

Foreign Actors in Libya's Conflict: Actions and Interests

The Libyan Civil War is a prolonged conflict that began in 2014 and is part of a longer period of revolution, violence, and political reconstruction originating in 2011. Despite efforts by the UN to transition the Libyan state into a functioning democracy, the country is currently home to hundreds of loosely aligned militias, gangs, extremist organizations, and ethnic alliances who generally fall under the rule of two competing governments within its borders. While violent and complex on its own, this conflict has been artificially prolonged by the interference from foreign powers who each seek to play a role in shaping the new Libya. This interference has emerged as two separate rivalries. The first – between Italy, France, and Russia – is largely fought for each country's economic and geopolitical gain. The second – between Qatar, the UAE, and Egypt – is fought for regime security and over the future role of Islamists in regional governments. Considerable work has been done to analyze the impact and incentives of foreign actors in the Libyan conflict, but much of it has either been dated by changes on the ground or limited by narrowness of scope. As the conflict appears to be reaching a turning point, this paper seeks to provide an up to date map of foreign interests in Libya and to show that a potential reordering of factional power in the conflict is causing foreign parties to double down on their efforts rather than withdraw. Each foreign power concentrates its efforts on one of the two Libyan governments.

In the West, the existence of the UN recognized Government of National Accord, or GNA, in Libya is a result of a transition process that started immediately after the Libyan revolution. Even before the fall of Qadhafi, prominent Libyans formed a National Transitional Council that oversaw the ratification of an Interim Constitutional Declaration. Intended to be temporary, the declaration remains today as the supreme law of the land until a permanent constitution can be ratified¹. The NTC also organized the first general elections in the country since the 1950s that were by all international accounts fair and transparent, resulting in the first elected temporary Libyan government: the General National Council. However, when elections were held again in 2014 to form a permanent body, the House of Representatives, holdouts from the previous GNC disputed the results of the election ruling them unconstitutional and refusing to recognize the legitimacy of the new government². Finally, in December of 2015, the United Nations and GNC worked together to sign the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) and formed a new inclusive government called the Government of National Accord. Since the signing of the LPA, the GNA has been the UN recognized body governing Libya³.

While territorial control in Libya is in many ways subjective, as well as subject to rapid change, the GNA territory can be expressed as the territory held by the various militias in the north-western part of the country with which it is currently aligned. Headquartered in Tripoli, the GNA effectively rules a span of coastal territory from Qadhafi's hometown of Sirte in the east to the city of Wazzin and the Wazzin border crossing in the west. The government also has reasonably secure rule over the strategic cities of Misrata and Gharyan⁴ and intermittently

¹ Congressional Research Service. *Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy*. Washington: U.S LOC, 2018

² Ibid.

³ Wehrey, Frederic. *The Burning Shores* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2018), 75.

⁴ Alsharif, Asma. "Eastern Libyan forces advance to position near town of Gharyan". Reuters (Apr. 4, 2019)

operates the Mitiga and Misrata airports⁵. Asserting GNA control over territory is a dubious proposition as the lack of a unified army means that the government has essentially no way to independently assert its authority. By all accounts, the mission of the GNA is to consolidate sovereignty over all of Libya's territory, unify the various militias into a legitimate army, and continue to hold fair elections that are recognized by the Libyan people. Unfortunately for Libyan citizens, GNA leaders have had essentially no success at fulfilling these objectives in recent years.

In the East, the disputed House of Representatives has continued operations out of the city of Tobruk and expanded its rule through conquests and partnerships led by General Khalifa Haftar. A once disaffected military officer under Qadhafi and leader of an unsuccessful post-revolution coup, Haftar has returned to Libya's political scene as the commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA)⁶. In 2014, Haftar gained the support of the leaders of several armed groups in eastern Libya by tapping into common grievances – namely anti-Islamic sentiment and eastern feelings of exclusion⁷. By waging what he called Operation Dignity and opposing the extension of the GNC mandate, he received backing from the National Forces Alliance, the anti-Islamist Zintani militias, and former regime politicians who had been forced out by Political Isolation Laws⁸. Since then, his Operation Dignity campaign has wrestled control of major population centers and the majority of Libya's land area. While Haftar's forces are technically under the authority of the HOR, his disavowal of civilian military control and incendiary rhetoric closely mirror that of Egyptian authoritarian General Abd al-Fattah al-Sisi. If Haftar's forces manage to conquer the remaining territory held by the GNA, he will likely subjugate the authority of the HOR to military control and emerge as the new leader of the Libyan people.

