ K. Giles, *Russia's 'New' Tools for Confronting the West: Continuity and Innovation in Moscow's Exercise of Power*, Chatman House, London, March 2016.

³⁶ C.K. Bartles, “Getting Gerasimov Right”, *Military Review*, no. 1, 2016a, pp. 30-38.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ M. Kofman and M. Rojansky, *A Closer look at Russia's “Hybrid War”*, Wilson Center, Washington D.C., no. 7, 2015.

airborne and naval infantry, and motor rifle brigades followed³⁹. However, these kinds of operations were possible in Crimea, where the majority of the population was Russian and where Moscow had already had a strategic naval in Sevastopol to which it secretly sent Special Forces members before the operation. The geographical proximity and the presence of Russian military assets in Crimea are crucial elements that cannot be replicated in Libya, which is a remote war theater where Moscow cannot exercise leverage on the local population.

To a different extent, one might expect that Russian involvement in Libya would follow a pattern similar to that in Syria: using local allies, militias and Special Operations Forces, and then, in the case of success, implementing an A2/AD strategy. According to Kofman and Rojansky, Russian operations should be understood “as an attempt to employ diplomatic, economic, military, and information instruments”⁴⁰. In both Ukraine and Syria, “the use of force has come after other non-kinetic means have been tried” and failed. Therefore, from a Russian point of view, the use of force represents a last resort. In the six months leading up to the 2014 invasion of Crimea, Moscow employed both economic sanctions and economic assistance and engaged in diplomacy before restoring to military force⁴¹. In Syria, Russia engaged in extensive diplomatic outreach, conducted arms transfers, and even attempted to organize the opposition before directly using military means. As for the Libyan theater, a similar escalation is difficult to foresee at the moment; however, given Russia’s strong ties with local allies and possible, albeit it small, military involvement, Russia may similarly resort to military force in Libya, particularly in light of US disengagement from the country and the resulting political vacuum.

³⁹ C.K. Bartles, “Russia’s Indirect and Asymmetric Methods as a Response to the New Western Way of War”, *Special Operations Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2016b, pp. 1-11.

⁴⁰ M. Kofman and M. Rojansky (2015).

⁴¹ S. Charap, “Russia’s Use of Military Force as a Foreign Policy Tool. Is there a Logic?”, PONARS Eurasia, The George Washington University, Policy Memo no. 443, October 2016.

Special forces

Russian military doctrine underwent profound transformations after the war in Georgia in 2008, which improved the army's professionalism, readiness, and effectiveness. Selected elements of elite units (Special Forces, Airborne Assault Troops, and Marine Infantry) were particularly affected by this reform, and it is not coincidental that those units were sent to Syria and allegedly Libya. Special Forces and Airborne troops are an ideal tool for rapid intervention in war theaters far from Russia. In fact, the use of special forces and military intelligence to coordinate "paramilitary groups and political front organizations" has been part of the Russia's military doctrine for decades⁴².

On 14 March 2017, Reuters reported that Russia had deployed Special Forces as well as drones to Sidi Barrani Airbase (a former Soviet military base) in western Egypt near Libyan border⁴³. According to the report that cites Egyptian security sources, a 22-member Russian Special Forces unit was deployed. The sources added that Russia had used another Egyptian base farther east, in Marsa Matrouh, in early February. Although the report was denied by the Russian defense minister, AFRICOM Commander General Thomas Waldhauser said that the presence of Russian troops in Libya was undeniable⁴⁴.

Russian Special Forces represent an agile tool that could bolster both Russian influence in Libya and the military capabilities of its ally. For instance, in Syria, the Russians proved very effective at training and operating alongside local allies, such as the Syrian Army and Hezbollah, whose military skills seem to have

⁴² O. Jonsson and R. Seely, "Russian Full-Spectrum Conflict: An Appraisal After Ukraine", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2015, pp. 3-4.

⁴³ "Exclusive: Russia appears to deploy forces in Egypt, eyes on Libya role – sources", Reuters, 14 March 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-russia-libya-exclusive-idUSKBN16K2RY>.

⁴⁴ R. Oliphant, "Russian links with Libya general 'undeniable', US general claims", *The Telegraph*, 24 March 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/24/russian-troops-ground-libya-us-general-claims/>.

impressed the Russians⁴⁵. It should be noted that, in contrast to the American Special Forces, the Russian counterpart has always been an integral part of conventional operations; they have been used more as a reconnaissance unit than a strike force⁴⁶. Only in 2013 did Russia operationalize the Special Operations Command, suggesting that Russian Special Forces would become less involved in reconnaissance tasks and more engaged in direct actions⁴⁷. This could represent a key element for operating in distant theaters like Libya.

As far as the Special Forces are concerned, it is important to underline their role related to intelligence. According to Haukkala and Popescu, Russian troops have always relied heavily on Human Intelligence to gather information on specific theaters of operation. Russia faces serious limitations in operating outside the space of the former Soviet Union, especially when seeking to use a kind of expeditionary warfare. The reliance on Special Forces in places like Libya complements Russia's reliance on local allies and precludes the need to send a large number of troops to the country.

An additional element of the new Russian doctrine is that it recognizes the participation of private military companies in military operations. According to McDermott, one of the most outstanding features of Russia's intervention in Syria is related "to the success of training proxy forces" by "introducing new or advanced systems in these operations and supporting operations adequately through predominantly air and sea lines of communication"⁴⁸. Russia has used the private company Wagner in Ukraine and Syria in conjunction with conventional forces and may seek to follow a similar path in Libya. Indeed, on 11 March

⁴⁵ A. Corbeil, *Russia is Learning About Hezbollah*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D.C., January 2017.

⁴⁶ M. Galeotti, "Hybrid, ambiguous, and non-linear? How new is Russia's 'new way of war'?", *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2016, pp. 282-301.

⁴⁷ C.K. Bartles (2016b).

⁴⁸ R.N. McDermott, "Does Russia Have a Gerasimov Doctrine?", *Parameters*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2016, pp. 97-105.

2017, Reuters reported that a force of several dozen Russian armed private security contractors had been operating for about a month in Benghazi, which is under Haftar's control⁴⁹. These contractors were hired by the Russian firm RSB-Group, which stated that the men had been in Libya for months but had been pulled out after completing their mission to remove mines from an industrial facility. Officially, RSB-Group did not work for the Russian Defense Ministry, but it had been in touch with the Russian Foreign Ministry. Reuters was told that the contractors had not taken part in combat, but that they had been armed, although it is unclear with what type of weaponry.

Analysis and conclusions

Russia has increased its diplomatic involvement in Libya over the last two years, strengthening its alliance with Soviet-trained Haftar who is in control of the East. However, Russia has also continued to maintain diplomatic relations with Serraj and the internationally recognized government in Tripoli. This position could signal a comprehensive approach toward Libya, but it could also be read as Russian acceptance of a fractured Libya. It is beyond question that Russia has economic interests in the country that it is trying to defend; yet, Russia also has geopolitical interests linked to its desire not only to have military bases in the Mediterranean region, but also to use its influence in Libya as leverage against the EU, particularly regarding the migration issue. A stronger Russian presence in Libya could enable Moscow to deploy advanced anti-access, area-denial systems along the Libyan coast, significantly enlarging the anti-access bubble that it has already established in Syria that threatens NATO's southern flank.

Although the meeting between Serraj and Haftar in Abu Dhabi in early May 2017 offered no shared way forward for a

⁴⁹ M. Tsvetkova, "Exclusive: Russian private security firm says it had armed men in east Libya", Reuters, 13 March 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-contractors-idUSKBN16H2DM>

political deal to end the conflict and unify the country, it represented a positive step that could also be understood as a Russian diplomatic victory. The fact that Haftar's important political and military role in Libya was recognized in part signaled recognition of the role and influence of Moscow.

Still, Russian involvement entails major limitations related to logistics. Despite recent reforms, the Russian Army is not an expeditionary force, and it relies extensively on artillery fire instead of air assets. This will widely limit its ability to operate in Libya's distant theater and limit the agility and speed of deployment. Furthermore, Russia's intervention in the MENA region is strongly limited by the geography of the region itself. Russia has a secure and permanent foothold in Syria and is engaged in Egypt and Libya; however, Russia's engagement relies on its naval operations, which hinge on free passage through Bosphorus, the Suez Canal, or Gibraltar, none of which is under Russian control.

Finally, economic constraints are an important factor for Russian expansionism in Libya. In 2015, Russian GDP shrank by close to four per cent. Several factors including corruption, low oil and gas prices, and Western sanctions are contributing to the failure of the economy bounce back⁵⁰. Russia's economic situation would hamper any attempt to win a protracted conventional conflict. Moscow is therefore seeks to instead pursue its interests without overt use of military power whenever possible. However, it will continue to be difficult for Russia to maintain military forces and support allies in light of these difficult economic conditions, especially for an extended period of time.

⁵⁰ S. Guriev, "Russia's Constrained Economy: How the Kremlin Can Spur Growth", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 95, no. 3, 2016, pp. 18-22.

