

Ceasefire Failure as Haftar Leaves Russia to Resume Military Operations in Libya

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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Russian President Vladimir Putin made a joint statement last week regarding the civil war raging in Libya to “declare a sustainable ceasefire, supported by the necessary measures to be taken for stabilizing the situation on the ground and normalizing daily life in Tripoli and other cities.” However, as I said in [last week’s article](#), Russia has little influence over the Libyan National Army (LNA) and there is no incentive for General Khalifa Haftar to accept any terms made in any proposed ceasefire agreement.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov had to admit to reporters that talks last night in Moscow “aimed at reaching an agreement on an unconditional and open ceasefire in Libya failed to make significant progress Monday, despite overall progress on the issue.”

The ceasefire talks were held separately as neither Haftar or Fayeze al-Sarraj, the ethnic Turk leader of the Turkish-backed Muslim Brotherhood and internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli, wanted to be at the same table. The Russian delegation met with Haftar and the Turkish delegation held a similar meeting with Sarraj. Haftar declined to discuss any possible withdrawal of his troops from the outskirts of Tripoli and asked for more time to consider the parameters of the ceasefire proposal. Haftar made it clear that his army was at an advantage and did not have to make any concessions, but responded positively to the ceasefire that was in place at midnight on Sunday, despite isolated incidents of fire being exchanged. He even criticized Turkey for its involvement in the country and for the support to the GNA, which defends Tripoli with jihadists who also fought in Syria.

Despite initial positive signs at last night’s meeting held in Moscow for a ceasefire between the GNA, the LNA, it quickly became explosive. The hope of signing a ceasefire utterly failed with Haftar leaving Russia and military operations in Tripoli intensifying. This occurred because of the insistent unrealistic demands by the GNA, such as calling for Haftar’s forces to return to positions they held all the way back in April 2019 when the operation to liberate Tripoli began. This of course was rejected by the LNA since they would lose major territorial gains made.

“The document presented in front of me was a document of shame and betrayal, something the Government of National Accord were happy to sign, but our real Libyan hands never could,” said Haftar when explaining why he did not sign the ceasefire.

It is a fact that the big players on the Libyan issue are Russia, despite having little influence over the LNA and Turkey. The U.S. is watching discreetly and remotely while the Europeans are acting powerless to react vigorously and to get enough resolutions. Despite the failure of the ceasefire agreement, Russia has proven once again to be a country that continually works towards peace initiatives, just as it consistently does in Syria through a variety of forums, such as the Astana Peace Process with Turkey and Iran. Russia would have known the ceasefire would not be signed; however, it provided an opportunity to strengthen relations with Turkey as Moscow proves it is willing to actively acknowledge and attempt to deal on issues of importance with Ankara.

It appears that Russia is becoming the power to pacify Turkey after it creates crises. Although Russia is working closely with Turkey to bring peace to Syria and Libya, it cannot be forgotten that Turkey was one of the main players in sowing instability in both Syria and Libya. The militancy against the legitimate government of Syria would not have been possible without Turkish funding, arming and equipment of jihadists, as well as being a base for anti-government forces to mobilize and train. In Libya, the GNA whose stint in power has gone well beyond its two-year mandate, would not have survived for as long as it has without Turkish assistance. While Turkey manufactures crises across the region, it is increasingly appearing that Russia is the one to clean up, or attempting to clean up the chaos created.

Although Moscow, at no fault of its own, failed to convince the LNA to sign a ceasefire agreement, its attempts demonstrate the importance Russia is placing in its relations with Turkey. As Turkey occupies strategic space in Eurasia and controls the Bosphorus Straits, strong relations with Ankara is critical for Moscow. For the time being, such relations are crucial for finding peaceful solutions, but Moscow's patience will surely be limited if Turkey continues to create crises.

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