

The Libyan Crisis: Internal Power Rivalries and Foreign Entanglements

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Abstract:

Libya did not harvest the fruits of democratization or economic progress the "Arab Spring" was supposed to bring to this country after the brutal downfall of Muammar Gadhafi's regime in 2011. Instead, it generated political chaos, violence, a de facto territorial fragmentation of this country and a severe economic recession.

The current quagmire of Libya was not due to the failure of the popular protest as such, but to the nature of the political system based on authoritarian rule, tribalism, rent economy and the meddling of foreign powers in the internal affairs of this country..

As long as a modern civilian society based on political consensus and loyalties to the Nation-State and not to tribes, regions or external alignments does not emerge, distorted political configuration, heavy reliance on oil exports and foreign interferences will continue to threaten Libya's political cohesion and territorial integrity.

Keywords: Libyan crisis, tribes, power scramble, terrorism, foreign interference.

Introduction:

The thorny political and security crisis Libya has witnessed since the 2011 uprising does not reflect a civil war in the traditional conception related to a rebellion of segments of the population against the central authorities, a rift between regions or a secessionist movement or a war opposing religious schisms. It refers mainly to a set of conglomerates of interests, sustained by

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tribal chiefs and militias bearing more or less marked religious pedigree and fighting for power and the control over natural resources.

This atypical crisis may contain new and unclearly identified threats towards the national security of Libya's neighbours, such as Algeria or Tunisia for instance, because the source that may present a potential danger remains blurred and even unpredictable. Yet, Libyan warlords such as Marshall Khalifa Haftar the chief of the Libyan National Army (LNA) expressed some hostile behaviour against Algeria. This army, formed out of remnants of Muammar Gadhafi's regular army, contests the legitimacy of the Government of National Accord (GNA), a political body situated in Tripoli and endowed with a legal recognition from the United Nations. Tunisia also witnessed strained relations with Marshall Haftar after accusation that a warplane belonging to the LNA has violated the air space of Tunisia⁽¹⁾.

Libya is the only Arab country hit by the "Arab spring" uprisings to have witnessed a direct foreign military intervention. This move occurred in the framework of United Nations' mandate. It is also the only Arab country torn into two geographically distinct political entities: the Tripoli-based National Government of Accord (GNA), on the one hand, and the House of Representatives (HoR) of Tobruk, situated in Benghazi, on the other. This self-proclaimed enjoys the support of the Libyan National Army and some foreign powers.

Two parameters, one related to internal power scramble in Libya due to oil wealth and to tribal atavism and the other pertaining to the meddling of

⁽¹⁾ Zammit Elyes (2015), Les relations Tuniso-Libyennes : un froid qui qui s'installe <https://www.businessnews.com.tn/les-relations-tunisie-libye--un-froid-qui-sinstalle.519,56061.3>, May 20, (retrieved on 28/6/2015).

foreign powers in this country may explain the violent crisis that has persisted since the downfall of Colonel Gaddafi in 2011:

1-Political demands raised in the wave of the "Arab spring" were short-lived as no political forces that existed in Libya have been able to push for a democratic process as it happened in Tunisia. The reason was that there was not really a State under the reign of Colonel Gadhafi and no social impetus inclined to ignite a radical political change because a powerful clan ruled Libya along tribal antagonisms, regional differentiations and on a fragile internal consensus that has lasted only thanks to the redistribution of huge oil revenues. This redistribution of revenues relies on the balance of power between the powerful tribes, unequal repartition of resources and absence of any transparency or accountability. The apparent stability of Libya was possible as long as substantial flows from oil exports remained high.

2- Foreign powers, especially France and Great Britain encouraged the popular protest in Libya in contrast to the case of Tunisia, Egypt or the Monarchies of the Gulf that emerged in Libya in the light of the Arab spring. Unlike the example of Syria, no other foreign power came to help preserving stability in Libya and preventing this country from falling into a devastating civil war. The scramble for power has caused more than 2.000 victims, displaced 150.000 persons, forced thousands to seek refuge in neighbouring Tunisia and costed several \$ billions of damages to the national economy. In addition, flows of thousands of illegal migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa looking for access to the northern rim of the Mediterranean by using precarious open boats (boat people) at the risk of losing their own lives, became a part of the Libyan tragedy. As a corollary, some of these illegal migrants turned to banditry and smuggling of persons, arms and drugs, a matter that has increased the hostility of the local population against illegal migrants.

Ever since the collapse of the regime of Gadhafi, the interference of foreign powers has not only fueled violence between the parties in conflict but also

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prevented any solution to bring national reconciliation and peace to a broken and devastated Libya. The stakes of competing foreign powers remain linked to the geostrategic importance of this country in the Mediterranean and the Sahel Sahara region and to its huge energy potential.

The analysis of the Libyan crisis takes as its starting point the postulate suggested by Noam Chomsky when treating the abuses of power by the United States to the extent that these misuses of authority have become a danger for the people of this country⁽²⁾. It draws its analytical substance from Robert Rotberg's pioneering findings that Nation-States fail because of internal violence and are no longer able to provide political goods to their peoples. Citizens demanded these political goods as a part of the social contract, from providing security to "tolerance of dissent."⁽³⁾.

In addition, not only the governments of these failed States lose their legitimacy but also the Nation-State whose legitimacy is heavily contested by large segments of their population⁽⁴⁾.

Another important feature of the failed States lies on the postulate that these political entities threaten not only themselves but also their neighbours and even global security. Furthermore, failed States are usually those countries well-endowed with natural riches and consequently are the target of internal power struggle and foreign scramble. From this perspective, Libya fits ideally into Rotberg's taxonomy since this country has witnessed a decade of internal violence that threatened the foundations of the Libyan society and brought worries to its neighbours in terms of security and stability.

