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**Interview with Fraser Grice and Anandeep Sandhu, Libya Desk Officer (Security and Sanctions) North Africa Unit, MENAD, FCDO, UK, London, January 9.**

Having a single unified gov to work with is still fundamental goal. (but at the moment having more a focus on security than the overall political process).

However, you can draw similarities when ISIS had stronghold in Libya. Isis was predominant threat so leaned into security. Similar situation with Russia, they are so obstructive and entrenched with Libya we have to address the threat. Political process slow for a while.

**Doing a re-hash of our policy. Titling as State, to look at Russia as fundamental pillar of Libya policy. But that is where we are t… migration threat another big priority going forward for UK. Libya is a key transit node, instability is a key, smuggling, gangs, etc, … more of a case of going to Europe (from or through Libya) and they (the threats) might transit to UK.**

**Different ways Russian activities in Libya are a threat**

How else frame migration threat? Bit of an enabler for other threats. For better or worse, politicians do have particular political game, debate around that.

What is Russia doing… predominant threats in Libya, Russia predominant threat. Threat to UK, they use Libya as a node for influence to sub-Saharan Africa and goal to expand that further. In parallel they get opportunity to threaten NATO on southern flank. Esp with Syria downfall, they are moving ops to Libya. Next best option for Russians is Libya bc already embedded. Regional threat is worry for us. Russia an **unreliable partner**, just look at Mali and Russian support to CT. Russians not dealing with that threat. Ineffective Russian partnership. Wider voice in the international community sympathetic to Russia should they plot up dictators. Then an African nations where significant number of **votes on general assemblies**. Then on the **migration**, you have ability to manipulate what is going on migration wise, possibly facilitating established routes through Libya. If that becomes apparent, they are willing to do that you have **some NATO members susceptible to pressure. In return for migration they might gain concessions elsewhere**.

**Resource pillaging.**

**Illicit economies**, how Africa corps and Russia using those channels to evade sanctions. What is the impact of that, how is it effecting the Ukraine war, how is that working against wider uk objectives and wider region, where flows going. A lot in the illicit trade.

**Oil swap, Libya has fuel swap**. The Russians can export refined oil into Libya, Libya has few refineries, so Libya can use for own conception or rediverted to sell as Libyan oil. The swaps program could swap for crude, that Libyan crude can be refined in Russia and exported.

Bloomberg cited with century, 5 billion dollar industry.

Russia also active in reestablishing and furthering oil company in Libya. Bp interest, Italians have interests, Spanish, so there is economic threat. As Libya being exploited by Russia might become sympathetic.

**Russian activity**

So in terms of what Russia actively doing. East where based and south and recently est embassy in Tripoli. So two types of activity. In east uptick post pergozin death**, a number of air bases, allows them to take in equipment from Syria and funnel into Libya** and **support Sahelian dictators**. Op in Sahel trying to provide security… for Mali, need fuel, sustenance and equipment and Libya is the node for funneling that down.

In turn for that you have LNA getting what they want in return. A significant amount of equipment from Russians in exchange to exploit eastern Libya. The Russians provide sufficient incentive that they may provide access to port of Tubrook.

In the east Russia also had printed counterfeit dinars to pay for activities. Central bank divided for a while so **Russians flooded economy in east with fake dinars** and that went over. That was billions of dinars they sent into.

If they have a base in the **Port of tubrook (sp?) that would give Russia naval presence** in Mediterranean. (which we definitely do not want)

I wonder whether … they use **Libyans as training ground for Ukraine, I don’t know. Some telegram channels hinted troop rotations**.

Since opening of embassy a lot of soft diplomatics that leans on narrative Russian here to support Libya and sovereignty and security and that is narrative of ambassador as well as trying to support cultural links.

**British policy?**

We are going through a **refresh at moment**, **pivoting policy toward Russia but also not taking our eye off the ball of political process**. It is definitely a difficult one, tackling this through policy. **Trying to provide a broad security offer to Libya to not occupy same space that Russia does but to show Libyans that there is an alternative to the Russian orbit**.

