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A Sea Change in the MENA Region: External Interventions in Libya

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ABSTRACT *External interventions by both regional and global powers in Libya have not been a scarcity after the 2011 revolution. With the turn of 2014, however, the nature of external interventions became more of a military one especially with the imposition of Haftar's rule in the east by several counter-revolutionary regional and global actors. At the point that the same counter-revolutionary alliance attempted to geopolitically strangulate Turkey both via propping up hostile and authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa, and also excluding it from the prospect of exploiting the riches of the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkish intervention materialized in early 2020. This study attempts to explain the various motivations of the major intervening actors in Libya, namely France, Russia, Egypt, and the UAE with a special focus on Turkey. Structural realist perspective is used to elucidate the international interventions to the Libyan civil war. The nature of the uncertainty emanating from the regional transformation motivated the key actors to get militarily involved in the Libyan crisis. The actors with defensive motives are more likely to stick to the conflict despite the risks of escalation.*

Keywords: Libya, Blue Homeland, EastMed, Geopolitical Containment, Defensive Intervention

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been experiencing cycles of structural change since the beginning of the Arab revolts in late 2010. The political landscape in the entire region has been transforming drastically following the events that unfolded after the popular protests in Tunisia. Cycles of popular revolts, regime changes, authoritarian resurgence, state failures, proxy wars, the spread of extremist groups, and the implicit and explicit external interventions of regional and global powers are among the significant dynamics of the structural transformations ongoing in the MENA region. The spillover effects of the civil wars and migration flows have destabilized MENA's neighboring countries and regions thus triggering the interventions of regional powers to those conflicts.

The transformations in the MENA region can be characterized as a tectonic shift that has shaken the entire political landscape and affected almost all of the local actors and their international allies and "patrons."[1] This study seeks to make sense of the motives behind the regional and global actors' involvement in Libya in the aftermath of the Arab revolts. What is happening in Libya is a microcosm of the broader post-Arab revolts' tensions in the region. More specifically, we focus on the involvement of external actors in post-revolutionary Libya and try to explain the logic of those actors' involvement under the conditions of broader structural change. There are ideological,[2] even idealistic[3] explanations of the motivations behind the external interventions in Libya, but we argue that the frameworks offered by neo-realism, more specifically the uncertainties caused by the structural changes in the regional power configuration, explicate the situation better in comparison to alternative explanations.[4]

This study provides an analytical comparison of the pro-change and counter-revolutionary foreign policies in effect in the region. For this reason, our explanations may be illustrative of other cases in the region as well. We argue that concerns related to security emanating from uncertainty is the key dynamic of external actors' involvement in Libya. Both pro-change and counter-revolutionary actors within the region are driven by similar concerns. Countries outside of the region, however, think in opportunistic terms –or their interest definition may be broader. Libya offers economic and geopolitical opportunities and may turn into a zone of risk if the political configurations in the country are shaped in an unpredictable way. There is currently a balance between opportunistic motives and motives to avert threats. We argue that the concerns related to avoiding political and security risks predominate over opportunistic calculations among the countries of the region. Extra-regional actors, on the other hand, are driven by an opportunistic perspective. If their expected benefits are higher than the costs, they consider involvement as the correct policy. The actors whose security is directly affected by the developments in Libya

will continue to commit to the competition for power in Libya. The actors who are indirectly related to the developments in Libya and those who have opportunistic drives are less likely to be committed to the confrontation if the proxy war intensifies. Alliances between local actors in Libya and external powers therefore have a very complicated dynamic. This dynamic will determine Libya's future political configuration.

Some regimes in the region felt threatened by the change of the status quo and the collapse of regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen and responded with counter-revolutionary strategies

Actors like Turkey, Russia, Qatar, the UAE and France consider the transformation in MENA since both the Arab spring and the subsequent counter-revolutionary wave that kicked off roughly around 2014, as an opportunity to get involved in the politics of the region and benefit from the strategic and economic opportunities it offers. Those new opportunities have triggered revisionist sentiments and policies with ideological or sectarian tokens, which created theatres of power struggles such as Yemen, Syria, Libya, Sudan, and Tunisia across MENA.[5] Conversely, many actors have perceived the transformation in the region and the shaking of the existing order as a significant threat to their national security or as a threat to the security of their regimes.[6] Some regimes in the region felt threatened by the change of the status quo and the collapse of regimes in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Yemen and responded with counter-revolutionary strategies.[7] The political transformation provided new opportunities for some actors in the region, whereas other powers felt threatened because of the rising influence of pro-change actors like Turkey and Qatar. The monarchies in particular, led by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia, tried to form a counter-revolutionary alliance and attempted to extend this alliance with the support of other international actors, including Russia and France, as a part of their containment strategy.[8] None of the regional actors were indifferent to the uncertainties that increased after the popular revolts.

The region's transformations have so far led to the devastation of many countries, including Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Iraq. Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Lebanon, and Bahrain have also been directly affected by the consequences of the transformations. Regional powers like Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Iran came to the brink of military confrontation due to their involvement in the proxy wars in Syria, Libya, and Yemen.[9] Even the great powers like Russia and the U.S. came to the brink of an indirect military confrontation in the Syrian context.[10] It seems that the instability in the region caused by the recent uncertainties and confrontations will continue to be a concern for regional actors. Other critical international powers will continue to get involved for different reasons

The wave of change after the Arab revolts was a grave threat and uncertainty for some actors when it comes to maintaining their domestic status quo, or in other words regime security

until the underlying sources of the instabilities are addressed and a new order or balance is restored in the region. For the moment, both the regional actors and the great powers have developed different response mechanisms to overcome the uncertainties emanating from the recent developments. The seeds of a broader armed confrontation are still in play, considering the tense relations between the pro-political change and counter-revolutionary alliances. Important international actors like the U.S., Russia, France, Italy, and the UK have occasionally positioned themselves according to the changing balance of power in the field.

