

Anatomy of the Libyan Crisis

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ABSTRACT *In Libya high hopes for change, experienced in 2012 and 2013 after Muammar Qaddafi was overthrown in 2011 by a civil rebellion following a 42-year rule, were lost in the civil war which broke out as a result of a coup attempt in 2014 by Khalifa Haftar. This article aims to investigate the Libyan crisis by taking into consideration the actors involved in the crisis, the causes, bottlenecks and the positions of regional and international actors. The article argues that the Libyan crisis, in a sense, was shaped under the deep impact of the competition experienced among the regional actors in the Arab World following the Arab Spring and suggests that the support for Khalifa Haftar especially provided by some of the countries in the region deepened the Libyan crisis and prevented the Presidential Council established under the leadership of UN Libya Mission from guiding the political transition process in Libya.*

Introduction

Muammar Qaddafi, the Libyan leader deposed in 2011, monopolized the politics, society, economy, culture and even the forms of socialization in Libya during his 42-year rule but the “February Revolution” changed the equilibrium. While Muammar Qaddafi did not allow opposition, he also prevented the middle classes from gaining strength. A small part of the Libyan public opposed Qaddafi and some of them were arrested and jailed or executed whereas others fled abroad to continue their opposition. Large masses of the public that socialized via tribal organizations chose to stay quiet assuming a dormant but stable attitude. The unrest experienced for long years by the Libyan public against Qaddafi turned into a civil uprising with the help of the Arab revolutions that started in 2011. As is the nature of all revolutions, the whole system established during the Qaddafi period collapsed as a result of the civil uprising known as the “February Revolution” by the Libyans; many Libyan elites fled the country and those that stayed behind went underground. The individuals who led the opposition against the Qaddafi regime at home and abroad, the tribes that had to

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The GNC, which is the political front of the religious, political and social groups and their armed extensions that oppose the LPA and the PC, argues for the LPA to be renegotiated and their “revolutionary” demands to be represented more strongly

in the region. The new Libyan actors developed regional alliances with the governments which had differing positions regarding the Arab revolutions and the political engagements necessitated by these alliances affected their political positions in Libya. All the parameters that were determinative in regional politics had an effect on Libyan politics whereas Libya’s historical parameters also affected the developments following the “February Revolution.” Therefore, many local, regional and international actors are determinant in the Libyan crisis which has a complex structure with many interwoven religious, tribal, military and economic parameters. Taking these characteristics of the Libyan crisis into consideration, this article addresses all the actors in the crisis separately and assesses their claims of legitimacy, goals, local and regional allies and international supporters. Overall, the Libyan crisis is examined in the article by addressing the developments in Libyan domestic policy in the framework of regional transformations experienced following the Arab revolutions.

take a backseat during the Qaddafi regime, the leaders of some tribes who had to stay in the background during that period and the youth who demanded change became the new actors of Libya.

As a part of the Arab World, Libya was deeply affected by the developments in the region while the “February Revolution,” a part of the 2011 Arab revolutions, was also deeply affected by the transitions

Political and Military Balance in the Western Region

Presidential Council

The Presidential Council (PC) established in the framework of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA)¹ signed in December 2015 is accepted by international actors as the legitimate authority of Libya. The LPA was signed in Skhirat, Morocco as a result of national agreement negotiations initiated by the UN for Libya, which drifted into a civil war with the coup attempt in 2014 by the retired General Khalifa Haftar. The PC is composed of nine members, the president, five deputy presidents and three ministers, and undertakes its executive functions with the authority obtained from the UN since it has not been approved by the LPA House of Representatives (HR). The PC was not able to enter Tripoli for a long time due to opposition and did not reach the naval base in Abu Sitta, Tripoli until March 30, 2016. The PC established its



Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj speaks during a press conference following his meeting with representatives of Libyan political parties on July 17, 2016 in Tunis.

AFP PHOTO / FETHI BELAID

authority by creating a chain of alliances in Tripoli, but, as will be described below, it is facing serious opposition although it has obtained the support of many actors.

The PC, which does not intend to become aligned to any of the actors in the Libyan crisis, aims to manage the transition process in Libya by receiving the support of all the actors. The PC, which entered into Tripoli as a result of a consensus, wants to achieve the same result in the East of the country. Therefore, it desires to negotiate with the retired General Khalifa Haftar and aims to mastermind the transition process in the whole country by gaining the support of the actors in the Eastern region. Hence, it has avoided any strong reactions to Khalifa Haftar's violations of its own authority. This attitude has resulted in criticisms from both the supporters of and opposition to the PC in the Western region. The PC is facing substantial challenges and there are critical uncertainties regarding its position and future in Libya. The fact that it was not approved by the HR means that the actors in the Eastern region, especially Khalifa Haftar, do not accept it as a legitimate authority. Moreover, the actors in the Western region that reject the LPA do not accept the PC's legitimacy either. Although the LPA is regarded as having executive power with the authority bestowed upon it by the UN, the political framework in which the PC can gain legitimacy has not been activated since the LPA has not been carried into effect. In addition to this there is an independent military administration in the Eastern region, controlled by Khalifa Haftar, which is completely outside the authority of the PC.²