⁽²⁾ – Noam Chomsky, *Failed states, the abuse of power and the assault on democracy*, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2006.

⁽³⁾ - Rotberg, I. Robert, "The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair, " in Robert I. Rotberg, *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

⁽⁴⁾ -Rotberg, I. Robert (2002), *Failed States in a World of Terror*, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.81, N° 4, 127-140.

It seems, however, that the failure does not lie only on the destruction of the State's legitimacy and foundations as such, but on the failure of the Libyans to build a sound society, which can sustain the perennial character of their State. Indeed, a decade of a civil war and foreign meddling in Libyan internal affairs has eroded the efficiency of the political institutions of this country. Indeed, a government came to power in Tripoli, runs its own militias and enjoys international recognition. In the opposite side, stands a political entity which is located in Tobrouk and which benefits from the support of the so-called Libyan National Army led by Marshall Haftar.

The Libyan case reflects the general feature of the failed States, which have been marked by distinctive and disparate provinces, traditional but fragmented social structures and by the lack of loyalties of the ruled populations to their States' authorities. Yet, these States have failed to impose citizenship and a nation based on democratic values. They have rather erected conflicting communities, regional disparities, nepotism practices and patron-client relations.

This study contains two parts:

-The first part delves into the analysis of the nature of the State inherited from Gadhafi's legacy in order to grasp meaningfully the scramble for power Libya has witnessed since the 2011 popular upsurge. It scrutinizes this power struggle through the nature and objectives of the various rival parties, particularly the Islamic groups,

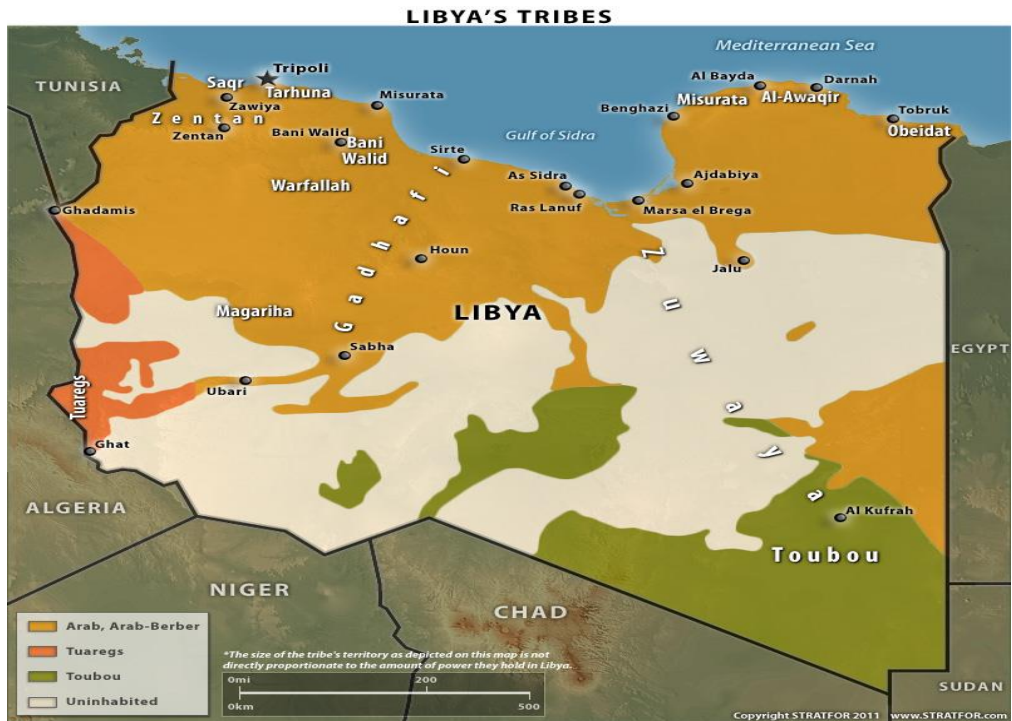
-The second section probes the interferences of foreign powers in Libyan internal affairs, through an analysis of their competing and divergent stakes and interests they attempted to achieve in this country.

1. Delinquescence of Libyan State: atavisms and conflicts of interests:

I have asked some time ago a Libyan friend, an international expert based abroad, what do Libyans expect from their neighbours and foreign powers? He bluntly retorted to which Libyans I was referring. A congruous answer and a sheer dilemma, indeed!

1.1 The impact of tribal configuration:

The post-Gadhafi Libya inherited a geographically fragmented country, the lack of a viable State, the absence of legitimate political institutions, an embryonic civil society and a disintegrated national army. During his long tenure, the regime of Gaddafi surfed from one unconventional political system to a melting pot marked by populism and the reliance on tribal configuration (as shown in the following figure) and on conflicting alliances.



Source: Understanding Libya: The Role of Ethnic and Tribal Groups in any Political Settlement, *Fragile States*, <http://www.fragilestates.org/2012/03/01/understanding-libya-the-role-of-ethnic-and-tribal-groups-in-any-political-settlement/> in *Basic, Alija Libya: a contemporary conflict in a failing state* Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/451602015-03>. Accessed, July, 10, 2021.

Although tribes "are by no means the only force in Libya's knotty conflict and while tribes do not act as uniform bodies," they have become, however, crucial in the conflict opposing the GNA to LNA⁽⁵⁾ (Pargeter 2021). The Eastern part of Libya is more tribe-dominated than the West and most of its tribes account for the survival of Marshall Haftar's forces. This mosaic configuration survived only thanks to the domination of tribal fiefdoms whose

⁽⁵⁾ Pargeted, Alison (2021), Haftar, Tribal Power and the Battle for Libya, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/05/haftar-tribal-power-and-the-battle-for-Libya>. Retrieved on July 16.

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importance relies on the degree of access to the oil rent since Libya generates huge oil revenues while encompassing a tiny population.