The expectation of democratic political transformation turned into a deep disappointment in Egypt, Yemen, and Libya due to the direct involvement of counter-revolutionary forces. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, Turkey, Iran, and the influential international powers like the U.S., Russia, France, and the UK got involved in the uncertain political environment. Some of those actors supported the change, whereas the majority of the regimes in the region and their allies opted for a counter-revolutionary strategy.[11] Alliances have been formed among those actors to balance each other. While Turkey and Qatar supported and still support the political change in the region, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt wanted and still want to bring back the area's authoritarian status quo. The U.S. and Europe were in favor of the democratic change in the early stages of the Arab revolts,[12] yet when the post-revolution elections brought Islamist actors to power, they changed their roles and positions.[13] Many European actors and the U.S. now prefer a more pragmatic and case-based approach in their policy preferences concerning the region, rather than pursuing a norm-driven foreign policy.

Libya as the Center of a Wider Geopolitical Struggle

This study investigates the motives of the key regional and global players in the MENA region in the context of their involvement in Libya. Since the toppling of Muammar Qaddafi's 42-year reign, political developments have pushed the country into a bloody civil war. Libya is an appealing case for regional competition with its rich hydrocarbon resources and strategic geographical location stretching from the Mediterranean to Sub-Saharan Africa. Further, the nature of Libya's post-revolutionary regime is a significant issue for the ongoing debates related to ideological competition in the region. Some actors favor a democratic transition; others favor robust, authoritarian regimes; and

some others want a weak and fragmented Libya so that they can more easily exploit Libya's resources to project their power there. Overall, Libya is just one of the key domains in which the dynamics of regional anarchy and competing actors' responses are visible. With its low population density, mostly concentrated in Northern coastal cities, large geographical landscape and fragmented political configuration, Libya is a suitable ground for external interventions. In this article, we try to understand how various actors have responded to the crisis in the region, what their key motives are, and how we can draw the lines between offensive, defensive and opportunistic responses. The significant debates within structural realism will guide our discussion of the Libyan case, which is part of a broader structural change. The Libyan case is useful to illustrate the ideological, geopolitical, and economic competition in the region. We have to consider the policy formulations of all actors according to this transforming environment

The civil war between the internationally recognized, Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) and the renegade General Khalifa Haftar, supported by Egypt, the UAE, France, and Russia, is still going on despite the current stalemate and temporary ceasefire. Haftar has complicated relations with the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR).[14] The country is practically divided into three 'factions:' the Tripoli-based GNA, the Tobruk-based East and the Southern tribes. The weak and fragmented nature of the Libyan governing system also allows for the intervention of external actors. A key question is whether the actors are driven by opportunistic motives or by cautious, security-oriented concerns within this context of uncertainty.

The regional transformation and the cracking of the regional political order has allowed Turkey, Qatar, UAE, Russia and the U.S. to extend their influence in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The wave of change after the Arab revolts was a grave threat and uncertainty for some actors when it comes to maintaining their domestic status quo, or in other words regime security. Counter-revolutionary actors seeking to reinstate the pre-Arab revolts political order were concerned about the limitations of their regional influence and sought to strengthen their regional competition within the emerging political landscape. Many actors got involved in the regional change either to influence the direction of the change or to defend their countries and their regimes from the medium and long-term consequences of the regional transformation. The unstable region turned into a zone for tough competition. Especially after the military coup that toppled Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohammed Morsi, the counter-revolutionary forces gained more momentum in the region. Now the counter-revolutionary alliance is much stronger with the commitments of the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the case-based contributions of international actors like the U.S., Russia, France, and the UK. The current regional competition is beyond pro- and counter-change; many

Infographic
showing the
maritime
boundaries and
agreements
bordering Turkey's
Continental
Shelf, including
the most recent
agreement with
Libya.

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actors have diverging interests and motives. Geopolitical uncertainty pushes those regional actors such as the UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain in different directions, although national security or regime security is their main driving factor. The situation is much more complicated for the extra-regional actors.

Logic of External Intervention in Libya: Offensive, Defensive, Opportunistic, or Ideological?

Kenneth Waltz, the leading theorist of structural realism, argues that security and protection of a state's existing position in an anarchic international system is the highest end.[15] States pursue power expansion strategies when their security is at stake. Offensive and defensive versions of realism come from the same structural neo-realist tradition and rest on the same basic assumptions of this tradition. Offensive realists (Robert Gilpin, John Mearsheimer, Colin

Elman, and Randall Schweller) argue that the anarchic international system forces states to maximize their power and seek superiority to survive and ensure their security.[16] Mearsheimer, one of the leading theorists of offensive realism, claims that states always aspire to more power with revisionist intentions by watching for possible opportunities over their rivals.[17] Thinking in terms of relative strength and maximizing power against competitors is the natural consequence of offensive thinking.

Actors like Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar played more active roles in Libya for different reasons

Given the impossibility of ascertaining other states' real intentions, whether they pursue offensive or defensive policies, states have to be prepared for a worst-case scenario according to offensive realists.[18] For Mearsheimer, the multipolar system, especially an unbalanced one that includes several great powers and a potential hegemon, is the most unstable system. In contrast, a bipolar system is the most stable. Mearsheimer argues that global hegemony is not possible because of geographic limitations as the world becomes too big and complex to be dominated by a single power. Thus, the most suitable strategy is to pursue regional hegemony through offshore balancing and/or obstructing the rise of other hegemonies in other regions.[19] Robert Gilpin claims that states will seek expansionist policies when marginal benefits exceed the costs. In other words, states prefer expansionism if it is profitable for them. For Gilpin, the most stable system is a hegemonic system dominated by one global hegemonic power.