The fact that the HR does not approve the LPA obstructs the foreseen political transition process and therefore the HCS is deprived of mechanisms of implementation that can express the role projected for it in the LPA

Therefore, the PC's legitimacy and executive power on Libyan soil faces serious challenges. Additionally, the PC has failed to make any substantial steps, since taking up this position, to solve problems such as: Libyan dinar losing its value against the dollar six times, serious drops in the purchasing power of the public, increasing value of imported goods, power outages that hinder everyday life, safety and security problems

and political assassinations.³ When all these are considered together, the future of the PC becomes questionable in a political framework in which the LPA is not carried into effect.

The General National Congress and National Salvation Government

The General National Congress (GNC), which took office after the July 2012 elections, was supposed to be transformed into the High Council of State (HCS) according to the LPA; however, a group of parliamentarians refused it and the GNC continued its activities under the same name. The main motivation for GNC members who promote the use of the same name is based on their refusal of the LPA. This group, led by GNC President Nouri Abusahmain and the National Salvation Government (NSG) it appointed –which was led by Khalifa al-Ghawil– consider the HR as illegitimate claiming that the elections held in June 2014 were invalid.⁴ Since the GNC refuses the LPA as well, it regards itself as the sole legitimate authority in Libya.

The GNC, which is the political front of the religious, political and social groups and their armed extensions that oppose the LPA and the PC, argues for the LPA to be renegotiated and their “revolutionary” demands to be represented more strongly. The GNC believes that the LPA has allocated all legislative power to the HR, all executive power to the PC and that the HCS is only a council and therefore it is not fair to the actors in the Western region. At this point, the GNC maintains that a text of agreement should be generated in which the demands of the Western region actors are more strongly represented. Some of the religious leaders, most notably Libyan Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani and some of the revolutionary commanders, are in the same alliance with the GNC. The congress uses the HR's tolerant conduct towards Haftar as a propaganda tool and claims that the HR President al-Sarraj prefers Haftar to the revolutionaries.⁵

Since the GNC and the coalition around it do not have regional or international support, they are day by day evolving into a marginal opposition group.

Both the GNC and the NSG, which were quite powerful in March 2016 before the HR entered Tripoli, weakened when the HR gained strength in Tripoli and the Western region. The fact that the HR gained acceptance in the international arena familiarized the actors in the Western region with it. As such the GNC and NSG started to become isolated and attempts to use military power against the HR were unsuccessful. With no support from regional and international actors, the GNC and NSG started to transform into marginal opponent groups whose sphere of influence shrank and whose ideology sounded empty.

The High Council of State

The High Council of State (HCS) was established in February 2016 by GNC members who accepted the LPA and supported the PC. When the discussions about the acceptance of the LPA inside the GNC became stronger, its members made a political move and founded the HCS thinking that refusing the LPA could be used to marginalize the Western region. The fact that the HCS was established, although the LPA was not carried into effect, can be qualified as a move by the actors in the Western region who desired to gain international legitimacy. The actors who did not have regional or international support, wanted to obtain international support through the LPA and they were successful in their efforts. The HCS has succeeded in becoming one of the prominent actors in Libya. It supports a political transition process led by the PC and aims to create a system in which all social groups participate and the military is under the authority of civil political composition.⁶

The fact that the HR does not approve the LPA obstructs the foreseen political transition process and therefore the HCS is deprived of mechanisms of implementation that can express the role projected for it in the LPA. According to the agreement, the legislative organ is the HR and the executive organ is the PC; the HCS is the advisory council therefore it can play an effective role in the political framework in which the LPA is active. However, since the LPA has not been carried into effect, the HCS has no legislative or executive authority and it is only regarded as an actor due to its political representation. Additionally, the fact that the HCS supports the PC strongly, as they acts in consultation with each other in executive actions, relatively strengthens the HCS' hand.

Security Sector and Politics

The armed groups formed during the revolution were given official titles by the Libyan governments after the revolution and therefore a hybrid security sector was created.⁷ The revolutionary military groups succeeded in becoming determinative actors in the security sector following the revolution since the Libyan Army was weakened during the time of the Qaddafi regime for fear of coup attempts and many of the military personnel did not participate in the fighting. Libyan governments assigned the revolutionary armed groups under the Ministry of Interior by establishing a structure titled "The Supreme Security

Committee” to ensure security in cities. Additionally, “The Shield Forces” were formed under the Office of Commander in Chief to intervene in security problems experienced in different regions of Libya. These military groups, developing with the titles and financial support they received from the government, were strengthened by the addition of more fighters. The PC added another hybrid security entity by creating a different structure called the “Presidential Guard” to protect itself.⁸ In addition, *al-bonyan al-marsous* [a solid structure] forces that fight the ISIS terrorist organization in Sirte are composed of militia commandeered by military officers with the authority given by the PC. Hence, a hybrid security sector, in which the chain of command is fuzziier, has been created in Libya.

