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EVENT REPORT

# LIBYA'S PROXY WAR AND ITS FUTURE

APRIL 2020 - 006

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EVENT REPORT

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## **SPEAKER**

### **Emadeddin BADI**

Libya Expert, Non-Resident  
Senior Fellow at Atlantic Council

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## **MODERATOR**

### **Şebnem Arsu**

Journalist, The Independent

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## **MAIN QUESTIONS**

- How has the crisis in Libya evolved since 2011?
- What are the roles and influences of global powers and regional players in the Libya crisis?
- How do GNA and Libyan citizens see Turkey's interference?
- What are the ideological, political and economic aspects of Turkey's intervention on Libya?

\* This report has been authored by Abdullah Esin

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The fifth installment of the Foreign Policy Talks we are organizing in coordination with Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey Representation was held on February 12, 2020 in Istanbul with the participation of Libya analyst Emadeddin Badi. During the roundtable, which was moderated by senior journalist Şebnem Arsu, Badi delivered a presentation on the trajectory of the Libya crisis, the current situation in the country and the effects of relevant actors like the EU, Egypt and Turkey.

The presentation was followed by a discussion session with questions and comments from participants.

Badi explained the situation in Libya by dividing the crisis into two parts: in the first part, he talked about the NATO intervention and other states' roles in the 2011-2014 period and in the ongoing developments. Then he explained Turkey's intervention and the reasons behind it.

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### THE 2011-2014 PERIOD IN LIBYA

According to Badi, Italy, France and the UK took part in a soft power competition over the Libyan conflict during this period. Some of the European countries supported soft intervention and the others supported direct intervention. As a result, Europe was very reluctant to support an intervention because different states had different views and strategies regarding Libya and a possible intervention during Qaddafi's rule. Badi stated Europe had played the role of a referee to some extent in the Libya crisis. Europe has basically failed in its Libya intervention because there was no long-term strategy. On the other hand, the US very clearly supported a UN military intervention in Libya. In that period, other states have become involved in the civil war, such as

Egypt and the UAE. Emadeddin Badi also stated Turkey did not get involved in the Libya crisis in that period.

According to Badi, many states remained silent due to pragmatic or other strategic reasons in the 2011 period during the NATO intervention.

In the post-2014 period, the civil war accelerated and the situation in Libya has changed dramatically. According to Badi, the civil war was staged by foreign powers to a certain extent in 2014, but the real reason was divisions among Libyans. The 2014 civil war led to migration flows to European states and this initiated a view among European countries of Libya as a source of terrorism and conflict. In post-2014 period, the EU and other players in the Libya conflict changed their diplomatic approaches to the conflict. An understanding of "foreign policy should be deployed to secure short-term interests, including counter-terrorism and counter-migration," which may lead to diplomatic negotiations. Political solution mechanisms and UN dialogs have begun to end this civil war.

If we turn to Europe's involvement in the Libya conflict, Badi stated that France has been involved in the Libya conflict and has started to use its leverage between Libya and Europe.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION IN LIBYA

After giving a briefing trajectory of the Libya conflict since Qaddafi's rule, Emadeddin Badi talked about the current two-legged government in Libya, and the political and ideological differences between the two sides along with other players' involvement in the civil war.

The civil war of 2014 has divided the country into two parts: West and East. This division is not historical or demographic. Badi also said that the civil war is very localized. Fighting is continuing near Tripoli. The conflict in Libya is not considered a civil war because of the numbers of groups involved in armed conflict. It is because the number of people who are affected from civil war, who are estimated to be about 3-3.5 million people near Tripoli.

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According to Badi, the Sarraj government representing the Government of National Accord (GNA) is not concerned with governing the country. The GNA is not interested with governing the country as much as it is interested with corruption and deal-making. On the other hand, the National Transition Government has taken its legitimacy to a very high extent from Europe. The armed groups under the GNA use the UN Council Resolution's decision to recognize the GNA government to legitimize themselves and their actions. Badi also stated that Haftar's alliances are too fragmented and this is a problem for the Haftar side.

He defined the Haftar government as secular and the GNA as Islamist. Therefore, there is a clash of Islamist vs secular governments in Libya.

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Badi said the present scenario was not foreseen by the UN and other participating states. Diplomatic negotiations between the UN and other diplomats sought to deescalate the civil war, but the current situation is far from peaceful. Today, we see the clash of economic, political and ideological interests in Libya. Of these, ideological interests have especially accelerated the civil war.