When the system becomes more equal and power becomes less concentrated, hegemonic wars and competitions start.[20] Fareed Zakaria stresses that states pursue an expansionist strategy when politicians perceive a relative increase in state power.[21] Structural changes in the power distribution, the emergence of new threats due to structural change, or the emergence of new opportunities trigger a new cycle of power competition among key actors due to the system's changing nature. In all versions of offensive realism, there is a general assumption that those actors who want to gain hegemony or maximize power do so with the understanding that they have capacity and will to do so. While Mearsheimer focuses on our inability to predict the intentions of other actors as the key driver of power maximization, Zakaria and Gilpin focus more on self-assessment.

Defensive realists argue that security is a common concern, and states aim to maximize their security by maintaining the existing balance of power and pursuing more moderate and restrained policies since the motivations for expansionist strategies are rare and most costly.[22] According to Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory, alliance behavior is shaped by threat perception

For Turkish authorities, the costs of non-interference in the Libyan equation are estimated to be much higher than the potential risks of intervention

from the other side rather than other actors' power accumulation.[23] Randall Schweller challenges Walt's balance of threat logic by declaring that it is biased in favor of status quo; he claims that bandwagoning is more common than balancing, which is a costly behavior. Bandwagoning, as a seeking for profit in an opportunist way, is a strategy adopted by states for which the value of revisionism exceeds the value of the status quo.[24] Grieco summarizes that defensive realists assume that countries aim at maximizing their security and protecting the status quo because states refrain from potential relative losses. Therefore, "states are uncertain about one another's future intentions; thus, they pay close attention to how cooperation might affect relative capabilities in the future."[25] For defensive realists, expansionism and aggression are dangerous; self-defeating and costly. Expansionism mostly exceeds benefits by producing counter-balancing behaviors leading to a more insecure environment. So, the system generally punishes aggressor states.[26]

The U.S.' gradual withdrawal from the MENA region in the last couple of years, Britain's concentration on Brexit, and related domestic problems and the EU's lack of foreign policy coordination and prioritization led to a power vacuum in the MENA region following the Arab spring. This situation allowed for the broader involvement of regional powers like Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, and unconventional global actors like Russia. The reluctance of key conventional actors like the U.S. and the UK, and the indifference of other significant global players like China reduced the risks and costs of involvement in the region. Actors like Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar played more active roles in Libya for different reasons. Italy and Malta were also very active on the diplomatic side of the Libya crisis, yet they refrained from engaging in a power competition in the military domain. Malta and Italy instead preferred to mobilize their allies and use their diplomatic leverage. Uncertainties about the future of Libya as well as the geopolitical and economic opportunities that the country may provide led international actors to get involved in the Libyan conflict. As the parties became part of the struggle in Libya, the conflict grew more complicated. Libya and Malta are anxious about potential refugee flows if Libya becomes more destabilized. They are also concerned about increased terrorism activity in the region. An unstable Libya could turn the country into a hub for migration from North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. This is a serious security concern for both countries. Italy's oil sector is dependent on imported oil from Libya; losing such a resource and investment completely would be costly for the Italian economy. Despite the potential security and economic risks related to the destabilization of Libya,

both countries have refrained from military involvement. They therefore are not included in our analysis.

In the next section, we examine the four key regional and international actors who have agenda-setting and game-changing roles in the ongoing competition and confrontation in Libya. These actors also have roles beyond the ongoing civil war. We specifically focus on the following features in foreseeing the endurance and commitment of these four key regional and international actors: (i) geographical proximity (from the region, outside of the region), (ii) neighboring (from sea or land), (iii) predominant motive (defensive, opportunistic), (iv) key capabilities (military, economic, ideological, diplomatic).

The Logic of Turkey's Military Involvement in Libya

For Turkish authorities, the costs of non-interference in the Libyan equation are estimated to be much higher than the potential risks of intervention. The main rationale of Turkey's intensive involvement in the Libyan crisis is related to the escalating geopolitical tension and new energy games in the Eastern Mediterranean region. In addition to these factors, Turkey has strong economic interests in Libya. The most challenging issue for Turkey is related to the sovereignty debate on the maritime zones in the Eastern Mediterranean. In terms of geographical proximity, Libya seems far from Turkey on the map. Turkey does not have a land border with Libya, but it does have a maritime border with Libya. According to a famous Turkish admiral, "Libya is Turkey's neighbor by sea."[27] This view is increasingly gaining ground in tandem with the Blue Homeland doctrine.[28]

Turkish involvement in Libya can be considered a defensive and a counter-geopolitical encirclement/siege one in essence. Turkey has clear objectives in its Libya engagement. It supports the GNA, which has relatively more international legitimacy and broader popular support among the Libyan population, especially in the Western parts of the country. The ambiguous security situation in the Eastern-Mediterranean region motivated Turkish authorities to play a more active role in Libya. Turkey viewed the pro-Haftar coalition's Libya objectives as part of a broader strategy of excluding Turkey from the Eastern Mediterranean, both materially and in terms of geopolitical competition. Cyprus, the Aegean, the Levant, and Syria are connected to this zone. The Turkish military sees the new encirclement strategy being enacted against it as 'a naval Sèvres'[29] and, as such, a fundamental threat to Turkey's geopolitical interests. Moreover, Turkey has deep historical, cultural, and economic ties with Libya, which it wants to preserve, and the Turkish private sector has historically had significant investments and projects in Libya; Turkish contractors and investors do not want to lose their economic stakes in Libya. All these factors are motivating Turkey's involvement in the Libyan crisis.

