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THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS IN LIBYA: THE CASE OF PRESIDENT MACRON'S ENIGMATIC LIBYA POLICY

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THE ROLE OF FOREIGN ACTORS IN LIBYA: THE CASE OF PRESIDENT MACRON'S ENIGMATIC LIBYA POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

France's foreign policy has been known for its realism and steadfastness under all presidents of the French Fifth Republic.¹ However, President Emmanuel Macron has shifted his foreign policy towards idealism unlike his predecessor Francois Hollande, a paradigm that can put France's foreign policy goals in the MENA region at great risk. The risk stems from the challenges which idealism presents to the domestic political imperatives.

President Macron is haunted by the ghosts of one-term presidents like his predecessors President Nicolas Sarkozy and President François Hollande. President Macron, however, has taken over an unusual determinant and objective of foreign policy from his mentor and predecessor, former President François Hollande. President Hollande had

orchestrated a prudent foreign policy in office, which matched his character and a long-running course of realpolitik designed by the first socialist President François Mitterrand in the '80's and early '90's.

Unlike his late predecessors and despite his own constitutional attributes, foreign policy was not related directly to President Macron's persona. Similarly, he did not place much emphasis on it during his presidential campaign in 2017, although he adopted a constructive position on the E.U., a contrastingly aggressive one on Syria and a preemptive defense policy in the Sahel, notably in Mali. He even paid a visit to the French troops stationed in Northern Mali on his very first day in office.

Does President Macron really have a foreign policy in Libya? According to history

¹"How French Government Works", *Gouvernement.fr*, <https://www.gouvernement.fr/en/how-government-works>, 2020.

At the bottom of the case, there are repeated violations of the embargo by Turkey and a record of falsifications and trafficking.

and geopolitics, France should. Nonetheless, President Macron has been displaying a style that is likely to push France into isolation because of his foreign affairs and European minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian. For instance, in his anti-Turkey rhetorical style in the last couple of months, while Turkey is a NATO ally and a major intelligence and military asset in the MENA region to fight the IS Organization in Syria and Iraq, Ankara was infuriated about undiplomatic French foreign affairs minister statements about the Operation Peace Spring last fall. Last summer, with the naval incident between France and Turkey on June 10 off the Libyan coast - the Frigate Courbet incident - France accused Turkey and took the case to a high instance of NATO and did call the EU Commission for more sanctions against Turkey.

With the latest tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, in which France explicitly sided with Greece following Turkey's gas drilling mission in the Mediterranean, the tension is over gas reserves and maritime rights and has prompted fears that tensions could escalate further between the two neighboring countries. Hence, Paris is bringing down 71 years of principles of collective security since the creation of NATO and since the adhesion of Turkey in 1952. The

latest verbal escalation between the two countries' presidents over the French president's declarations on Islam and his policies with Muslims in France have worsened the relations between the two countries.

FRANCE ACCUSES TURKEY OF VIOLATING ARMS EMBARGOES IN LIBYA

Beyond the maritime incident, during a press meeting last July the French Ministry of Armed Forces said: "At the bottom of the case, there are repeated violations of the embargo by Turkey and a record of falsifications and trafficking." Paris indeed denounced the Turkish military intervention in Libya alongside the government of national unity (GNA) of Tripoli, led by Premier Fayeze Al-Sarraj² recognized by the U.N., and France protested before participating again in Operation Sea Guardian.

In order to better understand France's foreign policy in Libya, it must be put into perspective. For a long time, Paris had an ambiguous relationship with the Al-Qaddafi regime. Over the last century and a half, France has never had a coherent strategy in Libya. French authorities have been inconsistent and impatient with this territory that acts as a kind of black hole for its MENA foreign policy framework. The

²"Libya's PM Fayeze Al-Sarraj Reportedly Set To Resign", *Middle East Eye*, 16 September 2020.

history of Franco-Libyan relations is littered with diplomatic about-faces and they are less a sign of an in-depth understanding of the local realities than a sign of French single-mindedness in arbitrary or distorted interpretations of Libyan politics.

