

GENERAL HAFTAR AND LIBYA'S 'GAME OF MUSICAL CHAIRS'

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Since the ousting of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has fallen victim to a continuous civil war for control of the country's natural wealth. The analogy to the game of 'musical chairs' is defined by international powers vying for influence with the one person with the clearest path to gain control – General Khalifa Haftar. As ally of the elected House of Representatives in Tobruk, the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Haftar has launched a war against the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli.

For those who have only known a Libya ruled by Gaddafi, the notion of a fractured Libya is steeped in history. For centuries it was under the rule of Phoenicians, Romans and sometime later the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Libya has three areas that have evolved separately. These are Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan.ⁱ There are over 140 tribes and clans in these three areas of Libya. According to scholars and researchers, only 30 of these tribes are influential and were close to power during Gaddafi's rule.ⁱⁱ Before calling themselves a Libyan, the average citizen identifies with their clan or tribe (Also known in Arabic as a *banu* – meaning 'descended from').ⁱⁱⁱ If such tribal relationships are taken into account, the eventual winner of this civil war will be one who provides these tribes with assurances that they will have power in a future government.

Forgotten for a number of years, Haftar's re-emergence could only have occurred in the last few years. As Gadhafi's closest ally during the early years, he attended officer's courses called 'Vystrel' at the Former Soviet Union's Frunze Military Academy.^{iv} After being taken as a prisoner of war during a failed campaign in Chad, Gaddafi's rejection directed him to consider other options.

The option he chose was to make his way to the United States and the CIA.^v Today as leader of the Cyrenaicaen LNA, General (now Field Marshal) Haftar might be the one who best understands these internal dynamics given his claim to control two-thirds of the country. Case in point is his promotion of al-Hassa tribesmen. His deputy is former Gaddafi-era Special Forces Officer General Abdesallam al-Hassi. His comrade in exile and military commander of Benghazi Ahmad Salem is another. A third is the former head of intelligence in Cyrenaica Salem al-Hassi. A fourth is Salem al-Hassi's cousin Hamed al-Hassi. As the former head of the Military Council in Cyrenaica, Hamed al-Hassi's role in recruiting former intelligence officers have proven pivotal to the LNA.^{vi} With a military and intelligence cadre that were loyal to Gaddafi for forty years, the transition to Haftar was an easy one.

The center of gravity of the opposition GNA (based in Tripolitania) is the RADA Special Deterrence Force (RADA SDF). RADA is an elite SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactical) type of unit based in Tripoli. Comprised of militia members of 'Madkhali group'-Salafi sect founded by a Saudi Clergy Rabee ad-Madkhali.^{vii} Haftar approached one of the Tripoli commanders of this group, Abd al-Raouf Karah, with the hope of luring him to the LNA^{viii}. The reason why exactly al-Raouf Karah was singled out was due to a leak of a draft GNA proposal to grant the RADA a legitimate status within the new government's Special Forces.^{ix} In June, 2018, Prime Minister al-Saraj made good on the proposal, issuing decree #555 which transformed the status of the RADA SDF into 'The Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism' or DACOT within the Ministry of Interior. Appointed as its head is al-Karah.^x

Both parties are focused on the Fezzan region where the wealth resides. In February 2019, the GNA appointed General Ali Kana, a Tuareg tribesman as military commander in the city of Sebha; located near an oil field which produces over 300,000 barrels per day.^{xi} At the same time, Ali Kana was also promised a position in Haftar's military council.^{xii} Supported by neighboring Algeria, Ali Kana is also a former military officer from the Gaddafi-era.^{xiii} Back in 2016, Ali Kana met with local Tuareg tribes in the town Ghat. Raising the Green Flag to promote the revival of Gaddafi's *Jamahiriya*, allegiance was pledged to Gaddafi's son Jamahiriya Saif al-Gaddafi.^{xiv} At present it is hard to tell which agenda the Tuaregs and in particular Ali Kana favors however their present aloofness appears to be the soundest strategy. What is clear is that the Tuareg tribes and clans are the ones where both insiders and outsiders want to take their seat in the musical chairs game. Haftar is no exception. Knowing Tuareg sentiments for Jamahiriya and Saif al-Gaddafi, Haftar is quoted as voicing no objection for al-Gaddafi to be given a political role.^{xv}

Given these circumstances, Libya's neighbors have every right to be concerned. With Algeria already suffering internal turmoil, spillover is to be avoided at all costs. Egypt on the other hand, is clearly in support of Haftar given Former General and current President el-Sisi's shared dislike of the Muslim Brotherhood. Europe too has interests in Libya. Italy has been involved with Libya since they took it from Ottoman rule in 1911. Italy has always been the main buyer of Libyan gas and oil. In October of last year, Italy's ENI acquired half of BP's shares in Libya's oil and gas assets.^{xvi} France and Great Britain were in control of Libya after Italy's fall in World War II.^{xvii} That is why France in May of 2018 held a Summit in Paris. Instead of participating, Italy organized their own conference in Palermo. The only beneficiary from these conferences have been Haftar. Having secured informal talks with Russian Prime Minister Medvedev, Egypt's el-Sisi and Tunisia's President Essebsi,^{xviii} the fractured diplomacy between France and Italy brought little else. Instead it fueled the impatience of Haftar who ended up launching a campaign against the Tripoli-based government.

Currently Turkey and Qatar support the GNA. In Qatar's case, their support of the Muslim Brotherhood came natural.^{xix} Turkey had extensive business interests in Libya before 2011. At one time there were 214 Turkish construction projects with private investments totaling \$15 billion. When the war broke out, Turkey evacuated its 2500 Turkish nationals.^{xx} Turkey of course is anxious to return but prefers to wait until given assurances by a legitimate government.

The history of Russian energy companies and their partnership with France's Total goes back some 25 years. Total is investing in projects of Novatek in Russia and Novatek Investing on Total's projects in Lebanon, for example.^{xxi} Given the amount of years and money invested these two countries are willing to employ all tools available to protect each others interests. Both countries have vetoed international condemnation of Haftar's campaign against Tripoli. Last Sunday, Russia blocked a UN Security Council statement that would have called on forces loyal to Haftar to halt their advance on Tripoli^{xxii} In turn, France blocked an EU draft resolution condemning Haftar's assault and call for his retreat.^{xxiii} Russia and France are in a position to benefit regardless of who wins. If the conflict continues oil prices stay high. Given Italy's withdrawal of ENI personnel, Rosneft is in the best position to step in. If Haftar wins, Russia will build refineries, rebuild the port of Benghazi and maybe deploy war ships; a prospect that also calms Egypt. Compared to the Turkish-Qatari alliance with GNA, Russia's *troika* with Egypt and the UAE are heavily funding Haftar.^{xxiv} What Russia and France are not burdened with is fishing migrants from the Mediterranean as does Italy and Greece.

The larger question this raises is - What follows? Given his fragile health and advanced age, Haftar's design is for his two older sons fighting alongside him to take it over for him, who are already introduced to Moscow's power elite. While other son takes diplomatic trips to Washington, to help along older brothers.^{xxv} Then again, RADA SDF has a vote in the outcome as well with the greater Madkhali group seizing power in the south. For the time, the music continues as does the circling of chairs.

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