

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین یوم ویر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2016/09/30/russia-asked-intervene-libya-gaining-clout-middle-east.html>

Russia Asked to Intervene in Libya: Gaining Clout in Middle East

PETER KORZUN
9/30/2016



Libya's military leader Khalifa Haftar, the commander of the Libyan National Army loyal to the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR), has requested Russia to end its arms embargo on Libya and begin supplying weapons and military equipment to eastern Libyan forces.

According to Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, Abdel Basset Badri, Haftar's special representative who also serves as Libya's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, visited Moscow on September 27 to deliver the request addressed to both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

Mr. Badri held talks with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov, Russian newspaper *Izvestia* reported, citing a diplomatic source familiar with the situation.

The agenda included the prospects for lifting the embargo on arms supplies, including warplanes. More importantly, General Haftar asked Russia to start an anti-Islamist military operation in Libya similar to the one in Syria.

The toppling of long-term leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 led to a power vacuum and instability in Libya, with no authority in full control. The country is divided between two governments: the HoR in the east of the country and the Government of National Accord (GNA), which moved to Tripoli in March 2016 and set up its headquarters in a heavily-guarded naval base.

A large part of Tripoli is still held by Islamists. The division prompted the United Nations to launch negotiations aimed at forming a unified government and army to face the growing threat of terror groups. In September, Libya's rival governments were reported to have reached a "consensus" on the main elements of a political agreement.

Parts of Libya are outside of government's control, with various Islamist, rebel, and tribal militias administering some cities and areas. The existence of two competing governments and the lack of stability allow militants, including the Islamic State (IS) group, to operate on Libyan soil.

In March, 2015, the HoR appointed General Haftar commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA). The military leader has been part of the Libyan political scene for about half a century. Around 1990 he went into exile to the United States after a failed attempt to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi. In the 1970s, Haftar received military training in the Soviet Union. The general speaks Russian language. After the start of the uprising against Gaddafi in 2011, the general returned to Libya where he became a key commander of the makeshift rebel force in the east.

The military leader is known as an «anti-Islamist general» for his tough stand against Muslim fundamentalists. This year the forces under his command pushed the Islamist militants out of much of Benghazi. In 2014 General Halifa launched Operation Dignity and vowed to oust all extremist terrorist groups in the country. In September 2016, the LNA seized from the Petroleum

Facilities Guard - an armed group aligned with the UN-brokered Government of National Accord (GNA) - the country's key oil terminals.

In recognition of this, the speaker of the HoR and supreme commander of the armed forces, Agilah Saleh, promoted Haftar from lieutenant-general to field marshal. The major Western powers believe that the oil terminals should be administered by the UN-backed GNA.

Speaking at a ministerial meeting on Libya in New York where the 17th session of the UN General Assembly is underway, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Gennady Gatilov said it would be wrong to disregard the Libyan National Army that has been fighting terrorists in the eastern part of Libya. The minister said Western air strikes and activities of special operations teams in certain areas of Libya exacerbate the situation in the country. Russia considers the parliament in Tobruk as the legitimately elected legislative body.

Anvar Makhmutov, a member of Russian State Duma's committee on international affairs, and Vyacheslav Matuzov, a former diplomat and scholar, supported the idea of sending arms and military instructors to support the LNA.

The UN imposed an arms embargo on Libya in 2011. In August 2014, after violence had flared up in Libya, Security Council Resolution 2174 required that any supplies of arms and related materiel to Libya must be approved in advance by the Sanctions Committee.

With a national unity government established, the ban on arms supplies will be eased or lifted. Major world powers have been mulling the possibility of lifting the arms embargo against Libya in recent months. The request to at least partially lift the embargo has been made by the GNA, which says it needs the weapons to fight the Islamic State group.

Last year, Jordan circulated a draft resolution at the Security Council proposing to lift the embargo, among other urgent measures. The weapons supplies could start as soon as the embargo is revoked. Ivan Molotkov has recently said that Moscow would be ready to supply the legitimate Libyan government with weapons as soon as the arms embargo against the country is lifted.

The most important thing is that it is Russia - not the US, France or any other Western state involved in the Libya conflict - that the Libyan military leader has asked for help. Libyans remember well the NATO intervention of 2011 and don't trust the West, especially in view of its failure to achieve any positive results in Syria. Russia's operation in that country has changed the political landscape and strengthened Moscow's standing among the region's powers. The collapse of the recent Russia-US agreement on Syria and the following tragedy in Aleppo confirms the fact. Besides, unlike the US, Russia enjoys a good relationship with Egypt and good working relations with the UAE – the countries that back General Haftar.

The request to help and intervene in Libya testifies to the fact that Russia's clout is growing in the Middle East, while the West is displaying unwillingness to play a responsible role in the

region. The operation in Syria was followed by a host of tangible Middle East policy successes. Russia has special relationship with Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Israel and the Persian Gulf states. King Salman of Saudi Arabia is planning a trip to Moscow soon. Russia is strongly back in the region with its clout growing by leaps and bounds, while the US appears to have lost its way in the regional maze of overlapping problems and complexities.

According to Foreign Policy, «Across the eastern Mediterranean and Levant, through Turkey, Iran, and the broader Gulf region, the trend line is obvious to anyone with eyes to see it: Russia's star is waxing while America's wanes».

«From Israel to Saudi Arabia, from Egypt to Turkey, traditional US partners are also increasingly compelled to curry favor with Moscow», the magazine adds.

Resurgent Russia is asserting itself in the Middle East as a big and important international player and it is only natural that its Moscow the Libyan leader approached to save his country mired in turmoil.