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Egypt´s proxy warfare strategy in the Libyan civil war

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Abstract

This Bachelor´s Degree dissertation analyzes Egypt´s post-2013 indirect intervention in the Libyan civil war using Haftar´s LNA as a proxy to advance its own foreign policy interests. Specifically, it addresses the factors motivating its involvement in the crisis, the Egypt-Haftar proxy relationship itself and the difficulties it has entailed. The necessity of securing a very porous western border, its rediscovered anti-Political Islam stance, and economic benefits in the form of subsidized energy sources stand out as the main drivers of a Libya policy that has remained vulnerable to the intricacies and complexities of the Egypt-Haftar proxy relationship. For one, the divergence of objectives between the two has eroded the relationship, particularly its utility for Cairo. Moreover, the involvement of other state actors acting as sponsors, namely the UAE, France, and Russia, has contributed to the LNA´s resource independence and, consequently, negatively impacted Egypt´s ability to influence Haftar´s actions.

Key words: Egypt, Libya, civil war, proxy, Haftar, LNA, Political Islam.

Resumen

Este Trabajo de Fin de Grado analiza la intervención indirecta de Egipto en la guerra civil libia desde 2013 usando a Haftar y su Ejército Nacional Libio (LNA) como proxy para avanzar sus propios intereses de política exterior. Específicamente, analiza los factores que motivan la intervención egipcia, la relación proxy entre Egipto y Haftar, y las dificultades que ésta ha supuesto. La necesidad de asegurar una frontera occidental porosa, su recuperada postura anti-islam político, y los posibles beneficios económicos en forma de fuentes energéticas subvencionadas destacan como los principales motores de una política que se ha mantenido vulnerable a las complejidades de la relación proxy entre Egipto y Haftar. Por un lado, la divergencia de objetivos ha erosionado la relación, particularmente su utilidad para Egipto. Asimismo, la intervención de Emiratos Árabes Unidos, Francia y Rusia ha contribuido a la independencia de recursos del LNA, mermando la capacidad de Egipto de influenciar las acciones de su proxy sobre el terreno.

Palabras clave: Egipto, Libia, guerra civil, proxy, Haftar, Ejército Nacional Libio, islam político.

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Timeline of the Libyan Civil War

2011	February 15th	Arab Spring uprisings begin in Benghazi, Cyrenaica
	February 27th	National Transitional Council (NTC) is established
	March 19th	Beginning of NATO-led intervention in favor of rebel forces
	August 3rd	National Transitional Council (NTC) promulgates interim constitution
	August 20th	Muammar Qaddafi is overthrown
	October 20th	Muammar Qaddafi is executed
2012	July 7th	Parliamentary elections held for the General National Congress (GNC).
	September 11th	Ansar al-Sharia launched military attack on U.S. consulate and CIA station in Benghazi
2013	May 5th	The GNC approves the Political Isolation Law (PIL). Rise in militia violence.
	December 30th	The GNC extends its mandate for an additional year.
2014	February 14th	Failed attempted coup led by Khalifa Haftar
	May 16th	Launch of Operation Dignity against Islamist militias in Benghazi
	June 25th	Elections held for the House of Representatives
	July 13th	Launch of Operation Dawn
	November 6th	The Constitutional Chamber of the Libyan Supreme Court rules the House of Representatives elections unconstitutional
2015	February 15th	Egypt airstrikes ISIS training locations in Derna in retaliation for the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians
	December 17th	Members of the GNC and the House of Representatives sign the Libyan Political Agreement in Skhirat, Morocco, establishing the Government of National Accord (GNA)
2016	February 20th	LNA launches Operation Blood of the Martyrs to capture the city of Benghazi

	May 12th	Start of the Battle of Sirte between ISIS and the loyalist forces of the GNA
2017	December 7th	Haftar declares the Libyan Political Agreement void
2018	May 7th	Beginning of the Battle of Derna
	May 29th	Haftar and Sarraj meet at the Paris Peace Conference and conclude a tentative pathway for new elections, that are never organized
2019	January 16th	LNA begins the Southern Libya Offensive
	April 4th	LNA launches Operation Flood of Dignity, also referred to as the Western Libya Offensive
	November 28th	The GNA and Turkey sign maritime and security agreement providing for Turkish military support for the GNA
2020	January 5th	Turkey deploys troops to Libya
	January 19th	International Berlin Conference on Libya
	End of January	LNA reasserts control over western ports and establishes an oil blockade
	April 14th	GNA forces with Turkish air support recapture several western coastal cities and extend GNA control westwards
	April 27th	Haftar claims a "popular mandate" to govern Libya
	June 4th	GNA forces retake full control of Tripoli
	June 6th	GNA forces launch offensive to capture Sirte from the LNA
	June 7th	LNA forces propose a ceasefire backed by Egypt, also known as the Cairo Declaration. The GNA rejects it.
	June 21st	Egypt declares Sirte a "red line"
	September 28th	Egypt hosts military inter-Libyan talks under UN sponsorship
	October 23rd	Ceasefire agreement
	November 9th	Libyan Political Dialogue is launched
2021	March 10th	The House of Representatives approves the formation of an interim unity government
	March 15th	Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh is appointed interim Prime Minister
	April 30th	End of this Bachelor´s Degree dissertation

Glossary

Al-Qaeda: transnational umbrella militant Islamist organization that emerged out of the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s. It operates as a network of Salafi jihadists and looks to overthrow the Western-corrupted "apostate" regimes of the Middle East and replace them with "truly" Islamic governments. It has favored a "far enemy" strategy and thus has targeted Western countries, especially the United States.

Ansar al-Islam: Egyptian militant Islamist group aligned with Al-Qaeda and active in the Western Desert.

Al-Morabitoon: militant Islamist group likely based in the Libyan city of Derna, Cyrenaica. It is very active in Mali and other African countries but has claimed no attacks in the Sinai Peninsula.

Ansar al-Sharia: Libyan Salafist Islamist militia aligned with Al-Qaeda. Established during the 2011 revolution, it controlled parts of Benghazi during the Libya war until its dissolution in May 2017.

Bedouins: nomadic Arab Tribes that have historically inhabited North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Levant and Upper Mesopotamia. In Egypt, they mostly reside in the Sinai Peninsula and in the suburbs of Cairo and have traditionally been subjected to political and economic marginalization by the central government.

Coptic Christians: members of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria, the principal Christian denomination in Egypt, a majority Sunni Muslim country, where they make up around 10% of the total population (approximately 9.5 million).

Freedom and Justice Party (FJP): Egyptian Islamist political party with strong links with the Muslim Brotherhood. It was banned and dissolved in 2014 following Morsi´s ouster, though it reportedly continues to operate underground.

General National Congress (GNC): legislative body of Libya following the parliamentary elections on July 2012. It was tasked with conducting Libya´s democratic

transition, it was meant to give way to the democratically elected House of Representatives, which took power in August 2014. However, it has continued to operate though it is no longer the internationally recognized parliament of Libya.

Green Movement: 2009 Iranian anti-government protests following the presidential elections that demanded the removal of the then President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, from office. It is also referred to as Persian Awakening or Persian Spring.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): regional intergovernmental organization formally established in 1981 that includes all Arab states of the Persian Gulf except for Iraq, that is, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Jund al-Islam: Egyptian militant Islamist group active in Northern Sinai and aligned with Al-Qaeda. It has condemned Wilayat Sinai´s targeting of Muslim civilians.

Justice and Construction Party: also known as the Justice and Development Party, it is a political party in Libya with strong links with the Muslim Brotherhood. It was officially founded in March 2012, to run the parliamentary elections.

Hassm: Egyptian militant Islamist group active in the Sinai Peninsula and reportedly off-shooting from the Muslim Brotherhood. It announced its existence on July 16th, 2016, after claiming an attack in Tamiya, Fayoum, with two police casualties.

House of Representatives (HoR): internationally recognized legislature of Libya following the 2014 parliamentary elections. It relocated to Tobruk following the failed coup attempt led by Khalifa Haftar to take over the capital, Tripoli.

ISIS: the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State (IS) or Daesh (its Arab acronym) is a transnational militant Islamist group operating primarily in Iraq and Syria. Rooted in Salafi-jihadism, it emerged from the remnants of al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) in the late 1990s, though it gained prominence in 2014 after its capture of Mosul and the Sinjar massacre. In June 2014, it declared that the territory they held at the time, which included substantial parts of Iraq

and Syria, was a caliphate, and al-Baghdadi, ISIS leader until his death in 2019, proclaimed himself the caliph of Muslims everywhere.

Khalifa Haftar: Libyan field marshal and Qaddafi-era general that commands the forces loyal to the internationally recognized legislature in Tobruk, the so-called Libyan National Army.

Libyan National Army (LNA): militia group loyal to Haftar composed by a sector of Libya´s military forces nominally declared a military force under his command by the Tobruk House of Representatives.

Liwaa al-Thawra: Egyptian militant Islamist group active in the Sinai Peninsula reportedly off-shooting from the Muslim Brotherhood. It announced its formation on August 21, 2016, after claiming an attack on a security point in Monofeya with two police casualties.

Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*): transnational Sunni Islamist organization founded in 1928 in Egypt by Hassan al-Banna. Its presence spans across the Middle East, and it also has affiliated branches in Africa and Europe.

National Forces Alliance (NFA): Libyan political alliance created in February 2012 comprising a myriad of political organizations, NGOs and independents. Usually portrayed as liberal, it calls for democracy and moderate Islam.

National Transitional Council (NTC): transitional government of Libya since the overthrow of Qaddafi in 2011 until it handed power to the General National Congress in August 2012 following the July 2012 parliamentary elections.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO): intergovernmental political and military alliance established on April 4th, 1949. It includes 28 European countries, Canada and the United States, and comprises a system of collective defense whereby member states agree to mutual defense in case of an attack against one or several of its members.

Operation Dawn: offensive launched in July 2014 by a loose coalition of mainstream and radical Islamists to retake Tripoli and push back on Haftar´s LNA military advances.

Operation Dignity: also known as the Battle of Benghazi, it was an offensive launched on May 16th, 2014, by the LNA against Islamist militias in Benghazi.

Operation Flood of Dignity: also known as the Western Libya campaign, it was an offensive launched on April 4th, 2019, by the Libyan National Army (LNA) to capture the western region of Libya and the capital, Tripoli, under control of the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA).

Shura Council of Islamic Youth: coalition of radical Islamist militias that controlled Derna, a port city in Eastern Libya, since 2011 until the Battle of Derna, in 2018, against the Libyan National Army (LNA). It was subsequently dissolved on 11 May 2018 and replaced by the so-called Derna Protection Force (DPF).

Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF): Egyptian statutory body comprising between 20 and 25 senior military officers. Currently headed by President Abdul Fatah al-Sisi, it assumed power during the transitional period that followed President Mubarak´s ouster in 2011 and was later reconstituted in 2014.

***Tamarod* movement:** Egyptian grassroots movement founded to mobilize opposition to the Morsi administration. It called for a vote of no confidence and early presidential elections. They participated in the 2013 popular uprising that culminated in the al-Sisi-led military coup.

Toubou: non-Arab ethnic group, traditionally distributed across the central Sahara and the north-central Sahel, in modern-day northern Chad, northeastern Niger and southern Libya. In Libya, they are reportedly aligned with Operation Dignity.

Tuareg: non-Arab ethnic group, once nomads and currently distributed across the Sahara Desert, including Mali, Niger, Libya, Algeria and Chad. In Libya, they are reportedly aligned with Libyan Dawn.

Wilayat Sinai: militant Islamist group active in the Sinai Peninsula since 2011. Formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), it pledged allegiance to ISIS in November 2014 and adopted its current name, meaning Sinai Province.

I.   Introduction

1. Motives and purpose

This dissertation aims to explore the dynamics of indirect intervention in another state´s civil war using a proxy, notably the factors that account for the involvement in the first place, as well as the intricacies of the proxy relationship and the difficulties it may entail. Moreover, it discusses the role of political determination at the regime level as a foreign policy driver. As 2021 marks the ten-year anniversary of the Arab Spring, it seems like an appropriate time to address the changes, desired or not, both domestic and regional, that the uprisings brought about. Lynch (2017) reflects on the Arab Spring´s unintended consequences and triggered dynamics. For one, he explains, the uprisings gave way to the, very internationalized, civil wars in Syria, Yemen, and Libya, as well as to an overall increase in regional interventionism and proxy warfare therein.

Around the world, internationalized intrastate conflict seems more and more prevalent, and the resort to proxy warfare is recurrent. The Middle East´s current landscape, in particular, allows for an in-depth analysis of the complexities of a war strategy carried through proxy. At the same time, it seems that the qualification of a local actor as a proxy is sometimes done in a rushed and simplistic manner. The comparative reality on the ground seems, in contrast, quite nuanced. Similarly, the advantages of a proxy warfare strategy are seemingly highlighted much too often, whereas less attention is given to its potential drawbacks. This dissertation offers the opportunity to thoroughly address the theoretical concept of proxy, together with its different models and uses, as well as to examine the real-life complications that may arise. Specifically, this analysis focuses on objective divergence and resource independence as determinants that may effectively hinder the sponsoring state´s ability to influence the proxy´s actions on the ground.

Another unforeseen and very visible consequence of the Arab Spring was the creation of an informal alliance whose binding element was an anti-Islamism, and anti-Muslim Brotherhood, stance (Lynch, 2017). Abu Dhabi and, to a lesser extent, Riyadh, launched a counterrevolutionary, anti-political Islam campaign aimed at reversing the politics of the Arab Spring and ensuring the establishment of politically alike governments in the

region. Egypt effectively joined the counterrevolutionary camp after the 2013 military coup. Such a stance seems not only to drive foreign policy in certain stances, but also to impregnate security narratives. This dissertation provides an opportunity to evaluate the conceptualization of political Islam as a threat to regime survival as well as a driver for foreign policy and, potentially, intervention.

Both the aforementioned dynamics, together with previous knowledge of Egyptian politics and intrigue for the short-lived democratic attempt of the Morsi administration and the military, and mass-supported, military coup that led to its demise, justify the choice of case study for this Bachelor´s Degree dissertation. Since 2013, Cairo has been following a counterrevolutionary foreign policy in terms of avoiding the establishment of Islamist, pro-Muslim Brotherhood governments in its neighborhoods, that is mostly visible in its involvement in the Libyan crisis. At the same time, its Libya policy has been mostly carried indirectly through Qaddafi-era general Khalifa Haftar, and the militia it commands, the LNA. A thorough study of the relationship between the two will hopefully provide some insight on the qualification of a local actor as a proxy. Moreover, the difference objectives pursued by Egypt and by Haftar, as well as the latter´s multiple sources of funds, weapons and support, perfectly illustrate the aforementioned and well-theorized determinants of objective divergence and resource independence that influence the individual proxy relationship.

