Egypt's Role in Libya

Ferhat Polat



(Sinan Gül - Anadolu Agency)

This policy outlook examines Egypt's role in Libya. Cairo's various interests in Libya are assessed and used to explain Egypt's policy in Libya and its effect on the Libyan conflict. Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Russia and France have been supporting Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar and the so-called 'Libyan National Army' (LNA) out of concern for their own economic and geostrategic interests. Egypt and the UAE have taken a proactive role in empowering Haftar and facilitating his control over eastern Libya, supplying vital support to his offensive against the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA). This policy outlook examines these multi-layered considerations and provides insight into some of the complex dynamics at play.

The opinions expressed in this policy outlook represent the views of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the TRT World Research Centre.

Introduction

The war in Libya has claimed the lives of tens of thousands and increased instability in North Africa and the Sahel. The political deadlock and on-going humanitarian crisis have now entered their ninth year in Libya, and there is no obvious end in sight. The international community's lack of coherent policy has led countries such as Egypt, the UAE, France and Russia to intervene in the conflict with relative ease.

Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Russia and France have been supporting Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar and the so-called 'Libyan National Army' (LNA) out of concern for their own economic and geostrategic interests. Egypt and the UAE have taken a proactive role in empowering Haftar and facilitating his control over eastern Libya, supplying vital support for his offensive against the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA).

Since Turkey's parliament passed a bill in early January to deploy troops to Libya in support of the GNA, Egypt has been trying to mobilise the Arab and international community against Turkey's intervention. Cairo has provided Haftar's militias with significant logistical support, and Egyptian forces have reportedly carried out airstrikes in Libya on behalf of Haftar's LNA.

Almost six months after a mandate by Turkey's parliament to pass a security and maritime agreement signed by the GNA and Turkey, a direct impact is being witnessed on the ground in Libya. The fall of al-Watiya, a key military base, and the push towards Tarhouna have been significant developments. The latter is a town of strategic value for Haftar forces and his last major stronghold in the capital's vicinity.

These defeats represent a significant blow to Haftar and his backers a year after he launched an offensive on the capital in April 2019. As a result, Haftar is facing his worst crisis since 2014. Egyptian authorities are reportedly unhappy with the Tripoli offensive, which they consider a military failure.