6. United States: Reluctant Engagement

Ben Fishman

US involvement in Libya since the 2011 revolution has involved five time periods identified below. While these phases are distinct, they share common themes. First, Libya has never been at the top of the US foreign policy agenda, even in the Middle East. Consequently, the country is often viewed through the lens of other competing interests in the region, such as terrorism, military requirements for other conflicts, or the need to balance other regional relationships. Additionally, under President Obama and in the early months of the Trump administration, the United States has sought others actors, including the UN, European allies and regional partners, to assume leadership roles in facilitating Libya's post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction. Unfortunately, those efforts have not proven successful, and in the case of the regional actors, have often worked at cross-purposes from the US-European views on promoting an inclusive and unified Libya. Finally, the Libyans themselves have not yet broken free from the oppressive system Qaddafi imposed on the country, its institutions, and its citizenry. This combination of restrained US engagement, competing outside actors pursuing their parochial interests in Libya, and the corrosive impact of Libya's 42-year old history under Qaddafi account for much of difficulties that still plague Libya.

The five phases of US engagement

US policy toward revolutionary and post-revolutionary Libya can be broken down into five phases:

1. February 2011 – November 2011, when the United States played an instrumental role in supporting the Libyan Revolution despite being accused of “leading from behind”;
2. November 2011 – 11 September 2012, when the United States reestablished its diplomatic presence in Libya and attempted to support the interim Libyan authorities until the attack on the special mission in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans;
3. September 2012 – July 2014, when the United States sought to recover from the loss of Ambassador Stevens until the escalation of violence and civil war forced the evacuation of the American embassy in Tripoli;
4. July 2014 – January 2017, when the United States participated in the efforts of UN Envoys Bernardino León and Martin Kobler to end the civil war, forge the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in Skhirat, Morocco, and support a resulting Presidency Council (PC) and nascent Government of National Accord (GNA). This period also included the six-month air campaign against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Sirte; and
5. January 2017 – present, during which the Trump administration has so far disengaged from Libya. President Trump has signaled a lack of interest in Libya aside from matters of counterterrorism. Other actors, including Russia, have pursued their interests in the southern Mediterranean partly due to American inactivity.

While this volume explores the role of international players in Libya since 2014, it is impossible to understand US involvement in Libya in this period without first examining the context of American foreign policy dating back to 2011. Since 2014, the United States has operated with several constraints that limited American political engagement in Libya. First, the original hesitancy to get involved in Libya's revolution, especially militarily, loomed large. Former President Obama was particularly sensitive

to avoiding being drawn into a war in a third Muslim country while he was trying to extricate the American military from Iraq and Afghanistan. He wanted the United States' European partners – who had the most immediate interests in Libya – to play more significant roles in the military intervention and post-conflict reconstruction.

Second, the ramification of the tragedy in Benghazi cannot be overstated. The event cast a long shadow over the prospects of US assistance to the interim Libya authorities. Moreover, the decision by Republicans to seize upon the incident as a political vulnerability for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and drag out investigations until mid-2016 created a backdrop through which all activity in Libya was scrutinized and viewed through the lens of avoiding further American casualties in the war-torn country. Whereas the United States had tens of thousands of soldiers on the ground to help protect civilian reconstruction and assistance activities in Iraq and Afghanistan, the “light footprint” approach pursued in Libya proved similarly unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, after the US mission in Libya relocated to Tunis as a result of the insecurity in Tripoli, American diplomatic engagement with Libya's major political players continued. Although security concerns inhibited US diplomats from meeting Libya's factional representatives in Libya, they met frequently in neighboring states and Europe, supported UN peace diplomacy, issued joint statement along with several European partners, imposed sanctions against “spoilers” of the UN-led process, and most visibly, conducted a six-month bombing campaign against ISIS in Sirte. While the primary purpose of the anti-ISIS mission was to eliminate the growing threat of the expanding terror group, the mission was also designed to strengthen the GNA. Statements from the Pentagon and the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) made clear that all missions were made at the request of the GNA to support forces aligned with the unity government¹.

¹ “Statement by Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on US Air Strike in

As the conflict in Sirte was winding down, so was the presidency of Barack Obama. Whereas Hillary Clinton was a known entity on Libya, Donald Trump had only made statements on the Benghazi tragedy as a political tool during the 2016 presidential campaign to attack his rival for alleged incompetence and a non-existent cover-up. After his election, it was unclear how Trump would approach Libya through his “America First” prism. Consequently, other actors with divergent views on Libya from the UN-US-European consensus supporting the LPA and GNA – particularly Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Russia – began testing the limits of an alternative vision that elevated the position of the eastern-based strongman, General Khalifa Haftar. So far, the Trump administration has said little on Libya, although the President did indicate in an April press conference with Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni that he does “not see a role” for the United States in Libya with the exception of counter-terrorism actions².

An absence of US diplomacy on Libya will almost certainly weaken the UN peace process and the GNA in favor of those who support General Haftar, especially Russia. The most significant arguments that European officials can make to compel the Trump administration to reengage with Libya is to emphasize Russia's intentions to establish a foothold in the southern Mediterranean and prospects of heightened transnational terrorism emanating from Libya, as demonstrated by the devastating Manchester bombing perpetrated by a British citizen of Libyan descent³. The prospects of future Russian arms deals, troop deployments, and

Libya”, News Releases, U.S. Department of Defense, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-ReleaseView/Article/881794/statement-by-pentagon-press-secretary-peter-cook-on-us-air-strike-in-libya/>

² Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Gentiloni of Italy in Joint Press Conference <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/20/remarks-president-trump-and-prime-minister-gentiloni-italy-joint-press>

³ R. Callimachi and E. Schmitt, “Manchester Bomber Met With ISIS Unit in Libya, Officials Say”, *The New York Times*, 3 June 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/03/world/middleeast/manchester-bombing-salman-abedi-islamic-state-libya.html?_r=0

even potential basing in Libya should greatly worry the Trump administration. This could compel greater US engagement to forge a more durable agreement between all factions in Libya's enduring debate over the country's political future.

Obama's Priorities

President Obama was reluctant from the start to intervene in Libya. The debate in the White House Situation Room has been well documented⁴. Several significant voices argued against the intervention, most notably Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Obama demonstrated some sympathy for the "right to protect" arguments favored by UN Ambassador Susan Rice and then National Security Council staffer Samantha Power. However, as he demonstrated in his policy on the conflict in Syria, in matters of the use of force, Obama was a pragmatist at his core. As Gates reported in his memoir, Obama told him privately that the decision to intervene in Libya was a 51-49 call⁵.

At first, the President was presented with a binary choice of whether or not to respond favorably to an early March request from French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron to support a no-fly zone over the besieged city of Benghazi. However, Obama questioned how a no-fly zone would impact the threat posed by Muammar Qaddafi's troops and artillery that was causing the gravest threats to citizens in the city. He instructed his team to come up with an alternative option, which soon became civilian protection mission adopted in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011⁶.

⁴ M. Hastings, "Inside Obama's War Room", *Rolling Stones*, 13 October 2011, <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/inside-obamas-war-room-20111013>; D. Chollet, *The Long Game: How Obama Defied Washington and Redefined America's Role in the World*, New York, Public Affairs, 2016.

⁵ R. Gates, *Duty*, New York, Knopf, 2014.

⁶ Resolution 1973 (2011), Security Council United Nations, 17 March 2011, <http://>

Two days later, the United States launched Operation Odyssey Dawn, which conducted initial bombing raids against the forces posing the most imminent threat to Libyan civilians and destroyed much of Qaddafi's air defense network. NATO took over the coalition campaign, Operation Unified Protector, on 30 March⁷. The NATO operation lasted just over six months until the last vestiges of the Qaddafi regime had been driven from Sirte and the leader himself met his unceremonious demise.

Obama sought both to ensure that US allies in Europe, whose interests were affected more by events in Libya, played a significant role, and to avoid the perception that he was invading another Muslim country. He laid out the conditions of American participation for the intervention in his speech at the National Defense University speech on 28 March. He said the United States would contribute "unique capabilities", such as intelligence and aerial refueling assets to the NATO campaign; the operation would not include US ground forces; and the operation required support from regional and international bodies, such as the Arab League and the UN Security Council. These conditions bounded the extent of US military participation in Operation Unified Protector and limited American involvement in the anti-Qaddafi revolution. The lack of even a small presence of US forces on the ground limited America's knowledge of the actors fighting, especially Islamist militias and their dynamics and long-standing feuds with defected regime military officers.

Did the United States drop the ball after revolution?

A constant refrain from critics of Obama's Libya policies is that his administration forgot about Libya after the revolution and

www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1973%282011%29

⁷ J. Gertler, *Operation Odyssey Dawn (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, CRS Report for Congress, 30 March 2011, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R41725.pdf>

did not invest sufficiently in post-conflict stabilization and security. Obama himself has admitted that Libya is his one major foreign policy regret (as opposed to Syria or the emergence of the Islamic State on his watch)⁸. However, this narrative absolves the Libyans themselves of responsibility for either contesting or delaying offers of assistance to help stabilize the country in the immediate aftermath of the revolution⁹. The United States certainly could have been more insistent with its Libyan interlocutors in 2011-2012 and put more resources in the field to provide post-conflict aid to a reluctant interim government. Yet the United States did offer a fair amount of assistance, including the prospects for various forms of security training. Unfortunately, the Libyans were their own worst enemy. The interim government could not identify priorities for assistance they desired, (e.g. training and professionalization of security forces or modernizing government ministries). Nor could they agree to accept certain specific offers of assistance when offered by the international community.

When interim Prime Minister Abdurrahim el-Keib visited Washington in March 2012, he was presented with a series of concrete ideas for assistance, including on organizing his national security system. Rather than accept, he pledged to both National Security Advisor Tom Donilon and Secretary Hillary Clinton that a letter requesting specific assistance would be forthcoming, possibly even before he departed from Washington. The United States never received such a letter despite multiple follow-up requests¹⁰.

