

Khalifa Haftar: Rebuilding Libya from the Top Down

[Barak Barfi](#)

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As a leading Libyan military figure carries out a comprehensive campaign to uproot extremism in his country, Washington and its allies will have to find a way to balance his efforts against the need to curb growing violence and nurture a pluralistic state.

On May 16, 2014, Libyan general Khalifa Haftar launched Operation Dignity "in order to eliminate the extremist terrorist" groups that have been destabilizing the country. Two years in the planning, Operation Dignity involved Haftar revamping the army and attacking the government for its inertia and ties to Islamists. In rapidly evolving developments, intense fighting has spread to Tripoli and numerous airstrikes have been made on Islamist targets in the city, an escalation that portends the worst is yet to come.

In this highly documented research note, Libya scholar Barak Barfi examines Haftar's life in detail to better allow policymakers to understand the lurking pitfalls in his movement while highlighting its potential to extract Libya from the morass. Although Haftar's campaign poses risks to Libya's nascent democracy, allowing the government to neglect the country is an even greater threat to its well-being, and the challenge facing Washington and its allies lies in balancing Haftar's aspirations against the need to nurture a pluralistic state.

THE AUTHOR

Barak Barfi is a research fellow at the New America Foundation, where he specializes in Arab and Islamist affairs. His articles have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Foreign Policy*, *Daily Beast*, the *Atlantic* and the *New Republic*, and are regularly featured in *Project Syndicate*; he has also published extensively in leading foreign publications. Barfi spent six months in Libya during the 2011 revolution and has made frequent return trips. He is coauthor of the 2012 Institute study [In War's Wake: The Struggle for Post-Qadhafi Libya](#).