The relations between the two countries resembles a revival of Napoleonism while the French return to Libya is a strategic imperative according to President Macron. However, relations between Paris and Tripoli deteriorated in 2019 only to worsen from the full support of Khalifa Haftar by France. Meanwhile France has been endorsing the legal government (GNA) in Tripoli led by Fayaz Al-Sarraj, head of the legitimate government recognized by the international community.

In May 2018, France hosted a meeting in Paris bringing together Libya's four principal competing leaders to endorse a roadmap for the country's stalled peace process. This was to be sanctioned by key external stakeholders, including the U.N. The proposed draft agreement called for Libya to organize elections by the end of 2018, support adoption of a constitutional framework, reintegrate military forces through the ongoing Egypt-led security dialogue and reunify financial institutions.

Thus, in September, President Macron, considering his yearly UNGA speech, announced that he wanted to gather together all of Libya's neighboring countries to help find a solution to the country's conflict. "This is the initiative that France wishes to lead in the coming weeks in conjunction with the Secretary General of the United Nations, bringing together all the neighboring countries to help bring about the Libyan solution," said President Macron.

In desperate attempts President Macron wants to bring together the two main belligerents in the Libyan armed conflict, LNA chief Khalifa Haftar and the GNA Premier Fayaz Mustafa Al-Sarraj. However, President Macron's latest initiative, is too little and too late because of his ambiguous and paradoxical policy in Libya. President Macron domestically is facing serious socioeconomic challenges following the impact of COVID-19 crisis mismanagement, which has added as another layer to the narrative in his presidential story-line campaign populist discourse in 2022.

Such an initiative existed already in the frame of 5+5 Mediterranean dialogue created in 1990 in Rome as a sub-regional system, a security initiative to secure closer cooperation between the five Western Mediterranean E.U. member states and the five Arab Maghreb countries. This was enhanced by the Euro-Mediterranean conference in Barcelona in 1992.³

WHAT DOES PRESIDENT MACRON NEED FROM THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES?

"This re-engagement of the Libyan neighbors is essential in the long-term," said President Macron in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly. He did not, however, name which countries he wanted to involve in the talks or elaborate on the details. Following the 2015 Shkirat Agreement, Morocco has, to some extent, excelled in reviving this accord, despite its rejection by Haftar last summer. Yet Rabat has launched another round of peace talks last September in the Bouznika meeting in the province of Casablanca under the auspices of UN Interim Libya Special Envoy, Stephanie T. Williams. This is to revive the

³ "The Barcelona Process Or Euro-Mediterranean Partnership", *Barcelona.com*, [https://www.barcelona.com/barcelona_news/the_barcelona_process_or_euro_mediterranean_partnership#:~:text=The%20Barcelona%20Process%20or%20Euro%2DMediterranean%20Partnership%20\(Euromed\),the%20Mashriq%20and%20Maghreb%20regions.](https://www.barcelona.com/barcelona_news/the_barcelona_process_or_euro_mediterranean_partnership#:~:text=The%20Barcelona%20Process%20or%20Euro%2DMediterranean%20Partnership%20(Euromed),the%20Mashriq%20and%20Maghreb%20regions.), 2020.



Libyan Political Dialogue Forum

The last time the peace talks process was about a political process but this new round of peace process talks seems to look to resolve the military issues such as the role of foreign fighters in Libya.

spirit of the Skhirat Agreement, bringing again the Libyans' political rivals to the negotiation table in Rabat. A peace talks process is taking place between Tunis, Tunisia and Tangier, Morocco. Libya has been in a state of chaos since 2011 and divided since 2014 between rival factions in the east and west, with major institutions also split or controlled by armed groups.

Recently, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita has said that Libyan members of Parliament meeting in Moroccan Tangiers will decide the date and place of the coming meetings expected to take place in Libya. He will strive to unify positions on the outcomes of the Libyan political dialogue, hoping it would lead to a thaw between the parties after years of division. The Moroccan Foreign Minister explained that this meeting was a reaffirmation of the understandings reached by the Libyan-Li-

byan dialogue in Bouznika, related to the unification of the sovereign positions included in Article 15 of the Libyan Political Agreement signed in Skhirat.

