

Libya's Tobruk parliament refuses to recognize Western-backed government

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On August 21 the Libyan parliament in Tobruk refused to recognise the Government of National Accord in Tripoli, which enjoys the support of the United Nations.

The news was reported in the *Libyan Observer* of August 22. According to the news report, a quorum meeting of Tobruk deputies (HoR) refused to express any confidence in the unity government led by Fayeze al-Sarraj in Tripoli. This means that the bombing conducted by the United States in Sirte, which dates back to Sarraj's call for help, violates international law.

Sarraj's Government of National Accord (GNA) was neither elected nor sworn in, but rather assembled by the United States and EU from various rival factions. According to the Libya agreement of December 2015, the fate of the GNA is dependent on the consent of the parliament in Tobruk. The agreement was adopted on the initiative of the UN Security Council in Skhirat, Morocco. The decision in Tobruk now means that Sarraj has lost his pseudo-juridical basis of support.

One hundred and one members participated in the meeting of the HoR on August 21. According to Parliament Speaker Fahima this was the first General Assembly since January to reach the necessary quorum for a decision. Sixty-one deputies voted against recognition of the GNA, 39 abstained and just one voted in favour of the GNA.

Sarraj left the country immediately and flew to Stuttgart, where he was received in the US AFRICOM headquarters by its new chief, General Thomas Waldhauser. The US base is now the planning centre for further action in Libya.

In early August, Sarraj appealed to Washington for air support against the Islamic State (IS) in Sirte. Since then American fighter jets have carried out more than 90 airstrikes against the city and the surrounding areas.

In the latest stage of the war in Libya more than 300 GNA soldiers are alleged to have been killed and 1,800 wounded. The number of victims on the IS side is not known. Meanwhile Sirte has been completely abandoned by residents.

The UK, France, Italy and Germany are all involved in the renewed fighting in Libya. For half a year special military units from the US, Britain, France and other nations have been active in Libya, gathering information and building alliances with local militias.

The attacks on Libya are justified as part of the so-called war on terror, with official Western propagandists stressing that the struggle against IS in Sirte was particularly urgent. In fact, it is the imperialist military intervention of 2011 that is responsible for the advance of Islamist terror and the Islamic State. Libyan IS fighters emerged from the Islamist militias backed by Washington and other Western intelligence services that were given arms in 2011 to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi.

Over 100,000 people were killed in the war of 2011 and the subsequent civil war. The country, which had one of the highest standards of living in Africa and the best health care and social system, has been bombed back to the Middle Ages and is now considered a "failed state."

In February, a US fighter jet attacked a training camp of the IS in the western Libyan city of Sabratha. In July, three French soldiers on a secret reconnaissance mission were killed in Benghazi after their helicopter was shot down.

Italy also has a special interest in its former colonial possession. Thanks to a new law, the Italian government can now deploy several dozen special forces operatives in Libya without informing parliament. The law, which was adopted following the

Paris attacks in November 2015, allows military action without the approval of parliament if the action is under the control of the secret service rather than the military. Italy has also opened its military bases, especially Sigonella in Sicily, for US fighter jets to carry out airstrikes.

The UN Security Council officially approved an intervention on the Libyan coast in June. In the context of the EU mission “Sophia” (EUNAVFOR MED), European governments have sent two dozen warships and a thousand soldiers to the Libyan and Tunisian coast. In June the European Council decided to extend its mandate on the Libyan coast until the end of July 2017.

The military build-up takes place at the expense of thousands of refugees. The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has counted a total of 2,606 drowned refugees in July alone on the Mediterranean route from Libya to Italy. In the months from January to May 2016 there were at least 2,200 deaths. The EU mission “Sophia,” however, is not aimed at rescuing the shipwrecked but rather at combatting the so-called smugglers. It has the task of reducing the flow of refugees and at the same time enforcing the arms embargo against IS.

Germany is also participating in the Libya mission. The Bundeswehr is involved in “Sophia” with ships, planes, helicopters and 130 soldiers. At the same time it has been preparing for half a year for deployment on the Libyan mainland. Back in January, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) told the *Bild*: “Libya is on the opposite coast of Europe—separated only by the Mediterranean.” She argued that in meeting the urgent need to stabilize and enforce “law and order in this huge state ... Germany will not evade its responsibility to contribute.”

The real reason for the imperialist powers’ intervention in Libya is not the fight against terrorism, but rather access to and control over natural resources, especially oil and gas, and to acquire first place in the race to re-colonise Africa.

“It is ultimately a struggle over the distribution of oil and power,” UN special envoy Martin Kobler told *Deutschlandfunk* on August 3. According to Kobler the Government of National Accord in Tripoli has “100 percent international backing.” It was extremely

important that the unity government asked Washington for help in order “to maintain Libyan sovereignty.”

The Sarraj faction recently signed an agreement with Ibrahim Dschedhren, head of Petroleum Facilities Guard, which controls a large part of the oil production in the region. The GNA would allow oil exports to start again and use the proceeds to finance its affairs.

The competing government in Tobruk reacted by occupying the oil terminal port of Zuwetinah south of the coastal city of Benghazi. It encompasses an area that is the most important centre for oil trade.

General Khalifa Haftar, who commands the armed forces of the Tobruk HoR, has threatened to carry out attacks against cities and towns, which continue to be loyal to Sarraj and his unity government.

Haftar had initially aligned with the US and played an important role as a CIA operative in the overthrow of Gaddafi. He later distanced himself, however, from the US government and is now looking for support from France and Egypt. A spokesman of Haftar announced on August 25 that the eastern-based Libyan armed forces now regard the US intervention in the battle for Sirte as “illegal.”



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