



RESEARCH PAPER

Realizing the Complex Nature of the Libyan Crises

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DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II\)2.30](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II)2.30)

PAPER INFO

ABSTRACT

Received:

August 22, 2021

Accepted:

December 12, 2021

Online:

December 15, 2021

Keywords:

Arab Spring,
Crammed,
Dictatorial Policies,
Jasmine
Revolution,
Neorealism,
Surrender

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In the milieu of 'Arab Spring', the protests against the Libyan President Qaddafi instantly turned into a full-scale civil war. Although Qaddafi tried to crush the activists through military means but failed as he was suddenly crammed by the internal/external forces. The western lobby did not even wait for the United Nations (UN) approval and employed its forces against his army, engaged with protestors. Qaddafi was not given a chance, even to surrender peacefully. Since 20 October 2011, when he was killed, the country remains involve in the civil war between the UN-backed Govt of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli and its rival General Khalifa Haftar led, Libyan National Army (LNA). Consequent to the escalating military confrontation, the security situation in Libya has become too complex. The Egyptian-Saudi-Emirati alliance versus the Turkish-Qatari alliance are now part of the great game in Libya. There is also the Franco-Italian struggle alongside Russia's anti-American agenda. Ankara's support was critical to stabilizing the GNA in Tripoli against the mounting pressure from LNA. Despite the number of meetings held to tackle with the issue, the security state in Libya still remains uncertain due to lack of resolve by the key players. Thus, the Libyans' dream for a democratic culture in the country seems off the table. In this study, 'neorealism' theory has been applied to understand the behaviour of the regional/extra-regional actors.

Introduction

Geographically, Libya is surrounded by Tunisia in the northwest, Algeria in the west, Egypt in the east, Sudan in the south-east, and Niger and Chad in the south and the Mediterranean Sea (Flower, Cordell et. al, 2020) in the north. Tripoli is the

capital city of Libya. Libyans are predominantly Sunni Muslim, while a small percentage of Christians and others also reside in Libya (Nations Encyclopaedia, 2020).

At the time of independence, Libya was a poor country yet, with oil discovery around 1959, its economy flourished rapidly. On 1 September 1969, a group of army officers led by Captain Muammar al-Gaddafi staged a successful coup against Muhammad Idris al Sanusi, the first King of Libya and continued to remain in power over four decades (BBC News, 2019). Due to various reasons, the Qaddafi regime continued to face problems regionally/globally, including the UN sanctions (1992 to 2003). Thus, despite being rich in oil resources, the Libyan masses' comfort level continued to dip down, in the process, his graph as a leader also declined.

As the Libyans got sick of the Qaddafi regime, they exploited the environments, created by the 'Arab Spring' to revolt against him (Lambert, 2020). Despite having an adequately strong army, the rebel groups managed to overthrow Qaddafi with foreign support. Washington instantly imposed sanctions against the Qaddafi regime and paved the way for the UN to move against him (Cooper & Landler, 2011).

In a strategic blow, duly backed by Arab League, the UN Security Council (UNSC), vide its Resolution 1973 (2011), unanimously approved various measures to put pressure on Qaddafi to step down, including a decision to refer his case to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged crimes against humanity (Plett, 2011). By evading from voting in the UNSC, China and Russia implicitly supported the resolution and isolated Qaddafi in his effort to defend his regime.

Ever since the death of Qaddafi, Libya remains in a state of war. It was assumed that Libya's subsequent crises were the outcome of an in-fight, duly fuelled by regional powers. Yet, at the end of 2019, Moscow was physically involved in Libya's civil war in support of Haftar. During mid-2020, Turkey made a bold manoeuvre and helped the GNA consolidate its position, ending 14-months siege of Tripoli by Haftar forces and driving them eastward, thus breaking the myth that Haftar might replace the GNA in Tripoli any time soon (Chughtai & Allahoum, 2020). Right now, through the UN initiative, led by Stephanie Williams, efforts are in progress to form an interim govt that would be responsible for holding elections in December 2021 (BBC News, 2020).

