



Haftar's Support for the Rapid Support Forces

As Sudan nears its 3rd month of war, it is becoming ever more evident of the extent of external powers involved in the conflict. One of these powers is Libyan warlord Khalifa Haftar. According to multiple reports and satellite images, Haftar has been providing aid to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (aka Hemedti). Haftar's forces, known as the LAAF The Russian-backed Wagner Group is also involved, working with Haftar to transport supplies and guard bases where the supplies are housed. Most of the supplies being shipped by Haftar are fuel, which the RSF is in dire need of. Currently, the Sudanese Armed Forces, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, control most of the oil fields in the country. If the RSF hopes to continue fighting, fuel is essential. Other supplies of note include anti-tank missiles, surface-to-air missiles, and medical supplies.

Haftar's support for the RSF in this current conflict predates the outbreak of violence. U.S. intelligence indicates that RSF troops were seen being trained by Haftar's forces in urban combat months before the start of the war. This training has no doubt proved invaluable, with large urban areas like Khartoum seeing the most fighting.

The RSF and LAAF are long time allies that have conducted military operations together. In 2019 during the Libyan Civil War, a thousand RSF troops were deployed to Libya to help in Haftar's attempt to capture Tripoli. It is unlikely that Haftar will deploy his troops to directly support the RSF, as this would jeopardize his relationship with Egypt, which is backing Burhan with troops of their own. Haftar is currently walking a political tightrope. His support of the RSF puts his relationship with Egypt, who are backing Burhan. Losing Egyptian support would be a damaging blow to Haftar's forces.

Russia and the United Arab Emirates are also involved in these transactions. Haftar has a close relationship with both Russia and the UAE. Moussa Tehoussay, a member of Libya's Change Party, has indicated that Haftar's support is primarily related to his allies outside of Libya, referring to Russia and the UAE. Multiple sources have indicated that Russia and the UAE are responsible for providing the support that is being transported into Libya. Both Russia and the UAE have been working to extend their influence in the Middle East. This is just one of the many areas these powers are indirectly influencing.

Haftar does see some personal benefits from the arms shipments. The Haftar family is deeply involved in the illicit trade networks between Sudan and eastern Libya. Fuel, captagon, hashish, gold, stolen cars, and people have been smuggled in and out of Sudan and Libya. Continuing to uphold relations with the RSF, which controls the area where much of the smuggling happens, allows the smuggling to continue.

Libyan support will likely continue for the RSF, but not in large enough quantities to have any significant impact. There is also little chance that Haftar will send troops to aid in fighting to not risk his relationship with Egypt. The fallout from a potential incident between Egyptian troops operating in the area and Libyan forces far outweighs any benefits of supporting the RSF. Relegating his support to supplies will

give him enough flexibility to easily stop the flow of aid if it becomes an issue. However, Russia and the UAE have significant power over Haftar's actions. This may force Haftar to make decisions that could potentially harm his relationship with Egypt.

Russia's and the UAE's involvement in Libya and Sudan is part of the increasing trend of larger powers exploiting unrest within smaller powers for their own countries' gain. This exploitation prolongs conflict leading to more death, destruction, and suffering for civilians. Russia and the UAE are not the only countries doing this. This behavior will likely continue to escalate as U.S. influence continues to deteriorate in the region.