

## If Not a Military Solution in Libya, Then What?

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### Summary:

On 18th of October, the Governments of France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States expressed in a Joint Statement on Libya their agreement that they do not support a military solution to the Libyan crisis. The article describes how a dual power situation has developed in Libya, where the monopoly on violence definitely no longer is in the hands of the legitimate government. The government has left the traditional political center of Libya, Tripoli, and in the present situation it is difficult to predict how things will develop in Libya, where the militias seem strong and determined to stay in charge. Right now the situation in Libya is deadlocked and it is very difficult to imagine a foreign intervention. It cannot be ruled out, that Egypt will increase its help to the government in Tobruk, but a direct military intervention seems improbable. Probably the international actors, the US and the EU, will stick to insisting on negotiations between the fighting parties in Libya, and concentrate on avoiding that the Libyan crisis has consequences for EU's and US' own security.

### Key Words

Libya, dual power, alliances, Egypt, US, EU, security, victims.

## Introduction

The Governments of France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States expressed 18 October in a Joint Statement on Libya their agreement that “there is no military solution to the Libyan crisis.”<sup>1</sup> The statement follows an aggravated situation in Libya in recent weeks, where intensified fighting between rival militias takes place both in areas west of the capital Tripoli and in Benghazi, the large eastern city where the uprising against Muammar Qadhafi took its beginning in early 2011 (Mattes, 2014).

The official Libyan government has since August resided in the far eastern Libyan cities of Bayda and Tobruk. Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni has also – for security reasons – fled to the area relatively close to the Egyptian border. Tripoli is in the hands of militias, which predominantly are Islamist in their ideological orientation, some of which belonging to the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood – and some belonging to more radical Salafist groups. Added to that militia groups with a background in Libya’s Amazigh (Berber) movement are joining the temporary militia based “power house” dominating Tripoli and its most important facilities, the main airport etc.

Libya has in other words developed an internal dual power situation, where the monopoly on violence definitely no longer is in the hands of the legitimate government (Seeberg, 2014). And furthermore the government has left the traditional political center of Libya, Tripoli. In the present situation it is difficult to predict how things will develop in Libya, but the militias in Tripoli seem strong and determined to stay in charge. An alliance between the Government army and loyal, secular militias might attempt to reinstate the Government, maybe in some kind of alliance with former general Khalifa Haftar, who during the summer has launched a military campaign in Benghazi, which is called Operation Dignity. The political goals of Haftar, however, seem unclear and it is not obvious, that he will go for helping al-Thinni back into power.

## Regional Worries

The states around Libya are for obvious reasons worried about the problematic situation in Libya. The Presidents of Egypt and Sudan, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi and Omar Al-Bashir, respectively, held 18-19 October a meeting in Cairo, where they agreed to support the Libyan state and its army. The meeting is interesting, because strategic alliances between the two countries are normally rare. Al-Bashir, whose regime in Sudan is based on the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood,

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<sup>1</sup> STATE, U. D. O. 2014. Joint Statement on Libya by the Governments of France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Office of the Spokesperson, 18 October 2014. Washington: US Department of State.

was maybe in principle an ally of the ousted Egyptian President Mohammad Morsi, but due to his highly problematic political record, he has been considered a leader, that was best kept at arm's length.

Al-Sisi of Egypt is not interested in being identified with his southern neighbor, but has several interests to take care of, which are shared by Al-Bashir of Sudan. A stable Libya is certainly one of them, but added to that control with the eastern Mediterranean migration route mainly from the Eastern part of Africa to Europe and common interests in not letting a new dam over the Nile under construction in Ethiopia influence the flow of water in the Nile too much. The issue of stability in Libya is closely connected to the question of migration, because attempts at controlling migration are only efficient if they can be coordinated with a reasonably well-functioning Libyan government.

Libya has for decades functioned as a transit migration country, where the migratory movements to some degree involve both Sudan and Egypt (Seeberg, 2013). But furthermore the East African region contains many different groups of political refugees, some of which affiliated to radical movements and parties, which contribute to the turmoil in Libya. Al-Sisi claims that there have been episodes of cross-border attacks into Egypt by militants from Libya, but it is also a part of the story that Libya's government has accused Sudan of arming terrorist groups in Egypt. We still haven't seen the Egyptian support for the Libyan government materialize, but it cannot be ruled out that the Egyptian regime will intervene in the internal conflict in Libya by increasing arms deliveries in order to stabilize the elected regime and secure that the Islamist oriented "second government" in Tripoli will not dominate the whole country and that the radical groups do not continue crossing the Egyptian border.

On the other side of Libya both Algeria and Tunisia are watching the tragic development with fear of spillover effects from the internal crisis in Libya. It is a well-known fact that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) operates in Algeria, and it is therefore feared in Algeria, that AQIM and maybe also other terror groups will use Libya as hiding place while planning actions in Algeria. Similarly in Tunisia, where the new regime is worried, that AQIM, Ansar Al-Sharia etc. will infiltrate the opposition in Tunisia attempting to destabilize the Tunisian state. The regime in Tunisia also want to avoid that migrants from south of Sahara will take advantage of the chaotic situation in Libya and attempt via Libya to arrive in Tunisia in order to wait for opportunities to reach European destinations.