The revolutionary armed groups aim to protect their own interests by establishing various political alliances. These military groups which became stronger under the umbrella of the government took root by forming alliances with political and social actors. The political actors in GNC had armed allies in Tripoli and other cities in 2012 and 2013 but these political conflicts transformed into armed conflicts in 2014.⁹ The armed extensions of the political groups in the GNC clashed in the capital Tripoli in mid-2014 and one of these parties had to completely withdraw from the capital. On the other hand, Khalifa Haftar attempted a coup with the militia he commandeered and the HR, which took office with the June 2014 elections, turned the retired general into a political actor by giving him the title of “Commander of Libyan Armies.” All of the military groups that gained power by undergoing these processes are currently in existence on the grounds of the political alliances they are involved with.

Fragmentation of the Libyan security sector prevents the formation of a central security force under the supervision of a civil authority and this fact deepens the crisis in Libya. As expressed before, no political will can venture to reform the security sector since armed actors have been transformed into political actors. The division of Libya into seven military zones¹⁰ with the PC’s latest decision received substantial reactions from the actors in the Eastern region because these actors believe that such a reform would damage their interests in the security sector. The refusal of the actors, who practice politics with weapons, to come together under a civil political structure, or their desire to prioritize their agendas even if they manage to unite, deepens the crisis in Libya.

Religion and Politics

Islamic movements that started as hidden opposition movements during the Qaddafi regime preferred to transform into official political structures after the revolution. The Society of Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the jihadist Libyan (Islamic) Fighting Group organized in Libya in secret since Qaddafi did not allow political opposition. The individuals who went abroad to study or who

participated in the “Afghan jihad” played significant roles in organizing Islamic opposition movements to Qaddafi. The Society of Muslim Brotherhood publicly announced its mission after the revolution. The Justice and Development Party supported by the Society of Muslim Brotherhood participated in the

2012 and 2014 elections and became one of the most significant political actors in Libya. The party is the PC’s most influential supporter and advocates that the crisis in Libya will resolve through dialog. The Libyan (Islamic) Fighting Group annulled itself after the revolution since its aim was to overthrow Qaddafi which was accomplished with the revolution. Most important actors in this group continue their activities in different areas of politics. For instance, one of the leaders of the group Abdul Hakim Belhadj founded the Homeland Party and Khaled al-Sharif, one of the influential names of the group took office as the Deputy Minister to the Secretary of Defense during the Ali Zeidan government.¹¹ Khalifa Haftar, supported by UAE, Egypt and the actors in the Eastern region, try to label all Islamic movements, particularly former members of The Libyan (Islamic) Fighting Group and the MB, as the extensions of al Qaeda or other terrorist groups. However, the majority of the members of Islamic movements have acted in the framework of legitimate politics and compared to other actors they have refrained more from using weapons.

Salafi ideology started to be more widespread after the revolution, transformed into a political actor by intertwining with various interest groups and became a tool for regional intervention. Although it has many interpretations, Salafism can be categorized under four main headings: pure Salafism, Medhali Salafism, political Salafism and jihadist Salafism.¹² The type of Salafism that became widespread in Libya after the revolution was Medhali Salafism. In Libya, Libyan Salafi religious functionaries adopting the religious interpretations of Salafi scholar Sheik Rebi Madkhali, who advocates absolute obedience to the master and regards any form of opposition as non-religious, are called “Madkhalism.” They harshly criticize the Muslim Brotherhood, the Libyan (Islamic) Fighting Group or any other Islamic movements even to the point of accusing them of being non-religious. It is known that the leaders of the most powerful and important armed groups in the capital Tripoli such as Abdul Rauf Kara, Abdul Ghani al-Kikkli and Haitham Tajouri have adopted the Madkhali interpretation of Salafism. Also, it is observed that the number of Salafi religious functionaries has increased in many cities located in the West of the country. Audio recordings, related to fatwas given by Saudi religious leaders for many political and military activities in Libya, have infiltrated the media.¹³ The impact of the religious discourse of Madkhali Salafis which sub-

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stantially corresponds to UAE foreign policy can be observed in Libya, Yemen, Egypt and Tunisia.

