

**Media Roundtable with Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Omar Maiteeg**  
June 7, 2019

**Journalists in Attendance:**

Courtney McBride – Wall Street Journal

David Lawler – Axios

Ben Marks – NHK

Sean Tandon – AFP

Journalist: "I'd be curious to know what the purpose of your visit to Washington is? If you know what the Trump administration's policy right now and what the call from Trump to Mr. Haftar was about? What would you like to see them do?"

DPM: I spoke to the State Department and they said they are supporting the Libyan Government. We have been working with the U.S State Department since 2016. And we have a great achievement we were able to reduce ISIS. And after that the achievement were continuous on the economic side and every side. President Trump spoke with Haftar and I heard that they spoke about terrorism. We made it clear that American administration that everybody can work together to prevent the spread of ISIS in the country. Haftar attacked Tripoli and made it worse. The military on both sides is in conflict which gives space and room for ISIS to work in the country easily. This is our message and we saw the United States continuing to support GNA.

Journalist: You spoke with the State Department, are you able to tell us who you met with? Are there any other government representatives in the U.S Government that were there like members of Congress or others from the administration.

DPM: We saw a lot of members of Congress. We saw many of those that believe that Haftar is completely and can cause big division. And does not help the security of the region and the security of the United States. Plus, a lot of senators. They signed a letter for President Trump and sent it already. We want to emphasize this is the right direction and the congressmen did a great job sending that letter to the administration and President Trump. As you know Haftar administration cannot run a government and they only make it worse in Benghazi. We are not seeking any military or financial support from the United States. We need a strong diplomatic help and leadership in the Libyan fight from the United States. As you see the Libyan government in 2016 achieved ended all the division in the country regarding the government of Libya. After Haftar everything froze again. We cannot let Haftar and his group get to the capitol, Tripoli.

Journalist: In your meetings with Congress did you discuss the possibility of a cease fire of any kind? Do you have any conditions in which you would be able to negotiate a cease fire?

DPM: We think ISIS should no longer be considered a threat. There is more than 100,000 people displaced more than 1,600 injured and more than 600 people killed in this fight. 100 of them are civilians. As you know, we are not the ones who attacked Tripoli and we are ready to stop the fighting after troops go back to where they came from. We did not attack we are defending the capital from his attack. Of course, they were really concerned about the cease fire. They want to get back to the political talk and stop the military conflict.

Journalist: Just to put a fine point on the issue of President Trump and the call to Haftar you said what you're looking for from the U.S is diplomatic support. His most public intervention in the current crisis has been this call with Haftar. Are you getting the support you need from President Trump? Are you positive he is an ally of your government?

DPM: We believe the whole administration of the United States is standing by us. They know we have been trying to fight terrorism in Libya and Africa. The alliance of GNA has allowed us to work closely with the Libyan Government we have a successful story to tell. Regarding to Trump the message was passed to him that Haftar is doing a positive job fighting terrorism but maybe this is something from the past when he is attacking civilians. They sent him a message he is controlling 75 percent of the country geographically, but nobody told him he was controlling the desert part of Libya. The other 25 percent that actually makes up 75 percent of the population of Libya.

Journalist: And who do you think is passing the message to him? The Emirates? The Egyptians? Is it the people in the region passing that message now?

DPM: I'm not sure who is passing that message maybe some of the names you mentioned. Now after 62 days of the conflict I'm sure he knows Haftar can do no good to attack Tripoli or continue his attack. At the time of the phone-call it was only a few days after the attack and Haftar was passing the news all around the world that he is going to take Tripoli in two days in two hours.

Journalist: Can you expand a little bit more when you say you're looking for diplomatic support from the United States. What is it that you want the United States to do to provide relief?

DPM: The United States has a lot of friends and allies in the region. And we want the United States to care about the Libyan conflict and take a strong stance. We want the United States to send a message to those other countries to stay out of Libya and not intervene in Libyan fighting and Libyan issues. We can solve our problems. There is a big division about Libya in Europe. That is why the U.S. leadership and the relationship with is important and can be very successful in Libya.

Journalist: Who are you referring to? The Saudis, Egyptians, Emirates?

DPM: I am referring to everybody interfering. All of them the Italian, French, the Egyptians, the Emirates, the Turkish.

Journalist: And you think that message is being sent to the U.S.?

DPM: I am trying to send it.

Journalist: Do you think the U.S. is talking to those countries in the region and saying?