While the territorial control of the HOR is similarly subject to the rapidly changing allegiances of Libya's numerous armed groups, it credibly holds claim to the majority of the nation's land area. Headquartered in the eastern city of Tobruk, Haftar's forces have wrested control of the strategic cities of Benghazi and Derna, a notable achievement in cities who have for decades been hubs of Islamist groups and Islamic radicalism. Haftar's control extends along the coast to the towns of Kofaliya and Harawa on the Sirte Desert, westward to the Egyptian border, and down to the sparsely populated borders of Sudan, Chad, Niger and Algeria⁹. In the west it controls the desert town of Ghadames and the Ghadames border crossing into Algeria as well as the northwestern town of Zintan whose strong militias are pivotal in driving out the Islamists. Special military units guard the Sarir oil fields in the east and the el Sharara and el Feel oil fields in the west who combined produce on the order of 700,000 barrels of crude oil per day and comprise the majority of proven Libyan oil reserves¹⁰. Contrary to the GNA, the LNA is unified and has shown considerable progress in expanding its territory and eliminating rivals. Haftar's

⁵ Assad, Abdulkader. "Libya's Interior Ministry seized Iranian ship at Misrata port". *Libya Observer* (Apr. 27, 2019)

⁶ Cole, Peter, Brian McQuinn. *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 123.

⁷ Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, 173.

⁸ Ibid. 174.

⁹ Assad, Abdulkader. "Sirte celebrates second anniversary of liberation from ISIS". *Libya Observer* (Dec 17, 2018)

¹⁰ Wardany, Salma. "Libya Fighting Has Erupted Again: Here's the Oil Impact". *Washington Post*. (Apr. 16, 2019)

core belief is that the Muslim Brotherhood, jihadists, and other politically motivated Islamists must be defeated and that a unified, military led government is necessary to achieve this¹¹.

The internationalization of the Libyan civil war is in large part a result of a larger trend of Gulf states increasing their regional involvement and developing active foreign policies¹². Beginning in 2011, the GCC states initially pursued a unified Libya policy. Qatar and the UAE cooperated to provide operational support for the rebels while enjoying open Saudi approval. Even the Omanis, who enjoy much less disposable income by far, channeled humanitarian support to Abadi communities in the Nafusa Mountains¹³. This cooperation, however, was eroded in the following years by competing economic interests, divergent views on the Muslim Brotherhood, and exacerbated tensions from the Egyptian presidential election that resulted in the Gulf boycott of Qatar¹⁴.

Qatar thus has multiple incentives to actively intervene in the Libyan conflict. First and foremost, Qatari leaders foresee the rise of Islamist political forces as a result of increased democratization in the Middle East¹⁵. Given that the Qatari royal family does not feel threatened by Islamist forces at home, and given Qatar's lack of partners in the region following the GCC boycott, the support of the Muslim Brotherhood, Islamist, and even Jihadist organizations in Libya makes sense as a piece of a Qatari grand strategy that seeks to cultivate friendly governments in the region. Second, Qatari organizations have made investments in Libya's future that it sees as worth protecting. In 2012, the Qatar National Bank purchased a 49% stake in Libya's Bank of Commerce and Development before selling it off several months ago¹⁶. The Qatar Investment Authority has lasting joint ventures with the Libyan Development and Investment Company and the Libyan Economic and Social Development Fund that date back to before the revolution¹⁷. These joint ventures resulted in multiple tourism projects that attempted to bring Gulf style luxury to Libya's shores, though the conflict has understandably put this on hold. The summation of Qatar's newfound foreign policy ambition and its economic interests in Libya have thus led to a concerning pattern of interference in the Libyan conflict that has supported some of the worst actors in the country.