Tribes and Politics

The position taken by the tribes in Libya have a significant effect on Libyan politics. The socialization of the tribes in Libya is strongly based on cities. Although there are large tribes that transcend the limits of cities, the founding tribes of particular cities are highly effective in the political positions of those cities. For instance, while the Warfalla tribe is widespread in the whole of Libya, the city of Bani Walid is their center and the members of the Warfalla tribe are not as effective and determinative in other cities. Or, even though there are historically many migrants to Benghazi from the city of Misurata, the native tribes of Benghazi are much more influential there. Hence, when we talk of the cities we are in fact referring to the tribes. The positions of the Libyan cities during the revolution were effective on their political decisiveness following the revolution. For instance, while the cities of Misurata and Zintan, which actively took part in the revolution, emerged as the most important actors in Libya, the cities of Sirte and Bani Walid, which were passive during the revolution, remained in the background after the revolution –especially from 2012 to 2014. The units from Misurata and Zintan with active roles in bringing Tripoli down became effective at the center of Libyan politics by establishing headquarters in Tripoli after the revolution and these leading cities made alliances with other cities to fortify their strength.¹⁴

Misurata, a coastal town with commercial power which played a significant role in the success of the revolution, became one of the most significant and influential political actors after the revolution.¹⁵ The units from Misurata who pulverized the units of Qaddafi in the city played an important role in bringing down the Tripoli based regime and they became the strongest military units in Tripoli subsequent to the revolution. When operations against the GNC started in Tripoli in 2014, parallel to Khalifa Haftar's coup attempt, it was the units from Misurata who protected the GNC and forced the units from Zintan to withdraw from Tripoli. It was the units from Misurata again who cleaned Sirte from ISIS by successfully continuing the struggle against ISIS and barricaded Haftar's progress to the West with the help of military units they kept in Tamanhent air base in the South and in Jufra. Cities such as Zliten, al-Khums, Garyan and Az-Zawiyah adopted the same political position with Misurata and made alliances. In addition, Misuratan politicians have played significant roles during the processes following the Libyan revolution. Currently, the President of the HCS, Abdulrahman Asswehly and PC Vice President, Ahmed Maiteeq are politicians from Misurata. In addition, President of the National Salvation Government, Khalifa al-Ghawil is also a Misuratan politician. Hence it can be said that Misuratan politicians play significant roles in many political structures with differing political stances in the country.

Zintan became an important actor after the revolution but had to withdraw from Tripoli in 2014 and has currently lost its influence in the Western region. The units from Zintan who played substantial roles during the revolution established their headquarters in Tripoli and were in close contact with Mahmoud Jibril, the President of National Forces Alliance who obtained the majority of the GNC in 2012 and 2013 elections. When Khalifa Haftar started the coup attempt in 2014 by threatening the GNC, units from Zintan in Tripoli undertook an operation against the GNC. The Wirshiffana tribe acted with Zintan in this process and supporting their units during the operations in Tripoli. However, they had to withdraw from the capital with the intervention of Misuratan units but formed closer relationships with the actors in the Eastern region while they lost their determinative influence in the Western region. Politicians from Zintan also played significant roles after the revolution. The Minister of Defense in the Zeidan Government, Osama al-Juwaili and Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Interior, Ahmad Dromba are examples of influential politicians from Zintan. The event that brought Zintan to the agenda of the world public agenda was the release of overthrown leader Muammar Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam Qaddafi in June 2017.¹⁶ Even though the city council and the military council declared that they had no connections to Saif al-Islam's release, that event created serious question marks about Zintan's allegiances.



Considering that the most important reason for the lack of HR approval for the LPA is based on protecting the political and military position of Khalifa Haftar, it can be argued that the HR is risking a continuation of crisis and conflict in the country in the name of protecting Khalifa Haftar

Political and Military Balance in the Eastern Region

House of Representatives

The House of Representatives (HR) that took office with the June 2014 elections supported Khalifa Haftar from the very first day and rendered him legitimate. A meeting in Tobruk, initiated by HR who took office with a very low participation –around twenty percent in the 2014 elections– was deemed to be against the constitution when the country slipped into a civil war due to Khalifa Haftar's coup attempt and while violent clashes were continuing in the capital Tripoli and Benghazi. While the Libyan Temporary Constitution stipulated that the HR should take over the duty from the GNC with a ceremony in Tripoli and continue its duties in Benghazi, the HR convened in Tobruk which was under Haftar's control at the time. At first, a minority of HR dele-



Members of the forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar, take cover behind an armored vehicle during clashes in the destroyed city of Benghazi.