2. Methodology

This dissertation follows a case study method that allows for an in-depth analysis of a crucial and recurrent issue in international relations, proxy warfare, within the defined context of Egypt´s post-2013 involvement in the Libyan war. It relies mostly in qualitative, secondary data sources, including academic books, articles, think tank publications, as well as news articles from regional and international networks to illustrate observed dynamics. In particular, the research I have attempted to build on for the purpose of this dissertation stems from three main books: *Proxy War: The Least Bad Option* (2019) by Tyrone L. Groh, which conforms the basis of my theoretical framework on proxy warfare and its uses; *The Muslim Brotherhood: Evolution of an Islamist Movement*

(2011) by Carrie R. Wickham, which has helped me grasp the different, and extremely nuanced, notions relative to Islamist trends observed in the Middle East, as well as the centrality of the Muslim Brotherhood as a key non-state actor in domestic, and now also regional, politics; and *The New Arab Wars: Uprisings and Anarchy in the Middle East* (2017), by Mark Lynch, which provided me with a comprehensive explanation of the regional dynamics and new logic of alliances that has characterized the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings.

Such preliminary research has been complemented with academic articles from journals specialized either in the field of security or in Middle Eastern studies, including *International Security,* the *Journal of Peace Research,* the *Middle East Journal* or the *International Journal of Middle East Studies,* amongst others. Similarly, this dissertation has relied significantly on academic publications from several think tanks, including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East at the Atlantic Council, the Instituto Per Gli Study Di Politica Internazionale (ISPI) or the Arab Center Washington DC. News sources consulted include *Middle East Eye, Al-Monitor* or *Reuters,* as well as the Tripoli-based *Libya Observer* and the Egyptian *Al-Ahram*.

Additionally, the section dealing with the economic dimension of Egypt´s involvement in the Libyan war draws from quantitative secondary data. Data sources consulted include intergovernmental organizations that address specific aspects of the economic relationship between Egypt and Libya, including the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the International Energy Agency (IEA) and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), as well as the data visualization site Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC) and the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, amongst others. Moreover, the dissertation includes some quantitative data regarding airstrikes carried out in Libyan soil in the last few years, retrieved from several studies by U.S. think tank *New America.*

3. Structure

This dissertation is structured in three parts, including this first introductory one comprised of seven subsections. The first three present the motives, purpose, methodology and structure of this analysis. Subsection four deals with the state of the art, which includes the general context and outcomes of the Arab Spring uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa, Libya´s NATO-led intervention, failed transitional process and impact of sustained foreign meddling, and Egypt´s 2013 coup and subsequent anti-political Islam stance and counterrevolutionary foreign policy. Subsections five and six set out the objectives, research questions and hypothesis. Subsection seven contains the theoretical framework this dissertation builds upon, including the contested concept of proxy warfare, its models and uses, and the conceptualization of Haftar´s LNA as an Egyptian proxy. It also includes the delineation of notions such as Islamism, mainstream or institutional Islamism, political Islam, Salafism and Salafi jihadism, and the definition of the Muslim Brotherhood as the embodiment of political Islam.

The second part of this dissertation contains the analysis and discussion and is also further divided into two main subsections. The first one attempts to account for the factors that motivate Egypt´s involvement in the Libyan war, including the cross-border fueled Sinai insurgency, that has recently extended to other parts of the country, the economic dimension in terms of trade, remittances, and subsidized energy resources and, significantly, the avoidance of an Islamist, pro-Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya that may threaten regime survival. The second one will analyze the difficulties faced by Egypt in its proxy warfare strategy in Libya, notably the conflicting interests between Cairo and Haftar and the latter´s resource independence deriving from both local resources and external support. Lastly, the third part includes the concluding remarks of this dissertation.

4. State of the Art

The Arab Spring, also known as the Arab Awakening, was a series of protests and uprisings that swept Arab countries in late 2010 and 2011. Probably one of the most impactful events in the regional politics of the Middle East, the Arab Spring uprisings were led by democratizing movements rebelling against autocratic and corrupt systems of governance, widespread poverty and rampant inequality.

The Arab Spring caught the world by surprise, as Arab autocracies were widely believed to be remarkably stable and immune to the democratizing trends that had succeeded elsewhere. Across the Arab world, the uprisings were led by grassroots movements that sought increased political participation and social and economic justice (Ardiç, 2012). A wide variety of groups were involved in the protests, including liberal, socialists and Islamists, motivated by the common grievances of corruption, denial of elementary freedoms, poverty, inflation and unemployment (Falk, 2016). However, the uprisings were characterized by the urban youth as the principal actor, as well as by their use of conventional media and ICTs for organizational and awareness-raising purposes (Aboelsoud, Khalifa & Khodair, 2019).

The uprisings started in Tunisia, though some have pointed to the 2009 Green Movement anti-government protests in Iran as the precursor of the Arab Spring (Kurzman, 2012). On December 17th, 2010, a vegetable street vendor called Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in the Tunisian town of Sidi Bouzid after the police seized his stand. Tired of having to pay bribes to local authorities worth more than he earned in a day because they refused to give him a permit, he headed to the municipal office to file a complaint but was not heard (Beaumont, 2011). Frustrated and hopeless, he self-immolated in protest against police corruption, ill-treatment and overall lack of opportunities. Such claims reverberated in Tunisia and the Middle East amidst slogans demanding "bread, freedom and social justice".

His death a couple of days later led to escalating political developments in the form of massive protests challenging the Ben Ali regime. The uprisings spread rapidly across the region to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Enduring demonstrations took place

in Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman and Sudan, and there were also minor protests in Djibouti, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Mauritania and Western Sahara.

Although the causes motivating the uprisings were common ground, its results varied greatly. Overall, the Arab Spring had limited results, with few autocratic regimes being toppled and their incumbents replaced (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015). Tunisia, Egypt and Libya experienced regime change with the ousting of Ben Ali, Mubarak and Qaddafi respectively. However, while Tunisia did achieve a sort of incremental transition towards a more democratic form of governance (Falk, 2016), Egypt′s move towards democracy in the hands of the Muslim Brotherhood political branch, the Freedom and Justice party, triggered a relentless counterrevolutionary reaction that resulted in the restoration of an even more repressive form of authoritarianism. In Libya, the uprisings soon led to a protracted bloody struggle between opposition groups and the Qaddafi regime. Post-conflict attempts to implement a transitional plan towards durable, democratic institutions failed and in 2014 the country spiraled into an ongoing, full-scale civil war. Yemen and Syria descended into civil wars that continue to this day, while in Bahrain the uprisings were quickly and violently repressed by the regime with the support of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Husayn, 2015).

In short, the Arab Spring uprisings varied greatly in intensity and outcome across different countries. Such differences have been attributed to distinct national circumstances, notably the role of the military establishments, as well as foreign meddling (Ardiç, 2012). However, the general aftermath has not been characterized by democratic reform. Instead, the major short-term effect has been a striking increase in regional interventionism, repression and proxy war in the Middle East, most visible in the Yemen, Syria and Libyan conflicts (Lynch, 2017).

4.1. Arab Spring uprisings in Libya. Libyan war and foreign meddling.

The situation in 2011 Libya was different from those in other Arab countries. Despite being governed by an authoritarian ruler, its rather small population, remarkable economic performance and a strict control over politics and security allowed Qaddafi to hold a firm grip on power (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015). At the time, no

meaningful opposition movements were present in Libya, and popular dissent was limited to the diaspora (Pedde, 2017), located mainly in the United Kingdom and the United States, and to a lesser extent in Canada, Switzerland and Ireland, but also in Middle Eastern countries like Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the UAE or Afghanistan (Alunni, 2019).

Inspired by Mubarak´s ouster in Egypt, protestors organized demonstrations on the eastern city of Benghazi, Cyrenaica, starting on February 15th. The regime did not hesitate to use violence, and, by early March, the peaceful protests had transformed into violent revolt. The uprisings received an exceptional level of media attention, and rebels soon organized in a political body in Benghazi, the National Transitional Council (NTC), comprised by representatives of all the regions, which was quickly recognized by the international community (Lynch, 2017).

In March, as Qaddafi´s forces advanced relentlessly, rebel forces appeared on the verge of defeat. However, on March 19th, a NATO-led coalition launched an airstrike campaign targeting Qaddafi´s forces and tipping the scales in their favor (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015). It was Qaddafi´s hardline, exterminationist rhetoric, coupled with an extremely harsh crackdown on rebels, that motivated the intervention (Lynch, 2017). On February 26th, the Security Council passed Resolution 1970 unanimously, referring the Qaddafi regime to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity and imposing an arms embargo as well as a travel ban, and assets freeze on Qaddafi and other government officials. On March 12th, the Arab League requested the United Nations to impose a "no fly zone" in an attempt to protect civilians from bombings. On March 17th, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, it approved Resolution 1973, establishing the "no-fly zone" and authorizing Member States to take "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. On the 19th, France, the United States and the United Kingdom initiated an airstrike campaign against pro-Qaddafi forces, with a coalition of states from Europe and the Middle East soon joining them.

Arab encouragement for intervention in Libya was a remarkable event in regional politics (Lynch, 2017). In contrast with an Arab League-sponsored regional order rooted in the principle of state sovereignty, and past examples of neglect for the civilian population, including the crackdown on protesters by the Bahraini regime that same year, or Hussein´s genocidal campaign against the Kurds in the 1980s, Arab countries not only

pushed for the intervention, but also took active part in it. Notably, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were initially on the same side, supporting rebel forces against the Qaddafi regime, and so intervention in Libya was a vehicle for GCC cooperation (Lynch, 2017) rather than regional competition, which would soon unfold.

Qaddafi was finally forced from power in August 2011, after rebel forces took control of Tripoli, and was executed in October. During the uprisings, there was no common cause bringing the different factions together other than the goal of overthrowing Qaddafi (Sawani, 2014). Consequently, once that was achieved, the unifying factor waned, and Libya slid into a spiral of factional fighting and external interventionism. This way, the aftermath of a civil war gave way to another, as had happened in Afghanistan in 1992, after the Islamic Society (*Jamiat-e-Islami*) refused to step down as posited by the rotatory power-sharing agreement reached by the transitional government.

The National Transitional Council (NTC) assumed the leadership of the transitional phase. In August 2011, it promulgated an interim constitution laying out a roadmap for Libya´s democratic transition. It provided that the NTC would govern until the election of a 200-member General National Congress (GNC), which took place on July 7, 2012. The liberal-leaning National Forces Alliance (NFA), running on a platform of unity, democracy and moderate Islam, won 48% of the vote, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood´s Justice and Construction Party won a slim 10% of the vote, which translated into 17 seats. From early on, the GNC was marked by competition between the NFA and the Islamist bloc (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015). Ultimately, the transition failed to produce a unified government, leading to the fragmentation of authority and the proliferation of criminal organizations and militia politics that undermined the attempts at the establishment of a state apparatus (Mezran & Miller, 2017).

On September 11th, 2012, Islamist militia Ansar al-Sharia launched a military attack on the U.S. consulate and CIA station in Benghazi. In the aftermath of the attack, Libyan politics and society polarized dangerously, and militia violence spread. At this point, Libya was already presenting the classic state failure symptoms, including the lack of agreed upon rules of the game, lack of effective state institutions, rampant insecurity, easily available weaponry, a failing economy and escalating social and political polarization (Lynch, 2017). In December 2013, the GNC, which was meant to give away

to a newly elected legislature in February 2014, extended its mandate for an additional year on the grounds of insecurity and instability.

In February, Qaddafi-era general Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army attempted a failed coup. On May 16th, his forces regrouped and launched "Operation Dignity" against Islamist militias in Benghazi. He demanded the dissolution of the GNC, which was now dominated by a coalition of Islamists and backed by the Misrata militias (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015), but the GNC refused. On June 25th, new parliamentary elections took place, with all the candidates running as independents following the electoral law in force at the time. Islamists managed to secure only 30 seats, and so the resulting parliament was dominated by anti-Islamist, secular factions loosely affiliated with Haftar (Lynch, 2017), with Islamists garnering only 30 seats.

The new parliament gained rapid international recognition, but the GNC refused to acknowledge the transition and continued to present itself as the legitimate government of Libya. In July, Operation Dawn was launched to retake Tripoli and push back on Haftar´s military advances, bringing together mainstream as well as radical Islamists (Lynch, 2017). The situation soon degenerated into a full-fledged civil war between two armed coalitions claiming to be the legitimate government of Libya. The conflict invited increasing foreign intervention, with third-party states siding with either the pro-Dawn or the pro-Dignity camps, with a broader bloc focusing on counterterrorism.