As mentioned in New York Times (NYT) 21 October the "new freedom that came with the Arab Spring revolt has allowed militants to preach and

recruit more openly than ever before.”<sup>2</sup> And maybe the radical groups relatively easy can reach the Tunisian youngsters who, according to NYT, feel that the new freedoms and elections have done little to improve their daily lives and create jobs. The notorious democratic improvements in Tunisia (which will be tested once again in late October) are without doubt appreciated by a majority of the Tunisian people, including many youngsters, but a disgruntled minority has embraced the solutions by radical movements and parties, including Islamic State. According to NYT several thousand of the youngsters have left for Syria or Iraq to fight for the caliphate, often travelling via Libya and then becoming armed with weapons from there. Some of the foreign fighters return to Tunisia and the role played by Libya in connection with this traffic thus becomes a threat for the inner stability of Tunisia.

### **International Actors and the Libyan Crisis**

After the fall of Qadhafi in October 2011 the EU and the US started different activities in order to help Libya making things work, secure deliveries of food and medicine etc. The EU supported the Libyan authorities with funding for public administration, civil society, health and education as well as security and migration related initiatives. Back in May 2011 Catherine Ashton opened an EU Embassy in Benghazi and in November 2011, after the fall of the Libyan regime, she opened one in Tripoli as well. One of the main purposes was to secure the safety of European nations and the delivery of EU humanitarian aid. Further EU programmes were supposed to help dealing with border management, the establishment of a civil society and some education programmes related to the building of administrative capacities.

The EU has also become involved in security sector reforms, which – as a significant element – deal with the many security-related aspects of migration. For the EU (as well as for Libya) it is important to tackle the security issue related first of all to transit migration. Within this field there is a commonality of interest between the two parties. The EU has in 2013 established an Integrated Border Assistance Mission in Libya (EUBAM), which is a civilian mission aiming at “improving and developing the security of the country’s borders.”<sup>3</sup> The mandate of EUBAM Libya is limited to the borders of Libya, but the initiative should from the EU side be seen in the wider regional perspective taking both the migration from other Maghreb countries and the transit migration from the Sahel regions into consideration. The official idea behind

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<sup>2</sup> KIRKPATRICK, D. D. 2014. New Freedoms in Tunisia Drive Support for ISIS. *New York Times*, 21 October.

<sup>3</sup> See the EU Common Security and Defence Policy homepage, Press Release, October 2013, available at: [http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eubam-libya/pdf/eubam\\_libya\\_factsheet\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eubam-libya/pdf/eubam_libya_factsheet_en.pdf).



EUBAM, which is supposed to be working closely together with EU's Frontex-agency, was to motivate Libya for regional and international cooperation, but obviously also expresses the European strategic interests in controlling the in a strategic perspective important migration phenomenon.

But migration (in its many different manifestations) is of course not the only security related issue. Added to migration and the obvious security interest related to the confrontations between the militias and the government, issues concerning oil and gas production should also be mentioned. The question of energy security has become a part of the internal conflict in Libya in the sense that some militias have been able to overtake parts of the oil trade from Libya and thereby score the income. Summing up the Libyan crisis has, at least potentially, significant implications for the EU with its complex and important relations to the Arab Mediterranean states. This does not, however, mean that the EU is willing to intervene directly and the fact that the four large EU states in an official statement, coordinated with the US, express that there is no military solution to the Libyan crisis, speaks its clear language.

The US has apparently also chosen a strategy, where they – from the distance – watch the development in Libya without any ambitions of intervention, at least not in a foreseeable future. The US is engaged in Syria and Iraq and does not want to open another “front” in the Middle East. They were the main responsible for the successful NATO-campaign ending Qadhafi's regime, but since the attack on the US consulate in Benghazi in 2012 in which the ambassador, Christopher Stevens, was killed, they have not been much involved in internal affairs in Libya.

## Conclusion

Right now the situation in Libya is deadlocked and it is very difficult to imagine a foreign intervention. It cannot be ruled out, that Egypt will increase its help to the government in Tobruk, but a direct military intervention seems improbable. A conflict like the one in Libya might last for several years and no army wants to intervene in what more and more looks like a civil war. Intervention is dangerous and would easily result in many casualties. Egypt is probably the only state in the region, which – militarily speaking – is strong enough to intervene with any efficiency, but presumably they will decide to send some arms and then concentrate on securing the Egyptian border.

The US and the leading EU states have explicitly said that a military solution is not the right thing in the recent situation. Foreign soldiers on Libyan soil seem to be an unrealistic perspective. Probably the international actors will therefore stick to insisting on negotiations between the fighting parties in Libya, and – via the instruments mentioned above – avoid that the Libyan crisis has

consequences for EU and US security. The victims of such a strategy will be the Libyan people, over the last four and a half decade exposed to 42 years with Qadhafi's terroristic regime, a civil war through most of 2011 and three years of anarchy.

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