

- EUROPEAN UNION LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA -

EULPC WEEKLY Report, 4 February 2021

1. General remarks and current tactical situation

2. Update military events



- ① 5+5 Joint Military Committee meeting.
- ② Sudanese Armed Groups and UAE direct links with LNA.
- ③ Western Militias alignment with Sarraj. Union of the Western Region Protection Force (UWRPF)
- ④ Information Operations

BLUF: Sides are freezing to react upon completion of the new interim political structure with the LPDF and the 5+5 JMC in Sirte from 4-7 February 2021, to go forward or react against in the upcoming days to verify the evolution of the Libyan peace process.

1. General remarks and current tactical situation

The military track is standing by expecting the refuelling on the peace process pending on the good news coming from the political track and the 5+5 Joint Military Committee meeting in Sirte from 4 to 7 February, where the Cease-Fire Monitoring will be key to success.

It looks the next step will be the reopening of the coastal road between Misrata and Sirte, but it is worth saying the Ceasefire Agreement was not only limited to that coastal road but in addition, to reopen the Misrata-Abu Grein-Jufra roads.

1.1 Sudanese Mercenaries, UAE and LNA.

A report by the UN panel of experts on Sudan, submitted on January 13, revealed links between Khalifa Haftar's forces in Libya and Darfur rebels from Sudan. They have been equipped with anti-aircraft, and anti-tank artillery, including missiles and machine-guns, and other supplies and financing.

It adds that

The UAE, Haftar's main backer, was reported by the UN panel of experts as having direct links to the Darfur rebels in Libya for over a year, and senior leaders met with UAE military officers in Benghazi in last September and November to have a direct contact with them.

Juma Haggag of the Sudanese Liberation Army-Minni Minnawi (SLA-MM), visited the UAE for about two months in November.

In addition, the main Darfurian rebel movements (SLA-MM, Gathering of the Sudan Liberation Forces (GSLF), SLA-Abdul Wahid (SLA-AW), SLA-Transitional Council (SLA-TC), Sudanese Revolutionary Awakening Council (SRAC)) are in direct contact with senior LNA commanders and hold frequent meetings in Benghazi with them with reports suggesting meetings took place in July, September, October and November 2020.

In the last week of November, a number of UAE military officers visited the Darfur rebels' camps in Jufra.

COMMENT: Saddam Haftar was the main contractor and boss of the Darfur rebels fighting for his father in Libya, saying Saddam held meetings with them in Benghazi, while the Secretary General of Haftar's General Command Major General Abdelkarim Hadiya and LNA Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Abdelrazik Al-Nadhuri, also held meetings with them. Operationally, the Darfurian group's main LNA interlocutor is 128th Enhanced Brigade commanded by Colonel Hassan Maatuq al-Zadma.

ASSESSMENT: It's possible this increased importance and direct contact of UAE and LNA with Sudanese armed groups is to counter the reliance on Wagner Group which has shown itself to be a Moscow hybrid tool to directly influence the military situation in the country which is not always in aligned with the LNA. Whilst the UAE and the LNA are adamant that Turkey needs to leave Libya.

Russia has approach several economic contracts and diplomatic approaches directly with GNA interlocutors this week and they are diminishing Haftar's support in all spheres: political, diplomatic and logistical, with some sources claiming on cover arrangements with Turkey to maintain both factions' external main stakeholders with winning options.

It is likely to maintain the presence of Sudanese mercenaries till further improvements on security happens under the shadow of the Political and Military reconciliation in one year time at least, after elections will happen next December.

1.2 Syrian Mercenaries.

Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) has claimed that Syrian mercenaries are still been trained and recruited for deployment into Libya. Recruitment was ongoing in Idlib, Aleppo and Afrin through "brokers." Recruits are allegedly been offered \$400 a month for "securing facilities in Libya." This comes after the SOHR claimed a "state of anger" pervaded the mercenaries in Libya after a repatriation flight home was cancelled.

COMMENT: The amount per month, the Syrian mercenary are earning, is going down and explain there were some claims to come back Syria and the need to shift new fresh fighters with new contracts.

ASSESSMENT: It is likely the mercenaries will continue their rotations with Syria homeland.

1.3 Libyan GNA training in Turkey.

A statement from Turkish MoD gave details on the Turkish training, which comes within the framework of the Military Training, Cooperation and Consultancy Agreement signed between the two nations.

The statement also pointed out that 20 Libyan Air Defence soldiers started the training in Konya region in Turkey on 11 January, noting that they had been instructed on the use of anti-drone jammer defences, air defence radar systems and anti-aircraft modern artillery.

On November 2019, Turkish government signed two memoranda of understanding with GNA, the first related to security and military cooperation, and the second centres on defining areas of maritime jurisdiction, with the aim of protecting the rights of the two countries in accordance with international law.

ASSESSMENT: It is likely the training and equipment requested to and facilitated by Turkey will continue, without having into consideration they were part of the Ceasefire Agreement, because they sustain the legal framework of the GNA legitimacy as a sovereign Libyan government to ask for other nation's assistance.