Other critics have argued that the United States or NATO should have led an international peacekeeping or monitoring

⁸ D. Tierney, "The Legacy of Obama's 'Worst Mistake'", *The Atlantic*, 15 April 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/obamas-worst-mistake-libya/478461/>

⁹ B. Fishman, "How We Can Still Fix Libya", *Politico Magazine*, 28 February 2016, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/02/libya-intervention-hillary-clinton-barack-obama-213686>

¹⁰ Author's participation in meetings.

mission in Libya after the revolution. However, such a mission was never in the cards, despite some post-conflict planning that the United States undertook during the revolution. Not only did the Libyans reject even a hint of a post-revolution international presence, especially from the West because of the neo-colonial implications, but US defense planners could not conceive of such a mission being led effectively by a non-European country¹¹.

At the same time, there were some initially positive signs that Libya's transition would not encounter major problems. Libyans enthusiastically voted in their first free and fair democratic election in 2012. Oil production was quickly restored to its prewar level (which ironically discouraged foreign governments from paying for assistance in Libya, a nominally wealthy country). Civil society and free media started to blossom. Therefore, primary responsibility for aiding post-revolution Libya was left to the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), with contributions from the United States and EU member states.

Throughout 2011, the United States provided approximately \$118 million in economic assistance for Libya. The majority of these funds went to international organizations for humanitarian relief and support to refugees, in addition to specific State and Defense Department programs that facilitated the destruction of Qaddafi's undeclared chemical weapons and the thousands of man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS) accumulated by his regime¹². The US Agency for International Development (USAID) was on the ground in Libya prior to the end of the revolution and supported the emergence of civil society and new media organizations, both of which had not existed under the prior regime. Eventually, USAID also collaborated with the UN to establish Libya's first Electoral Commission, which conducted the first free and fair election in Libya's history in 2012.

¹¹ D. Chollet and B. Fishman, "Who Lost Libya," *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/2015-04-20/who-lost-libya>

¹² "US Aid by Foreign Country: Libya", US Agency for International Development (USAID), https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/LBY?measure=Obligations&fiscal_year=2011

However, assistance dried up after 2012 due to Congressional opposition and difficulty of programming with the Libyans. The United States also had a number of limited training visits planned for the fall of 2012 that had to be cancelled as result of the Benghazi attacks.

The devastating effect of the Benghazi attacks

By the time Ambassador Stevens arrived in Tripoli in June 2012, he only had a few months on the ground to assess the situation and devise a strategy for rebuilding the US embassy and engaging with the Libyans. Tragically, he did not have a chance to make his recommendations to Washington before his death. The events of 11 September 2012 effectively blocked any future plans the United States had for assisting Libya's transition. The tragedy traumatized the remaining embassy team and similarly affected Washington's willingness to find creative methods to support Libya's stability just as the rifts were emerging after the election of the General National Congress (GNC).

By end of 2012, President Obama insisted that the United States not give up on Libya and reengage to address growing security concerns. This led to a series of coordination meetings between the United States, United Kingdom, France, Italy, and eventually the UN and the Libyans to devise a renewed effort to train and establish a reliable Libyan security force that could protect the country's key institutions and critical infrastructure. The effort was announced at the UK-hosted G8 summit in June 2013, where the United States, UK, Italy, and France pledged to train roughly 7,000 so-called "general purpose forces"¹³.

Unfortunately, the effort failed. The Libyans could not establish a mechanism to pay for the training, and the vetting standards applied were so poor that the few troops who were trained

¹³ David Cameron's Speech, The Prime Minister's closing press conference at the G8 Summit, 18 June 2013, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/press-conference-prime-minister-at-end-of-g8-summit>

damaged the training facilities, and in the case of the UK, assaulted British citizens¹⁴. Because the United States insisted that the Libyans fund the totality of the training efforts in advance, American plans to train Libyan forces in an unused NATO base in Bulgaria never materialized. Similarly, a US-led training effort for specialized counterterrorism troops failed when the trainees lost control of their base to another rival militia¹⁵.

By the time that General Khalifa Haftar announced the formation of Operation Dignity in early 2014 against Islamist militias that he equated to terrorists, the United States had minimal tools at its disposal to halt the impending civil war. Prime Minister Ali Zeidan was losing his already limited legitimacy; repeated kidnappings demonstrated his personal vulnerability. Zeidan had envisioned the General Purpose Force as a Government Protection Force, but a year after the G8 summit, he was still empty-handed. The United States and its European allies also proved ineffective in preventing blatant outside interference by Egypt and the UAE, who bombed anti-Haftar positions in Tripoli¹⁶. Ironically, the bombing mission backfired and forced the pro-Haftar Zintani militias to lose control of their base around Tripoli International Airport. The heavy fighting in

¹⁴ M. Tran, "Two Libyan soldiers jailed for raping man in Cambridge", *The Guardian*, 15 May 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/may/15/two-libyan-soldiers-jailed-for-raping-man-in-cambridge>.

¹⁵ E. Schmitt, "US Training Elite Antiterror Troops in Four African Nations", *New York Times*, 26 May 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/27/world/africa/us-trains-african-commandos-to-fight-terrorism.html>

¹⁶ US policy *vis-à-vis* the UAE on Libya has always suffered from a divergence of interests in Libya. The UAE views Libya through the lens of a regional existential threat posed by Islamists and the global Muslim Brotherhood, whereas the US, at least under President Obama, saw political inclusion as a necessary element for Libya's long-term stability, so long as participants in the political process gave up *vi* violence. Consequently, the UAE supported anti-Islamist militias during the revolution and have backed Haftar since. US diplomatic attempts to limit the UAE's pro-Haftar behavior are always hindered because the Gulf State is a critical ally on so many other regional priorities. It is too early to tell how the Trump administration will navigate these issues.

the area around the US Embassy also forced embassy personnel to depart Libya and cease operations in June 2014 along with most other international representatives in the capital.

US efforts during civil war

US mediation efforts were significantly impeded in Libya without an in-country presence. Just as the UN was designated by the Security Council to coordinate Libya's stabilization, it assumed the lead in trying to halt the violence and assisted with facilitating a Libya Dialogue process that ultimately produced the LPA, or the Skhirat Agreement. In December 2015, the international community convened in Rome to endorse the LPA and the formation of the GNA, which was reaffirmed in a UN Security Council Resolution 2259 later that month¹⁷. In the Rome meeting, Secretary of State John Kerry said, "We cannot allow the status quo in Libya to continue. It is dangerous for the viability of Libya, it is dangerous for Libyans, and now, because of the increase of the presence of Daesh purposefully migrating there, it is dangerous for everyone"¹⁸.

Kerry met with the Libyans in international forums on Libya at least three times in 2016: in a Vienna meeting in May, primarily to discuss security assistance issues; in New York on the margins of the UN General Assembly in September; and in London in October to help set the stage for technical economic discussions described below. However, GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj never visited Washington.

Throughout this period, the United States provided consistent diplomatic support to the UN along with its key European

¹⁷ "Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2259 (2015), Security Council Welcomes Signing of Libyan Political Agreement on New Government for Strife-Torn Country", Security Council, United Nations, 23 December 2015, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12185.doc.htm>

¹⁸ "Press Availability With Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni and United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General Martin Kobler", US Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, December 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/12/250599.htm>

partners in the UK, France, Italy, and often Germany and Spain. US Special Envoy Jonathan Winer led these efforts, which involved orchestrating statements condemning incidents that threatened Libya's stability, endorsing actions that advanced the peace process, and meeting with Libyans on different sides of the political spectrum. Winer also helped lead the process for imposing US and EU sanctions against "spoilers" of the peace effort's government formation process in 2016. Initial targets of the sanctions were eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh, who impeded quorum votes to approve a GNA cabinet, and Khalifa Ghwell, who declared his own "Government of National Salvation" in Tripoli formed by some former GNC members.

However, as the Obama administration entered its final months, particularly after the election of Donald Trump, other outside actors, especially Egypt, the UAE, and Russia all sought to expand their diplomatic influence in Libya. They made no secret of their favoritism for Haftar over the GNA and its backers in Misrata whose militias conducted the brunt of anti-ISIS fighting. The conflicting diplomatic activity was especially pronounced given Trump's lack of any record on Libya. If anything, due to Trump and his surrogates' tendencies to attack "radical Islamic terrorism", it appeared to Haftar's allies that they could convert the new president to their position.

Prioritizing counter-terrorism

One issue that continued to capture the attention of the Obama White House was the counterterrorism threat posed by Libya. Even before ISIS emerged in Libya in late 2015, the United States had pursued the perpetrators of the Benghazi attack and al-Qaeda figures in the region. In January 2014, US Special Forces captured Abu Anas al-Libi, who was wanted for his role in planning the 1998 East Africa embassy bombings. Libi was captured outside his Tripoli home and was transported back to the United States,

however he died in 2015 of a preexisting illness before his trial began. Special Forces also captured Ansar al-Sharia leader Ahmed Abu Khattala who was wanted for his role in the September 2012 attack against the U.S. special mission in Benghazi that killed Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans. Khattala is awaiting trial in a federal prison in Virginia. Additionally, the United States carried out two significant airstrikes before the 2016 campaign against ISIS in the city of Sirte. In June 2015, a strike killed several militants outside Benghazi; the Pentagon confirming the target to be the North African jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar, who had perpetrated the 2013 attack against an Algerian gas plant, among other attacks throughout the region. Belmokhtar's death has not been confirmed. And in February 2016, US bombers attacked militants at an ISIS camp in Sabratha reportedly responsible for training the perpetrator of the deadly June 2015 terrorist attack at a beach resort in Sousse, Tunisia¹⁹.

