INSTABILITY IN LIBYA: ASSESSING THE REGIONAL IMPACTS

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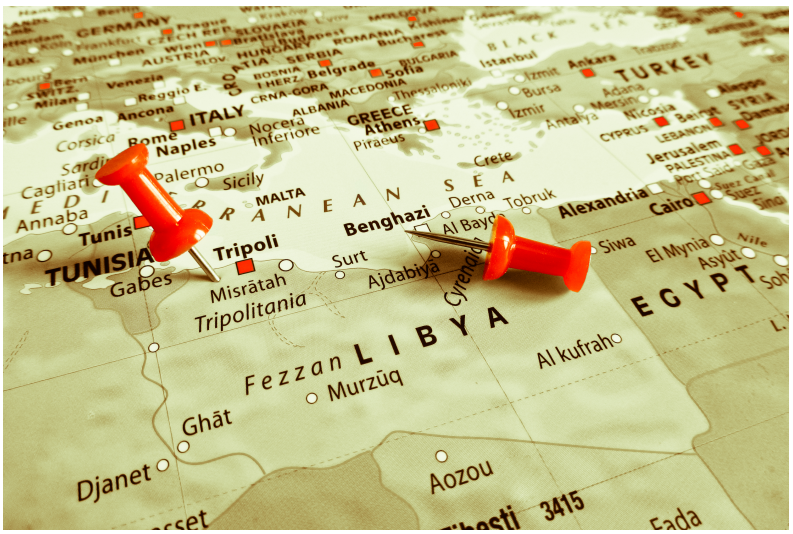

NATO ALLIED COMMAND TRANSFORMATION

INSTABILITY IN LIBYA:
ASSESSING the REGIONAL IMPACTS

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1. Executive Summary

Post-revolutionary Libya has been subject to violent competition, fragmentation and the breakdown of effective governance. Centralized political authority remained in some form following the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime but collapsed in 2014 when rival governments emerged. The internationally-backed Government of National Accord has been unable to function as the unity government it was envisaged to be. The fragmented security scene further complicates the picture, as a wide array of armed groups control territory. There is consequently no state monopoly on the use of violence and the prospects of developing a unified national force remain distant. The rival governments have been unable to provide many basic public services, with budget deficits increasing as the state payroll becomes ever more bloated. This affects the daily lives of millions of Libyans in a multitude of ways, from electricity blackouts to a liquidity crisis.

Libya's breakdown has created dangerous ripple effects elsewhere. The ongoing instability and continued presence of fighters are of grave concern to regional players like Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria. The crisis in Libya also risks exacerbating existing conflicts in Libya's Southern neighbours Sudan and Chad, as well as in the Sahel. Libya has become a hub for irregular migration into Europe. In 2016 alone, more than 180,000 migrants were detected attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean route along which Libya is the main departure country.[3] And while flows declined significantly since mid-2017, Libya remains a key transit country and crossings could spike again.

Political and material support for local groups from international actors continues to contribute to instability. Despite shared Western interests in stabilizing Libya, attempts to bridge the governance split and to reform the security sector have thus far failed. To be more effective in the future, Western actors must align their policies more closely.

[3] Frontex (2017) "Risk Analysis for 2017"Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2017.pdf

2. Factors of Instability in Libya

Shortly after the Arab Spring began in neighbouring Tunisia, it spread to Libya in January 2011. However, unlike in Tunisia, when Libyans called for freedom in the streets, they were violently repressed. The protests morphed into an uprising as Libyans rose up against Muammar Gaddafi, the dictator who ruled the country with an iron fist since coming to power in a coup d'état in 1969.

Instead of stepping down, as was the fate of the leaders of Egypt and Tunisia, Gaddafi used advanced weaponry, including tanks and aircraft, against his own people. Following the loss of the major cities of Benghazi and Misrata in February 2011, regime forces launched a counter-offensive that reached the outskirts of Benghazi. In response, the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed Resolution 1973 on 17 March to enforce a no-fly zone which authorized "all necessary measures" to prevent attacks on civilians.[4] An international coalition contributed military assets to enforce the resolution. Military activities began on 19 March. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed command of all coalition military operations in relation to Libya on 31 March 2011, striking Libyan air defences and regime targets. The civil war pitted a range of revolutionary groups against the regime and its supporters. By August, rebel groups controlled most cities, including most of Tripoli. In September, the National Transitional Council was recognized by the UN as Libya's governing authority. NATO's mission ended shortly after Gaddafi was found and killed in the coastal city of Sirte in late October 2011.

A Broken Political System

More than seven years after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, the country continues to be sharply divided. A complex governance environment has emerged (see Table 1) where an UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) operates in Tripoli, but whose writ does not in reality extend beyond the city. The so-called "Interim Government" continues to operate in the East of the country, but is not recognized by the international community. To complicate matters further, the internationally recognized parliament, has not ratified the agreement that established the GNA. This leads many to argue that the GNA is illegitimate, and some to continue to argue that the Interim Government remains the legitimate government. There is no governance actor whose mandate is not subject to legal challenge.

The GNA's detractors note that its basis in Libyan law is non-existent, and argue that it exists purely as a result of international support. The House of Representatives mandate has expired (although it held a vote to extend it, this is open to challenge) and many of its members boycott its sessions. The interim government continues, but in reality Libya's East is witnessing a competition between civilian-led governance structures and the increasing reach of the Khalifa Haftar-led Libyan National Army (LNA) that is seeking to provide public services and mimicking the role of the Egyptian army in its economic activities. There is consequently

[4] UNSCR 1973

no central government or single political power that can offer unified governance. Furthermore, there is no individual, or armed group that holds a monopoly on the use of force. The presence of a wide array of armed groups, including violent extremist organizations, makes the situation on the ground even more challenging.

Table 1: Key institutions and actors

Government of National Accord (GNA)

The GNA is the internationally recognized government of Libya. It was formed as a result of the conduct of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). The GNA has been based in Tripoli since March 2016. Envisaged as a unity government to end the governance split, the GNA has failed to meet this goal. Its presence in Tripoli has been dependent on the acquiescence of Tripolitanian armed groups, and its control over those groups has been minimal. The GNA is led by Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj, who heads the Presidency Council. The Presidency Council was formed as a 9-member body that fulfils the role of interim head of state. Its membership was designed to encompass Libya's regions and factions, but its Eastern members boycotted the PC soon after its formation and further resignations have followed.

High State Council (HSC)

The HSC is the consultative body of the GNA. It was formed as a result of the LPA. Its membership draws significantly from that of the General National Congress (GNC), the parliament that was elected in 2012, and replaced by the House of Representatives at elections in 2014. In 2014, the GNC's rejection of the election result led it to form a rival government, the Government of National Salvation (GNS). The creation of the HSC was a means of including some of these elements in a unified governance structure. Tripoli-based, it is currently headed by Khaled al-Mishri.