## THE ROLES OF REGIONAL PLAYERS IN THE LIBYAN EQUATION

Badi also talked about the involvement of regional players in the Libya conflict. In the pre-2014 era, Egypt, the UAE and Qatar were primarily involved in the Libya conflict to fill the void left by the EU, which was reluctant to create a Libya policy as the US remained absent. In that time, Turkey did not get involved in the Libya crisis. As a result, Egypt, Qatar and the UAE jointly crushed the democratic transition. According to him, Egypt is an important determinant in the Libya crisis, and it supports the Haftar regime along with Saudi Arabia. Badi emphasized that Haftar's military operations are financed by Saudi Arabia and Haftar-led

forces have also created local finance sources to mobilize their mercenaries. The other player in the area is Russia. Badi stated that, from August to December 2019, the support for the GNA declined and ended. The GNA government has lost its many bases due to Haftar attacks. So, Russia who is the supporter of the Haftar regime gained a great opportunity through this situation. Emadeddin Badi emphasized the only way for Russia to exert leverage in Libya is through physical/military presence. Therefore, Russia does not want to leave Libya from a military stand point.

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The other player in the region is Italy. Energy resources and colonial legacy are the reasons behind Italy's interests in Libya. The problem with Italy is that successive governments in Rome have different policies regarding Libya. The other issue for the EU is France. One of the reasons for France's involvement in Libya is its foreign policy alignment with the UAE. The other reason is to establish a security structure in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Badi, Haftar was introduced by France alongside with Egypt. The other prominent member of the EU, Germany, does not want to play on its own in Libya. Germany wants to create and implement a common EU policy for Libya. An arms embargo and foreign intervention are the two demands of Germany from EU over the Libya crisis. Badi highlighted in this point that without an embargo and foreign intervention, Libya cannot recreate public order. As a result, Badi states the EU's lack of a common policy for Libya exists for different reasons, among which are the clashing interests of EU countries. The only common point

of between EU members regarding Libya is the fear of ISIS and migration flows.

Along with regional powers' clashing interests, the other problematic players in Libya are Selefis. According to Badi, Selefi groups have an important power in Libya and they are directly coordinating with Saudi Arabia. These Selefi groups work generally on army recruitment. They have a military aspect but there are also local sheiks who lead Selefis, and these people have political influences in Libya. There are groups with Selefi components with the side of the GNA but Selefis do not fight directly. These Selefi groups were loyal to Qaddafi. Therefore, Haftar does not trust Selefis and Selefis do not trust Haftar in the current equation in Libya.

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#### **TURKEY'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE LIBYA CONFLICT**

Why has Ankara become interested with the GNA in Libya? Badi started the Turkey part with this question. According to him, there are two reasons for Turkey's policy shift from Syria to Libya and its involvement. One reason is security concerns and the other is economic concerns.

Badi stated the geopolitical calculation has changed for Turkey. Geopolitical expansion is one of the goals of Turkey's involvement, but commercial and maritime interests come first for the Ankara government.

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Turkey has foreign policy priorities like being against the UAE-Egypt-Saudi block. The economic reason for involvement is Turkey has many of financial agreements with the Libya government of the Qaddafi era and individual networks have played an important role for the continuation of these economic ties. He said: "I am very harsh on the framing of Turkey's intervention in Libya only as a result of post-Ottomanist policies.

There are other economic and political reasons behind this intervention." Badi also emphasized domestic landscape concerns play an important role in Turkey's Libya policies. Turkey's economic concerns are strongly linked with the Eastern Mediterranean issue. According to Badi, the "Maritime Deal" is an important diplomatic maneuver. This deal was executed with the Libyan government because Turkey has no allies in the Mediterranean. He also added that the deal between Turkey and the GNA can accelerate Haftar's attacks in Libya.

Badi added the domestic facets of Ankara's decision for intervening in the Libya crisis. According to him, Turkey wants to gain a domestic reward for its involvement in Libya for two reasons: one is that last year was not a successful year for Erdogan, so he wants to gain a diplomatic victory to sell it in the domestic sphere. The other domestic facet of is the political maneuvering by Erdogan himself.

After this diplomatic and domestic context of Turkey's involvement, Badi continued his presentation by focusing on the domestic effects of Turkey's involvement. He said that Islamist leaning groups have started to contact the Libyan government in the name of Turkey. The

groups opposed to Haftar are located in a large area. Revolutionaries and Islamists have joined these groups against Haftar and Turkey's logistical support is used by these groups.

The other important point is "How Libyans see Turkey's involvement into the conflict?" Today, there are 3,000 Syrian mercenaries in Libya, but not all of them

are involved directly in the war. They are not deployed as offensive forces. He also stated the Syrian mercenaries' deployment is very centralized. According to Badi, the Libyan side did not want Syrian mercenaries, they did not want this type of involvement. The GNA side wants more military equipment and logistical support from Turkey. Overall, Syrian mercenaries are not wanted by the NCG side. For Badi, the Western side will gain from Turkey's intervention; they will not lose. On the other hand, the Eastern side does not

want Turkey's involvement. This is one aspect of the ideological struggle between the two sides in the Libyan conflict.

If we look from military perspective, Haftar controls most of the territory, air bases and harbors. According to Badi, from a rational perspective, there is no reason for Turkey's support for the GNA government. He also stated that if you look from a game-theory perspective, Haftar makes a promise for future gains to his allies. This is Haftar's leverage against the GNA government.

Badi ended by talking about the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. According to him, it is not comparable to the branch in Egypt, as the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya is not as powerful.

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