Succinctly, even though there is a myriad of militia in post-revolutionary Libya, there are several broad factions (Reeve, 2015). On the one hand, we find the pro-Haftar camp, also sometimes referred to broadly as Operation Dignity, their initial campaign, an alliance between the internationally recognized parliament, now located in Tobruk, and the majority of the Libyan National Army under the command of general Haftar. They control most of eastern Libya, the region of Cyrenaica, and its oil export infrastructure. On the other hand, we have the anti-Haftar or pro-GNC camp, also referred to as Operation Dawn, a coalition of militia from western and central Libya, the region of Tripolitania, headed by forces from Misrata. After taking control of Tripoli in August 2014, they reconvened the GNC as its parliament, which has not been recognized by the international community. Moreover, Ansar Al-Sharia, a radical Salafist group, controls parts of Benghazi and is loosely aligned with Libyan Dawn. The Shura Council of Islamic Youth

is a radical Islamist group that has controlled Derna, a port city in Eastern Libya, since the beginning of the revolution (Reeve, 2015). It has pledged allegiance to ISIS and has been the target of several attacks from Operation Dignity. Lastly, there are two non-Arab ethnic groups, the Tuareg and the Toubou, reportedly aligned with Libyan Dawn and Operation Dignity, respectively, which have battled each other for the control of the main oasis towns and the el-Sharara oil field of southwest Libya (Reeve, 2015).
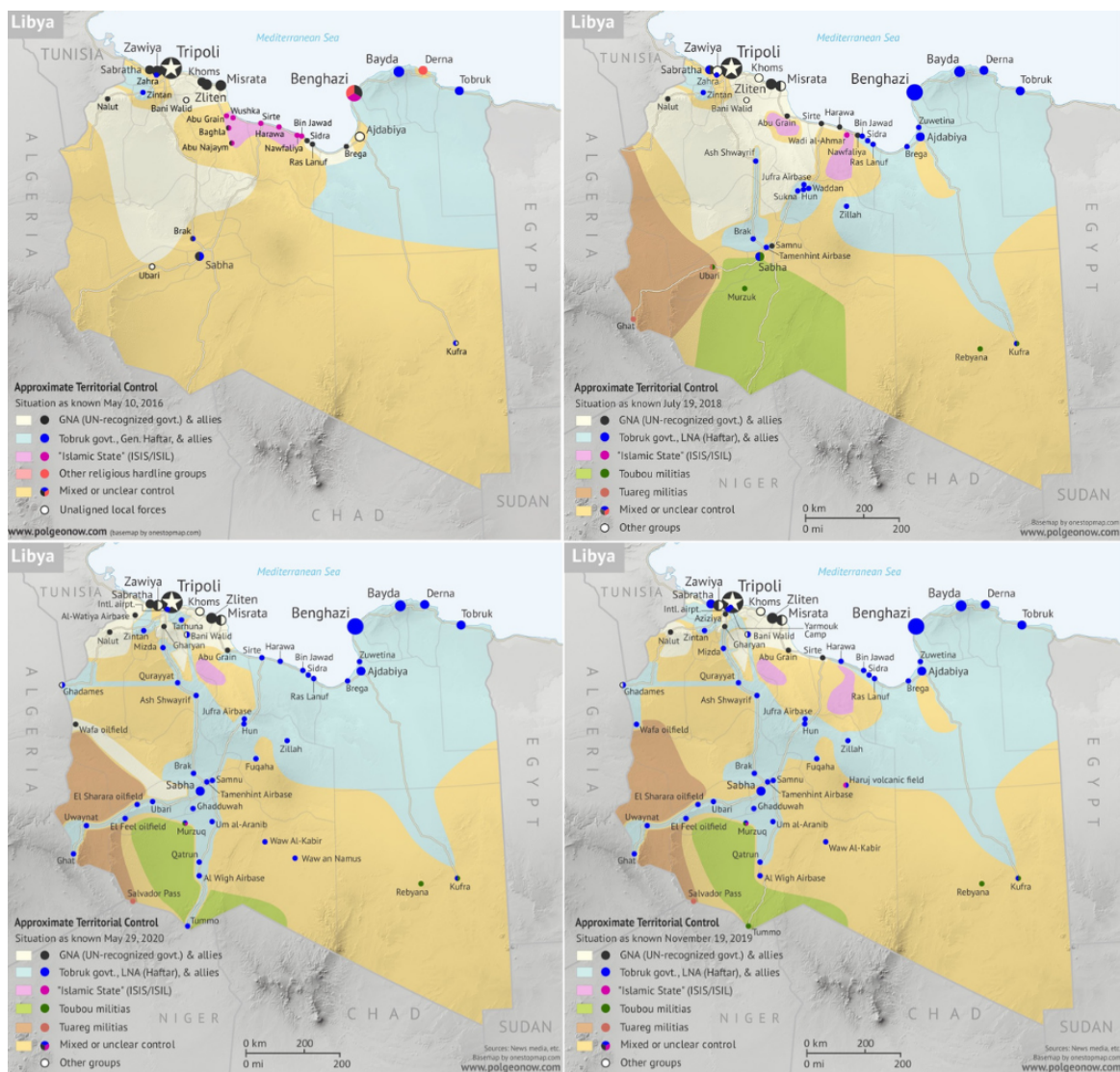

Figure 1. Evolution of territorial control in Libya, 2016-2020. Source: *Political Geography Now*

As per foreign intervention, there are several third states actively involved in the conflict, to varying degrees. On the pro-Dignity camp, we find the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and post-2013 Egypt, as well as Saudi Arabia, France and Russia to a lesser extent. The UAE and al-Sisi´s Egypt share the broad political vision of "rolling back" the politics of the Arab uprisings (Megeresi, 2019) and see political Islam, embodied by the Muslim Brotherhood, to be an existential threat to the survival of their regimes. Saudi Arabia entered a more moderate phase in 2015 in terms of its attitude towards the Muslim Brotherhood with the death of King Abdullah and has since taken on a more understate role as financer of Haftar´s operations (Pedde, 2017), although it may have recently adopted a more assertive policy following the 2019 offensive on Tripoli (Megeresi, 2019).

Russia has lately grown closer to Haftar, likely looking to project power in an area that is key to Western interests (Mezran & Miller, 2017), while also attempting to strengthen its relationship with Egypt, capitalizing on Western alienation after the 2013 coup (Megeresi, 2019). France´s Libya policy has been one of "double-game" (Fasanotti & Mezran, 2020). In other words, while its official stance supported the UN-led negotiations over Libya and the GNA, and focused on counterterrorism, its policy on the ground has been of full support for Haftar´s forces, including the attack on Tripoli.

On the pro-Dawn camp, we find Qatar and Turkey. They have both been active in the support of the post-Arab Spring expansion of the Brotherhood and its allies (Reeve, 2015). During the 2011 uprisings, where most Gulf monarchies saw repression and anti-political Islam as the only way to regime survival, Qatar considered the support of moderate transitions led by Islamic movements a better strategy (Pedde, 2017). For that reason, it openly backed the revolt against Qaddafi, Morsi´s Egypt, and then the Islamist-dominated GNC. Furthermore, its engagement in Libya is a form of power-projection vis-à-vis the UAE, and ought to be understood as part of the regional struggle between the two powers (Lynch, 2017). Turkey, on the other hand, has had a growing role in Libya. Initially motivated by the contracts it had in the country, Ankara has come to see Libya as a way of cultivating political Islam groups across the region (Reeve, 2015). Turkish involvement should also be analyzed in the context of wider regional competition, to counter Egypt and frustrate its foreign policy objectives (Megeresi, 2019).

4.2. Arab Spring in Egypt. From the overthrown of Mubarak to the 2013 al-Sisi coup. Post-2013 anti-political Islam and repression.

When protests erupted in Tunisia, Egypt quickly followed. The movement started with small demonstrations in Egyptian cities led by the urban youth and soon escalated into a full-fledged revolution on January 25th (Farag, 2012). The regime tried but ultimately failed to control the protests. The army announced that it would not charge against peaceful protesters, and finally compelled Mubarak to step down on February 11th. The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) assumed power for the transitional period, dissolving the parliament and suspending the constitution on February 13th.

Unlike other groups, the Muslim Brotherhood had an initial shy response and participation in the uprisings. This can be partially explained by the repression in had undergone in previous years, but also answers to a strategic and precautionary mindset of "testing the waters" and avoiding the erosion of its political momentum (Wickham, 2011). After the uprisings, it entered decisively on the game of electoral politics. Although there was an initial consensus among secular forces that the Brotherhood should be allowed into the political competition, it soon dissipated, when elites observed that they had underestimated its electoral popularity (Falk, 2016).

Indeed, when elections finally took place between November 28th, 2011 and January 11th, 2012, the Muslim Brotherhood´s political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party, captured a sweeping 42% of the seats in parliament. Moreover, Muhammad Morsi, Freedom and Justice Party candidate and Muslim Brother, narrowly won the presidential elections in May 2012 against Ahmed Shafiq, former minister of the Mubarak regime. Although the SCAF did not endorse any particular candidate, most of the public understood that they were in fact supporting Shafiq, who came to be seen as the pro-establishment candidate (Ghanem, 2016). This may have led secularists who participated in the Tahrir Square protests to vote for Morsi instead.

However, secular forces in government and in society ultimately refused to accept this outcome, which led to a crisis of legitimacy that destabilized the democratically elected regime (Falk, 2016). At the same time, the Morsi administration proved unable to run the country effectively or to achieve the objectives of the January 25th uprising, alienating the

other opposition forces, including liberals, leftists and secularists (al-Anani, 2015). Finally, there was a second popular uprising in 2013, culminating in massive street demonstrations in the so-called *Tamarod* (rebel) movement and a widely supported coup led by Defense Ministry and member of the military, Adbel Fattah al-Sisi, that overthrew the Morsi administration (Brownlee, Masoud & Reynolds, 2015). In May 2014, al-Sisi was elected to the presidency with a reported 96% of the vote. The coup received significant outside support and financial assistance from Saudi Arabia and the UAE which have become the main sponsors of Egypt´s post-2013 autocratic regime (Reeve, 2015).

Indeed, although domestic factors were the primary drivers of the 2013 developments, regional factors played a significant role, particularly the incipient anti-political Islam campaign (Lynch, 2017). In 2019, President Morsi died while serving jail time on several charges, including conspiracy to commit terrorism, in conditions that were reported to amount to a state-sanctioned arbitrary killing, including the denial of the necessary healthcare (OHCHR, 2019).

Egypt´s post-coup political determination as a military autocracy represents the restoration of the pre-revolutionary status quo, in what can be referred to as a phenomenon of democratic reversal (Brownlee, Massoud & Reynolds, 2015). Post-2013 Egypt has been characterized by increasing oppression, becoming even more authoritarian and repressive than it was under the Mubarak administration (Falk, 2016). Indeed, following a brief opening after the lifting of the emergency law following the 2011 uprisings, Egypt´s civil society now faces a remarkable repressive environment, including criminalization of public dissent in the name of national security and counterterrorism (Hamzawy, 2016) and the widespread violation of human rights (Amnesty International, 2014; Rights Trends in Egypt: World Report, 2020). Initially, the military crackdown targeted the Muslim Brotherhood and Morsi´s key political constituencies (Brechenmacher, 2017), including the declaration of the group as a terrorist organization, the freezing of its assets, the dissolution of the Freedom and Justice Party, the closedown of more than 500 civil society affiliated organizations and the arrest and death sentence of its senior leaders (Rutherford, 2018). However, regime repression soon started targeting other regime critics, including journalists, activists and protesters (Hamzawy, 2016).

In addition to its palpable impact in domestic affairs, Egypt´s 2013 coup was also a *"seismic event in regional politics"* (Lynch, 2017, p. 166). Not only did it shift Egypt into the pro-Dignity camp and, arguably, emboldened Haftar to launch Operation Dignity, but it also transformed Egypt´s role in the region. The Arab Spring uprisings had triggered a new logic of regional alliances based on attitude towards the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and like-minded groups, overlapping rather than substituting, the previous pattern positing *status quo* powers, like Saudi Arabia, against revisionist powers (Quero & Soler, 2017). Between 2011 and roughly 2013, Turkey, Qatar and Egypt formed an informal alliance in support of Muslim Brotherhood branches and similar political movements, with Saudi Arabia and the UAE opposing them. This stance established an Islamist or pro-Muslim Brotherhood bloc against a counterrevolutionary, pro-status quo or anti-political Islam bloc (Lynch, 2017). Following the 2013 coup, al-Sisi´s Egypt moved firmly into the latter.

The Al-Sisi administration has adopted an anti-political Islam discourse akin to that of the UAE, portraying the Muslim Brotherhood and like-minded organizations as virtually indistinguishable from jihadist groups (Boduszyński, 2017). He has been capitalizing on the terrorist threat to bolster its domestic legitimacy and justify repression and human rights abuses both at home and abroad. Moreover, conceptualized as a main threat to regime survival, the anti-political Islam stance has been one of the main drivers of post-2013 Egyptian foreign policy.

According to the Egyptian State Information Service website, Egypt´s stance in dealing with the Libyan crisis is based on support for an inner Libyan political solution through the promotion of a ceasefire, securing the western border from the threat of terrorists and mercenaries, and ridding the country of illegal foreign interference deteriorating the situation on the ground (Egypt State Information Service, n.d.). This is not an accurate depiction of the reality of the Egyptian involvement in Libya. For one, Egypt has been conducting an active Libya policy in order to achieve certain foreign policy objectives, and it has done so by backing one of the factions to the conflict, Haftar´s LNA. Its late interest in a political solution responds to a recent shift in conditions on the ground following Turkey´s increased involvement in Libya after the 2019 Tripoli campaign, but has certainly not constituted an element of continuity in Egypt´s Libya policy. Moreover,

Cairo has itself been part of the foreign interference in Libya, and so have some of its allies, most notably the UAE.

In contrast, securing the porous western border is indeed a priority for Egypt. Through a mixed policy of proxy and airstrikes, it has been looking to avoid the penetration of weapons and fighters that may contribute to the exacerbation of the ongoing domestic insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula. In this line, Cairo wants to avoid the consolidation of jihadist groups like Ansar al-Sharia, and ISIS, also active in northern Sinai, in Cyrenaica (Megeresi, 2019), and to establish an Islamist-free zone in its western border (Mezran & Miller, 2017). However, Egypt also has ideological and economic interests in its neighboring country. For one, it wants to prevent the Muslim Brotherhood and akin groups from gaining control of Lybia via the GNC and subsequently destabilizing the al-Sisi regime (Reeve, 2015). Also, its calculations include the profitable economic advantages of exercising influence over eastern Libya, most notably a reliable supply of subsidized oil (Megeresi, 2019).

5. Objectives and research questions

This dissertation aims at providing a multidimensional analysis of Egypt´s involvement in the Libyan war since 2013. Firstly, it intends to determine whether Haftar´s LNA can be conceptualized as an Egyptian proxy and, if so, identify the model of proxy it falls into and assess the use of proxy that Egypt is pursuing in Libya. Moreover, it looks to explain the factors that account Egypt´s involvement in Libya in the first place. In particular, it aims to examine: the role of the insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert that Cairo has been struggling to control, Egypt´s post-2013 coup anti-political stance and its determination to prevent an Islamist government in neighboring Libya, and the economic factors that may have been taken into account.

Furthermore, it aims to examine the Egypt-Haftar proxy relationship and assess the difficulties that Cairo has encountered in its proxy strategy. Specifically, it intends to analyze the impact of Haftar´s resource independence, both domestic and in the form of external support offered by other sponsoring states, notably the UAE, France, and Russia,

in Egypt´s ability to incentivize the LNA into a specific course of action. Also, it looks to assess the impact that over time objective divergence may have had in the proxy relationship.

This way, the research questions motivating this dissertation are the following:
- Can Haftar´s LNA be conceptualized as an Egyptian proxy? If so, which model and use of proxy does the relationship fall into?
- Which factors account for Egypt´s intervention in Libya, and to what extent?
- Which difficulties has the proxy relationship entailed? How have objective divergence and Haftar´s resource independence hindered Egypt´s ability to control its proxy?

6. Hypotheses

To elaborate on the objectives and research questions posited above, this dissertation aims to address the following hypothesis.

Firstly, Egypt´s involvement in Libya can be characterized as proxy warfare, with Haftar´s LNA as its agent. However, insofar as Egypt is able to exercise influence over its proxy´s action only to a certain extent, the proxy relationship is a "weak" one, with the proxy retaining considerable power and independence.

Secondly, there are several factors that account for Egyptian involvement in Libya to varying degrees. Notably, the cross-border security concerns in the form of penetration of fighters and weapons through the Egypt-Libya border fueling the insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western Desert, as well as the desire to prevent a pro-Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya, have played a significant role. The economic dimension, though less relevant, has also contributed to shape Egypt´s Libya policy.

