

Video: A New Battle for Tripoli: Preconditions and Prospects

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Libya has been in a state of the constant chaos since the NATO intervention in 2011. After the fall of the government of Muammar Gaddafi, the country fell into the hands of warring armed factions, many of which were linked to radical Islamist groups. Al-Qaeda and then ISIS strengthened and expanded their presence in the country. The erupted humanitarian crisis has never been fully overcome. A high level of violence, crime and unsolved humanitarian issues turned Libya in one of the key hubs of arms, drugs and even trafficking. A large number of the refugees moving to Europe uses Libya as a transfer point.

NATO contributed very little efforts to change this situation, defeat terrorism and restore the order. One of the reasons is that the Western-backed Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli, is itself largely linked to radicals. Groups that declared their support to the GNA control a part of northwestern Libya. The only real anti-terror effort undertaken by pro-GNA forces and their foreign backers took place in 2016, when they moved to chuck ISIS out of the coastal city of Sirte. Despite this, ISIS cells kept a notable presence in the county. The GNA receives support from the US, various EU states, Qatar and Turkey.

The southwestern part of the country is controlled by local Tuareg and Tabu militias. Central, northeastern and southeastern Libya is in the hands of the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the allied to it House of Representatives based in the city of Tobruk.

Over the past few years, the LNA under the leadership of Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar has consolidated control over a major part of the country, sometimes by forming pacts and alliances with local communities like in the south and sometimes by defeating radical militant groups by force. The LNA has also carried out a successful operation against militant and criminal groups in southern Libya. This effort was officially coordinated with the governments of Niger and Chad. Egypt, the UAE and France are often mentioned as the LNA backers. An interesting fact is that wild media speculations about Russian mercenaries, Special Forces and, if we take into account the British mainstream media, even military bases allegedly deployed and created to support the LNA are barely linked with the reality on the ground. The real Kremlin involvement in the conflict has so far been mostly limited to diplomatic contacts with representatives of at least formally constructive local forces.

On April 4, Field Marshal Haftar officially announced a start of counter-terrorism operation in the area of Tripoli. In the following days, the LNA has made a series of advances capturing large areas south of the city, including Tripoli International Airport, and reached the vicinity of the city. According to local sources, over 40 people were killed or injured in clashes between the LNA and pro-GNA forces. The sides even employed their existing air forces in

order to deliver strikes each against other.

However, a coalition of pro-GNA forces, which includes the al-Nuasi Brigade, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade, the Special Deterrence Force, the al-Mahjub Brigade, the 33rd Infantry Brigade, the Abu Obeida al-Zawia Forces, the al-Halbus Brigade and the Usama al-Juwayli Forces, appeared to be able showing some resistance to the LNA only when Haftar-led forces reached the city's vicinity.

On April 7, the U.S. Army Africa Command (AFRICOM) announced that it had evacuated its troops from the Libyan capital "in response to the evolving security situation" there. This means that Washington expects clashes in the city itself.

The LNA claims that its move to capture Tripoli is not a part of political struggle, but an operation against terrorists who are hiding there. Nonetheless, it's clear that the LNA advance is another move made in the framework of the previous LNA attempts to put an end to the division of the country into feods controlled by local warlords and to consolidate the governmental power, including the right of use of force, in one hands. In the event of success, it will allow to restore a kind of order in the major part of he country and to crack down on local militant and criminal armed groups that operate freely in the existing power vacuum.

On the other hand, the LNA advance faced a wide criticism on the international level. Foreign powers use the collapse of Libya to exploit its territory and energy resources in own favor are opposing the LNA actions under the banner of the need to defend democracy and prevent humanitarian crisis.

In the event of their success the humanitarian and security situation in Libya will likely continue to deteriorate creating a room for the further expansion of radical groups, first of all ISIS and al-Qaeda, in and contributing to the continuing flow of migrants to Europe.

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