The nature of the Libyan crises and its solution have become too complex to be resolved easily. The conflict in oil-rich Libya has become a proxy war, involving around six regional and six outside powers, besides an unaccounted number of militant groups, who continue to switch their loyalties from one bloc to another. In this war, Libya remains the battlefield. Although an in-depth analysis of the Libyan crises, present a gloomy picture but optimistically, a 'stable political order' in Libya can still be restored through political means.

Above in view, this research paper aims at exploring the complex nature of the Libyan crises with a view to suggest a possible way forward. The article has been divided into the following sections: One, a brief history and strategic significance of Libya; two, understanding the complex character of the Libyan crises; three, the key stakeholders in Libya's civil war, a net assessment, four, Libyan crises, an analysis from the theoretical prism, and finally, the suggested way forward and conclusion. The opinion expressed in this paper is that of the authors' and is not necessarily backed by any institution.

Understanding the complex character of the Libyan crises

In Tunisia, 17 December 2010, when Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor, set himself on fire in protest, catalyzed the so-called 'Jasmine Revolution.' Tunisia's public reaction set off uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa that became known as 'Arab Spring' (Micallef, 2017).

Ensuing the 'Arab Spring,' the popular uprising also started to occur in Libya, starting from 15 February, 2011. In reaction to the arrest of Fethi Tarbel, a human rights lawyer, anti-govt rallies took place in Benghazi city calling Qaddafi to step down (Cordell, Barbour & Brown, 2020). From authors' viewpoint, due to the harsh crackdown, the Qaddafi regime helped turn a protest movement into a civil war instantly. Chris Arsenault opined that unlike Egypt, "where the military remains in control, Libya's rebellion became a true revolution..." (Arsenault, 2011)

Qaddafi and his son Saif al-Islam, both went drastically wrong in evaluating the ground realities. As the protests intensified, the Libyan govt began using lethal force against the activists. Furthermore, instead of controlling the public sentiments, Qaddafi vowed that the regime would fight "to the last bullet" (Arsenault, 2011) Yet, as the civil war expanded, the loyalties of his armed forces' as well as many of his close associates started to shift away from him. The fast-evolving security state inside Libya embroiled outside actors in the never-ending horror, making the situation far more complex (Cooper & Landler, 2011).

As highlighted earlier, in the backdrop of the most stringent UN Resolution 1973 (2011), the pressure was mounted on Qaddafi by the west. The Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) also released statements supporting a 'no-fly zone' over Libya. It was the first time in history that such a killing resolution was passed by the UNSC unanimously though, the African Union objected to some clauses of the resolution, including referring of Qaddafi's case to the ICC (Hosain, 2011). China and Russia's decision to abstain from the voting was a clear message for Qaddafi that he was left alone. The authors believe that catastrophic in Libya could have been avoided if Qaddafi and his family was given a 'safe exit'.

Although the rebel forces captured the Benghazi and many other western cities in a short period but after their initial success, they were beaten back by Qaddafi's troops (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020). Yet, in the backdrop of the UNSC resolution, beginning 19 March 2011, the US and its western allies launched cruise missiles and air attacks and choked Qaddafi forces by effectively imposing the UN-authorized 'no-fly zone' (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020). The NATO officially took over the operational command on 27 March 2011 to enforce Resolution 1973, beyond the call of the UN resolutions, in violation of Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter (Abass. 2011).

In early March, 2011, a rebel leadership council, termed Transitional National Council (TNC), with Mustafa Abdel Jalil as its interim leader was formed in Benghazi. Its ultimate aim was to guide the country's transition to a democratic govt after fall of the Qaddafi regime. The TNC was immediately recognized by France and Qatar as the legitimate govt of Libya. In August/September 2011, the African Union acknowledged the TNC. On 15 September, 2011, the UN General Assembly also recognized the TNC as the legitimate authority to represent Libyan people in the UN (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020).