AFP PHOTO / ABDULLAH DOMA

gates protested to the HR because of the meeting in Tobruk and their support of Haftar, but during the process, the number of the delegates convened in Tobruk substantially decreased. HR assigned Haftar a position in the Libyan Army in January 2015 by promoting him to a higher rank although during that time Haftar had no legal ties to the Libyan Army and he controlled the region using military methods.¹⁷ The HR promoted Khalifa Haftar as the “General Commander of the Libyan Army” in March 2015,¹⁸ and gave him the title of Marshall. In addition, the HR made efforts in international platforms to lift the weapons blockade against Libya in order to procure weapons for the Libyan Army under the command of Khalifa Haftar.¹⁹

Arguing that it should be the only legitimate authority in the country, the HR asked for the LPA to be changed to ensure that Khalifa Haftar is guaranteed to be the commander of the Libyan armed forces. The HR regards itself as the sole authority in the country asserting that the authority of the GNC ended along with the 2014 elections and that the PC has no official authority since it has not gained the approval of the LPA.²⁰ The LPA has not been approved yet and the changes demanded by the HR to approve the LPA are mostly related to strengthening the military and political position of Khalifa Haftar in the country. The fact that the PC President Fayez al-Sarraj is negotiating with Khalifa Haftar,²¹ rather than with the HR President Salih, to convince the Eastern region shows Haftar’s influence over the enactment process of the LPA.

Haftar who seeks international support for “counter-terrorism” has not directly fought against a terrorist group listed in the international terror list since 2014. In contrast, he targets the Derna and Misuratan military units that pulverized the ISIS terror organization in Derna and Sirte respectively

The HR's lack of approval for the LPA holds up the process of political transition in Libya. At the moment, a political transition process based on the LPA and led by the PC upon which international actors and the regional actors (other than Egypt and UAE) have agreed is regarded to be the most reasonable solution for Libya. Considering that the most important reason for the lack of HR approval for the LPA is based on protecting the political and military position of Khalifa Haftar, it can be argued that the HR is risking a continuation of crisis and conflict in the country in the name of protecting Khalifa Haftar. On the other hand, considering that the majority of HR delegates do not attend HR sessions and convene in Tripoli instead²² and that the number of delegates convening in Tobruk is not even close to one hundred, it can be seen that the HR has diverged from the mission given to it, the mission of representation and procurement of national consensus.

Khalifa Haftar and Military Administration

Khalifa Haftar, who attempted a coup against the legitimate parliament in 2014, has become one of the most important actors in Libya with the approval of the HR and the support of Egypt and UAE. Haftar who was taken to the U.S. by a CIA rescue mission in 1990 after being held captive during the 1987 Chad War lived in the U.S. until 2011. Haftar returned to Libya in March 12, 2012, a month after the Libyan revolution and declared himself the “commander of the revolution armies.” He always had a critical approach to the political authority and presented solutions that involved military administrations.²³ Haftar, who could not find a position for himself in Libyan politics during 2011, 2012 and 2013, stepped into action for a coup attempt at the end of 2013 and read the coup declaration against the GNC in February 2014.²⁴ The fact that Haftar started coup arrangements after the military took over the administration in Egypt and the coup declaration was first read on *Al Arabiya* channel –a channel influenced by UAE and financed by Saudi Arabia– are evidence of the union with which he sought to find suitable ground. As a matter of fact, during the process following Haftar's coup attempt, Egypt and UAE provided him with unlimited support. The deep split among the political elites in Libya in 2012 and 2014 took a different direction with Haftar's coup attempt and the

politicians who were unsuccessful in Tripoli, the officers who believed they were pushed out of the system through the revolution and the Eastern tribes who believed they were treated unfairly progressively aligned themselves with Haftar.

Haftar who highlighted discourse such as “counter-terrorism” and “Libyan Armed Forces,” although he was not able to deepen the issues, wanted to establish a military government in the country. Haftar openly attempted a coup against the legitimate authority in the country in 2014, and he defines himself as the “Commander of Libyan Armed Forces.” However, when the coup was attempted, he was not even assigned to the Libyan Army and Ali Zeydan, the president at the time, defined him as an illegal individual attempting a coup.²⁵ In addition, the military grouping described as the “Libyan Army” is composed of militia commanded by a small cadre of officers because seventy percent of the Libyan Army is connected to the PC and the Office of Commander in Chief in Tripoli. Haftar who seeks international support for “counter-terrorism” has not directly fought against a terrorist group listed in the international terror list since 2014. In contrast, he targets the Derna and Misuratan military units that pulverized the ISIS terror organization in Derna and Sirte respectively. While he affects political decisions with the pressure he applies on HR, the latest statement to the politicians in his country included the information that “the politicians will be given a grace of six months after which the Libyan army will say what is necessary.”²⁶ Therefore, he has signaled for the full transition to military rule in the area he controls.

Haftar, who cannot possibly control the whole country in military terms, is one of the main reasons for the deepening of the Libyan crisis and the lack of solutions. As expressed, despite the full support of UAE and Egypt, the military elements in the Western region displayed a much better performance compared to Haftar. In addition to protecting their area on two fronts –one internal and the other external– the Western region excluding Zintan and Wirshiffana took a complete stance against Haftar, both in military and civil terms. Additionally, the military government mission represented by Khalifa Haftar has not been reciprocated yet in the Western region and it is not likely to be supported and approved in the short or medium terms either. Therefore, the military methods in Libya imposed by Haftar and support of some tribes in the Eastern region has not created any sustainable solutions but rather deepened the Libyan crisis.

