

Complex Power Play in Libya

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The fighting around the vicinity of Tripoli's Mitiga airport continues with the airport still closed, in flames.

As previously reported, seasoned US State Department man, Jeffery Feltman, now with the UN, recently visited Libya followed on the heels of the French Foreign Minister Le Drain, to persuade all parties to adhere to the LPA agreement – an impossibility.

The GNA Government and post of Prime Minister for Faye Serraj was ‘created’ by the UN in December 2015, enough time, you would think, to get a grip on at least the capital.

But further information has come to light that the continuing attack on the Prison located in the grounds of Mitiga Airport, that started last week, has additional objectives. They were designed, not only to free Islamic extremists like AQ and ISIS members held in the prison run by Abder Raouf Kara’s RADA force. But also reports did not reveal that the attacking militias had belonged, until then, to the forces loyal to the government appointed by the UN, of Faye Serraj but, and here is the real kicker, they were also, and still are, close allies of former ‘rogue’ Islamic extremist Prime Minister Khalifa al Ghwell and radical religious Grand Mufti al Ghariani based in Tripoli still (sometimes Misrata too!). These two gentlemen are seeking to destabilise the UN’s PM Faye Serraj any way they can.



This is Mitiga Airport before the attack (Source: author)

As a consequence, Serraj reached out to eastern Libya strong man, Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar, which, if he agrees to become involved, could have the effect of isolating even destroying the Mitiga attacking militias and their radical allies both in Tripoli and in Misrata.

Initially the RADA militia force countered the attack with assistance from 10 or so other

militias 'loyal' (paid mercenaries in effect) to the UN Libyan appointed government, including those led by a key militia player, Haitem Tajouri. They were assisted by an American reconnaissance aircraft based in Pantelleria, which flew over Tripoli while fighting started last Monday. Begs the question why they didn't mobilise aircraft from Pantelleria when Ambassador Stevens was being attacked in Benghazi, but that's another story.

Its worth for a moment to discuss this Base. Though the international airport in Malta is used by Italian, British, French and US aircraft of varying types to undertake surveillance operations in particularly in Libya's Gulf of Sirte, the most mysterious position, used by mainly US intelligence forces to watch over the Tunisian and Libyan skies, remains at Pantelleria.

This small Italian island, under 60 km off the coast of Klibia in Tunisia, has become a busy airfield for 'private' air intelligence companies, who rent aircraft not only to the US but also to other countries like France, Italy and the EU.

Meanwhile Russian officials are rumoured to want to construct a military base near Tobruk, but Russia is anyhow at the moment increasingly active in its support for Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar. Russian military intelligence officers are in Tobruk and Benghazi and Russian Special Forces are said to be giving close support to some of Haftar's elite units.

But Russia's political involvement in Libya is even more important than its military one. The meeting in mid-December in Moscow between Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and Bechir Saleh, Col. Muammar Gaddafi's former chief of staff, purpose was to develop tribal contacts overall in Libya but, above all, in the southern Fezzan region, where Saleh still has especially good contacts with the tribes.

Moscow in turn also has contacts in Tripoli and Misrata via the very effective Chechen connection. Russian-Libyan contact group chairman Lev Dengov, who is also a special adviser to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, keeps regular contact with Haftar's opposition factions in Tripoli and Misrata.

The complex super power Libyan game between the West, in the form of the US, UN, EU & NATO, continues with opposing equal intrigue from the Russians.

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