In other words, it is in Turkey's interests to try to be an influential actor in the Eastern Mediterranean power game in order to protect its national security and rights of hydrocarbon exploitation in that region.[30] For Ankara, this is a national security priority for its future. There is an emerging alliance forming under the title of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EastMed).[31] Seven countries formed this forum: Greece, Greek Cypriot Administration (GCA), Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, and Italy. In January 2020, France asked to join the forum and the U.S. requested to be a permanent observer. It seems that the forum aims to share the hydrocarbon resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and specifically aims to exclude Turkey.[32] On the surface, the forum looks like energy cooperation, but for Turkey it is an emerging geopolitical pact that is trying to exclude and isolate Turkey from the region, despite the fact that it has the longest shores on the Eastern Mediterranean. An alliance between Athens, Tel Aviv, and Cairo has tried to form an economic and energy cooperation forum to silence and incorporate its former enemies by means of the promise of some carrots. Excluding the country that has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean and strong naval capabilities is not a wise decision if the objective of the forum is to promote the idea of energy for peace. Turkey has made it very clear on many occasions that it will not accept being boxed into the Gulf of Antalya.

The Turkish president have reiterated on several occasions that Turkey will do whatever is necessary to prevent any plans that aim to exclude or sideline Turkey from Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical/geo-economic projects: "Our opponents should consider acting against our interests if they are ready to pay the price we already have been paying for and if they are ready to consider taking the risks that we are ready to take. If they are not ready to take such risks and make such mistakes, then a fair diplomatic solution is the best path for addressing the problems between us."[33] Erdoğan has mentioned on various occasions that Turkey will not refrain from taking any substantive steps for protecting its sovereignty and rights in the region. This stance can be understood in different ways. Turkey has made it clear that Turkish sovereignty and Turkish economic rights will be protected regardless of the potential costs. Turkey will not accept any *fait accompli* in the region. Despite the statements by other countries in the region accusing Turkey of expansionist moves, Turkey conceptualizes its involvement in Libya defensively.

Turkey's Blue Homeland doctrine[34] aims to formulate a naval strategy to support Turkey's geopolitical interests in the region. The doctrine was a defensive reaction to an initial perception that became an actual attempt to encircle Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean by means of a geopolitical and geo-economic alignment among Israel, Egypt, Greece, and the Greek Cypriot Administration that culminated in the formation of EastMed. The emergence of the doctrine was triggered first by the generation of the so-called Seville

Map, which envisaged excessive maritime zones for both Greece and the GCA that encroached upon the maritime rights of both Turkey and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) to such an extent that Turkey, as per the Seville Map, was to be boxed into the Gulf of Antalya. The map was also treated as the basis for a series of oil and gas drilling and extraction permits around the island of Cyprus, and

The Blue Homeland doctrine is viewed by Turkey as the only and last resort of remaining in the Eastern Mediterranean game and protecting its rights and interests

permitted the drilling and extraction activities of multi-national energy companies including French Total and Italian ENI, among others. The fact that the permits were unilaterally issued by the GCA, without the approval of and in disregard for the rights of the TRNC, fed Turkey's fears that the latter was being excluded from the exploitation of the rich oil and gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean by *fait accompli* carve-outs. Hence, the Blue Homeland doctrine is viewed by Turkey as the only and last resort of remaining in the Eastern Mediterranean game and protecting its rights and interests.

In addition, Turkey signed maritime boundaries and military cooperation agreement with Libya's GNA in November 2019 as a key component of the Blue Homeland doctrine.[35] Agreements with the GNA are viewed as an effort to break Turkey's geopolitical containment and protect its rights in the East Mediterranean. Considering its policy towards the region, it is obvious that there are different motivations of Turkey. Adoption of the Blue Homeland doctrine fell into the offensive side of Turkey's motivations; establishment or maintenance of economic agreements between Libyan commercial companies and Turkish companies fell under the opportunistic category; whereas the diplomatic opposition to the EastMed project or attempts at inclusion in it fell under defensive motivations.

Turkey played active roles in the political transition period in the aftermath of the February 2011 Revolution in Libya. Turkey's successful humanitarian role and humanitarian evacuation campaign were received constructively among the international actors.[36] Turkey was one of the key diplomatic players regarding matters related to Libya after 2011. It is important to note that Turkey was a latecomer to the Libyan military competition; Turkish involvement was activated only by the invitation of the GNA government, which was a boon for Turkey to break the geopolitical siege imposed upon it. The invitation per se was not the reason Turkey intervened, but it facilitated the intervention and provided the necessary legitimacy for it. Even without the formal invitation by the GNA, the geopolitical dynamics and Turkish interests were pushing Turkey to intervene. Turkish authorities had refrained from becoming involved

With Turkish help, the GNA took control of several towns within a few weeks. The GNA's *Bayraktar* TB2 drones destroyed several of the LNA's Russian-made Pantsir air defense systems
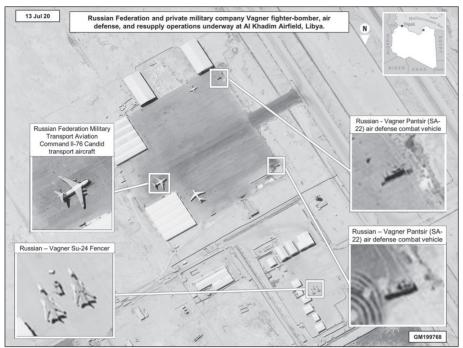
in another international conflict after the Syria crisis, but as EastMed's efforts to sideline Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean geopolitical game became more concrete, Turkey decided to intervene in Libya. In terms of military involvement, however, Turkey's intervention in the Libyan crisis began after the renegade General Khalifa Haftar's campaign to topple the GNA in Tripoli, which would leave Turkey without an ally in Libya and Eastern Mediterranean and thus, complete and consolidate the encirclement. Two key agreements between the GNA and Turkey in late 2019 changed the course of the civil war in Libya. Despite the GNA's weak position against the pro-Haftar coalition, Ankara decided to work with the internationally recognized government in Tripoli.

