

Washington Lobbyists Duke It Out Over Libya's Civil War

by John Rossomando



Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar

Both sides in Libya's ongoing civil war are waging political warfare in Washington. They have [Government of National Accord \(GNA\)](#). Unfortunately, neither faction has "clean hands." Both employ mercenaries, are supported by foreign powers, and have been accused of war crimes.

The GNA formed in December 2015 through a [Obama administration](#) and the [aimed to unite](#) the Islamists who were installed in the capital in August 2014 after Muslim Brotherhood and allied al-Qaida militias exiled the secular/liberal dominated House of Representatives (HoR) to Tobruk in eastern Libya. The Islamists [continued meeting](#) as the General National Congress (GNC), naming [balked](#) at a demand to transfer control of Libyan military forces to the GNA. The agreement that created the GNA expired in 2017. The Presidential Council was [receive](#) a vote of confidence from the House, but that never happened.

The split never healed, with both sides claiming to be Libya's

legitimate government – the HoR based on popular elections and the GNA based on international agreement.

Turkey and Qatar back the GNA, providing it with [both sides](#) of torture, war crimes and other abuses, but those committed by the GNA have generated less news coverage. They also have accused the pro-GNA militias of [waged](#) an offensive in Tripoli to end what they see as the Muslim Brotherhood and “terrorist” control of the city.

The lobby war [endorsed](#) Haftar’s offensive.

Since that call, however, the administration appears to have backed away. Haftar’s hired lobbyist [told reporters](#) during a February background briefing. Haftar’s actions, the official said, are “directly counterproductive to [his] goals. He is – his offensive is empowering militias in Tripoli.”

[Gotham Government Relations & Communication](#) are the GNA’s registered lobbyists. They seem to have fared better casting Haftar’s forces as rebels and war criminals.

Mercury has been paid [\\$2 million contract](#) with the GNA. Mercury also works for Islamist governments supporting the GNA, including [Qatar](#).

GNA [Mercury’s point man](#) for the GNA and Turkey, FARA documents show. POLITICO [reported](#) in a November FARA filing. That month, the U.S. State Department [denied](#) that the GNA has connections with the Muslim Brotherhood or its Justice & Construction Party (JCP): “There are zero JCP members serving in the Government of National Accord (GNA); the GNA does not receive any type of support from the JCP, and the GNA would reject any offers of same.”

But Brotherhood members [gave the GNA sole oversight](#) in 2017. The CBL [limited funding](#) and [required](#) audit.

Former Libyan Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates Aref

Nayed, who originally worked with the GNA, [pays millions](#) to the GNA-aligned militias.

Brotherhood-linked GNA individuals include:

- GNA Deputy Prime Minister [sponsored](#) by the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party;
- GNA Economy Minister [Khaled Al-Mishri](#), a founder of the Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party;
- CBL Adviser and Libyan Investment Authority Board Member [Brotherhood sympathizer](#) who is [Fathi Ayoub](#), whose [back him](#) largely due to their hatred for the Muslim Brotherhood. [Turkey](#) covet Libya's oil.

But Gotham has [similar to that used](#) by Muslim Brotherhood supporters in the United States before the GNA hired Mercury and Gotham.

Former Muslim American Society President Esam Omeish, a GNA supporter, [pressure](#) the Trump administration against changing policy to support Haftar, calling him a "war criminal." Omeish's brother, Mohamed, is a [hosted](#) al-Mishri, the GNA state council chairman, at his Virginia home in February 2019. Al-Mishri [Wagner Group](#), while ignoring their client's use of them.

Haftar [appeared to show](#) his forces engaging in summary executions of unidentified men near Benghazi in 2017. The International Criminal Court [violated](#) the [reports](#).

Turkish fighters captured by Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) during the battle for Tripoli [said](#). Turkey's MIT has supported militias linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaida.

One, the Sultan Murad Brigade, is [developed](#) a brutal reputation following the Turkish occupation of Afrin, Syria's Kurdish enclave. These jihadist mercenaries have been [reported](#).

The State Department in February [Mercury](#) claims that the GNA has worked to eliminate militias and fight terrorism. But the militias remain, and have built a [Joshua Meservey](#), senior policy analyst for Africa and the Middle East at the Heritage Foundation, told the Investigative Project on Terrorism.

“I do think the U.S. government needs to be very cautious about the GNA and have its eyes wide open in engaging with it, however,” Meservey said.

GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashaga [dominating](#) the GNA’s security forces have more power than GNA’s leadership. Despite its international diplomatic recognition, critics [said](#).

One such militia in Tripoli, known as the Nawasi Battalion, [al-Qaida linked](#) Mujahideen Shura Council of Derna. The battalion also [linked](#) to the 2012 attack on the U.S. consulate that killed Ambassador Christopher [strong pressure](#) from the militias. For example, the Nawasi Battalion leader’s son-in-law was [U.S. Treasury](#) and [past associate](#) of Wisam Hamid, who was [use](#) radical Salafist fighters, and have been accused of war crimes. He believes the U.S. should use its immense diplomatic heft to get Turkey, Qatar, Russia and other foreign powers to leave and stop arming the militias, and to hammer out a final agreement to end the civil war.

“None of them have legitimacy. What we have said is that you should push for cease fires nationally, see if you could push for some kind of political agreement, but municipal governments might be the way to go because they are a lot closer to the people,” Meservey said.

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