Tribes and Politics

The tribes in the Eastern region support Haftar to a great extent.²⁷ The majority of the deputies, notably including HR President Aguila Saleh, attending HR meetings held in Tobruk belong to Eastern tribes. Additionally, many of the militia units commanded by officers under Khalifa Haftar belong to Eastern

tribes as well. On the other hand, unsolved assassinations of tribe leaders who do not support Khalifa Haftar or openly criticize him²⁸ demonstrate the oppression being experienced in the Eastern region.

Tribes that support Haftar demand a more decentralized political system by making changes to the LPA in favor of the Eastern region. Establishment of a Tripoli-centered political system by the overthrown leader Qaddafi and lack of inclusion of the Eastern region, especially Benghazi, in the political system as well as insufficient infrastructure investments has disturbed the tribes of that area. The fact that almost no steps were taken by Libyan governments after the revolution regarding the problems of the Eastern region damaged the trust for the government felt by the tribes in the East. Since the country's politics focused on conflicts in Tripoli after the revolution and no steps were taken to solve the country's economic, social and service related problems, the Eastern cities' trust for Tripoli centered politics was damaged. In these circumstances, when Haftar attempted a coup in the Eastern region, the tribes started to support him in order to fulfill their expectations from the governance of the country. However, the differentiation between Khalifa Haftar and Eastern tribes' goals and desires would cause disintegration of the upcoming process.

Since the country's politics focused on conflicts in Tripoli after the revolution and no steps were taken to solve the country's economic, social and service related problems, the Eastern cities' trust for Tripoli centered politics was damaged

Religion and Politics

Khalifa Haftar has put pressure on the religious functionaries who oppose him, but he is supported by Salafi groups. Sadiq al-Ghariani who played an important role in the Libyan revolution and later became the Libyan Mufti has a distinguished religious education. Al-Ghariani who openly opposes Haftar was removed from duty by the HR. However, the Office of the Mufti did not implement the decision since it does not regard HR as a legitimate authority. Al-Ghariani has substantial influence over the religious representatives in Libya and many of the traditional religious leaders in the Eastern region have followed al-Ghariani's political position and did not support Haftar. In response, Haftar put pressure on the religious functionaries and mosque imams to leave Benghazi. These imams were replaced with ones who had adopted the Madkhali interpretation of Salafism. Sheikh Rabi al-Madkhali gave a fatwa in July 2016 to his followers to join Khalifa Haftar.²⁹ Salafi Sheikh Osama al-Otaibi, a substantial contact point between Saudi Arabia and Khalifa Haftar defended the military operations held in the Eastern region.³⁰ It is known that Mahmud al-Warfalli Salafi enforced the heaviest executions in Benghazi in the name of Haftar.³¹ Hence, Madkhali Salafism, which adopted a religious

discourse parallel to the foreign policy of notably Saudi Arabia and UAE in Yemen and Egypt, also took sides with Haftar in Libya.

Revolutionaries

Benghazi Revolutionaries, the armed revolutionary groups organized against Haftar under the name of the Shura Council and Benghazi Defense Brigades in the Eastern region, were weakened to a great extent in the war that lasted two years. The armed revolutionary groups established in Benghazi during the revolution opposed Haftar from the very beginning. These groups assembled under the name of “Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council” have fought against Haftar since the middle of 2014. However, those groups, whose contact with the other regions was cut off due to Haftar’s siege, lost their power during the process and Haftar gained complete control of Benghazi. Haftar who obtained the control of Ghanfuda region intensified the operations against the last two regions controlled by the revolutionary groups in Benghazi: al Sabri and Souk al Hout.³² The forces under Haftar announced that they had gained complete control of Benghazi in June 6.³³

The Benghazi Defense Brigades are the Libyan officers and soldiers organized under the command of Mustafa al-Sharkasi.³⁴ The officers in the Eastern region who did not agree to Khalifa Haftar’s political or military vision deployed in Jufra under the command of Mustafa al-Sharkasi and headed to take control of Benghazi a few times albeit unsuccessfully. They had to withdraw from Jufra as a result of operations against them by units under the command of Haftar.

