

Italy's Libya talks lay bare deep divisions

Author:

Fri, 2018-11-16 23:09

TRIPOLI: Italy's Libya talks this week laid bare deep divisions between the key power brokers, threatening attempts to resolve the country's ongoing crisis, analysts say.

Two days of meetings in the Sicilian capital Palermo saw some delegates refuse to sit side by side, while a meeting held on the sidelines sparked a diplomatic spat.

"The dynamics between the four Libyan delegations attending the Palermo conference regrettably show that the rifts are still very deep," said Claudia Gazzini, a Libya analyst at International Crisis Group.

Libyan strongman Khalifa Haftar showed up, only to snub the main conference and organize separate talks with international leaders.

Such a move was "a slap in the face to the Libyan politicians at the conference," said Gazzini.

Haftar, whose self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) holds much of eastern Libya, held a meeting with representatives of Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, France and Russia.

One of his main rivals, UN-backed Prime Minister Fayeza Al-Sarraj, also attended the "informal talks," but Qatar and Turkey were not invited.

Their exclusion prompted Ankara to pull out of the main conference in protest.

LNA spokesman Ahmed Al-Mesmari later accused Turkey and Qatar of traveling to Palermo "to protect the interests of the terrorist groups which they are supporting in Libya."

Fragility

Khaled Saleh El-Kuafi, a professor at the University of Benghazi, said the outcome "illustrated the extent of the crisis, the divisions in Libya and the fragility of the situation."

Haftar "succeeded in being the star of the conference" by refusing to meet some of his rivals and sidelining Turkey and Qatar," he added.

The Palermo talks followed a Paris meeting at which Libyan leaders agreed to prepare for elections this December. Such a timeline was widely viewed as unrealistic, however, and preparations for polls have now been pushed back to 2019.

For Khaled Al-Montasser, a professor at the University of Tripoli, international meetings cannot succeed “while the international parties are putting the Libyans under pressure and while they put forward solutions to the crisis which suit themselves and them alone.”

It should be up to the Libyans, he said, to “agree on the subjects that they must discuss.”

But, as Montasser noted, the Libyan leaders themselves are “not ready to accept each other and to tolerate differences of opinion.”

Just as in May, the top Libyan invitees to Palermo were Haftar, Al-Sarraaj, who heads the Government of National Accord in Tripoli, the eastern parliament’s speaker Aguila Salah and Khaled Al-Mechri, speaker of a Tripoli-based upper chamber.

But the Italy talks were not really focused on improving relations between the rivals, according to Libyan analyst Emad Badi.

It was instead “an attempt by Italy to both react to the French initiative and to reposition itself as a power broker,” he said.

Despite the conference being viewed as a failure by numerous analysts, some have underlined the importance of meetings organized by the UN a few hours before the formal talks opened.

Those discussions focused on economic and security issues in Libya, where residents have seen their currency’s value plummet and endured years of violence.

Weeks of clashes in September between rival militias in the capital Tripoli killed at least 117 people and wounded more than 400, prompting Al-Sarraaj’s government to introduce reforms.

The UN’s Libya envoy, Ghassan Salame, this week welcomed the participants’ backing for the new measures and their “unanimous support” for a national conference early next year.

The 2019 talks are intended to give Libyans a chance to spell out their vision for the future, with elections slated for a few months later.

However, “numerous Libyans are still not certain of the format and aims of that conference,” said Crisis Group’s Gazzini.



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[Iraq's president to visit Saudi Arabia as part of regional tour](#)

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Fri, 2018-11-16 22:17

JEDDAH: Iraq's President Barham Salih will visit Saudi Arabia as part of a regional tour that will also include a visit to Iran on Saturday.

The Iraqi president visited Jordan on Thursday where he met King Abdullah II of Jordan. The two leaders discussed projects in the fields of energy, the extension of an oil pipeline between the two countries, and supplying electricity to Iraq.

"The governments of Iraq and Jordan will promote economic cooperation: the joint industrial city, energy cooperation, the oil pipeline from Basra to

Aqaba,” Salih tweeted.

Salih also visited the UAE on Monday and Kuwait on Sunday.

On Saturday the Kurdish president will meet Hassan Rouhani in Tehran and a number of Iranian leaders and officials to discuss bilateral relations, ways to increase cooperation, and developments in the region, the Iraq state news agency said.

The veteran politician was elected last month as Iraq attempted to form a government after months of deadlock since elections in May.

His meetings in Iran will be dominated by a number of pressing political, economic and security issues.

The election left Iraq’s main political forces divided into pro and anti Iran factions. Many in Iraq have become critical of Iran’s heavy-handed influence in the country and its funding of powerful armed factions.

Because of its economic ties with Iran, Iraq has also been put in a difficult position by fresh US sanctions against Tehran.

Last week, the US said Iraq could continue to import natural gas and energy supplies from Iran for a period of 45 days, after reimposing sanctions on Tehran’s oil sector.