Turkey's previous success in preventing the regime change efforts of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the Qatar crisis[37] was a turning point in terms of responding to the GNA's call. The involvement of the UAE and Saudi Arabia had led to civil wars in Yemen and Libya and the former had supported the coups in Egypt and Sudan. As such, their counter-revolutionary interventionism was perceived as a threat to Turkey's vision for the region. Turkish military involvement in the Qatar blockade helped prevent a regime change in Doha. The plan had been orchestrated by Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) and Mohammed bin Zayed (MBZ) and their regional allies –but they faced some limitations.[38] The U.S.' reduced interest in the region left behind a power vacuum that ambitious leaders such as MBZ and MBS tried to fill by supporting their proxies. Counter-revolutionary and pro-political change competition is another fault line in the region that triggered Turkey's involvement in Libya.

Turkey's significant role, especially the effective drone campaign in Idlib during the Operation Spring Shield, had changed the course of the Syrian crisis. Russia and the Assad regime had planned to end the Syrian civil war by taking over Idlib and bombing the opposition groups there, including civilians. Turkey's Operation Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch were significant moves to counter the PKK and ISIS in Syria. Each operation was well-organized and executed, despite the U.S., Russian and some European actors' resistance. Those two successful military moves put Turkey in an experienced and 'combat-proven' position evidencing her maturity to aid the GNA government against Haftar's assault on Tripoli.

Turkey's military support to the GNA changed the balance of power on the field. Technologically advanced Turkish drones and Turkish military advisors

Satellite photographs showing that Russia continues to deploy military equipment in Libya through its security company Wagner, July 13, 2020.

AFRICOM / AA

reversed the gains of Haftar's so-called Libyan National Army (LNA).[39] With Turkish help, the GNA took control of several towns within a few weeks. The GNA's *Bayraktar* TB2 drones destroyed several of the LNA's Russian-made Pantsir air defense systems;[40] its effective drone warfare also demoralized the Haftar coalition and led to the retreat of the foreign fighters and mercenaries. The GNA's capture of the strategic al-Watiya airbase and Tarhuna were critical turning points in the fight between the LNA and GNA forces. The al-Watiya airbase is close to the Tunisian border, and it had been a key strategic asset in Haftar's offensive to capture Tripoli and indeed his overall campaign in the Western part of Libya. In order to halt this seemingly unstoppable and potent sweeping operation by the GNA, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi declared a red line to protect Sirte and Jufra, the likely fall of which would mean a complete defeat of the pro-Haftar forces.[41]

Turkey's intervention in Libya on the side of the GNA changed the balance of power in the field. The pro-Haftar coalition was weakened and the credibility of the renegade general plummeted. However, the coalition supporting and sponsoring the Haftar side did not give up their geopolitical and economic goals in Libya. They merely started to re-calibrate their position and consider alternative game plans. It would be unrealistic for those actors to abandon their ambitions. Turkey does not have sufficient capacity to counter the entire

coalition militarily due to logistical constraints. However, Turkey's military involvement in the field helped to form a balance between the fighting factions in the Libyan field.

The UAE's Counter-Revolutionary Agenda

The UAE is an offensive and ideologically motivated actor in its intervention in Libya. Its actions are offensive in nature since the UAE aims at designing the whole country from scratch by subverting the status quo and existing political and social structures. The UAE will not settle for a limited influence that could be maintained within the boundaries of a particular region of Libya. That is why Haftar did not content himself with being the practical ruler of Eastern Libya and the Fezzan region with Benghazi as its de facto capital; hence, he attacked Tripoli with the clear aim of toppling the GNA and being the only authority in the whole of Libya. Abu Dhabi's intervention is also offensive since the UAE wants to re-design the political order of the country (Libya) and a wider region (the Sahel and North Africa) geographically far away from the UAE. Thus, it is impossible to treat the UAE's intervention as one that presumably emanated from a defensive, 'neighborly concern.'

The UAE's intervention has come in the form of a continuous process since roughly after the revolution but especially by 2014, rather than a one-shot occasion. The progressive intervention of the UAE has ranged from military support in the form of hardware, ammunition and manpower, to influencing operations through the media and pitting other social actors against certain political and societal figures. In the expectation that they would conquer the new Libya after 2014, Abu Dhabi stepped in to patronize specific military and political factions. The imposition of Haftar by the UAE and Egypt was followed by a campaign of propaganda that blamed the unsuccessful transformation of the country on 'Islamism' and portrayed Haftar as its savior.