Thirdly, conflicting interests between Egypt and Haftar, as well as the latter´s resource independence, has effectively hindered the proxy relationship, and negatively impacted Cairo´s ability to influence developments on the ground.

7. Theoretical Framework

This dissertation aims to analyze Egypt´s intervention in the Libyan war through the concept of proxy using the realist theory of international relations. This theoretical background will address the notions of internationalized intrastate conflict, proxy warfare, models and uses of proxy as well as the conceptualization and differentiation of Islamism, political Islam and Salafi jihadism.

7.1. Theory of International Relations

The theoretical bases of this dissertation are rooted in the realist theory of International Relations. Though realism is not a unified body of thought, it has some basic, fairly shared, premises. For one, it argues that nation-states are the main actors in international relations. Moreover, states are unitary actors, that is, they speak and act with one voice. Also, states are expected to act rationally in pursuance of their own national interest within the international system, and thus look to maximize power. Lastly, states coexist in a state of anarchy, that is, in absence of an international authority to enforce peace.

Consequently, according to realism, international relations are a highly competitive realm in which states seek, at the very least, to guarantee their own survival and, preferably, to ascertain and expand their domination. Moreover, because states are self-interested and look to maximize their power, they are bound to distrust the actions, motives, and intention of other states. In trying to optimize their security and ensure regime survival and territorial integrity, states may trigger in others a sense of insecurity which will in turn encourage them to do the same, leading to security dilemmas, instability, and overall tense interstate relations. Changes in the distribution of power may also unleash the same dynamics, leading states to either balance or bandwagon against the state that accumulates power, in order to safeguard themselves from domination. According to other accounts, states balance against perceived threats, and not overall power. In contrast, some scholars have argued that Middle Eastern states in particular tend to prioritize regime survival, and to balance against the state that is perceived as most hostile towards their regime, regardless of other factors such as aggregated state power and geographic proximity (Fawcett, 2016).

The issue of threat or hostility perception has been increasingly addressed by the realist school. Indeed, not many analysts seem to argue that outcomes in international relations are inevitable regardless of factors such as implicated states, or non-state actors, identity, or legitimacy. Some have argued that the materialist argument that objective conditions overdetermine international politics are is naïve are those who completely neglect their impact (Jackson, 2004). In this sense, many have accepted the constructivist propositions that anarchy is not completely deterministic, that national interests are not objective, but rather subjectively shaped, and that threat perception if influenced by different factors (Jackson, 2004). Though the discussion of whether factors such as identity or ideology actively shape interests in international relations or, rather, serve to legitimize pre-existing ones, is beyond this analysis, the author wants to remark that realism is not an *"analytic straitjacket"* (Glaser, 2003, p. 409), and that there is use in complementing it with other theories in order to overcome possible shortcomings, notably regarding perceptions and misconceptions in international politics.

7.2. Internationalized intrastate conflict and proxy warfare.

Interstate armed conflict, that is, direct military confrontation between two or more states (Harbom & Wallensteen, 2005), is markedly less prevalent today than it was throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Although we do find interstate strife today, such as the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, current conflict is characterized by internal armed conflict or civil war, that is, confrontation between the government of a state and internal opposition groups. However, civil war is nowadays hardly a domestic phenomenon, given the recurrency and intensity of third-party intervention (Gleditsch, 2007), which introduces the element of "internationalization" to an otherwise internal conflict. For that reason, there is a need to clearly distinguish between a "proper" intrastate armed conflict, that is, one free of external interference, and an internationalized intrastate conflict. The latter can be defined as the one occurring between the government of a state and internal opposition groups, with intervention from other states, whether militarily or otherwise (Eriksson, Gleditsch, Sollenber, Strang & Wallensteen, 2002).

A non-state actor may be either the backer or the backed faction in an internationalized intrastate conflict. The rise in numbers and importance of non-state actors is one of the main features of the global political system since the second half of the 20th century. In scholarship, some have argued that non-state actors have led to significant changes in world politics (Glaser, 2003), while others posit that, structurally, the international system should still be analyzed on the basis of states (Waltz, 1979), especially given the nature of relationships between state- and non-state actors. However, and even if states are widely considered the main actor in international relations, there is a tendency to include other types of actors in analysis.

In this sense, an actor in world politics can be broadly conceptualized as an organized entity that is not entirely subordinate to other international actors and that participates in power relationships (Young, 1972). According to this definition, what characterizes an actor of world politics is a certain degree of autonomy and influence. In turn, states are differentiated from non-state actors on the basis of sovereignty as a legal status. Territory, although important, is not a definitive element when categorizing a specific actor as a state or non-state actor. Indeed, some non-state actors control territory, while some states are sometimes unable to do so, at least partially (Zohar, 2016). Within this broad category, non-state armed actors are generally defined as organizations that lie outside of formal state institutions, have the capacity and the willingness to resort to force in pursue of their objectives and enjoy a certain degree of autonomy regarding politics, infrastructure, resources, and military operations (Hofmann & Schneckener, 2011).

States may intervene in domestic conflict either directly or indirectly. According to Groh (2019), if an intrastate conflict directly threatens a third state´s security, it is more likely to intervene directly. In contrast, there are a myriad of factors that may drive a state to opt for indirect intervention, namely the stakes, the risk of escalation, lack of domestic or international support, or lack of capacity (Groh, 2019; Pfaff, n.d.; Salehyan, 2010). Considering its own limitations, a state will choose the policy that best allows it to pursue its foreign policy objectives and national interest.

Proxy war is not a pacific theoretical concept. However, most scholars agree that not every indirect intervention qualifies as a proxy war. Groh (2019) defines it as "*directing the use of force by a politically motivated, local actor to indirectly influence political*

affairs in the target state" (p. 29). Basically, proxy entails the backing of a local actor to do the fighting on the ground. Though contested, this view would entail that using actors that lack political motivation, such as mercenaries, would not qualify as proxy warfare. In contrast, Groh (2019) argues that aiding an actor engaged in an intrastate conflict without the intent to control its actions amounts to "donated assistance". In short, proxy warfare is characterized by a relationship between an intervening state, also referred to as sponsor, principal or benefactor, and a proxy or agent, in which the former has the intention to control the latter´s actions. Similarly, the intervening state needs to be able to actually control its proxy´s actions, at least to a certain degree (Byman, 2018; Fox, 2019).

How much direct military support is too much to count as proxy is unresolved in scholarship (Byman, 2018). While Groh (2019) has a stricter approach and posits that once the intervening state begins to use its own forces on the ground, the conflict becomes a direct intervention, other authors adopt a more flexible approach, allowing for minimal intervention if most of the fighting is done through proxy (Pffaf, n.d.). The latter seems more persuasive, as minimal direct intervention does not necessarily undermine an overarching strategy of war carried through proxy.

A proxy warfare policy presents several advantages. Arguably its most attractive feature, especially in a competitive regional environment, is that it offers plausible deniability (Groh, 2019). Moreover, costs are lower compared to those of direct intervention and, precisely for that reason, proxy war is more politically palatable (Byman, 2018; Salehyan, 2010). It offers a higher chance of acceptance by the affected communities, with less likelihood of a potential anti-intervention nationalistic backlash that often follows foreign intervention (Saleh, 2010). Also, proxies are indigenous actors, and thus have better knowledge of the terrain and are better suited for intelligence-gathering (Byman, 2018).

However, proxy is not a risk-free policy. Even though proxy wars carry a lower risk of escalation, they have a higher risk of conflict intensification (Mumford, 2013). For one, they may empower local actors that would otherwise seek a peaceful settlement. Moreover, they may provoke rival powers to back rival powers. For instance, the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran may have led them to back rival factions in the ongoing Yemen civil war, the Hadi government and the Houthis respectively. Likewise,

during the Cold War, the U.S. and the Soviet Union backed multiple opposing groups, for example the UNITA and the MPLA in the Angola civil war.

Regarding the individual principal-agent relationship, the power imbalance can shift in favor of the proxy, and it may grow strong enough to achieve its objectives on its own (Fox, 2019). Similarly, the proxy may be able to mobilize power from actors other than the principal (Groh, 2019). Insofar as the proxy does not need the principal to further its interests, they will inevitably grow apart. Moreover, proxies tend to disappoint their sponsors, pursuing their own interests while profiting from the received support (Mumford, 2013). The intervening state may possibly see itself dragged into unwanted confrontation that would otherwise have not gotten involved into (Byman, 2018). Lastly, there is the question of diverging objectives. Theoretically, the higher the objective compatibility, the lower the costs and the higher the benefits of a proxy warfare policy (Groh, 2019). When objectives start to diverge, the proxy will likely seek alternative ways, proxy or otherwise, to meet its needs.

Fox (2019) identifies two *models* of proxy warfare: exploitative and transactional. The former depicts a scenario in which the proxy is completely dependent on its principal for survival and, consequently, the sponsor possesses remarkable power and influence over the proxy. Examples include Russia and the separatists in Ukraine´s Donets Basin or the U.S. and the Iraqi Security Forces during the invasion of Iraq. In contrast, the transactional model is conceptualized as a mutually beneficial exchange of goods and services. This model is rather paradoxical, because in spite of the power asymmetry, the proxy is in fact the powerbroker in the relationship. In this scenario, the proxy can stand on its own, but needs assistance to defeat an adversary. Consequently, it requests support from sponsoring states, and in doing so it aligns the principal, with whom it shares interests to some extent, with its own political and military objectives. Once the goals are attained, the proxy will likely end its dependency on the principal. This model is extremely vulnerable to external influence, and the proxy is prone to engage in parallel relationships with other sponsors, or even substitute the initial proxy relationship if it finds other ways to achieve its goals.

Groh (2019), in contrast, identifies four *uses* of proxy warfare, depending on the intervening state´s policy objective: in it to win it, holding action, meddling and feeding

the chaos. The first two are of relevance to our case study. *"In it to win it"* proxy warfare is characterized by the intervening state´s perception of a great need to influence the outcome of the intrastate conflict, because of its relevance to its existential security. In contrast, in *"holding action"* warfare, the preferred outcome is seen as relevant to the intervening state´s security, but it is perceived as slightly less significant or unlikely.

7.3. Egypt´s intervention in Libya: conceptualization of Haftar´s LNA as an Egyptian proxy

Egypt´s intervention in Libya in pursue of its own perceived national interest is hardly a disruptive element in its foreign policy since the second half of the 20th century. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism ideals of the 1952 Free Officers Coup resonated in Nasser´s foreign policy, and so Egypt provided significant support to liberation movements across the Middle East and Africa, including training to various rebel groups. The most visible policy path in this regard was Egypt´s intervention in Yemen in 1962, to combat pro-Western forces (Hemaid, 2018). Likewise, Egypt was an active participant in the Arab-Israeli conflict, taking the lead in military efforts against Israel until the U.S.-brokered Egyptian Israeli peace accord of 1979. Parallelly, it led the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during the 1964 Arab League Summit, which it would latter support in its endeavors against Israel. Lastly, following the eruption of the Iraq-Iran War, Egypt supplied Baghdad with arms and military equipment and provided diplomatic support to the Iraqi regime, helping it conclude an arms deal with the United Kingdom (Hemaid, 2018).

The Libya war has been, from its onset, an internationalized intrastate conflict, following a very internationalized Arab Spring uprising. After the NATO-led intervention, militias that had fought together against the Qaddafi regime developed divergent interests and consolidated their control over different territories (Mezran & Miller, 2017). Most of them receive support from foreign powers, to varying degrees, which has transformed the country into a scenario for competitive power-politics. Egypt has, since the early days of the conflict, supported general Khalifa Haftar and his forces, comprised of most of the Libyan National Army (LNA), which is aligned with the internationally recognized parliament in Tobruk. Egyptian support for Haftar has been active regarding both military

and diplomatic assistance (Megeresi, 2019). Some reports have revealed the presence of high-ranking Egyptian army officers that have been operating in Libyan territory, providing logistical support and intelligence to Haftar´s forces (al-Anani, 2020a). Likewise, Egypt has been active in whitewashing Haftar´s alleged war crimes (Megeresi, 2020).

In this sense, Egypt´s intervention in Libya has been mostly indirect, except for various airstrikes conducted mostly in the Libyan-Egypt border or in the ISIS-controlled city of Derna. As of 2018, *New America* documented a total of 93 airstrikes attributed to Egypt in media reports (Bergen & Sims, 2018). Egypt´s first participation in an airstrikes campaign in Libya occurred during the 2014 Tripoli battle, though it did not strike itself, but rather provided bases in inner Egypt from which Emirati planes took off (Kirkpatrick, 2014). Moreover, it conducted airstrikes in Sirte and Derna in 2015 in retaliation for the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians by a Libyan ISIS branch. Similarly, it conducted airstrikes together with the LNA in May 2017, in Derna, also in retaliation for the deaths of 29 Coptic Christians in an attack claimed by ISIS (Bergen & Sims, 2018). The last Egyptian airstrike in Libya reported by New America took place in February 2019 along the Libya-Egypt border (Salyk-Virk, 2020). However, it should be noted that they report a significantly large number of unknown belligerent strikes in 2019 and 2020, most of them in Tripoli. Moreover, the Libyan Observer informed on October 19th, 2020, of an airstrike near the border with a civilian fatality, that would have been allegedly conducted by Egypt (Alharathy, 2020).

In any case, the question remains as to whether the relationship between Egypt and Haftar´s forces qualify as a proxy. Egypt´s strategy in Libya seems to follow Groh´s (2019) definition of proxy, in the sense that it entails the backing of a local actor to do the fighting on the ground in order to influence the outcome of the conflict, instead of committing its own military forces. It is clear that Egypt has the intention to influence Libya´s affairs to better fit its interests. Specifically, it seeks to utilize Haftar´s forces as a means to achieve certain foreign policy goals, notably impeding the consolidation of armed Salafi-jihadist groups in Cyrenaica and avoiding the formation of a Libyan government akin to the Muslim Brotherhood that may later destabilize Egypt and challenge the al-Sisi regime (Reeve, 2015). On its part, Haftar´s LNA is a politically

motivated non-state armed actor with its own political objectives, some of which align with Egypt´s priorities.

