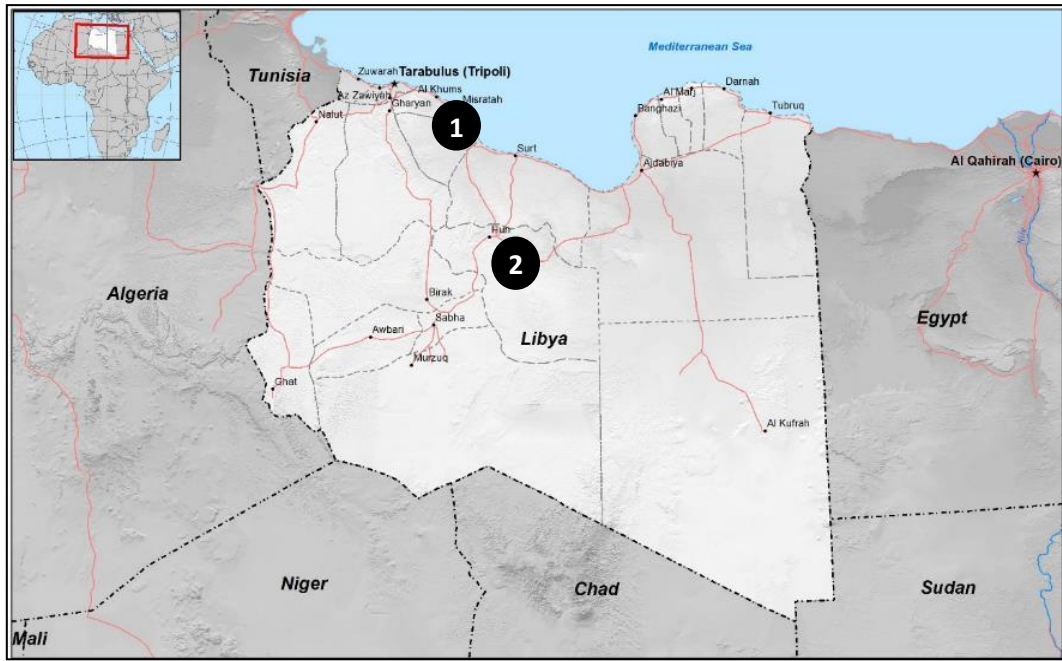


**EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA**

**Weekly Report 09 – 15 MAR 2023**

Authors: MAJ RAMIREZ (*Analyst*) - LTC LOTTI (*Planner*) - MAJ WEERSINK (*EGF Advisor*)

Coordinated by LTC REITSMA



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**SUMMARY**

After significant changes to the Capital’s security facelift, tensions re-emerge as armed group-commanders continue to compete for their positions. A part the contrast between militia in the Eastern part of the Capital area, the involvement of the highest institutional bodies seems to have an opposite effect in the aim of stabilization. That, with respect to the increased tensions caused by the GNU Mol’s decision to reduce power/funds to the connected DCIM in favour of the Border Security Agency, also with respect to the control of areas of interest.

The military Eastern construct allegedly continues on improving security by implementing rule of law-operations, formally aiming to creating better conditions for the next electoral process. This causes tensions between stakeholders who believe are disadvantaged.

In a contested political environment and a resurgence of connections between migration and security, the UN-envoy insists to leverage into finding support within the security sector that hopefully has to lead to the unification of the armed forces and push to foster national reconciliation confidence-building measures.

## 1. MAIN EVENTS IN THE GREAT TRIPOLI AREA (GTA)

In the framework of the Tripoli Security Plan (TSP), forces under the umbrella of the Tripoli Security Directorate (TSD) and the Libyan Customs Authority engaged multiple **law enforcement operations**. They were also conducted by the 444<sup>th</sup> Bde and units of the Stabilization Support Agency (SSA). Of interest:

- on 12 MAR, the Joint Operations Force (Misrata) carried out further raids in the Misrata area, targeting dens used to manufacture and sell large scale narcotics and alcohol;
- on the same day, the 444<sup>th</sup> Brigade arrested suspects accused of damaging the Man-Made River in Bani Walid;
- on 13 MAR, the Zintani Security Directorate (ZSD) arrested Muhammad Bashir Al-Qarj who is affiliated with the Western Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG). Al-Qarj is responsible for multiple closures of the oil pipeline valves in the Al Riyayna area, just North of Zintan;
- on 14 MAR, the Joint Operations Force seized over two million narcotic tablets hidden inside vehicles on board of an Italian-flagged freighter sailing from Antwerp (Belgium), boarding 2,400 cars;

**Comment:** Recently, on 12 MAR, 1,7 million Xanax pills were also seized at the Misrata harbour, using the same smuggling method and coming from Antwerp too.

