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LIBYA

**Monthly Follow up**

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| Une image contenant carte  Description générée automatiquement   * Political context marked by uncertainty: rapprochement between the Haftar and Dabaiba clans for power-sharing, which is seen as an alternative to the electoral process underway. This rapprochement is causing tension in the eastern camp, between parliamentary speaker Aguila Saleh and Libyan National Army (LNA) leader Khalifa Haftar. * Consolidation of the power of the head of the Tripoli government, Abdulhamid Dabaiba, through drone attacks against armed groups in Tripolitania opposed to his rule. |  |

## Process of rapprochement between Khalifa Haftar and Abdulhamid Dabaiba as deadline for drafting electoral law approaches

## Suspension of the head of the eastern government, Fathi Bachagha, as the deadline for drafting an electoral law approach (mid-June).

The rapprochement between the Haftar clan (East) and the Dabaiba clan (West), which has been. underway for several months, was given a new impetus by the suspension in mid-May of Fathi Bachagha, head of the National Stability Government (GNS), based in Sirte. Bachagha was suspended by the House of Representatives (HoR) in a closed session in the absence of President Aguila Saleh, on corruption charges, and replaced by GNS Finance Minister Osama Hammad. This suspension is a sign that the Haftar and Dabaiba clans are seeking to organize power-sharing in Libya. Indeed, the suspension of Bachagha, reputedly opposed to this rapprochement, gives the latter more room for manoeuvre.

This dismissal comes at a pivotal moment: the two Libyan chambers were preparing to unveil the electoral law, with a view to holding elections by the end of 2023, in accordance with the UN process announced in 03/2023. In addition to the electoral law, the presidents of the two chambers, Aguila Saleh (East) and Khaled al-Mishri (West), were to announce the formation of a new unified executive to oversee the elections. This was to mark the end of the mandate of Abdelhamid Dabaiba, head of the Tripoli government (GNU). This announcement was finally delayed, due to a lack of agreement between the two men. Despite this, work in this direction continues.

**Tensions in the eastern camp: the Haftar clan against the head of Parliament, Aguila Saleh**

The dismissal of Fathi Bachagha revealed tensions within the eastern camp, between the head of the House of Representatives (HoR), Aguila Saleh, and the Haftar clan. The leader of the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA), Khalifa Haftar, and Aguila Saleh are the most influential men in eastern Libya.

Whereas the Haftar clan had sealed an alliance with Aguila Saleh - who is seeking to overthrow the Dabaiba GNU - it is now engaged in seeking a rapprochement with the Dabaiba clan in the West. According to Jalel Harchaoui, the Haftar clan was seeking to overthrow Aguila Saleh in mid-May, when the latter was in the process of announcing major advances on the drafting of the electoral law and the formation of a unified government. Bachagha's suspension also generated tensions between Khalifa Haftar and Egypt, which positioned itself as Aguila Saleh's main supporter. These tensions are amplified by the conflict in Sudan, in which Haftar and Egypt are supporting opposing camps (see May Monthly).

As a reminder, Khalifa Haftar supported the initiative of the HoR and its President Saleh in 03/2022 to form a new government in the East led by Bachagha, as he saw it as a means of gaining influence in the capital, which concentrates the main institutions of power, in particular the headquarters of the country's Central Bank. This led to the creation of an alliance of convenience between Aguila Saleh and Haftar. However, Haftar's support for Bachagha, mainly opportunistic in nature, came to an end when the latter failed to install his government (GNS) in Tripoli following deadly clashes between armed groups in and around the capital at the end of 08/2022. In addition, the head of the GNS, Bachagha, refused to grant public funds to Haftar in an irregular manner, according to Libya expert Jalel Harchaoui. He was therefore no longer of any use to the strongman of eastern Libya, Khalifa Haftar.