However, although the element of Egyptian intent to control Haftar´s actions seems clear, the control that the former is able to exercise over the latter is particularly complex to assess in practice (Rondeaux & Sterman, 2019). Given the conceptualization of proxies as politically motivated actors, it follows that they are driven by their own self-assessed interests, that may overlap or conflict with the ones held by sponsoring states. This is especially the case if proxies are not resource-dependent and can garner support to further their interests otherwise (Groh, 2019). Moreover, the secrecy and informality that surround a proxy strategy, necessarily foregoes, or at least limits, thorough oversight of the proxy´s doings. In general, foreign sponsors in Libya are rarely able to fully dictate their proxies´ actions, which seem instead to be calibrated upon local factors (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019). In this sense, proxy relationships in the Libyan conflict, including the one between Egypt and Haftar´s LNA, can be referred to as weak or tenuous, with the former being able to exercise control over the latter only to a certain extent. In any case, we can conclude that, insofar as Egypt is using a Libyan actor in order to achieve certain foreign policy objectives both in the long and in the short term, Haftar´s LNA can be conceptualized as a proxy of Egypt.

Egyptian choice of proxy is the product of careful political and rational calculations in terms of economic advantage, security, perception of Islamism as an existential threat, and a shared belief in militarism as a form of government (Megeresi, 2019). Moreover, Egypt has identified its porous border with Libya as a key vulnerability that directly contributes to exacerbating the domestic insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula that the government seems unable to control, due to cross-border arms smuggling and fighter penetration. This is even more important in recent years, as the insurgency extends to other parts of the territory (Dentice & Melcangi, 2020).

Haftar´s forces control eastern Libya, and can consequently help exercise control over the border, avoiding the entrance of fighters and intercepting weapons and explosive devices being smuggled, destined for Sinai. Moreover, informed by its post-2013 coup political identity, Egypt perceives Islamist groups, most notably the Muslim Brotherhood, as a destabilizing factor to domestic politics, as well as a potential threat to regime survival.

Haftar´s forces have a similar anti-political Islam stance, and thus constitute an alternative to a potential Islamist Libyan government that is much more beneficial to Egypt´s interests.

Arguably, Egypt perceives Libya, and particularly Cyrenaica, as a key national security issue (al-Anani, 2020). In June 2020, al-Sisi threatened to intervene directly in Libya if the GNA enters Sirte, located in eastern Libya but still far from the border, and described the city as an absolute "red line" (Saleh, 2020). Consequently, Egypt´s use of proxy in Libya can be characterized as "in it to win it", according to Groh´s (2019) classification. However, insofar as Turkey is getting more intensively involved in the country, backing the GNA, it can be argued that Egypt sees its preferred outcome as increasingly unlikely, and so it could be getting closer to a "holding action" approach. Taking into consideration that United Arab Emirates, a bigger power, favors a similar outcome, Egypt may be realistically fluctuating between the two.

In its use of proxy, Egypt is facing many of the difficulties inherent to proxy warfare as described above. For one, foreign sponsors are not the main, and certainty not the only, source of material autonomy for Libyan actors (Harchaoui & Lazib, 2019). With material opportunities available within the country, whether legal or illegal, intervening states inevitably face greater difficulty when trying to incentivize their proxies into a specific behavior path. Moreover, Haftar´s LNA has numerous foreign sponsors, including the UAE, which has in fact recently intensified its support (Fetouri, 2020), France and Russia. Arguably, Egypt´s reluctance to support a wide military campaign to reconquer Libya has led Haftar to seek further support from them (Mezran & Miller, 2017). That is, there is certain objective divergence between sponsor and proxy, which inevitably affects the relationship and negatively impacts Egypt´s ability to control Haftar´s actions and tactics.

In essence, Egypt´s proxy warfare in Libya falls into the transactional model category as defined by Fox (2019). Precisely because Haftar´s forces have multiple sources of foreign support, they are prone to pursue closer relations with the "best bidder", that is, the sponsoring state that offers them the best resources-autonomy ratio to pursue their own interests. Although this hinders Egypt´s ability to decisively dictate Haftar´s actions, it also means that, in the cases in which it is perceived as the best option, it can seize the opportunity. Notably, Egypt enjoys the particular advantage of geographical continuity

and a very extensive shared border with Libya, which allows for rapid action and troop mobilization. Moreover, French and Russian interests in Libya do not appear to conflict with those of Egypt and, in the case of the UAE, they are even partially coincidental. Consequently, though parallel proxy relationships are inconvenient, they do not seem to threaten Egypt´s foreign policy objectives.

7.4. Islamism, "political Islam" and the Muslim Brotherhood. Salafi jihadism.

Islamism can be broadly defined as an ideology that seeks the establishment of a Sharia-based political system connecting *din,* religion, with *dawla,* state (Tibi, 2012). Political Islam is a somewhat overlapping term, coined in the 1970s and 1980s to refer to groups that build a formal political agenda drawing from Islamic sources (Denoeux, 2002). In a similar vein, the term "mainstream" Islamist or institutional Islamism (Tibi, 2012) is used to refer to Islamist groups who engage in political and social action within the state, even via electoral politics.

"Mainstream" Islamism, or political Islam, is epitomized in the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*), the oldest, most influential contemporary Islamist group in the Arab world, and the main non-state actor in Egyptian politics (Wickham, 2013). It has many offshoot affiliate organizations across the Middle East. Founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, it has experienced substantive change over the years, going from a small and charitable society, to a large, mostly illegalized, opposition group during the Nasser and Sadat administrations, to a timid participant of (limited) electoral politics under Mubarak, to the party in power under the Morsi administration following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, and back to being an outlawed, repressed organization under al-Sisi (Wickham, 2013). It is characterized by a gradualist approach and focuses on the Islamization of society rather than on the establishment of a Sharia-based system overnight (El-Ghobashy, 2005). They aim to change the system from within and have participated in electoral politics when permitted.

In contrast, Salafi jihadism is a militant Islamist offshoot movement rooted in Salafism, Wahhabism and Qutbism (Mongham, 2008; Zollner, 2007), and encompasses groups like al-Qaeda and affiliated branches. Salafism is an Islamist trend that embraces the principle

of *tawhid* or unity of law, meaning that all man-made laws have to be rejected on the grounds of interference with the word and will of God (Mongham, 2008). Mainstream Salafists follow a *da'wa* approach, that is, proselytization, while Salafi jihadists advocate for violent jihad. Moreover, they elevate jihad to the level of the five pillars of Islam. Qutbism, in contrast, is an ideology developed by Sayyid Qutb, a Muslim Brother who developed the pre-existing concepts *jahiliyya* and *hakimiya*. *Jahiliyya,* refers to all political systems based on norms other than Sharia, while *hakimiyya* refers to the imposition of a system of Islamic law (Wickham, 2013). Qutbism calls for *jihad* against all *Jahili* systems and its supporters. He also developed the doctrine of *takfir,* whereby Muslims deemed "insufficiently committed" to Islam are considered *kafir*, non-believers (Lynch, 2010). Consequently, jihadist groups conceive themselves as outsiders to a corrupt *jahiliyya* and aim to overthrow it from the outside and by force (Lynch, 2010).

Some authors have argued that the difference between mainstream Islamism, notably the Brotherhood, and Salafi jihadism, is an issue of tactics or approach (Tibi, 2012). After all, they both ultimately strive for a Sharia-based political system. Others have pointed that there are deep ideological cleavages (Lynch, 2010). For one, the Muslim Brotherhood has officially rejected Qutbism and the doctrine of *kafir* (Wickham, 2011). Although they embrace *jihad*, they understand it differently, in terms of resistance against foreign occupation and intervention in the Arab and Muslim worlds (Wickham, 2013). Outside defined cases, they have renounced the use of force. Similarly, they have never accepted the elevation of *jihad* to a pillar of Islam (Lynch, 2010).

II.   Analysis and discussion

1.   Factors motivating Egypt´s involvement in Libya.

1.1.   Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. Addressing cross-border and increasing domestic insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western Sahara.

In recent decades, Egypt has been facing a mounting insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, that it has proven unable to control, and that has recently extended to other parts of the country. In its early years, it was mostly carried out by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), a later al-Qaeda affiliate, which has now been largely replaced by Wilayat Sinai, an ISIS-affiliate formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis (ABM), and most active insurgent group in the Sinai. Although this is seemingly a domestic issue, it is fueled by cross-border factors, notably the penetration of fighters and the smuggling of weapons, coming from the western border with Gaza and, since 2011, the eastern border with Libya. The latter is over 1,100 km long and, due to the power vacuum that followed Qaddafi´s ousting, extremely porous. Therefore, one of the main aims of Egypt´s Libya policy has been securing the border to disrupt cross-border activity that may contribute to the insurgency at home. Similarly, the simultaneous presence of militant groups in both countries has led Egypt to carry out a double-sided strategy of airstrikes and proxy warfare to prevent their consolidation in Cyrenaica.

Figure 2. Map of Libya, Egypt and the Sinai. Source: Deutsche Welle.

Islamist insurgency in Egypt is not unprecedented. Violent extremist groups have been active in the country since the 1970s and, although they never gained a mass following, they conducted several attacks (Ndiaye & Tazi, 2020), including the assassination of President Anwar al-Sadat in 1981. During the 1980s and 1990s, a mild jihadi insurgency unfolded in mainland Egypt, but it was eventually subdued by the Mubarak regime (Awad & Hashem, 2015). Many Islamist fighters fled to Afghanistan, contributing to the trend of "transnationalization" of Islamism at the time (Hegghammer, 2011).

Indeed, it has been estimated that approximately 35,000 foreign jihadis, predominately from Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Sudan and Algeria, took part in the Soviet-Afghan War and were instrumental in the creation of Al-Qaeda (Williams, 2011). Egyptian fighters in particular have been reported to arrive in Afghanistan in two waves, most of them between 1979 and 1992, and some others between 1996 and 2001 (Stenersen, 2011). Ayman Al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda, is in fact and Egyptian. In the 1980s and 1990s, he led the insurgency in Egypt commanding the Egyptian Islamic Jihad (EIJ), which would become allied with al-Qaeda in the late 1990s and, finally, the two groups would essentially merge in 2001 (Fletcher, 2008).

Ever since the Sinai insurgency started in the 1970s, there have been continuous, and sometimes large-scale, attacks, accompanied with uninterrupted instability in the region. The Luxor massacre, for instance, was a 1997 attack that targeted Deir el-Bahari, a major tourist attraction, killing 62 people, mostly tourists. Likewise, in 2004, there were three bomb attacks targeting tourist hotels that killed 34 people and injured 171. Christian Copts have also been a major target for Islamist insurgent groups. For instance, on New Year´s Day, 2011, there was a suicide bomber attack outside a church in Alexandria that killed at least 21 people and wounded 97 (Saleh, 2011). Similarly, in 2017, on Palm Sunday, there were twin bombings at a church in Tanta, a city on the Nile Delta, and St. Mark´s Coptic Orthodox Cathedral, in Alexandria, seat of the Coptic papacy, with 44 people being reported killed and other 126 injured (Hendawi, 2017).

After the 2011 uprisings, and the consequent temporary withdrawal of security forces from the Sinai Peninsula, jihadi violence increased significantly in the territory, and some groups were able to capitalize on the resentment of the population and garner support. At the same time, the absence of security forces facilitated the flow of foreign Islamists and weapons into the Peninsula. During the Morsi administration, there were several attacks, including the August 5th attack near Rafah resulting in the death of 16 Egyptian soldiers, the August 15 launch of two rockets at Eilat, Israel, and the September 21 attack on an Israeli checkpoint resulting in the death of an IDF soldier (U.S. Department of State, 2013). Moreover, on November 3, suspected Islamist militants killed three Egyptian policemen in El-Arish, the largest city of the North Sinai Governorate. Though during this period violence was not particularly salient, the presence of Salafi jihadists actually increased (Dentice, 2018).

The aftermath of the 2013 coup led to the radicalization of Islamists, with the reaffirmation that their objectives could not be achieved through moderation and democratic participation (Awad & Hashem, 2015). Attacks became more intense, lethal and frequent, and targeted checkpoints, security personnel and energy infrastructure (U.S. Department of State, 2014). Ever since, armed groups have used Morsi´s ousting to further legitimate their anti-government stance and broaden their support base, enlarging their strategic range into the mainland. Ever since, Islamist violence has intensified in the Sinai Peninsula and has extended to the Nile Valley, Upper Egypt and the Western desert, and new extremist groups have emerged, notably Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra.

There is a myriad of factors accounting for the emergence of insurgent groups in the Sinai, including the peninsula´s large size and scarce population, its remoteness to the mainland, weak central governments and constrains on military presence following the 1979 Peace Treaty with Israel. Moreover, the borders have traditionally been ill-defined and poorly managed. Ndiaye and Tazi (2020) identify four root causes, including economic inequality and underdevelopment, political marginalization and authoritarianism, Islamist extremism and regional instability, including the Gaza and Libya conflicts. Arguably, the lack of basic services and infrastructure, as well as the absence of a large enough formal labor market has made the local population rely on illegal trade for income generation. Moreover, the economic and political marginalization of the Bedouin community, based primarily in the Sinai, may have fostered disaffection and anti-government sentiment, though Bedouins only make up a small fraction of the insurgents. Altogether, the government´s securitized approach against insurgency, which has included mass detentions, displacements and civilian casualties, may have fueled local resentment (Dentice, 2018).

Egypt´s current insurgency landscape is characterized by three broad categories: jihadist groups affiliated with the Islamic State, jihadist groups affiliated with, or that are supporters of, Al-Qaeda, and non-Salafi jihadist groups made up of Islamist supporters and some former, and possibly current, members of the Muslim Brotherhood (Awad & Hashem, 2015). The aftermath of the 2013 coup saw the emergence of two significant terrorist groups, Hassm and Liwaa al-Thawra, which reportedly off-shoot from the Muslim Brotherhood (Alrababa´h, Bishop & Wehrey, 2015). They have diverged from the Brotherhood´s stance on violence, justifying it to the extent that it allows for retaliation against security forces and for the overthrow of the al-Sisi regime. Consequently, they have carried out attacks on infrastructure, security forces and religious authorities in the mainland, but do not target civilians (Ndiaye & Tazi, 2020).

Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province) is the most active group in the insurgency. Formerly known as Ansar Beit al-Maqdis, it pledged allegiance to ISIS in November 2014. It operates mostly in Sinai using conventional guerrilla tactics against security personnel and political figures, though it has also been carrying out larger-scale attacks on civilian population (Ndiaye & Tazi, 2020), including the downing of a Russian plane that killed 224 people in October 2015. The crash was caused by an explosive device placed inside

the aircraft, which the ISIS later claimed was a can with some explosive substance inside (Hanna, Martinez, & Deaton, 2015), an illustrative example of "low-cost jihad". Likewise, it launched an attack on November 2017 on a Saudi-affiliated mosque in North Sinai that killed 311 civilians, it deadliest one to date (Council of Foreign Relations, n.d.). It has also targeted religious minorities, including the April 2017 attack on Coptic churches in Tanta and Alexandria and the December 2016 attack on a Coptic chapel located in Cairo (Council of Foreign Relations, n.d.).