House of Representatives (HoR)

The HoR is the internationally recognized parliament of Libya. Based in the East, to where it was relocated from Tripoli in 2014 citing security concerns, it is headed by speaker Ageela Saleh, who wields outsized influence over the legislative agenda of the HoR. The HoR was envisaged to be the parliament of the GNA, but the HoR's failure to ratify the LPA meant that it did not recognize the GNA. The HoR's location in the East leads many to believe that it is also subject to the influence of Khalifa Haftar, whom the HoR appointed Commander of Libyan Armed Forces. Many of the HoR's deputies do not attend its sessions leading to votes being held and delayed without a quorum. The results of the votes that take place have regularly been challenged for process violations.

The 'interim' Government

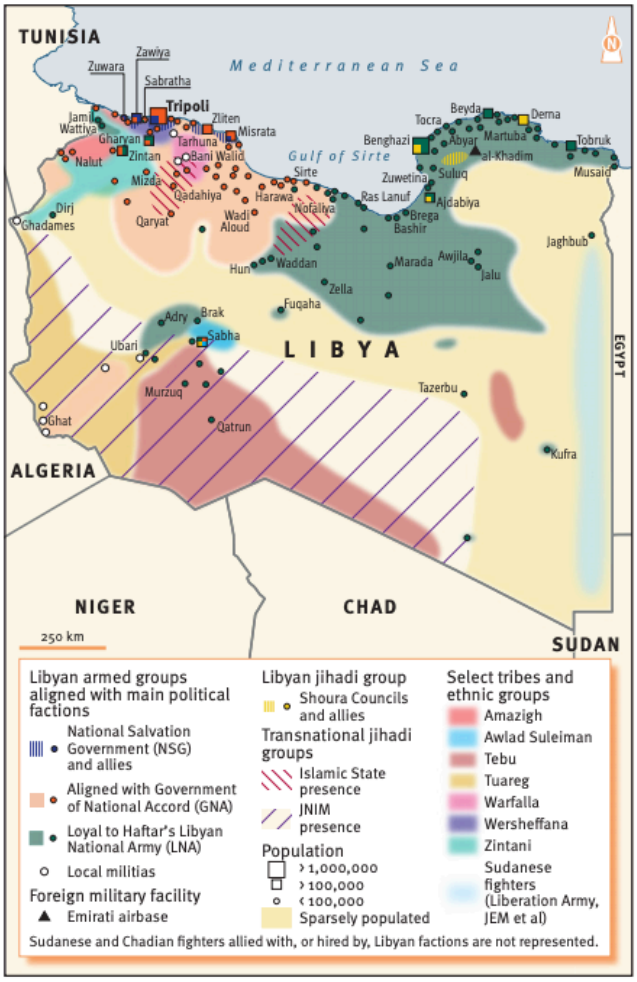
Headed by Abdullah al-Thani, the interim government is not recognized by the international community. Located in the Eastern city of al-Bayda, its claim to legitimacy rests upon its contention that the GNA is not legally formed, which means that the interim government – which was formed in 2014 – remains the representative of the state. The Interim Government was endorsed by the HoR.

The Libyan National Army (LNA)

Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar heads the so-called LNA. His opponents note that many elements of the LNA – particularly those affiliated with the GNA – do not recognize Haftar's leadership, and therefore reject the characterization of Haftar's force as being synonymous with a

national army. Haftar's forces include a range of local groups, including Salafi battalions. The presence of the Salafists runs counter to the anti-Islamist positioning of Haftar. Haftar's forces have fought long campaigns against opponents in the East, in Benghazi and most recently in Derna. The LNA is also emerging as a rival governance actor, putting in place military governors and providing services. It is also expanding its economic base through the development of its own investment authority.

Figure 1: Armed Groups in Libya, Small Arms Survey



Source: Jalel Harchaoui, 2018. The information in this map is derived from original research conducted by the author.[21]

The result of this legislative mess is that governance actors provide few services. Critically, the split among rival governance actors has led to a split in key state institutions such as the National Oil Company and the Central Bank of Libya. The international community has not recognized rival Eastern entities, which has meant that the East has been unable to sell crude into the international market. The Eastern branch of the Central Bank, has however been able to enact its own monetary policy – including obtaining printed dinar notes and coins from Russia – to a degree.

Economic impact of the conflict

The population has felt the consequences of the governance crisis. While the state's payroll continues to expand – through which antagonistic armed actors continue to receive salaries – spending on other key areas of the economy has fallen. Electricity blackouts, for example, have become increasingly common. GECOL, the state electricity provider, has a shortfall of around 1000MW in times of peak demand.[5] Extended blackouts have become a fact of life for most Libyans in the sweltering summer months. In many cases where phased blackouts are required to keep the grid operational, armed groups have been known to prevent the electricity being shut down in their areas, exacerbating the problems elsewhere. In January 2017, a 900km blackout was caused by a dispute between the National Oil Corporation and an armed group controlling the Zawiya refinery.[6]

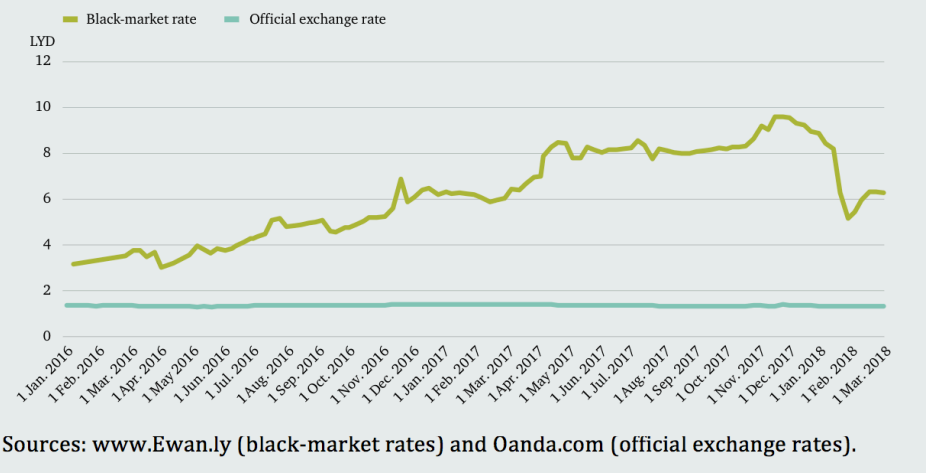
[5] Al-Warfalli, A. & Elumani, A. (2018) "Rolling summer blackouts weigh on Libya's struggling traders" Reuters. Accessed 25 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-libya-economy-power/rolling-summer-blackouts-weigh-on-libyas-struggling-traders-idUKKBN1L214C

[6] National Oil Corporation (2018) "An Important Statement" NOC. Accessed 27 November 2018. Retrieved at: http://noc.ly/index.php/en/new-4/1976-an-important-statement

Such dynamics are also visible with other resources. In October 2017, forces under the command of one local warlord turned off the valves of the Great Man Made River as a means of forcing the release of his brother, from detention in Tripoli. Homes in the capital that were dependent on the Great Man Made River went without water for around two weeks.[7] This is just one example of how public services are sometimes held hostage to achieve the objectives of armed groups—worsening conditions for Libyans in the process.