From March 2011 till August 2011, Qaddafi continued to hold power in Tripoli. However, due to the NATO's extensive role, the balance of power shifted in the rebels' favour who captured Tripoli on 22 August, 2011 and raised Libya's pre-Qaddafi flag over the compound. By early September, rebel forces consolidated Tripoli's control, and the TNC formed a de-facto govt. *On 20 October, 2011, Qaddafi was discovered and killed by rebel fighters in violation of all human norms in his hometown, Sirte.*

Post Qaddafi security and political status in Libya

As expected, despite recognition from the U.N., the TNC as an interim govt failed to achieve smooth sail (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020). In a bid to legitimize TNC, elections were held in July 2012, which caused more confusion. Out of 200 seats, 120 seats were kept for independent candidates who were free to switch their loyalties to destabilize the govt. By winning 39 seats, the National Force Alliance (NFA), a secular party, led Mahmoud Jibrial, could win 39 seats vs 19 seats by the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party (JCP). The remaining seats were won by other small parties (Mezran, Lamén & Knecht, 2013). NFA emerged as single largest party in the assembly. The assembly was later named as General National Congress (GNC).

Right from the start, it was understood that the real power lied with small parties/independent members. The govt led by Jibrial was neither fully supported by independent members nor by the JCP. Thus, the decision-making process got paralyzed which led to dangerous polarization of the political landscape(UNHCR, 2012). By early 2014, in a drastic change, the GNC was divided into two competing factions. The LNA led by Haftar (a former high-ranking officer of the Qaddafi army), broke away from GNC for being dominated by Islamists and started to dominate over

the eastern part of Libya, including Tobruk. In May 2014, duly financed by Emiratis, he led his forces against Islamists and their allies in the east of Libya in an offensive named 'Operation Dignity' (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019). By the end of 2014, Haftar emerged as a strong man to dominate the eastern part of Libya. Thus, within two years, Libya was again involved in violent conflicts in a divided country, with one govt in Tobruk (in the east) and the other in Tripoli (in the west) (Kaskin, 2020).

In December 2015, the U.N. once again made an attempt to bring the rival factions together by brokering a new U.N. power-sharing Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) and established the Govt of National Accord (GNA), as an interim arrangement to hold a fresh election to form new assembly, termed as the House of Representatives, to replace the GNC but both Tripoli and Tobruk based power blocs refused to recognize its authority (Robinson, 2-20). Despite reservations, fresh elections were held in June 2016 but they were made controversial due to low turnout and were also declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court later that year (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020).

Regardless of reservations, in March 2016, Fayez al-Seraj was appointed as prime minister of the GNA. Due to obvious reasons, al-Seraj failed to consolidate the govt writ in the country. By September, 2016, Haftar was in full control of the oil export terminals located in the east. In January 2018, his forces also captured strategically important coastal city of Siret (Kaskin, 2020). Despite its failure, in yet another attempt, in May 2018, the U.N. Support Mission in Libya finalized a plan to hold elections by the end of the year but the next step could not be taken due to unfriendly environments (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020). As pointed out earlier, step by step, Haftar continued to gain ground including Tobruk's control over many oil fields, limiting the leverage of Tripoli based GNA. Still, his attempt to capture Tripoli during April, 2019, ended in a stalemate along the outskirts of the city that lasted through the rest of 2019 (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020).

Meanwhile, with the division of the power at the top level and the anarchy created thereafter, a struggle for control of the govt institutions by GNA and LNA also continued. The leading institutions like the National Oil Corporation (NOC) and Central Bank of Libya collapsed. Libya's ports along the Mediterranean Sea were frequently captured and re-captured by various factions. Like the oil corporation, the Central Bank of Libya was divided into two branches. Yet, since the world community decided to do trade exclusively with the Tripoli-based NOC, therefore, Haftar was unable to do business in oil, freely (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020).