The first troubling sign of Qatari intervention was the Qatari royal family's support of Abd al-Hakim Belhaj in the 2011 Libyan elections. Belhaj is the founder of the conservative al-Watan political party and a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group where he developed a real, but unclear, relationship with al Qaeda¹⁸. Since then, Qatar has continued to support some of the most radical Islamist and Muslim Brotherhood affiliated groups in the nation. Qatar has provided funding to armed groups through institutions in Misrata and has, with the help of Turkish contacts and Sudanese aircraft, smuggled weapons through the Misrata airport and the

¹¹ "France and Italy Each Go Their Own Way in Libya". STRATFOR (Sep 5. 2018)

¹² Mezran, Karim, Arturo Varvelli, Tarek Megerisi, Saskia Van Genugten, Mattia Toaldo, Andrea Beccaro, Ben Fishman, et al. "Foreign Actors in Libya's Crisis". Atlantic Council (2017), 54.

¹³ Van Genugten, "Foreign Actors in Libya's Crisis", 49.

¹⁴ Ibid. 54.

¹⁵ Ibid. 55.

¹⁶ "Libya: Qatar's QNB sells shares in Bank of Commerce & Development". The North Africa Post (Feb. 5, 2019)

¹⁷ Ibid. 50.

¹⁸ Watanabe, Lisa. "Islamist Actors: Libya and Tunisia". Center for Security Studies (Jul. 2018).

Libyan desert¹⁹. According to LNA reports, Qatar “supported the assassination of senior officials, facilitated training of Islamist extremists by Hamas, and helped transport Libyan Islamists to Syria”²⁰. The oppositional coalition consisting of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, and Egypt issued a list of accused terrorists which identified 59 individuals and 12 entities linked to Qatar²¹. These reports may be exaggerated, however, given the adversarial relationship between these states. Nonetheless, it is clear that Qatari leadership has strong ties with Libyan radicalists and has a nearly decade-long track record of funneling support to groups that actively undermine Libyan security.

By contrast, the Emirati intervention in the Libyan conflict is the latest installment of a nearly three-decade long struggle between the Emirati government and the UAE based Muslim Brotherhood branch, Islah²². Beginning in the 1970s, Islah members began expanding their influence in Emirati domestic politics by ascending to leadership in the education system and the judiciary. Members then used these positions to favor other Islah supporters and members, increasing the value of membership and creating what some scholars called the “state within a state”²³. The royal family saw the expansion of Islah’s influence as a potential challenge to their rule and as a direct challenge to their secular, comparatively liberal model of investment and society²⁴. Beginning after the September 11 attacks, and doubling down in 2011, the Emirati government has sought to shape regional development and counter Islamist government forces of the type that currently control the GNA. Abu Dhabi is aligned with its gulf allies in supporting a new Libya led by a secular regime that doesn’t present foreign challenges to secular monarchies and allows for the expansion of gulf state economic interests in Libya²⁵.

Emirati intervention has largely been in the form of the supply of military assets and direct military support to the Libyan National Army. After its 2014 report that identified the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization, the UAE purchased several Belarusian attack helicopters and fixed wing aircraft and transferred them to the LNA in order to build up LNA airpower²⁶. They likewise provided hundreds of ground vehicles, including 93 armored personnel carriers, to bolster LNA ground capabilities²⁷. The Emirati military itself has provided air support to LNA forces and has conducted drone operations over Benghazi which have been credited as decisive operations in aiding Haftar’s solidification of control over eastern Libya²⁸. While there is little evidence that Abu Dhabi is directly funding the LNA, various UAE based financial institutions have been implicated in transactions with sanctioned Libyan individuals with known money

¹⁹ Wehrey. *The Burning Shores*. 193.

²⁰ Schanzer, Jonathan. “Qatar’s Support Of The Worst Of The Worst In Libya Must End”. Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (Aug. 2017)

²¹ Ibid

²² Freer, Courtney. “The Muslim Brotherhood in the Emirates: Anatomy of a Crackdown”. Middle East Eye. 2015.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Van Genugten, “Foreign Actors in Libya’s Crisis”. 49.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ United Nations. Security Council. *Letter dated 1 June 2017 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council*. Geneva: UN, 2017. 24, 23.

