

## Nato powers plot new Libya role

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Five years after the NATO-led intervention into the revolutionary civil war that ended in the overthrow of dictator Muammar Gaddafi, Western powers are preparing to send ground troops into Libya. Britain, France and Italy may all play some role in this. Their declared objective is to destroy the forces of Islamic State (IS) in Libya, who have held a sizeable, but under-populated, area of Libya's central coast around Gaddafi's war-devastated home town of Sirte for the last year.

Western governments claim to possess a UN mandate to strike anywhere in the world at organisations plotting attacks on their citizens or territory, and that a strike on IS in Libya would thus be a 'defensive' action. The UK Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, has said that the government will not hold a parliamentary vote as they did for air strikes in Syria, because British troops would be deployed on 'training' rather than 'combat' missions.

They have two other, less openly advertised, objectives. One is to establish firm control of Libya's oil reserves, the largest in Africa; they fear that the massive oil terminals of Ra's Lanuf are vulnerable to IS attacks. The other, especially important to Italy, is to control the small ports from which large numbers of refugees and migrants are likely to resume dangerous cross-Mediterranean voyages, now that Turkey has blocked the Aegean route. US, British and French special forces have reportedly already conducted covert operations; US aircraft based in the UK have carried out 'targeted killings' in Libya.

US President Barack Obama had been hesitant about further involvement since his disastrous meddling in Libya's second-largest city, Benghazi, in 2012, which resulted in an Islamist attack on the US consulate and the death of its Ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens. However, in an interview in August 2014, Obama said that 'we [and] our European partners underestimated the need to come in full force if you're going to do this?.'

Their problem for the last two years has been the existence of two rival governments in Libya, with two sets of armed forces and dozens of local militia allies. One, supported by Turkey, Qatar and Sudan, claimed its mandate from the rump members of a dissolved General National Congress (GNC) originally elected in July 2012, and was defended by the Libya Dawn coalition of former anti-Gaddafi militias in Misrata and the capital, Tripoli.

The other, supported by the USA, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, was based in Tobruk in eastern Libya. Its army is led by the loose cannon strongman General Khalifa Haftar, a former Gaddafi regime minister who joined a US-sponsored opposition movement in 1988. It claimed its mandate from widely boycotted elections held under civil war conditions in June 2014.

UN-sponsored negotiations saw the rump GNC abandon power in favour of a 'Government of National Accord' (GNA). However, Haftar has said that he will not join the GNA until the mainly Islamist militias that supported the GNC are dissolved.

Indeed, for two years Haftar has waged a campaign against Islamist militias in Benghazi, destroying much of the city and displacing more than a quarter of its residents. Many regard him as an Egyptian stooge and as a representative of the old regime. The GNA itself has yet to make a formal request for foreign intervention.

It should be plain enough that Western intervention now will be no more productive of peace and prosperity than in 2011, or their invasions and interventions in Iraq and Syria before and since. We should therefore oppose any new Western intervention, and give no political support to any of the rival forces tearing the country apart.

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