Media outlets linked to Egypt and the UAE blamed democratically elected leaders for the political failures of the country, and Haftar was whitewashed and presented as the only one that could manage the widespread frustration among Libyans. Moreover, the GNA was boycotted by UAE-sponsored factions in Libya almost as soon as it was officially launched on December 17, 2015. Simultaneously, the UAE established an airbase at al-Khadim, close to Haftar's headquarters. Thus, the UAE did not settle for influencing operations to disrupt the consolidation of the GNA, but also made preparations for future military campaigns to destroy it physically.[42] To this end, since April 2019, the UAE has carried out thousands of drone and fighter jet strikes to support Haftar's offensive against Tripoli.[43] Furthermore, since January 2020 alone, Abu Dhabi has maintained an air bridge consisting of hundreds of cargo flights, which are believed to have carried tons of armaments, from the UAE to Eastern Libya and Egypt.[44] The UAE is also known to have supplied multi-national

cadres of mercenaries to fight for Haftar in Libya within the scope of its multi-faceted support to him.[45]

The UAE's unremitting support to Haftar has not been limited to influencing operations and military elements–it also included diplomatic protection for him. Thanks to its enormous financial capacity, the UAE invested in actors in both the U.S. and Europe to facilitate Haftar in circumventing widespread condemnation for his belligerence

The UAE's lack of qualms about allowing Tripoli and its infrastructure to be demolished at the hands of pro-Haftar forces during the assault on Tripoli is proof that UAE's ideological commitment to Haftar overshadows any potential economic concerns

through its bilateral relationships and lobbying endeavors.[46] All of these different kinds of support to Haftar aimed at a wider, aggressive geopolitical agenda for the UAE: namely, its rivalry with Turkey. By intervening in Libya, the UAE attempted to set off a *fait accompli* that would cut Turkey off from North Africa and deprive Turkey of a substantial gateway into Sub-Saharan Africa.[47]

The UAE's intervention is ideologically motivated in the sense that Abu Dhabi is determined to exterminate all revolutionary actors and pro-democracy groups by installing a military dictatorship led by Haftar. The UAE's main concern regarding regime type in Libya is the fear of threat to its own authoritarian monarchy. Abu Dhabi is worried about the democratic contagion that may eventually jeopardize its own regime.

Like any other external actor that has intervened in Libya, the UAE expects economic benefits in Libya in the future, and one might imagine that it would be concerned about the increasing cost of reconstructing the country should the conflict continue; however, this seems to have not influenced its conduct. The UAE's lack of qualms about allowing Tripoli and its infrastructure to be demolished at the hands of pro-Haftar forces during the assault on Tripoli is proof that UAE's ideological commitment to Haftar overshadows any potential economic concerns.[48] If the UAE was concerned about the civilian cost and the future burden of reconstructing Tripoli after the war, it would not allow such an indiscriminate mass destruction of the city.

Pragmatically speaking, Abu Dhabi is not dependent on oil imports from Libya as the former has its own abundance of oil and, in fact, Libya is a competitor for Abu Dhabi and other oil exporters in the region. If Libya's oil exports were delayed or obstructed due to violence, blockade or other reasons related to instability, Abu Dhabi would be a beneficiary of such a delay. In short, eco-

In an attempt to play a decisive role in Libya's political and military future, Cairo has used the high-level talks it has mediated in recent years

nomic benefits emanating from Libya are a lesser concern for Abu Dhabi, and the continuation of instability there is advantageous for it in the short and medium term. Abu Dhabi's counter-revolutionary and counter-Islamist agenda precedes all other interests within the Libyan game. Limiting Turkey and Qatar's geopolitical and ideological influence in the region is therefore the main driver of the UAE's aggressive interventions in Libya. By intervening there, Abu Dhabi is also trying to be a party to the geopolitical confrontation in the Eastern Mediterranean. In terms of its geopolitical drives, the UAE's intervention in Libya is an expansionist and offensive one. Coordination and alliance with Egypt helps the UAE to expand its geopolitical influence, but Abu Dhabi's aggressive moves may eventually disturb Cairo as well. Without cooperation and coordination with Cairo, Abu Dhabi's influence in Libya would be limited. Hence, the UAE would not be able to maintain its offensive actions in Libya without the support of other powerful regional actors such as Egypt, as unilateral action would severely diminish Abu Dhabi's capacity.

Between Border Security and Economic Opportunities: Egypt's Ambitions in Libya

Egypt's intervention is a defensive one, despite its diluted ideological tone compared to those of the UAE and France. As Egypt shares a 1,115 km-long border with Libya as well as social, economic, and cultural ties, it stands to lose to a great extent from an insecure, destabilized, and politically hostile Libya. Although Cairo believes in the merits of a military tutelage, if not a proper military rule in Libya, the ideological credentials of this belief are not as strict as the French and Emirati visions.

Certain considerations have convinced Egypt to back Haftar militarily and diplomatically. Haftar was seen as a natural ally due to the location of his forces near the Egyptian border. For Egypt, the mutual ideology of militarism between el-Sisi and Haftar, economic opportunism and direct threats to Egypt's security interests can be considered as a mixture that explains Egypt's support for Haftar with the hope of a stable Libya that could help prop up the Egyptian economy. Furthermore, allowing Egyptian laborers to resume work in Libya –where the remittances accounted for nearly $33 million per year prior to the uprisings– and maintaining a subsidized oil supply from Libya are among Egypt's great expectations.[49]

Since Qaddafi's fall in 2011, insecurity in Cyrenaica has far worsened, and the constant flow of militants across the Eastern border has posed a direct threat to Egypt's stability and internal security. Egypt has made a decision to get involved in Libya mainly to ensure its border security; Egypt was concerned of

the formation of 'a safe haven' in Libya's Eastern border for militias, and this concern evidently pushed Egypt to secure its Western border with an aim to prevent spillover effects of such a safe haven in Eastern Libya into Western Egypt. Furthermore, eradicating a deeper proliferation of illegal immigration, as well as arms and drug smuggling as illicit traffics through Libya to Egypt and vice versa has been another grave concern.[50]