Nonetheless, tribal linkages and alignments are not, *stricto sensu*, a negative historic and social paradigm, as primary loyalties may be important to maintain a social cohesion. However maintaining this social configuration for ensuring the survival of a populist ruler only, may constitute an anachronism in the face of the evolution of the society in an era of technologic innovations, propagation of universal culture and economic interdependence between States and societies.

Still, tribal atavism irrupted in Libya in 2012, only one year after the popular upsurge occurred. At that time, an unelected assembly made up of the chiefs of the main tribes, including the Warfalla and the Congress of the People proclaimed, unilaterally, the autonomy of Cyrenaica, a region that covers 50% of the territory of Libya, encompasses 70-80% of its oil reserves, but contains only 25% of its population⁽⁶⁾. As it appears, tribes in Eastern Libya, control three quarters of the country's oil and benefit from Haftar's army protection in the fight against Islamist militias some of which back the Tripoli-based government.

In Tripolitania and Fezzan, the Western parts of Libya, tribes supported the GNA government, but like in Cyrenaica, they did not take arms or enroll in the fighting militias. They were mainly worried in controlling oil resources and pleading for a better redistribution of oil royalties, mainly. A Libyan political scientist reported that tribal leaders in Eastern Libya asked the former chief of the United Nations Stabilization mission in Libya (UNSMIL),

⁽⁶⁾ Djazir, Moncef, Tribalisme, **guerre civile et transition démocratique en Libye**, N° 212, 2012 pp. 61–75.

Martin Kobler in July 2016 to deal directly with them in order to secure oil wells and revive oil production and exports⁽⁷⁾.

If the Libyan crisis did not turn into a generalized and continuous war, it was thanks to the unwillingness of some powerful tribes to resort to military actions. In this sense, tribal configuration seems to have a great deal of national responsibility despite conflicting interests. The main tribes support the Inter-Libyan Political Dialogue Forum incepted under the auspices of UNSMIL, and from a federalist perspective, these tribes call for the distribution of political decision-making power and oil wealth among the three provinces.

1.2 Libya's strategic assets and political frictions

The dramatic experience witnessed by Libya consists in the fact that this country enjoys an appreciable geostrategic location, substantial oil and gas reserves but which possesses a territory much bigger than the ambitions of its leaders and much larger than the needs of its population.

Libya is situated at the crossroads of three continents: Africa, Europe and the Middle East. It encompasses nearly 7 million inhabitants, stretches over 1.76 million sq. /km and enjoys a 1,770 km-long coast on the Mediterranean, close to Italy's Sardinia peninsula and the Malta Islet. The country leans westwards to the Maghreb with long borders with Tunisia, Algeria and eastwards to the Middle East, with a frontier line with Egypt. It has also a Sub-Saharan depth through its southward desert confines adjacent to Niger and Chad.

Libya boast a slightly more than 48 trillion barrels of proven oil reserves, ranking 9th in the world and accounting for about 2.9% of the world's total oil reserves in 2020 (WorldMeters Libya). Libyan gas reserves reached 1.505

⁽⁷⁾ Djaziri, Moncef (2021), Tribal, Power, the State and Political Transition in Libya, <https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/tribal-power-the-state-and-political-transition-in-libya>. (retrieved July 16, 2021).

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billion cm in 2020, ranking 21st in the world (Statistica Research Department 2020a) and its gas production neared 25.54 billion cm, standing in the 40th place in the world for the same period of time (Statistica Research Department 2020b).

The two paradoxes, embodied in a tiny population as compared to a huge territory and substantial energy resources, did not encourage the setting up of a modern Nation. They have, rather, contributed to perpetuate a rentier economy that has maintained tribal fiefdoms, clannish alignments and the aspirations of *Zaimism* that were observed in the case of Gaddafi, his son Seif-Al Islam and the warring leaders, such as Marshall Haftar, that have run partly Libya since his downfall.

In July 2011, the international Contact Group on Libya formally recognized the main opposition group, the National Transitional Council (NTC), as the legitimate government of Libya. A year later, this transitional body handed power to the elected General National Congress (GNC). Protests erupted in response to GNC's refusal to disband after its mandate had expired in 2014. After crushing Islamist groups in Benghazi in June of the same year, General Haftar forced Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteg to resign because of accusations of a thrall with Islamic armed extremists. A new parliament was picked up, but violent skirmishes broke out between forces loyal to GNA and militias siding with this Parliament. In April 2016, a Government of National Accord (GNA) emerged in Tripoli with the support of the United Nations and Faïd El Serraj became the new Prime Minister. However, The GNA came to face a violent opposition from the Tobruk-based House of Representatives and the Libyan National Army.

The political configuration of Libya or rather the fracture between rival authorities has been centered mainly on the violent antagonism existing between the Government of National Accord (GNA) led by Prime Minister Faïd El Serraj until his replacement in February 2021 by Abdulhamid El Dabaiba and a coalition backed by Marshall Haftar. These two blocs are not monolithic and do not encompass a coherent human spectrum, but entities based on political or ideological affinities. Inside these two blocs, a number of factions, as disparate and fragile they may be, are in a constant conflict.

The GNA-led first bloc comprised also *Fajr Libya*, the Brigades of Misurata, a Muslim Brotherhood organization, the Amazigh Brigades and *Tuareg* militias.

The other bloc, formed out of a coalition supported by Haftar's army, includes the brigades of Zintan, Arabic-speaking tribes located in Nefussa Mountains in the Northwestern part of Libya and groups representing the *Toubou*, a tribe of a black descent activating in the southern swathes of Libya.

Around these two blocs, swing the Revolutionary Brigades of Benghazi, the Jihadist groups such as the Mujahidin of Derna, *Ansar Sharia*, *Al Djaich al Islami al libi*, *Al Murabitun* as well as militias linked to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Daesh (ISIS). Needless to state that these militias and groups have fought each other according to agendas of their foreign mentors.