This peace process could be a breakthrough if all sides stick to their promises, especially the Eastern side. As the United Nations has taken the leading role in bringing all parties to the negotiating table to discuss the political solution, it seems the UN is trying to include a wide range of people, bringing all different parties together without excluding any groups and is learning a lesson from the past.

The last time the peace talks process was about a political process but this new round of peace process talks seems to look to resolve the military issues such as the role of foreign fighters in Libya. The issue of foreign fighters is a key factor in deepening the conflict further,

and that is why this time it is different than the earlier ones.

On the other hand, Algeria has been trying extremely hard since the election of President Tebboune in December 2019 in Tunisia and has fully supported a peace process and a political solution in Libya. Last June, Egypt did launch a peace initiative in Libya that was supported by France, the US, the United Kingdom, Russia, Greece, Italy, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Bahrain, Algeria, the Arab League, and the African Union.

In November, in the Tunisian town of Garmarth, Libya's rival factions met for another round of a peace talks process brokered by the United Nations Mission in Libya. The goal has been to outline a roadmap to presidential and parliamentary elections in the country.

However, since the fall of the Libyan leader and the takeover of operations by NATO forces, France has had three Presidents, Presidents Sarkozy, Hollande, and the current President Macron, whose foreign affairs minister was President Hollande's defense minister. The situation got worse under President Hollande and today it has become clear that Paris is not shying away from taking a side in the bloody conflict in Libya.

FRANCE'S MILITARY PRESENCE IN LIBYA

In the context of the Libyan civil war, the French have a military presence in the North African state. This is no secret to anyone, despite all efforts by the French ministries of defense and foreign affairs to hide the fact about French military and intelligence presence in Libya. They are supporting Haftar, a dual citizen (Libyan and American), and the ongoing military struggle between his troops and the

legitimate government of Premier Fayaz Mustafa Al-Sarraj, the Chairman of the Presidential Council of Libya and the Head of National Accord Government formed on 17 December 2015 in the country's capital Tripoli.

France has been involved in the Libyan conflict since the beginning of the Libyan uprising against the Al-Qaddafi regime in 2011, which led to the ousting of the Colonel Muammar Al-Qaddafi. France played a significant role in his capture, according to French military sources that were responsible for targeting the Libyan leader's convoy, which led to his capture and summary execution by the rebel forces.

An investigation by the French newspaper, "Le Monde" in February 2016 revealed that France had secretly deployed its special forces and the operational arm, called "service action", of the French General Directorate of External Security (DGSE) for very precise strikes against targets designated as affiliates of the Islamic State in Libya. Its aim was to contain the eventual development of the IS Organization threat in Libya.

Although Paris never acknowledged officially providing weapons, training, intelligence, and Special Forces assistance to Khalifa Haftar, it seems that Paris had been involved probably since 2015 in training Haftar's military forces. Paris, under the orders of its Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian, currently minister of foreign affairs, had decided that Khalifa Haftar would be Libya's next strongman to rule the country. Yet the latest developments on the ground are showing the opposite.⁴ The death of three undercover French soldiers in a helicopter crash in Libya in 2016 while conducting an operation against an "Islamist" group suddenly revealed France's secret presence in Libya.

⁴"Haftar Losing Battles In Libya's Civil War", *The Media Line*, 23 December 2020.

On the other hand, Khalifa Haftar has made no secret of the deal with France nor about the modern weaponry he had received from Paris and the UAE during his debacle march to Tripoli in Spring 2019. This was despite a U.N. arms embargo on Libya. In fact, Khalifa Haftar's spokesman revealed at a press conference that a French naval force had docked at the Sidra oil terminal with the specific task of protecting the oil fields from attacks by Islamists or by forces loyal to the Tripoli Government.

The spokesman said that the French task force was composed of French military officers specializing in aviation and that their number was in the dozens. He noted that the French contingent had emptied the port's water storage containers to fill them with fuel. He further elaborated that Haftar's forces enjoyed Emirati, Egyptian, and French support mainly in the form of intelligence assistance and special forces stationed in Al-Kharruba base (east of Benghazi, in the middle of Cyrenaica), six kilometers from a separate Libyan military base.