²⁷ Ibid. 43

²⁸ Ibid. 144

laundering schemes²⁹. As of now, the financial connection between the two parties appears to be real but indiscernible. At no point has Emirati support of the LNA slowed in the past couple of years, and with the recent momentum leading up to Haftar's assault on Tripoli, Abu Dhabi will likely be incentivized to continue providing support.

Much like the Emiratis, Egyptian interests in Libya are rooted in concerns over regime security. Since ascending to the presidency in 2014, Abdel Fattah al-Sisi has battled an Islamist insurrection in Sinai and faced threats from Islamist political forces throughout the country. Sisi declared the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organization in 2013 and sees Libya as a potential breeding ground for Islamic radicalism³⁰. Given the historic porosity of the thousand-kilometer Libya-Egypt border, smuggling of guns, drugs, and Islamic extremists has long been a point of tension between the two nations³¹. In light of Libya's newfound instability, these trans-border threats are now more dangerous than ever³². Likewise, the loss of Gaddafi as a strong economic partner has brought additional instability. During the Qadhafi regime, more than two million Egyptians worked in Libya and provided essential remittances for their families³³. Libyan investments in Egypt were valued in the tens of billions of dollars and Qadhafi provided Mubarak's Egypt with considerable aid and subsidized oil³⁴. Egyptian companies look to Libya as a lucrative source for oil contracts which can only be obtained in a friendly, stable Libya³⁵. This combination of violence and economic problems at home constitutes a serious threat to Sisi's rule, and greatly incentivizes the support of a new Libya whose regime resembles Mubarak, and resembles itself.

Egypt's unwavering support for Sisi is thus unsurprising. In coordination with the UAE, Sisi has been backing Haftar militarily and financially since the beginning of the conflict³⁶. Egypt conducted airstrikes in support of LNA forces and sold Haftar weapons despite the UN arms embargo³⁷. Egyptian personnel helped to rebuild Libya's old intelligence services for Haftar and there are reportedly hundreds of Egyptians on the ground fighting alongside the LNA³⁸. Egypt reportedly attempted to illegally purchase \$2 million of Libyan crude - a likely much needed financial injection for Haftar's eastern forces - but UN discovery and pressure forced the transaction to remain incomplete³⁹. Sisi's government may not enjoy the funding available to the Emiratis to fund their Libyan adventures, but they do benefit from proximity and the aforementioned porous border with eastern Libya. Working together, Egypt and the UAE have been indispensable allies to the LNA and much of the territory gained for the HoR can be in part attributable to their financial and military support.

²⁹ Ibid. 65

³⁰ Ghafar, Adel A., Mattia Toaldo. *Does the road to stability in Libya pass through Cairo?*. Brookings (Jun. 2017)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Eaton, Tim. "Libya's War Economy: Predation, Profiteering, and State Weakness". 2018. Chatham House.

³³ Ghafar, Does the road.

³⁴ Megerisi, 24.

³⁵ Ghafar, Does the road.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Eaton, Libya's War Economy.

³⁸ Megerisi, 25.

³⁹ United Nations, 56.

Much as the Gulf rivalry has complicated and prolonged the Libyan civil war, the competing interests and concerns of western powers have further limited the prospect of a lasting peace. The primary western actors - Italy, France, and Russia - have exacted their foreign policies with individual visions of becoming the dominant European influence in the new Libya⁴⁰. While Italy and France have a mutual interest in a Libya policy that mitigates the Mediterranean migrant crisis, their primary interests lie in the creation of a new state who they can both buy oil from and sell weapons to⁴¹.

