

Khalifa Haftar is a Libyan warlord and an American problem

“take no prisoners....show no mercy....strangle them....cut off the air... allow them no medicine”.

These are not the words of some crazed warlord from the middle ages. These are the words of a present-day Libyan warlord conducting one of the dirtiest wars in recent history. And when he is not busy killing civilians, this warlord is trotting the globe meeting with top diplomats, ministers, and presidents from the US, Italy, France, and the UK. He is K.B. Haftar. Or Field Marshal Haftar as he prefers to be called.

Haftar, has arguably done more to sow chaos and instability in Libya than anyone else. The self-appointed Field Marshal and his Libyan National Army have blockaded government buildings to prevent votes of elected representatives. He ordered the arrest of elected officials. He pledged support to one faction, then switched sides. Then reversed course again. He has refused to allow even a vote on a UN-sponsored political agreement, and laid siege to neighborhoods and cities. Some of Libya’s most fanatical and deadly religious groups consider him as their supreme and only leader.

And his armies have engaged in clearly documented war crimes. The International Criminal Court (ICC) called for the arrest of Haftar’s chief subordinate, Mahmoud al-Werfalli. According to their request, the ICC, “found reasonable grounds to believe that Mr al-Werfalli committed murder as a war crime for allegedly directly participating in seven incidents in which 33 individuals were killed.”

And now there’s striking and compelling evidence that Haftar ordered his forces to commit those war crimes, and others, including summary executions, taking no prisoners, torture, war crimes, and denial of humanitarian aid to civilians.

Haftar is an American problem not just because the continued vacuum in Libya will exacerbate and prolong a humanitarian and refugee crisis in Africa and Europe which will further ensnare American interests. Khalifa Haftar is an American problem because he’s an American citizen.

But he's an American problem we can actually do something about, and we should.

First, it should make US policy public in Libya that the United States does not and will not support Haftar and his LNA militia. That's more than good policy; it's illegal under both United States and international law to give material aide to war criminals.

Second, the Trump administration should, considering the new evidence implicating Haftar, call on the ICC to issue an order for his arrest too. Further, the administration can and should offer intelligence that may aid in the arrest of Haftar and al-Werfalli.

Finally, and most importantly, Attorney General Sessions should convene a federal grand jury to indict Haftar for war crimes.

There's precedent for such a move. In 2006, the George W. Bush Justice Department indicted Charles "Chuckie" Taylor, Jr., the American citizen son of the former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, for war crimes he committed in Liberia. Those crimes included torture and extra-judicial killing. The younger Taylor was convicted and is now serving a 99-year sentence in US federal prison. An indictment and domestic arrest warrant would make it clear that Americans do not support war criminals or war crimes - not just even, but especially - when they are committed by Americans.

An indictment would also further isolate Haftar from political and military allies in the region. Haftar met with French president Emanuel Macron in July in an attempted peace negotiation, giving him prestige and standing on an international stage - a maneuver which would have been far more awkward had Haftar been a wanted fugitive in the United States.

Just two weeks ago President Trump, at the United Nations, said, "America stands with every person living under a brutal regime." And, "All people deserve a government that cares for their safety, their interests, and their well-being, including their prosperity."

There is no more brutal regime than an unaccountable war criminal. That this one in Libya happens to be an American means Trump, who called himself the "law and order" candidate, can do something about it. Bringing order to Libya may

seem too ambitious. But Trump can bring a little law to this American in Libya, and he should.

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the writer, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Libya Observer

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