The present stalemate in Libya

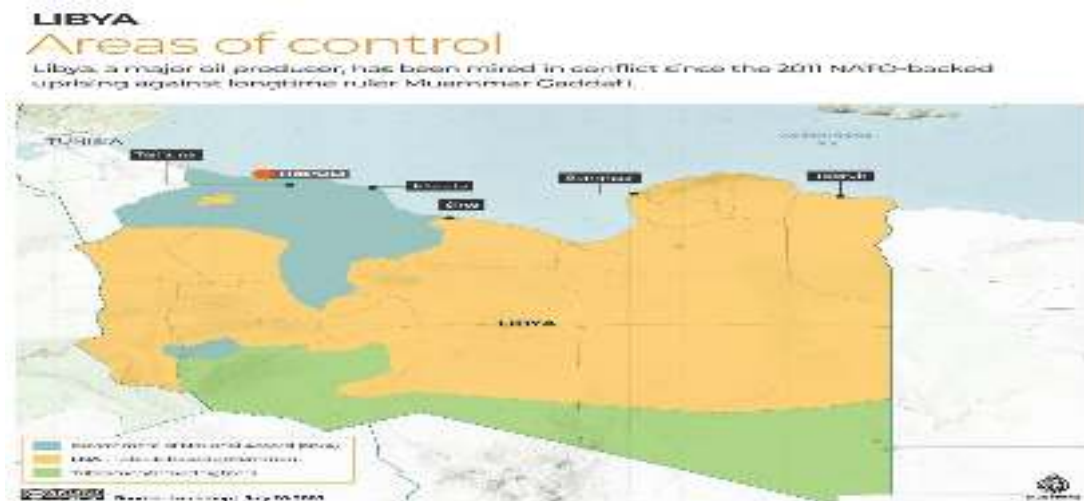
Unlike Egypt and to an extent Syria, the security state in Libya after the 'Arab Spring' was different and unique as the people did not buy "the brand of self-absorbed", that Qaddafi had been trying to sell as "the dean of Arab rulers" (Arsenault,

2011). Hence, Libya's rebellion became “a true revolution, where the old order was swept away” (Cardell, Barbour & Brown, 2020).

Despite repeated calls from the U.N. to the member states to fully respect the arms embargo, illegal arms continue to reach all fighting groups without much difficulty. The unchecked supply of the arms contributed to the consolidation of various militia groups on the ground. As reported by the BBC News, Russia, Turkey, the UAE, and other states were accused by the UN of blatantly defying Libya's international arms embargo (Robinson, 2020).

As earlier said, Haftar, duly backed by Russia still maintains control over a large part of the country. Meanwhile, during January 2020, in Russian response, Turkey also deployed its troops to support the GNA (Robinson, 2020). On 19 January, 2020, the Berlin summit failed to reach an agreement to de-escalate the conflict. As earlier explained, the GNA, assisted by Turkish-backed foreign forces, succeeded in dislodging the LNA from the area around Tripoli. The GNA fighters ignored the unilateral call by Egypt for a cease-fire in Libya (Arab News, 2020).

The map below shows the ground position of various factions involved in fighting since October 2011. The map indicates that neither of the two groups are able to have a stable govt and unfortunately, civil war continues.



Haftar’s “strategic retreat from the Western part of the country have created a new equilibrium in the conflict.” In fact, after failing to establish a foothold in Tripoli, Haftar seems “losing internal and external support...to the point that no one will likely bet on him again,” said Alessia Melcangi and Giuseppe Dentice (Melcangi and Dentice, 2020).

For a change, duly brokered by the U.N., during October 2020, both sides signed an agreement for a permanent cease-fire. Explaining the terms of the deal, the

U.N. envoy Stephanie Williams gave encouraging news of creating real and durable peace in Libya. As per the terms of the deal, besides other actions, "all military units and armed groups on the front lines shall return to their camps, and all mercenaries and foreign fighters will leave Libya within three months" (BBC News, 2020) However, only time would dictate whether or not this deal would succeed.

In a latest move, duly brokered by the U.N., the opposing factions have agreed to hold a national election on 24 December 2021. The U.N. envoy Ms. Williams is working hard to create a mechanism in the form of an interim govt, "capable of organizing elections and implementing political, economic and military reforms." It is relevant to highlight that similar accords followed by elections, held during 2012 and 2016, failed to bring a consensus govt in Libya (UN News, 2020).

