

France and Italy Are Involved in a Proxy War in Libya

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The following is the full English-language interview that Andrew Korybko gave to RT (German) about the latest developments in Libya, which was published by the outlet in an abridged form under the title "[Colonialism 2.0: France & Italy Are In A Proxy War In Libya](#)":

RT: General Khalifa Haftar's army has declared that it has captured the largest oil field in Libya. What are the consequences for the internationally recognized government in Tripoli that has controlled the field so far?

Andrew Korybko: The so-called "Government of National Accord" (GNA) is becoming increasingly marginalized and forced by circumstances into "politically compromising" with General Haftar's unrecognized "Libyan National Army", similar in a sense to how the internationally recognized Kabul government in Afghanistan is being pushed into doing the same with the Taliban despite the latter still being internationally regarded as a "terrorist organization" (currently banned by Russia but Moscow recently said that it would [support lifting UN sanctions](#) against it).

RT: How great is the chance that Khalifa Haftar could militarily take power in Tripoli in the absence of a political solution?

AK: General Haftar wants to avoid a military solution to the Libyan Civil War for both symbolic and pragmatic reasons, understanding how counterproductive it would be for his national reconciliation vision if both Libyan "governments" fight one another to the end in a disastrous battle that would only make life worse for the average citizen. Therefore, his strategy seems to be to make incremental progress around the capital's peripheral regions in order to position the LNA as the kingmaker of Libyan affairs, after which the GNA would be pressured into making "political compromises" with it in the interests of national unity.



Libyan National Army (Source: South Front)

Failing that, the LNA might advance closer to the capital, though possibly holding back on launching a full offensive and instead "tightening the noose" around it to provoke the people to "rise up" against the GNA and "open the gates" to General Haftar's forces afterwards. Engaging in a large-scale battle for the capital would also be disadvantageous to the LNA's soft power abroad because it could be interpreted as an unrecognized armed group trying to seize power from an internationally recognized government, which is another reason why he's so sensitive about advancing that scenario.

RT: France has carried out air raids in the border area between Libya and Chad. Previously, Macron visited Egypt, considered the main supporter of the rival government in Tobruk under Khalifa Haftar. Does France undermine Tripoli?

AK: France has always had interests in Libya since the so-called “Scramble for Africa”, and it’s using its “G5 Sahel” regional anti-terrorist mandate to expand its influence near the southern Libyan border after it bombed an invading rebel group in northern Chad, which also complements the tacit (if not direct covert) support that it’s giving to General Haftar on the same implied basis (i.e. that he’s the most effective anti-terrorist force in the country). Paris expects that its efforts will pay off handsomely if he comes to power and grants French companies privileged rights in the Libyan energy industry.

RT: To what extent can it be said that France is waging a kind of proxy war against Italian interests in Libya? Italy is regarded as an influential supporter of the internationally recognized government in Tripoli and the energy giant ENI is also at risk of losing influence.

AK: The historic Italian-French competition reemerged after the 2011 NATO War on Libya succeeded in destroying the Jamahiriya and both European countries raced for control of its resources, with Paris trying to gain the upper hand over Rome’s entrenched interests there (inherited as a result of its colonial-era influence and geographic proximity). Nowadays the two neighboring countries are ideological enemies after Italy’s EuroRealist government stood up to France’s EuroLiberal one several prominent times over the past year, most notably with the Yellow Vests and the issue of illegal migration. Therefore, it’s not inconceivable that Paris might be hoping that General Haftar can be used as a proxy of sorts against Rome’s influence over Tripoli in order to carry out a geopolitical coup in the EU’s “Near Abroad” and send a message to Italy to “know its place” and never dare challenge France’s African ambitions again.

RT: France and Italy are both former colonial powers in Africa. How much does the colonial heritage still shape the geopolitical considerations of both countries in the region today?

AK: Both European powers’ colonial-era footprints in Africa powerfully shape their present-day geopolitical tussle over Libya. Italy is only just returning to the continent in a strategic sense after decades of withdrawing from it, so it has a lot of “catching up” to do with France. Paris has much more experience in this “game” than Rome does, which is why it prudently threw its weight behind General Haftar after correctly predicting that he’d be much more effective of a national unifying and anti-terrorist force than the deeply divided authorities in Tripoli that Rome decided to back instead. In terms of international law, Italy is “playing by the rules” while France is “breaking” them, though the latter will probably succeed because its strategy is much more pragmatic for pursuing its interests.

RT: The Foreign Policy article [“The West Is Letting Libya Tear Itself Apart”](#) points out that the European powers are using the Libyan conflict to make their own profit. To what extent do the Europeans have no long-term interest in peace in the country despite the continuing waves of refugees entering Europe from there?

AK: For as convincing as the argument put forth in the piece may be, and bearing in mind that there are some actors (both state and non-state ones) in Europe that want to perpetuate the conflict, it’s in the objective interests of the European powers to see peace prevail as soon as possible. Not only would this help them contain large-scale migrant flows

from West Africa (which might become even worse in the coming future as Mali's Libyan-triggered destabilization spreads to Burkina Faso and endangers stability in its neighboring coastal nations of Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, and Benin), but it would also make the profitable enterprises of energy extraction and post-war reconstruction much more reliable.

RT: Officials in Tripoli like to explain that Haftar cannot market the oil despite taking the wells because the National Oil Corporation (NOC) controls its sale. To what extent could Haftar possibly circumvent this process in the future? What other reasons could there be for Haftar to launch his offensive in southern Libya?

