

Anniversary of Gaddafi's Death and the Current Situation in Libya

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The seventh anniversary of the killing of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi on October 20, 2011 provides us with an opportunity to reassess those dramatic events which caused a major step backwards in the country's development. With the fall of its leader, the country's power hierarchy collapsed, leading to the disintegration of both government authorities and the armed forces.

The "triumph of the February 17th Revolution and the fall of the dictatorship" was initially greeted with euphoria, but this mood was not enough to prevent the country from falling apart. The victors, who had seized power with the support of NATO and an unlikely coalition of various armed groups, were unable to prevent the country's descent into chaos. That coalition split apart in 2014, and the country has effectively been split in two ever since. There are now two opposed "territories", one headed by Tripoli in the west of Libya, the other headed by Tobruk, in the east. Each has its own government, parliament and armed forces.

What is more, the capital, Tripoli, is controlled by four main armed groups, which, together, prop up the Government of National Accord, headed by Fayez al-Sarraj. Their official role is to guarantee security, serve as a police force, and guard the airport, government organisations and prisons etc. According to many experts in the region, these armed groups have built up an unprecedented level of control over both public and private organisations. They are involved in business and a wide range of illegal schemes: these include various forms of smuggling, especially of oil.

This situation gives rise to rivalry with other armed groups which came to Tripoli as victors after the collapse of the regime, but these newcomers have been sidelined as time has passed.

They were angered by Facebook posts in which commanders of pro-government militias showed off their luxury cars and flats. That explains why, at the end of August, the commanders of 7 brigades from Tarhuna, 45 km south of the capital, adopted the slogan "An end to corruption!" and moved their forces against the alliance of four armed groups.

Despite calls by the Government of National Accord for peace, serious armed clashes have broken out in several parts of Tripoli – the worst eruption of violence in the city in the last four years. Between August and the end of September, 115 people were killed and 383 wounded in these clashes. Thousands of families have fled to avoid the fighting between groups of militants.

As a result, the UN has declared a state of emergency in the capital. In the view of these events, it is hardly surprising that the UN special envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, recently declared that the planned general elections, the result of several years of negotiations by the UN, are unlikely to take place on the intended date of December 10 this [year](#).

It seems as if the combined efforts of the UN, a number of European countries and Libya's Arab neighbours to reconcile the two factions based on the Libyan Political Agreement signed in 2015 in Shkirat are doomed to failure. (The Shkirat Agreement called for the creation of national transitional state bodies, elections to the newly-formed parliament, presidential elections, etc.)

Another problem is that Libya still lacks charismatic leaders who could unite society and persuade it to accept the necessary compromises. The existing political elites are all pulling in different directions.

It is hard to see how things could have been otherwise. The UN's efforts to broker and implement an agreement was hampered by the fact that the politicians' authority was limited by their dependence on armed groups and their "godfathers".

Libya since the fall of Gaddafi has been a tragic example of how a country which used to be stable, and which is rich in oil reserves, can be brought to its knees by internal conflict. Libyans' standard of living has fallen dramatically. People are weighed down by the problems of everyday life: a shortage of cash in the economy, power cuts and interruptions to the water supply, a lack of flour in the shops, endless queues at bakeries, etc.

And, at an international level, the country is faced with potential threats from its neighbours in North Africa and the Middle East. The authorities are unable to effectively police the country's borders, which extend over 6 000 km. In 2017 the majority of the 200 000 migrants who travelled across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe started their journey in [Libya](#).

Seven years ago, Western politicians and the media cheered on the militants and celebrated their victory over the "dictator". This enthusiasm has long since vanished. Reality has confounded all those optimistic predictions and naive hopes. They lack the will or the power to sort out the chaos.

Nevertheless, the same countries that intervened in the internal conflict in Libya under the pretext of "fighting against dictatorship and for democracy" were keen to unleash a similar situation in Syria. The government, army and people of Syria, with their allies, have been able to resist that policy and prevent the breakup of their country and its transformation into another Libya.

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