

Libyan civil war intensifies amid growing international negotiations

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The domestic and international parties of the civil war in Libya have recently intensified talks as Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj’s UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli advanced on the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an called his US counterpart, Donald Trump, Monday about Libya and other regional issues. Afterwards, Erdo?an announced: “A new era may begin between the US and Turkey regarding the [Libyan] process, and we had some agreements during our conversation, and such a step could be taken.”

This comes amid growing international diplomatic initiatives across the region. On June 4, in the Turkish capital, Ankara, al-Sarraj met Erdo?an to discuss recent developments in the North African country. Then, at a joint press conference, Erdo?an once again denounced Haftar as a “putschist.”

“History will judge those who cause bloodshed and tears in Libya by supporting the putschist Haftar,” Erdo?an said at the press conference. For his part, al-Sarraj told Haftar’s forces: “you have been defeated in Tripoli; just accept it.”

On June 6, in Cairo, Egyptian President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi, who came to power in a US-backed coup, met Haftar and his political ally Aguila Saleh Issa of the Tobruk-based House of Representatives in Libya. After the meeting, Sisi, Haftar and Saleh Issa held a joint press conference and issued a Cairo Declaration also calling for a ceasefire and diplomatic talks in Libya. Previously, Haftar had rejected diplomacy and calls for a ceasefire when his forces were gaining ground against the GNA.

Throwing its military and diplomatic weight behind Sarraj, Ankara denounced this declaration as “stillborn.” Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşo?lu told reporters on Wednesday: “Amid recent victories of the Government of National Accord, they are calling for a truce as Haftar began to lose on the ground. The cease-fire efforts in Cairo are stillborn.”

However, Washington has also continued separate discussions with Cairo. According to a White House statement, “President Trump praised President El-Sisi’s

efforts last weekend to promote political reconciliation and de-escalation in the Libyan conflict,” during a phone call Wednesday.

The European Union’s (EU) response on the Cairo Declaration was not positive, calling on parties in the conflict to adhere to the German-led Berlin conference held in January. EU spokesperson Peter Stano declared on Monday that “In general, any initiative in line with the UN-led Berlin process is a positive development. But no alternative to the inclusive political solution of the Berlin process, also confirmed by the UN, is acceptable.”

A further joint statement Tuesday by EU High Representative Josep Borrell and the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Italy urged “all Libyan and International parties to effectively and immediately stop all military operations and engage constructively [in negotiations] for a comprehensive political agreement in accordance with the parameters agreed upon in Berlin.”

On Monday, Erdo?an also stressed his “sadness” about Russia’s participation in the Cairo Summit, declaring: “Especially Russia’s participation in Cairo Summit with a different role along with Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi administration, France, and Jordan saddened us.” Previously, Erdo?an had accused the Kremlin of deploying mercenaries to Libya alongside Haftar’s forces.

The negotiations proceed as the civil war continues with unabated violence in Libya. The GNA announced that it had recaptured the surroundings of Tripoli, which Haftar’s army has besieged for nearly a year. It also recently captured several strategic LNA strongholds, including al-Watiya airbase near the Tunisian border, Tripoli International Airport and settlements like Ain Zara, Vadi er-Rebi and Tarhuna. The GNA’s Libyan Army announced that it had launched a new operation called Victory Road targeting Sirte, Al Jufra and oil fields in southern Libya.

Libya has been the scene of a bloody civil war since the 2011 NATO war and the assassination of longtime ruler Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Since then, armed factions serving as foreign proxies have divided the country into two

main rival power centers. Moreover, Libya has seen a surge in confirmed COVID-19 infections from 75 on May 25 to 378 as of Wednesday—likely a significant underestimate—under conditions where it is highly vulnerable to a pandemic after the destruction of its health care system by years of imperialist and civil wars.

Italy and Turkey are backing the GNA to gain more from the partition of energy resources in Libya and the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey’s intervention in the conflict—deploying soldiers, drones and Islamist fighters from Syria—has changed the trajectory of the civil war to the GNA’s benefit.

Ankara aims to benefit from the carve-up of Libyan oil reserves overseen by the imperialist powers and from a future reconstruction of Libya. Moreover, it has broader ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean. Turkey and the GNA signed agreements in November on military assistance and maritime boundaries to guarantee Turkish rights to offshore drilling in the eastern Mediterranean. Last month, Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Dönmez announced that Turkey “will be able to start our oil exploration operations there within three to four months.”

Last month, in a joint declaration, the foreign ministers of Greece, Egypt, France, the UAE, and Cyprus accused Ankara’s drilling activities in eastern Mediterranean as “illegal.”

The LNA, which controls vast swathes of eastern and southern Libya and is aligned with an influential faction of the House of Representatives, a rival parliamentary body that fled to the eastern city of Tobruk near the Egyptian border in 2014, is being armed by the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, France and Russia. Until recently, it held the upper hand in the conflict.

By militarily supporting the belligerent parties in Libya, countries like Turkey, Russia and Egypt aim to be key actors not only in Libya but also in the eastern Mediterranean. However, the US and European imperialist powers’ intervention in both the Libyan conflict and the broader scramble for Africa and eastern Mediterranean will be decisive, threatening a regional or even world war.

There is no joint position on Libya within the EU. Italy gives open support to the GNA to maintain the positions of its energy giant ENI. ENI, through its joint venture with Libya’s National Oil Corporation (NOC), controls the el-Feed oil field along with other concessions in the Ghadames Basin in southwest Libya, as well as critical export and refining facilities in the north. However, France supports the LNA. Last year, Paris withdrew its ambassador to Italy as tensions mounted between Paris and Rome over Libya.

Germany is trying to use its contacts with both opposing

factions in Libya to increase its own influence across the region. Berlin has prepared to intervene more violently in Libya and Africa through the EU, such as its broad participation in the “Irimi” military mission in the Mediterranean. This decision, praised by Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (SPD) as an example of Germany assuming “more responsibility in the world,” is part of the German bourgeoisie’s drive to remilitarize its foreign policy.

As the WSWS stated last month, the United States has been backing both sides in the conflict so far. However, recent US statements signal that its neutrality could change to oppose growing Russian influence in Libya and across the region. After Sarraj’s call with Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, the US Embassy in Libya declared on its social media account on May 25: “The United States is proud to partner with the legitimate, UN-recognized government of Libya, the GNA.”

On May 26, General Stephen Townsend, commander of US Africa Command, declared on social media: “Russia is clearly trying to tip the scales in its favor in Libya. Just like I saw them doing in Syria, they are expanding their military footprint in Africa using government-supported mercenary groups like Wagner. ... The world heard Mr. Haftar declare he was about to unleash a new air campaign. That will be Russian mercenary pilots flying Russian-supplied aircraft to bomb Libyans.”

In an interview with Italian daily *La Repubblica* last month, NATO’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg declared, “NATO is ready to give its support to the government of Tripoli,” adding that the alliance has not “put on the same level the forces led by Haftar and the government of Fayez al-Sarraj, the only one recognized by the UN.”

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