Libya has become a kind of Capharnaum, a country without a State and even without tribal structures. It has even plunged into a situation of a fragmented and microscopic entity. Thus, the famous remark "which Libyans?" may not be stupendous to recall again.

On the economic level, these two fighting blocs have created their own Central banks and competed to get access to the oil wells and keep control over the energy reserves and infrastructures.

In 2013, groups allied to GNA have blocked the main terminals of Essidra and Ras Lanuf and stopped the exports of oil. The *Toubou* and *Tuareg* tribes have, on many occasions, perturbed the exploitation of the oil installations situated in the South of the country in retaliation for their growing impoverishment and the increase of unemployment in this region.

Groups from Zintan have blocked since 2014 the main oil pipeline linking the oilfields located in the South of the country to ports on the Mediterranean coast in a protest against their expulsion from Tripoli by *Fajr Libya* (a

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coalition in Misurata of Islamic armed groups based in Tripoli. In 2014, *Fajr Libya* launched attacks on the oil terminals of Essidra and Ras Lanuf in order to regain the control of the oil installations situated in the central parts of the country from the Federalist forces led by Ibrahim Jathran Dardes. In January 2020, troops belonging to the Libyan National Army of Marshall Haftar have blocked the main oil terminals, a move that caused a drastic diminution of Libya's oil exports.

Conflicts over the control of Libya's energy resources have caused a substantial decrease of the oil production and exports ever since the upsurge that occurred in 2011. In that year, Libya produced 1.8 million barrels per day (bpd) of which 1.5 million bpd were exported. However, oil production fell from 1.2 million bpd in 2019 to 110.000 bpd in February 2020. Reports estimated that Libya's oil and gas revenues have decreased by 92% by the end of 2020 as a blockade of facilities for several months led to the suspension of most of Libya's oil export operations.⁽⁸⁾

Some conflicting parties in Libya have badly managed the national oil wealth and have become, perhaps, the targets and interfaces of foreign powers, beyond declarations of patriotism. None of these parties in Libya can, arguably, claim popular legitimacy and stand as a valuable interlocutor for other countries.

This gloomy perspective has been confirmed by the fact that despite the conclusion of several agreements of ceasefire, notably the latest accord concluded through the mediation of Russia in January 2020, combats have

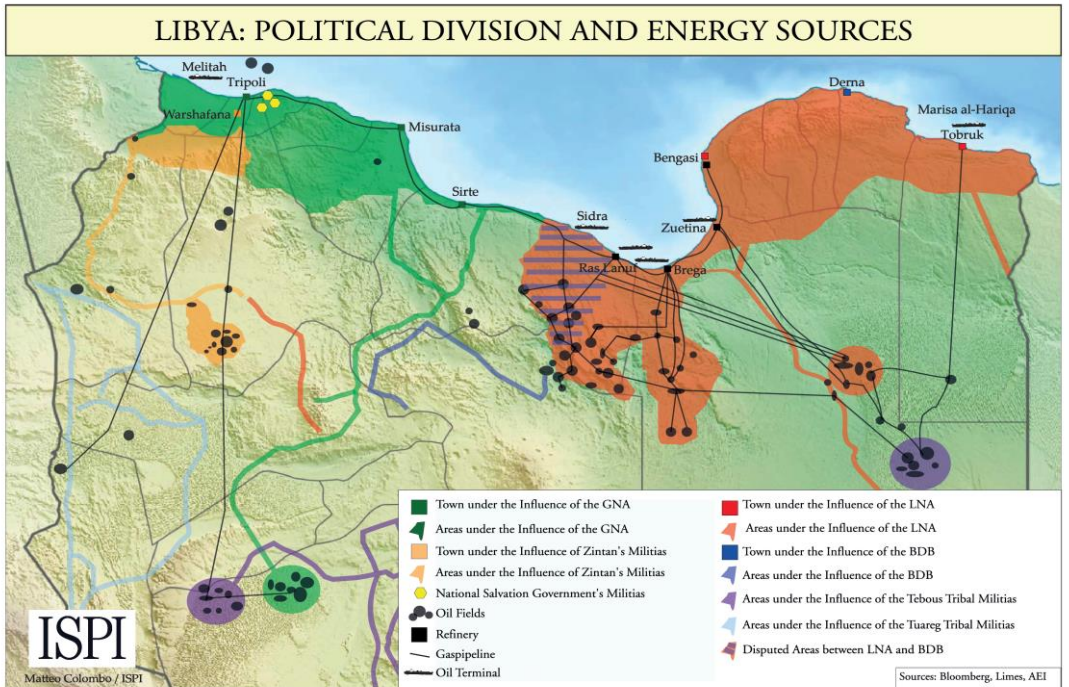
⁽⁸⁾ Hafidi, Meriem, Libya loses 92% of its oil and gas revenues, *Atalayar*, <https://atalayar.com/en/content/libya-loses-92-oil-and-gas-revenues-2020%C2%A0>, (retrieved on 5/6/2020).

continued to oppose, by intermittence, the troops of GNL and their Islamist groups allies to the LNA reinforced by mercenaries.

