

Western Accusations of Russian Interference in Libya in Favor of Haftar's LNA

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Marshal Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army (LNA) has declared that his forces will take control of Libya, arguing that the UN-negotiated unity agreement is dead. The statement was made during a televised [speech](#), in which Haftar reported that “the will of the people” gave him a mandate to govern, announcing that the LNA will take control of the country, radically changing the situation in the war-torn country.

“We thus announce that the General Command of the Armed Forces accepts the will of the people despite the burden of that trust, multiplicity of obligations, and the magnitude of responsibilities before God, our people, and conscience and history,” he said.

Haftar's forces already control most of Libya's territory and population, and have spent much of the past year advancing against the capital city of Tripoli to overthrow the Turkish-backed Muslim Brotherhood Government of the National Agreement (GNA). The GNA was created in 2015 after UN-mediated talks following the 2011 NATO-led operation by the U.S. that deposed long-time Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi and threw the country in years of civil war.

During Haftar's speech, addressing the “free Libyans,” the marshal condemned the unity agreement that established the GNA, insisting that it “destroyed” Libya, and that the citizens had chosen another “eligible” leader.

“We have followed up the call that you announced to end the Political Agreement, which has destroyed the country and led it to the abyss, and also to authorize those you consider eligible to lead,” said Haftar, adding that the LNA would work in “building durable institutions of the civil state.”

In response to the announcement, the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli [said](#) Washington regrets “Haftar's suggestion that changes in Libya's political structure can be imposed by a unilateral declaration,” and urged the LNA to declare a ceasefire during the month of Ramadan that is holy for Muslims and while the country fights the coronavirus outbreak.

With the support of Turkey, the GNA has managed to repel Haftar's latest offensive, including regaining a small amount of ground against the LNA near Tripoli in recent weeks. However, the GNA asked Washington for support, declaring in February that it would welcome U.S. troops on Libyan soil to help fight “terrorism,” the irony being that many of the GNA militias are jihadists themselves. It is not such a shameful prospect for the GNA to

ask for U.S. assistance considering it once supported the very same jihadist militias in 2011 that toppled Gaddafi.

The NATO regime change operation in 2011 that was aimed at maintaining the U.S. global hegemony and toppling those who opposed it, forced Gaddafi out of power and ended in his brutal roadside execution at the hands of Western-backed jihadists. The end of his decades-long rule transformed Libya into a war-torn state, prompting armed conflict between competing powers and the rise of terrorist groups such as ISIS, which flourished because of the anarchy created in the midst of fighting. The LNA however emerged in the midst of the Western-created chaos as a unifying force for Libyans and aims to expel the Turkish-backed and UN-recognized Muslim Brotherhood government.

However, Haftar's move to declare the LNA as the government has come as a shock for many international players, with Moscow describing it as "surprising," [according to Reuters](#) via RIA who cited a foreign ministry source on Tuesday. The source added that "we support the continuation of the political process. There is no military solution to the conflict."

Many commentators on Libya have argued that Russia has big influence in Libya like it does in Syria. The Russian Wagner volunteer group are contracted on the side of the LNA. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [claims there are](#) 2,500 Wagner volunteers operating in Libya, but there is no evidence on the actual number. Washington, Ankara and commentators from the West have pointed to the Wagner group as evidence that Russia is influencing events in Libya like it does in Syria, but this is just a distraction and diversion for their own responsibilities in creating the near 10-year chaos in the North African country.

Rather, Haftar's surprising move even caught Moscow off guard. Turkey will surely act more aggressively now in Libya to defend the GNA, but to what extent is not known considering it battles a destructive coronavirus outbreak and sees its economy slumping, hampering its efforts for power projections in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The NATO powers of the U.S., Italy and France were the main Western players involved in Libya, however, with all three countries distracted by the coronavirus that has killed tens of thousands, Libya would be a minor concern for them. This has provided Haftar the opportunity to cease power with only the GNA standing in the way of complete control over Libya. As his power grab has shown, Haftar acts independently of Moscow despite accusations made by the West and he will surely begin a new campaign to complete the takeover of Tripoli.

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