

# - EUROPEAN UNION LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA -

## EULPC WEEKLY Report, 26 Nov to 3 Dec 2020

UNOFFICIAL

1. General remarks and current tactical situation

2. Update military events

Annex A: Libyan Factions Foreign Military Aid



- ① No Foreign Armed Groups and factions redeployment
- ② Militia and Tribal clashes
- ③ Information Operations
- ④ Counter Terrorist Operation against AQMI

**BLUF:** There are no signs of military withdrawal and reinforcements and Information Operations continue on both sides. Intra faction clashes are increasing between militias and tribes/ sub clans while influence on Fezzan tribes continues to shape their loyalty.

## 1. General remarks and current tactical situation

There are no proven intentions in any opposing side to withdraw forces, especially foreign ones. Logistical reinforcements continue. Information Operations to shape loyalties in Fezzan region increase the scope using counter terrorism operations, allowed by the ceasefire agreement, to increase the soft power and influence on local tribes.

### Foreign Military Aid

In Annex A we give an overview of international support for the GNA and LNA in the form of equipment, mercenaries, finance and logistics, in the last couple of months.

**Comment:** In spite of the ceasefire agreement, the logistics reinforcements on both sides continue and have increased during last week, mainly from Turkey. The frequency of air cargo flights saw a significant increase since last week. There is lack of OSINT to get evidences from the porous Libyan border with Egypt.

The UAE has been repeatedly accused of breaking a UN arms embargo on Libya. However, this is the first official accusation that the Emiratis are funding Wagner by USA.

**Assessment:** It is likely military reinforcements will continue by external actors taking possible advantage of any perceived *impasse* related to Operation IRINI. The logistics movement will be most likely maintained and reinforced by air to avoid possible searching and external scrutiny.

### Consequences of Lack of Military Progress on Ceasefire Agreement

Activity in the area of Sirte/al-Jufra remains subdued. This week did see reports of an increase of troops being moved to the area by both the LNA and GNA, with additional reporting of LNA foreign forces preparing defensive positions along the Sirte- al Jufra road. The GNA also conducted a two-day artillery exercise in the general area.

There are some reports alerting of the connected effect of the military, the economic and the political tracks in the lack of implementation of the already signed arrangements. Libyan negotiators feel that we are in a relax in the ceasefire accomplishment memento that could jeopardize the rest of negotiations. The military track has been the starting point to build up the opportunity to UNSMIL mediation but the fragile and dangerous reality on the ground driven by poor basic services, lack of liquidity and insecurity threatens the ability of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) to fulfil its ambition. The sensation of unwillingness or incapacity could take the floor to the collapse of the political roadmap, that can lead to a restart of fighting to seek a military solution.

LNA moderates are losing ground to hardliners who reprove lack of progress on military, economic and political tracks.

**Comment:** The Joint Military Commission (JMC) sought to operationalise the ceasefire agreement by forming several sub-committees tasked with addressing items such as prisoner exchange, hate speech, collection of information on heavy weaponry and vehicles, and a number of other issues. It also facilitated the unification of the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) in Brega, and activated a Joint Operation Room to oversee the withdrawal of foreign forces into barracks and reopen roads linking eastern and western Libya.

The opposition of the LNA and GNA's Sirte-al-Jufra Operations Room to the JMC will rise if the economic track does not lead to a wealth distribution agreement. The withdrawal of forces in Sirte strategic positions have suspended any progress in the reopening of the coastal road linking Sirte to Misrata and Tripoli.

The losing of Sirte could mean a decisive strategic step back that could open the capture of oil fields in the Libya's Oil Crescent and then, suppressing the future LNA monopoly of the Oil Fields control, and the financing resources for the whole Libya.

**Assessment:** It is likely that the impasse in the military track will continue if no neutral verification system is set up urgently. A future military break with sudden hostilities is probable in the case of no practical timely improvement in the three tracks: military, economic and political, that could fuel the rest of processes and maintain the sense of success and hope, they could be sequential or in parallel but they need continuous movement to win the peace and reunification. The military track could be key to success maintaining the rhythm and moral as it could be monitored with UN external military/police observers and with agreed mechanisms and time frames.

### **LNA Counter Terrorist Operation against AQMI**

The LNA spokesperson, Major General Ahmed al-Mesmari, confirms an LNA counterterrorism operation targeting alleged Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) members in the Al-Tarqin and Al-Sharb neighbourhoods, North Awbari on 28 November. The operation was carried out by the Special Operations Company of the Tariq Bin Ziyad Commando Brigade and the 116<sup>th</sup> Motorized Infantry Battalion with the arrest of seven individuals and seizure of large quantities of weaponry, ammunition, money, and documents. One of the arrested individuals, identified as "Omar al-Washi" (Omar Musa a.k.a. "Omar Aduush"), Hassan Washi, Mohammed Avagash and Haroun Muhammad. Omar al-Washi had recently returned from Mali where he allegedly smuggled weapons, ammunition, and money to a fellow AQIM cell. The arrested individuals were transferred to Benghazi for interrogation.