The Libyan crisis poses a challenge to domestic stability and political legitimacy in Egypt from the view of el-Sisi. Establishing a sort of Egyptian protectorate in Cyrenaica against extremist groups and facilitating the stabilization of Libya would be an outcome of Egyptian intervention that would mean a substantial benefit for Egypt. Therefore, el-Sisi could get the help of Libya's strongman Khalifa Haftar as well as the HoR. When his return to Libya succeeded with Operation Dignity in 2014, Haftar enjoyed political and military support from Egypt. In an interview in a newspaper in Egypt, Haftar did not hesitate to cite his close cooperation with Egypt encompassing intelligence sharing and military assistance, despite violating the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) embargo on arms to Libya by sending weapons.[51]

In an attempt to play a decisive role in Libya's political and military future, Cairo has used the high-level talks it has mediated in recent years. Much of this initiative has centered on expanding control over the reconstruction and future leadership of the united Libyan Armed Forces. In these consultations, Cairo has an obvious goal: to ensure that there is language in the constitution that will offer a role in state management to the "military institution." This will serve as a bulwark for Egypt against 'Islamist factions' in Libya's West.[52] Cairo's approach has a history. Egypt published the Cairo Declaration months after the signing of Libya Political Agreement (LPA) in Morocco; it proposed a series of changes to step past a diplomatic impasse, the most important of which is the article granting the GNA authority over the Libyan Armed Forces. However, Egypt needed to ensure that the House of Representatives retained control over any potential military alliance, the strongest component of which would be the LNA. Egypt continues to perceive some elements of the military patchwork of former Libyan Armed Forces soldiers, foreign mercenaries, local militias and Islamists as the main security guarantor along the long, porous border shared by the two countries, regardless of the significant setbacks faced by the LNA since 2016.[53]

As the stability and consolidation of Eastern Libya is a paramount concern for Cairo, Egypt has sought, at many turns, to smooth over relations among Eastern actors, especially between an unruly Haftar and figures more dedicated to the political process. For example, Egypt worked to resolve differences between the two figures ahead of the political dialogue forum during a meeting between Egyptian officials, Haftar and Aguila Saleh on September

23, 2019 for fear that the conflict could jeopardize the strength of the East and the interests of Egypt at the bargaining table.[54] In addition, using its influence in the talks, Cairo wanted to ensure that Egyptian officials could clear up all appointments for senior roles to be assigned to the East in a potential national government.[55] Cairo's geopolitical interest and involvement in Libyan politics will be persistent due to its geographic location and strategic interests. Cairo would be unhappy about an Islamist-led democratic transformation in Libya due to its possible impact on and diffusion to Egyptian politics. The economic opportunities and resources offered by Libya are also important drivers of Egypt's interest in Libya. While Egypt's alliance system in Libya may change, it is highly unlikely that Egypt will reduce its involvement in the geopolitics of the Libyan conflict.

France Efforts to Maintain Status Quo in North Africa

France is another offensive and ideologically driven actor intervening in Libya. Fighting against "Islamism" is considered one of the pillars of French foreign policy in recent years. In terms of its vision for Libya, France sees eye to eye with the UAE, they only differ in terms of the scale and medium of their respective interventions. The convergence between the two is not confined to Libya; they have the same strategic vision for a wide area spanning the Gulf, the Middle East, the Sahel, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa. Put plainly, both France and the UAE strive to eradicate any form of "Islamism" in this vast geography.

In line with the grand geopolitical vision of Abu Dhabi, through its intervention in Libya, France aspires to redesign the Sahel, North Africa, and the Mediterranean

With a view to fighting terrorism and restoring stability in Libya, France's covert military support for Haftar started in Benghazi as early as 2015. With the instalment of Haftar, France was almost entirely guided by a counter-terrorism policy headed by its security and intelligence establishments. France completely engaged in Haftar's 'counter-terrorism' initiative in 2016 under the outgoing Socialist presidency of Francois Hollande, who went so far as to supply Haftar with Special Forces, weakening the agreed-upon UN procedure for fostering the GNA.[56] Five years after the revolution, there were rumors of three French soldiers losing their lives in Libya during a Special Forces mission.[57] French support for the authoritarian Haftar seems hostile to its liberal-democratic ideals, but is largely in line with its attempts to establish military alliances to protect the Sahel by means of authoritarian leaders in other parts of Africa. Haftar spread into Libya's South-Western Fezzan region and took complete control of the country's oil infrastructure through a French-backed operation.[58] Apparently, Macron's France has a vision of Haftar taking over Libya and creating a country-wide, French-friendly political order.[59]

The greatest contribution Paris has made to Haftar is arguably the 'diplomatic shield' it created for him. Macron transformed Haftar from a discreet proxy to an avowed political ally at a surprise conference in 2018 at La Celle-Saint-Cloud. Macron's grand plan reinvented Haftar from one upstart warlord among many to the apparent heir of Libya. France and the UAE have not only armed and funded Haftar's conquests since the La Celle-Saint-Cloud conference, but have protected him from international criticism and marketed his takeover of Libya as a desirable inevitability. By the time he scheduled a National Conference of the United Nations by invading the capital of Libya in April 2019, Haftar could assert support from most of the UN Security Council. This is a spectacular example of how successful Paris and Abu Dhabi have been in undermining Western consensus to make way for their own agenda.[60]

Moreover, France has used its diplomatic muscles to ensure that the Emirati mission in Libya is not criticized by anyone. In Paris, decision makers agree that the stakes are high when it comes to the future of collaboration and communication between France and the Emiratis throughout Africa. France's leadership sees the UAE as an "ideal" Sunni Muslim partner that can help Paris accomplish its core foreign policy goals across Africa. This is due to ideological variables, French appreciation for the "economic dynamism" of

The actors that have defensive motives and that have a land and/or sea border with Libya are more likely to maintain their presence and military involvement in the Libyan civil war

the UAE and many common understandings within the Sahel region of the definitions of "terrorism" and "extremism."[61]