Among the three competitors, Italy has the most extensive economic and historical ties to the Libyan state. Virtue of its history as an Italian colony for nearly four decades and as a key trading partner after liberation, Libya houses the economic interests of over one hundred Italian companies, most of which are located in Tripoli⁴². Before the revolution, Italian oil giant ENI derived approximately 15% of its total hydrocarbon output from Libyan reserves and Qadhafi accepted shipping and security contracts from Italian firms valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars⁴³. Perhaps most importantly, Italian defense contractors were some of the largest providers of weapons to the Qadhafi regime with exports totaling over 200 million Euros in the 2008-2009 timeframe alone⁴⁴. Separately, Libyan instability has led to an increase in the country's border insecurity and an exacerbation of Libya's historic role as a transit country for sub-Saharan migrants attempting to cross the Mediterranean. The first eight months of 2011 saw the arrival of over 50,000 migrants to the Italian island of Lampedusa which, given its proximity to Libyan shores, is a primary destination point for migrant ships⁴⁵. Given the current weakness of the Italian economy and the anti-migrant policies held by far-right Italian leadership, Italian leaders across the political spectrum have been incentivized to support intervention in the Libyan conflict.

This intervention has been focused on a mixed approach of international and local diplomacy. The Italian government has hosted summits and engaged directly with Sarraj and Haftar in hopes of achieving a solution that will end the country's instability⁴⁶. Diplomats have worked with the GNA in an attempt to control the migrant crisis and reduce the number of migrants that reach Italian shores⁴⁷. On a micro-level, Rome has regularly engaged mayors, city councils, and ruling groups in Libyan cities and regions that are home to Italian financial interests⁴⁸. Throughout the process, Italian leaders have repeatedly stressed that a military solution is not in the best interest for Libya's future and these words have been backed up by Italian interference that is based on

⁴⁰ Ceccorulli, Michela, Fabrizio Caticchia. "Multidimensional Threats and Military Engagement: The Case of the Italian Intervention in Libya". Routledge. 2015. 315.

⁴¹ Lefèvre, Raphaël. "The Pitfalls of Russia's Growing Influence in Libya". Routledge. 2017

⁴² Ceccorulli, Multidimensional threats, 315.

⁴³ "Italy's Interests in Libya" Forbes. (Mar. 31, 2011)

⁴⁴ Ceccorulli, Multidimensional threats, 315.

⁴⁵ Lorena Macias. Arab Spring has brought migrant issues to the fore in Europe. St. Louis Public Radio. (Jul. 23, 2018)

⁴⁶ Salacanian, Stasa. "How France and Italy Fuel Libya's War". Gulf News. (Feb. 11, 2019)

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

engagement, cooperation, and humanitarian assistance⁴⁹. Unfortunately, these efforts have been all but entirely ineffective.

Likewise, France has vested economic interests in southern Libya and identifies the Sahel as part of an area of strategic priority that encompasses much of north and francophone Africa and the Arab Middle East⁵⁰. French interests in this area include countering the expansion of Chinese influence in Africa, reducing the threat of al Qaeda affiliates and extremist organizations, and controlling the flow of forced migration that originates in sub-Saharan Africa and is funneled through Libya's shores⁵¹. France may be more likely to exert its influence in the region in part as a response to the eastward shift in American foreign policy. However, when viewed in the context of recent 21st century French interventions in Mali and Cote D'ivoire, France's interest in Libya's future could signal a return of Francafrigue, the historical relationship between France and its former African colonies⁵². France has immediate economic interests that favor a stable Libya. Prior to the revolution, France was Libya's sixth largest trading partner and Libyan oil accounted for 15% of France's total oil supply⁵³. A 2007 arms contract worth 300 million euros between EADS and the Qadhafi regime constituted a major economic relationship between the two countries and the allure of future contracts likely persists to this day⁵⁴. More recently, executives from French oil company Total have met with Libyan officials in Tripoli and the company recently made a \$450 million investment in oilfield acquisitions in the Sirte Basin⁵⁵. While many countries are seeking to reduce their liabilities in Libya, France is doubling down.