DPM: A lot of people on the State Department understand the Libyan perspective quite well. And been clear that it should stay only Libyan and should be up to Libya what to do. Plus, the United States did not confirm the appointed ambassador of Libya yet. They have been appointed not confirmed yet. We want ambassador and American employee to closely work with him. We have a lot of people dealing with terrorism and securities. But on the political side less than before.

Journalist: The UN expressed concerns about arms flowing in on both side. There has been a lot of reports about who's arming what side. Who is arming the militias you support? And who are your biggest allies in the current struggle?

DPM: We have a lot allies working with the legitimate government of Libya. All countries working with us. We should look at who's supporting the non-legitimate government because as you know we are dealing with the whole world. We don't have an ambassador. We know someone is supporting the illegitimate government. That is the problem.

Journalist: There is reports that there is military hardware coming in from Turkey coming into Libya is that a fact?

DPM: We have very good relations with Turkey. And more than once our security people were in Turkey and came back from there. We have a lot of support from Turkey on many issues not just military

Journalist: But you view them as allies working with the legitimate government of Libya as opposed to outside countries intervening with a domestic affair. Because your saying everyone needs to stay out an allow Libya to solve this but if Turkey is supplying weapons?

DPM: A lot of reports come from a lot of different parts of the world especially from the UN for a long time. There have been weapons that have come from Haftar and nobody talk about it. Just talking about making sanctions on Libya because of weapons is a joke. Nobody emphasizes strongly that Haftar should not have weapons. He is illegitimate government. He does not have any political representation in the world. How did he get all of this?"

Journalist: Pursuing that, what do you think the U.S. relationship with Haftar should be? There have been reports do not know how credible saying the U.S. is still in contact with him. Do you think the U.S. has a reason for this or would you like to see them break off contact?

DPM: Well I think the U.S. has to solidify with the countries around Libya what the goal is in the end. Diplomatic help we need from the United States is to achieve a political solution in the end.

Journalist: How dire is the situation in Tripoli? Is it a city in danger of falling within weeks? What message are you sending in terms of how urgent this situation is?

DPM: Its clear Haftar will not gain anything out of this. He cannot achieve getting to Tripoli. There are a lot of people and forces defending Tripoli quite well. They will not achieve anything out of that. They can achieve a civil war, Libya is going to be split. They cannot control the capital, but he will have Libya divided. ISIS will be stronger our production will be falling. This is a result of his attack, yesterday he attacked an airport, school and a hospital. Three in one day! And he continues to attack the airports. Because Haftar knows if continues to damage the Libyan society it might bring him in the government.

Journalist: So, it sounds like, correct me if I'm wrong, it sounds as far as comparing military capabilities, Haftar and the government, you seem confident in your ability to stage off if he attacks to hit Tripoli or elsewhere in Libya.

DPM: Well, we were not prepared for conflict with Haftar. [unintelligible] And we had all our forces split around Libya in conflict with ISIS in different places, especially in certain area which was worse than other places. We never thought that he was going to attack the capital. We were 10 days ahead from a meeting that brings everyone on an agreement on Libya. And he attacked Tripoli on the day where United Nations Security General entered, at that night. So, he took us completely by surprise. Took us by surprise, he did not achieve getting to Tripoli. So today, after 62 days, our forces are building a good, confident, build around Tripoli and he cannot get in. We are prepared to attack back and send him back.

This what is happening today on the ground. The same way, I don't think he will achieve only a great loss of life on both sides. And we consider both of them Libya. We have, as a government of Libya, we take care of all Libyans.

Journalist: Two related questions, one, if you could address the role of France, I think their position in this might lend some legitimacy in people's eyes to Haftar because they're not generally viewed as a country, perhaps like the Emirates and they're meddling all over the region. And a related question to that, every time this conflict is written about, there is a sentence, basically, about all of the countries supporting Haftar. There is not usually a similar note about the countries that are actively supporting you, I know you say that it's the default because you are the legitimate government, but I want to know who has skin in the game and is helping you keep control in Libya.

DPM: I think France is dealing with us diplomatically and politically working with us on many issues, but still considers Haftar as a military partner to France in many ways and that's why we see the French trying to, many times, put the two sides together, but unfortunately, this sends the wrong message inside Libya and to other places that he can have the legitimacy true and that he is presenting as the leader of the Libyan army, which is not true, he does not have any legitimacy but he is considered the director or leader of the Libyan army. It's all illegal, but France is dealing with him and his position like this.

Journalist: And the second question about who is actively in the region and helping you?

DPM: Helping us?

Journalist: Yeah, as opposed to, there is always mention of the fact how the emirates, or maybe the Jordanians, all these countries and how they're supporting Haftar. Who are the equivalent countries that are helping you?