Timeline of Libyan Conflict

15 February, 2011: Uprising in Libya leads to a full-blown revolution.
16 September, 2011: UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) created by UNSC Resolution 2009.
20 October, 2011: Gaddafi is captured and killed by opposition fighters.
7 July, 2012: Elections for the General National Congress (GNC) are held.
14 February, 2014: Coup attempt by warlord Khalifa Haftar. He announces he has suspended the GNC with no immediate effect.
18 May, 2014: Armed forces loyal to Haftar launch a military offensive against the legitimate government, resulting in a downward spiral of violence.
25 June, 2014: Elections held for a new legislative body, the House of Representatives (HoR).
6 November, 2014: The Constitutional Chamber of the Libyan Supreme Court rules the HoR elections unconstitutional.
17 December, 2015: Members of the GNC and HoR sign the Libyan Political Agreement(LPA) in Skhirat, Morocco. The agreement establishes the Government of National Accord (GNA) with Fayez al Sarraj as Prime Minister.
30 March, 2016: Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj arrives in Tripoli to lead the GNA.
17 December, 2016: The GNA is formed under the terms of the LPA, a United Nations-led initiative.
17 December, 2017: Haftar declares the LPA void.
29 May, 2018: The Paris Peace Conference brings Haftar and Fayez al Sarraj together and concludes with a tentative pathway for new elections. The elections are never organised.
12-13, November 2018: The Palermo Conference was organised to bring Haftar and Fayez al Sarraj together.
27 March, 2019: Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Emirati representatives reportedly meet with Haftar in Riyadh and decide to launch a military offensive to take Tripoli.
4 April, 2019: Haftar's LNA lays siege to Tripoli and takes control of coastal towns west of the capital.
29 April, 2019: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan spoke to Prime Minister of the GNA, stating that he will "use all his country's capabilities to prevent the conspiracy against the Libyan people" and reiterated his support for the legitimate government led by Fayez al Sarraj.
September-December 2019: Hundreds of Russian mercenaries employed by the Wagner Group arrive in Libya to support Haftar's LNA.
28 November, 2019: The UN-backed Government (GNA) and Turkey sign a maritime and security agreement, securing Turkish military support for the GNA.
12 January, 2020: Leaders of the LNA and GNA meet in Moscow to discuss an end to the conflict. Haftar left Moscow without signing the ceasefire agreement.
19 January, 2020: German Chancellor Angela Merkel hosts the International Berlin Conference on Libya, signalling increased engagement from the European Union (EU) to end conflict.
End of January 2020: Haftar's militias reassert control over western ports, establishing a blockade of oil terminals.
31 March, 2020: The EU launches Operation IRINI to enforce the UN arms embargo in place since 2011.
14 April, 2020: GNA forces with Turkish air support recapture several western coastal cities, including Sabratha and Surman, extending GNA control west from Tripoli to the border with Tunisia.
27 April, 2020: While LNA militias suffer defeats in western Libya, Haftar claims a "popular mandate" to govern, brushing aside the civilian government based in eastern Libya.
8 May, 2020: Malta withdraws from the EU's Operation IRINI.
18 May, 2020: GNA forces recapture a key military base, al-Watiya airbase south of Tripoli, dealing major blow to Haftar.
25 May, 2020: Hundreds of Russian mercenaries withdraw from fighting on the capital's front lines.
3 June, 2020: GNA forces capture Tripoli international airport from Haftar's militias.
4 June, 2020: GNA said they regained full control over Tripoli after being besieged for more than a year by militias loyal to Haftar.

What drives Egypt's policies in Libya?

Egypt's policy towards Libya is driven by various interests, which range from security concerns and economic considerations to ideological objectives and the fight against political Islam.

"The Libyan crisis is a relevant challenge to domestic stability and political legitimacy for Egypt. In particular, the defence of the Egyptian national interests in Libya primarily grounded in economic and security concerns has been allowed thanks to the risky strengthening role of Khalifa Haftar." Giuseppe Dentice, Associate Research Fellow at ISPI, told TRT World Research Centre.

Security Priorities

The on-going conflict in Libya could be a direct threat to Egypt's national security and stability. A serious security challenge is the 1,150-km Egyptian-Libyan border. Since Gaddafi's fall, violence along the border has grown considerably.

Given the insecurity in Libya and the length of the border, complete border security is viewed as impractical from the Egyptian side. The border continues to be a major trafficking hub for weapons, drugs and people, including extremists and militants.

According to Giuseppe Dentice, "there is a rise in arms trafficking, with weapons reaching radical militants in the Sinai region. Notably, the Eastern coastal region of Cyrenaica has been perceived as a direct threat to Egyptian national security. The precarious situation in Cyrenaica aggravated by Jihadist attacks and the continuous flow of militants across the eastern border has threatened Egypt's stability and internal security. First, Libya's eastern border could become a safe haven for Islamist militias, where illegal weapons and militants could flow freely from Libya to the Sinai Peninsula".

Reportedly, massive arms stockpiles have fallen into the hands of several militias, including groups with ties to al-Qaeda. According to some security experts, a large proportion of the arms that found their way to militants in the Sinai Peninsula came from Libya.

Egypt has been fighting an increasingly intense insurgency against radical militant groups in the Sinai Peninsula. Hundreds of Egyptian soldiers have been killed. Radical militias also have increasingly targeted Egypt's Coptic Christian minority, killing 45 people in April in attacks on churches in Alexandria and Tanta.