The Berlin conference that gathered Libyan conflicting parties on January 19, 2020 the neighbours of Libya and foreign powers did not end the Libyan civil war nor stop the flows of arms to various military factions. According to the United Nations mission in Libya, " transport airplanes were seen landing at the GNA-controlled airports located west of Libya and at airports located in the Western parts of this country under the control of LNA. Both operations aimed at providing the two belligerent parties combatants with arms and armored vehicles⁽⁹⁾. How could Libyan crisis end when the rival actors of the Libyan tragedy, Prime Minister Faïd El-Serraj and Marshall Haftar failed to meet at the Berlin conference? Indeed, fighting resumed a week after the convening of the Berlin conference and the blockade imposed by Greece and contingents of the army of Haftar in order to prevent the access of Turkish warships to the stream situated between Crete Island and the Eastern coasts of Libya. According to the chief of the naval forces belonging to Haftar's army, these ships were carrying militias from *Daesh*, arms and equipment. Tension between the two camps escalated after GNA accused the troops of Marshall Haftar to have launched 60 GRAD missiles on various parts of Tripoli on January 27, 2020. The GNA leader has disclosed that his troops have attempted to target barracks where Turkish soldiers were installed, stating that these soldiers have transformed the airport of Tripoli into a military base from which drones were launched against the LNA.

⁽⁹⁾ - Babouche Yacine, Tout Sur l'Algérie (TSA), January 28, 2020.

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Source: Mezran, Karim, Varvelli, Arturo Foreign actors in Libya's crisis, Atlantic Council, *ISPI*, Milan, 2017, p 22.

2. Stakes and interferences of foreign powers

This section attempts to scrutinize foreign attitudes and initiatives towards the Libyan crisis. It distinguished between the stakes pursued by neighbouring countries (stakeholders) and the strategic or economic benefits pursued by foreign powers (interest seekers) through their involvement in the Libyan issue.

This analytic distinction reveals the differences in treating the Libyan issue from contending foreign powers based on structural and vital stakes on the one hand, and more or less strict advantages, on the other. However this distinction is not a clear cut evidence as common objectives may bring together stakeholders and interest seekers. These convergences have bought

to light two ideologically opposed broad coalitions fighting each other, whether directly or through their allied parties:

-An axis formed out of Turkey, as the key player, and comprising Italy and Qatar. It supports the Government of National Accord and relies on the assistance provided by Islamic militias.

-A loose pole of countries centered on Russia as the main impetus and includes France, Egypt, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia . It backs the House of Representatives and its Libyan National Army which seems to advocate an authoritarian rule that tries to eradicate radical Islam and religious extremism in Libya. This pole relies also on mercenaries coming from Chad and Sudan. These mercenaries are not professional soldiers, but members of militias composed of former rebels and delinquents and their engagement does not signify a direct implication of the central authorities of these two countries in the Libyan conflict. This pole also reveals ideological alignments, since the Russian and Egyptian regimes share a quite authoritarian conception of political rule, a tendency found also in the behaviour of Haftar, himself a high military officer, believed to have received training in the United States.

The siding of United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia with this coalition was possible because of the animosities related to a struggle for the leadership in the Arab world that opposed mainly Abu Dhabi to Doha (Qatar). UAE favours military-backed regimes in the Middle East and Africa, while Qatar supports radical Islamic movements in these parts of the world. Both countries are also heavily engaged in providing huge military and financial assistance to their respective protégées, a matter that may contribute, further, in the destabilization of countries such as Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Chad and even Tunisia.

Divergent alignments noticed in the dynamics of the two rival coalitions in Libya are the result of a political conjecture marked by the fluctuations of alliances. These designs pertaining to this country and its future remained based on the attitudes of foreign actors along stakes or interests as explained earlier.

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Borrowing from economy concepts, countries involved in the Libyan conflict are, for analytical purpose, defined as shareholders and stakeholders. In economic terms, "shareholders are always stakeholders in a corporation, but stakeholders are not always shareholders. A shareholder owns part of a public company through shares of stock, while a stakeholder has an interest in the performance of a company for reasons other than stock performance or appreciation" (Ivestopedia).

The Shareholder State refers to a country whose security and stability are intimately linked to the evolving situation in Libya because of geographic contiguity, common racial stock historic ties and even shared destiny. In this category, stand Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt, although Morocco tried to play a role in the Libyan conflict despite its geographic remoteness. This country, as Abdulaziz Rahabi, a former Algerian Minister and diplomat asserted " is isolated by virtue of its geographic location, and it has no borders except with Algeria and the Western Sahara. From the geopolitical perspective, Morocco cannot play a regional role, so it tries to compensate by playing a helper role for the benefit of the great powers".⁽¹⁰⁾

The Stakeholder States pertain to countries that have interests in Libya, whether economic or geostrategic, but whose security is not structurally linked to the evolving situation in Libya. This set of countries includes Turkey, Italy, Russia, USA, France, United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

2.1: Shareholders' approaches:

With the exception of Egypt, Libya's neighbours did not intervene militarily or interfere directly in shaping the outcome of the violent clashes occurring between the National Government and the Tobrouk parliament. Both Algeria and Tunisia worked for a political solution to the Libyan crisis by calling for

⁽¹⁰⁾ -Stitou, Imad, Morocco, Algeria Compete over Libya, Al-Monitor, 23 April, 2015.

reconciliation between the belligerent parties, the end of foreign intervention and a ban on arms flows to Libyan factions.

Historically, Egypt exercises some influence over Cyrenaica, the Eastern Libyan province adjacent to the 1.000 km-long common border. People from this province have been, traditionally, leaning towards Middle East concerns in contrast to Tripolitania and Fezzan, the other two Libyan provinces whose populations look towards Tunisia in the North (630 km of common border) and Algeria in the South (1300 km of shared frontier). Since the upsurge of the Libyan crisis, Egypt, like Algeria and Tunisia, has considered the Islamist militias operating in Libya as a potentially dangerous threat to its own security. Since the rise to power of President Al-Sisi, Egypt has pursued a policy of military eradication of Islamists militants, especially after the increase of attacks from jihadist groups in the Suez region. The fear is that a junction between terrorist groups activating in the Eastern parts of Libya and those operating in Egypt may lead to the destabilization of this country.