In line with the grand geopolitical vision of Abu Dhabi, through its intervention in Libya, France aspires to redesign the Sahel, North Africa, and the Mediterranean. To this end, France has been investing in military dictatorships for the sake of maintaining its influence and furthering its interests –and its investments in Haftar's destructive project are no different. French support to Haftar has not only been about maintaining influence and interests but has also been driven by an ideological obsession and even zeal against any manifestation of Islamism, which was recently epitomized by Macron's 'Anti-Separatism Bill' even within his own country. France has both offensive and defensive drives in its Libyan gambit. Efforts to protect its former colonial clout and economic interests in the Sahel region can be considered a defensive motive. However, fighting against Islamist groups and factions and trying to change the political landscape in the region together with the UAE is an aggressive, offensive policy. Yet French interventionism in Libya and beyond also leads to backlash from former French colonies such as Algeria. France's current geopolitical posture in Libya can be described as an "offensive-defense." France will try to stay in the Libya game by means of its allies and proxies as far as it can. Only the argument of fighting against "Islamist-extremists" can justify French support for the renegade general Khalifa Haftar.

Russia's Opportunistic Venture in Libya

Russian involvement in the Libyan crisis is an opportunistic venture. Russia seized an opportunity to exert its influence, especially over Eastern Libya, by making use of the weakness or shortcomings of the Haftar camp in military terms. Russia basically offered the military expertise and skills of Russian mercenaries as well as weaponry for Haftar's Tripoli offensive, and in return it gained considerable influence –so much so that Haftar's LNA does not have any authority over the movement and deployment of Russian mercenaries in Libya.

One of the main drivers that encouraged Russia to intervene or to maintain a presence in Libya is the fact that it detected a 'power vacuum' there. The power vacuum is the very thing that rendered Russian intervention in Libya possible. In the absence of a forceful presence of the U.S. and major European powers, Russia gradually filled the vacuum.[62]

The biggest dividend of maintaining a presence and rendering itself an influential actor in Libya was undoubtedly achieving a geopolitical trump card and a whip hand over the European continent. Having some sort of a foothold in Libya would grant Russia the ability to have a sway over the politics of international migration, security and energy that concern Europe to a great extent. Since Libya is one of the main routes of migration from all of Africa into Europe, by maintaining a presence and influence there, Russia would be able to control the wave of illegal migration and thus weaponize it against Europe. When relations between Russia and the European countries are good, Russia could increase its grip over the migration waves and in return ask for certain concessions from its European interlocutors. On the other hand, when relations sour, Russia could use the threat of unleashing the migration flow from Libya to Europe to get what it wants from the latter.[63]

Russia's intervention in Libya is the one that bears a lot of fruit despite its limited nature.[64] Although Russia does not consider Libya an essential national security issue for its long-term goals, whatever Russia achieves in Libya will be a bounty in many respects. By maintaining a presence in Libya, Russia stands to strengthen its position in the Eastern Mediterranean as well. Moreover, Libya is also a significant location from which Russia can project influence, especially into Sub-Saharan Africa. Last but not least, Russia aims at generating cracks within the EU and NATO with its intervention in Libya, and so far, it seems to have been successful, given the emergence of a strong anti-Turkish position by France and Greece recently.

Conclusion

Together with the Syrian civil war, the civil war in Libya is one of the most complicated showcases of internationalized conflict in the MENA region. Popular revolts and NATO intervention helped to topple the Qaddafi Regime, but Libya has been experiencing deep divisions since the February 2011 revolution. The Libyan civil war is part of a region-wide, systemic transformation. This transformation and change have affected almost all the actors in the MENA region. That is why most of the actors in the region have responded to this tectonic shift. Libya's new geopolitical and strategic preferences, economic system, and hydrocarbon resources are crucial factors for the other actors. Libya's alignment is also crucial for shaping the new balance of power in the region. Indeed, Libya's position is becoming more important, especially given the new geopolitical competition in the Eastern Mediterranean region. Ideological, geopolitical, and economic transformation in Libya has consequences for almost all of the actors in the region. Some actors decided to get involved in Libya in order to have a broader impact on the shaping of the new order in the region.

The UAE and Russia will also remain committed to their involvement in Libya to the extent that the political and material costs and risks of their involvement do not exceed their potential geopolitical gains

To summarize, geopolitical proximity, as well as the main motives of intervention and the key capabilities of the actors that have intervened militarily in the Libyan civil war have been comparatively analyzed. We argued that the actors that have defensive motives and that have a land and/or sea border with Libya are more likely to maintain their presence and military involvement in the Libyan civil war. So far, Turkish intervention on the side of the GNA has brought a balance in the military field. Further escalation of the conflict beyond Sirte could have risked the interests of all the actors. The possible changes in the structural power balance in the region will determine whether the conflict in Libya will escalate further. Egypt and Turkey are the actors that are more likely to persist in the geopolitical confrontation in Libya. Both countries have defensive motives; Egypt has a land border, and Turkey a maritime border with Libya. Both countries have different preferences about the possible form of a future Libyan regime and have aligned with actors within Libya who share similar ideological preferences. France also has defensive motives behind its Libyan involvement, but this is due to the France's efforts to maintain post-colonial geopolitical and economic privileges. The UAE and Russia will also remain committed to their involvement in Libya to the extent that the political and material costs and risks of their involvement do not exceed their potential geopolitical gains. For the UAE, how the Libyan regime is shaped may put some pressure on its own regime as well. Therefore it will be part of a broader ideological confrontation in the region, but the UAE may continue to mobilize its different capabilities depending on the risks. Overall, it would be unrealistic for Abu Dhabi to get involved in the Libyan conflict more directly. ●

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