As the situation has unfolded in the Arab press, France's stance on the Libyan conflict is unclear. One of President Macron's first diplomatic initiatives as president in 2017 was to invite the two competing heads of government in Libya, Fayaz Al-Sarraj (Government of National Accord) and Haftar (Libyan National Army), to try to broker a power-sharing deal.

Now, as Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian was the architect of the "behind Haftar" strategy, he has convinced president Macron that he should bet on Haftar rather than on Al-Sarraj. France is the second importer of Libyan oil and this could be tied to Paris' align-

ment with the Emirati, Saudi, and Egyptian regimes, to whom it has sold billions of dollars of weapons and who back Haftar.

The three Arab countries distrust Al-Sarraj's Tripoli-based government because of the support it receives from Turkey and Qatar. Also, according to French reasoning, the conflict in Libya relates to the fight against "Islamic" terrorism in the Sahara-Sahel belt and the continued struggle against terrorism at home, and, more importantly, to fight political Islam in the region.

Backed by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Egypt, the "strongman" of the east recently is facing a challenge from Aquilla Salah,⁵ the head of the eastern Libyan parliament in Tobruk. Khalifa Haftar feels emboldened by the support of important regional players, or proxy players, who are giving him legitimacy, France is said to be one of them, although Paris publicly denies supporting Khalifa Haftar.

On the ground, however, the situation is far from certain. Khalifa Haftar has urged his troops to inflict "an even harder" lesson on forces loyal to the country's internationally recognized government. They have put up a counter-offensive in the south and east, despite a fragile cease fire that exists between the Libyan armed rivals. Khalifa Haftar's militias, however, have violated the agreement for the fourth time since it was declared last month.

Then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy, in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, fully supported his country in the 2011 NATO-coalition military intervention in Libya.⁶ Thus, France as a pivotal European state ended up with the

⁵ "France Concedes Haftar In Libya Is A 'Liability'", *Anatolian Agency*, 6 July 2020.

⁶ "Obama scolds Sarkozy over Libya", *TheLocal.fr*, <https://www.thelocal.fr/20160311/obama-scolds-sarkozy-over-libya>, 11 March 2016.



The 2011 NATO-coalition military intervention in Libya

The French approach towards its allies in the region was full of rhetorical and cautionary discourses, and never towards “regime change,” despite the overwhelming lack of legitimacy and credibility of those regimes.

decisions made by super-powers that aligned with the national security interests of the non-Arab regional power countries like Turkey and Israel in the eastern Mediterranean. In 2008, the Mediterranean Union became a potential instrument of the dear and individual efforts of President Sarkozy who attempted to accelerate the process across neighboring countries. This project was fruitless⁷ because of the high stake of heterogeneous strategic interests of fifteen different Mediterranean countries including Libya and Turkey.

In the face of France’s realpolitik stance on the MENA region before and during the Arab uprisings, Paris was accused of

acting “hypocritically” by collaborating with authoritarian and corrupted regimes. However, considering President Sarkozy’s relations with the Libyan leader,⁸ France adopted a leading role in the military and intelligence intervention in Libya in 2011. Thus, the French approach towards its allies in the region was full of rhetorical and cautionary discourses, and never towards “regime change,” despite the overwhelming lack of legitimacy and credibility of those regimes.

The reaction of Paris to the popular revolts in Tunisia and Egypt was bound by a “wait-and-see” approach despite growing opposition towards the Arab regimes. For instance, Madame Al-

⁷ “25 Years Of The Barcelona Process”, *Union For The Mediterranean*, 2020.

⁸ “Former French Leader Nicolas Sarkozy Haunted By Gaddafi’s Spy”, *TRT World*, 25 February 2019.

Al-Qaddafi warned that, "All foreign intervention in Chad will be considered by us as an act of war against Libya."

liot Marie, then-foreign minister in President Sarkozy's cabinet, had made the remarkable suggestion to equip Tunisian police with metal sticks and modern helmets during the Jasmine uprising against President Ben Ali. According to Mme. Secretary Alliot Marie who offered French "savoir-fer" before the MPs in the French Parliament in January 2011, it was a law-and-order matter for the police to resolve.⁹

Libya had occupied a particular place in French foreign policy, when viewed from the historical relations between the two countries. Paris' foreign policy became trapped between two ways of thinking, like the diplomats in Quai d'Orsay or like the thinkers and the designers in Parisian Ivy schools (l'E.N.A. and Sciences Po), universities and think-tanks. Thus, the Gaullists and the Atlanticists guided Paris' foreign policy orientation.