The revolutionaries, who demand that the civilians that were forced to migrate are allowed to return to their homes and requested Haftar’s withdrawal from the military and political arena, have had their activity restricted by the propaganda carried on local, regional and international arenas labelling them as terrorists. Egypt and UAE backed media institutions and supporters, especially the pro-Haftar Libyan media describe the armed groups in Benghazi and the Benghazi Defense Brigades as “terrorists.” While there is no clear information or evidence linking these groups with global terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, it is clear that the Benghazi Defense Brigades in particular are composed of Libyan officers. In his last statement, al-Sharkasi expressed that he was ready to abolish the group “due to the possible dangers that may be caused by the smear campaign against the Defense Brigades” and to undertake any mission given to him by the Libyan Government.³⁵

Terror and Counter-Terrorism

Concepts of “terror” and “counter-terrorism” have been converted into arguments used by political actors in Libya to gain legitimacy. The cluster of con-

cepts such as “terror,” “support for terrorism” and “counter-terrorism” used by regional and international actors to legitimize all their moves in the Middle East and North Africa has become a means for pro military government individuals in Libya to achieve legitimacy. Khalifa Haftar strives to present himself to

Instability caused by the ongoing political crisis may provide opportunities for terror organizations to gain power in Libya where an active threat of terror does not currently exist

international actors as the leader of counter-terrorism. However, it was observed that Haftar never fought against the existence of ISIS in Derna and Sirte. Haftar’s forces even blockaded the city of Derna and the revolutionaries there who had thrown out the ISIS terror organization from their city. Currently, the ISIS terror organization only exists in the country in small groups; however, forces under Khalifa Haftar do not perform operations against these groups. It is mostly, military forces under the PC that fight against these groups. Despite these facts, Khalifa Haftar is striving to represent himself as the “leader of counter-terrorism” and strangely enough, some regional and international actors accept this discourse as accurate.³⁶

The ISIS terror organization emerged in Derna and Sirte and was neutralized by revolutionaries from Derna and forces from Misurata.³⁷ The most important factor allowing the ISIS terror organization to gain ground in Derna was related to the fact that it is a mountainous area as well as one of the main centers of Islamic opposition since the Qaddafi period. A large number of warriors from Derna joined the “Afghan Jihad” and “Iraqi Jihad” and were intertwined with global jihad circles; some of the Libyan jihadists obeyed ISIS when it first appeared and announced an “ISIS Caliphate” in Derna. Since the city was distant from the political discussions in Libya in 2012, 2013 and 2014 and the Libyan security forces were weak, ISIS was able to get firmly established. However, when the threat of ISIS became more pronounced in the area, Derna revolutionaries threw the group out of the city and ISIS warriors went to Sirte to join other cells. Sirte, the city Qaddafi’s tribe belongs to, was pushed out from the central political arena after the revolution. As can be seen in the Derna example, the warriors who joined the “Afghan Jihad” and “Iraqi Jihad” were organized in the city after the revolution and being distant from the geographical center of Libyan politics enabled the organization to gain power there. However, when ISIS’ area of impact became widespread towards the end of 2015, the coalition established under PC particularly forces centered in Misurata cleared ISIS from Sirte in 2016.

Instability caused by the ongoing political crisis may provide opportunities for terror organizations to gain power in Libya where an active threat of terror does not currently exist. As expressed, the transformation of armed ac-

Then U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, Italian FM Paolo Gentiloni and special representative for the UN Martin Kobler, attend an international meeting on Libya, on December 13, 2015 in Rome.

AFP PHOTO / TIZIANA FABI



tors to political actors is delaying the security sector reform in Libya and that hinders the holistic handling of counter-terrorism. The political crisis, caused by political actors' turning to counter-terrorism arguments in order to gather legitimacy for themselves, creates social fractures from which terror organizations are fed. The ideological discourse used by terror is spreading rapidly. Considering that the mobility of terror organizations increased in the Sahara region and that small ISIS groups are activated in Libya, it becomes evident that local, regional and international actors should take comprehensive measures.

The Regional and International Dimensions of the Crisis

Strong support provided to Khalifa Haftar by UAE and Egypt continues to hinder the implementation of LPA in Libya and administration of the country by the PC. UAE's financial and logistic support and Egypt's military and political support were determinant in Haftar's high-pressure military dominance over Benghazi and its surroundings and his oppression over civil politics.³⁸ HR brought "the Libyan Army is our red line" discourse into prominence and has not yet approved of LPA in order to protect Haftar's military and political future in Libya. The constriction of the political transition process over HR in the name of protecting Haftar deepens the crisis in Libya. Intervention against Libya in the framework of UAE and Egypt foreign policy priorities may preclude the solutions of the UN Support Mission in Libya.

The fact that the UN Support Mission in Libya does not adopt a clear attitude towards Haftar's violations of the HR and institutions related to it deepens the Libyan crisis. In the first place, Haftar does not allow the PC, Government of National Accord (GNA) or related institutions to enter the East of the country. Ultimately, Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani appointed by the HR gave instructions for the arrest of GNA ministers if they enter the Eastern region.³⁹ Additionally, military troops under Khalifa Haftar carry out operations against military troops under the command of the GNA in Tamanhent air base in the South, Jufra and the Oil Crescent region, forcing these troops to leave their positions. Moreover, the military operations performed inside Benghazi are conducted against and contrary to the commands and instructions of GNA's Ministry of Defense and Office of Commander in Chief. If the UN Support Mission in Libya recognizes PC as the official authority of Libya, all of Haftar's actions are illegal and urgent measures need to be taken against him. If, on the other hand, the UN Support Mission in Libya does not recognize PC as the official authority of Libya, the activities of the UN Support Mission in Libya lose the foundation of their legitimacy. This contradictory attitude of the UN Support Mission in Libya deeply erodes the parameters of legitimacy in Libya.