**Comment:** A recent US Inspector General report on terrorism in North and East Africa estimated IS strength to be approximately 100 fighters, with the group struggling to recover from the loss of leading members in an airstrike in September 2019. Furthermore, the group has been subjected to significant pressure from both GNA and LNA forces throughout 2020 which has seen their leadership further eroded including the killing of the IS-Emir for Libya, Abu Muadh al-Iraqi.

#### *GNA Disinformation Operation*

Related with the operation in Awbari GNA Joint Chief of Staff, Colonel Muhammad Qununu released a statement, expressing surprise over the UN Support Mission in Libya's (UNSMIL) alleged silence over the perceived breach of the ceasefire agreement by the LNA by the counter terrorist operation realised. Colonel Qanunu claims that LNA forces killed children and demolished homes during operations in Awbari, during the counterterrorism operation on several AQIM members.

**Comment:** LNA released extensive footage and video to demonstrate its narrative and take advantage of the success in the counter terrorist operation. LNA explained that the ceasefire agreement does not apply to its counterterrorism operations and allows this kind of security operations.

**Assessment:** It is likely this operation could have been prepared to be launched in the appropriate time with full coverage to take advantage for information operation and propaganda to justify the movements of LNA in the southern Fezzan region, to win international profit of counter terrorist excellence in comparison with GNA, clean Haftar's image and to maintain local tribes loyalty.

## **Civil and Militia Clashes**

### *Sabha Tribal Clashes. LNA*

Clashes erupted in Sabha on 1 December in the Mansheya district of the town. The trigger incident appears to have been the killing of an individual named as Ahmed Saleh Al-Khatari, which saw the mobilization of armed forces, clashes, and mortar fire.

**Comment:** The uptick in activity is the second series of clashes in recent weeks, with the previous series of incidents being related to internal fighting within the Qadhadafa tribe. Both episodes highlight the underlying insecurity in the town, and the ability of local grievances to quickly escalate to significant armed clashes.

### *Tripoli Militia Clashes. GNA*

Activity has decreased with 24 incidents reported compared to 36 last week. Incident levels have remained within a window of 20-30 for a period of several weeks, with the majority of reporting being related to criminality or security operations. Within the capital militia related clashes remain low in frequency, with only one incident reported in the Kremiya area on the evening of Nov 28.

**Assessment:** It is likely there will be more clashes to reshape tribal and militia powers in both areas.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The focus of possible escalation of a military realm could become Fezzan South region but most likely the situation is consolidated in favour of Field Marshal Haftar, with the support of local tribes. Even though, the LNA probably will not be ready for a blitzkrieg lacking of enough logistic reserves, although it is not possible to evaluate the reinforcement by land through Egypt.

On the other hand GNA is getting apparently more reinforcement of logistics and possibly offensive weaponry, based on advanced air fighters, some unconfirmed sources tell F-16, and Air Defense. Time is running good for GNA to have properly military trained and effective Libyan forces and consolidate rear bases to launch air power, but in case of impasse in the economic and political talks, they could be more interested in open military operations in South Fezzan to capture some important oilfield which could be the strategic objective to change balance of power to conduct to the centre of gravity of LNA, the monopoly of fuel production, in the final Libyan map.

In the next two months, the most dangerous scenario could be named "Black Swan" being not probable but still possible: a desperate move by both perceived losing actors: Haftar's hardliners if they are put aside to the end, and on the other side if pro political Islam hardliners and their main external stakeholder, have no economic long term compensation to solve their internal financial problem and prestige that could put in danger the regime and his electoral survival.

## **2. Update military events**

In addition to the points above, some events could be mentioned:

- 23-26 November, in Abu Grain, Misrata Province, the GNA conducted an artillery exercise in the Abu Grain area with Turkish weaponry.
- On 27 November, two suspected IS members were arrested in the Tripoli area. No additional information was available on the nature of their activities or further confirmation yet.