Since the 2014 governance split, a major gap has emerged between the official and black market rate for the dinar. At some points it has neared Libyan Dinar (LYD) 10: US Dollar (US$) 1, while the official rate of exchange has remained steady at around LYD1.3:US$1 (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Black-market rate dinar vs official exchange rate



Sources: www.Ewan.ly (black-market rates) and Oanda.com (official exchange rates).

This is a major contributing factor to a liquidity crisis and rising inflation. The arbitrage opportunities that the gap have provided (for those who can buy at the official rate and sell at the unofficial rate) are seen as an incentive for a range of illicit activities. Foremost among these have been scandals over the provision of letters of credit for the import of goods. The 2016 Audit Bureau annual report identified more than US $570 million in fraudulent letters of credit in the 11 months from January to November.[8]

A liquidity crisis means that Libyans are unable to withdraw all of their salaries, and the weakness of the banks means that traders who allow people to pay by cheque may charge up to 50% more for goods owing to the uncertainty of them being able to collect. The collapse of subsidies on basic goods such as bread – reportedly of up to 500% – has led to significant increases in prices in many places. For many traders, restricted access to foreign exchange has meant a dependency on the parallel market, which is volatile and therefore has a significant impact on prices for consumers.

[7] Ali, M. (2017) "Man-Made River Company says water will be in Tripoli homes "within three days" Libya Herald. Accessed 28 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/10/28/man-made-river-company-say-water-will-be-in-tripoli-homes-within-three-days/

[8] Libyan Audit Bureau (2017) "Annual Report 2016" LAB. p. 134, Accessed 24 November 2018. Retrieved at: http://audit.gov.ly/home/pdf/LABR-2016.pdf

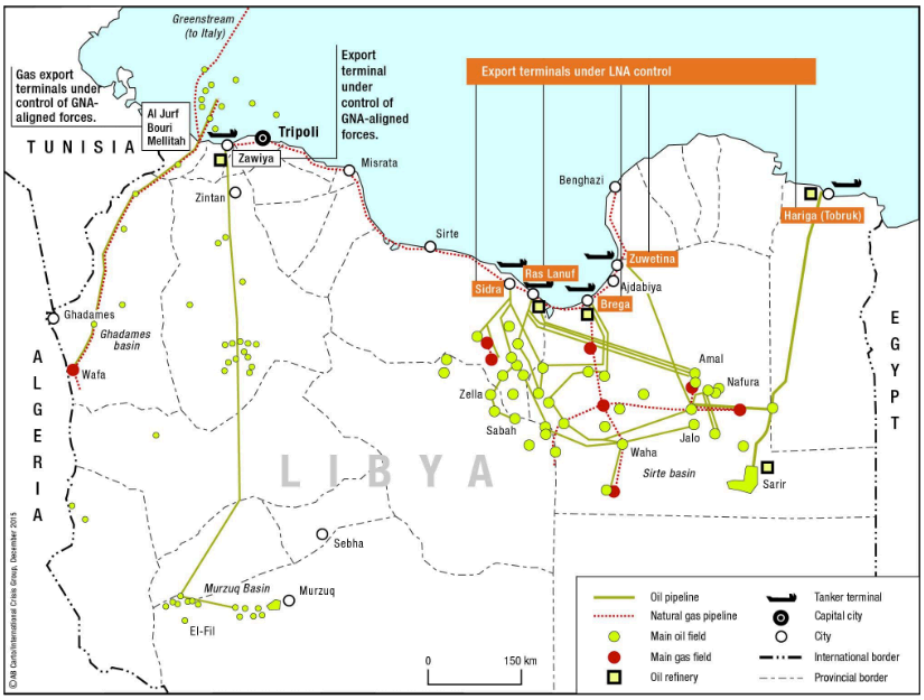
The fragmented security scene and violent competition for resources

A key driver of conflict in Libya is the competition for the control of and access to resources. There is a mismatch between the nature of the centralized governance system and the disparate nature of the power balance. Libyan actors' power bases are predominantly local with limited ability to operate nationally: no one actor or group is strong enough on its own to control the state with force. The result is a kaleidoscope of transactional alliances at the local and national level among blocs that are at best loosely connected. Yet, the nature of the system of governance is hyper-centralized: those who control Tripoli control the distribution of state resources, leading to zero-sum calculations and a privileged position for Tripolitanian in terms of the resources available to them, a motivating factor for further violence.

Two major escalations of violence in 2018 have been linked to the distribution of resources. Ibrahim Jadhran took advantage of Haftar's advance on Derna by attacking and displacing Haftar's forces from the "oil crescent" in June. Libya's oil crescent is home to a large proportion of Libya's oil and gas fields as well as most of its oil terminals, and thus a critical part of Libya's economic infrastructure.[9] After Haftar's forces recovered the area, he refused to allow the Tripoli-based NOC to market the oil. Haftar would receive a greater share of the revenues if the oil was sold directly from the East to the international market, cutting out his opponents in Tripoli. Yet, the international community would prevent the East from accessing international oil markets and pressure Haftar to back down.

[9] Crisis Group (2018) "After the Showdown in Libya's Oil Crescent" Report 189 Middle East North Africa. Accessed 29 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/189-after-showdown-libyas-oil-crescent

Figure 3: Libya Oil Crescent, International Crisis Group



3. Regional Impacts of Instability in Libya

Libya's neighbouring countries (Egypt, Sudan, Chad, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia) have been directly impacted by security threats and economic spill over emanating from Libya's instability. That instability has also had clear impacts on European states and on other conflicts, from Syria to Mali. It has done so in three principle ways. First, Libya's fragmented security scene has made it an attractive operating environment for violent extremist organizations – a number of which are proscribed terrorist organizations – that have ambitions to increase their influence in Libya as well as using it as a base to strike abroad. Second, the collapse of state authority has sparked rapid growth and competition within Libya's illicit marketplace. This has made Libya the key transit hub for irregular migration to Europe and a hub of the illegal arms trade. Finally, the damage to Libya's economy as a result of conflict and the ongoing governance crisis impacts the economies of the neighbouring states, particularly in areas of proximity to the Libyan border.