"Egypt frames its activity in Libya around its security interests, namely the very long desert border between the two countries, which Egypt considers a thoroughfare for fighters and weapons to the Sinai where it has been fighting a long war against a jihadist insurgency." Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), Tarek Megerisi, told TRT World Research Centre



President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (L) meets Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (R) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on December 01, 2016. (Egyptian Presidency - Handout - Anadolu Agency)

Egypt's tie with Haftar

By announcing his intentions to confront the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in Libya, Haftar has secured support from the UAE and Egypt.

President El Sisi continues his aim to marginalise the Muslim Brotherhood at home and abroad and sees Haftar as a suitable ally toward this end. Egypt has been assisting Haftar's forces by supplying arms, logistical support and intelligence.

Ramzy Baroud, a consultant at Middle East Eye, commented that "Haftar is also out to crush the Islamists, but the problem is that Libya's Muslim Brotherhood is hardly the dominant political force in that country. Haftar knows well that Islamic-leaning parties in Libya are not all one and the same. Yet, he seemed keen on emphasising the Brotherhood as a target behind his on-going war. Haftar intends to "purge" Libya of Muslim Brotherhood members. [For him], they are a "malignant disease that is seeking to spread throughout the bones of the Arab world". He even formed a Libyan counterpart of Egypt's Supreme Council of the Armed Forces."

"At a bilateral level, it is the interest of El Sisi to prevent a regime more or less favourable to his opposition, or even non-hostile to it, to be in charge in Tripoli. This is the main reason why, at a regional or even global level, Egypt is part of this "anti-Muslim Brothers" alliance headed by the Emirates and supported by France, Russia and the US." François Burgat, Academic and Senior Research Fellow (Emeritus) at the French National Centre for Scientific Research, told TRT World Research Centre.

"To strengthen his dictatorship, warlord Haftar has pursued the example of Egypt's military ruler, El-Sisi. The latter came to power in 2013 through a military coup backed

by the UAE and Saudi Arabia against Egypt's first democratically elected government, led by the MB affiliate Mohamed Morsi. Whereas El-Sisi's Egypt provides Haftar with a model and ambitions, the UAE is Haftar's main backer, supporting Haftar's campaign with financial and military aid." Guma El-Gamaty, a Libyan academic and politician who heads the Taghyeer Party in Libya, told TRT World Research Centre.

In February 2018, in an interview with "John Africa", a French magazine, Haftar described his relationship with El Sisi as follows: "Our positions are close, and the situation of his country when he came to power is similar to that of Libya today... Our great enemy, the Muslim Brotherhood, threatens our countries and our African and European neighbours alike."

The relationship between Egypt and Haftar is not solely determined by security priorities and arms deliveries, but it is a part of a real political project, eliminating political Islam. El Sisi's view of Haftar as a bulwark against democracy is at least partially responsible for his on-going support.

According to Tarek Megeresi, "while security is clearly the key interest that Egypt has in Libya, Egyptian policy is also animated by strong ideological drivers and economic opportunism. President El Sisi would like to see Libya under a leadership that channels his brand of a military man turned president, who frames his political mission as an existential fight against Islamism. Seeing such a status resonate abroad would help them feel more politically secure at home."

For Giuseppe Dentice, "Cairo competes with other regional powers regarding influence in Libya. But Egypt is only a part, and maybe a junior partner in the inter-Arab relations with Gulf countries when we talk about Libya. Anyway, like the UAE and KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) are directly involved in Libya, Egypt has been supporting a counter-revolution in Libya through providing unlimited military and logistical support for people such as Haftar in his bid to revert Libya to authoritarian military rule. Egypt backs the Libyan general because he has vowed to eliminate the political Islamists they oppose from Libya. Cairo has emboldened one side of the conflict, namely Khalifa Haftar and his followers, in order to allow him to achieve a military victory and take over as an absolute ruler of Libya, thus emulating the Egyptian model in Libya."

