

SHOT:

A bi-partisan group of House Foreign Affairs members call for the Justice Dept. to launch war crimes investigation into Libyan strongman recently embraced by President Trump.

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/16/politics/trump-libya-haftar-doj-letter/index.html>

CHASER:

Said Libyan strongman days later inks \$2 million lobbying contract, per Politico.

FIRST IN PI — LIBYAN MILITIA LEADER'S FORCES HIRE THEIR OWN

WASHINGTON LOBBYIST: *The Libyan National Army, the militia group led by Khalifa Haftar, has hired a lobbying firm following President Donald Trump's unexpected endorsement of Haftar last month. Stephen Payne and Brian Ettinger of Linden Government Solutions will lobby in Washington on behalf of Haftar's forces as well as assist with "international coalition building" and public relations, according to a copy of the contract shared with PI. The one-year contract, which will be filed with the Justice Department, is worth \$2 million.*

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Background:

##Libya has been in varying degree of turmoil since the the NATO-backed revolution toppled Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, but experts had seen reasons for optimism. UN-sponsored talks scheduled for mid-April aimed to produce a power-sharing arrangement and ultimately elections.

##On April 14, Gen. Khalifa Haftar and his self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) launched a surprise attack on Tripoli in an effort to topple Libya's UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

##On April 15, President Trump made a surprise phone call to Haftar, praising his anti-terrorism efforts. The call sent a message that the U.S. was reversing its support of the GNA, and instead joining Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Russia in backing Haftar.

##Haftar failed to take Tripoli, and now the bloody conflict threatens to drag on and on. More than 450 dead already. It has become a proxy war among foreign countries, oil production is threatened, and the chaos is creating a big opening for ISIS.

Testimony last week before House Foreign Affairs Committee (transcript attached), whose members want the Justice Dept. to investigate Haftar for war crimes:

Haftar's attack has really opened up this political vacuum. He's attacking the Misratan militias that, as we've heard, attacked the Islamic State in Sirte. I was embedded with those militias in 2016 during the battle. I saw the sacrifices they made. They received American counterterrorism support. What's happening now is because of this civil war the militias on both sides are more focused on fighting each other than containing the Islamic State, so it's a -- it's a gift for the Islamic State.

Oil production: <https://www.ft.com/content/bab46eb0-766a-11e9-bbad-7c18c0ea0201>

On the anti-terrorism issue: <https://warontherocks.com/2019/05/libyas-coming-forever-war-why-backing-one-militia-against-another-is-not-the-solution/>

Refugees/humanitarian crisis: <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/16979/tunisia-prepares-to-host-refugees-fleeing-libya>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/15/fighting-in-libya-will-create-huge-number-of-refugees-pm-warns>

Sorry for the unsolicited email, but this might make for a good media/tech/politics piece. The Russian-backed side trying to overthrow Tripoli appears to be waging sophisticated social media war. Self-serving pitch, as I'm working for the UN-backed Govt of National Accord (the good guys), but these are independent sources/studies:

See here:

<https://twitter.com/MaryFitzger/status/1127475770811658241>

And here:

https://www.cesi-italia.org/contents/Analisi/Information%20warfare%20in%20Libya%20The%20online%20advance%20of%20Khalifa%20Haftar_1.pdf

There are two types of online propaganda being conducted:

- One - Arabic language news and blog websites – who in the period analysed, published over 15,000 articles citing Haftar – probably from software that automatically publishes articles online from various sources.
- Two - They have identified a series of fake bot accounts who have all posted pro-Haftar messages - many the same text and same account characteristics that suggest they are fake.

Two key takeaways - Some of the sites publishing very high numbers of articles on Haftar are monetised and earning money through Google's ads servers. According to the report, the sites also index well in Google results for Arabic/Libya news – again Google has been very vocal about clamping down on this. Google has publicly said many times they are clamping down on fake sites publishing dis/misinfo to ensure they can't earn money/rank in their search engines.

Arabic language content accounts for over 75% of all content published relating to Khalifa Haftar from the period analysed.

34.1% of all content published originated from Saudi Arabia, 7.3% the US, 6.9% Libya, 5.2% Qatar, 4.9% Italy, 4.6% Egypt, 4.3% the UAE, 4.3% the UK and 3.2% from France – remaining 25% from countries with concentration under 3%.

The fake Twitter accounts all published similar pro-Haftar content – sometimes the exact same text. Accounts were assessed to have been set up to look like UK users as their profile photos were often UK landmarks. From French accounts were also identified.

The language used in the tweets constructs the following positive messages about Haftar - man of order in Libya, struggling with Daesh, al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups in Libya.

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