1.4 Information Operations.

1.4.1 Turkish Disinformation

Turkish Anadolu Agency reported about armed clashes that broke out last 2 February between rival militias loyal to Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar in Sirte, according to military sources.

Militants from the Tariq bin Ziyad Brigade launched an attack on the main headquarters of Al-Kaniyat Brigade in Sirte.

COMMENT: This agency has known contacts with Erdogan's Information Offices and several times it was a propagandist of the official and sometimes fake news for Turkish internal influence and external support for the official statements without proper veracity. This news has no other confirmation and add noise about LNA situation in Sirte where it has to be held the 5+5 JMC on February the 4th, and in a key week for the future political configuration of the interim Libyan structure.

1.4.2 Attacks planned in Tripoli by GNA aligned forces, Mismari

Major General Ahmed al-Mismari (LNA) issued a warning of possible attacks on public and foreign facilities in Tripoli. The LNA claimed these attacks would be used to discredit the LNA by blaming them. Mismari stated that they had "reliable information" that 33rd Infantry Battalion (al-Bugra Battalion) and the Shura Councils are planning on blowing up public and private headquarters, including the UNSMIL HQ at OEA, before accusing the LNA of being the perpetrators.

COMMENT: Again, this information couldn't be confirmed with independent sources and it was a new propaganda bullet fired against GNA to spread out rumours and narrative about internal fights between militias and against international organizations to balance the last upon LNA.

1.4.3 UAV East of Sirte:

On 28 January, the LNA claimed to have detected a "foreign" UAV carrying out reconnaissance over Harawah, claiming the UAV had breached Libyan airspace. The UAV is assessed as being a Turkish UAV operated on behalf of the GNA.

LNA monitored a foreign unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) conducting reconnaissance flights over Harawah, 70km east of Sirte, on January 28 at 1100hrs. LNA Spokesman al-Mismari states that the action contradicts LNA's request for prior coordination before entry into Libya territory, is a violation of the ceasefire agreement.

COMMENT: Turkish UAV has the technical capability to do this ISR mission but it is not credible they can overflight the air defence system around Sirte, so well covered, without being fired nor detected earlier. This news goes in the same direction of propaganda issues to justify the LNA victim roll.

1.4.4 LNA claims about fake news on Mercenaries in Sirte.

Pro-GNA sources provide imagery showing the continued presence of external forces (said to be Russian Wager Group forces) in the Sirte area.

Libyan National Army (LNA) Spokesman, Major General Ahmed al-Mismari releases statement, claiming that rivals are attempting to undermine the political process and discredit the LNA by spreading "fabricated news", including "lying" about the presence of mercenaries in Sirte. LNA Spokesman Major General al-

Mismari states that “there is no presence of mercenaries inside or outside of the city” and that the claims seek to divert attention from “the real mercenaries” supported by Turkey in Western Libya.

COMMENT: In the same way, LNA is promoting its victim roll against GNA propaganda, but it is confirmed the presence of mercenaries in the outskirts of Sirte, such as Janjaweed and Air Defence systems operated allegedly by Wagner contractors, not so far away of Sirte downtown.

1.4.5 Propaganda leaflets in Sirte

Additionally, pro-GNA sources share images of alleged leaflets found in Sirte, near the Wadi Jaref and airport roads, written in both Arabic and Russian, threatening external force members, stating that their movements are being monitored, and calling for the external forces to immediately leave the area. On 30 January, GNA sources stated it appeared several psychological operations, PSYOPS, typical propaganda leaflets in Sirte district written in Arabic and in Russian with statements and rhetoric targeting Wagner Group and other Arab speakers’ mercenaries to depart the city.

COMMENT: This is not the first time we can see this alleged information operation PSYOPS campaign using leaflets deep inside Sirte controlled area. GNA suggests with this narrative an internal movement in opposition to LNA within Sirte.

We have to consider GNA have no means to spread out leaflets so deep inside LNA controlled territory, such as artillery shell, helicopter or aircrafts/drones, or agents.

GNA, with probably Turkish Intelligence Service (MIT) support, would like to influence media speech about civilian unrest with LNA, and it adds rhetoric from weeks ago about the not desire presence and abuses of mercenaries, Russian Wagner, Janjaweed in Sirte.

ASSESSMENT: Information Operations and hate speech on social media can jeopardize the willing of reconciliation, it is likely the hardliners and external stakeholders will continue with build influence campaigns to shape people behaviours and rulers. Next week it will be

1.5 **West Tripoli Militias aligns with Sarraj.**

The Union of the Western Region Protection Force (UWRPF), issues a statement on 31 January, announcing unification of all Western Region military battalions and opening of communication lines; combatting of organized crime, terrorism, smuggling, and human trafficking; calling for the return of displaced persons; integration of fighters and youth under the Government of National Accord (GNA) security/military institutional umbrella.

They reject of GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha’s previously announced *Operation Snake Hunt*.