Military aid to Haftar

When Haftar launched Operation Dignity in mid-2014, the extent of military cooperation and rapprochement between Egypt and the militias linked with Haftar became clearer. The Egyptian help ranged from training and supply of weapons to the participation of Egyptian troops in military operations on the ground, besides carrying out airstrikes jointly with Emirati forces in Libya's eastern, western and southern regions.

"In May 2014, when Haftar launched "Operation Dignity," Egypt was the first state to fully back the LNA. But the Egyptians had no intention of spending their limited resources to finance Haftar's campaign, so they sought additional backers. The first of these was the United Arab Emirates (UAE), whose comparatively deep pockets could provide far greater support. Two to three months into "Operation Dignity," the UAE had already become the LNA's main financier" Giorgio Cafiero, the CEO of Gulf State Analytics, told TRT World Research Centre.

"Since Haftar's return to Libya and the launch of Operation Dignity (May 2014) against radical militias in Benghazi and Cyrenaica, Haftar has benefited from the support of the Egyptian leadership and its military force. President El-Sisi is putting high pressure on the international community in coordination with regional and international allies (United Arab Emirates, France and in passing Russia) to turn a blind eye to Haftar's operation in Libya. Egypt perceives the events in Libya as a national security threat," commented Giuseppe Dentice in an interview to the TRT World Research Centre.

For Dentice, "If the primary goal of Egypt in Libya is to securitise its Western border from extremist groups and to contribute in stabilisation in an Egyptian way (i.e. supporting a military government), it's crystal-clear how the Libyan crisis represents an important testing-ground for El-Sisi's foreign policy ambitions in North Africa and in the Arab Levant, in which Cairo hoped to reassert itself as a regional power broker, enhancing the position of Haftar in the country."

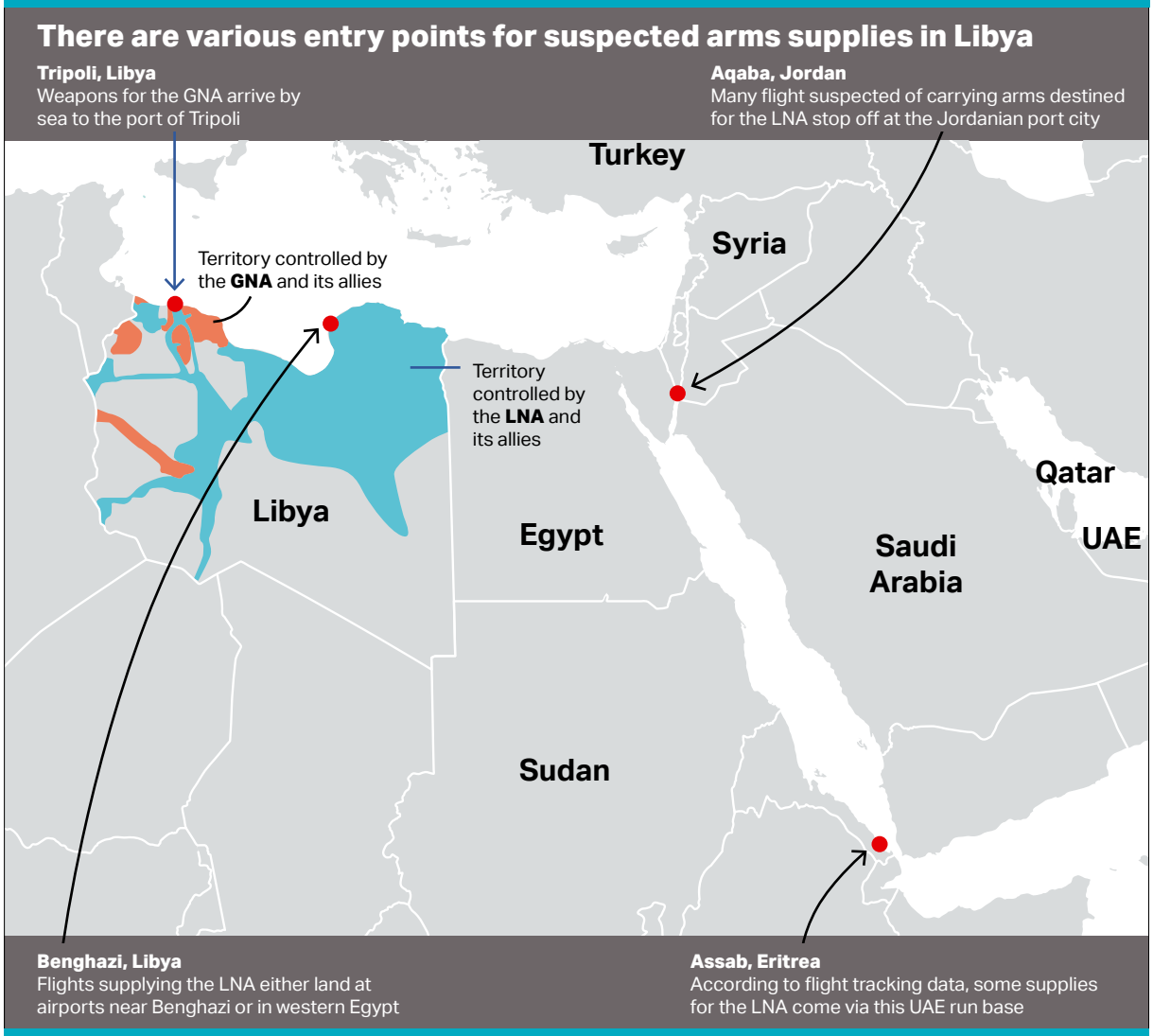
Given its support of Haftar since 2014, three months before the launch of Operation Dignity, Egypt began taking Haftar seriously and respecting him before other governments did. As Cairo sees it, the crisis of "terrorist" militias in Libya is one that Haftar has been best positioned to address. Egypt played a critical role in terms of bringing Russia around to seeing Haftar and his self-proclaimed Libyan National Army as worthy of Moscow's support". Giorgio Cafiero told TRT World Research Centre