France is notably the most active diplomatic player in Libya⁵⁶. It was the first country to recognize the NTC and it hosted the pre-war Paris summit on the insistence of French Leadership in the EU⁵⁷. In 2017, it was the French who negotiated a ceasefire between the LNA and the GNA and who in 2018 held national elections negotiations between four major Libyan leaders from both governments⁵⁸. From the first days of the revolution through the many iterations of the post-revolutionary Libyan political system, the French government has been a dominant figure in the official UN and EU processes. However, it is through military intervention that French leaders have shown their willingness to forgo official diplomatic processes in pursuit of quicker solutions that defend French interests. Despite publicly supporting the EU process, the French clandestinely provided military support to the Libyan National Army. This became public when Islamists shot down a LNA helicopter and the bodies of three French special forces were found to be on board⁵⁹. In 2016, France gave critical military

⁴⁹ Santini, Ruth H. "The Libyan Crisis Seen from European Capitals". Brookings. (June 1, 2011).

⁵⁰ Simon, Luis. "The Spider in Europe's Web? French Grand Strategy from Iraq to Libya". Routledge. 2013. 405.

⁵¹ Ibid. 421

⁵² Keating, Joshua. "Mali and the Return of Francafrigue". Foreign Policy. 2013.

⁵³ Jason Davidson. "France, Britain and the intervention in Libya: an integrated analysis". 2013. Cambridge Review of International Affairs. 319.

⁵⁴ Kim Willsher. *Libya and France sign £200m arms deal*. 2007. The Guardian.

⁵⁵ Ahmad Gaddar, Aiden Lewis. *Oil major Total expands in Libya, buys Marathon's Waha stake for \$450 million*. 2018. Reuters.

⁵⁶ Matteo Ilardo. *The Rivalry between France and Italy over Libya and its Southwest Theatre*. 2018. AIES.

⁵⁷ Davidson, France, Britain, 318.

⁵⁸ Patrick Wintour. *Libyan factions agree to hold elections on 10 December*. 2018. The Guardian.

⁵⁹ Wehrey, *The Burning*, 319.

support to Haftar's LNA during its assault on Benghazi, which is credited as allowing the LNA to secure control over the city⁶⁰. Following these revelations, the French government has openly supported the LNA in its subsequent conquests but continues to call for ceasefire and for talks between the rival Libyan governments. As in its former African campaigns, France has shown willingness to work with authoritarian leaders with questionable human rights records when French economic and strategic interests are at stake.

Much like in Italy and France, Russian interference in Libya comes at the intersection of Russian political and economic interests. In recent years, Moscow has consistently tried to weaken the influence of the United States, European Union, and NATO by waging a series of small, local wars in the Middle East and former Soviet Republics⁶¹. The United States is retreating from leadership in the region and Russian leaders have seized the opportunity to expand their influence in America's absence⁶². Russian-Libyan partnership was extremely valuable on a number of economic and geopolitical fronts and the fall of the Qadhafi regime constituted a major strategic loss. The economic toll of Qadhafi's fall was devastating. Pre-revolutionary defense, security, and technology contracts with Russian companies reportedly totaled \$10 billion dollars. Libya's army was almost exclusively reliant on Russian arms and training with Libyan imports accounting for 12% of all Russian weapons manufacturing capacity⁶³. As part of the long-standing Russian strategy to gain access to warm water ports, Russia wrote off \$4.5 billion of Libyan debt in exchange for access to the port of Benghazi⁶⁴. Russian oil and gas companies Tatneft and Gazprom secured contracts to develop Libya's plentiful oil fields⁶⁵. To an extent, all of these gains have been put on hold and Moscow hopes that these contracts can be revived by a new Libya of its own making⁶⁶.

For years, direct Russian military intervention in Libya was suspected but unconfirmed. Reports and rumors of equipment shipments, Russian special forces, and arms deals with the LNA worth billions of dollars were only substantiated with circumstantial evidence⁶⁷. In 2017 the presence of Russian special forces and Russian funded security contractors was finally confirmed⁶⁸ and it was revealed that some wounded LNA soldiers would be treated in Moscow⁶⁹. Indirectly, Moscow has been progressively strengthening its ties with Cairo and Egyptian leader Abdel Fattah el-Sisi by signing an arms agreement in 2014, conducting joint training exercises in Sinai, and holding regular meetings between Sisi and Putin⁷⁰. While it can be difficult to point to the direct outcomes of this partnership, it is no coincidence that Sisi is one of Haftar's strongest allies in the region.

