

Security group GardaWorld placed under investigation and ordered to leave Libya

Following the arrest of several members of its staff on 12 April, Canadian private security giant Gardaworld is being investigated by Libya's internal intelligence services. Its contracts in Libya are under threat.



Grounded aircrafts sit on the tarmac at Mitiga International Airport in the Libyan capital Tripoli on 8 April 2019, where several GardaWorld employees were arrested on 12 April. © Mahmud Turkia / AFP

Canadian private security group **GardaWorld** has been undergoing a major crisis following the arrest of a number of its employees at Mitiga airport on 12 April. Three foreigners of Croatian, Romanian and Irish

nationality and five Libyans are still being held in the prison inside Tripoli airport.

The Gardaworld team was there to meet a number of people for the **European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM)** mission. Its staff members were arrested by the **RADA** Madhkalist militia commanded by the powerful **Abderraouf Kara**, which controls Mitiga airport along with a Turkish contingent. According to our information, the Gardaworld team were in possession of hand guns but were unable to produce a permit for them.

Visa and permit problems

A permit has to be issued by the Libyan interior ministry for each mission carried out. Until now, however, Gardaworld had been operating with a licence delivered directly by EUBAM. The Canadian firm, which is headed in Libya by **Nicholas Bennett**, is understood to have been in the sights of the Libyan authorities for several months, moreover, because of other irregularities.

Some of its staff are believed to be continuing to take part in field operations despite the expiration of their visas and a number of them are thought to no longer have arms permits. About a quarter of the vehicles used by the group are also understood to no longer have the requisite operating licences.

The company is getting more bogged down from one day to the next. Its efforts to reach a solution with the Libyan authorities have not produced results. A court in Tripoli decided to open an investigation on 16 April and a good proportion of the group's workforce left the country the following day. They are now at the four-star Golden Tulip hotel in Tunis. At the same time, the interior ministry's **Internal Security Agency** headed by **Lotfi al-Hariri** has begun an investigation into Gardaworld's activities in Libya.

Amarante sole EUBAM contractor?

France's **Alexandre Hollander**-led **Amarante International** group, which is Gardaworld's partner on the EU contract, has taken steps to try to take charge of the operational part of the EUBAM mission on its own. The pair won the €42m two-year contract in April 2022 against competition from **GEOS** of France and Sweden's **Vesper Group**. A complaint from GEOS

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over the way the award was made is still being considered by the **European Anti-Fraud Office**.

Other Gardaworld contracts could also be affected. The Canadian giant was one of the security groups most active in Libya. Some of its clients are already feeling the impact of the group's departure. To its consternation, Italian oil group **ENI** suddenly found itself without security services on 20 April.

GardaWorld was also carrying out a contract for German development agency **GIZ**, providing security for its personnel while they were travelling (AI, [06/12/22](#)), and another for the **Siemens** group. Only its contract with the British embassy in Tripoli has so far not been affected.

Local partners also targeted

Gardaworld relies on local partners in Libya, notably **First Call Security**, headed by **Tarek Mohammed Owaynat** and **Yaseen El Kanuni**, and **Safety International**. One of the latter's directors, **Adel Albazizy**, is understood to have been arrested some weeks ago by **Lotfi al-Hariri** for religious proselytism.

Al-Hariri, who is close to **Abdelghani al-Kikli**, head of the Ghneiwa militia and the **Stability Support Authority**, has been carrying out a crusade against proselytising Christians in recent weeks. In early April, he arrested American citizen **Jeff Wilson**, head of consulting company **Libya Business**.

These matters tend to get politicised to give the militias extra weight in their dealings with the government of **Abdelhamid Dabaiba**, which is trying to rein them in.

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