

# Briefing

## Competing peace plans in Libya hamper political process

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There are at least three different political processes by three different international 'orbits' operating independently but in parallel to one another in Libya. Washington and Berlin, Turkey and Russia, and France and the UAE, are all pursuing political processes although not entirely to secure the same outcome. The result has been the facilitating of an environment conducive for increased unilateral action by individual factions that have inevitably undermined the established umbrella organisations that are the GNA and the Eastern-based government.

This briefing explores the impact of the competing political peace processes on the current dynamics in Libya while assessing the reasons for the changes in some of the stances of the international powerbrokers.

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The crux of the problem is that there are three separate international orbits pursuing their own attempts at bringing about a political process that differ entirely in their overall objectives. In one orbit, Washington and Berlin have been liaising with one another to win over Serraj and bring about a political process built on the Geneva outcomes. The other orbit includes France and the UAE which scuppered the US-German led initiatives by secretly seeking to revive Haftar's fortunes and arrange a face-to-face meeting between Serraj and Haftar in Paris. The third orbit is Turkey and Russia which are engaged in their own negotiations, although Turkey is beginning to experience increasing difficulties in navigating the renewed jostling between the individual militias that operate under the GNA, and struggling to handle an increasingly dissatisfied Serraj.

The result of these three orbits acting separately and parallel to one another in bringing about a political process has created an environment that has undermined the established umbrella institutions of the GNA and the Eastern-based government, and facilitated more independent action by individual Libyan actors. Serraj announced he would resign, with Turkey's President Erdogan expressing dismay, suggesting that Serraj had not informed him prior. The GNA deputy Maitig has signed an agreement with Haftar in exchange for lifting the oil blockade which will result in Tripoli bearing the burden of debts incurred by the East. Initial reports suggest this was done without Serraj and Aguila Saleh's knowledge and was a Russian-brokered initiative.

The lack of coordination between these political manoeuvres emphasises the lack of centralised authority that might be influential enough to bring about the political process needed to facilitate genuine dialogue. Instead, the parallel orbits mean that despite the ceasefire and the relative balance of military power that brought about the lull in fighting, Libya remains a scene laden with different circles of power that operate under loose umbrellas and that remain capable of lobbying international powers independently from the authorities that they are associated with.

This means that while Serraj promises a political process that might lead to elections, his resignation may well condemn him to irrelevance and create the space for Bashagha, Maitig, and others to leverage their own power in exchange for international support even against one another. Likewise in the East, the continued gamble of Paris on Haftar and Russia's careful balancing of Haftar's concerns with its desire to see Aguila Saleh empowered (and maintaining a link with Gaddafists) mean that the power dynamics remain in flux, as was seen in the fiasco over Abdullah Al-Thinni's government and the suggestion it was about to resign.

The flux in dynamics has led to a change in approach in both Paris and Ankara. Turkey has begun to launch overtures to Egypt, calling for cooperation and dialogue and breaking with previous rhetoric as prominent commentators including Yasin Aktay have described Egypt's army as a 'great army deserving of respect'. Turkey has been concerned for some time that Serraj has been reluctant to expedite the implementation of bilateral agreements, and fear that Serraj is not entirely on board with its vision for Libya. Moreover, the mosaic nature of the GNA has left room for Turkey's rival France to lobby individual factions, demonstrating to Ankara that the GNA cannot (as an institution) be considered an ally and that it must rely on individual local powerbrokers such as Misrata where it seeks to build a naval base. Egypt

however has been cautious and unenthusiastic about Turkey's overtures. For Egypt, Turkey's overtures are a result of deep concerns in Ankara that it has failed to capitalise on its success in the immediate aftermath of rescuing the GNA, and that its failure to take Sirte and the oil crescent after mocking Egypt's Cairo Initiative, as well as Serraj's refusal to operate in tandem with Turkish policy, suggest Turkey is no longer in the position of strength it once was.

France is seeking to capitalise on the willingness of some GNA factions, notably Maitig, to deal with Haftar even at the risk of drawing the ire of other GNA factions. The success of the deal coincided with French President Macron's tweet calling for dialogue with Turkey, suggesting France is seeking to present itself to Libya's factions as a party willing to engage in a political process rather than encourage a renewed conflict.

More important however is a growing undercurrent that is reflected in growing protests in major cities in the East and the West that have the potential to upend the current political dynamics. The presence of these protests compounds the sense among Libya's actors that today's power dynamics are temporary and that the current political actors are not secure in their position. This is why dealings between the factions are often based on short-term goals and aims as neither is certain the other will still have the power and influence they enjoy today.

If the situation continues in such a devolved manner whereby the political processes proposed by international powers continue to operate in parallel and inevitably at each other's expense, then the prospect of small skirmishes that have the potential to escalate into a return to war remains possible as the next stage of the political process descends into a scramble of individual factions for the backing of an array of international forces deeply suspicious of one another.

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