

Video: Libyan War, Syrian War and Qatar Crisis

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In-depth Report: [NATO'S WAR ON LIBYA, SYRIA](#)

The war in Libya was caused not so much by any internal dissent but rather by the West's need for continued economic expansion, which Western elites view as part and parcel of the post-Cold War "end of history", a still-potent messianic ideology which gives the West the license to attack anyone, anywhere, to achieve its mercantilist objectives, and which gives the necessary humanitarian "fig leaf" for the benefit of the politically correct faction of Western societies.

Naturally, politically correct Westerners have been unbothered by the "humanitarian interventions" invariably making the situation far worse, and Libya has not been an exception. Since the fall of the regime of Muammar al-Gaddafi, Libya has not experienced any political, financial or even social stability, as the country is witnessing a state of constant fighting between all parties despite the absence of any religious or sectarian differences between the populations. Libya turned from one of the richest countries in the world to a failed state.

The current war in Libya began in 2014, with most of the fighting being between the internationally-recognized Tobruk-based Libyan Interim Government centered on the House of Representatives that was elected democratically in 2014, an Islamist National Salvation Government founded by the General National Congress based in Tripoli city, and the UN-backed Government of National Accord also based in Tripoli.

The Libyan Interim Government has the allegiance of the Libyan National Army under the leadership of General Khalifa Haftar and enjoys the support of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates directly, with indirect support from both the United States, Britain and Russia, with the latter country's affinity to Haftar clearly demonstrated when the Libyan general boarded the Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier in January 2017, as the ship was returning home from its combat mission off the coast of Syria. It is a secular entity and has the sole legitimate power in Libya. Since 2014, Egypt has supplied many light and heavy weapons to the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar, which included several MiG-21 fighters. The United Arab Emirates also provides financial support to Haftar and has a small airbase in eastern Libya, including AT-802 turboprop light attack aircraft and WingLoong UAVs which appear to be operated by Erik Prince's Academi (formerly Blackwater) Private Military Company.

The emergence of the Libyan Interim Government was made possible by the withdrawal of House of Representatives support for the Government of National Accord, whose power has since greatly decreased.



General Khalefa Haftar (Source: [Magharebia](#) / [Wikimedia Commons](#))

Instead, the chief opponent of the LIG is the Islamic government of the General National Congress, also called the Salvation Government, which is led by the Muslim Brotherhood with support from a coalition of Islamic groups known as the Dawn of Libya. It is believed that one of the combat groups of the General National Congress was involved in the assassination of US Ambassador Christopher Stevens in 2012. The Muslim Brotherhood are also accused of providing political cover to ISIS during its expansion in Libya before 2014, which is a plausible accusation considering Qatar's tangible support to both ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood.

It too enjoys international support by Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan, with the former two countries playing roles identical to they played in the Syrian conflict. Qatar's considerable contribution includes financial support to the General National Congress and smuggling arms using C-130 military cargo planes in cooperation with Sudan, while Turkey has smuggled arms to the Dawn of Libya using ships. Turkey also benefits from illegal oil trade with the militia, according to unconfirmed reports.

Since 2014, ISIS has had strong influence in much of Libya, especially in Darnah east of Benghazi, but this influence of the terrorist organization has shrunk over time. However, Libya is one of the bases of recruitment and money laundering for ISIS, where ISIS is believed to have received indirect support from Turkey, Qatar and the General National Congress. Moreover, ISIS views Libya as an operating base from which to stage expansion into countries of the Sahel and to aid ISIS cells operating in Tunisia and Egypt.

Completing the list of warring parties, Tuareg forces control southwestern Libya, including Amazigh and Ghat area, and are considered indirect allies of the General National Congress.

Given the balance of forces outlined above, the conflict in Libya would have come to a close years ago had it not been for the direct involvement of the Qatar-Turkey alliance, whose aggressive acts against Syria had likewise escalated that conflict. To be sure, the Qatar-Turkey alliance was one of convenience, with the two parties pursuing different objectives

which simply happened to be not mutually exclusive.

For Turkey, the aim of the game at the time was neo-Ottomanism. Both Syria and Libya are, after all, parts of the former Ottoman Empire, with the former being wrested from its grasp by the French and the British at the end of World War I, and the former falling to Italy in Italo-Turkish War of 1911-1912. For Qatar, the objective was establishing oneself as a regional power player not only independent of Saudi Arabia but also equivalent to it, a task that would have been greatly facilitated by establishing Qatar-friendly regimes in Libya and Syria, extending Qatar's control over the region's hydrocarbons, and gaining access to new markets in Europe. That final point of the Turkey-Qatar strategy was welcome by European factions favoring continued eastward expansion because the Qatari gas pipeline could be used as a political weapon against Russia.