The civil war has caused miseries for the civil population due to uncalled shelling, injuries from explosive devices, shortage of food and medicine and kidnapping for ransom. Multiple mass graves have also been discovered near the western city of Tarhuna. As estimated by the U.N. Support Mission in Libya, hundreds of civilians have been killed nationwide since Haftar began his assault on Tripoli. Besides, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees "estimates that more than 200,000 people have been internally displaced and approximately 1.3 million people need humanitarian assistance (Robinson, 2020)."

The key stakeholders in Libya's civil war: A net assessment

As briefly explained earlier, it was assumed that the post-Qaddafi unrest in Libya was the outcome of the infight between various internal factions. Yet, the conflict in Libya has become a proxy war, fuelled by rival foreign powers from within and across the region (Robinson, 2020). In successive paras, the role of regional/extra-regional actors in Libya's civil war has been briefly explained.

The Western World

As underlined before, since early 1980s, largely, Qaddafi did not enjoy good relations with the US and its western allies (Cooper & Landler, 2011). In the backdrop of the instant reaction against Qaddafi's public policies, Washington quickly closed its embassy in Tripoli and imposed unilateral sanctions against Libya. Its European allies were even keener to bring down and hurriedly moved to isolate Libya diplomatically (Cooper & Landler, 2011). They did not even wait for the U.N. approval and started to employ NATO forces, to counter Qaddafi's forces engaged with protestors.

In a surprise move, after giving the initial thrust to destroy the Qaddafi regime, the US decided to stay on side-line in the current conflict. Though, formally, Washington continued to support the UN backed GNA, but practically, it did not extend any support against LNA (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020). Thus, America's decision

to stay on the margins of the conflict has made the issue more complex because the vacuum created has been filled by other actors, including Russia (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020). Washington has warned Moscow against its policy of “fanning the flames” of the conflict, saying that “it could deploy its own forces in Tunisia to deter the Russians from destabilizing North Africa” (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020). Besides, the rivalry between France and Italy, the old colonial powers in Libya, has complicated the E.U.’s task (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020).

Russia and the Libya Civil War

During the early stage of the civil war in Libya, Russia did not show enthusiasm. Yet, in the absence of the America’s active role, it decided to influence the region through military adventures (DW, 2020). Tomas Olivier, opined, “Strengthening the Russian military position in North Africa will undoubtedly provide Russian President Vladimir Putin with a much tighter grip over Europe and possibly even deep-rooted influence and control in the wider MENA region” (DW, 2020). He further added that if Putin succeeds in achieving grip over Libya, it will give him the logistical/ geo-strategical advantage due to the presence of several deep-water ports as well the energy resources in Libya. Hence, to realize its goals, Moscow decided to support Haftar (Walsh & Schmitt, 2020). Michael Kofman indicated that the deployment of Russian airpower in Libya, “could be the first step in a gradual escalation to what eventually becomes a permanent Russian military deployment in the country.” The Pentagon has already voiced its concern about Russia's growing influence in the ongoing civil war in Libya (Walsh & Schmitt, 2020).

To avoid direct conflict, Moscow managed to coordinate its military moves with Turkey inside Libya. Both sides collected Libya’s top leadership in Moscow and brokered a cease fire between them (Voice of America, 2020). Still, to promote its strategic interest in eastern Libya, Russia seems playing its cards carefully by also engaging other influential figures in the country’s eastern govt (Semenov, 2020). Conversely, “if the Kremlin’s strategy is to achieve the upper hand in mediating...for a possible future bargain with Turkey”, Haftar remains relevant to Russia” (Melcangi and Dentice, 2020)

The role of the Arab League and the African Union

As an organization, the Arab League and the African Union played a minimal role in Libya’s civil war. From the Arab League forum, it backed the U.N. action against Gaddafi and imposed a ‘no-fly zone’ against Qaddafi regime (BBC News, 2017). After Qaddafi’s death, the individual states from Middle East started to participate in the civil war from opposite camps. Presently, Turkey and Qatar back the GNA in Tripoli while Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) stand with Haftar led LNA (Allahoum & Traina, 2020).