**The rapprochement between the Haftar and Dabaiba clans: transactional and opportunistic**

Since this failure, the Haftar clan has begun a process of rapprochement with the Dabaiba clan, implemented by one of Khalifa Haftar's sons, Sadam Haftar, and Abdulhamid Dabaiba's nephew, Ibrahim Dabaiba, under the aegis of the United Arab Emirates, which is close to both clans. This rapprochement led to the appointment of a close associate of Haftar, Farhat Bengdara, as head of the national oil company in 07/2022. Many experts agree that this rapprochement, if it materializes, will not necessarily lead to a merger of the Western (GNU) and Eastern (GNS) governments, since the two leaders - Dabaiba and Haftar - are not willing to cede power to the other. In this respect, it is highly significant that Saddam Haftar, in parallel to forging closer ties with the Dabaiba clan, is forging relations with militia leaders in Tripolitania, some of whom are opposed to Dabaiba's GNU, in order to gain a foothold in the capital. Thus, the rapprochement between the Haftar and Dabaiba clans has a strong transactional dimension, with both clans defending their respective interests above all. On the one hand, Haftar sees it as a way of increasing his influence in Tripolitania, and on the other, Dabaiba sees it as a way of holding on to power at a time when he fears being ousted by the legislative process of the two Chambers. Reshuffles in the western and eastern executives, to include people close to Haftar and militia leaders from Tripolitania, are conceivable if the two clans manage to reach an agreement.

Faced with this fragmentation of the eastern camp, Egypt is seeking to hinder the still-fragile rapprochement between the Dabaiba and Haftar clans, which is supported by Turkey and the Emirates. In this respect, the visit of Abbas Kamel, head of Egypt's intelligence services, to Libya at the end of last week is highly significant. According to local sources, Kamel complained about the pressure exerted on Aguila Saleh by one of Khalifa Haftar's sons, Belqacem. He also asked Khalifa Haftar to ensure that he presented a more positive image of his relationship with Aguila Saleh.

**Failure to adopt an electoral law**

# While the 6+6 Committee, made up of 6 elected members of the House of Representatives (HoR) and 6 elected members of the High Council of State (HCS), had agreed on an electoral law at the beginning of June, the presidents of the two chambers, Aguila Saleh (HoR) and Khaled al-Mishri, delayed the presentation of the electoral law and a unified executive, which was due to take place on 06/06 in Bouzniqa, Morocco, due to persistent disagreements over the candidacy of the military. Observers saw this as yet another political maneuver by the two men to hamper the electoral process. However, the pressure of the Haftar/Dabaiba rapprochement could lead the two men to become seriously involved in the legislative process. In addition, the UN envoy and the Western countries involved in Libya have praised the legislative work carried out by the 6+6 Committee. In this respect, Aguila Saleh announced an agreement on the candidacy of the military on 06/13. On 15/06, he announced talks to form a government of 15 ministers whose sole mission would be to supervise the elections. This would mean the end of the mandates of Abdulhamid Dabaiba's GNU and Osama Hammad's GNS.

# In this highly uncertain context, marked by the formation of opportunistic partnerships in the run-up to the elections, all scenarios still seem possible for Libya's future.

**Abdulhamid Dabaiba's attempt to consolidate power in Tripolitania: drone strikes against dissident armed groups**

**Since the end of May, the head of the Tripoli government (GNU), Abdulhamid Dabaiba, has been seeking to consolidate his power in Tripolitania, by attacking rival armed groups with drones, under the pretext of fighting illegal trafficking and** smuggling (human beings, arms, drugs and oil). In fact, while all armed groups, especially those from Zawiya, are involved in these various forms of trafficking, including armed groups loyal to the GNU leader, the latter only targets armed groups affiliated to his political opponents.

The timing of these strikes is not insignificant, **as they coincide with an acceleration in the rapprochement between the Dabaiba clan and the Haftar clan, which is seen as the beginnings of power-sharing in Libya.** Dabaiba is seeking to get rid of his opponents in Tripolitania in order to exercise total power in the West, similar to that exercised by Haftar in Cyrenaica. In fact, for power-sharing between the two clans to be functional and equitable, the Dabaiba clan must be able to control Tripolitania, a fragmented territory under the control of various armed groups engaged in struggles for influence. **Libya is once again in the grip of political maneuvers to derail the electoral process, despite the support of a majority of the Libyan population for this process.**

## Despite political fragmentation and a volatile security context that could tip the country into violence, Libya has enjoyed relative calm since the ceasefire of 11/2020, which enabled oil production to resume. Oil revenues, set to rise to 2022 (20.4 billion USD), have enabled the (re)construction of infrastructure, such as new shopping malls in Tripoli and Benghazi, raising hopes among the Libyan population, who fear more than anything a resumption of fighting between the two camps. The rapprochement between the Dabaiba (West) and Haftar (East) clans, which has been underway for several months now, has contributed to this climate of calm and enabled the country to enjoy a precarious and relative stability.