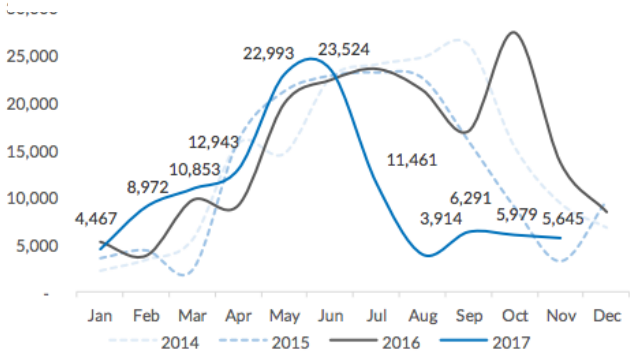
Illicit flows: Irregular Migration & Arms Trade

Libya has become a hub of human smuggling and the illegal arms trade. These illicit flows present a significant challenge to Libya's neighbours and to Europe. Human smuggling existed prior to the fall of the regime and was instrumentalized by Gaddafi as a means of generating leverage over Europe. Gaddafi infamously threatened to turn Europe "black" before striking a deal with then Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi to prevent migrant flows across the Mediterranean[10]. Under Gaddafi the sector was largely under the control of the regime. After

[10] Squires, N. (2010) "Gaddafi: Europe will "turn black" unless EU pays Libya £4bn a year" The Telegraph. Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at:

the overthrow of the regime, however, border security forces were no longer paid and many dispersed. As a result, other actors in the illicit actor expanded their activities. This led to open competition for the control of smuggling networks and the development of lucrative protection markets as smuggling has become more closely connected to violence.

Figure 4: Monthly Sea Arrivals to Italy 2014-2017, UNHCR



On the north-western coast, for example, smuggling activities are closely connected to armed groups. Some armed groups "tax" the movement of migrants as part of protection rackets. Others control detention centres in which migrants are held. This allows them to market the labour of those detained. They can also exploit them in other ways (including sexual violence) and extort their families into sending them money for the release. In a number of cases collusion has been alleged between coast guard units, armed groups and smugglers whereby the smuggler pays the armed group and the coast guard to allow his boats to pass while those who don't pay or are connected to rival groups are intercepted.[11] In fact, one commander of the Libyan Coast Guard has been placed under UN sanctions for his alleged role in human smuggling yet appears to remain in position. There are also a number of allegations of rights violations perpetrated by the Coast Guard, including tactics of intimidation, extortion and abuse.[12] In its 2018 assessment of EU support to the Libyan Coast Guard, the European External Action Service notes that vetting of Coast Guard recruits is set to be intensified. To address capacity and training needs (on issues such as human rights) the EEAS notes that more than 213 personnel of the Libyan coast guard and navy have thus far been trained, with a further 100 to undergo training by the close of 2018.[13] For its part, the Coast Guard has denied such charges, and contends that is inadequately equipped and undermanned. "These are old boats, not even designed for search and rescue... their capacity is very limited," Coast Guard Colonel Abu Ajila Abdelbarri told AFP, before warning that the service was on the point of "total collapse".[14]

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https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/libya/7973649/Gaddafi-Europe-will-turn-black-unless-EU-pays-Libya-4bn-a-year.html

[11] Amnesty International (2017) "Libya's Dark Web of Collusion: Abuses against Europe-bound Refugees and Migrants" AI. p. 39, Accessed 25 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1975612017ENGLISH.PDF

[12] De Bellis, M. (2018) "How Italy's seizure of an NGO ship exposes Europe's dangerous policy" Amnesty International. Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/03/how-italys-seizure-of-an-ngo-ship-exposes-europes-dangerous-policy/

[13] EEAS (2018) "EEAS(2018) 835" Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.statewatch.org/news/2018/aug/eu-sophia-libya-overview-11471-18.pdf

[14] AFP (2018) "Libya bemoans lack of EU support over migrants" news 24. Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/libya-navy-bemoans-lack-of-eu-support-over-migrants-20180628

With opportunities for work within Libya for migrants reduced, these developments contributed to a dramatic increase in the numbers of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea. In 2012, just over 15,000 migrants were detected attempting to cross the Central Mediterranean route.[15] This figure rose to over 180,000 in 2016. Along this route, Libya is the main departure country.[16] One prominent researcher has described these developments as akin to the "industrialization" of the sector.[17] Prices for transit dropped drastically. In 2013, crossing the Mediterranean would cost around US$1000- 1500. In 2016, prices had reportedly dropped to as low as US$250.[18]

Mid-2017 would see a precipitous fall in the number of crossings. These reduced levels have continued since. This is due to two principal developments: first, a number of Libyan armed groups switched from facilitating smuggling to clamping down upon it as a market for "anti-human smuggling"[19] has developed. Second, and most significantly, the international rescue zone has been moved further from the Libyan coast line. This means that migrant boats must travel much further than previously before they will be rescued and taken to European shores. Most are now returned to Libya.

These developments have meant that the journey across the Mediterranean has become significantly more difficult, and, more dangerous. In July 2018, ISPI figures indicated that only around half of those who departed Libyan shores in 2018 reached Italy compared to 86% in 2017.[20] In 2017, 2.3% of those who crossed died or went missing at sea. From January to July this year that figure rose to 4.5% (Figure 5).

The surge in irregular migration has had far reaching political impact for member states. Europe has adopted a heavily securitized approach to tackling irregular migration while doing

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[15] Frontex (2017) "Risk Analysis for 2017"Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2017.pdf

[16] Frontex (2017) "Risk Analysis for 2017"Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://frontex.europa.eu/assets/Publications/Risk_Analysis/Annual_Risk_Analysis_2017.pdf

[17] Micallef, M. "The Human Conveyor Belt: Trends in Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Post-Revolution Libya", The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. p. 8, Accessed 1 December 2018: Retrieved at: http://globalinitiative.net/report-the-human-conveyor-belt-trends-in-human-trafficking-and-smuggling-in-post-revolution-libya/

[18] Micallef, M. (2017) "The Human Conveyor Belt: Trends in Human Trafficking and Smuggling in Post-Revolutionary Libya" The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. p. 20, Accessed 23 November 2018. Retrieved at: http://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/GI-Human-Conveyor-Belt-Human-Smuggling-Libya-2017-.pdf

[19] Micallef M., Reitano, T. (2017) "The Anti-Human Smuggling Business and Libya's Political Endgame". Institute for Security Studies. Accessed 2 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://issafrica.org/research/north-africa-report/the-anti-human-smuggling-business-and-libyas-political-end-game

[20] Villa, M. (2018) "Migrant Departures from Libya" ISPI. Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ncHxOHIx4ptt4YFXgGi9TIbwd53HaR3oFbrfBm67ak4/edit#gid=0

little to expand opportunities for legal migration. This approach has seen flows of migrants reduced but fallen short of addressing drivers of irregular migration. Greater stability in Libya is likely not only to make human smuggling harder to undertake, but will also mean more opportunities for work within Libya which will also reduce the incentive to seek to reach European shores. It is too rarely noted that the majority of migrants in Libya are circular migrants (who seek to work in Libya for a period prior to returning to their countries of origin). For example, 56% of migrants interviewed by IOM in Libya between April and August 2017 listed Libya as their final destination.[21]

