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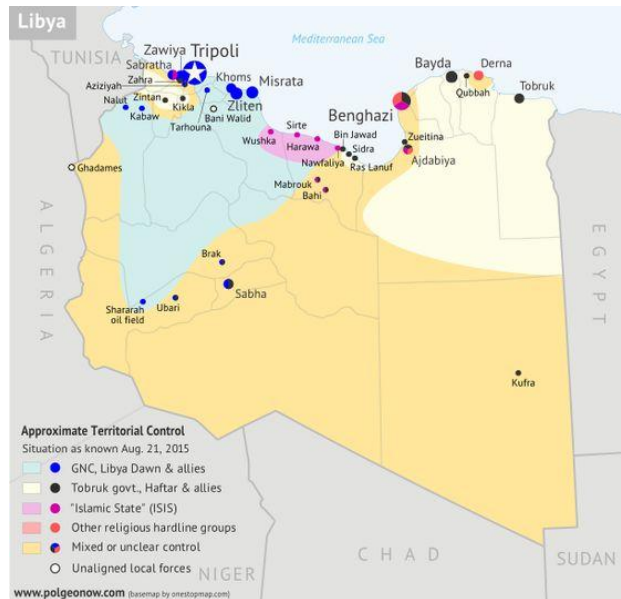
## Libya: The Battle for Oil Amidst Chaos and Terror

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The civil war in Syria, Russia's burgeoning influence in the Middle East, and the transformation of US policy in the region have all eclipsed the current events happening in Libya. Meanwhile, the situation in that country is growing more explosive and the West's destruction of the Libyan state remains one of the greatest war crimes of recent history.

Two news stories captured the world's attention in earlier this year: after great pains had been taken to assemble it, the national unity government moved to Tripoli and the Islamic State began to expand within a region that is home to some major oil fields. Oil field workers at three sites in Libya were evacuated because of the threat of an IS attack. According to some reports, militants loyal to Daesh began to concentrate their forces in the region between Sirte and the oil ports of Es Sider and Ras Lanuf.



Libyan society has a strongly tribal structure. The country is home to 140 tribes, approximately 50 of which play an important role in the nation's political life. Given the historical absence of any traditions of statehood (the independent nation of Libya was created after World War II out of three quite disparate regions – Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan), ideology plus a strong charismatic leader were essential in order to cement a sense of unity within the country. Muammar Gaddafi and his «Third Universal Theory» filled this role admirably.

NATO's direct military support during Gaddafi's overthrow, in addition to the shattering of the ideology of the Jamahiriya system, destroyed the country. Libya became a stateless territory, a conglomerate of tribes, clans, and armed groups that conducted endless wars against each other in order to win power and access to natural resources.

Since the summer of 2012 Libya has been guided by its General National Congress, which was elected to a 24-month term in order to draft a new constitution. But it proved unequal to that task, and in the summer of 2014 a new parliament was chosen. Unlike its predecessor in which the Muslim Brotherhood was predominant, supporters of secular and moderate forces gained a relative majority in the new body. However, the old leadership had no intention of relinquishing its hold on power and declared the election invalid. As a result, two governments and two parliaments were established in the country. The one in Tobruk consists of the deputies elected in 2014 and is headed by Abdullah al-Thani. The other is located in Tripoli.

The government in Tripoli includes supporters of the quite diverse Fajr Libya coalition («Libya Dawn»), which itself incorporates both the comparatively moderate Muslim Brotherhood as well as hard-core Salafists.

No description of the state of affairs in the western part of Libya would be complete without mentioning the Misrata tribe, which is theoretically a member of «Libya Dawn», but in fact holds close ties to Doha and Ankara.

The forces present in Libya create an equally complicated picture in the east. The primary military arm of the government in Tobruk consists of the armed factions controlled by General Khalifa Haftar. He was a high-ranking officer back when the Jamahiriya system still held sway and he commanded the Libyan army corps in Chad. He led a successful battle in Cyrenaica against al-Qaeda, with the help of Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. However, along with Haftar, other warlords are also part of the alliance with the government in Tobruk, and they have their own interests.

One of the worst repercussions of the Libyan crisis has been the destruction of the state's monopoly on the sale of oil. The National Oil Corporation (NOC) has splintered into «Eastern» and «Western» branches, which opens up a wide playing field for the black market.

The Western Oil Corporation has established a close relationship with the Swiss dealer Glencore, shipping it large quantities of oil at reduced prices. Things are even worse in the eastern part of the country, where Ibrahim Jadhra's militants control the biggest oil terminal of Marsa al-Hariga. The oil smuggled out of there is being used by the French company Total, Spain's Repsol, Italy's Saras, and China's Sinopec. Some of those companies are at times resorting to the use of arms to safeguard their interests. In January 2016 Jordan's King Abdullah claimed that British SAS special forces were present in Libya. At the same time, reports were appearing in the Arab press alleging that the government in Tobruk had received help from French special forces troops during the assault on Benghazi.

The cancer of Daesh is rapidly spreading throughout Libya. Its militants have a firm grip on the city of Sirte and the surrounding regions. Daesh headquarters in Sirte is under the command of a Pakistani, a militant from Kuwait controls the prison, and the local university is being run by a Nigerian associated with Boko Haram. The IS's greatest strength lies in its iron discipline and freedom from clan and tribal favoritism.

In September of last year, some of the militants involved in Gaddafi's ouster tried to mount a rebellion against the Daesh. They were all executed, along with many of their tribesmen. There comes a time when even «freedom fighters» begin to feel nostalgia for the Gaddafi era: back then opponents of the regime were merely imprisoned, but today any opponents of the «Caliphate» are decapitated, along with their relatives.

Recently an exodus has been noted of IS terrorists from Syria into other countries, particularly into Libya. To some extent Qatar is behind this, redeploying Islamist militants to a new location in order to take control of Libya's oil. Having seized Sirte, IS is now moving forward, expanding its operations in the direction of oil fields and terminals.

In December 2015, under the mediation of the United Nations, a fragile national unity government for Libya was assembled in Morocco from representatives of the various factions. But questions have arisen about its viability, because for a long time it could not even enter Tripoli and was stationed at a naval base on an island near the capital.

Without mechanisms for wielding power, and given the ongoing animosity between those in charge, in addition to the foreign interference, Libya's «national unity» will remain a paper dream, and foreign companies will continue to plunder the country. We need to remind the world constantly of these «fruits» of the West's intervention in Libya.