AK: Tripoli's international backers are surely scrutinizing activities along the Libyan coast and trying to ensure that General Haftar isn't in violation of the prohibition placed upon selling the country's oil outside of the NOC's ambit, and he probably understands that it would be more politically beneficial in the long term for him to abide by this than to circumvent it for the sake of short-term profits. He didn't capture the southern Libyan oilfields to finance his war effort, but to enter into a kingmaker position whereby the NOC and its internationally recognized owners of the GNA in Tripoli are placed in a position of strategic dependence on him that could consequently compel them to make "political compromises" such as constitutional reform and a power-sharing arrangement ahead of national elections.

RT: The United States AFRICOM commander Thomas Waldhauser accused Russia of seeking to reinforce its presence in Libya. Does Russia really play such a strong role on the Haftar side? After all, it also maintains relations with Tripoli.

AK: Russia's 21st-century strategic vision is to becoming the supreme "balancer" of Afro-Eurasian affairs, which I elaborated on at length in my analysis on the topic last year titled "[Russia's Grand Strategy In Afro-Eurasia \(And What Could Go Wrong\)](#)". In this specific context, most of the reports about Russia's so-called "presence" in Libya originate from the Western Mainstream Media's unverified accusations that reek of a discrediting infowar intent designed to disrupt Moscow's equally cordial relations with both the GNA and Haftar and therefore undermine its delicate "balancing" strategy between them. Russia isn't taking sides in this conflict but hopes to use its diplomatic influence with both parties to broker a political solution to the conflict along the lines of what it just astonishingly pulled off in the much more war-wrecked Central African Republic earlier this month.

RT: Russia is particularly active in Africa in the Central African Republic. It also maintains good relations with Sudan and is an actor in Libya. What geopolitical strategy is Moscow pursuing on the continent and are there goals such as building up spheres of influence during Soviet times?

AK: Russia is creatively utilizing various low-cost but highly effective instruments of power to bring stability to Africa following the "Democratic Security" model that I described in detail in my recent piece titled "[The US Is More Afraid Of Losing Africa To Russia Than To China](#)", all of which is in accordance with international law and importantly doesn't violate state sovereignty unlike the US and France's preferred methods when they claim to be doing the same. [Sudan](#) is Russia's gateway into the continent, which I explained in an analysis last year titled "[Russia's Railroad Expertise Could Reshape African Geopolitics](#)" about how Khartoum's invitation for Moscow to participate in its international railway projects could result in Russia powerfully exerting its multipolar integrational influence all across the continent. It should also be noted that Sudan's diplomatic assistance was crucial for

reaching the latest Russian-brokered Central African Republic peace accord that was just clinched in Khartoum.

Contrary to the comparatively more static state of affairs during the Old Cold War, the [New Cold War](#) doesn't have any clear-cut ideological or geopolitical fault lines and is much more dynamic, seeing as how methods of influence have diversified to the point where information networks, soft power, and integrational projects are much more important than ever. Russia is in the process of crafting a comprehensive but nevertheless flexible strategy for all of Africa capable of adapting to changing circumstances and shaping them in the direction of its partners' shared interests, which takes the form of implementing custom "Democratic Security" solutions that can sustainably create the environment for socio-economic development and international integration initiatives to succeed. With Sudan as its bridgehead, it can be said that Russia is focusing on Northeast (Horn of Africa), Central, and East Africa most of all, which also happen to be the regions where other extra-regional powers like China, [the UAE, and India](#) are deepening their presence as well.

RT: Turkey and Qatar support the Tripoli-backed troops in Misrata. Again and again there are coming up pictures of alleged arms deliveries from Turkey. Will Ankara, which has also invested heavily in Ubari, interfere in the conflict in southern Libya?

AK: Turkey or any other of the Misrata forces' alleged foreign backers have a much easier time supporting them than those in Ubari would for reasons of simple geography: Misrata is a Mediterranean coastal city while Ubari is a Saharan oasis. Ankara has amazing relations with Khartoum, but its regional partner is dealing with a lot of internal turmoil at the moment and also has no desire to allow its territory to be used for interfering with its Libyan neighbor, thereby precluding the possibility of Turkey clandestinely shipping weapons there through that access point and somehow also circumventing General Haftar's forces across the approximately 1,000 miles from the Sudanese border to that city.

It might, however, try to funnel some of the weapons that it's reported to have provided to the Misrata forces towards the southern front, but that probably won't be a game-changer in any case even if it does so because those fighters might already be demoralized by General Haftar's swift successes in the region. Turkey simply lacks the means to change the military dynamics in that part of Libya, though its continued support for the Misrata forces might make it impossible for General Haftar to stage a final assault on the GNA without suffering unacceptable casualties and resulting in the total destruction of the northern region around the capital.

RT: There are rumours that Misrata wants to use the conflict in southern Libya actually to consolidate its own power in Tripoli. What do you think of such statements?

AK: It's possible that the weakening of the GNA coalition brought about by the defeat of their southern forces could lead to Misrata's becoming even more pivotal players in the internationally recognized government, resulting in General Haftar having to secure their support for any "political compromise" that he compels Tripoli to undertake in the coming future.

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Andrew Korybko is an American Moscow-based political analyst specializing in the relationship between the US strategy in Afro-Eurasia, China's One Belt One Road global vision of New Silk Road connectivity, and Hybrid Warfare. He is a frequent contributor to Global Research.

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