According to a UN report, the UAE and Egypt have constantly given high levels of support for Haftar since 2014. In violation of the UN arms embargo placed on Libya and with significant concerns for the security of the country and the region, Egypt and the UAE have smuggled drones, armoured personnel carriers, and sophisticated missile systems into Libya.

Reportedly, Egypt has been transporting Egyptian and Emirati-made military equipment to Haftar's forces since May 2014. Sometimes this equipment was transported by air and sometimes by land from the Egyptian western military zone adjacent to the Libyan-Egyptian border.

Military equipment reaches Libya by air, land and sea

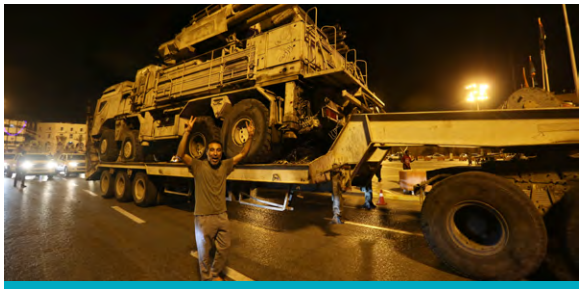
There are various entry points for suspected arms supplies in Libya



Source: Political Geography Now

The panel of UN experts, which reports on violations of the U.N.-mandated arms embargo on Libya have reported that Haftar's forces have received aircraft as well as military vehicles from the UAE. The UAE has even established an airbase at Al Khadim near the north eastern Libyan city of Marj and Haftar's headquarters at el Rajma, which is capable of hosting advanced jets, such as the F-16, the Mirage-2000, and the Rafale. According to the report, The UAE has been involved in operating a covert air-bridge to supply weapons to Haftar. It is believed that the UAE has delivery of military equipment to Haftar's forces over the last few weeks.