The rise of ISIS in Libya proved to be another challenge for US interests in the country, especially when ISIS media started encouraging fighters to go to Libya rather than join the fighting in Syria or Iraq. The problem became acute when ISIS fighters drove out the Misratan militias who had controlled Sirte since the Revolution. Misrata's historic rivalry with Sirte and the presence of Qaddafi loyalists helped enable the ISIS takeover. The Misratans rallied in the summer of 2016 and began pushing back the ISIS lines, which had extended from the city along a large swath of the coastal road. However, the militias became bogged down when they confronted urban warfare and suffered significant casualties due to snipers, improvised explosive devices (IED), and Vehicle-Borne IED's for which they lacked the training or equipment to counter.

At this point, the United States stepped in and launched an air campaign, Odyssey Lightning, (in reference to the 2011 Operation Odyssey Dawn) in order to assist the effort to take

¹⁹ B. Fishman, *The Trump Administration and Libya: The Necessity for Engagement*, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Notes 40, May 2017, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/the-trump-administration-and-libya-the-necessity-for-engagement>

back Sirte from ISIS. From a political perspective, the US decision was consistent with its overall anti-ISIS strategy of supporting locally aligned forces against the terrorist group. This required the Misratan militias to formally align with the US supported-GNA. The United States did not provide training or equipment to the Misratan militias as it did for the Iraqi military and select local forces in Syria. Instead, US anti-ISIS activity in Sirte consisted entirely of airstrikes and minimal on-the-ground coordination. The campaign lasted from August to December 2016 when ISIS was finally driven from the last urban blocks it controlled. In total, the United States conducted nearly 500 airstrikes against ISIS personnel, equipment, control centers, and firing positions²⁰. This was not before Misratan fighters suffered over 700 deaths in the fighting against ISIS²¹. Notably, Khalifa Haftar's forces stayed away from the fray.

The Sirte operation was a significant victory against ISIS and for the GNA, however the group is not defeated. Initial reports suggest the Manchester bomber had visited Libya and remained in touch with an ISIS brigade responsible for coordinating other attacks in Europe and Tunisia²². ISIS will continue to take advantage of ongoing political chaos in Libya and use the country as a base to conduct further attacks in the region and in Europe. AFRICOM recognizes the connection between political chaos and the presence of ISIS. The Commands' 2017 posture statement notes the importance of promoting responsive and effective governance in Libya and ensuring that the rights of all Libyans are respected. "These are foundational to long-term regional security"²³.

²⁰ "AFRICOM concludes Operation Odyssey Lightning", US Africa Command press release, 20 December 2016, <http://www.africom.mil/media-room/pressrelease/28564/africom-concludes-operation-odyssey-lightning>.

²¹ S. Zaptia, "A Total of 1,523 Violent Deaths Were Reported in Libya in 2015: Libyanbodycount", *Libya Herald*, 5 January 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/05/a-total-of-1523-violent-deaths-were-reported-in-libya-in-2016-libyanbodycount/>.

²² R. Callimachi and E. Schmitt (2017).

²³ "United States Africa Command 2017 Posture Statement", www.africom.mil/media-room/document/28720/africom-2017-posture-statement

The struggling economy

In October 2016, a meeting in London co-hosted by UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson and US Secretary of State John Kerry aimed to address one of Libya's most persistent problems – the inability to execute a budget due to competing claims of legitimacy over the Central Bank and its assets by the HoR and GNA²⁴. Even though oil revenue was entering the Central Bank, its disbursement was mostly limited to salary payments to a massively inflated public sector payroll, including an unknown number of militia salaries. The London meeting, during which technical discussions took place with the Libyans, led to the creation of a so-called temporary financial arrangement (TFA) aimed at enabling budget execution for the end of 2016 and 2017. Yet the TFA itself highlighted Libya's economic problems. In the agreement, 73% of expenditures were allocated to salaries and subsidies, whereas just 5% was allocated to non-oil-sector development projects, despite the desperate need for repairs to the country's basic infrastructure²⁵. Nevertheless, the basic agreement on public spending was superior to continuing deadlock. It also highlighted the important role played by US Department of the Treasury officials who worked closely with Libyan and international counterparts to address these longstanding issues. Despite the TFA, the persistent liquidity crisis in Libya is caused in large part by a cash and black market economy resulting from lack of confidence in the banks and a dual exchange rate. Until those issues are resolved by a currency devaluation, the economic crisis is likely to persist.

²⁴ At its core, the economic crisis is rooted in political gridlock, not technical deficiencies in the Central Bank, the National Oil Corporation, or the Ministry of Finance. So long as there is political discord, the country's economic institutions will function on autopilot. Political agreement is required to address budget and currency challenges.

²⁵ S. Zaptia, "The GNA's 2017 'Budget' Is Illegal, Say HoR Members", *Libya Herald*, 2 January 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/02/the-gnas-2017-budget-is-illegal-say-hor-members-an-analysis/>

The Trump Era begins

While a Hillary Clinton administration would likely have maintained the Obama's administration's Libya policy, with perhaps some modifications to press harder for a political solution between the GNA and HoR, there was great uncertainty regarding what policy towards Libya the Trump administration would adopt. What Trump did suggest was a strong anti-Islamist outlook, which some regional actors, such as Egypt and the UAE, welcomed. For Libya, that meant a greater chance that the United States would tilt politically toward their preferred strongman, General Haftar. Meanwhile, the diplomatic vacuum led to greater Russian involvement in Libya. Haftar visited Moscow several times in 2016 and was dramatically hosted on board a Russian aircraft carrier off the Libya coast in January 2017.

Without an apparent policy review of Libya policy, the State Department bureaucracy initially persisted in advancing the status-quo policy of supporting the UN-led peace process and endorsing the GNA as the only legitimate government in Libya. Although it received limited visibility, the United States endorsed the G7 ministerial statement of Libya on April 11:

We reaffirm our commitment to preserving the sovereignty, integrity and unity of Libya and to support the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) as the sole framework within which political solutions can be found [...] We reiterate our strong support to the Presidency Council (PC) and the Government of National Accord (GNA), headed by Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj, as the legitimate executive authorities under the LPA, in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2259, and we underline our firm opposition to any attempt to disrupt the stabilization process²⁶.

A week later in a UN Security Council session of Libya, UN Ambassador Nikki Haley reiterated US support for the LPA,

²⁶ G7 Foreign Minister's Meeting, Final Communiqué, Lucca, 10-11 April 2017, Communiqué7, http://www.esteri.it/mae/resource/doc/2017/04/g7_2017_fm_m-joint_communicu3.pdf

though she made no reference to al-Serraj his leadership of the Presidency Council:

The United States believes that the best way to resolve differences is through a Libyan-led dialogue with the support of the UN and the international community. All parties should immediately commit to this process [...] The Libyan Political Agreement remains the framework that Libyans agreed on for their country's transition.

Interestingly, Haley added a specific warning seemingly aimed at Haftar and his allies. "The country deserves a national, unified military under civilian oversight. Moving forward in Libya requires building up this kind of force – one that is capable of securing the country [...] Libya's international parties need to be clear in pushing for a single government security force"²⁷. Since Haftar's seeks military leadership outside of civilian or GNA authority, the statement directly endorsed Serraj and GNA's position in the internal Libyan debate.

However, when Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni visited Washington on 20 April, President Trump upended the previous lower level policy declarations by the State Department with only a few words. In the press conference after their meeting, Gentiloni called for "a stable and unified Libya" and said a US role was "critical" in this effort. Trump replied bluntly, "I do not see a role in Libya. The United States has right now enough roles"²⁸. While he did leave the door open for continued counter-terrorism support against ISIS, Trump's message was clear: Libya is Europe's, or anyone else's, problem, but it is not the problem of the United States.

²⁷ Ambassador Nikki Haley, "Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on the Situation in Libya", United States Mission to the United Nations, New York City, 19 April 2017, <https://usun.state.gov/remarks/7774>.

²⁸ Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Gentiloni of Italy in Joint Press Conference, The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/04/20/remarks-president-trump-and-prime-minister-gentiloni-italy-joint-press>

Whether Trump could be compelled to change his mind on Libya, as he has done on several policy issues in his early presidency, such as China is contingent on several factors. First and foremost is Libya's connection to terrorism. If the Manchester bomber indeed received his training in Libya, there is a greater chance that the Departments of State and Defense would propose a more comprehensive Libya policy to replicate a version of the 2016 Sirte campaign, which included a political effort to strengthen the GNA. Odyssey Lightning succeeded in part because the Misratan forces at the time were not in an active fight against Haftar's forces. However, over the last few months, escalation and fight in the south threatens to restart the civil war of 2014-2015. If these forces are pre-occupied with fighting their Libyan rivals instead of ISIS, there is little of building an effective counter-terrorism coalition. In short, an effective counter-terrorism strategy requires a comprehensive political strategy.