- On 27 November, in Wadi Zamzam, Misrata Province, an unidentified armed group carried out house searches in the Wadi Zamzam and Qadahiyah areas.
- On 27 November, in Benghazi, a large scale LNA arrest operations were reported against alleged criminal networks.
- On 28 November, in Kremiya, Tripoli Province, an armed clash between unknown groups was reported.
- On 28 November, in Sirte, an armed clash was reported between an armed group and Sirte Operations Room forces after the former refused to withdraw from a school it occupied.
- On 29 and 30 November, in Sabha, Fezzan region, there were different small arms fires in several areas.
- On 1 December, Media sources report that LNA Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar appoints Major General Ramadan Atiyatallah Bouzid Al-Barasi as the new Chief of Staff of the Border Guard forces and Major General Saleh Abdullah Othman Bouabouda as an assistant to Al-Barasi.
- On 2 December, in Aziziyah, Al-Jafara Province, an armed clash was reported.

## **Annex A: Libyan Factions Foreign Military Aid**

### **LNA**

Equipment: Public release of imagery, during Tariq Ibn Ziyad Enhanced Brigade last exercise (14 November) , demonstrates the embargo break by UAE, with the Haftar's recent acquisition of the new Serbian self-propelled multiple rocket launcher, the LRSVM Morava, it is only in service in UAE, allegedly without Serbia direct selling. In addition, there was a first show of two Su-24M, possibly piloted by Wagner PMC.

Mercenaries: USAFRICOM alleges by 30 September there were 2,000 Wagner Group fighters in Libya within the ranks of Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA). It says there were also around 2,000 Syrian pro Assad fighters as support.

Finance: UAE has funded suspects, sustained by US AFRICOM and DIA, to finance the Wagner PMC in Libya. Additionally, there are other mercenaries within Haftar's forces, such as Janjaweed from Sudan and less numbered fighters from Chad and Niger.

Logistics: Cargo Flights were reported from Syria by Russian made aircraft as IL-76 to several LNA airbases such as Benina, al-Jufra and al-Gardabiya while military outposts between Sirte-Jufra have been fortified and equipped with new air defence systems.

There were several reports of cargo flights from UAE to main Egyptian Airbases next to the Libyan Border, as Sidi Barrani Airbase, but not evidences could be collected by open sources of such those logistic reinforcements neither by air or land during recent weeks.

### **GNA**

Qatar and Turkey have signalled publically their intent to establish a permanent military presence in Libya. They asked for limited outside monitoring of the ceasefire, which was established in the final Ceasefire Agreement last October.

Equipment: There are evidences of Turkish equipment like Roketsan T-122 multiple launch rocket systems, since May, but it was still operated directly by Turkish soldiers. It could be now operated by GNA after the training delivered for several weapon system servers as it was seen in a live fire from 23 to 26 November, it was carried out a live-fire artillery exercise in the eastern area of Abu Grayn with Turkish weaponry such as Boran howitzers and MLRS T-122 Sakarya.

Logistics: Turkish Air cargo is maintaining a continuous and heavy rhythm using extensively their biggest aircrafts, Airbus A400M from different Turkish bases to Tripoli, Misrata and mainly Al Watiya Air Base. On 1 December, three Turkish military cargo aircraft were reported and unconfirmed sources claim that at least 10 Turkish military flights have arrived in Libya during the week. Additionally, there are several reports about cargo ships heading main ports in GNA controlled area, mainly Misrata and Tripoli, some of them from Turkish Navy; there are reports of discreet disembarkation of military vessel cargo in Misrata Port with extreme security operations to avoid any port observer to take evidences or pictures.

A Turkish Navy vessel arrived in Al-Khoms Naval Base on 30 November.

Training and formation: The memorandum of understanding on military and security cooperation between Turkey and Libya includes the following areas: training, consulting, transfer of experience, planning, materials support, and forming a joint Defense and Security Cooperation Office in Turkey and Libya in case of a request. It will provide training in technical information, support, development, maintenance, repair, recovery, disposal, port, and providing consultancy support. The memorandum also covers that -- on the condition of keeping the ownership -- land, air, and sea vehicles, equipment, weapons, use of buildings and field (training bases) inside the territorial borders of parties, upon invitation of them, as well as joint military planning, exchange of experience, training and consultancy services for the use of weapon systems and equipment in the areas of land, sea and air forces within the armed forces.

The memorandum of understanding at the same time includes security and military training and teaching, practice or participation in joint exercises and training, such as security and defence, terrorism and fighting against illegal migration, the security of land, sea, and air borders, combating smuggling and narcotic terror, operations on clearing handmade explosives, natural disaster relief operations, training, information and experience exchange. The execution of joint operations in different areas of cooperation between the parties and contact visits to rise up the organizational structure of the defence and security forces.

Openly, the Turkish MoD spokesperson announced on 29 November that Turkey had completed training for 2,301 Libyan soldiers, while a further 264 were still in training in five training centres.