Iraq’s central bank said in August that Baghdad would ask Washington for exemptions from some of the sanctions.





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Veteran Kurd Barham Salih becomes Iraq's next president Iraq recovers property worth millions after illegal sale

[Russian army says 270,000 Syrian refugees have returned home](#)

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Sat, 2018-11-17 (All day)

MOSCOW: The Russian military said nearly 270,000 Syrian refugees have returned home in recent months, a fraction of the estimated 5.6 million Syrians who have fanned out across the world fleeing the seven-year conflict. Moscow and the government in Damascus have been encouraging refugees to repatriate, arguing that the violence has subsided. Russia launched military operations to help Syrian President Bashar Assad in 2015, changing the tide of the war in his favor.

Western governments have, however, argued that it's too early to encourage return. Rights groups and the UN fear refugees would face persecution returning to government-controlled areas in the absence of a comprehensive political agreement.

Col. Gen. Mikhail Mizintsev of the Russian Defense Ministry told reporters Friday that nearly 6,000 people have returned to Syria in the last week alone, according to data collected by Russia.

He said they are seeing large waves of refugees returning home.

The conflict has caused nearly half of Syria's population to be displaced, with an estimated 6 million internally displaced and 5.6 million fleeing to neighboring countries and Europe, and registering with the United Nations Refugee Agency.

Russia has negotiated local cease-fires that have greatly reduced the fighting, but the causes of the conflict have not been addressed. The Syrian government has regained control of nearly 60 percent of Syrian territory. But armed opposition, some backed by Turkey, and Daesh militants remain holed up in areas in the north and south of the country.

The violence has not completely stopped.

On Friday, the UN Children agency UNICEF said the first nine months of 2018 saw the highest number of children killed since the conflict began in 2011, putting it at 870 till September.

"These are only verified cases, with actual numbers likely to be much higher," UNICEF said in a statement Friday.

The agency said it is alarmed by recent reports of the killing of up to 30

children in the last IS-held pocket in eastern Syria where the U.S-led coalition and its local allies, the Syrian Democratic Forces, have been waging an offensive for over two months. UNICEF didn't say how the children were killed, but reports by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights – the Britain-based group monitoring the war – said more than 30 children were killed last weekend in coalition airstrikes on Shafaa village held by the extremists. The coalition says it checks reports of civilian casualties, describing its airstrikes mostly as targeting IS installations or posts.



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Assad calls on Syria's Druze minority to do military service
Ankara's handling of EU programs for Syrian refugees under scrutiny

[**Six convicted for 2016 Istanbul**](#)

[airport attack that killed 45](#)

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Fri, 2018-11-16 (All day)

ISTANBUL: A court in Istanbul convicted six people and sentenced them to life in prison for involvement in an extremist attack at Istanbul's main airport that killed 45 people and was blamed on Daesh, Turkey's state-run news agency reported Friday.

The six were convicted of premeditated homicide and contravening the Turkish Constitution in the 2016 attack that also injured 163, the Anadolu Agency said. Twenty-six other defendants were acquitted of all charges.

On June 28, 2016, three suspected militants armed with automatic weapons stormed Ataturk International Airport and opened fire. They eventually detonated suicide vests that killed them as well as more airport visitors. The attack was one of several in Turkey blamed on Daesh extremists.

The attackers were identified as Vadim Osmanav and Rakhim Bulgarov, while the third man's name remains unknown.

A total of 46 defendants were on trial for the attack, including Russian, Algerian, Tunisian, Egyptian, Syrian and Turkish citizens. Six were sentenced to prison terms ranging from six to 12 years for membership in a terror group, Anadolu said.

Others were convicted of aiding a terror group or fraud. Four defendants remain at large.

No group claimed responsibility for the attack, but Turkish authorities blamed it on Daesh.



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Erdogan opens new Istanbul Airport, planned to be world's largest Turkey jails
24 Istanbul airport workers pending trial after protests

[Arab coalition in Yemen facilitates UN and aid agencies access](#)

Fri, 2018-11-16 16:34

JEDDAH: The Arab coalition fighting the Houthi militia in Yemen said on Friday it is continuing to provide facilities and permits for UN and aid agencies operating in the country.

The coalition is supporting pro-government forces fight the Iran-backed militants in the battle for the country's main port of Hodeidah. Fighting in the Houthi-held city, which is a key supply point for aid, intensified this month.

The coalition said 24 permits had been issued to the Red Cross, five to Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), and three to King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Centre (KSRelief).

The coalition added that 157 orders to provide movement permits for humanitarian and relief organizations inside Yemen had been made during the last 72 hours.

The coalition said the Houthis continues to violate international law and deliberately obstructs the work of relief organizations in the country.



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Al-Jubeir: Saudi-led coalition 'working with UN to end Yemen conflict' Key officials meet in Riyadh to discuss economic crisis in Yemen