Training of local forces will be far more effective (as past experiences in Libya have suggested) if the individuals receiving training are vetted and assigned to designated units in a security force that has a clear mission and function. None of those factors currently exist in Libya, and they are unlikely to emerge in the foreseeable future absent significant progress toward a more comprehensive peace deal. Further, relying on Haftar's forces (the Libyan National Army) to combat ISIS is problematic. Haftar's forces did not participate in the Sirte campaign. Supporting him at the expense of the Mistratans who fought ISIS in 2016 would almost certainly trigger a civil war and deal a death blow to the GNA. All of these factors suggest that a greater US political and diplomatic role will be necessary.

The final factor that might compel renewed US interest in Libya is the threat of Russia's expanded presence in the southern Mediterranean, specifically in eastern Libya. Russia has already improved ties with Egypt's President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who supports Haftar, and is courting the strongman. The extent of Russia's ties to Haftar and proposed assistance to the LNA remains unclear, but press reports suggest that Russian security

contractors have already been present in Benghazi. HoR Speaker Salah has also said he expects the east to receive direct security assistance from Russia.²⁹ A decision by Russia to make its support to Haftar more overt by defying the UN imposed arms embargo could trigger a crisis in which the Europeans, supportive of the GNA, would force the Trump administration to decide whether to cede at least part of Libya to Russia or play a more significant diplomatic role in Libya to prevent such an outcome.

One way or another, the Trump administration is likely to get involved in Libya. President Trump can do so early on, on his terms, by supporting the Europeans and the UN-led peace effort, or he can be forced to deepen American involvement under far worse conditions forced by ISIS or Russia. In either circumstance, Trump is likely to resemble Obama in one respect: they were both reluctant to invest the United States in Libya's internal conflicts.

²⁹ M. Tsvetkova, "Exclusive: Russian Private Security Firm Says It Had Armed Men in East Libya", Reuters, 13 March 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-libya-contractors-idUSKBN16H2DM>

Conclusions

Karim Mezran, Arturo Varvelli

In March 2011, NATO led a military intervention in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1973 that authorized member states to take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in Libya¹. The mandate was to protect the civilians of Benghazi who had revolted against the regime. Despite this limited mandate, the way the NATO military operations were carried out made it immediately evident that the real goal of the intervention was much wider, namely to provoke the collapse of Muammar Qaddafi's regime. However, the lack of a plan for the stabilization of the country following the armed revolt and the international intervention resulted, more than six years later, in a significantly more complex and dangerous situation.

The militias who fought against Qaddafi developed diverging interests and found value in entrenching their control over cities and local villages. This led to a fragmentation of authority, the proliferation of militias, criminal organizations, and terrorist groups, which undermined any attempt to bring stability back to the country. Inevitably, the rivalry among various factions dragged a series of external actors into the politics of Libya, which turned the country's conflict into a proxy war.

The interests and operations of regional and international actors in Libya have become complex and pervasive at the same time. An understanding of these dynamics makes it apparent that only coordinated action by the international community to insulate the country from competing regional interests in Libya's

¹ United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1973, 17 March 2011, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/20110927_110311-UNSCR-1973.pdf

internal affairs would have the ability to successfully reestablish order.

The biggest shortcoming of the 2011 NATO intervention was the failure to assist the country with a comprehensive stabilization process following the military operation. While NATO may not have been able to prevent regional actors from getting involved in Libya – indeed, the country is of important economic and national security interest to its neighbors Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria and holds significance for the Gulf as well – a continued presence in Libya focused on stabilization could have helped manage post-intervention contention among the various competing parties. Instead, NATO's departure and determination not to “own” the Libyan problem led to a rapid deterioration on the ground.

The rivalry between domestic factions and their international supporters reached its climax in the summer of 2014 when the country was *de facto* split into two parts, one in Tobruk in the east under the control of General Khalifa Haftar and the newly elected House of Representatives (HoR), and one in the west led by Islamist leaning militia leaders and those in the city of Misrata.

As it has been shown throughout the various chapters in this volume, while in most cases the factional rivalries in Libya have real roots, they have been exacerbated by the interests of foreign actors. United Nations and European Union as collective organizations sought to find a negotiated solution to the civil war, which culminated in the signing of the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in Skhirat, Morocco in December 2015. The LPA formed a Presidency Council (PC) and a cabinet, the Government of National Accord (GNA), led by Prime Minister Fayeẓ al-Serraj².

Despite major efforts at bolstering the PC/GNA, more often than not the United Nations and the European Union were undermined by the double game played by some of their members.

² United Nations Security Council, Document 1016, “United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: Draft Resolution”, 22 December 2015, https://unsmil.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/UNSC_RES_2259_Eng_1.pdf

In fact, while almost all states formally pledged allegiance to the UN-led process, many behaved differently on the ground. This book explores the dynamics of those foreign actors most involved in Libya's proxy conflict. The chapters analyze and discuss the strategies, interests, and behavior of most of the actors involved in the Libya crisis. As the various authors have shown, unfortunately not all interests of the various actors in Libya are in agreement with one another, not only among the international actors but also among the regional ones.

Ultimately, the stabilization of Libya should be the primary goal of any western engagement.

The LPA, which produced the PC/GNA, has not taken off, and the weakness of the unity government is a result of the failure of UN-leadership. The scandal behind the departure of the former Special Representative of the UN Secretary General Bernardino Leon damaged the credibility and effectiveness of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)³. Meanwhile maneuvering by the United States and Russia has so far prevented the appointment of a replacement to current representative Martin Kobler, whose mandate is coming to a close. There is by now a majority consensus that the LPA must be amended.

What emerges clearly from the analysis presented in the chapters is that the failure of the UN-led negotiations and lack of cohesion between European actors necessitate a leadership role for the United States in Libya. The United States is the only country that can credibly employ both carrot – for those seeking to reach a negotiated agreement – and stick – for those who prefer to act as spoilers to the peace process and favor entrenched interests and military solutions. The competing and conflicting interests of key international actors was the main reason behind the failure, at least until now, of the LPA project. It is imperative that the United States exercise all its leverage to force the

³ "Anger at UN Chief Negotiator in Libya's New Job in UAE", *Al Jazeera*, 5 November 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/11/anger-chief-negotiator-libya-job-uae-151105161323791.html>

international actors involved in the conflict to relinquish support for armed factions on the ground and rather use their influence to convince all parties to come to an agreement.

In doing so, it is critical that President Donald Trump's administration understand that the situation on the ground in Libya is such that a military solution is neither possible nor welcome. The belief that a shift in US support towards the forces led by eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar could be a solution for Libya is wrong, as it does not take into correct account the forces opposing Haftar and the malcontent that the restoration of autocratic rule would produce. The same objection can be applied to those who suggest partitioning Libya as the best way out of the current crisis. The fragmentation of each region, the internal divisions, and the lack of high-level leadership, to say nothing of how partition would allocate Libya's natural resources, makes any idea of partition simply a trigger for further violence.⁴

However, as clearly shown in the chapter on US involvement in Libya, the Trump administration appears unlikely to take up such a leadership role. Yet the United States clearly has significant interests at stake in a stable and secure Libya and, contrary to President Trump's remarks, should assume a larger role in Libya. A number of US officials recognize this fact⁵. Moreover, there is no evidence that Washington is prepared to shift its support from the GNA to Haftar. Indeed, in an April meeting of the G7 foreign ministers, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson signed onto a declaration expression support for the GNA and calling on the elimination of spoilers from the negotiation process. The US Ambassador to Libya Peter Bodde again reaffirmed US commitment to the UN-led process during a visit with al-Serraj in Tripoli in May⁶.

⁴ G.D. Porter, "So you Want to Partition Libya", *Politico*, 11 April 2017, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/04/libya-partition-sebastian-gorka-215012>

⁵ "The Crisis in Libya: Next Steps and US Policy Options", United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 25 April 2017, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/crisis-in-libya-next-steps-and-us-policy-options-042517>

⁶ A. Lewis, "US Envoy Endorses Libya's UN-Backed Government in Whirlwind

Those within the US executive and legislative branches that recognize the importance of reaching a peaceful settlement in Libya should therefore push the administration to put its weight behind a more inclusive negotiation process. The United States does not have to be alone in this effort. Countries with relevant interests in the stabilization of Libya, such as Italy, could help by playing a primary role in support of a more inclusive peace process. If Rome can marshal a united front among leading European actors in support of an inclusive peace process in both word and deed – one that alienates spoilers and pressures international actors to cease support for competing proxies – it could, with support from US congressional leaders, convince the Trump administration to invest leadership in finding a solution for Libya's conflict⁷.

Italy is already playing an important role in bringing opposing sides of Libya's conflict together⁸. Rome should continue to push for the inclusive reorganization of the Libyan component of the political dialogue. Modifications to the LPA should be undertaken with as much consensus as possible. In particular, the leadership of the major armed groups in the country should be engaged and involved in the negotiations. Tribal and economic heavyweights should also be included; their presence would ensure enough stakes in the success of the negotiation process and its outcome. Rome should also continue to call on Washington – and the wider international community – to view Libya and overall security in the southern Mediterranean as a top priority for global security⁹.