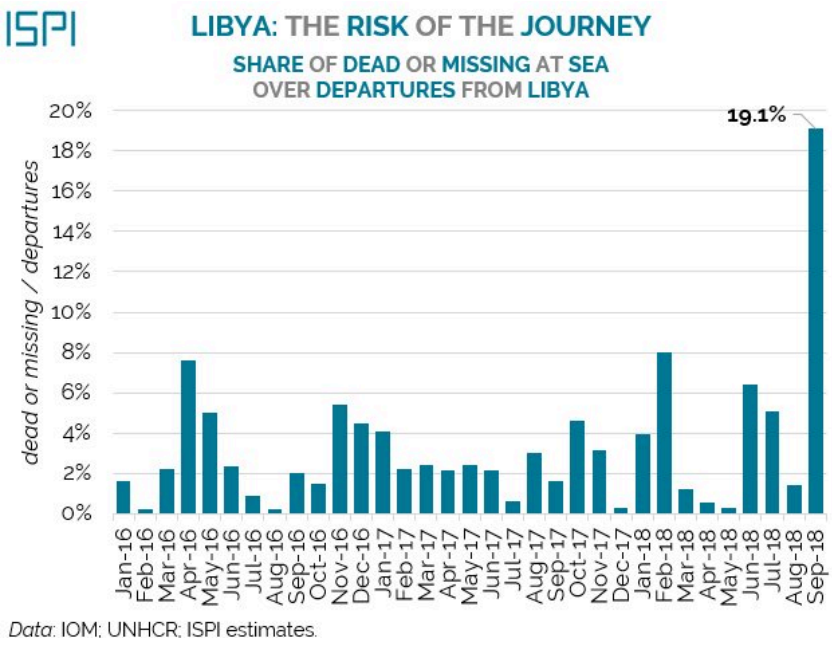
Libya is both a market and transit point for weaponry and the illegal arms trade. According to a UN report, Libyan arms have fuelled conflicts in Syria, Mali and beyond.[22] Gaddafi compiled large weapons caches which have been unleashed since the outbreak of violence in 2011. Many of them have been found elsewhere. The problem is compounded by the amount of weapons that have entered (and left) Libya since 2011. An Ansar al-Sharia Tunisia, and later Islamic State of Syria (ISIL), leader Abu Bakr al-Hakim told ISIL's al-Dabiq magazine that "Libya was next to us and weapons were widespread there. So we went to Libya and established a training camp. We would train brothers there and at the same time we would work to smuggle weapons into Tunisia."[23]

Overland weapons smuggling routes from West Africa and East Africa are long established. Gaddafi-era stockpiles were used extensively in the 2012 Tuareg and Islamist insurgencies in Mali[24] and throughout the Sahel region. The destabilization of the Sahel, in turn, is a key concern for Algeria, which lies just to the north. Darfurian rebels (operating in Sudan) have reportedly transported heavy weaponry such as anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns from Libya

[21] Data taken from IOM DTM. IOM began to ask this question in its surveys from April 2017 and the latest publically available migrant interview survey dataset is from August 2017.
[22] Nichols, Michelle (2013) "Libya arms fueling conflicts in Syria, Mali and beyond: U.N. experts" Reuters. Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-arms-un/libya-arms-fueling-conflicts-in-syria-mali-and-beyond-u-n-experts-idUSBRE93814Y20130409
[23] Zelin, A. (2018) "The others: foreign fighters in Libya" Washington Institute. Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/PolicyNote45-Zelin.pdf
[24] Nossiter, A. (2012) "Qaddafi's Weapons, Taken by Old Allies, Reinvigorate an Insurgent Army in Mali" The New York Times. Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/06/world/africa/tuaregs-use-qaddafis-arms-for-rebellion-in-mali.html

into Darfur.[25] Weapons from Libya have also been found in Syria, reaching ISIL.[26] Arms smuggling to Algeria has abated in 2013 to 2014, but it has not come to an end.[27]

Figure 5: Share of Dead or Missing at Sea, ISPI



Outflows appear to have diminished as domestic demand increased. The Libyan market for ammunition, for example, is significant. Nevertheless, the illicit flow of arms continues. The arms trade also goes the other way: international criminal networks continue to traffic weapons into Libya. Meanwhile foreign states like the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have reportedly channelled arms and equipment to Libyan actors in violation of the UN arms embargo.[28]

[25] Wanjala, T. B., Darracq, V., Kravetz Miranda, D., Melia, W. and Srivastav, A. K. (2017), "*Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan established pursuant to resolution 1591 (2005)* (S/2017/1125)" UN Security Council. p. 43. Accessed 2 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.undocs.org/s/2017/1125

[26] Crawford, J. (2017) „Report Details where ISIS gets its weapons" CNN. Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://edition.cnn.com/2017/12/14/politics/isis-weapons-report/index.html

[27] Harchaoui, J. (2018) "Too Close for Comfort: How Algeria Faces the Libya Conflict" Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Algeria-Libya.pdf

[28] UN (2017) "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" United Nations Security Council. p. 35, Accessed 1 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/466

The illicit flow of people and weapons from and through Libya has the potential to destabilize countries of transit and destination as well as countries that are close to them. This includes regions as far apart as Europe, the Sahel, Syria and Darfur.

Threats from Violent Extremist Organizations

The activities of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) in Libya remain a key concern in the region and beyond. Listed transnational terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and the ISIL continue to operate in Libya, while a range of Libyan Salafi-Jihadi groups like the Benghazi Defence Brigades (BDB) are also present on the ground. The absence of a functioning central government and the fractured nature of the security environment has provided a conducive environment for their operations.

However, the fortunes of VEOs has waned in recent years. The LNA's capture of the Eastern city of Derna in 2018 and tightening grip over Benghazi means that Haftar's forces have consolidated their control of the East after years of bloody conflict against a range of armed groups, including Islamist and violent extremist organizations such as Ansar al-Sharia and the BDB.

ISIL continues to operate in Libya, although it no longer holds significant territory. By the end of 2015, the group controlled a 120-mile stretch along the Libyan coast from Sirte. Yet, ISIL has regrouped since its ouster from its Sirte stronghold in 2016 by an alliance of armed groups from the coastal city of Misrata (with air support provided by international actors). In 2018 it has launched two significant attacks: the first in May targeting the electoral commission in Tripoli.[29] In September the head office of the National Oil Corporation in the capital was attacked by militants.[30] ISIL would later claim responsibility for the attack.