Similarly, the African Union collectively objected to the clause of the UNSC that referred the case of Qaddafi to ICC but thereafter, they had no united response to the Libyan civil war. Yet, indirectly, mercenaries from Sudan/ Chad, without the backing from their respective govts are found involved in civil war supporting the two sides, having no precise mission. The claim was validated by the U.N. panel of experts in its reports (Burke & Salih, 2020).

Turkey and the Libyan Civil War

It is a fact that the GNA in Tripoli was almost losing the war against Haftar, if Turkey had not come to rescue it. Yet, Turkey took a longer time to decide its role in the Libyan crisis. To begin with, Turk president warned that “sanctions would do more harm to Libya’s people than to Colonel Qaddafi.” Nonetheless, since 2014, Turkey continues to extend its political/ diplomatic support to the U.N. backed GNA in Tripoli (Allahoum & Traina, 2020).

It is viewed that by having a direct role in the outcome of the Libyan civil war, Ankara is hoping to carve out spheres of its influence on energy-rich Libya and in process, counter the influence of the regional/ extra-regional states including Egypt, Greece, Israel and Cyprus which have already established an Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and planned to transport the gas into Europe. But the catch is that the pipeline has to cross the Turkey-Libya jurisdiction (Sahinkaya, 2021). “Ankara considers Libya as a gateway for influence over the Mediterranean Sea” said Nigar Goksel (Marcus, 2021).

As a countermeasure, in November 2019, Ankara already struck a maritime deal with GNA. Kaskin views that Qatar, a close Turkey ally also played a role in Erdogan’s intervention (Kaskin, 2020). In fact, “Turkey's more aggressive oil exploration off Cyprus with armed drones "riding shotgun" for its survey vessel is all part of this new activism”, said Jonathan Marcus (Marcus, 2021).

Due to its long term commercial interests, Ankara would wish to see a stable Libya (Kaskin, 2020). But its decision to deploy troops marks a new stage in the internationalization of the fighting which has further complicated the already multi-layered Libyan crisis “enmeshed itself in an escalating conflict with a complex mix of players and stakeholders”, said Marcus. Some experts consider that in the milieu of the GNA success, Ankara has emerged as the potential dominant external player in Libya thus, the possibility of a compromise solution by the local factions has become dubious (Walsh & Schmitt, 2020).

Egypt and the Libyan Civil War

Though initially, Egypt did not show enthusiasm in the Libyan crisis but later, during February 2014, it decided to involve itself in Libya’s multifaceted civil war in

support of Haftar, a one-time CIA asset (Walsh & Schmitt, 2020). Taqadum al-Khatib, a political analyst, argued that the complex Libyan crisis is bound to become a threat on Egypt's western borders (Egyptian Foreign Policy, 2020). So, to stabilize the growing asymmetrical threats along its 1115 km western border, Egypt is keen to have a favourable outcome of the civil war in Libya.

Al-Khatib argued that if Cairo was not involved in the conflict directly, it had an opportunity to play a mediating role, having a number of cards at its disposal to move towards a political solution to the crisis (Egyptian Foreign Policy, 2020). In the backdrop of Ankara's direct support to the GNA in Tripoli, "the two govts are on a collision course on a plurality of political/ economic issues, such as Turkey's support for political Islam and the geo-economic disputes in the eastern Mediterranean," said Melcangi and Dentice. (Melcangi & Dentice, 2020)

To begin with, Egypt was quite confident about Haftar's capacity to deal with the Libyan crisis and willingly allowed its forces to use western Egypt as a staging area to fight the GNA (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019). However, with the change in the military tide against Haftar forces, Cairo decided to modify its strategy to deal with the Libyan issue. It made a unilateral declaration to end the war. Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, the Egyptian President, warned that there was no military solution to the ongoing crisis in Libya hence, at the Cairo conference held in June 2020, he suggested to form the presidential council which should rule for an interim period, followed by elections. Besides Haftar, the meeting was also attended by the reps from America, France, Italy and Russia (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019).