Visit to 'Tripoli', Reuters, 23 May 2017, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-usa-idUSKBN18J2HR>

⁷ K. Mezran and E. Miller, "Trump on Libya: What Now?", MENASource, 21 April 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/trump-on-libya-what-now>

⁸ P. Wintour, "Libya's Warring Sides Reach Diplomatic Breakthrough in Rome", *The Guardian*, 24 April 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/24/libya-warring-sides-diplomatic-breakthrough-rome>

⁹ H.E. Angelino Alfano and Frederick Kempe, "Facing Common Challenges: The Italian Contribution to Security", Atlantic Council

As shown in this volume's chapters, the fragmentation of European actors in Libya, combined with the lack of interest expressed by the US administration in engaging in an effort to stabilize Libya, has left a void that Haftar's main supporters, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Egypt, have attempted to fill. In early May, through an initiative driven by Abu Dhabi and Cairo, the UAE staged a meeting between Haftar and Serraj, the first meeting between the two rival leaders since early 2016 following the signing of the LPA¹⁰. While there were no official statements on the particular results of the meeting, what has emerged lead us to understand that rather than a breakthrough, in reality the meeting was in effect an attempt by Haftar to impose a conditional surrender on Serraj.

In light of the weakness of the government of Serraj, as proven by the Abu Dhabi meeting, the strong direct involvement of the UAE and Egypt on the side of Haftar, and recent escalation on the ground, the West should increase its support to the PC/GNA with the intent to secure the city of Tripoli and immediate neighborhoods. Western states should collaborate with the local militias that are willing to 1) support a new government produced by a revised LPA, and 2) ultimately be incorporated into a professional, nascent armed Libyan force. Western states can also engage in training the Presidential Guard and other security forces on the ground. These efforts should be undertaken within a theoretical framework for a decentralization process that shifts functions and duties of the state from the center to the periphery. The stabilization of the whole of Libya should start from the local level and move from the bottom-up. The establishment of a minimum level of security in the city of Tripoli, which by itself comprises almost a third of the population of Libya, could allow the PC/GNA to initiate a series of economic projects to

Webcasts, 21 March 2017, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/events/webcasts/facing-common-challenges-the-italian-contribution-to-security>

¹⁰ "Fayez al-Sarraj Meets Khalifa Haftar in UAE for Talks", *Al Jazeera*, 2 May 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/fayez-al-sarraj-meets-khalifa-haftar-uae-talks-170502140623464.html>

repair Tripoli's infrastructure – such as restoring roads, rebuilding schools and hospitals that have been badly damaged by war and neglect, and repairing the power grid and electrical infrastructure – and restart economic activity in the city. Success in these endeavors could slowly and progressively, but consistently, be expanded throughout the entire country. Success in Tripoli could be replicated in every city and village in Libya, where local militias would join municipal security forces under the supervision of the central government and the support of the reconstituted national armed forces.

The international community could further support economic revitalization by establishing an international financial committee that would support government reforms and development projects through an advisory role. This committee could also push for a higher degree of transparency and accountability in the operations of Libya's main economic and financial institutions such as the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA), and the National Oil Corporation (NOC). All of this would also help private corporations and international investors identify areas for development in the country and, in cooperation with Libyan actors, create a positive cycle that would build Libyan capacity and construct an active economy.

The success of this plan means the setting of a deterrent against Haftar's and others' ambitions to weaken the PC/GNA and pursue a military victory. It also entails rebuilding support among western militias, including those from Misrata, for the PC/GNA. In order to avoid further escalation, these militias would need to be convinced that a negotiated settlement, even one that would bring Haftar into the fold would not threaten their interests.

If, with the help of strong Western engagement built on robust diplomacy from Europe and, ideally, the United States, in support of a Libyan-created consensus government succeeds in Tripoli and establishes a credible model, Haftar and other spoilers would have no choice but to join that effort and participate in the reconstruction of the country and of its institutions.

Given the critical national security implications of Libya's chaos for the United States and its European allies, the choice to step back may encourage further escalation on the ground that would ultimately drag the west into Libya. A well-planned stabilization effort now, rather than an unwelcome intervention later, would in the long run be the best bet for Western and regional interests in Libya, as well as that of the most important actors of all: the Libyan people.

Appendix

Nicola Missaglia

Main political and military players in Libya today

Since the fall of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011, many different actors – political and military; Islamist and not; tribal, local, domestic, foreign, and transnational – have been competing with one another for power and hegemony in Libya. Moreover, Libya’s national political scene remains highly polarized. In order to understand the main forces at play today in Libya and their goals, we offer a synthetic guide to the main domestic players “on the ground” and a chronology of main events in Libya since 2011. For reasons of space and clarity, the events and actors that currently have a more limited impact on the unfolding of Libya’s crisis at the time of writing are left out.

The Presidential Council, the Libyan Government of National Accord (Tripoli), and the House of Representatives (Tobruk)

Headquartered in Tripoli, the Libyan Presidential Council (PC) has nine members and carries out the functions of head of state and supreme commander of the armed forces. Its president Fayeze al-Serraj is also Prime Minister of the Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli as well. Installed in March 2016 in the naval base of Abu Sittah, near Tripoli, the PC was formed under the terms of the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Agreement (LPA, or “Skhirat Agreement”), which was signed on 17 December 2015. Currently, the GNA, operating since 30 March 2016, is the UN-backed and officially recognized

government in Libya. The legislative body recognized by the international community and in charge of the democratic legitimization of the GNA is the House of Representatives (HoR), headquartered in Tobruk in the Cyrenaica region in the eastern part of the country and presided by Aguila Saleh Issa. The HoR, also known as the “Tobruk Parliament” (or sometimes “Tobruk government”), stated its support for the al-Serraj government in a number of written declarations. But, to date, official endorsement of the GNA by the HoR, as well as general relations between these two organizations, are stymied by the great influence exerted in the eastern part of the country by General Khalifa Haftar. This situation is, at least in part, one of the reasons for the inefficiency of al-Serraj’s government, and has led to a growing discontent that – even at the international level – is rapidly eroding consensus for the GNA. In early April 2017, the HoR announced preconditions it requires to restart peace negotiations with the GNA. Importantly, they include ending the PC’s control of the army (under article 8 of the LPA) in order to pave the way for Haftar to officially assume control.

General Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army

General Khalifa Belqasim Haftar, Head of the Libyan National Army (LNA), was a key figure in Qaddafi’s army, where he attained the rank of colonel before being exiled to the United States for over 20 years. Haftar returned to Libya during the 2011 revolution to try to oust the long-time leader. Today, his LNA exerts *de facto* control on the Cyrenaica region, in the eastern part of the country, where Haftar’s general headquarters are located (in Marj). The LNA is the General’s own ambitious definition of a broad but heterogeneous army comprised of soldiers, former police officers, special forces, armed civilians, and brigades of militias (including Salafi militants) under his command. At first, Haftar formed the LNA to serve an anti-Islamist function – with the so-called “Operation Dignity” launched in 2014 against Islamist armed groups in Benghazi – but it evolved into an authentic

tool of political power. Thanks to his military strength and the political and military support of regional powers – including the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and neighboring Egypt, which is interested in both eradicating political Islam from Libya and in creating an autonomous buffer zone in eastern Libya governed by a leader close to Cairo – Haftar in effect controls the HoR in Tobruk and has been able to indefinitely postpone its approval of the GNA and al-Serraj's PC in Tripoli. In 2014, the HoR itself appointed Haftar head of the LNA and, in this context, Haftar's closeness to HoR Spokesman Aguila Saleh Issa is noteworthy. By gradually broadening and extending his power, Haftar is progressively eroding and undermining al-Serraj's leadership, most likely with a view to force the international community to assess alternative options (or at least officially include Haftar in the country's transition process). This strategy has produced some initial results; the European Union, as well as other international actors including the United States, has officially asked al-Serraj to devise a more inclusive cabinet and evaluate the integration of Haftar's forces into a future governmental structure. Haftar is also reportedly enjoys links to Russia, which he has visited at least two times since 2014 to meet government authorities in order to seek weapons and backing.

Khalifa Ghwell's National Salvation Government

A second power center, the National Salvation Government (NSG, also known as the "Tripoli Parliament"), exists in Tripoli led by Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell. This government, Islamist-leaning and hostile to al-Serraj's GNA, bases its legitimacy on the authority of the General National Congress (GNC) – a body established by politicians from blocs that lost the June 2014 elections headed by Nouri Abusahmain and built on the remains of the original parliament elected in Libya in 2012 – but is recognized neither by al-Serraj's GNA nor by the United Nations. The European Union has levied sanctions against Ghwell and Abusahmain due to their hostility to the GNA. Today most of

the members of the GNC belong to the State Council, a purely consultative body established through the LPA that meets in Tripoli. Although the popular consent on which, in recent years, both the NSG and the GNC founded their legitimacy is progressively eroding – it was concentrated mainly in the heterogeneous and now dissolved “Libya Dawn” coalition, which included Islamist factions, the city-state of Misrata (now pro-GNA) and various cities in western Libya – it is still able to undermine the efficiency of the GNA and al-Serraj through acts of sabotage aimed at eroding the latter’s precarious legitimacy. Formally disbanded on April 5 2016, the NSG reformed in October 2016 when forces loyal to the GNC and Khalifa Ghwell attempted a (failed) “coup d’état” against al-Serraj’s government, taking over the building of the High Council of State in Tripoli. In February 2017, the Libyan National Guard was announced in Tripoli, a military force headed by Brig. Mahmoud Al-Zigal and Loyal to Khalifa Ghwell that opposed both the GNA and the LNA. After heavy clashes erupted in Tripoli in February and then mid-March between militias aligned with the GNA (especially the Abu Salim Brigade) and forces loyal to the NSG, the Rixos Hotel complex where Ghwell had established his headquarters was taken, the al-Nabaa TV channel loyal to the NSG shut down, and Ghwell – who was slightly injured during the clashes – and his forces were forced to leave Tripoli.