DPM: We appointed our minister in Egypt. We appointed our, sorry, ambassador in Egypt. We appointed our ambassador in Saudi Arabia. We appointed our ambassador in Jordan. Diplomatically, they're dealing with a [unintelligible] All these countries, but in some way or another, we see a supply for [unintelligible] And there is a report, clear report, that is coming from the UN talking about how who is supplying Haftar with that. The last report was out in 2018. So, if you talk about the government and who is dealing with the government, everyone is dealing with the government, dealing with us. He did not see any government that say that we are not the legitimate government, but they are interfering in Libya this is the problem.

Journalist: But I guess, who is actually engaged in helping you keep control in Libya in the way that there are other parties helping Haftar?

DPM: We have our own forces, we have our defense ministers, our army, our troops. These are the same troops that liberated Sirte. I mean, you are talking with the government who has the whole government cabinet working for this now.

Beth DeFalco: Your excellency – sorry for jumping in – one thing that I did not know that was helpful to the geography of Libya in understanding the parts that Haftar is controlling right now and what that looks like compared to Tripoli, in terms of population.

DPM: It's clear that he is controlling the desert population of Libya and the whole population is between Sirte and the Tunisian border, which is under the control of GNA. This represents 78 percent of Libya, or more. In Tripoli alone, there is more than 3 million out of 6.5. The other cities around it, we control the population of Libya. This is where Libyans live.

Journalist: Interesting. What about the role of Russia diplomatically? Certainly, you see in the United Nations in terms of the calls for \_\_\_ with Libya, you see the United States and Russia taking positions that could be dissimilar. How do you find the diplomatic position of Russia? Is there something you are also seeking from them diplomatically?

DPM: At the beginning of the attack, Russia did not take a position except to refuse one of the countries will refuse having a statement from the UN regarding the attack. But, we heard in the last 2 weeks that Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov asked that we should consider a ceasefire as long as possible. And this is – we see it – as a change in the position of Russia.

Journalist: Do you think that the U.S. also has that support for the ceasefire?

DPM: I think the U.S. is looking for something more advanced than a ceasefire.

Journalist: Can you expand on that, what they are looking for?

DPM: I think that, the ceasefire, all the members of the UN Security Council want the ceasefire, but the U.S. is looking to solve the whole problem politically and diplomatically between the Libyans and that is why we ask for leadership and support for Libya. They are our main ally.

Journalist: Just, your end of your trip here. Are you ending on a more positive note? Do you think there was much accomplished here?

DPM: So, before I can here there were a lot of rumors talking about “the U.S. is not supporting our government,” but I'm coming back home with different that the U.S. is standing by us as the legitimate government of Libya. We see it as our main allies and many feats economically with the terrorist act and ISIS. We have a job to do including rising the production of gas and oil in Libya with the United States' help.

Journalist: If there was a meeting with President Trump on your itinerary, what would have been the first thing you would have told him?

DPM: Well, I would have told him leadership from the United States is needed in this part of the world. We have been allies for good reasons and this is good help ending ISIS in the north side of the region. Plus, we want to see the good for Libyans and Americans to make stability in Libya.

Journalist: There have been other situations in the Middle East – and Libya is among them – where President Trump's focus is oil. He frequently talks about oil and the conflict. Do you worry that he potentially wouldn't be viewing the situation purely in a diplomatic relationships way and also thinking about oil considerations?

DPM: President Trump himself knows that when the GNA came to power there were 110,000 barrels a day. Today, we are talking about 1.5 million barrels a day. This is a great achievement and thanks to the GNA investment in oil and locating a good part of the Libyan budget for that our production of oil is still rising. So, we are hoping that by 2020 we will have up to 2 million barrels a day.

Beth DeFalco: I'm going to let this one be the last one, if that's okay? Does anybody have any last question?

Journalist: Maybe just final thoughts. We've already asked you about this, but maybe your first reaction when you first heard that Trump had a positive call with Haftar and released a statement that they had a shared vision for Libya. Just how you reacted to that.

DPM: Well, I heard differently, not exactly as you explained. I heard that Haftar had a talk with President Trump regarding terrorism. And this can be understood if they talked about terrorism and somebody passed a message to President Trump telling him that this is a guy that is fighting terrorism in different parts of Libya. But I want to see how positive they want the talk and what Haftar has achieved on the ground afterwards.

Journalist: So, are you confident that President Trump has a clearer picture of where Haftar stands and where the GNA stands in terms of the power.

DPM: Yes, I think so.