The above initiative notwithstanding, el-Sisi while speaking to senior military officers and the heads of Libyan tribes from an airbase inside Libya along the Egyptian border has delivered a stern warning to Libya's GNA and its allies, clearly demarcating Siret and Al-Jufra airbase as the Egyptian 'redlines'. He said, "Egypt's national security is off-limits". Yet, he re-emphasized a political solution to the Libyan conflict based on the U.N. resolutions, the Berlin and Cairo conference (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019). Giorgio Cafiero and Emily Torjusen concluded that Egypt seems under pressure to stand with Haftar as loyalty to Haftar is due more to the money received from several Muslim countries from the Middle East than to his ability as a leader (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019).

Role of militant groups in Libyan civil war

To begin with, the revolt against the Qaddafi regime was purely a domestic issue (Robinson, 2020). But as the ground realities unfolded, it also created a vacuum that was gradually filled by the militant organizations. By September 2012, powerful Islamist militant groups such as al-Qaeda, Ansar al-Sharia, and the self-proclaimed Islamic State started to operate throughout the country. Their first target was the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, killing its ambassador and four other consulate members (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019).

Fighters from the group's core territories in Iraq and Syria also began to arrive in early 2014. On 15 February, 2015, a Libyan branch of ISIS beheaded 21 Coptic Christians, including 20 Egyptians in the central coastal city of Sirte and by the summer of 2015, they had taken full control of this important city. The sporadic attacks by the terrorists against various embassies continued through the 2014 to 2017 (Robinson, 2020).

In 2016, a coalition of western militias confronted ISIL with the U.S. air force's help and dislodged them from Sirte and the surrounding area. ISIL fighters are still active while operating from scattered small desert camps, staging occasional attacks. It is also important to highlight that hardliners in Libya like Salafist forces and 'Muslim Brotherhood' are already operating from the opposing camps, each led by Haftar and Sarraj. However, there is no denying fact that thousands of mercenaries, mostly from war-torn Syria, continue to fight from two camps.

Libyan crises, an analysis from the theoretical prism

The real world is too complex to be explained in tangible terms. In a globalized world, the 'relative gains' as transmitted by the scholars from 'neorealism' school of thought at a time put the states at risk of losing prospects of success. To begin with, it is believed, it was the western initiative to bring down Qaddafi intentionally, while ignoring the possible fallout of the collapse of the Qaddafi regime.

As underlined earlier, since the Qaddafi regime was not in good books of the western bloc hence, following the 'realist approach', they exploited the opportunity to bring him down. It is opined that after committing a historical blunder in Iraq, they did not learn a lesson and committed yet another slip-up by helping rebels to bring Qaddafi down. The authors are of the view that despite small irritants, Qaddafi was still serving their interests well in the north African region.

In the absence of the America's direct role, France, Italy and Egypt seem indecisive about their decision in the final outcome of the civil war in Libya. Yet, an in-depth analysis of the behaviour of Turkey and Russia, having boots on the ground, indicates that to protect their respective national interests, they are involved in fighting 'war of position' in the region by applying 'Structural Realism' theory, coined by Kenneth Waltz. The 'war of position' is the form of war where great powers struggle over the control of small third parties (Waltz, 1979).

Albeit, during the last four years, despite its inclination to look 'inward', Washington would still wish to maintain the status-quo as a sole 'superpower'. It would not give up the option of maximizing its power because in the global context, America still enjoys enough clout over the world affairs. With the change of command in the Oval Office in January 2021, the new administration led by Joseph Biden would

engage with the world positively and try to restore the U.S. lost image as the sole super power.

Nevertheless, it is viewed that after staying in a shell for over twenty years, Russia led by Putin has re-emerged as a strong competitor, capable of opposing America in the regional context if not globally. Russia's displayed conduct amply proves that it also wishes to maximize its power. It has already consolidated its hold on Eastern Europe and Syria by applying 'offensive realism', compelling the U.S. and its allies to adopt 'defensive realism' in the regional context (Valeriano, 2009).

As earlier explained, in the absence of the U.S. boots on the ground, Russian has started expanding its influence in North Africa. Olivier has already indicated Russia's long-term interests to have tight grip over Europe and possibly even deep-rooted influence/control in the wider MENA region (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020). Similarly, Kofman too clarified that deployment of Russian airpower in Libya might be the first step, gradually leading towards permanent military deployment in the country on southern flanks of Europe (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020).