Despite the efforts to implement the TSP, **intra-armed groups tensions** enlightened into skirmishes in Tajoura. Of interest:

- on 12 MAR, violent clashes erupted between armed groups belonging to the 51<sup>st</sup> Infantry Bn. Members of Rahbat Al-Duruoa attacked the HQs of the Usood Tajoura Bn and few other Usood Tajoura-camps.

**Comment:** on 11 MAR, during previous skirmishes members of Usood Tajoura killed Mahmoud Al-Zayani a prominent member of the Rahbat Al-Duruoa.

Additionally, **internal disputes within GNU** entities, specifically the Ministry of Interior, provoked an increase of tensions between armed groups belonging to the Mol. In fact:

- on 13 MAR, tensions emerged in Tripoli between the Border Security Agency (BSA), linked to GNU Minister of Interior and the Directorate for Combating Illegal Migration (DCIM), led by Mohammed Al-Khoja. The Commander of the SSA, Abdul Ghani Al-Kikli, intervened and instructed DCIM to withdraw;

**Comment:** Previously to the occurred tensions, Trabelsi decided to reassign specific mandates and financial support of the DCIM, led by Al-Khoja to the Mol-affiliated Border Guards Service (BGS), led by Muhammad al-Marhani.

Prior to this event, GNU Mol held various meetings where Al-Khoja was not present, as well on 12 MAR when Trabelsi met with the GNU Chief of the General Staff, that same Al-Marhani, Al-Kikli's close associate, and Lofti Harari who is head of the Internal Security Agency, to enhance security cooperation and coordination.

In 2012, the DCIM was created under the Mol to oversee detention centres in the country. The Cabinet Decree (386) of 2014 confirmed its mandate. Al-Khoja was appointed as the head of DCIM on 23 DEC 2021, taking responsibility for the country's 15 official detention centres from General Al-Mabrouk Abdel-Hafiz, a Zintani Commander, under pressure from Al-Kikli. Al-Kikli and Trabelsi allegedly had several disagreements in the past.

**Assessment:** It is likely that tensions among armed groups in Tripoli stemmed from a dispute between Trabelsi and Al-Khoja which disturbed the balance of power. Therefore, it is highly likely that:

- DCIM is influenced by Abdul Ghani Al-Kikli and the SSA;
- Trabelsi' meeting on 12 MAR related to the onward emerging clashes with Al-Khoja;
- the growing tensions between Trabelsi and Al-Khoja put more pressure between the SSA and the GSA.

GNU-affiliated **armed groups redeployment** continued in the GTA with the aim of showing military power and occupying key terrain. In the meantime, an information campaign spread rumours of an offensive military operation by LNA against the GNU. Specifically:

- on 09-12 MAR, the GSA and the Border Guards carried out static and mobile security operations along the Mizdah to Qaryat-route, as ordered by the GNU Mol;
- on 11 MAR, the 777<sup>th</sup> Bn Cdr Haythem Tajouri and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) Cdr Ayoub Abouras, allegedly arrived at 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade Camp in Aziziyah;
- on 14 MAR, elements of the BGS deployed to Ghadames overnight.

## 2. SECURITY EVENTS OUTSIDE OF THE GTA

The **LNA** is continuing on its effort to secure the regions, restructuring the security organization and **enforcing rule of law**. Of interest:

- on 10 MAR, the 166<sup>th</sup> Bn and the LNA-affiliated Subul al-Salam Bde conducted joint mobile security operations along the Sudanese and Egyptian border, near Uweinat;  
**Comment:** On 10 MAR, it was reported the resignation by **Muhammad Al- Hassan** of his post as Cdr of the 166<sup>th</sup> Infantry Bn Support Force, and appointment as Cdr of the 603<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Bn Support Force. On 15 MAR, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> companies of the known 166<sup>th</sup> Bn have been transferred to 603<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Bn. Not clear if the 166<sup>th</sup> Bn has been disbanded or weakened, as the 166<sup>th</sup> aligned itself with GNS PM Bashagha.
- on 11 MAR, the Benghazi Security Directorate seized an unspecified number of illegal immigrants;
- on 12 MAR, the Sabha Security Directorate recovered a weapons cache from an abandoned house in Sabha. The seized weapons include 62 British RKT 57mm MK4 missiles, 440 missile fuses, and a machine gun;
- on the same day, the LNA carried out a raid against fuel smuggling operations and cache in Brak al-Shati;
- on 14 MAR, the LNA announced the arrest of a suspected member of a terrorist group in Ubari. The same man was allegedly arrested in 2022 with some local reports claiming he is not associated with the terror group but part of efforts to draw attention to LNA's continued anti-terrorism operations.

