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Libya and EastMed: The center of new global strategic issues

In his famous definition of the state of nature, Thomas Hobbes insisted it is not peace but war, and ultimately, if there is no restraining force, a war of all against all.

That, unfortunately, is the state in which much of the world finds itself. In the middle east, especially, we are confronted with what are now called "forever wars."

Libya is an example of this phenomenon. In 2011, a coalition of Western powers, with UN approval, intervened in an internal conflict to avert what they feared would be a massacre of civilians. But even after a brutal ruler was removed from power, peace did not come to Libya. The last few years have seen instability, Hobbes's state of nature.

The country is now divided between two power centers, and their rivalry is drawing in outside powers. In particular, Turkey has recently proclaimed its support of the government in Tripoli, which puts it at odds with Russia, which is supporting the other side.

This is curious, considering the improving state of relations between Russia and Turkey. Responding to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's

condemnation of the Russian involvement in Libya, the chairman of the Federation Council's International Affairs Committee, Konstantin Kosachev, complained that "considering the level of our bilateral relations, it is not accurate to hear such statements from Ankara."

Yet Erdogan seems undaunted. On Thursday, he was reportedly told by President Donald Trump not to interfere in Libya. At the same time, however, Erdogan seems to be cultivating Iran, despite the current confrontation between Tehran and Washington. For example, the two governments recently signed an agreement on religious cooperation. According to Abouzar Ebrahimi Torkaman, the head of Iran's Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, "the trend and circumstances that exist in the world today [reflect] considerable convergence between Turkey and Iran."

Given that they were supporting opposite sides in Syria, that is an extraordinary statement. The wars of the middle east do not end; they just change their form.

Look, for example, at the Persian Gulf. We support the Shah to contain the Soviet Union. The Shah is overthrown in the Iranian revolution. We support Saddam Hussein in his war against Iran.

Then the Soviet Union collapses. But at the same time Saddam Hussein invades Kuwait. We launch a war to expel him from Kuwait, and then another war to overthrow his regime.

Now we are engaged in a contest with Iran for Iraq and the greater middle east. And Russia, which seemed defeated, now is viewed as a renewed challenger.

We thought our power could deter war, but it doesn't seem to have turned out that way. At least for the time being, the state of nature is war.

Resources

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