It is opined that in the changed political/security scenarios in the contested region of Middle East, Washington has already reconciled with Moscow and accepted its dominant role because it is already embroiled in containing China in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, it is also viewed that the impact of Covid-19 on the U.S. economy has also put it on back foot in dealing with global affairs. The U.S. demonstrated approach in the recent past towards Afghanistan, Syria, North Korea and its lean-back position on Libya does not suggest that a clash between Russia and the U.S. in the contested areas is likely in the near future.

In American absence, the other key stakeholders also jumped into Libya's civil war, applying the 'neorealism' approach (both defensive & offensive), allowing a dangerous international confrontation to deepen. Libya stands divided into competing for political/military factions, striving hard to establish nationwide control of their own choice. Turkey also emerged as a strong competitor to check Russia's expansionist designs in Mediterranean Sea (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020). Until now, the leadership on both sides appeared to view Libya as a place to divide the spoils, rather than go openly to war.

Turkey's gambit of dealing with the Libyan civil war applying 'offensive realism' may have far-reaching implications in the eastern Mediterranean. If the situation in Libya is not controlled at the early stage, it could complicate Turk relationships with both Moscow, Egypt and other Arab countries, it will make existing regional tensions worse (Ryan & Raghavan, 2020).

Libya's complex political and security environments with more than two centre of powers duly backed by the regional/ extra regional actors, present a number of difficulties. In their presence, it is any body's guess as how the U.N. brokered an

agreement to hold election for a united govt in Libya during December 2021 would work. Many countries involved in the Libyan crises have pushed their interests to manipulate developments on the ground, seeking to impose their own visions, ideologies, and ambitious agendas on the North African country. Such self-serving actions have led to greater uncertainty and impeded a quick resolution to the crisis (Cafiero & Torjusen, 2019).

Conclusion and the possible way forward

Currently, the Libyan people are in deep water. Although, an in-depth analysis of the ongoing crises in Libya, present a gloomy picture and is quite tricky to carve a right course from the 'fog of war', but we sincerely believe that 'where there is a will, there is a way'. To protect humanity in Libya, Egypt, Russia, Turkey and the Muslim countries of the Middle East need to adopt a sincere approach while relegating their vested interests and dig out a viable political solution of the issue in hand.

At this point in time, both regional and extra-regional actors have a special role to play to unite Libyan people by backing the U.N. plan of action. If we fail to build on the U.N. led initiative to create 'win-win' situation for all, it would ultimately lead towards a full-blown proxy war with major regional and international powers involved in outright conflict.

Because of the complex nature of the problem, it might take longer to carve an acceptable plan but we should not leave Libyan people high and dry. The solution to Libya's crises is political therefore, the international actors involved in the civil war should encourage the people to unite through political process for which, an opening has already been provided by the U.N. through its plan to hold the election during December 2021.

The UN envoy Ms. Williams must not lose heart. She should hammer out an interim set up by developing consensus among various factions including the two key groups one each led by al-Sarraj in Tripoli and Haftar in Tobruk.

It is believed that a political solution to the Libyan crises is possible, provided the permanent members of the UNSC become sincere to resolve the problem in hand. The UNSC has the mandate and means to restore peace in any part of the world therefore, peace in Libya is not an exception.

A stable regional environment is critical to move the ongoing U.N. peace initiatives forward. Russia alongside Turkey have emerged as the key power brokers in the region. They can play a critical role in improving the regional environment by encouraging their respective sides to cooperate with the U.N. envoy in holding free and fair election to unite the country. While doing so, they can still protect their respective national interests in the region.

Moreover, since polarizing fight against political Islam has strengthened the tensions between Saudi Arabia and the UAE on one side and Turkey and Qatar on the other thus, misgivings between them also need to be addressed for the long-term peace and prosperity in the region.

Finally, a poor and neglected Libya would continue to cause long terms security problems for the entire world. Thus, the end game in Libya depends on the behaviour and the level of economic support that the world community is likely to commit for the reconstruction of Libya.

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