Like Tunisia, Egypt has lost huge economic advantages it has enjoyed from Tripoli before the outbreak of the popular protest in Libya. More than two million workers who used to work as a cheap labour in this country have returned home, thus depriving Egypt's economy of substantial and regular remittances estimated at \$33 million a year⁽¹¹⁾. Moreover, Egypt has benefited from huge investments from Libya, and from importing Libyan oil at preferential prices.

These security concerns and economic interests explain Egyptian military involvement. They sustain the attempts made by President Al-Sisi to mediate between Marshall Haftar and Faid El-Serraj, as the two Libyan leaders refused to meet each other, as it happened during a meeting convened in Cairo

⁽¹¹⁾ Mezran, Karim, Varvelli, Arturo (2017), *Foreign Actors in Libya's Crisis*, Atlantic Council, *ISPI*, Milan, p 22.

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in January 2017. Therefore, Egypt could not but help the Libyan National Army through weapons and airpower to drive armed groups out of Benghazi and Eastern Libya in the framework of military campaigns incepted by Marshall Haftar's army. Egypt's efforts went on to assist this army in fighting also Islamic groups siding with the Government of National Accord and regarded close to Al Qaida and *Daesh*, two organizations considered as declared enemies by Egypt and its ally, the Arab United Emirates (UAE).

Lacking troops, UAE was unable to interfere militarily in Libya. Thus, it can only provide military assistance to Egyptian troops involved in Libya and financial aid to the Al-Sisi's regime or channel arms and money to some militias fighting radical Islamic groups in Libya.

Algeria refrained from interfering military in Libya because of its traditional foreign policy basic principles. In addition, its constitution, before the amendments introduced in December 2020, did not allow sending troops outside the national frontiers, with the exception of accomplishing humanitarian missions. Still, Algeria had warned that it would have intervened in Libya "in one manner or another," had Tripoli come under the control of "mercenaries," according to the declaration made by the Algerian President in an interview he gave to the Qatari-based Al-Jazeera channel in June 2021.⁽¹²⁾ Such a declaration reveals that Algeria would resent the eventual takeover of Tripoli by mercenaries and would consider this eventual move as a threat to its own security. Algeria's security worries did not fail to cause a quick reaction from Marshall Haftar.

⁽¹²⁾ APS-Algérie Presse Service, Les principales questions nationales et régionales au centre de l'entretien du Président Tebboune à Al-Jazeera, <https://www.aps.dz/algerie/123248-le-president-tebboune-accorde-un-entretien-a-la-chaine-al-jazeera-qui-sera-diffuse-mardi> (retrieved on 11/9/2021).

Equally, Algeria remained suspicious of the radical stance taken by some Islamist groups activating in the Tripoli region, supposed to bear links linked to Al-Qaida and *Daesh*. Like Tunisia and Egypt, Algeria fears that these groups may come to power in Libya and thus, threaten its own security and the stability of North Africa. Past memories are still vivid in Algeria as this country faced a bloody and very damaging extremist uprising for more than a decade. It still faces attacks, though sporadic, from remnants terrorist groups operating along the common borders with Libya, Mali and Niger and suffers from the smuggling of arms, drugs and illegal migrants coming from its neighbours and Sahel-Saharan countries.

It was not fortuitous, that the attack against the important gas plant of Tiguentourine in January 2013 was carried out by terrorists coming from Libya with the help of Tunisian armed groups. In addition, reports stated that many arms including missiles seized by Algerian security forces from terrorists operating along the Libyan-Algerian border came from the Libyan military arsenal left over by the dismantled army of President Gadhafi.

Algeria resorted then to strengthen the surveillance and control of its border with Libya, through placing additional and well-equipped troops, installing guard posts, alarm device, and thermic cameras.

Tunisia opted for building a wall along its frontier with its neighbor because it lacks capabilities able to mobilize in permanence security forces along its border with Libya in order to prevent incursions of terrorist groups and smuggling networks from this country. Furthermore, Tunisia's security worries inflated with the strengthening in the home polity of the weight of the Islamists believed closed to fundamentalist organizations and bearing sympathies to radical Islamist groups in Libya. Worst for Tunisia's stability was the increase of terrorist attacks targeting the tourism sector, regarded as vital for the country's economy, already suffering from the diminishing of foreign tourists. Terrorists, allegedly trained in Libya, were accused of carrying attacks on the Bardo Museum and a beach resort in Tunis in 2015.

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Recusing the military option, both Algeria and Tunisia attempted to display intensive efforts to help stabilize Libya, whether through mediation between the parties in conflict or participating in debates generated by international initiatives devoted to resolve crisis in Libya.

Efforts to reach a common approach towards the Libyan crisis proved vain as the Summit held between Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria in Tunis in February 2017 did not prove decisive. This failure owed less to the lack of good will from Libya's neighbours and to the daunting task to reconcile stubborn belligerents than to the determination of foreign powers to undermine the seeds of a political solution that favours political stability, territorial integrity and national security of Libya.

Lacking power capabilities to influence the course of events in Libya and weakened by internal political problems, Tunisia's official diplomacy was inclined to remain somehow neutral and follow the evolution of the events occurring in Libya as a relatively passive actor.

In contrast, Algeria's diplomacy displayed intensive efforts to mediate between the belligerent parties in Libya, and gathering them in conferences, which aimed at achieving national reconciliation in this country through an inclusive dialogue just as it succeeded in the case of the Malian crisis. Growing antagonisms between Libyan factions did not permit the two long visits made by the Algerian Minister of Maghreb Affairs, African Union and the Arab League to Libya in April and May 2017 to make further progress in finding a peaceful solution to the Libyan stalemate.

Feeling that it cannot resolve the Libyan crisis alone because of the complexity of this conflict and intense foreign meddling in the internal affairs of its neighbour, Algeria tried to gather support to a political solution to this crisis from the international community, far from foreign powers' interference. Thus, the Head of the United Nations Support mission in Libya, Martin Kobler was invited in Algiers and a bilateral summit with Russia was held in February 2017 in Algiers in order to push this country to use its influence on Marshall Haftar, so as to inflict the latter's opposition to a negotiated solution to the Libyan conflict.