⁶⁰ Toaldo, *Foreign Actors*, 67.

⁶¹ Ibid. 74.

⁶² Ibid. 74.

⁶³ Ibid. 76.

⁶⁴ Raphaël Lefèvre. The pitfalls of Russia's growing influence in Libya. 2017. *The Journal of North African Studies*. 330

⁶⁵ Beccaro, *Foreign Actors*, 76.

⁶⁶ Lefevre, *Britain, France*, 333.

⁶⁷ Beccaro, *Foreign Actors*, 82.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 86.

⁶⁹ Lefevre, *Britain, France*, 331.

⁷⁰ Beccaro, *Foreign Actors*, 86.

As of writing, the siege of Tripoli is now nearly a month long⁷¹. The conflict may be reaching a turning point, and Haftar may be close to capturing the city with the help of his international backers. However, as the LNA concentrates more personnel at the Tripoli offensive, weak spots in Haftar's territory are popping up elsewhere. Like a game of insurgent whack-a-mole, whenever the LNA moves on a new target, militias and radicalists pop up once again in territory that was thought to be secure. As a distant onlooker, the United States is faced with a question of whether it can, and whether it should, use its power to force an end to the conflict. Three options are discussed below.

First, the United States can continue its policy of non-intervention. Following the NATO air campaign undertaken during the Obama administration, U.S. foreign policy toward Libya has been hands off. President Trump has advocated a regional peace process, arguing that the most reasonable way forward is for other Arab leaders to find "Arab solutions to Arab problems". More recently, President Trump held a phone call with Haftar and reportedly discussed future cooperation in fighting terrorism and bring democratic institutions to Libya. While undercutting the position of the State Department, this shift likely signals little to no shift in U.S. action in Libya. The Trump administration has been unwelcoming to foreign military adventures and would likely be constrained by international opinion if it sought to provide aid to the LNA. By continuing the current policy of non-intervention, the Trump administration would avoid an unpopular military intervention, backlash from the international community, and interference in a conflict that has already been penetrated by more proximate and interested actors than itself.

Second, the United States could indirectly influence the conflict by applying pressure on Qatar in order to stop Qatari support of bad actors in Libya. Namely, the United States could threaten to vacate its al Udeid air base in Qatar. This base provides security that the Qataris see as essential, particularly as they have found themselves cornered by adversaries and unfriendly states in recent years. The presence of this base likely emboldens Qatari foreign policy and the removal of this base would force Qatar to become responsible for its own actions on the international stage. Benefits of this policy would be reducing the foreign penetration of the Libyan conflict and stopping the flow of Qatari weapons and funds to radical entities in the GNA and the Libyan State. A likely downside, however, could be the perception that the United States is indirectly aiding and endorsing Haftar's military campaign.

Third, the United States could reverse policy again and reassert its dedication to the GNA and the UN lead peace process. This would be challenging for a number of reasons. The United Nations has been criticized for not being a sufficiently active player in the Libyan crisis and successful reversal of U.S. policy would have to be met with considerable effort at engaging the UN and motivating reluctant allies. U.S. policymakers would also have to determine how to expand the authority of the GNA who, by itself, has made essentially no progress in this area. Such a policy would likely be expensive, time consuming, and require the deployment of American troops on the ground in order to create and maintain stability. This would be a high price to pay for the resolution of a conflict in which the United States is not directly interested.

⁷¹ Luster, Tim. "The Battle for Tripoli Becomes a Sandbox for Outside Powers. New York Times. (May 5, 2019)

The Libyan conflict presents a number of challenges for U.S. foreign policy and the foreign policies of our allies. Numerous foreign powers have attempted to use their influence to shape the new Libya into a mold of their own choosing; all have yet to succeed. In these circumstances, the U.S. policy of nonintervention is understandable and may continue to be policy in the future. Little is predictable but one thing is certain. If the battle of Tripoli proves indecisive, foreign support will continue to flow through Libya's borders at the detriment to the Libyan people.