Al-Qaeda-affiliated groups include Ansar al-Islam, al-Morabitoon and Jund al-Islam, which has condemned Wilayat Sinai targeting of Muslim civilians (Ndiaye & Tazi, 2020). Ansar al-Islam operates mainly in the Western desert, notably along the Egypt-Libya border and has claimed the October 2017 attack targeting Egyptian security personnel in the Bahariya Oasis (Council of Foreign Relations, n.d.). Al-Morabitoon, though very active in Mali and other African countries, has claimed no attacks in the Sinai Peninsula. However, it is likely based in Derna, Cyrenaica (Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, 2017), which makes it a potential key actor for cross-border activity.

The conflict in Libya affects the insurgency in Egypt in several ways. As stated, Libya´s eastern border has become a rather safe haven for militias, from which weapons and fighters, as well as other illegal items, can conveniently access the Sinai Peninsula and inner Egypt (Dentice, 2017). This is further facilitated by the simultaneous presence of some armed groups in both countries, notably Wilayat Sinai, and contributes to the overall escalation of the insurgency. Although most of the weapons coming from Libya intercepted by the Egyptian border authorities are small caliber arms, they have also confiscated heavier armament, including explosive devices, anti-aircraft weapons and Grad rockets (Alrababa´h, Bishop & Wehrey, 2015). Reportedly, land and sea routes for smuggling originate in Benghazi, from where goods are transported either across the border to the Egyptian port of Marsa Marouth, in the northwest, and onwards onto the Sinai, or by sea to the Gulf of Bardi, in Libya, and then to the Gulf of Salloum, located in Egypt next to the western border (Alrababa´h, Bishop & Wehrey, 2015).

Moreover, some terrorist attacks carried out in Egypt have reportedly been planned and facilitated by militias in Libya, for instance the July 2014 attack to a checkpoint on the Farafa Oasis, located 120 miles away from the Libyan border, in Egypt´s Western desert,

and another one on November 2018 targeting a group of Coptic Christians (al-Anani, 2020b). At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of attacks against military personnel at checkpoints in both sides of the borders (Dentice, 2017). Lastly, Egypt may fear the potential convergence of interests between radicalized Muslim Brotherhood-offshoot groups operating both in Cyrenaica and in Egypt´s Western Desert (Dentice & Melcangi, 2020).

In response to a cross-border issue, the al-Sisi administration has been pursuing a threefold strategy targeting militants in Egyptian soil, at the border, and within Libya. At home, Egypt has adopted a counterterrorist approach with some attempts at counterinsurgency that remain underdeveloped (Dentice, 2018). The military has, since 2011, launched six main counterterrorism operations including Operation Eagle I in 2011, Operation Eagle II in 2012, Operation Desert Storm in 2013, Operation Sinai in 2014, Operation Martyr´s Right in 2015 and Operation Campaign Sinai in 2018, with varying success. They have mostly focused on the northern and central parts of the Sinai Peninsula, though Campaign Sinai broadened the reach to the Nile Delta region and the Western Desert. Similarly, Egypt has conducted smaller-scale operations targeting militants in the Sinai and the Western deserts who were believed to be behind certain attacks (al-Anani, 2020b).

Since 2013, the military has also substantially increased the number of troops in the Sinai Peninsula (Dentice, 2018). In fact, Israel has allowed Egypt to surpass the limit on military presence agreed upon in the 1979 Peace Treaty following increased attacks in North Sinai. Under the Treaty, the Sinai is divided into four zones: zone A, the one closer to mainland Egypt, in which Egypt may station one mechanized infantry division of up to 22,000 troops; zone B, in which it may station four border battalions to support the civilian police consisting of up to 4,000 personnel in total; zone C, the one closer to the border, which is effectively demilitarized; and zone D, within Israel, in which Israel may station four infantry battalions. There have been reports that Israel allowed Egypt in 2013 to deploy two more infantry battalions in El-Arish and Sharm el-Sheikh, in zones B and C, respectively (Cohen, 2013). Moreover, according to official statement, the Egyptian army doubled its forces in the Sinai Peninsula between 2017 and 2018, with Israel´s approval, from 41 battalions and 25,000 men in 2017, to 88 battalions and 42,000 soldiers in 2018 (Staff, 2018). The Egyptian military has implemented a 5-kilometre buffer zone

along the eastern border in an attempt to curtail arms smuggling and militant penetration from Gaza. During Operation Martyr´s Right in 2015, they also destroyed part of the tunnels linking both sides of the border.

Military interventions have been successful regarding the temporary suppression of violence. However, after a while attacks resume, and anti-government violent sentiment escalates (Ndiaye & Tazi, 2020). Arguably, an overly securitized approach to Egypt´s domestic crisis overlooks the structural factors that lay at the root, and so are unlikely to be successful in the long-term, especially if the trends of repression, mass arrests and forced displacements continues. Since the end of 2015, Egypt may have shifted towards a counterinsurgency strategy that includes not only military, but also economic and political measures (Dentice, 2017). However, far from addressing political marginalization, it has instead focused on passing new anti-terrorist legislation and joining efforts aimed at stopping external operational support to Wilayat Sinai, notably through the international coalition against the Islamic State. Moreover, though the government has apparently taken some steps regarding a development plan for the Sinai (Samir, 2020), local economic grievances remain largely unaddressed. All in all, counterterrorism and repression seem to remain the focus of al-Sisi´s strategy.

At the same time, Egypt has taken certain measures to safeguard the border and prevent arms and militant penetration from Eastern Libya, including a general military build-up. Moreover, following the takeover of Libyan military bases in Benghazi by Islamist militias, notably Ansar al-Sharia, in August 2014, Egypt has reportedly increased military presence along the border (Alrababa´h, Bishop & Wehrey, 2015). In the same line, it carried out an extensive military drill in the Egyptian side of the border, near the Salloum checkpoint, referred to as "Raad 24", in October 2015. Lastly, it has also set up various ambush points targeting smugglers coming from both Libya and Sudan, notably the one in the Farafra oasis (Alrababa´h, Bishop & Wehrey, 2015).

More recently, it has carried out another military drill near the border referred to as "Hasm 2020", including not only land, but also maritime and air defenses (El-Shamaa, 2020). Reportedly aimed at damaging mercenaries´ gathering points, logistics and command centers (Egypt State Information Service, 2020), the exercise may have also been motivated, at least partially, by the desire to send a message to Ankara over the eastward

advancement of GNA troops. Also, it is reportedly preparing to open a new naval base on its Mediterranean coast, close to the border with Libya (Egypt to Open New Naval Base, Shield Itself against Libya, 2021).

Within Libya, Egypt has conducted hostilities mostly through proxy. Of special significance to the counterinsurgency efforts was the 2018 Battle of Derna, in which the LNA managed to recapture the city, formerly controlled by the Shura Council of Islamic Youth, a coalition of Islamist militias. However, there has also been some relevant direct intervention in the form of airstrikes. Most of them have been conducted not in support of the LNA, but rather to, ostensibly, defend Egypt´s western border (Bergen & Sims, 2018). Significantly, most of the airstrikes carried out in inner Libya have taken place in Derna (Bergen & Sims, 2018), including the 2015 retaliation campaign in which Egypt conducted heavy strikes in Derna and Sirte, an ISIS stronghold, for the beheading of 21 Egyptian Copts by an ISIS-affiliated cell. Such a dual course of action points towards two ultimate aims, namely establishing an Islamist-free zone in the Western border, alike to the one in the border with Gaza, and hindering the consolidation of militant groups in Cyrenaica.

1.2. Economic dimension: trade, remittances, and access to subsidized energy sources.

Libya´s armed conflict has had an overall negative effect on Egypt´s economy. Before 2011, Libya played an important role in the Egyptian economy in terms of remittances, trade and energy supply. For one, it has been estimated that between 330,000 to 1.5 million Egyptians were working in Libya, which meant a total annual inflow remittance of between 19.5 and 33 million US dollars, not including those conducted through informal channels (International Organization for Migration, n.d.). Following the uprisings and the subsequent outbreak of the civil war in 2014, there has been a steep reduction in the number of Egyptian migrant workers in Libya, down to 750,000 in 2015 (Miller, 2019). This has led not only to the loss of a significant portion of remittances, but also to an increased pressure on an aching economy.

Parallelly, bilateral trade has also been negatively affected, which the volume of Egyptian exports to the Libyan market having fell significantly, from 1.15 billion US dollars in 2010 to around 600 million in 2018 (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2018a). There has also been a decline in Libyan exports to Egypt, which amounted to 406 million US dollars in 2011, down to 63 million US dollars in 2018 (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2018b). Most significantly, given Egypt´s energetic dependency, while petroleum and gas represented 36% of imports from Libya in 2011, the made up only 14.8% of the total imports in 2018 (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2018b). Having an influence in post-conflict Libya would mean an increase in economic cooperation and the restoration of trade volume to pre-conflict numbers, as well as the participation of Egyptian companies in post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Moreover, a stable oil- and gas-rich Libya would provide Egypt with access to subsidized energy resources.

Egypt is a net importer of both oil and gas, and over the past years it has amounted a debt with foreign energetic companies of over 5 billion US dollars (Farouk & Noueihed, 2014). Though it has reportedly paid out 80% of its arrears, as announced by petroleum minister Terk El-Molla during an oil forum in Cairo (El-Din, 2020), and recently discovered significant oil and gas reserves (Zeid, 2021), it still faces an increasing energy demand amid falling production. Moreover, given that a significant part of the newly found reserves are located in the Western desert, we must also take into account the element of insecurity derived from insurgency activity.

Libya holds Africa´s largest crude oil reserves and one of the largest natural gas reserves (BP Global, 2020). Between the 1970s and 2000s, Libya´s oil and gas industries developed greatly, creating an array of structures and operators, most of them state-owned, presided over by the also state-owned National Oil Corporation (Barltrop, 2019). However, the aftermath of the 2011 revolution brought major disruptions and difficulties for the energy sector. In 2011, oil production in Libya experienced a major decline, down to 23,562 kilotons (kt), but made a rapid but short-lived recovery in 2012, to approximately 70,000 kt, almost reaching pre-revolution levels. There was a general decrease in production between 2012 and 2016, down to around 16,000 kt, the year that marked the beginning of an ongoing upward trend, with production in 2019 reaching almost 60,000 kt (International Energy Agency, 2020b). The gas industry has undergone

similar fluctuations. In the 2010-2011 period, production more than halved, down to 298,680 gross terajoules (TJ), and did not experience a rapid recuperation but rather a steady one, reaching pre-2011 levels only in 2014. Between 2014 and 2018, production experienced a noticeable decrease, from around 627,900 to 527,400 TJ, and a shaper increase in the 2018-2019 period, up to almost 600,000 TJ (International Energy Agency, 2020a).

Recent developments, including the lifting of the blockade on oil production imposed by Haftar and the resumption of production in the Sharara oil field, the country´s largest, seem to indicate that the energy production will continue its observed upward trend. Moreover, Haftar controls most of the oil crescent, and both Egypt and the UAE have been reportedly receiving oil from eastern Libya at 55 US dollars a barrel, below the official price according to the Chairman of the National Oil Corporation (Alharathy, 2019). For reference, the OPEC basket price for 2019 sat between 64.040 and 41.47 US dollars (OPEC, 2021), while Dubai Fateh sat between and 70.640 and 58.536 ((Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2021). In 2021, OPEC basket prices have fluctuated between 68.140 and 53.490 US dollars (OPEC, 2021), and Dubai Fateh between 60.366 and 53.968 (Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, 2021).

Either way, and even though Egypt may be already benefitting economically from its relationship with Haftar, as long as the conflict persists, oil production will be subject to militia activity and war advancements. Consequently, Libya´s subsidized oil and gas will only be a viable answer to Cairo´s energetic demand once war is over, more so if the resulting government is a friendly one. Moreover, gas pipelines have been traditional targets for Egyptian insurgents, with Wilayat Sinai having taken credit for two explosion that struck a gas pipeline in North Sinai, near el-Arish, in February and November 2020 (Islamic State Claims Sabotage Attack on Egypt's Gas Pipeline to Israel, 2020).

1.3. Avoiding the establishment of an Islamist, pro-Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, support for, or antagonism towards, the Muslim Brotherhood and akin political Islam organizations has been the main determinant in the competition between status quo and counterhegemonic powers (Lynch, 2017), with Libya becoming one of the main theatres of such polarizing fight. After the 2013 coup, Egypt came to define itself in terms of its active anti-political Islam stance. The al-Sisi administration declared the Muslim Brotherhood to be a terrorist group in December 2013, which entailed the criminalization of its activities, financing and even membership (Darwich, 2017). The move had quick regional reverberations, with the other counterrevolutionary powers, namely Saudi Arabia and the UAE, subsequently banning the organization in March and November 2014, respectively.

Ever since, one of the main focuses of Egypt´s counterrevolutionary foreign policy has been containing the spread of political Islam, particularly in neighboring countries where it could pose a threat to al-Sisi´s domestic legitimacy and, ultimately, regime survival. This is particularly visible in Libya, where Egypt would like to see a government that is not only friendly, but also politically alike, and that would serve its regional interests. Consequently, one of the main aims of its Libya policy, arguably the one of paramount importance, has been hindering the formation of a Libyan government based on political Islam or remotely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. In al-Sisi´s eyes, an Islamist government in a neighboring country could potentially look to destabilize Egypt. Furthermore, it would erode the political legitimacy of his regime, based on the premise that a military autocratic government is the only way to counter the "terrorist threat" posed by Islamism. Following this reasoning, the backing of Haftar seems natural, given their shared, unwavering anti-political Islam stance and firm belief in autocratic militarism as a form of government.

At home and abroad, al-Sisi has been making use of an anti-Islamist narrative that equates Islamism with jihadism, playing up the threat of the former (Boduszyński, 2017). This allows it not only to bolster its domestic and external support, but also to legitimize its involvement in Libya and justify repression and human rights abuses in the name of counterterrorism. Indeed, in post-Arab Spring Middle Eastern regional politics, the threat

of terrorism has become a foreign policy instrument, insofar as it can be politicized and instrumentalized as a source of legitimacy in pursuance of hegemonic policies (Cavusoglu, 2020). In this sense, Egypt´s labelling of the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist, and the extension of such label to any Islamist organization, seems to answer to both its concerns of political legitimacy and its foreign policy objectives.