**Strikes against positions and infrastructure of armed groups in and around Zawiya**

**- Strike sequence and targets**

The drone attacks initially **targeted positions held by armed groups in the vicinity of Zawiya, a city that concentrates a large number of trafficking operations and is plagued by sporadic clashes between armed groups.** The port of Al Maya, some thirty kilometers from Tripoli and one of the main departure points for migrants, near Zawiya, was the target of air strikes by Tripoli government forces from May 25. Videos circulating on social networks showed black smoke in the harbor and moored boats, testifying to the violence of these strikes. In total, the strikes in and around Zawiyya caused at least two deaths and several injuries.

As a reminder, in the period leading up to these strikes, the town had been the scene of clashes between armed groups for control of traffic, resulting in the refinery being shut down on several occasions. A youth protest movement had emerged to oppose the city's recurrent instability and rising crime rate (see monthly May). Through this campaign of strikes against "criminal groups", Dabaiba sought, among other things, to capitalize on the prevailing discontent. Zawiya, which is crossed by several oil pipelines and is home to the country's largest refinery and export terminal, is a strategic city for the country, with oil revenues constituting the main source of financing for the state.

In early June, the GNU's strike campaign extended to the town of Zuwara and Ajilat (Al-Shabika area), where smuggling sites were targeted. Once again, armed groups opposed to the GNU were the main target of these strikes.

**- These strikes are part of ongoing political rivalries**

Experts agree that **these strikes are politically motivated, given their selectivity**. In fact, only rival armed groups of the GNU were targeted, although those affiliated to the GNU are actively involved in all kinds of trafficking in the city. This is clearly stated by Jalel Harchaoui, a leading Libyan specialist: "There are notorious smugglers who are totally spared by Dabaiba. In Zawiya, the sites that have been hit are not linked to his political friends, who are themselves involved in criminal activities. This is not an operation against crime".

More specifically, **armed groups affiliated to the Bouzribah family, highly influential in Zawiya and firmly opposed to the GNU, are the main target of these strikes**. The Bouzeibah family is suspected of being involved in human trafficking. Parliamentarian Ali Bouzribah reported that his house had been targeted and that his nephew had been injured in one of the strikes. The Bouzribah family heads the Awlad Buhmira tribe, which includes the powerful militia leader Abd al Rahman Milad, "Bija", a Libyan coastguard officer accused of committing crimes against migrants. Finally, the Bouzribah family represents the powerful militia group, the Stability Support Agency (SSA), led by Abd al Ghani al Kikli, known as "Ghaniwa".

**- Retaliation: armed groups block roads and strategic infrastructure**

**In retaliation, on May 29, armed groups opposed to the GNU blocked the road linking the border between Tunisia and Tripoli, as well as supplies to the city's power station and gas pipelines.** In view of the deteriorating security situation, expert Jalel Harchaoui told Le Monde newspaper: "The closure of the Zawiyya power plant is already worrying. Behind that, there could be the closure of the crude oil port or the seizure of the energy complex. We could end up with a civil war in the middle of a city of 200,000 people and infrastructure. I'm not sure Dabaiba knows what he's doing". Furthermore, the expert notes that the strikes on Zuwara could lead to the formation of an anti-UNG alliance between powerful groups from Zawiyya and others from Zuwara - the Brigade 105 and the Bouzribah clan - capable of organizing the blockade of the Mellitah oil complex.

In early June, Dabaiba announced **the continuation of the security operation** at a meeting with the military, claiming that the first phase was merely a warning against criminal groups. He added that criminals would be neutralized or forced to surrender in a second phase of the operation. Finally, he called on civilians to stay away from criminal groups to avoid exposing themselves to future strikes.