Despite a decrease in the overall number of "terror" attacks in Libya between 2016 and 2017,[31] the country continues to be vulnerable to the operations of VEOs. The Global Terrorism Database lists 790 "successful terror attacks" between 2015 and 2017 alone (see Figure 6).[32]

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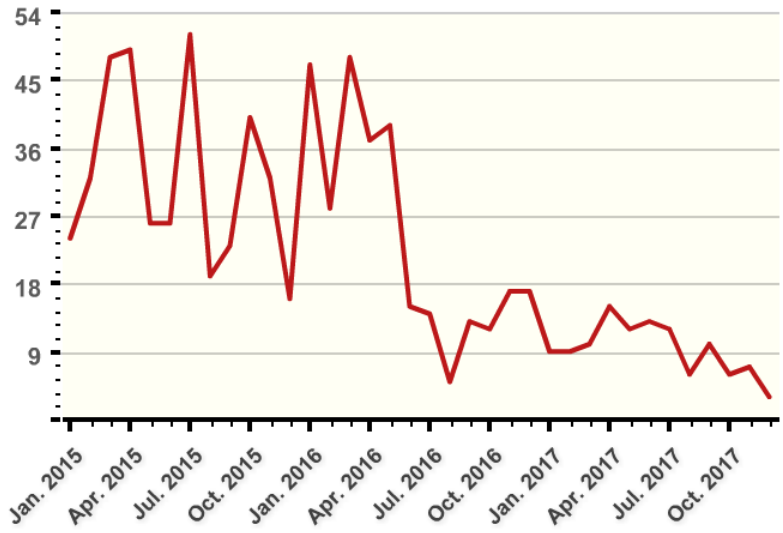
[29] AFP (2018) "ISIS attack on Libya election commission kills more than a dozen" The Guardian. Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/03/isis-attack-on-libya-election-commission-kills-more-than-a-dozen

[30] Wintour, P. (2018) "Masked gunmen attack Libyan oil corporation HQ in Tripoli" The Guardian. Accessed 20 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/sep/10/libya-masked-gunmen-storm-national-oil-corporation-hq-tripoli

[31] START (2018) „Global Terrorism in 2017"Accessed 7 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_GTD_Overview2017_July2018.pdf

[32] START (2018) „Global Terrorism Database"Accessed 7 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/search/Results.aspx?start_yearonly=2015&end_yearonly=2017&start_year=&start_month=&start_day=&end_year=&end_month=&end_day=&asmSelect0=&country=113&asmSelect1=&dtp2=some&success=no&casualties_type=b&casualties_max=

Figure 6: "Successful Terror Attacks" in Libya by Month 2015-2017, Global Terrorism Database



Violent VEOs are also using their comparatively safe space in Libya as a launching pad to support terrorist activities abroad. In 2015, for example, militants who had operated in Libya carried out two large attacks in Tunisia. In spring 2015, three militants attacked the Bardo National Museum in Tunis. Three months later, militants attacked a beach resort near the coastal town of Sousse. A combined 60 people were killed in the attacks. The attacks had a significant negative effect on Tunisia's tourism industry. Extremists linked to Libya have also attacked Europe. Salman Abedi, the British-Libyan who killed 22 in an attack on Manchester in 2017, was known to have travelled to Libya prior to the attack. His brother remains in detention in Tripoli.

Before 2014, Libya was seen as a key hub for training and transit of jihadist travelling to Syria and Iraq. Since then, it has become an "attractive" destination for foreign fighters in its own right.[33] According to the Centre for Security Studies at the ETH Zurich,[34] between 1350 and 3400 foreign fighters are believed to have travelled to Libya since 2011. With around 1000 to 1500, Tunisians make up the bulk of them. Most of the remaining fighters came from other North African countries. The return of these fighters or migration to another country represents a significant threat to countries in the region as well as Europe. Given the high number of Tunisians who have gone to fight abroad Tunisia is particularly vulnerable.

Economy & Energy

[33] Watanabe, L. (2018) "The Next Steps of North Africa's Foreign Fighters" CSS Analyses in Security Policy. Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse222-EN.pdf

[34] Watanabe, L. (2018) "The Next Steps of North Africa's Foreign Fighters" CSS Analyses in Security Policy. Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse222-EN.pdf

The toll of Libya's conflict on its economy has been severe. The oil sector has been heavily impacted by those with aspirations to sell crude oil directly into the international market, as well as communities holding the state to ransom for its failure to provide for them. The Central Bank of Libya estimated total losses for the state as a result of oil blockades at US$160 billion in August 2017.[35] During a period of low oil prices, however, drops in Libyan production have not had a significant effect on the oil market. Yet, the precarious security situation has led to a number of international investments in Libya's oil and gas sector being mothballed. In other areas of the economy, international companies that received contracts from the Gaddafi-era government complain that bills for projects remain unpaid.

Libya's economic woes have, however, more deeply impacted its neighbours. This is especially the case for the hundreds of thousands of nationals from neighbouring states who were, and in many cases still are, employed in Libya. These workers may come to Libya for short, medium and long-term employment. There are large numbers of Tunisian and Egyptian workers in Libya. Tunisians cross the Libyan land border visa free, and, while conditions on the official border points of Egypt are subject to change, there is a long established informal movement of Egyptians in and out of Libya.[36] According to UNDESA there were over 680,000 migrants in Libya in 2010, the equivalent of over 10% of Libya's resident population. Human Rights Watch assessed that there were an additional 1-1.2 million irregular migrants in the country in 2006.[37] The outbreak of conflict in 2011 reduced opportunities for work. Between February 2011 and January 2012, IOM estimates that 790,000 migrants crossed Libya's border to leave the country. Remittances sent back to the families of these workers can be an importance source of income for those families.

While the economies of the North African states are poorly integrated the subsidy regimes placed upon fuel and basic foodstuffs such as wheat have led to arbitrage opportunities for cross-border trade. For example, fuel obtained at the Libyan subsidised rate can be sold for a significant profit across the border in Tunisia. Yet, the reduction of this trade, as a result of developments within Libya and the securitization of the border is a significant threat to livelihoods in Southern Tunisia. The mooted removal of subsidies by the Libyan government would exacerbate these dynamics.

[35] El-Tablawy, T. & El-Wardany, S. (2017) "Libya's Central Bank Sends Warning About Slashed Oil Production" Bloomberg. Accessed 22 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-08-29/libya-central-bank-issues-revenue-warning-over-oil-disruption

[36] Husken, T. (2017) "The practice and culture of smuggling in the borderland of Egypt and Libya" International Affairs. 93 (4): 897-915.

[37] IOM (2012) "Migrants in Crisis: The IOM Experience in Libya" Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/migrationcaughtincrisis_forweb.pdf

4. Foreign Actors, Interests and the Political Process

Rich in oil and strategically located, Libya is of interest to a range of international actors. This section will outline the aims and activities of some of the key actors within the region and beyond with regards to Libya. This includes the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Russia, Egypt, UAE and Qatar.

International Actors

Western actors have an overwhelming interest in a unified and stable Libya that contributes to solving regional problems instead of amplifying them. Because of that, they have long sought a political solution to the crisis. Unfortunately, they have not always agreed on the best approach to find one.