For Tarek Megeresi, "over the past five years, Egypt has built and driven a military machine which has created huge social cleavages in Libya, transformed the second city of Benghazi exiling swathes of the population in the process, and destroying the city of Derna whilst exiling, killing or imprisoning a quarter of its population. This is in addition to the yearlong war on Tripoli, which has only amplified the social polarisation Haftar's project has actively engineered in Libya whilst killing thousands and displacing hundreds of thousands more. That all of this strife will result in nothing more than a deeply divided population at war with itself and a country whose infrastructure and economy are devastated and has indelibly traumatised a generation, suggests that the question of efficacy is more apt than justifiability and the response speaks for itself that this policy has failed Egypt, but more importantly Libya and the Libyans to a criminal degree."



(Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

Economic Interests

For Guma El-Gamaty, "Libya has long been viewed by Cairo as a place to ease its enormous unemployment issue. Prior to 2011, there were about 2 million Egyptians who used to work in Libya, most of whom worked in the oil and gas industries, construction, or the informal sector."

Egypt relied heavily on the Libyan economy before the 2011 revolution, as an expatriate workforce of approximately 2 million Egyptians sent $33 million back to their home country. Additionally, Libya was a reliable source of inexpensive oil. Moreover, Libya had invested over $10 billion in various sectors of the Egyptian economy.

For Tarek Megeresi, "the Egyptian economy is in perennial need of cash injections, cheap oil, and new markets for their military and state-owned companies to cannibalise. Libya has long been providing interest free-loans and cheap fuel to Egypt, a relationship they would like to see revived along with Libya once again accommodating hundreds of thousands of Egyptian migrant labourers. Finally, in its current state, Libya will be in dire need of rebuilding, as well as re-designing its economy, and Egyptian companies sense an opportunity to play a leading role if 'their guy' was in charge.

Libya has the largest proven crude oil reserves in Africa at 48.4 billion barrels. When Gaddafi was in power, Libya produced some 1.6 million barrels per day. There is little doubt that Cairo seeks to achieve significant commercial benefits by securing its interests in Libya, especially within the energy sector. Egypt wants to gain access to Libyan oil with favourable prices, considering that Haftar controls the oil fields in eastern Libya, which are eyed by Egyptian oil companies.

In 2016, Saudi state-owned Aramco suspended providing Egypt with oil products. Responding to Saudi Aramco's decision to stop shipping refined oil products to Egypt, the Tobruk based parliament in Eastern Libya, stated that it was ready to provide for Egypt's oil needs with a favourable price. Cairo sees Libya as a significant oil supplier for its economy. Egypt hopes that if Haftar maintains control of the eastern oil fields, it will be able, through Egyptian energy companies, to purchase Libyan oil.

Turkey's support for the UN-backed government alarms Egypt

It is believed that Turkey's support for the internationally recognised government (GNA) in Tripoli has prompted Egypt to become more engaged in the Libyan file.

On 2 January 2020, Turkey's parliament approved the deployment of troops to Libya in support of the GNA. In the face of another offensive on Tripoli, the GNA requested help from Turkey to fight armed groups and formations that reject the legitimacy of the UN-recognised government. Ankara responded, and Turkey has stepped up its efforts to deploy military advisers and armed drones.

Egypt and its allies, including the UAE, France and Greece, reacted negatively. Egypt's Foreign Ministry condemned the Turkish parliament's decision and called on the international community to "handle its responsibilities immediately facing this development."

"Egypt's government fears the possibility of Libya being run by the MB. Geopolitically, the leadership in Cairo does not want to see its western neighbour fall into the Turkey-Qatar axis of influence in the region. With these interests driving Cairo's Libya foreign policy, Egypt has established itself as one of General Khalifa Haftar's most important external backers. Cairo views the general as the most realistic bulwark against the forces of political Islam that exist in Libya." Giorgio Cafiero told TRT World Research Centre.



