

The Last Battle for Libya

Haftar's LNA units said they had taken control of the town of Gharyan, about 50 miles south of the capital Tripoli.

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The prize is Tripoli, for anyone that can take it and secure it by this summer. That will, it's felt by many, stabilise Libya or, conversely, at worse, make Her descend into a greater quagmire resulting in a new phase of very intense fighting and all out civil war.

Not much hope, at this moment, to feel optimism for a peaceful conclusion in Libya between the warring parties.

One of the reasons for such pessimism is the failed visit to Tripoli of the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres (and his U.N. Envoy for Libya Ghassan Salame) culminating a news conference there on Thursday.



UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres with his U.N. Envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salame (Source: The Duran)

Having arrived there for talks with the U.N. selected GNA Government of Fayeze Serraj ...ahead of hopes for National Reconciliation Conference planned for the middle of this month, they were caught off guard.

Because simultaneously Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar was ordering his Libyan National Army (LNA) troops to "advance" on Tripoli.

Guterres's parting words as he left Tripoli were fairly despondent,

“I leave Libya with a heavy heart and deeply concerned. I still hope it is possible to avoid a bloody confrontation in and around Tripoli.”

Though ‘Prime Minister’ Serraj and Field Marshall Haftar met in Abu Dhabi last month to discuss a potential power sharing agreement regardless fighting broke out on Wednesday evening between Haftar’s forces and ‘militiamen’ loyal to Serraj’s government.

On Thursday morning, Haftar’s LNA units said they had taken control of the town of Gharyan, about 50 miles south of the capital Tripoli.

Immediately Mr Guterres called for de-escalation and reiterated his view that there is “no military solution” to the country’s eight-year, what tantamounts to a slow burning, civil war.

“There can be no National Conference in these circumstances,” he told reporters in Tripoli.

While in his radio address on Thursday evening, Haftar ordered a “victorious march” on Tripoli to “shake the lands under the feet of the unjust bunch” adding “Tripoli, we hear your call,” concluding significantly with a ‘olive branch type ground rule’, by saying “Whoever raises the white flag will be safe.”

So to recap; the two main power rivals are Fayez Serraj’s Government called the GNA internationally-recognised and chosen, repeat chosen, not elected, by the U.N., who are based in Tripoli, and a rival government, located in the East of Libya, in Benghazi (and Tobruk) however this one was elected by Libyan people; an administration called the HoR, who’s Army Chief of Staff is Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar.

Haftar’s Army has also recently completed a campaign that leaves them controlling large areas of the the south of the Country.

These territorial gains in the main, were achieved by ‘cutting deals’ with local militia groups, rather than fighting them. A very Libyan solution!

The ‘\$64,000’ question is has or will Haftar secure a permanent reliable deal with enough of the important militias in both Zintan and Misrata? Militias who are currently in the pay of those that run Tripoli today.

If hypothetically there were a lasting agreement with Zintan and/or Misrata and Haftar, then but only then, would Haftar have a chance of taking Tripoli, by June at a guess, and he could declare an interim government.

What many people fail to realise is that Haftar at 75 years old has no appetite to keep the reigns of power. Haftar would prefer to be a figurehead such as a ceremonial President. His primary objective is to eradicate former terrorists like Abdul Hakim Belhadj and all senior members of the Muslim Brotherhood currently wielding the real power in Tripoli.

Not forgetting that Haftar personally enjoys the backing from Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, who see him as a potential leader. Russia and France also is favourably disposed to Haftar too. Eventually, one would presume, that the US will warm to him as well given the past association Haftar had with America.

In conclusion therefore is the prediction that IF Haftar persuades enough of the Western militias to either stand down and/or join him, that the last battle for Libya can start in Tripoli ...with hopefully Haftar prevailing and finally bringing peace to Libya.

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