

The Battle for Libya Continues

News:

Leaders of Libya's rival factions met on Tuesday 14 February in Cairo for joint talks on a political settlement in the country. The Egypt-brokered talks were led by head of UN-brokered Government of National Accord, Fayez Al-Serraj and Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. The talks were initially planned for Monday but were postponed due to disagreements on the conditions set by the two sides, according to Arabic media.

Comment:

The overthrow of Moammar Gaddafi, after 42 years of brutal rule, in October 2011 is now a distant memory as the country continues to fall apart. The optimism that accompanied the end of the Gaddafi era has evaporated and calls for another intervention are gaining ground. But much of this noise has blurred out what has been taking place on the ground in Libya and that is the fact that Britain and the US are backing different factions and this foreign interference is the heart of the problem.

Britain along with France was able to establish a transitional government composed of Gaddafi era individuals, this government eventually became the permanent government in 2012. The parliamentary elections which took place in June 2014 only saw an 18% turnout from the eligible 3.4 million population, the low turnout led to a complete change in the Libyan parliament, but the old government refused to accept the results. By August 2014 militia groups loyal to the old government seized the airport in the capital, Tripoli and proclaimed their own government. This forced the new government to flee the capital to Libya's eastern coastal town of Tobruk. They remain holed up there today. The US came to back the Tobruk government or the General National Congress (GNC) through Major General Khalifa Haftar. This resulted in the two governments, with tribes and militia groups attempting to gain more land and use this to become the official government for the whole of Libya, but the Tobruk government was unable to remove the Tripoli government. With the failure of the military option for the US through Khalifa Haftar, both the US and Europe agreed on the resolution to work on a negotiated solution to find a political solution to the crisis. This solution was delegated to the UN to execute.

The Shikirat agreement in early 2016 effectively saw the establishment of a third government in the country which consisted of some elements from the Tobruk government, but mostly from the Tripoli based government. The US thought it agreed to the establishment of this unity government or Government of National Accord (GNA) has practically done everything to undermine it and ensure it fails to succeed. The Tobruk government along with Haftar have promised to hand power and join the GNA but have failed to do so and at the same time expanded their power base by taking over oil terminals, which has completely undermined the government that was formed from the Shikirat agreement. Just as it did in Syria the US enlisted the help of Russia to bolster its position in Libya. Haftar travelled to Russia and boarded its ships and made a number of tentative agreements that will see Russia arm Haftar and his army.

With Egypt and the UAE already providing support to the Tobruk based government the people of Libya have been left on the sidelines as Britain and the US fight out this proxy battle. The uprising of the people against the brutal rule of Gaddafi is now a distant memory for the world and the people have all but been forgotten in this proxy battle.

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