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (R) and Libyan Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj (L) hold a joint press conference at Presidential Complex in Ankara, Turkey on June 4, 2020. (Metin Aktaş - Anadolu Agency)

According to François Burgat, "Egypt's position is strictly dependent upon the credibility and sustainability of the MBS-MBZ regional alliance with France and part of the West. This position is not logical since it is based on a very short-term counter-revolutionary understanding of the requirements of societies in MENA. France and several of the Western state actors in the region are back to their old strategy of blind support to the most authoritarian regimes, preventing any political opening in the name of the very weak pretext of "struggling against political Islam". In the midterm, the price to pay for France and its allies will probably be high."

Since April, backed by Turkey, the GNA has achieved significant victories while Haftar's forces have suffered heavy losses. Recently, GNA forces recaptured al-Watiya, a key military base on the outskirts of the country's capital, dealing a significant blow to Haftar's forces. The airbase was captured in 2014 by Haftar, who used it as his headquarters for attacks on Tripoli.

Egypt's concern with Haftar

Despite Cairo's significant assistance to Haftar, Egypt is also reaching out to other Libyan political leaders and groups to hedge its bets. As Egypt has very limited resources to continue its support for Haftar's offensive, Egypt may not put all of its eggs in one basket.

For Tarek Megeresi, "Egypt clearly has considerable concerns about Haftar's ability to rule the country, his obstinate refusal to attempt anything but the military route, and the fact that this ill-advised military adventurism could see the whole project collapse. However, Egypt is often snookered by Haftar in Libya, who cuts off other potential interlocutors (such as the speaker of the parliament Aguila Saleh) and embarks in all or nothing expeditions such as the war on Tripoli where Egypt is forced to try and make a success of it as to do otherwise would be to risk losing everything in Libya. Egypt plays a key role in legitimising Haftar abroad, especially in Washington DC and the Arab world. However, in the current scenario, it's difficult to see what else they could do for him, their options are severely limited and what remains (direct military intervention) opens up paths that they are not willing to go down. What they will likely try to do instead is to try and delegitimise the GNA, using Turkey's presence and familiar tropes over Islamism until they can find a new vehicle for their interests and influence."

According to Giuseppe Dentice, "Egyptian President El Sisi thought Haftar had the perfect profile. However, he has failed to meet all expectations in terms of political and military leadership. Moreover, Haftar has not been able to conquer Tripoli. In short, Egyptians have little faith in Haftar. As a result, the UAE, Egypt and Russia could have a meeting regarding Haftar's future even they might consider replacing Haftar with Aguila Saleh the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Aguila Saleh is an experienced politician who has never shown great sympathies for El Sisi. While he recognises an important role for Egypt and El Sisi in the Libya post-conflict, he prefers to pursue a political road based on dialogue with the GNA for the future of the country."

According to François Burgat, "the recent devastating loss of the al-Watiya airbase has convinced Haftar's sponsors to explore a more multi-lateral option."

How Egypt will act moving forward

Reportedly, Egypt is considering abandoning Haftar after more than a year of a failed military campaign to take Tripoli from the GNA. The move comes significant losses for Haftar, particularly his losing a key military base in the west of Libya.

Tribal support has been crucial to Haftar's survival and his capacity to describe himself as key to any political solutions. With dwindling support from the eastern tribes, Haftar's power has been significantly eroded. It appears that Haftar's setbacks in Tripoli are leading to the implosion of his internal support base.

Issa Tuwegiar, a former Libyan minister of planning, told Al Jazeera that it is Haftar's fear of fragmenting his power base that prompted his decision in late April to pull back from a landmark power-sharing agreement and promise to set up a new government of his own.

On 30 April, the Libyan House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh declared he had worked with Russian advisers in drafting a political road map that called for an end to aggressions, the establishment of a three-member presidential council representing Libya's three main regions and a new government of national unity while proposing only a military position for the LNA. The roadmap appears to have angered Haftar, driving him to declare himself the sole legitimate ruler of the country.