Convinced, however, that some Western powers were not overtly heading for a peaceful solution, Algeria attempted to encourage a "regional solution" to the Libyan stalemate. Therefore, it invited, in addition to Mali, the other five neighbours of Libya (Tunisia, Egypt, Sudan, Chad and Niger) to participate in a conference convened in Algiers in January 2020. Unfortunately, the gathering of Libya's neighbours made no tangible headway. Thus, Algeria called for the implication of the African Union (AU), which seemed to support a political solution to the Libyan crisis. As a result, the African Union created a "contact group" on Libya and the Algerian Prime Minister participated at its meeting convened in Brazzaville on January 30, 2020. Furthermore, Algeria went on attempting to convince AU to impose a cease-fire in Libya outside the interferences of foreign powers. However, there was no implementation of the call made by the "contact group" to the African Union to send a stabilization force to monitor the ease-fire and stop fighting in Libya. The reason was due, perhaps to the AU's lack of adequate troops and suitable military equipment.

2.2-Stakeholders' designs:

Arguably, the designs of foreign powers which have direct interests Libya have been intertwining, complicated and more than that, they have been fundamentally divergent and even hard to reconcile. Still, the national security of these foreign powers does not seem intimately threatened by the course of events in Libya. The perceived threats coming from this country such as terrorism or illegal migration may constitute serious menaces to these countries but they are not as much intricate and structurally linked as those felt by Libya's neighbours.

The main foreign powers that bear strategic and economic interests in Libya are Turkey Russia and Italy. Other countries may have wishes and hopes that this country will recover its political stability and preserve its territorial integrity in order to avoid regional crisis that may threaten peace and security.

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Neither the United States, France, Qatar nor Saudi Arabia have tangible direct interests in Libya. In fact, none of them has attempted to intervene directly in the Libyan conflict. These countries may have provided arms and money to their respective allies in Libya, as the conflict has become a real war by proxy. They may have also conducted airstrikes against radical Islamic groups, as did the US, though very scarcely and mainly at the beginning of the Libyan conflict. At that time, the main concern of the US was to get rid of Gadhafi's regime which seriously harmed American interests in Libya and elsewhere in the past. The American military forces went on to contribute in fighting terrorist groups activating in Libya after the killing of the US ambassador to this country and three other US personnel on two US facilities in Benghazi in September 2012.

US position fluctuated between openly calling for an UN-sponsored political solution and supporting a policy that oscillates between backing the LNA, though criticizing its alliance with Russia on the one hand, and siding with the GNA, although fearing the spread of the influence of radical Islamists, on the other.

The United States have slim energy stakes in Libya, as its oil imports from this country fell from 20.810 thousand barrels in 2017 to 3.115 in 2020 (EIA 2021a). It is true that Libyan oil production and exports have drastically decreased because of the civil war and the closing of some oil wells by rival factions. However, during the 2015-2020, the United States purchased 78,850 thousand barrels of oil from Libya, a volume that represents about 0,38% of US global oil imports (20.672.949 thousand barrels) for the same period (EIA 2021b).

Therefore, when the US called for the resumption of Libya's oil output, it was for humanitarian purposes, as publicly asserted. In a statement issued in January 2020, the US Embassy in Tripoli stated that "we are deeply concerned that the suspension of National Oil Corporation (NOC) operations risks

exacerbating the humanitarian emergency in Libya and inflicting further needless suffering on the Libyan people"⁽¹³⁾.

In line with his promise to limit US role in foreign conflicts especially in Africa, President Trump declared, at a Press conference held jointly with Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni in April 2017, that he "saw no role for the United States in stabilizing Libya, except in fighting the Islamic State"⁽¹⁴⁾. Such an intention confirms the difficulty of the US to put an end to the Libyan conflict. As an American political scientist rightly put it: "for years, U.S. diplomats and officials have emphasized the importance of a political solution, but U.S. actions have yet to convince or compel Libyans and their various patrons to disengage from confrontation"⁽¹⁵⁾.

Even Italy did not play a significant role in the Libyan crisis, despite its historic ties, economic stakes (mainly investments in the hydrocarbon sector of Libya). Italy seemed more worried by the inflows of illegal migrants coming to its territory through Libya.

The two countries heavily implicated in Libya are Turkey and Russia. Both pursue a grand design in the Mediterranean region in which Libya is an essential strategic ingredient. Both are competing to have a strong foothold in Libya and solid presence in Mediterranean politics in line with their national ambitions.

⁽¹³⁾ - Voanews (2021), The US calls for the resumption of Libyan oil, [voanews.com/Africa/us-calls-resumption-libyan-oil-production](https://www.voanews.com/Africa/us-calls-resumption-libyan-oil-production), (retrieved on 10/11/2020).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Abby Phillip: Trump says he does not see expanded role for U.S. in Libya beyond ISIS fight, The Washington post: Democracy dies in darkness, April, 20, 2017, in: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-says-he-does-not-see-expanded-role-for-us-in-libya-beyond-isis-fight/2017/04/20/> (retrieved on 14-6-2019).

⁽¹⁵⁾ – Christopher M. Blanchard, Libya and U.S. Policy: Conflict and Covid- 19, Threaten Libya, Congressional Research Service, informing the legislative debate since 2014, June, 16, 2020 in: [https:// crsreports.congress.gov](https://crsreports.congress.gov).(retrieved on 86-9-2020).