The “Eastern” Government of Abdullah al-Thinni in al-Bayda

In eastern Libya in the city of al-Bayda near Tobruk, there is a third center of power consisting of a government led since March 2014 by Abdullah al-Thinni, who succeeded Ali Zeidan as Prime Minister. This government is heir to the *ad interim* transition government elected after the fall of Qaddafi and, officially, should transfer (or should have transferred) its powers to al-Serraj’s GNA. However, this transfer of powers has not yet occurred because the GNA has not officially received a vote of confidence

by the Tobruk HoR. Indeed, the HoR for the time being seems to back the government of the “Eastern Prime Minister” al-Thinni, who it appears has rejected the idea of a “unity” GNA in Tripoli because he was not appointed Prime Minister. The key to understanding this situation can be seen in the almost complete control that General Haftar exerts not only on the HoR but also on the al-Bayda government. Both these bodies are frequently described as the “Tobruk authorities.” This situation has *de facto* produced two “competing” governments, splitting the country in two and creating a deep crisis of legitimacy of Libya’s political authorities.

The Islamic State in Libya

Originally installed in the eastern city of Derna in 2014, the Islamic State (ISIS) consolidated its presence in Libya in 2015 by taking control of the central coastal city of Sirte (Qaddafi’s hometown that was marginalized after his fall) and the surrounding region and launching military and terrorist attacks on other cities, including the capital. Sirte, where the group quickly installed a system of government based on fear and upheld its own radical interpretation of Islam, was an ISIS stronghold in Libya throughout 2015 and until spring 2016. Since March 2016, militias from Misrata on the one hand and militias from the Petroleum Facilities Guard (see below) on the other – both of which supported and were coordinated by al-Serraj’s GNA – instigated a ferocious and successful military campaign against ISIS. This culminated first in a long siege of the remaining ISIS troops gathered in the center of Sirte and then, thanks to support from the United States Air Force (summoned by the GNA), in the near total liberation of the city beginning in August 2016. On 13 September 2016, Italy announced the opening of a hospital in Misrata to treat the injured troops fighting ISIS. Although ISIS’ potential in Libya was been drastically reduced with its defeat in Sirte in December 2016, intelligence reports confirm that the group is still present in the country in some parts of

Sirte, Derna, and the western city of Sabrath. Sleep cells also exist in other parts of the country, and it has been reported that as early as spring 2017, ISIS fighters began regrouping in Libya's desert valleys and inland hills southeast of Tripoli, as well as in the south of the country.

The Islamist Groups in Benghazi

The main coalition of armed Islamist groups not belonging to the Islamic State operating in Libya is the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC), a military coalition composed of Islamist and jihadist militias created in 2014 in response to General Haftar's "Operation Dignity." As its name indicates, this coalition is headquartered in the central-eastern city of Benghazi, where, to date, clashes with Haftar's LNA have been particularly intense. The BRSC groups together Ansar al-Sharia, Libya Shield 1, the February 17th Martyrs Brigade, and several other Islamist-leaning militias including the increasingly powerful Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB). Among BRSC members, the now dissolved Ansar al-Sharia (formed in 2012 by militia members determined to impose Islamic law in Libya) has been the most numerous and powerful for almost five years. An ally of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the Al-Mourabitoun group (both of which also operate in the southern part of the country), as well as of Jihadist groups operating in Egypt such as the Mohammad Jamal Network, Ansar al-Sharia leaped to fame in 2012 for its attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi and the killing of the American ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other American citizens. Following the fall of Qaddafi, Ansar al-Sharia organized training camps for foreign fighters, above all Tunisians, and worked hard to recruit youth radicalized by Haftar's military campaign. Although the appearance of ISIS in Libya led a number of defections from Ansar al-Sharia – and consequently from BRSC – the group was been able to withstand attacks from Haftar's LNA for several years until it announced its own dissolution at the end of May 2017

following heavy losses inflicted by the LNA. While relations between the BRSC and ISIS (or what remains of it) have been tense due to the latter's attempts to co-opt militants from rival groups, the two organizations have fought together in Benghazi against the LNA on some occasions. More recently, coordinated actions carried out against the LNA by the BDB and pro-GNA Misratan militias (now under the PC's authority) were also reported: on 18 May 2017, for example, the BDB and the Misratan "Third Force" (the GNA Ministry of Defense's 13th battalion) attacked LNA forces at the Brak al-Shatti airbase in southwestern Libya.

Ibrahim Jadhran's Petroleum Facilities Guards

In the years following the ouster of Qaddafi, the so-called "Petroleum Facilities Guards" (PFG), a militia guided by revolutionary leader Ibrahim Jadhran, was present in various parts of the country and officially tasked with protecting infrastructure, oil wells, and terminals in Libya. Today, the PFG have practically disbanded, but the term is still used to designate the militias, operating mainly in eastern Libya, that remain faithful to Jadran. In 2013, the PFG took control of a number of terminals for oil export in Eastern Libya with the purpose of selling crude. This takeover, which lasted nearly a year, cost the country millions of dollars. On different occasions, the PFG repulsed ISIS attacks on oil infrastructure, and today Jadran supports al-Serraj's GNA and opposes Khalifa Haftar's LNA. In spring 2016, the PFG took part with other militias in GNA-led operations to liberate Sirte from ISIS. The PFG formally remain under the GNA Ministry of Defense, although its local units often operate under their own laws and the group's relationship with the National Oil Corporation has remained tense over the years.

The Libyan Crisis – Chronology of main events

- *February 2011* - Inspired by revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, protests erupt in Benghazi and spread to other cities. Clashes escalate between anti-Qaddafi rebels and security forces.
- *March 2011* - The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorizes a no-fly zone over Libya and air strikes to protect civilians. NATO assumes command.
- *July 2011* - The international Contact Group on Libya recognizes the main opposition group, the National Transitional Council (NTC), as the legitimate government in Libya.
- *October 20, 2011* - Colonel Qaddafi is captured and killed by rebel forces in his hometown Sirte. Plan to hold elections within 8 months are announced by the NTC. In November, Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam is captured.
- *January 2012* - Clashes erupt between former rebel forces in Benghazi, unhappy with the nature of change under the governing NTC.
- *January 23/25 2012* - The so-called "Bani Walid uprising" erupts among inhabitants in former Qaddafi stronghold 100 miles south-east from Tripoli, in particular against former the rebel militia called "May 28 brigade". Rather than a pro-Qaddafi act of "counterrevolution," the uprising is considered an act of frustration addressed at the high-handed behavior of former rebels.
- *March 2012* - From Benghazi, NTC officials in the oil-rich east launch a campaign to establish autonomy for the region, increasing tension with the central NTC in Tripoli.
- *July 7, 2012* - The General National Congress (GNC), a legislative authority, is elected by popular vote. Tasked with transitioning Libya to a permanent democratic constitution, it is given an 18-month deadline to fulfil this goal. Although the National Forces Alliance (NFA), a

coalition led by former leading NTC figure Mahmoud Jibril and regarded as the liberal and secularist option for Libya, wins the most seats in the election (39 seats), the GNC becomes dominated by Islamist factions. In particular, once in parliament, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party boosts its influence through strategic alliances with independents (including Salafis), eventually becoming the strongest bloc in parliament.

- *August 8, 2012* - The NTC hands power to the GNC. Mohammed Magarief of the liberal National Front Party is its chairman and interim head of state.
- *September 11, 2012* - Islamist militants, including Ansar al-Sharia, storm the US consulate in Benghazi, killing US ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.
- *October 14, 2012* - The GNC appoints Ali Zeidan to the post of Prime Minister.
- *May 5, 2013* - The "Political Isolation Law" (PIL) is overwhelmingly passed by the GNC. The law represents a far-reaching attempt to bar former senior members of Qaddafi's regime from holding public office during the country's transition. Critiques of the law, including local and international human rights organizations, criticized the law for being too vague and sweeping, appearing to fit a precarious pattern of post-conflict accountability in Libya characterized by acts of vengeance and one-sided justice aimed at anyone associated with the former regime.
- *May 28, 2013* - GNC Chairman Mohammed Magarief resigns in compliance with the new PIL banning Qaddafi-era officials from holding public office. The GNC elects independent Member of Parliament Nouri Abusahmain, a Berber, as Chairman.
- *August 12, 2013* - Petroleum Facility Guard (PFG) militia blockades Libya's two largest crude oil export terminals, es-Sider and Ras Lanuf, both in the Sirte district.

- *February 2014* - The GNC refuses to disband after its mandate expires. Protests erupt and general Khalifa Haftar appears in televised announcement declaring that the GNC had been dismantled and calling for a caretaker government to oversee new elections. His announcement is dismissed by acting Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, who condemns it as a "coup attempt".
- *March 2014* - Prime Minister Ali Zeidan is sacked by the GNC after a tanker laden with oil from a rebel-held port breaks through a Libyan navy blockade. Businessman Ahmed Maiteeq is elected Prime Minister on 25 May.
- *April 7, 2014* - PFG militia lifts the closure of two oil terminals, Zueitina and Hariga, in the Eastern part of Libya.
- *May 16, 2014* - General Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) launch the "Operation Dignity" offensive against the GNC. The LNA leads a military assault and airstrikes against Islamist militias in Benghazi.
- *May 19, 2014* - Armed groups apparently linked to Haftar's LNA attack the parliament building in Tripoli, suspending its activities and accusing Prime Minister Maiteeq of being controlled by Islamist groups.
- *June 2014* - Prime Minister Maiteeq's appointment is ruled illegal by the supreme court and he resigns. A new parliament is elected (on 25 June) amid a low turn-out and Islamists suffer a heavy defeat. Clashes break out between the new parliament and forces loyal to the outgoing GNC.
- *July 2014* - Security situation deteriorates as Tripoli's Islamists and Misratan militias launch "Operation Libya Dawn" to seize the Tripoli international airport, partially destroyed by fighting. UN staff and foreigners are evacuated and embassies are shut. The Islamist group Ansar al-Sharia seizes control of most of Benghazi.
- *August 25, 2014* - The GNC, whose mandate has expired, is forced to hold elections for a new House of

Representatives (HoR), which takes power and on 4 August. Armed groups linked to the Libya Dawn forces take control of vital institutions in Tripoli and declare that the GNC is once again the national parliament, with Nouri Abusahmain as its president, and announce the resumption of its sessions.