However, that coalition proved too weak to overcome the resistance of legitimate government forces in Libya and Syria, particularly after the direct Russian military involvement in Syria spelled the end of the "Assad must go" campaign, and it never managed to secure the support of the United States for either of its objectives. The US, for its part, attempted to sponsor its own jihadists in Syria or favored the Saudi-led efforts. Therefore it was only a matter of time before either Turkey or Qatar realized its strategy was doomed and sought to pursue a different course of action. Turkey proved the weaker link in that coalition thanks to, ironically, US enlistment of the Kurds as its proxy army in Syria. Faced with an impossible to dislodge Russian presence in Syria, Turkey opted to change its aims to become an "energy gateway" to Europe by joining forces with Russia in the form of the Turkish Stream pipeline.

Worse, while initially the West was generally in favor of any and all forms of "Arab Spring", including the Turkish-Qatari efforts in both Syria and Libya, by 2016 it was becoming clear the downsides were outweighing the positives. The refugee crisis, in particular, that became a potent political issue threatening the unchallenged liberal status quo had forced a re-evaluation of the policy, lest the likes of Front National or AfD come to power in Europe. Even the US, which did not receive a flood of Middle East refugees, was affected. On April 11, 2016, Obama was forced to admit that Libya was the "worst mistake" he had committed during his presidency as the mistake was that the United States did not plan for the post-Gaddafi era. He was not doing it because of any sorrow for the citizens of countries he despoiled, but rather because the resulting chaos was now negatively affecting Hillary Clinton's chances to win.

But it was Donald Trump who delivered what surely will be a fatal blow to Qatar's international ambitions, first by giving a green light to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states to pounce on Qatar, and then directly accusing it of sponsoring terrorists. The ensuing blockade of Qatar meant that the country's leaders would have little time or money to continue financing militants in Libya or Syria. Indeed, shortly after the Qatar blockade was imposed, the Russian military stated the war in Syria, other than the fighting against ISIS, had practically ground to a standstill.



Saif Al Islam Gaddafi (Source: Times of Oman)

Considering that Turkey and Qatar have been the main obstacles to ending the war in Libya,

Turkey's defection followed by the US-authorized Saudi political and economic assault on Qatar have implications not only for Syria but also for Libya. Indeed, there are already many signs the political situation in Libya is evolving. Arguably the biggest development in recent months was the release of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, Muammar Gaddafi's son, by a Tobruk-based militia upon a request from the House of Representatives. With Saif al-Islam Gaddafi being wanted by the International Criminal Court for alleged atrocities committed by the Libyan government during the 2011 war, the fact of his release indicates the political fortunes are now favoring the House of Representatives and Marshal Haftar, a shift also suggested by British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson's statements in support of Haftar playing an important role in Libyan politics and the new French President Macron's admission the war in Libya was a major mistake.

But here the Western officials seem to be following the trends rather than making them, as the root cause of the shift appears to be the sudden weakening of Qatar's positions in the region. Egypt is a clear beneficiary of that weakening and is intent on pressing its advantage, to the point of pro-Sisi Egyptian media actually advocating bombing of Qatar. The Qatari disarray is also made apparent by LNA's recent announcement that the Qatari opposition has provided the LNA with a list of Libyan citizens who worked for Qatar's intelligence services.

Qatar's situation is not an enviable one. For the time being Turkey's military support and the US unwillingness to allow Saudi Arabia to utterly devastate Qatar are enough to allow it to maintain a brave face. But in the longer term it needs to find an accommodation with at least one of the key power players in the region, such as Saudi Arabia, US, or...Russia. The fact of growing Turkey-Russia cooperation on a variety of issues and Qatar's outreach to Russia in the form of a foreign minister visit and the simplification of visa rules for Russian citizens, suggests that Qatar is at least contemplating realigning its alliance membership. However, considering that all of the three above-named powers are on the opposite side of the barricades as far as Libya is concerned, it seems unlikely Qatar can maintain its proxy war there even with Turkey's support. Therefore, almost no matter what Qatar decides to do next, it will have no choice but to write off Libya as a total loss, an act that will hasten the end of this tragic six-year war.

Voiceover by Oleg Maslov

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