By linking Islamism, and the Brotherhood in particular, with terrorism, Egypt is looking not only to legitimize its own actions, but also to delegitimize the foreign policy of the pro-political Islam powers, notably Qatar and Turkey. In this sense, the Libyan conflict ought to be analyzed both as part of a broader anti-political Islam campaign and as a scenario for competitive power politics driving both the Qatar-UAE and the Turkey-Egypt rivalries. Regarding the latter, tensions between the two regional powers have been escalating since the Arab Spring uprisings, as the two powers have developed clashing interests. Currently, they are engaged in a regional struggle for influence that includes not only Libya, but also Sudan, Syria, Yemen and the Eastern Mediterranean (Maher & Tsukerman, 2019). Arguably, Egypt´s effort to avoid a Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya is also partially motivated by its desire to prevent Ankara from gaining a foothold in Libya and, more broadly, North Africa. Conversely, Turkey´s involvement in Libya can be partially explained by its desire to counter Egypt and frustrate its foreign policy objectives (Megeresi, 2019). In this scenario, al-Sisi´s anti-political Islam rhetoric also serves a useful tool to delegitimize Turkey´s foreign policy in Libya.

In short, avoiding the establishment of a pro-Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya is an objective of outmost priority for Egypt, in light of its perception as a would-be existential threat to domestic legitimacy and, ultimately, regime survival. Libya´s polarization between Islamists and anti-Islamists not only perfectly mirrors Egypt´s recent history but is also relevant in Sisi´s current quest for legitimacy in a domestic scenario characterized by mounting insurgency, anti-government sentiment and repression. Consequently, Sisi´s short-term desire to rid Egypt´s neighborhood of political Islam seems to override the security and economic concerns stemming from the Libyan crisis that could be better addressed with a stable Libya with durable institutions.

2. Difficulties faced by Egypt in its proxy warfare strategy

2.1. Egypt´s and Haftar´s principal-agent relationship. Conflicting interest's dilemma. 2019 Tripoli campaign failure and Egypt´s policy shift.

As posited by Groh (2019), the question of objective convergence is central to proxy warfare. Theoretically, the higher the objective compatibility, the lower the costs and the higher the benefits of a proxy warfare policy. Moreover, and even if objectives were initially coincidental, the alignment may change overnight. For one, the proxy objectives may grow more ambitious following successes against its opponent. In that case, given that the supporting state seeks more limited objectives, it will likely struggle with restraining or redirecting the proxy´s course of action. Also, the intervening state´s objective may change following a shift in public support, or when a rival state intervenes, raising the stakes of the conflict. In these cases, the sponsoring state will tend to disengage from its proxy, while the proxy will likely seek alternative ways, proxy or otherwise, to meet its needs. Haftar´s late 2018 and 2019 advance eastward, the Tripoli campaign and Egypt´s subsequent Libya policy recalibration illustrate these points precisely.

Haftar´s ambitions are twofold. On the one hand, he aims to reconquer all of Libya. In April 2020, he stated in a televised speech that the UN-backed GNA was outdated and corrupted, and that he accepted "the will of the people" to take political control of the country (Rodríguez, 2020). He has also claimed that Turkey and terrorism threaten Libya´s sovereignty and instability and has stated that war will not stop until all of Libya is "freed of invaders and mercenaries" (Hernández, 2020). On the other hand, he would like to see the Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood completely dismantled and the country cleansed of "Islamic radicals" (Baroud, 2015).

Haftar failed to establish himself as an influential figure in post-2011 Libyan politics and was sidelined in the political transition attempt. However, he soon found another purpose: launching a "war on terror" in eastern Libya. The war on terror was supported by Egypt, the UAE and, also, France. Operation Dignity came at a time when France was increasing its counterterrorism narrative, and Haftar´s Emirati support, with whom France enjoyed an already close security partnership, made him a natural ally for Paris (Megeresi, 2020). As the war on terror gradually ended, Haftar´s foreign sponsors kept providing the

technology, finances, airpower and troops needed to acquire Libya´s oil export terminals and conquer the remainder of eastern Libya. Later on, France and the UAE backed Haftar´s advance eastward, into the oil crescent and the Fezzan region from mid-2018 to 2019 (Wehrey, 2020). Haftar succeeded in seizing Benghazi and Derna in 2018 and grew confident in his ability to obtain a victory in the eastern part of the country.

In April 2019, he launched an attack on Tripoli, also known as "Operation Flood of Dignity". His plan to recapture Tripolitania and blitzkrieg the capital quickly failed, and the LNA found itself in a costly war of attrition, struggling to maintain long supply lines through partially controlled territory (Megerisi, 2020). By June 2020, the GNA forces had recaptured the territory, and the LNA withdrew from the capital (al-Sahili, 2020). Some have argued that the Tripoli failure was a result of Haftar´s miscalculations. For one, he ignored the fact that Tripolitania-based militias have vested political and economic incentives to defend their ground and are deeply embedded in their communities, in contrast to the southern security vacuum and the eastern tribal demography that he had encountered in previous campaigns (Badi & Wehrey, 2019). Moreover, the offensive united a multitude of political groups and militias that had, until then, been in conflict with one another, in opposition to Haftar (Lacher, 2019). It should be pointed out, however, that he was able to garner backing in western Libya from various constituencies and armed groups, notably from Zawiya, in the western coast, and Zintan, in the Nafusa mountains, which are split between pro-and anti-LNA forces (Badi & Wehrey, 2019).

Most importantly, he may have underestimated Tripolitanian militias´ ability to garner outside support. Specifically, the offensive triggered increased Turkish intervention, to Egypt´s dismay. Ankara was faced with the choice of either moving against the pro-Haftar´s camp´s gambit to claim the rest of Libya or acquiesce to it. Moreover, the situation provided for an opportunity to advance its eastern Mediterranean interests (Megerisi, 2020). Once Turkish troops and air support were deployed, the GNA was quickly able to reclaim several strategic spots in western Libya, and Haftar´s forces were forced to retreat (Badi & Wehrey, 2019). Ever since, Ankara´s intervention in Libya has taken the form of air support through drones (Kington, 2020), continued provisions of weapons (Harchaoui, 2020), troops and Syrian mercenaries (Vohra, 2020), and intelligence operatives (Naar, 2020).
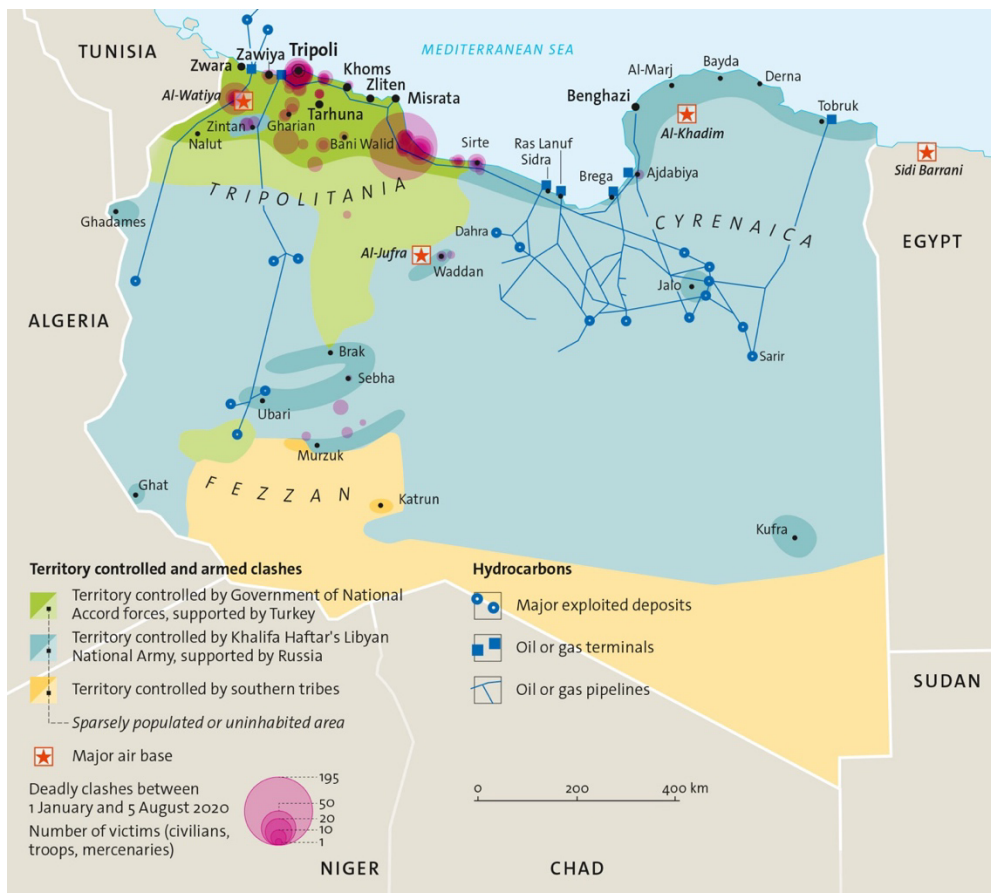
Figure 3. Libya Divided, August 2020. Cécile Marin for *Le Monde Diplomatique.*

In contrast with its initial support for Haftar´s war on terror and eastern Libya campaign, Egypt has not been keen to back Haftar´s reconquest ambitions. In fact, this may be the main point of divergence that prompted Haftar to seek support elsewhere. In the same line, Cairo initially opposed the Tripoli offensive, while the UAE, France and Russia supported Haftar and provided substantial intelligence, operational and military support (Wehrey, 2020). Subsequently, Egypt was reportedly pressured by the UAE into backing it not only diplomatically, but also in the information and military realms (Wehrey, 2020).

Haftar´s failure in Tripoli was a turning point not only for the Libyan war as a whole, but also for the Egypt-Haftar proxy relationship. There have been some reports that relations have been deteriorating, with al-Sisi having cancelled several scheduled meetings (Bachir, 2020). Egyptian authorities seem to consider the Tripoli offensive, as well subsequent defeats in Watiya and Tarhuna, as a military failure, one with particularly

harsh consequences for Egypt´s foreign Libya policy (Bachir, 2020). Moreover, there have been rumors that Egyptian loyalty to Haftar is to the resources received from its own external sponsors than to its proxy´s ability or usefulness, as its conduct in the Tripoli campaign would illustrate (Dentice & Melcangi, 2020).

Egypt has proven unable to constrain Haftar into following the action path that best serves its interests, a stable and friendly government in Cyrenaica, and, moreover, has seen itself dragged into an undesirable unfolding of events following its proxy´s actions. It was the failure in Tripoli that prompted increased Turkish intervention and, arguably, had the LNA secured a military victory, it would have been more costly, and complex, for Ankara to pursue such a decisive intervention in favor of the GNA. Now Egypt risks escalation with Turkey, stakes and costs of further involvement are higher than they were pre-2019, and Cairo´s preferred outcome seems further away.

This may have led Egypt to recalibrate its Libya policy and opt for a diplomatic escape out to contain its losses, though with limited success. Arguably, al-Sisi is looking to dilute Ankara´s security and military role in Libya and prevent it from arranging a favorable transition environment for Islamists to seize control of government. This calls for political, rather than military, maneuver. In this regard, Cairo has been showing not only an inclination to acquiesce to, but also certain assertiveness towards, a political solution to the Libyan crisis in the absence of a military way of deciding the conflict in its favor.

Reportedly, as early as June 2019, in a high-level meeting in Rome in which officials from the UN Special Mission in Libya, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Egypt and the UAE were to discuss the possibilities of de-escalation and resumption of the political process, Egypt and France intended to push for the LNA to accept a ceasefire, while Haftar and the UAE categorically refused (Mada Masr, 2019). Likewise, on September 28th, 2020, Egypt hosted military inter-Libyan talks under UN sponsorship to try to encourage an agreement between the factions (Zaid, 2020). Since the meeting sought to serve as preparation for a permanent cease-fire agreement, and it was held within the framework of the UN-supported 5+5 Joint Military Commission (consisting of 5 senior military officers chosen by the GNA and other 5 chosen by Haftar), the move was received as the return of Egypt to the role of mediator in the Libyan conflict (al-Anani, 2021).

On December 27th, a high-ranking Egyptian diplomatic and security delegation visited Tripoli to partake in talks with the GNA (Madgy, 2020). Indeed, Cairo and Tripoli had been growing closer in previous months, especially since the October 23rd ceasefire agreement between the factions. The Libyan Political Dialogue was subsequently launched on November 9th and Egypt welcomed the announcement of a new interim government (Zaid, 2021a). In the same line, al-Sisi and the new Libyan prime minister, Abdulhamid Dbeibeh, met in Cairo, and the former offered Egypt´s support in Libya´s transitional process (Egypt's Sisi Offers Support to Libya's New PM, 2021)

Notwithstanding, there are factors to take into account that may hinder Egypt´s new apparent policy of political solution. For one, both Haftar and the UAE still favor a hardline military solution whereby the LNA retakes full control of the country (al-Anani, 2021). The UAE could support Haftar in another attempt at reconquest and, also, could pressure Egypt into supporting it, just as it did during the Tripoli offensive. Moreover, the relationship between Cairo and Ankara is a tense one, not limited to the Libyan conflict but also spanning to the broader Mediterranean context. In Libya, Al-Sisi has been clear in his warning of the consequences of a continued advance of GNA forces towards the east, declaring Sirte a "red line" (Zaptia, 2020). Moreover, Cairo has obtained a statement by the Tobruk-based House of Representatives allowing the Egyptian army to enter the country (England & Saleh, 2020). Likewise, he obtained similar support from Libya´s Supreme Tribal Council (Hassan, 2020), and its own House of Representatives approved sending troops into the neighboring country ((Hamamdjian, 2020).

These moves set off alarms of a possible Egyptian military intervention in Libya. However, although al-Sisi may have some incentives to conduct a direct intervention, there are important factors deterring him from doing so, including international disapproval and more pressing concerns, such as the Sinai insurgency, challenges in the eastern Mediterranean and the ongoing Renaissance Dam negotiations with Ethiopia (Megeresi, 2020). Indeed, multilateral efforts to manage the Gran Ethiopian Renaissance Dam are yet to generate tangible results as the upcoming implementation of the second phase of filling increases the urgency for the Nile basin countries to reach an agreement (Zaid, 2021b). Most importantly, an intervention would lead to a formidable escalation of the conflict, and Egypt late Libya policy seems to instead focus on de-escalation with Turkey and, arguably, a gradual withdrawal of support for Haftar.

