
LIBYA'S SERAJ SEES RUSSIA AS POSSIBLE INTERMEDIARY WITH EASTERN COMMANDER

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Libyan Prime Minister Fayez Seraj of the U.N.-backed government in Tripoli said on Sunday he would like Russia to help overcome deadlock in the country, which is struggling with divisions among militias and an Islamist militant threat.

In an interview with Reuters, Seraj expressed hope that Moscow might act as an intermediary between him and Khalifa Haftar, a military commander who is supported by factions based in the east of Libya.

Seraj's Government of National Accord has been trying to formulate plans for unified Libyan security forces since arriving in Tripoli in March, but has made little progress.

Neighboring Egypt talked this month to the Tripoli and eastern factions, which are both vying for control of the whole country. However, it failed to engineer a meeting between the two key figures, Seraj and Haftar.

Haftar was given a tour of a Russian aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean last month in a show of Kremlin support. Russia also expects Seraj to visit Moscow soon.

Asked whether Moscow could become a useful intermediary to pass on political messages or pressure to Haftar, Seraj said "Yes".

"We hope that Russia will play a positive role in resolving the Libyan crisis," he said on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference. "We hope that anyone getting involved in Libya will have a positive effect in the sense that the message that I want to sit down with the other Libyan parties reaches them."

Seraj has already held talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Moscow's ambassador in Libya.

Referring to these meetings, he said: "We sent a clear message, we don't want to exclude any military leaders. We want to unite the military forces, we want to fight against terrorism together, we want military forces to come under a political umbrella."

Egyptian sources had said Seraj and Haftar agreed to honor a plan for creating a joint committee to negotiate reconciliation and elections by February 2018. But Seraj said: "There was no agreement in Cairo... Unfortunately the other side remains stubborn in rejecting dialogue."

Western officials see the U.N.-backed government as a way to stabilize Libya, which has been

caught in fighting since the 2011 civil war that toppled veteran leader Muammar Gaddafi. The country has also become a major departure point for migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean to Europe.

Italy and the European Union promised this month to finance migrant camps run by Seraj's government as part of a wider drive to stem immigration from Africa, but Seraj said help was not sufficient yet to provide good humanitarian help.

He reiterated Libya's refusal to take back any migrants who have already reached Europe, adding that the EU needed to make good on promises to help Libya monitor its southern border electronically and return migrants back to their countries.

"We are talking about people who are coming today from Africa and who end up in Libyan (camps) and would then try to go to Europe.... We are not talking about the return of migrants in Europe to Libya, that would be unacceptable," he said.

"We're not talking about soldiers on the ground. We're talking about economic support, support with medical drugs, humanitarian aid, to provide medical services, doctors until the migrants return to their countries of origin."

Kaynak/Source: