

Libya May Lose Again: Agreements Aren't Worth the Paper They're Written On

It was Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and NATO which, in 2011, murdered Moammar Gaddafi

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The Past. In the not too distant past, the warring factions in Libya (the Government of National Accord, GNA, and the Libyan National Army, LNA) concluded an armistice. The negotiations, stretching from the August 2020 ceasefire to the October 2020 agreement, revived the country's oil production and exports. Funds started pouring out into the Libyan economy, with equal shares going to regions and tribes. That arrangement also boosted the career of Deputy Prime Minister of the GNA, Ahmed Maiteeq, who negotiated the deal with the Commander of the LNA, Khalifa Haftar.

Or that was the idea, then. Now, despite overcoming initial opposition and confronting Turkish and Syrian mercenaries occupying parts of the country, Libya is back where it started, with a GNA filing up with Islamists and war lords.

Changes Coming. Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya, Fayez al-Sarraj, is planning retirement. Although the logical choice for his successor is Deputy Prime Minister of the GNA, Ahmed Maiteeq, there are other contenders, those whose allegiances apparently lie outside of Libya. Some of these claimants are Fathi Bashagha, the Interior Minister, accused of torture, and Khaled al-Mishri, the head of Libya's High Council of State, a representative of the radical Muslim Brotherhood. Both seem to have ties to the United States.

These two appear on the lists of possible leaders of Libya compiled by The Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF). The head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Stephanie Williams, an American diplomat, selected 49 out of 75 participants for the Tunisian conference on Libya's future. Its aim is to appoint Libya's new leadership that will govern the country until fresh elections are held throughout the land.

More disturbingly, UNSMIL has reserved the right to determine which candidates are suitable for positions in Libya's new leadership "compromise" and which are not. Consequently, this allows the Americans to use the LPDF to appoint the new UN-recognized leadership of Libya. (It was Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and NATO which, in 2011, murdered Moammar Gaddafi, and destroyed Libya, the African country with the greatest quality of life.)

Fathi Bashagha now seems well-positioned to take over from Fayez al-Sarraj. He is the only leader in Libya who has called for the American military to set up a base in the country. He is in close contact with Stephanie Williams and makes regular voyages to foreign capitals in an effort to gain external support.

Problems. But, there is a fly in the ointment. Bashagha has been plagued by his involvement in war crimes and torture since the storming of Tripoli Airport in 2014. He is closely associated with armed groups from Misrata. The US Department of State has claimed that the Libyan Interior Ministry under his leadership has been actively involved in human trafficking.

Bashagha's rise to power will undoubtedly set in motion a fresh conflict. It may be against Haftar, who had launched an operation against Tripoli last year precisely to stop people like Bashagha. Or there might be war between Bashagha and the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF), a militia regularly opposing Bashagha. There have been numerous clashes between the TPF and formations under Bashagha's control already. If Bashagha is promoted to the head of government or Presidential Council, these groups may start a civil war in the Libyan capital itself. Bashagha's rise to power may set in motion a fresh conflict.

But what of Khaled al-Mishri? His backers, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, also support Haftar. They and many Libyans would not want a member of the Muslim Brotherhood in charge. It was also Khaled al-Mishri, head of Libya's Supreme State Council, that reportedly even tried to prevent the Haftar oil agreement from being signed.

Resolution? Will this really lead to new conflict? Would the appointment of a capable, flexible technocrat, such as Ahmed Maiteeq, be a way out? He understands that politics is the art of the possible, not the route to personal or extra-national gains.

Maiteeq's other advantages are that he is a secular businessman and respected politician. He is not a powerless figurehead like Fayez Sarraj, a warlord like Fathi Bashagha, or a Brotherhood backer like Khaled al-Mishri. Ahmed Maiteeq appears to be a compromise figure who could coordinate the peace process between the GNA and the LNA.

As we've seen, his lucrative deal with Khalifa Haftar unlocked Libyan oil exports. That is the sort of achievement the world community should be looking for: technocrats like Maiteeq, acceptable to all external actors and someone with enough authority in Libya to help restore unity and hold general elections for president and parliament.

Yet the opposition won't go quietly. According to the *Voice of America* (VOA),

"A news conference at which Maiteeq was to explain the oil production agreement ended abruptly when supporters of a Tripoli militia prevented him from speaking. Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya TV reported that partisans of Islamist Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha blocked both the deal and the media event." Continuing, VOA noted "The foreign minister of the interim government in eastern Libya, Abdul Hadi al Hwiej, told Arab media that he thought Turkey was responsible for [attempting to torpedo] the oil deal. The agreement included a stipulation that no oil money would be used to fund mercenaries or agreements with Ankara."

Still, "Libya analyst Aya Burweila, a visiting lecturer at the Hellenic National Defense College, told VOA that [the September oil] deal was a "breakthrough for conflict resolution" since "traditionally antagonistic parties" from both east and west "cooperated" to make it, but that "a minority of spoilers and actors, who have profited from the staggering corruption and lack of transparency in Libya, are up in arms over the agreement."

In the End. What's really important is that the long-suffering people of Libya, where the civil

war has been going on for almost 10 years, are interested in peace and need the stability it will bring.

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