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Gotham Government Relations

What's Really at Stake in Libya

What Gotham Government Relations Says is at Stake in Libya

TRIPOLI, Libya, February 27, 2020 (Newswire.com) - It would be nice to think Russia merely wants to sow confusion across North Africa and the Mediterranean, and that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) merely seeks to root out any trace of the Muslim Brotherhood in favor of their own brand of extremist Islam. But their support for renegade warlord Khalifa Haftar, who's been trying to overrun Libya's internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and [rule Libya with an iron fist](#), also advances their particular economic and strategic interests.

Earlier this month, the day after news that Dubai Ports World (DP World) is [returning to full state ownership](#) by the UAE, Haftar [attacked the Tripoli port](#). With funding and advanced drone systems (and operators) from the UAE, Haftar has already blockaded other Libyan ports and oil facilities for weeks, costing Libya billions of dollars in lost production. This reduced production also helps UAE's Saudi partners [keep oil prices from dropping too much](#) during the Coronavirus downturn.

Russian mercenaries make up the elite core of Haftar's ground forces, and Moscow has opened its own diplomatic track rivaling the one mandated by the United Nations Security Council. Haftar's [latest attack](#) occurred just as Libyan government officials were in Geneva to resume ceasefire negotiations with Haftar's representatives.

While UAE seeks to [dominate ports and boost its investment across Africa](#), Russia wants control over Libya's oil reserves — the largest in Africa — and naval access along the southern Mediterranean. The fact that Moscow has potential replacements for Haftar waiting in the wings, [including Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam](#), reflects Vladimir Putin's lack of concern for Libya's future, as long as Russia gets what it needs.

In 2006, DP World's bid to take over American ports was rejected by Republicans and Democrats in Congress and in governor's mansions across the country, out of concern this would constitute a [national security risk](#).

The GNA has made clear that, while it is open to doing business with Russia and the Emirates, it remains engaged with other Gulf states as well as European and American companies. The Libyan people did not overthrow Muammar Qaddafi only to become a beachhead for the Kremlin or the

Given Russia's scorched-earth response to Muslims seeking freedom in places like Chechnya and Syria, and UAE's destructive war in Yemen, neither country sees a democratic, Western-leaning Libya serving its interests. Americans should see this fight for what it is — it's fundamentally an attack against American values and interests.

Gerstman is a founding partner of Gotham Government Relations & Communications, which has previously represented the Trump Organization and currently represents the UN-recognized GNA in the United States.

Source: Gotham Government Relations

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