Libya at the Crossroads: Where is the Caravan of History Headed?

Although in recent months, Libya has not been in the focus of attention of top-level politicians and the global media at large, nevertheless, several developments have occurred that are actually quite important, albeit hardly noticeable to the outside world.

The gradual accumulation of these not-very-significant changes in the domestic political situation and on the foreign policy background could potentially lead to a qualitative shift and scrapping of the fragile balances that formed after the overthrow of the regime of Muammar Gaddaf in 2011 and led to the coexistence on Libyan territory of three governments with varying degrees of legitimacy. One of these administrations is headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, who is recognized by the international community as Leader of the Libyan State based on the inter-Libyan Agreement that was duly signed in Skhirat (Morocco) on December 17, 2015. The second one is based in Tripoli, and is mostly made up of Islamist groups operating from the capital, as well as from outlying cities like Misurata and Sabratha (having no legitimacy except for control over part of Tripolitania). The third is based in Tobruk (Cyrenaica) and is made up of a legitimately elected parliament recognized by the international community and the Libyan armed forces led by Marshal Khalifa Haftar, who has long been fighting against radical Islam. At the same time, the south of Libya (the historical Fezzan) remains partially under the control of the forces of Khalifa Haftar, in part under the rule of the forces of Ali Kahn, a former officer of the troops of Muammar Gaddaf, but supported by Algeria.

The first "pebble" that could engender an avalanche was the liberation of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in Zintan on June 9 by the Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, an armed group cooperating with Marshal Haftar. He, like the marshal, is an implacable enemy of radical Islam, since it was precisely these groups, supported by France, Turkey and Qatar, that played an ominous role in the tragic fate of his father, and indeed of all of Libya. This figure has great political experience and weight and, probably, considerable financial opportunities. But he has not yet announced his political position, and it is possible that he will form an independent pole of national-patriotic forces around himself, which will comprise in part of representatives of the former regime and partly on the large Libyan tribes that formed the backbone of his father's power. We cannot exclude his alliance with the ‘Council of the Tribes and Cities of Libya’, led by the faithful gaddafist Taher Dachesh. The weaknesses of the Gaddafi movement include the fact that they do not control the oil fields and terminals of the country, which are firmly held by the people of Marshal Haftar and Aguila Saleh Issa.

It would be logical for Saif al-Islam Gaddafi to move towards the bloc led by Aguila Saleh (Head of Parliament in Tobruk) and H. Haftar, taking into account the fact that the mother of this son of Gaddafi comes from the eastern regions of Libya (historical Cyrenaica). However, this path can be littered with significant obstacles connected with the fact that both forces in Tobruk are ready to enter into an alliance with Saif al-Islam, as well as those who are with the representatives of the former regime in very ambiguous relations, like the same marshal H. Haftar, who, at one time, deserted from the camp of Gaddafi and lived in the United States for an extended period of time, and in Libya, some regard him as a person who defends more than simply national interests alone. Therefore, it is unacceptable for Saif al-Islam to cooperate with the French, who stole from the Libyan state money that was in the
accounts of French banks, with Nicolas Sarkozy having openly betrayed Gaddafi. There are other obstacles, chief of which being connected with the fact that the internationally recognized government in Tripoli, just like the International Criminal Court, still considers him a state criminal, and continues to look for him to bring him to trial.

However, with any development of events, it is clear that in the camp of fighters against Islamists, there is an explicit addition, and the balance of power is inexorably shifting in their favor. This is indicated by the case of the May 22 Manchester Bombing, in which a terrorist blew himself up at the Manchester Stadium during singer Ariana Grande’s concert performance. The investigation showed that the terrorist, Salman Ramadan Abadi, although a British citizen, was from Libya and, shortly before the terrorist attack, for which the Islamic State accepted responsibility, possibly came to Libya and received instructions from extremist groups from Misurata (where the Muslim Brotherhood runs the show).