However, the LNA campaign against illicit trafficking triggered a lot of disagreement in the South. Specifically, on 12 MAR, Tuareg elders and tribal members denounced LNA's raids and "hostile acts". They summoned the LNA-affiliated Tariq Bin Ziyad Brigade (TBZ), to withdraw from the city of Obari.

**Comment:** Earlier that day, the LNA raided an unofficial fuel depot in Qabroun, which led to clashes with the fuel dealers who owned the warehouse.

### 3. OTHER INTERNATIONAL AND SECURITY RELATED EVENTS

LNA military rapprochements with others international counterparts continued. Of interest:

- on 08-09 MAR, the LNA Chief of Staff, Mohammed al-Haddad, visited Algiers to meet with the head of the Algerian People's National Army, Said Chengriha.

In relation to the removal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, negotiations continued for Sudanese mercenaries to leave. Specifically:

- on 10 MAR, representatives of Sudanese mercenaries deployed in Libya travelled to Niamey to agree on being reintegrated into the Sudanese armed forces.
- on 11 March, UN-SSRG held a press conference in Tripoli to address his initiative to lead the country to elections. During the press conference Bathily stated that the realization of **presidential and legislative elections requires a security environment** and a broad national consensus, which involves the buy-in and participation of a wider range of stakeholders, including the security actors. About the security concerns, he mentioned:
  - expressed **increased insecurity**, all of which will ultimately undermine the territorial integrity of Libya and the unity of its people, that **Libya has remained a regional and international playground**, positive proposals came also from Gen. Haftar and 5+5, and that **an improvement of security environment is imperative** for a high-level dialogue among security actors to enable peaceful conditions for the candidates and the electorate during elections;
  - remarked that 5+5 JMC continues to make progress in the implementation of the cease fire agreement. He reported that the **ceasefire continues to hold** and there have been no violations recorded since my last briefing;
  - requested a jointly 5+5 JMC PALNS to facilitate and launch a **dialogue with representatives of armed groups** in the coming weeks to discuss **ways to secure a conducive environment for elections**;
  - encouraged the authorities of Libya, Sudan, and Niger to develop and endorse an integrated mechanism for joint coordination and information exchange, to facilitate the process of **withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters**;
  - encouraged steps were also taken by 5+5 JMC to set the conditions for the **Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration process** once the political environment is conducive.
- Despite the continued UN arms embargo on Libya, Turkish companies continued providing **weaponry to GNU-forces**. Of interest, on 13 MAR, GNU Chief of the General Staff met with the General Director of Turkish Havelsan in the presence of the Director of the Office of the MoD;  
**Comment:** The Turkish company Havelsan for Aerospace and Electronic Industries is owned by the Turkish Ministry of Defence. On 25 OCT 2022, GNU PM Dbeibah signed two security-based agreements with the Turkish Minister of Defence, Hulusi Akar. The first calls for the raising of the efficiency of Military Aviation with Turkish expertise, and the second includes the implementation of the protocols of the security agreement signed by the GNA in NOV 2019.
- On 14 MAR, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) warned that 2,5 tonnes of **uranium have gone missing** from a site in Libya. The IAEA alarmed about the matter after

a visit by its inspectors to the undisclosed site.

**Comment:** It is unclear when the uranium went missing, if it was later recovered as stated by the LNA spokesperson or who could have taken it. The organisation stated it would conduct further investigations to clarify the circumstances of the removal or recovering of the nuclear material and its current location. The IAEA spokesman mentioned that the site where the uranium was stored appeared not to be under any governmental control.

- On 15 MAR, UNSMIL hosted a meeting of the **5+5 Joint Military Commission** (JMC) in the presence of UN SRSG and several military and security commanders in Tunis. The meeting discussed establishing a **security environment for the elections**. Several agreements were made including; moving forward with organising elections in 2023, continuing to convene in Libya including in Tripoli and Benghazi, abstain from using force, violence, arrest, or threats for political or material gains or for regional or factional interests, and the rejection of foreign interference.
- On the same day, Italy MoD accused Russia's Wagner mercenary group of fuelling irregular migration towards Europe as a way of hitting back at countries which support Ukraine. However, while illegal-migrating is impacting the entire North African region, Tunisia has far surpassed Libya as the country of departure for migrants;  
**Comment:** on 11 MAR, intelligence reports indicate nearly 600,000 migrants are in Libya awaiting an opportunity to set out by sea toward Italy.

Sign-off for release: Brig. Gen. STELLA, V.

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*Disclaimer: This report is based on security events and reports from multiple open sources, whose accuracy may not always be verified. Therefore, the information and conclusions expressed are subject to change without notice.*