The ideologue Atlanticists, however, have defended a foreign policy close to Washington rather than seeking an independent foreign policy, pushing for an idealist E.U. common foreign policy.¹⁰ This was so, for instance, when the U.S. was searching for allies to intervene in Syria in 2013. Paris did not hesitate to participate with an international

coalition who were implementing Paris' foreign policy. This was under a "socialist" president and foreign affairs minister Laurent Fabius.

FRANCE AND LIBYA FACE OFF IN CHAD'S CIVIL WAR

Chad's civil war (1979-1986) was turning into an international confrontation, with France and Libya as major foreign players. Libyan-backed rebels of former President Goukhouni Woddei swept down from the North in a major attempt to overthrow the government of Hassan Habré. To stop them, France, as the former colonial power in the northern central Sahelian African country, has moved quickly to supply President Habré with modern weapons, troop trucks, fuel, and spare parts, as well as an undisclosed number of "civilian experts." President François Mitterrand warned on a trip to Cameroon that, "France must repeat, that it cannot accept reckless actions that would make Chad fall prey to foreign adventures."¹¹

Libyan leader Muammar Al-Qaddafi's next move was unknown, but some thought he may send his troops into Chad just as he did in 1980.¹² "We have no intention of intervening," he

⁹ "French Foreign Minister Alliot-Marie Quits Over Tunisia", *BBC News*, 27 February 2011.

¹⁰ "Libya's Lessons On Syria", *Foreign Policy*, 4 September 2013.

¹¹ William Echikson, "France and Libya facing off in Chad's civil war", *Christian Science Monitor*, 8 July 1983.

¹² "Libya/Chad: Beyond Political Influence", *Crisis Group*, 23 March 2010.

told the French newspaper "Le Matin." But Al-Qaddafi warned that, "All foreign intervention in Chad will be considered by us as an act of war against Libya," and he added that he thinks the United States is trying to broaden the conflict by pushing Zaire, Sudan, and Egypt to intervene.¹³

But the French were also worried about Libyan adventurism and a possible escalation on Al-Qaddafi's part. The Libyan leader had long talked of creating a "Pan-Islamic"¹⁴ empire stretching across the Sahara and French officials said installing Mr. Woddei as Chad's leader would be a first step toward this goal. Such a design would threaten Egypt and Sudan and both countries have joined France in announcing that they are prepared to "take measures" if the Libyan-backed intervention of Chad continues.

Libyan meddling in sub-Saharan Africa also scares Francophone West Africa. But most of West Africa is looking to France for protection from the Libyans. According to the French weekly magazine "Le Point," the President of Guinea, Ahmed Sekou Touré, phoned the Élysée Palace in Paris last week and reminded a top adviser to President Mitterrand, "France has its responsibilities with regard to its former colonies." Politically, Chad is a sad story. Since it became independent in 1960, it has lapsed into civil war after civil war. The basic division is between the Muslim north and the Christian and animist south. But personal and tribal animosities played a larger role in recent developments.

Considering Chad's history and its rambunctious northern neighbor, however, even

the French admit that intervention this time around is no more likely to create a lasting peace than the last time.

LIBYANS TALK AND TALK BUT DO NOT BUY

The recent relations between the two countries can be summed up in three symbolic dates, representing the milestones of a realpolitik that is now closing in like a trap on Libya as much as on France.

- 2007, a Sarkozy-Gaddafi "honeymoon" period, as a U.S. ambassador put it.
- 2010, the moment of lost illusions has arrived, as demonstrated by the unvarnished comment of a French diplomat: "The Libyans, they talk, they talk but they don't buy anything (from us)".¹⁵
- 2011, war - at France's initiative.

The French highlight how Al-Qaddafi was so recently, unambiguously and largely unsuccessfully courted for his wealth before suddenly becoming a despot. He was worthy of odium against whom Paris has led what interior minister and Sarkozy insider, Claude Guéant, controversially called a "crusade." The outcome of this appears increasingly uncertain.

