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Russia Seen Supporting Libya General, Formerly a CIA Asset

By Jason Ditz
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Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the head of the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA), has had a long list of allies. Starting as a participant in Gadhafi's 1969 military coup, he rose steadily through the ranks before being captured by Chad during the 1987 war. He was disavowed by Gadhafi, but by 1988 was a top figure in the CIA-backed rebels.

The rebel force was short-lived, however, and Hifter was brought to the US as a CIA supported "refugee" in 1990. He participated in at least one other failed rebellion before the 2011 Arab Spring, when he claimed to be the head of the post-Gadhafi military. Power struggles led to him announcing a military coup in 2014 before finally being named the head of the LNA, a faction allied with the Tobruk government.

Now Gen. Hifter is fighting against the US-backed “unity” government, and is looking for an increasing amount of Russian support as a way to cement his position. Russia’s support so far is seen as fairly limited, agreeing to print money for the “central bank” based in one of his cities and providing some defensive advisers. Hifter’s top allies, however, call greater Russian involvement on their behalf “inevitable,” and will eventually secure Hifter a major position in another, even-more-unity government.

Analysts say the end-game for Hifter is to come to some sort of deal where he recognizes the “unity” government, and vice versa, and is named the absolute commander of the armed forces, which in a nation like Libya effectively makes him the nation’s ruler.