The fact that actors such as the U.S. and France regard Haftar as “a part of the solution” makes a solution more difficult

The fact that actors such as the U.S. and France regard Haftar as “a part of the solution” makes a solution more difficult. Considering that up to now, the only solution that the UN has reached as a result of negotiations in Libya is a political transition process and it can be said that this political solution is itself chiefly constricted by the HR and Haftar. At this point, the question that comes to mind is what kind of a solution can Haftar be a part of? The Libya envisioned by Haftar can be clearly seen knowing that Haftar emerged with a coup attempt against the legitimate government, established a military regime at the East of the country and restricted the movements of HR. A civil political transition process does not seem possible with Khalifa Haftar's Libya vision centered on military solutions. In addition, it is evident that almost all the actors in the Western part of the country will not accept a solution that will answer Haftar's military regime demands. It is also evident that Haftar will not accept a political solution that will resolve the anxiety experienced by the actors in the Western region. Furthermore, considering the fact that Haftar is an actor that has gained ground with the support of Egypt and UAE, it becomes questionable to even feel obligated to regard him as a part of the solution. However, it is clear that international actors will not try to find another name over which local actors in the Eastern region will be able to agree. Under these circumstances, the efforts to transform Haftar, who is the cause of the problem, into a part of the solution deepen the Libyan crisis.

Conclusion

Regional interventions have been considerably effective in intensifying the Libyan crisis. Following the Libyan revolution in 2011, the Libyan public largely participated in the July 2012 elections; the first democratic elections in the country since independence. The GNC, selected as result of these elections, was approved by all sections of the Libyan public who had high hopes for the congress to ensure that the country, ruled by dictatorship for 42 years, would return to democracy and modern institutions. However, deep political polarizations were experienced in the GNC in 2012 and 2013 while almost no steps were taken to rebuild the Libyan State. The Zeidan Government appointed by the GNC did not even attempt to continue the half completed projects left from the Qaddafi period at a time that witnessed political conflicts. The political groups in GNC formed coalitions by intertwining with armed revolutionary groups in different cities especially Tripoli while a deep social and economic crisis started to manifest itself. The country was being pulled into a deep crisis in which the GNC was used as a tool for the political conflicts of the regional actors' local allies. When the politicians that allied with the UAE were politically unsuccessful the coup attempt led by Khalifa Haftar, who received the complete support of the UAE and the military regime in Egypt, caused the country to drift into civil war. Khalifa Haftar who obstructed the LPA and PC established by the UN Support Mission in Libya to lead Libya's political transition process and to rescue the country from civil war is strongly

supported by UAE and Egypt led by Sisi. The unlimited support of UAE and Egypt to Haftar affects the domestic balance in Libya and hampers the political transition process guided by the PC.

The Presidential Council may be able to guide the solution if it is sufficiently supported by international actors

The biggest obstacle blocking the solution of the Libyan crisis is the military government established by Khalifa Haftar. To claim that "Haftar is a part of the solution" means no solution whatsoever. If the Libyan Political Agreement created with the guid-

ance of the UN Support Mission in Libya is an agreement over which international actors have agreed, Haftar has to accept being a part of it. However, as expressed before, Haftar is the one who obstructs the implementation of the LPA and prevents the PC from guiding Libya towards finding a solution. Looking at it from this point of view, it is clear that Haftar does not want to be a "part of the solution." On the other hand, what transforms Haftar into an actor is not any legitimacy that he has but the support provided to him by UAE and Egypt contrary to the international agreement. Taking the foreign policy goals of UAE and Egypt in the region into consideration, it is evident that they will not refrain from deepening the conflicts in Libya. Hence, saying that "Haftar is a part of the solution" causes a deepening of the crisis in Libya.

The Presidential Council may be able to guide the solution if it is sufficiently supported by international actors. A more rapid and uncomplicated solution can be found by supporting the Presidential Council to control the country as a whole instead of claiming that “Haftar is a part of the solution.” The PC can fortify its power if no authority is recognized in the country other than itself in terms of the political, economic and military authority. All actors should be regarded as illegal and sanctions imposed when they act outside the decisions taken by the PC and sanctions should be imposed on regional actors that address parties other than the PC. Supporting the PC to activate projects that will fulfill the daily needs of the Libyan public will increase public support for the PC and it will block their path to other actors that deepen the lack of solutions. Therefore, international actors led by the UN Support Mission in Libya should provide the PC with the support it deserves. ■

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