The ambassador describes, not without irony, the "honeymoon" former President Nicolas Sarkozy enjoyed with the Libyan leader during a visit by the French president to Tripoli on July 25th, 2007. The title of the cable is unambiguous: "President Sarkozy's Trip to Libya sets High hopes for Lucrative Contracts."¹⁶

¹³ "Mot Clé: Zaire 1971-1997", *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 2020.

¹⁴ Kim Willsher, "France's Foreign Minister Did Speak To Tunisian President While On Holiday", *the Guardian*, 16 February 2011.

¹⁵ "Special Briefing Via Telephone with Richard Norland, U.S. Ambassador To Libya", *U.S. Embassy In Libya*, 5 June 2020.

¹⁶ "French 'honeymoon' to war: what US cables said about French courtship of Gaddafi", *Mediapart*, 30 March 2011.

The ambassador continued, "Sarkozy's effort to derive real commercial gain from his newfound relationship with Libyan leader Al-Qaddafi is partly intended to make up ground believed lost to the United States and others since Libya's rehabilitation in late 2003."¹⁷

The cable mentioned the signing of an agreement between the Libyan regime and Serge Dassault, head of Dassault Group, the French civil and military aeronautics firm. This was for the renovation of twelve Dassault Mirage-F1 fighter planes. These is the very same Dassault whose jets are today bombing Libya. That diplomatic cable also mentioned several other framework trade agreements signed during the French president's visit. For example, this includes French nuclear conglomerate Areva, which is expected to benefit from the warmer relations between France and Libya, as do other French groups such as the petrol company Total and engineering man-

ufacturer Alstom in the transport sector. According to the U.S cable,

"Franco-Libyan commitments to build a "nuclear reactor" for water desalination and to cooperate in the civilian nuclear field were clearly closely monitored and were the subject of several U.S. State Department reports in 2007 and 2008."

Bab Al-Aziziya is the site that was bombed by U.S. planes in April 1986, at a time when Libya topped the list of rogue states. Ever since the bombing, Al-Qaddafi had displayed it as a kind of revolutionary trophy. The bomb impacts remain visible on the walls of the compound.

Although known for his strong pro-U.S. approach, it was in this compound that, in 2007, Sarkozy made a number of trade agreements with Libya, posing for photographs with Colonel Al-Qaddafi in front of the shell-ridden walls.¹⁸



Emmanuel Macron

¹⁷ "From 'Honeymoon' To War: What US Cables Said About French Courtship Of Gaddafi", *Mediapart*, 30 March 2011.

¹⁸ "Sarkozy Meets Gaddafi, Defense Partnership Sealed", *Reuters*, 25 July 2007.

France is pushing for regional military support in the Sahel, which is part of its national security imperatives and hegemony. But the proposed special forces are causing more harm than good. The U.S. special forces are doing the heavy lifting in terms of intelligence, sharing their information with Algeria, a pivotal state in the Sahel and North Africa with Egypt and Morocco.

Subsequently, Paris is showing concerns about Algeria that it is in a historical turning point, notably in the aftermath of the purge operation launched by the military in Algiers against the so-called "French connection" in

Algiers. This was led by businessmen and former intelligence generals. It feels like Paris and Algiers have been enjoying a love/hate relationship trajectory and this is going to end. Certainly, it will have a direct echo with France's role in Libya, the military in Algiers are not going to let Paris use Libya and eventually the Sahel as France's rear base.

The situation of turmoil in Libya and the Sahel needs a new paradigm that will be set tactically and strategically and adding to the turmoil is the fact that thousands of migrants are crossing to Europe.

CONCLUSION

Paris does not have much room left in the aftermath of the fall of all the western cities into the hands of the GNA forces. Yet, Paris does have to review its foreign policy in Libya and "moonlight" for solutions with the main super and regional powers. This is instead of pursuing its enigmatic foreign policy as in President Macron's double-game tactic which he is playing in Yemen, Syria and Libya. The new military dynamics developed after the major developments on the ground and all of these peace talks initiatives that are trying to reach a breakthrough. Developments following the election of a new administration in the U.S would be a game changer in the dynamics of the nine-year Libyan armed conflict, which would make it even more complex for Paris's diplomatic contradiction.