- *October 2014* - UN-brokered talks between the new parliament, the government based in Tobruk, and Islamist Libya Dawn militias holding Tripoli are resumed with visit by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Islamic State (ISIS) forces seize control of the port of Derna.
- *January 15, 2015* - UN-sponsored peace talks in Geneva start. A partial ceasefire is declared in Tripoli.
- *February 2, 2015* - The HoR in Tobruk revokes the “political isolation” law the GNC passed in May 2013.
- *February 15, 2015* - ISIS releases a video showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians on a Libyan beach. Egyptian jets bomb ISIS targets in Derna.
- *March 10, 2015* - ISIS establishes control over the port-city of Sirte and the surrounding region. On 2 March, the internationally backed HoR officially appoints General Haftar as commander of the LNA.
- *December 17, 2015* - Both the HoR and the GNC sign the UNSC-endorsed Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) or “Skhirat Agreement.” Under the terms of the agreement, a nine-member Presidency Council (PC) and a seventeen-member interim Government of National Accord (GNA) are formed, both headed by Fayez al-Serraj, with a view to hold new elections within two years. The Tobruk-based HoR continues to exist as a legislature and an advisory body, to be known as the High Council of State, is be formed with members nominated by the GNC.
- *January 19, 2016* - The UN announces the new, Tunisia-based interim GNA. Neither the Tobruk nor Tripoli parliaments agree to recognize the new government.

- *January 21, 2016* - ISIS attacks Ras Lanuf oil terminal after attacking es-Sider terminal on 9 January.
- *March 30, 2016* - The UN-sponsored GNA arrives in Tripoli by boat because opposing forces block airspaces.
- *April 14, 2016* - UN staff returns to Tripoli.
- *May 2016* - The GNA leads a military campaign to retake the town of Sirte seized by ISIS. Misrata militias constitute the majority of the GNA's military forces in the operation.
- *May 2016* - The Islamist-leaning militia, the Benghazi Defense Brigade (BDB), is formed in Benghazi by former military and police personnel, militiamen, and including hardline Islamists, to oppose Haftar's LNA. It is also known as Saraya Defend Brigade.
- *September 11, 2016* - The LNA seizes the key oil export terminals of Ras Lanuf and Zueitina from the PFG headed by Ibrahim Jadhran. Haftar's forces promise to allow the National Oil Corporation (NOC) to control the ports.
- *September 21, 2016* - First oil cargo leaves Ras Lanuf since 2014, resuming oil exports.
- *September 2016* - Italy announces it will build a hospital in Misrata to support the GNA's military campaign to retake Sirte from ISIS. The hospital becomes operational in October.
- *October 14, 2016* - A coup d'état attempt is conducted by the former Head of the National Salvation Government (NSG) Khalifa Ghwell against the GNA headed by Prime minister Fayeze al-Serraj. The attempt fails.
- *December 10, 2016* - GNA authorities declare that ISIS is defeated and pushed out of Sirte.
- *January 9, 2017* - Italy announces the re-opening of its embassy in Tripoli as part of a broader effort to curb migration from Libya.
- *January 11, 2017* - Haftar is given a tour of a Russian aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean. The event is

understood as a show of Kremlin support for Haftar.

- *January 30, 2017* - Misrata Military Council announces that all of its militias will join the Central Military Zone of “the Libyan Army”, stressing its support for al-Serraj’s PC and opposition to Haftar’s LNA. In the announcement, Haftar is described as a “rogue General”.
- *February 2, 2017* - Al-Serraj meets President of the European Council Donald Tusk in Brussels. On the same day, he meets High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini. Al-Serraj and Italy’s Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni sign a Memorandum of Understanding to combat illegal migration, human trafficking, and contraband and to reinforce the border between Libya and Italy.
- *February 3, 2017* - EU heads of state hold an informal meeting in Malta to address the “external dimension of migration”. Discussion focuses on the Central Mediterranean route and on Libya, in order to step up cooperation with the Libyan authorities to “stem migratory flows, break the business model of smugglers, and save lives”.
- *February 8, 2017* - The HoR issues a statement calling the Memorandum of Understanding signed between Gentiloni and al-Serraj on February 2nd “null and void”.
- *February 9, 2017* - The establishment of the Libyan National Guard (LNG) – an armed force supporting Khalifa Ghwell’s NSG – is announced in Tripoli by chief Brig. Mahmoud Al-Zigal. According to his statements, the LNG will not be linked to any political party and will continue to fight the remnants of ISIS in Libya, protect Libya’s sea and land borders, and fight against illegal immigration. Nevertheless, while supporting Khalifa Ghwell’s administration, it strongly opposes both al-Serraj’s PC in Tripoli and Haftar’s LNA.

- *February 12, 2017* - The PC in Tripoli declares the LNG illegal
- *March 2, 2017* - GNA vice premier Ahmed Maiteeq and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohamed Taha Siala meet with Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Lavrov in Moscow to discuss the Libyan crisis and the possibility of dialogue between the GNA and the HoR.
- *March 3, 2017* - The predominantly Islamist BDB launches an offensive, capturing a strip of territory between the oil ports of Nofaliya and Ras Lanuf from the LNA and hands the territory over to the GNA. Most importantly, the BDB seize control of Libya's biggest oil port, the Sidra terminal.
- *March 13/15, 2017* - Heavy clashes erupt in Tripoli between forces loyal to the GNA and forces loyal to Ghwell's NSG. Headquarters of the NSG in the Rixos Hotel complex are seized, the NSG Tv channel al-Nabaa is shut and burnt down and ultimately, the NSG and Ghwell – slightly injured during the clashes – are forced to leave Tripoli. Subsequently, the NSG and its armed supporters resurface as the GNA struggles to impose its authority, and heavy clashes break out on different occasions.
- *March 21, 2017* - In a statement read by Chief of Misrata Military Council Colonel Ibrahim Bin Rajab, Misrata Military Council, Union of Revolutionary Fighters, branches of the Municipal Council, and Misrata Security Department announce the removal of Municipal Council members after their refusal to sit with the protesters to resolve their differences.
- *April 21, 2017* - Representatives of the GNA and the Tobruk-based HoR, State Council President Abdulrahman Sewehli and President Aguila Saleh respectively, reach an agreement to “stop the bleeding as well as (ensure) the return of displaced persons” following talks in Rome presided over by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Angelino Alfano and attended by the Italian Ambassador to Libya Giuseppe Perrone.

- *May 2, 2017* - The GNA's al-Serraj and Haftar meet in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to hold direct discussions. There is no official statement after the two-hour meeting, the second since al-Serraj was named prime minister-designate after the signing of the LPA in late 2015.
- *May 18, 2017* - A massacre of more than 140 LNA soldiers and civilians is carried out at the Brak al-Shatti airbase in southern Libya by the BDB in a surprise attack coordinated with the GNA defense ministry's 13th Brigade (the re-named Misratan Third Force). The Brak al-Shatti airbase (900 km south of Tripoli and 60 km north of the city of Sabha in Libya's southwest) was taken in December 2016 by the LNA's 12th Brigade from the Third Force, providing the LNA with a useful base for operations in the Fezzan, a region where it had almost no influence up to that point.
- *May 21, 2017* - The LNA retaliates for the Brak al-Shatti massacre in the form of multiple airstrikes by LNA MiG-23 "Floggers" on BDB facilities at the Jufra airbase, civilian targets in the city of Hun (the capital of Jufra district), and bases of Misratan militias that had previously fought ISIS in Sirte.
- *May 27, 2017* - The Islamist armed group Ansar al-Sharia in Libya announces its own dissolution, saying it has been "weakened" by fighting against the LNA in Benghazi and other Islamist groups' stronghold in the country. The dissolution was decided after heavy losses that wiped out its leaders and decimated its fighters, Ansar al-Sharia said, calling on other armed groups in Benghazi to form a united front and continue fighting.
- *June 3, 2017* - Haftar's LNA seizes control of the al-Jufra airbase 500 kilometers south of Tripoli that was occupied by the BDB.
- *June 5, 2017* - Tunisian, Egyptian and Algerian Foreign Ministers meet in Algiers to assess the situation in Libya,

hosted by Algeria's Maghreb, African, and Arab Affairs Minister Abdelkader Messahel, who in April toured Libya to speak with most of the key players.

- *June 11, 2017* - Saif al-Islam Qaddafi, the second son of late Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and his preferred successor, is released in Libya after having been held by a militia in the town of Zintan for six years. He was sentenced to death in absentia by a court in Tripoli in 2015. The HoR eastern Libya offered him amnesty.

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