France and Italy are key players in Libya and have competed with each other for leadership of international attempts to broker a political settlement in Libya. France is unique among European powers in that its strategic view of Libya is from the South, the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, rather than from the North. Unlike Italy, it prioritizes security and stabilization related issues over those of migration. France is believed to have extensive engagement with the LNA. President Emmanuel Macron's inclusion of LNA leader Field Marshall Haftar in French-sponsored talks in Paris in July 2017 and May 2018 afforded Haftar legitimacy on the international stage and parity with the internationally recognized Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj. This is significant as the Field Marshall had previously been excluded from such discussions. France did not seek any concessions from Haftar in return for his inclusion, leading to a continuing perception that Paris is acquiescent to the Field Marshall's demands.

Italy has sought to court Field Marshall Haftar, but with less success. Haftar would not agree to fully participate in Italian-brokered talks in Palermo in November 2018. Italy's failure to secure Haftar indicates that it is unable to play the leadership role it seeks. Given that migrants crossing from Libya predominantly arrive in Italy, the overwhelming priority of Italians with regard to Libya is migration. Frustrated with the lack of willingness of other European powers to meaningfully engage on the issue, Italy has leveraged its relationship with Libyan partners to counter migration. Libya is also crucial to Italy's energy needs and the presence of Eni is an important factor. Italy has a strong presence on the ground in the West of the country and a detailed understanding of local dynamics. While Italy has sought to reach out to forces in the East of Libya, and Haftar in particular, it doesn't have the same network or influence there.

Beyond competition for influence, the dispute between Italy and France is also one of strategy. Both accept that the status quo is damaging, but they disagree on the means of breaking it. France believes that only elections can solve the conflict and therefore seeks to expedite them. Italy (like the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and UN) believes elections can only come later, potentially after some form of political settlement.

Significant obstacles to new elections remain. Firstly, the constitutional basis of elections is not established. A draft constitution has yet to be passed and a referendum will be necessary to do so. The draft has been heavily criticized for a range of its components, from the lack of recognition of the rights of minority groups such as the Amazigh to its limited checks and

balances over government power. The threshold for its passing is also high, meaning it is unlikely to be approved in a referendum in its current form. An election law is also required to be passed by the House of Representatives before elections can take place. But for many of the current political actors elections represent a greater threat than opportunity. Loss of their positions through the ballot box would equate to the loss of their ability to maintain their political influence, to access state budgets and to maintain patronage networks. As a result, several of the important players support elections in principle, but not in reality. As one prominent Western diplomat put it: "Turkeys don't vote for Christmas[38]." Following the Palermo conference in November 2018, the target for national elections in December 2018 was finally abandoned, with a new target for an election process to begin in the spring of 2019. As 2019 looms, the result of the Italian-French competition appears to be that both have been unable to seize leadership of the Libya file, thus providing a further opportunity for the UN to drive the political process.

Other key western actors have been less active. The US has not thus far been willing to commit its diplomatic heft to its engagements over Libya. Many anticipated a significant policy shift from the incoming administration of President Donald Trump in favour of President Abdel Fatah al-Sisi in Egypt, and that this would translate into greater support for Haftar. Haftar appeared to use the prospect of this, along with interest from Russia, as leverage with his other allies, the UAE and Egypt. Improved relations with the US Department of Defence aside, no such shift has been discernible. Since 2014, American diplomatic staff has been posted to neighbouring Tunisia, with the US adopting a cautious approach in the wake of the 2012 attack on its consulate in Benghazi. On the political level, despite leading a dialogue between Libyan actors over economic reform, Libya does not appear to be a priority. In April 2018, US President Donald Trump told Italian Prime Minister Gentiloni that he does not see a role in Libya for the US. In contrast, US engagement over security issues is significant. US Africa Command has conducted a large number of airstrikes in recent years targeting extremist groups, including providing air support to the Misratan-led effort to oust ISIL from Sirte in 2016.

The UK has not placed significant political capital on Libya. It leads no diplomatic initiative or track. Wracked with other foreign policy challenges, overall interest from government appears to be limited. The UK backs the UN's action plan for Libya. The UK sees itself as an important balancing presence amongst diverging European positions. For the UK, Libya is principally a security and counter-terrorism issue.

The European Union has struggled to find its place in Libya diplomacy. This is mostly due to significant differences between individual member states. Its influence lies as a funder, contributing significantly to the UN mission and its activities, in addition to providing extensive funding for development and stabilization funding.

Russia appears to be taking an opportunistic approach towards Libya. On a security level, Russia has made clear overtures towards Haftar. Aside from inviting him aboard the Admiral Kuznetsov, an aircraft carrier, Russia is believed to be providing small arms.[39] According to the

[38] Interview with author on condition of anonymity

[39] Kozhanov, N. (2017) "Moscow's Presence in Libya Is a New Challenge for the West." Chatham House. Accessed 2 December 2018. Retrieved at:

New York Times, Russia had attempted to provide weapons to actors in the East in exchange for oil in 2014.[40] To the aggravation of Western powers, in 2016 Russia printed dinar notes for a reported LYD 4billion (approximately US$3billion) for the Eastern elements of Central Bank of Libya, despite a lack of international recognition.[41] This was compounded in October 2017, when the Eastern CBL ordered one-dinar coins, also from Russia.[42]

Beyond the Russian Ministry of Defence, a number of Russian state actors have engaged in Libya. Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov has welcomed a range of Libyans to Chechnya. A Duma-Libya Contact Group led by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov has facilitated exchange between the countries. Apart from political objectives and security ties, there are also commercial interests at play. Russia had significant arms sales to the Gaddafi regime, so there is a drive to recover that lost market. It is at times speculated that Russia could be the deal broker between rival Libyan factions, but there is little evidence to suggest that this will actually happen. Russia appears to be operating opportunistically, using the conflict in Libya to expand its power in the Middle East and to reduce that of the West.

Russia, along with other international powers, is likely to show interest in contracts associated with programs of reconstruction in Libya. Another power worth mentioning in this context is China, which had extensive investments in Gaddafi's Libya. The chaos in Libya cost China around US$20 billion of its investments in Libya between 2011 and 2013 alone, according to one estimate.[43] Outside of investment, China's political role is marginal. China abstained during the UN Security Council vote that authorized outside intervention, but became increasingly concerned with the way that the international approach played out, which challenges its principle of "non-interference" in the affairs of other countries.

Regional Actors in the Middle East and Africa

Regional actors within the Middle East and North Africa have taken a keen interest in Libya. The most influential regional actors are the UAE and Egypt. The UAE has backed Haftar's LNA, including through the provision of military equipment.[44] Egypt and the UAE have backed local

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https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/moscow-s-presence-libya-new-challenge-west

[40] Becker, J. and Schmitt, E. (2018) „As Trump Wavers on Libya, an ISIS Haven, Russia Presses On" The New York Times. Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/07/world/africa/trump-libya-policy-russia.html

[41] Associated Press (2016) "Libya's eastern bank to issue Russian-printed banknotes" Al Arabiya. 27 May, Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://english.alarabiya.net/en/business/economy/2016/05/27/Libya-s-eastern-bank-to-issue-Russian-printed-banknotes.html.