Paris has always played a double-game in the Libya crisis since its military engagement in April 2011. It is an absolute paradox that shows the delinquency of its timid military action and diplomacy, a paradoxical foreign policy that is personified by Foreign Affairs Minister Le Drian, who was also President Hollande's defense minister. On the other hand, Emmanuel Dupuy, the president of IPSE, Paris, said, "France's military presence becomes a de facto element of increasing insecurity for our own troops." Adopting a more constructive approach in spite of absolutely taking a side could contribute to further isolation and jeopardize France's national security. Nevertheless, the result sounds worrisome and is shaping Paris' concern about the Jihadists' dispersion from the Sahel¹⁹

President Macron has remained strangely silent too over the fact that all parties to the

conflict do not respect the arms embargo on Libya and that all the foreign parties mentioned support armed groups that have committed grave human rights violations. The two camps, the Government of National Accord, based in Tripoli, and the Libyan National Army, led by Hiftar and based in Benghazi are both supported by foreign combatants, notably from Syria and the Sudan. Syria has also intervened and sent a military plane to support Hiftar, probably at Russia's request.

Here is another enigmatic element of French diplomacy since President Macron took office in May 2017. "Macron advocated for smooth diplomacy, which is turning into inaction," Prof. Emmanuel Dupuy said. In this complex geopolitical game, France once again has thus systematically missed its second chance after the Libyan fiasco in 2011.

Paris' intelligence and military presence in Libya, like in Syria, has become irrelevant. This is, while their presence officially was aimed to fight against the IS organization and illegal migration and human trafficking, it turned to support of a renegade military commander. This renegade military commander's se forces are committing war crimes as a 14-month battle for the military conquest of the Libyan capital and the overthrow a legitimate government recognized by international governments including the French government! France also does this in Syria, supporting separatists (Democratic Syrian Forces), which proves how limited its vision and influence in Libya and Syria are.

The "moral-politik" principle of France's foreign policy is damaging the credibility of the country and its foreign policy determinants and principles, France's *Droits-de-l'homme*

19 "Terrorism: France's International Action", *France Diplomacy - Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/security-disarmament-and-non-proliferation/terrorism-france-s-international-action/>, 2020.

(Human rights).²⁰ An imperative is questioning Paris' independent foreign policy in the MENA region, notably in the Maghreb, while respecting the international law and non-governmental organizations like Mdm (Médecins du Monde) and MSF (Médecins sans Frontières), and the ongoing conditions in Libya and Syria, won't let Paris revive President Sarkozy's Mediterranean Union project either. The recent eastern Mediterranean Basin's offshore natural gas prospects have roused tensions between the five main countries that Paris sees as potential allies to contain Ankara's exploration projects and role.

France needs to overcome the void between its words and deeds, as to be seen in the case with Libya. France should cease turning a blind eye to grave violations there for the sake of preserving its strategic or economic interests. Macron's selective indignation over Libya harms both his credibility and the values that he claims are cardinal principles of his diplomacy, as well as the fight against impunity and the return to stability in a country

that has already mourned many atrocities and wars.

The strategic landscape is evolving so quickly that President Macron should take the future of the new Libya into consideration. The true evolution, however, is driven by the Turks who have put themselves in a very strong position with the Italians and the Germans, negotiating overtly. The Turks are also coordinating with the Americans and holding the Russians back, while imposing new imperatives in NATO. However, when negotiating with the French, one must speak to his adversaries/enemies and not to his friends. All the tensions and contradictory ambitions of super and regional powers depend on the priority of their interests. For instance, the fight against the ISO is no longer a valid argument since Paris is siding with the Saudis and the Emirates who are financing Al-Madkhalis.²¹ Yet, it sounds inevitable that President Macron's Libya policy is better off with a cemented realpolitik, rather than a quarantined irrealpolitik.²²

²⁰ Solene Jeanjean, "France's reaction to the Arab Spring", *Bilgesam*, 21 December 2011.

²¹ "Addressing The Rise Of Libya's Madkhali-Salafis", *Crisis Group*, 25 April 2019.

²² Védrine, H., "Le Monde du Défi", *Pluriel*, 29 March 2017.



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