Recently, Saleh met with LNA leaders, notably with Haftar's absence, to discuss developments in the country. There are some reports suggest that Saleh is planning to appoint Abdulrazek al-Nadoori, Chief of the General Staff in Haftar's LNA, as a successor to Haftar.

These developments in the eastern camp indicate the extent to which Moscow has been trying to influence changes on the ground. Thus, in the coming period Egypt and Russia could form a new alliance in eastern Libya to replace Haftar and empower a new LNA leader under Saleh's political leadership.



Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (R) meet on December 11, 2017 at the Presidential Ittihadiya Palace in Cairo, Egypt. (Egyptian Presidency / Handout - Anadolu Agency)

Karim Mezran, a resident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, has written that:

"Aguila Saleh is not only the speaker but a crucial political and tribal figure from Tobruk belonging to the al-Ubaidat tribe. This powerful tribe has been running security institutions in Tobruk since the times of the Ottomans and has never been side-lined not even at the time of Italian colonisation. It is significant, then that the tribe is becoming less and less keen on Haftar, as are several other critical constituencies in the east who played an essential role in Haftar's emergence in the Libyan theatre. The perceived failure of the rogue general's military gamble in western Libya is, now, bringing this discontent to the surface."

Egypt could potentially support Moscow's plan to enhance Saleh's political stance in order to negotiate with the internationally recognised government under the auspices of the United Nations without Haftar's approval. Such a move potentially side-line Haftar and bring an end to his ambitions to capture Tripoli militarily.

For Giorgio Cafiero, "Egypt does not want to see the Libyan civil war drag on forever. Officials in Cairo have had their disagreements with Haftar about tactics and strategies, fuelling some degree of tension between the commander and his patrons in the Egyptian regime that is often masked by the strong outright displays of support that are constantly evident. The future of Haftar is unclear. No one knows how much longer the crisis in Libya will persist and what roles the eastern commander could possibly play a post-conflict government, if any at all. Cairo may be keen to support an alternative Libyan National Army figure replacing Haftar within the context of a political settlement to the Libyan civil war."

Conclusion

Turkey's support for the UN-backed government has turned the tide of the war. By providing drones and air defence systems, Turkish support has helped the internationally recognised government retake almost all of western Libya from Haftar and the LNA. In this context, a new political and military landscape is emerging in Libya, which is not in favour of Egypt and the UAE.

Haftar's losses in the west have brought fissures within his eastern camp. His recent rejection of the political settlement and declaration of full control of eastern Libya, which angered many of his political allies, including HoR speaker Aguila Saleh and dominant tribes such as al-Ubaidat, have been fanning the flames of discord.

Given that Egypt has very limited resources to continue to support for Haftar's project for the long run. Egypt's worsening economic situation could make it harder to maintain its support for Haftar. As Haftar has proved that he does not have many viable military options, his ability to take Tripoli is being increasingly called into question by his backers. Haftar is now politically and militarily trying to hold his position in eastern Libya.

From a security point of view, Egypt seeks the restoration of order on its western border, which has experienced periodic terrorist attacks and sustained arms trafficking. From a commercial standpoint, thousands of Egyptian guest workers were employed in Libya's energy sector prior to the crisis in Libya in 2011 and Egypt seeks their return to Libya and a continuation of the critical remittances that those workers contributed to the Egyptian economy.

However, Egyptian authorities seem to be losing their confidence in Haftar to achieve his objectives in Libya and, consequently, secure their interests. Therefore, Cairo, a key Haftar-ally, could be looking for alternatives to warlord who can preserve Egypt's security and economic interests in the country.

Judging from the current internal and external dynamics, Egypt could well support Aguila Saleh as Cairo's new political partner and impose Abdulrazek al-Nadoori as its new military protégé in the upcoming period.