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Turkey dreams of reviving the Ottoman past power and prestige, besides trying eagerly to search for a larger share in Libyan energy sector in order to enhance its economic growth, power status and position in the world's commodity trade. Russia attempted also to revive the rank of a super power it used to have during the cold war by trying to reduce the domination and the presence of Western powers in the Middle East and North Africa and maintain access to the warm waters of the Mediterranean. This design became more perceptible with Russia's military intervention in Ukraine in April 2022.

Turkey moved to supply the Government of National Accord (GNA) with troops, sophisticated arms and logistics, notably the transport of troops. This substantial assistance proved decisive in stopping the great-scale offensive launched by the Libyan National Army (LNA) in 2020 that aimed at invading Tripoli, dismantling militias affiliated to radical Islamic groups operating in the Western parts of Libya and taking the control of the oil fields managed by the GNA and its allied factions.

The military forces supporting the Tripoli-based National Government took a decisive advantage over the troops belonging to Haftar-backed regime in Benghazi, thanks to Turkey's military engagement. Therefore, the Libyan National Army forcibly retreated from the positions it gained in the strongholds of GNA. As a result, Marshall Haftar came to lower his ambitions to become the only master of country and to consider negotiations in order to reach a political issue to Libya's crisis. Unsurprisingly then, Russia prompted to arrange a meeting between Faid El-Serraj and Marshall Haftar in Moscow in January 2020.

Turkey's incursion into the Libyan conflict alarmed Greece and other European powers such as France and Germany, which became worried of Turkish regional ambition. It also started to work for the departure of the GNA. Turkey may have feared that such a move would disturb the deal on maritime delimitation signed between Tripoli and Ankara in 2019 that Turkey believes it would create an exclusive economic zone from its southern coast

to Libya's northeast and protects its rights to resources⁽¹⁶⁾. Furthermore, Turkey worried that eventual reactions from Greece, France or Germany would undermine the oil agreement concluded by the Turkish President and the Libyan Prime Minister a year later. These objectives may have been some of the hidden designs of the European powers, which participated in the conference held in Berlin in January 2020.

Conclusion:

Tribes are a given sociological paradigm in Libya's political home polity and still play a role in the evolution of the internal situation. Thus, it seems difficult to reach a viable solution to the crisis this country has faced since the 2011 popular upsurge without the explicit support of some powerful tribes.

However, a tribal structure, as viable as it may be, cannot face security challenges and issues of economic development in a world of technology innovations, use of sophisticated weapons and rapid mutations with a continuous sectarian political spirit and archaic social behaviour.

To rebuild the State through imposed institutional bodies or through elections supposed to bring to power, legitimate representatives may prove illusory as long as the Libyan society remains intrinsically tribal. A military solution, as conceived by certain Libyan forces or by some foreign powers, will not also lead to a national reconciliation and to peace and security in Libya. Local antagonisms and divergent foreign powers' stakes are so exacerbated and so acute that a zero-sum equation will not last long.

If the redistribution of the oil wealth among tribes and the rival factions as well as their demand of a larger share in the national decision-making remain

⁽¹⁶⁾ Reuters, Turkey says may begin oil exploration under Libya deal in three-four months, May 29, 2020.

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possible through an inclusive dialogue guaranteed by the United Nations for example, it remains however hard, to see militias surrendering or getting rid of their huge military arsenals.

Tasks of national reconstruction in Libya may prove arduous as the return to civil life or the integration to the regular army, if any, of "former" militias may not be easy, as it happened in the cases of Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, and the Central African Republic or in Mali, for instance. According to experts on African conflicts, the concept of Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration is "not feasible because there is no legitimate political framework that would address the security concerns of the majority of Libyans⁽¹⁷⁾.

In addition, it remains also dubious to operate the removal of foreign troops from Libya. Both Turkey and Russia may be reluctant to withdraw their military advisers or withdraw a support to their allies without ensuring, however, that their interests in Libya were safe. Contending political forces will not also please foreign partners alike, because the foreign alignments of local factions are also vehemently divergent.

Persistent evidence remains that there is no solution to Libya's conflict if foreign troops do not withdraw from this country. Therefore, removing these troops out of Libya constitutes the priority for the international community and the United Nations. Only, then Libyans can manage their affairs and divergences themselves. Only then, they may agree on a political consensus that would suit all parties.

⁽¹⁷⁾ -Wilson, Nate, Abouaoun, Elie (2021), On the Road to Peace, Libya Makes Progress but Hits pitfalls, United States Institute of Peace, January 14, [\(https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/07/road-peace-libya-makes-progress-hits-pitfalls\)](https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/07/road-peace-libya-makes-progress-hits-pitfalls).(retrieved on 10/8/2021).

The new government of National Union established in March 2021 and led by Abdelhamid Dbeibeh, after the departure of Faïd El-Serradj, incepted a Comprehensive National Reconciliation as recommended by the second conference on Libya held in Berlin in June 2021. However, the content of this programme is still unclear and divergences over issues linked to transitional Justice and the nature of the future regime and leadership in Libya are still unsettled.

Presidential and general elections, expected to take place in late 2021, were delayed indefinitely, not only because of the lack of adequate technical means and legal procedures, but also because of a conflict of legitimacy and eligibility concerning some of the main candidates. In these long-lasting uncertainties, the United Nations new special envoy to Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily warned in November 2022 that " a further postponement of the polls could lead Libya to an even greater instability, putting it at risk of partition."⁽¹⁸⁾

Political crisis in Libya worsened with mounting dissonances between the Parliament in Sirte and Dbeibeh, which led to the replacement of the latter by Fethi Bachagha, close to Benghazi-based House of Parliament, on February 10, 2022. In parallel, violent skirmishes erupted between rival groups in Tripoli in July-August 2022 indicating, clearly, that prospects for ending Libya's crisis remain as gloomy as ever. Still, it remains for Libyans to surmount their divergences and conflict interests in order to preserve the unity of Libya and reconstitute to the people of this country the pride it utterly deserves.

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