**Arms embargo?**

Yes. There are exceptions to arms embargo, can provide certain amount of training, under consideration with US colleagues and might modify that to make it easier to provide such support but we have to get that through security council. So Russia might veto.

**Why would Russia not veto?** It goes against Russian narrative of Libyan sovereignty. So if they veto it shows Russia a sticky partner and hard to get rid of the monster in bed with them.

(off the record – don’t mention Moonkin). Have been considering,… constrained by resource. **The information space, we have looked at, but multiple things from stuff you discussed with MOD to resilience among Libyan civil society. We had project with MoonKin, how you strengthen resilience among civil society in Libya for mis/disinformation**.l. (OFF THE RECORD?). Check with Frank on what they did.

Where we thinking about intervention, Russia exploiting Libyan economy, think that will be a good landing zone bc it dispels Russia is interested in Libya.

**One thing we struggle with info ops, is how you measure impact. When you come up with something you put it to a board, also a lot of money bc have to sustain it for significant amount of time. To justify that is hard with resource env. That is why more linkage with us and France.**

**We have not had the funding, once we have the policy refresh that should open our options.**

**Also another one where we had ppl analyzing information space so we could see what actors were doing what.**

**(one goal is to provide offer to the east while sowing discontent with Russia**) What it should be, with the us and security initiatives, they also target the east. Ideally want to say, look, **say to individuals in east you want to east, say to the population in the east, the us is here offering you guys your security and sovereignty but your leaders are still intertwined with the Russians. Want to create discontent among the population so more pressure on elites in the east to lean off Russian support. And take what is offered by like minded.**

Go to impact of info ops. You need to take a wholistic approach, fundamentally there are several issues in Libya beyond what we can do just from info ops perspective. Ppl still have economic issues, social issues that can’t be solved. The thing we need to keep in mind, Russia offering something which is almost like not needed, but offering things that the local people don’t want. Meeting their needs on a basic level. The military leaders but also the narrative in the country is highly influential in the local population and that is

**You need the resources and need to offer something substantive (to those in the East). The opposite, if not willing to do that, then need to focus on stirring discontent with Russia.**

The UN process in Libya. Without the UN process you have no semblance of progress toward unified gov. the semblance of the UN doing something and pushing the politics is still quite key. When we spoke about this internally **we had considerations of how to use info campaigns to protect the reputation of the UN. If reputation of un deteriorates and is utterly useless then more of a chance at instability and Russian exploitation**. So something to protect statusa. Even if not… making sure the integrity of the un is preserved is key.

**How stable in the west?** Status quo that elites are trying to make stable. Often misquoted as a sustainable undesirable status quo. But lots of little things going on to change balance of power through patronage networks… fragile status quo. Massive oil shock. So not stable at all. The gno rely on patch work of militias and patch groups and those are not aligned on each other. Have armed group commanders gifted pieces of gov as rewards.

We have often questioned, five years ago, said military commanders in the west, anti Kaddafi, military dictator type ppl. Always been hope that no matter what these commanders will not get into bed with Russia. But not an uneasiness…

**Can we travel to Libya?** I was there for a month. We have to have armed vehicles, on a compound, need security detail. In Tripoli, the risk is that you are in the wrong place wrong time. Noone is out to get a UK diplomat… the patch work of militias is wrong.

**Meet with hosts: only issue is if puts people at risk.**

**Meet with government folks?** I wonder whether the gnu would be receptive to that. They arrested Russians in Tripoli, Russian intel ops. The prime minister staunchly came out against Russia. If you talk to ppl at post, give some advice on whether anyone in the gnu on how to identify this malign activity or provide a Libyan message.

**UNDP does a lot with Libya.**

Reinforcing point you made, in the Libyan context **it makes sense to combine the resilience building piece with the pointier, like info ops. It doesn’t make sense to focus on one or the other.**

Need to put resource behind actual policy.

Anti corruption, close space that Russia can exploit. How can we enable more transparency in gov budgets that allows less corruption. That is the incremental thing we should be doing to provide resilience across Libya so it is not exploitable. Challenge you have eastern and western economies.