Despite these threats, the situation in Zawiya calmed down in early June, as evidenced by the lifting of the blockade of the coastal road by the armed groups. **Strikes continue sporadically, despite the explicit threat of a more muscular operation, which raised the possibility of a ground operation by forces linked to the GNU.** Jalel Harchaoui doubts the GNU's ability to carry out such an operation. For the time being, **this strike campaign has failed to end the influence of militias opposed to the GNU in Tripolitania, and is proving counter-productive.** Moreover, it is likely to lead to greater assertiveness on the part of these armed groups, and ultimately fuel instability in Tripolitania.

**- Reactions and appeals for calm**

On 22/05, the GNU Ministry of Defense declared that it was seeking to "cleanse the areas of the west coast and the rest of Libya of crime", claiming that "seven boats used for human trafficking, six warehouses of drug traffickers, weapons and equipment used by criminal gangs and nine tankers have been targeted". It should be noted that the destruction of migrant boats could reduce the flow of migrants to Italy.

**Libyan politicians, largely opposed to the GNU, have condemned the strikes and denounced their political motivation**. The Tobruk House of Representatives (HoR) denounced the military operation in Zawiyya "in the strongest possible terms", threatening to refer the matter to the Security Council and the International Criminal Court. The head of the High State Council (HCS), Khaled al-Mishri, called on the Presidential Council to prevent Dabaiba from using drones to "terrorize and confront its political opponents". As mentioned in 1, both Chambers have been working for several months to form a new unified executive to end Dabaiba's mandate.

As for Turkey, the GNU's main supporter, notably through the presence of a substantial military force in Tripolitania, its posture of withdrawal during these strikes constitutes implicit support for the GNU. The drones used by the GNU are Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 drones**. The use of drones, as Libya expert Emadeddin Badi notes, sets a dangerous precedent in that it implies that a prime minister can now use a weapon of aerial warfare to eliminate his political opponents with impunity.**

Finally, many Western countries and the UN have called for calm and restraint. The US embassy in Tripoli called on Libyan leaders to "do everything possible to defuse the crisis in Zawiyya and take every precaution to protect civilian lives". As for the British embassy, it deemed "unacceptable" the use of weapons "endangering civilian lives". Finally, the UN declared that it was in contact with the national authorities and was closely monitoring the situation.

**New armed group formed by Dabaiba**

On 06/06, in a bid to consolidate his power in Tripolitania on the model of Haftar in Cyrenaica**, the head of GNU Dabaiba created a new armed group,** the "National Apparatus of Support Forces", to be commanded by a representative of the city of Misrata, Ahmad Ali Khalil, according to a document leaked to the press. This group includes the February 17 Revolutionaries, a group inspired by the revolutionary movement that toppled Muamar Gaddafi in 2011. The missions of this new group remain unclear, with the decree referring to the protection of "the sovereignty of the State" and the preservation of "the objectives of the revolution".

**Clashes between armed groups in Tripoli**

**During the night of 05/28 to 05/29, concomitant with the strikes on Zawiya and the surrounding area, clashes broke out between two armed groups in Tripoli.** Two very powerful groups, the Deterrent Force (Radaa) and Brigade 444, exchanged fire in the heart of the city, notably in Ain Zara and Salah Al-Din streets, following the kidnapping of a member of Brigade 444 the previous day near the port of Tripoli. Given the density of the urban areas controlled by these two groups, these clashes could have caused substantial damage, as well as a large number of collateral casualties, had they not ceased rapidly after the conclusion of an agreement leading to the withdrawal of these groups' armed vehicles.

**Countering illegal migration in Cyrenaica**

A curfew has been imposed on residents of the city of Tobruk between 8pm and 6am until further notice by the city's security director. According to the authorities, this measure is part of efforts to combat illegal migration and human trafficking in order to guarantee the safety of citizens. In practice, the curfew is little respected by residents, who continue to move about. Units of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army arrested thousands of illegal immigrants in the Egyptian border region of Umm Saad in early June, as well as almost a thousand illegal migrants in Tobruk and Musaid.

These operations come at a time when illegal migration from Cyrenaica has increased considerably in recent months. A meeting between Council President Meloni and Khalifa Haftar last month in Rome focused, among other things, on this issue. However, it should be noted that the ANL and people close to Haftar are involved in these various forms of trafficking, which explains their expansion.