



[Haftar in Moscow to Plot New Conspiracies](#)

By Brenna Haggerty

On September 26th, it was announced that Khalifa Haftar, leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA), met with Russian officials in Moscow. Haftar met with President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. A spokesperson for the Kremlin confirmed that they discussed “the situation in Libya and the region as a whole.” The LNA further commented saying the leaders discussed the current state of Libya, bilateral relations, and the strengthening of both countries. While this was the first meeting between Putin and Haftar since 2019, other recent meetings have taken place between the two governments. The first official visit of a Russian military delegation to North Africa was led by Russian Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov on August 22, 2023. Most recently, on September 17th, Haftar met with Yevkurov in Benghazi after the deadly floods in Derna.

The Libyan National Army is a rival of the UN-backed government in Tripoli. The LNA relies heavily on the Russian mercenary Wagner Group for military support. Haftar used the Wagner Group for his failed attempt to take the capital in Tripoli back in 2019 and 2020. Despite resolutions from the United Nations Security Council requesting the withdrawal of all foreign military personnel from Libya, Wagner Group remains stationed in the east. Since the death of Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in August, the mercenary organization has gone through some restructuring, with Putin asking members to sign an oath of allegiance to the Russian state. On Friday, September 29th, Putin met with former Wagner Group commander Andrei Troshev to discuss the use of units in the Ukraine war. It is possible that Haftar’s visit to Moscow involved discussions of the Wagner Group’s continuing presence and support in Libya.

Since the floods in Derna last month, Libya’s struggle for a stable government has compounded. Protests broke out quickly after the flood, and Haftar has been using the disaster to strengthen his hold on Libya. Marshal Haftar’s son, Saddam Haftar, is in charge of all disaster aid and has been using this position to increase his international standing. Observers have said that instead of focusing on humanitarian relief, Haftar and his sons are using the disaster response to exert more control over the region. First responders were surrounded by troops from the Libyan National Army as they tried to provide essential aid. The LNA kept an “iron grip” on incoming assistance. Now, public access to Derna is closed, and the city has been deemed a disaster zone as citizens struggle without access to food, safe drinking water, and electricity.

Haftar and the LNA have been using their propaganda channels to appear in control of the situation in Libya, and Emadeddin Badi, an analyst with the Atlantic Council, called the meeting in Moscow a “PR stunt.” It is key that Haftar maintains his strongman reputation so he presents as a capable leader who can unite Libya. His crisis response invites criticism. Tim Eaton from Chatham House said that dissent will be a “political problem for Haftar” as he wants to showcase his security and stability. His recent visit to Russia helps strengthen him.

Moscow also benefits from their meeting. As Russia seeks to combat Western power, they have been leading a diplomatic effort in Africa. For years Russia has been isolated in global power politics and needs more allies. Since the onset of the war in Ukraine, their efforts have increased, spurred even further by the sanctions from the

United States and the European Union. Libya makes sense as a diplomatic target; they have a friendly history and the potential to influence neighboring countries like Egypt and Sudan. Furthermore, a close allyship would be mutually beneficial, enhancing Russian influence and augmenting Haftar's political strength in Libya. As Haftar uses the recent floods to control the country, a connection with Russia will highlight his potential as the future leader of a unified Libya.