Either way, the 2019 Tripoli offensive, subsequent events and Egypt´s recalibration of its Libya policy illustrate the sponsor-proxy concerns that Cairo has been facing with Haftar. For one, there is a main point of objective divergence between Egypt and Haftar. On the one hand, Egypt´s preferred outcome seems to have gradually shifted, from a stable Libya ruled by a government alike to its own, rid of Islamists, to a stable Cyrenaica with a friendly government that allows stabilize its western border and control the insurgency at home. At the same time, subsequent military failures and the changing conditions on the ground have convinced Cairo of the unlikeliness of a full reconquest of Libya by the LNA. Haftar, however, has remained ambitious, in his attempt to retake the country and impose a Sisi-inspired military regime. He has also been pragmatic and utilized the available support. Knowing that he could not obtain the necessary backing from Cairo to conduct such a campaign, he has relied on other foreign sponsors that were willing to provide. Parallelly, Egypt has started to gradually disengage from Haftar, sometimes with little success. Indeed, his condition as a UAE client state has undermined its ability to carry out an independent foreign policy. Moreover, the changing conditions on the ground, brought about by Haftar´s military failures, have complicated matters for Cairo, which has had to recalibrate its Libya policy in face of an increased risk of escalation with Ankara.

2.2. Haftar´s LNA resource independence. Involvement of other state actors acting as sponsors.

The sponsor-proxy relationship between Egypt and Haftar falls within Fox´s (2019) transactional model of proxy warfare, in which the proxy is not dependent and subordinate on the sponsoring state, despite the power asymmetry, but is instead the powerbroker in the relationship. Able to garner the needed support from other sources, proxy or otherwise, the proxy is prone to engage in parallel relations with other sponsors, and even substitute the initial proxy relationship, especially in cases of objective divergence. Similarly, Groh (2019) talks about proxy isolation and posits that a resource-dependent proxy is key to a well-planned proxy strategy, insofar as dependency will facilitate the ability of the sponsoring state to dictate its proxy´s actions.

Haftar´s LNA has multiple sources of support, both local and proxy. Apart from Egypt, it has three other main sponsoring states, the UAE, France and Russia, willing to support his endeavors. Saudi Arabia has also supported the LNA, though it has limited itself to the role of financer. Such a wide array of available sponsors has meant that Haftar could request support from multiple sources when Egypt refused to do so, hindering the latter's ability to redirect its proxy´s ambitions. This dynamic of "best bidder" proxy is especially the case given the UAE ´s wealth and objective compatibility with Haftar. This has rendered Egypt´s proxy strategy remarkably volatile, and dependent on the UAE´s wishes, sometimes against its own.

a. Local resources

Haftar has significant local resources of financial that have been important to his military advancements. For one, he has been profiting off state resources, including oil production and taxing. Purportedly, LNA soldiers registered before 2014 are paid through a dual mechanism involving funds received from the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya and revenues coming from the support received by the House of Representatives, the internationally recognized parliament in Tobruk (Eaton, 2019). In 2018, they were reportedly able to secure more than 475 million US dollars for the LNA via legal budget provisions (Eaton, 2019). Also, an important part of the Libyan commercial banking sector is based in the eastern part of the country, most notably the Eastern Central Bank of Libya headquarters in al-Bayda, located in northern Cyrenaica. They have printed additional Libyan banknotes in Russia on several occasions, amounting to a total of 9.7 billion dinars, approximately 2 billion US dollars, between 2016 and 2018 (Assad, 2018). Also, a third of the Eastern Central Bank reportedly went to the LNA in the period 2016-2019, amounting to approximately $6.8 billion in three years (Eaton, 2019).

Moreover, the LNA has developed a long-term strategy for its own economic, business and investment role in Libya (Eaton, 2019). It takes after the Egyptian model of military involvement in the economy through the National Service Projects Organization (NSPO), whose power has in fact expanded under al-Sisi to become the biggest force in the country´s economy (Khalid, 2020). The Tobruk-based House of Representatives passed the so-called Military Investment Legislation in November 2018, and the LNA is now

involved in a wide array of economic activities, including waste management, waste export and agriculture (Eaton, 2019). Moreover, they may also be profiting off illicit traffics, including drugs but also human trafficking and smuggling, either directly or indirectly through safe passage taxations, extortion or protection deals (Mangan, 2020).

b. External sources

i)   United Arab Emirates

The UAE has been involved in the Libyan conflict since its onset. It has provided considerable weaponry to Haftar in violation of the UN arms embargo, and has launched numerous airstrikes against GNA forces, which have proven crucial for Haftar´s advancements (Wehrey, 2020). It has also recruited Sudanese mercenaries to fight alongside the LNA (Zoubir, 2020) and, like Saudi Arabia, has assisted in Haftar´s lobbying of the Trump Administration (Reid, 2020).

The UAE shares with al-Sisi´s Egypt the view that political Islam, epitomized in the Muslim Brotherhood, is an existential threat to regime survival, and, just like Egypt, it has been conducting a counterrevolutionary foreign policy to "roll back" the politics of the Arab Spring (Megeresi, 2019) and suppress any democratic and Islamist forces in the region. Such a stance led it to support not only Haftar in Libya, but also al-Sisi himself during his 2013 coup. Ever since, it has provided Egypt with substantial economic resources, and Egyptian financial dependence has allowed the UAE to meddle substantially not only in Egypt´s domestic politics, but also in its foreign undertakings (Zoubir, 2020). Arguably, the UAE´s preferred outcome for Libya would be a repetition of post-2013 coup Egyptian dynamics, regarding its ability to influence domestic and regional affairs.

Abu Dhabi is looking to ascertain its regional domination. In this sense, its involvement in Libya should be understood not only in the context of the UAE-Qatar rivalry, but also in the sense of preventing the emergence of a sovereign and stable Libya. Arguably, an independent, self-sufficient Libya, with its vast energy sources wealth, could not only

compete with the UAE, but also threaten its objective of exercising hegemony in North Africa and preserving the type of regime it favors (Zoubir, 2020). That way, the UAE and Egypt´s objectives for Libya are partially coincidental but differ in scope.

Such divergence between Abu Dhabi and Cairo can best be observed in recent conflicting views on how to solve the Libyan crisis. Whereas Egypt seems to believe that there is a chance at a political solution to the Libyan crisis through negotiation, the UAE insists on a military solution and is willing to support Haftar in his attempt to wage war on the GNA and take full control of the country (el-Anani, 2021). Moreover, as opposed to Egypt, the UAE backed Haftar´s advance eastward that culminated in the 2019 offensive on Tripoli.

For one, the UAE´s support for Haftar potentially undermines Egypt´s ability to influence Haftar, as well as its overall Libya policy. Most significantly, however, Egypt´s financial dependence in the UAE means that the latter may influence Cairo´s action path directly, instead of indirectly through proxy dynamics, as seen in the Tripoli offensive. Unless Egypt finds alternative revenue sources, it may end up giving in to pressures from Abu Dhabi, including a return to a hardline military solution to the Libyan crisis (el-Anani, 2021).

ii)   France

France started secretly backing Haftar in 2014, though it only became public in 2016 after three of its special operations soldiers were killed in the country, forcing the government to admit its involvement (Reid, 2020). In deep contrast with its official stance of support for the UN-backed GNA, France´s policy on the ground has been one of support for Haftar´s operations, including the 2019 campaign on Tripoli (Wehrey, 2020). For one, it has supplied a considerable number of weapons to Haftar both directly and indirectly through the UAE and Egypt (Zoubir, 2020). Moreover, it has provided substantial operational, intelligence and tactical support to the LNA, and even committed its own Special Force Units during Operation Dignity (Eltagouri, 2019).

In Libya, like the UAE and Egypt, France has instrumentalized the terrorist threat to legitimize its intervention in support of Haftar. More generally, in the name of

counterterrorism, it has been conducting an overarching regional strategy aimed at maintaining its traditional foothold in North Africa and the Sahel, as well as at asserting its influence in the Mediterranean (Köse & Öztürk, 2020). Moreover, France has important economic interests in the country, namely energy resources. It has been pursuing contracts for its oil multinational company Total S.E., which in 2018 purchased a 16.33% stake in the Waha Oil Company, a subsidiary of Libya´s state-owned National Oil Corporation (NOC) (Ghaddar & Lewis, 2018). In 2019, Libyan oil represented 6.36% of French total crude petroleum imports (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2019). Lastly, French involvement in the Libya crisis ought to be analyzed in the context of rivalry with Italy over the Mediterranean and, more importantly, Southwest Libya (Ilardo, 2018).

France´s preferred outcome for the Libyan crisis does not seem to differ from Cairo´s and Abu Dhabi´s vision of a government free of Islamist forces. Moreover, in line with the UAE, it seems willing to support Haftar´s military ambitions of reconquest, following its support for the 2019 advance westward and attack on Tripoli. In doing so, it inevitably undermines Egypt´s control on Haftar, as he can resort to France, apart from the UAE, to support and finance his objectives even if Cairo refuses to do so.

iii)   Russia

In contrast to the UAE and France, Russia´s policy of support for the LNA is nuanced and keeps the door open for dialogue with the GNA, in order to nurture its regional status and secure its position as a potential diplomatic arbiter, if need be. On the one hand, it has been supporting Haftar militarily since 2016, which has allowed it to increase its geopolitical influence in an area key to Western interests. While Russia has two permanent military bases in Syria, an air base in the western Latakia province and a naval base in the Mediterranean coastal city of Tartus, as well as easy stopovers in Egypt, it has never been able to establish a naval base in the North African coastline (Zoubir, 2020). Significant influence in Libya could potentially grant Moscow that opportunity. On the other hand, it has engaged in dialogue with the GNA, which has allowed Moscow to present itself as a possible mediator, emphasizing its great power status and, possibly, safeguard profitable reconstruction deals in a future post-conflict scenario (Zoubir, 2020).

Moreover, some have argued that, in a possible future bargain with Turkey, an involvement in the pro-Dignity camp could give Moscow the upper hand, with Haftar becoming negotiating tool beyond the Libya conflict (Dentice & Melcangi, 2020).

Russia´s choice to support Haftar may also have been motivated by Russian concerns about the role of Islamist militias in the western part of the country, as well as the increasing presence of the Islamic State in the region at the time. (Beccaro, 2017). All in all, Haftar seems to be doing a good job at presenting himself as a bulwark against Islamic terrorism. Moreover, in light of the shortcomings of the Haftar camp in military terms, Russia may have chosen to seize the opportunity of exchanging military expertise, weapons and the skills of the Russian Special Forces and mercenaries from the Wagner group for considerable influence in the LNA´s-controlled areas (Köse & Özturk, 2020).

Again, Russian objectives in Libya do not seem to conflict with those of Egypt. In fact, Russia views Cairo as a valuable ally in the North African context, and particularly in the Libyan crisis (Beccaro, 2017). However, as is the case for the UAE and France, its willingness to support Haftar in his most ambitious projects, including the 2019 Tripoli offensive, undermines Egypt´s proxy strategy by diminishing Haftar´s resource dependence and, hence, overall controllability.

III.   Conclusions

This dissertation has attempted to provide a multidimensional analysis of Egypt´s involvement in the Libyan war since 2013 building on three main hypothesis that ought to be validated. The first hypothesis suggested that Egypt´s involvement in Libya can be characterized as proxy warfare, with Haftar´s LNA as its agent but that, insofar as Egypt is only able to exercise influence over its proxy to a certain extent, the proxy relationship is a weak one, with Haftar retaining considerable power and independence. Egypt´s intervention in the Libyan civil war since 2013 has been mostly indirect, with the exception of several airstrikes' campaigns documented mostly near the Egypt-Libya border and in the cities of Derna and Sirte. Its support for general Khalifa Haftar and his LNA can indeed be conceptualized as proxy warfare, following the definition provided for in the theoretical framework, insofar as it includes the backing of a politically motivated, local actor to do the fighting on the ground instead of committing its own military forces, with the purpose of influencing the situation on the ground. Cairo wants to influence Libya´s affairs to better fit its interests and has attempted to direct Haftar to that end. However, the control that it has been able to exercise over him seems tenuous at best, and hence the proxy relationship can, as suggested, be characterized as a weak one. Thus, the first hypothesis can be considered valid.

Regarding the second hypothesis, there are several factors that account for Egyptian involvement in Libya to varying degrees, including the cross-border fueled domestic insurgency, the desire to prevent a pro-Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya and, to a lesser extent, economic concerns. Indeed, the porous border between the two states has been identified to allow for fighter penetration and weapons smuggling which may be exacerbating the ill-controlled domestic insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula and the Western desert. Moreover, some terrorist attacks have reportedly been planned or facilitated by militias settled in Libya. In order to subdue the insurgency, Cairo has been pursuing a threefold strategy, with limited success, targeting militants within Egypt, at the border and in inner Libya. Regarding the latter, it has been following a mixed strategy of airstrikes and proxy, relying on Haftar to rid the region of militias, hence its support for his "war on terror" and the 2018 Battle of Derna. However, although the insurgent attacks in the Sinai seem to be of outmost concern, the attacks carried out in the Western desert are less relevant in impact and scope, and thus that region seems to be

conceptualized instead as a buffer zone to prevent further penetration into the Sinai, instead of as a security concern in and of itself.

As per the prevention of an Islamist, pro-Muslim Brotherhood government in Libya, it seems to be a key driver of Egypt´s involvement, as well as of its choice of proxy, as part of its overarching objective of countering the spread of political Islam in its neighborhood. Lastly, and even though the Libyan crisis has had a negative impact on Egypt´s economy overall, it may be benefitting from close relationships with Haftar, who controls the oil crescent, in the form of better-priced access to crude. However, the economic benefits seem to be a byproduct of its influence over eastern Libya through Haftar, instead of a main driver of its Libya policy. Consequently, the second hypothesis may also be considered correct, with the exception of the role played by the insurgency in the Western Desert, which seems to be conceptualized as a buffer zone to prevent fighter and weapon penetration into the Sinai, and not as a security hot spot.

Lastly, the third hypothesis suggested that conflicting interests between Cairo and Haftar, as well as the latter´s resource independence, have hindered the proxy relationship and Egypt´s ability to influence developments on the ground. Indeed, Egypt has faced both difficulties in its proxy strategy, which have in fact proven to be closely interrelated. For one, there has been a substantial objective divergence between Cairo and Haftar. While the former was eager to support Operation Dignity and Haftar´s "war on terror" to rid Cyrenaica of Islamist militias, it has been reluctant to back the LNA´s advance eastward, including the 2019 Tripoli campaign, and most generally Haftar´s ambitions to reconquer all of Libya. Moreover, the LNA has multiple sources of support, both local and proxy, which it can turn to even when Egypt refuses to offer support. Specifically, Haftar has three other main sponsoring states, the UAE, France and Russia, who have been willing to support his reconquest plans. This resource independence has not only effectively hindered Egypt´s ability to redirect Haftar´s ambitions to better fit its foreign policy interests. Furthermore, Haftar´s ability to pursue its own aims regardless of Cairo´s acquiescence has led to some undesired developments on the ground, notably increased Turkish intervention, that have forced Cairo to readjust its objectives in Libya and recalibrate its overall policy. Hence, the third and last hypothesis of this dissertation can be deemed valid.

IV.   Bibliography

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