[42] Warfalli, A. (2017) "Eastern Libyan central bank launches its own coins made in Russia" Reuters. 20 October, Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL8N1MV3VL

[43] Sun, Y. (2013) „How China Views France's Intervention in Mali: An Analysis" Brookings. Accessed 7 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/how-china-views-frances-intervention-in-mali-an-analysis/

[44] UN (2017) "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"

actors that compete against Qatari and Turkey-backed groups, although support from Ankara and Doha appears to have reduced since 2014. Despite being under the radar of grand international diplomacy, UAE wields outsized influence in Libya in the security, economic and political spheres. The UAE is an important market for Libyan traders.

Despite its denials, Egypt has provided military support to Haftar's forces.[45] The LNA is seen as a security partner for Egypt. In October 2018, for example, Hisham Ashmawi, one of Egypt's most-wanted jihadi militants, was captured by the LNA. Not least because of its long, porous border, Egypt sees the situation in Libya as a security threat. There are also strong tribal connections between the two countries. The fall of the Muslim Brotherhood and the takeover of Sisi have had a major impact on the way Egypt has approached Libya. Egypt leads international efforts on Libyan army reunification, but its close relationship with Haftar-led forces means that it is not seen as a neutral arbiter.

Tunisia has attempted to insulate itself as best as possible from the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Libya. In reacting to the crisis, its key focus has been its long, porous border with Libya. At a length of 460 km[46], it presents a major challenge. By 2015, Tunisia had – with international funding – begun to set up trenches and monitoring systems around the border.[47]

Algeria's concerns are mostly security-based, with a focus on counter-terrorism.[48] Algeria's principle objective in relation to the crisis in Libya has been to prevent the "entry of weapons and terrorist groups."[49] To that end, Algeria has used vast amounts of money and resources to control its Eastern flank (see Figure 7).

United Nations Security Council. p. 35, Accessed 1 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/466

[45] Aboulenein, A., Elgood, G. (2017) "Is Egypt bombing the right militants in Libya?" Reuters. Accessed 2 December 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-egypt-security-analysis-idUSKBN18R2GE

[46] Laessing, U. (2018) "Pasta and petrol: Smuggling crackdown stirs dissent in Tunisia's south" Reuters. Accessed 29 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-libya/pasta-and-petrol-smuggling-crackdown-stirs-dissent-in-tunisias-south-idUSKCN1N30KL

[47] Laessing, U. (2018) "Pasta and petrol: Smuggling crackdown stirs dissent in Tunisia's south" Reuters. Accessed 29 November 2018. Retrieved at: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tunisia-libya/pasta-and-petrol-smuggling-crackdown-stirs-dissent-in-tunisias-south-idUSKCN1N30KL

[48] For a detailed exploration of Algerian interests and policy in Libya, see Harchaoui, J. (2018) "Too Close for Comfort: How Algeria Faces the Libya Conflict". Available at: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Algeria-Libya.pdf

[49] Harchaoui, J. (2018) "Too Close for Comfort: How Algeria Faces the Libya Conflict" Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Algeria-Libya.pdf

Figure 7: The View from Algeria, Small Arms Survey

At one point, Algeria had stationed around 23,000 border guards, gendarmes and soldiers in the East.[50] The nature of the threat has also made Algeria question its long-standing policy of non-intervention abroad. This is just one example that demonstrates that the conflict in Libya will have an influence in ways that are difficult to predict.

The UN Panel of Experts concluded in 2012 that the fragile infrastructure of Sahelian states of Mali, Niger and to a lesser extent Chad and Mauritania, has been severely challenged by ripple effects of Libya's instability. The Panel would conclude that "the mixture of large numbers of returnees, loss of remittances, weapons influxes, and the withdrawal of international aid, itself a result of increased insecurity" led to the resurgence of pre-existing conflict, the formation of new armed opposition groups and greater space for VEOs and international criminal networks to operate.[51]

Yet, this instability flows both ways. Problems in their countries of origin has witnessed a number of Sudanese and Chadian armed groups operating on Libyan territory in search of profit as guns for hire. For example, they are alleged to have played a key role in providing human resources for warring parties in the oil crescent.[52] In the latter half of 2018, the presence of these groups in Southern Libya has also sparked outbreaks of localized violence

[50] Harchaoui, J. (2018) "Too Close for Comfort: How Algeria Faces the Libya Conflict" Accessed 8 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Algeria-Libya.pdf

[51] UN (2012) "Letter dated 17 February 2012 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council" United Nations Security Council. p. 10, Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2012/163

[52] UN (2018) "Letter dated 5 September 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council" United Nations Security Council. p. 9, Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20S/2018/812

and a subsequent campaign against the "foreign elements."[53] In addition, the Chadian and Sudanese armed groups have used Libya as a platform to launch attacks in their country of origin. In one example in 2017, a Libya-based Chadian group infiltrated northern Chad from Southern Libya to reach Darfur. After they crossed the Chadian border, "they clashed with Special Forces, killed several men and withdrew to the Libyan border with captured arms and ammunition."[54]

6. Conclusion

Large-scale fighting might have subsided, but the conflict in Libya continues and the situation is highly volatile. More than seven years after the death of Gaddafi, the country continues to wrestle with insecurity and instability. There is no effective central government. Domestic actors wrestle for power and resources. The presence of countless armed actors, including extremist groups, makes the situation on the ground precarious and highly complex.

The economy has been damaged, particularly as rivals compete to capture state resources. Libya's infrastructure is in a state of disrepair. During the conflict, Libya has become a hub for the illicit flow of migrants and weaponry. Such an environment allows a permissive operating environment for VEOs. All of this has an effect on the wider region as well as Europe. Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria will continue to feel ripple effects from Libya's continued instability. Although not immediately obvious, the conflict in Libya has the potential to fuel conflict in the Sahel and Sudan.

European countries, who see Libya through a prism of migration and counter-terrorism, recognize that only a sustainable political settlement in Libya can effectively address these concerns. Yet, the path to such a settlement remains elusive, with Libyan rival actors able to utilize divisions in the international community and its relative lack of commitment to eschew pressure to compromise.

[53] Bocchi, A. (2018) "Foreign militants are taking over Libya's Fezzan region" The New Arab. Accessed 9 December. Retrieved at: https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2018/8/17/foreign-militants-are-taking-over-libyas-fezzan-region

[54] UN (2018) "Letter dated 5 September 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council" United Nations Security Council. p. 34, Accessed 10 December 2018. Retrieved at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20S/2018/812