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### Graham Statement on Libya (<https://www.lgraham.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/press-releases?ID=3844A1B9-C8AD-4D5D-B5B4-BBD0D9D188F5>)

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**THE HILL**

**Khalifa Haftar is no longer part of Libya's solution**

BY SASHA TOPERICH, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR — 05/01/19 11:00 AM

<https://thehill.com/opinion/international/441552-khalifa-haftar-is-no-longer-part-of-libyas-solution>

Khalifa Haftar, the renegade Libyan general, took many world leaders and most experts by surprise when he attacked Tripoli on April 4. Now, nearly three weeks later and with his forces confronted by a determined resistance, Haftar's high-stakes gamble may soon prove to be a colossal mistake. His advance on the capital city now faces the daunting threat of urban warfare against a motivated force of rival militias unified by their hatred of the ambitious general. What lay in front of him is a formidable military and political challenge: a long, costly campaign fought house-by-house in Tripoli's densely populated streets. Every Libyan and military expert will tell you this is a fight he is unlikely to win.

The United States and the international community used to view Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA) as part of the solution for Libya. However, even with a possible endorsement by President Trump following a phone call between the two, and even with backing from Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Egypt and France, it is hard to see how Haftar can become a unifier or claim victory.

Haftar understood well that the only way he can rule the country is to first label himself as a deliverer of stability to the war-torn country. His LNA did eliminate Ansar Al-Sharia, a U.S.-designated terrorist group. This raised his profile among critical western elites who saw the general as someone who could deal a blow to ISIS. But Haftar had other plans. Claims that he destroyed ISIS are simply wrong. In fact, Haftar gave free passage to ISIS fighters from Derna to Sirte, a trip of some 450 miles through the Oil Crescent area which he controls. It was the Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli with help of the United States, that actually defeated ISIS in fierce battles lasting months in 2016. Fighters mainly from Misrata lost over 700 people in heavy fighting to eliminate ISIS from their stronghold in Sirte. ISIS fighters fled into the desert when safe passage was given to women, children and citizens trapped in the city.

Haftar re-asserted this concocted image of strength last June when he repelled an attack by Ibrahim Jadhraan, a blacklisted militia leader who guarded the Ras Lanuf and Al-Sidra oil terminals with his Petroleum Facility Guard company after the 2011 revolution. Jadhraan's attack not only killed scores, it led to millions in losses for the oil industry. With critical storage tanks damaged, oil output fell by 400,000 barrels per day from nearly a million barrels per day. The world was relieved after Haftar regained control of the oil terminals, bringing back stability in oil markets, but he provoked outrage when he decided to sell the oil from a company under his own control, rather than through the internationally-recognized National Oil Corporation (NOC) based in Tripoli. He eventually backed off, but raised the prospect that Haftar might defy the international community and attempt to assert control and establish military rule in Libya.

Now, it is difficult to view Haftar's earlier promises and actions as little more than public relations stunts to win national and international sympathy, or an attempt to barter for further control. Haftar would address stability and extremists — but only if doing so would increase his power and control over the country.

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His actions against extremists were calculated and well-timed with plenty of balancing acts, logistics, and political support from key backers: the UAE, France and Russia, and lately Saudi Arabia. Haftar needs considerable help to recruit fighters and mercenaries from abroad as he was unable to recruit enough Libyans to his army. Within Haftar's LNA there are followers of radical Saudi cleric Rabea al Madhali, radical Justice and Equality Party fighters from Sudan, and the Awliaa Aldum (Blood Guardians) — a Salafist Wahabi militia that follows the same radical Saudi clerics from which grew Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

Like Gadhafi, Haftar placed two of his sons, Saddam and Khalid, into key military positions within the LNA, expeditiously promoting them to higher ranks. They are feared and loathed in the east. Saddam is accused of staging the biggest bank theft in the history of Libya when he raided a bank in Benghazi. Libyans are wary of Haftar's attentions as they see the 75-year-old transferring power to his sons, as Gaddafi was planning to do.

I once supported Haftar for the same reasons many others did: I thought Haftar, as a Defense Minister and Field Marshal of a unified Libyan army, could unite the military apparatus and truly provide stability for the Libyans.

I hoped Libya could escape its cycle of violence by drafting a new constitution and holding new elections, ultimately proving that it could build democratic institutions, as Tunisia did, without plunging into autocracy and military rule.

Haftar understood that time was running out for him to assert control over the entire country, so he launched his attack on Tripoli, betraying carefully planned, UN-backed efforts for reconciliation leading to elections. He also betrayed Al-Sarraj, head of Libya's internationally-recognized government who is trying to bring all parties to the negotiating table and who, well-informed sources in Libya suggest, offered very generous accessions to Haftar at their meeting in Abu Dhabi a month ago.

Many politicians have not met the aspirations of Libyan people, acting instead in their own self-interest and viewing compromise as weakness. Gadhafi's rule cannot be undone overnight. That the country is not ready for power-sharing and democratic institutions is an argument with some validity, but most Libyans, while they reject militias on both camps, do not seek to have another autocrat in power.

No wonder, after 40 years under the autocratic Gadhafi, they trust neither the military solution nor the politicians backed by militias.

What Libya needs is a strong voice from the United States to lead the international community in a decisive diplomatic effort to help the country get back on its feet.

Haftar has overplayed his hand and miscalculated the strong resilience of Tripoli and Misrata. If he continues his military campaign, he risks destroying the historic city of over 1 million people. Even though he holds the majority of Libyan territory for now, he has failed. Regardless of his public relations machine and his political backing, the people of Libya will not forget or forgive him for the destruction of Tripoli. Haftar's last move is doomed to fail.

Sasha Toperich is senior executive vice president of the Transatlantic Leadership Network. From 2013 to 2018, he was a senior fellow and director of the Mediterranean Basin, Middle East and Gulf initiative at the Center for Transatlantic Relations, at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University in Washington, D.C.

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