This circumstance, along with the irreconcilable (as it is considered) attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood Association on the part of the new US administration, could encourage Western governments to reconsider their relations with them (and in the struggle against the secular regimes of the Middle East, the United Kingdom and the United States have nurtured and supported them for decades). The first signs of this are, namely, the frequent contacts of Western diplomats with the H. Haftar faction.

Another sign is the introduction by US Congressman Tulsi Gabbard, a member of the committees of the House of Representatives for Armed Forces and Foreign Affairs, of a bill banning the US from selling arms sales to and participating in military cooperation projects with countries that provide weapons and finance terrorist organizations and their accomplices, along with providing any assistance to terrorist organizations in Syria. The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood falls directly under this category.

The next ‘pebble’ capable of provoking an avalanche may be the resignation of German diplomat Martin Kobler from the post of UN Special Representative, Head of United Nations Support Mission in Libya – a fact that was indicated on June 15. Kobler has been the force that, with the help of Western governments, strongly supported the Islamist entrainment in Tripoli and wide representation in Sarraj’s government.

Kobler will be replaced by a well-known Lebanese public and political figure, Political Scientist, Professor of International Relations and Conflict Resolution at the French university Sciences-po (Paris) Ghassan Salamé. The UN Security Council confirmed him in this position on June 17. G. Salamé has not only served as Minister of Culture in the Lebanese government (2000-2003), but also actively participated in the early 2000s in attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, and did so in cooperation with the United Nations and jointly with the League of Arab States, which then was not the pathetic and helpless empty structure into which it has turned now. He can contribute constructively to the settlement, if only because he is an Arab and better understands his interlocutors. It should be borne in mind that Kobler has lived and worked in France for a long time, and, therefore, he will take into account the approaches and concerns of his “second homeland”. It should also be known that he is also a member of the consultative International Crisis Group, created in the nineties by globalists. Behind this group looms the figure of George Soros and a number of Western governments. This, of course, is no good for Libya, unless, of course, Salamé chooses to show his best qualities, including independence of action and decision making, as well as a readiness to work honestly towards the realization of the UN goals in Libya.

In other events that could affect the Libyan situation and create a well-defined international background, we can note the conflict that has erupted since June 5 between Qatar and a group of influential Arab states, namely Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and a number of other countries. These states have demanded, in a written ultimatum of June 14, that Doha state its compliance in refraining from supporting terrorist and extremist groups, including the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ that has thoroughly entrenched itself in Libya. It is no accident that the Tobruk government (with the exception of Fayez al-Sarraj himself) has immediately joined these states in enforcing these requirements. Moreover, Riyadh, Cairo and Abu Dhabi firmly support H. Haftar and his allies in the fight against the thugs from Misurata.

Thus, we are witnessing a whole chain of events in June 2017, including the military victories after June 20 of Marshal H. Haftar over the remnants of Islamist groups in Benghazi, slowly but inevitably knocking out a few trump cards from the hands of Fayez al-Sarraj and Islamist groups, essentially weakening them. Maintaining contacts with them is, of course, the norm for any self-respecting diplomacy, but it is obvious that it would be short-sighted and dangerous to stake on them to enter into any binding deals with them (which some capitals still do).

Nothing will help Fayez al-Sarraj now. This includes even the demonstrative support of NATO, with its Secretary-General (Jens Stoltenberg) whom he met on June 22. He only remains with part of the seaport of Tripoli under his
control and zero support from the tribes, which is the most important factor in the formation of any kind of political structure in Libya. His government has failed to garner the support of the parliament, and after a threefold rejection of its nominated candidates, will no longer be approved.

We have already dwelt on the increasingly complex situation of the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’. The Skhirat agreements themselves have already expired and are held literally ‘on a wing and a prayer’. Of course, there is a UN Security Council resolution in support of them, but under the newly developing circumstances, it needs to be revised. The global super powers must understand this, and act accordingly.

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