Furthermore, the UWRPF accuses the United Nations Support Mission of Libya (UNSMIL) of creating the ongoing Libyan crises, including at the political realm through the survival of the GNA and the selection of individuals.

The UWRPF demands a clear and transparent roadmap presentation at the next UN Security Council (UNSC), rejecting inclusion of “non-consensual figures” in the “next-phase”, and calls on President of the Presidential Council (PC), Fayez Al Sarraj to form an interim executive until December 24 elections.

COMMENT: The complete breakdown of the GNA between Sarraj and Bashagha in their respective desires of power is increasing the polarization within the GNA and it could be an additional destabilisation factor in the thin line of reconciliation and stability.

ASSESSMENT: It is likely the positioning of the different intra factions with the different candidates could erupt in clashes next weekend between the militias trying to empower by the force the options they could reach by political means. It looks Bashagha’s options to capitalize power are decreasing but he still have some gambit chess options to surprise the players for Libyan power game. It is likely Bashagha will play them after LPDF output will run their positions or he could wait for December elections and then play his final cards.

1.6 **The UN Security Council instructed Secretary General Antonio Guterres to deploy ceasefire monitors to war-torn Libya.**

Last 28 January, the members of the Security Council requested to establish and deploy swiftly an advance team to Libya to prepare the future deployment of Observer Group to monitor the Ceasefire Agreement.

In the letter, the council said it expected within 45 days to receive reporting on preparations undertaken by the advance team and practical proposals for amending the mandate of the UN mission in Libya. The advance team of the observer force is expected to comprise around 30 people. Under the ceasefire agreement reached by the warring parties, international observers are supposed to monitor the truce and oversee the departure of foreign fighters from Libya. These number some 20,000, the UN says.

COMMENT: In a report late last year, Guterres called for the creation of an unarmed observer group for Libya, made up of civilians and retired military people from countries of the African Union, the European Union and the Arab League. He did not say how big it should be. Deployment of ceasefire observers is being carried out with the approval of the parties in Libya.

ASSESSMENT: The deployment of the observers could be a precondition to success in the complex roadmap to effectively make possible the 23rd October Ceasefire Agreement between the opposed factions and the ending of the conflict in Libya. The reaction in both sides about the interim political structure decided on 5th February will be the key to solve or disrupt in the conflict again.

1.7 UK Cooperation on Military Medical, Training and Equipment.

The Defence Minister of the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) expressed hopes that the UK would expand military cooperation with Libya, especially in training special and anti-terrorism forces, in addition to supporting military medical services with training and equipment. These remarks came in a meeting with UK ambassador to Libya, Nicholas Hopton and military attaché in Tripoli,

COMMENT: There were several contacts with private British private companies offering not only the referred above but also demining and Counter Terrorism training.

CONCLUSIONS

Situation remains in a tense calm waiting for the outcomes from Political and Military tracks top forums, the LPDF and the 5+5 JMC respectively. Next week can be the most important one to address the route in reconciliation direction or in the opposite.

Internal movements in each side with important call to armed groups and militias can be the influence tool to reshape the political map for the interim time till the elections next December.

Haftar's LNA is manoeuvring to gain independence from Russia and approaching UAE and Sudanese armed groups to counter balance the Russian movement toward GNA options to calm down the military realm in exchange for contracts and economic advantages in future Libya.

In GNA, more militias and governmental power are grouping around Serraj in opposition to Bashagha's supporters mainly some Misratan militias in Tripoli and Misrata.

While there have been no indications of a potential escalation in the short term, both sides remain poised to use military force to facilitate their internal agendas with the LNA in particular remaining concerned about their hold on the oil crescent. Factions may still use military force to disrupt or derail the current political process, or to create leverage.

2. Update military events.

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

- On 29 January, in Benghazi, there was an attempted assassination of Ayad al-Fassi , who is the commander of the Awlayi al-Dam armed group.
- On 29 January, in Suknah, Al-Jufra Province, a civilian opened fire on a vehicle from 77th Fight Battalion (LNA); the battalion mobilized forces and carried out a number of raids. The motivation is unknown, but, there are heightened tensions in the Hun area because the deployment of foreign fighters allegedly Sudanese Janjaweed.
- On 31 January, Saleh Al-Din Namroush, Minister of Defense (GNA), stated that his ministry plans on moving ahead with Turkish-supported military training programs. 1,000 soldiers have finished

training inside Libya with another 1,100 ready to begin training. 1000 soldiers have finished training in Turkey and returned to Libya with another 200 currently undergoing training in Turkey.

- On 1 February, in Sabha, the Bahri Moussa armed group alleged forced entry to the Sabha Transfer Station and occupied it. They hindered operations, sabotaged and stole equipment.
- On 2 February, in Neighborhood Two, Sirte Province, clashes broke out near the Uqba Bin Nafaa School in Neighborhood Two with two people reported to have been wounded. Unconfirmed reports suggest the clashes were between LNA Military Police and 166 Infantry Battalion (LNA) after the Military Police attempted to arrest a number of 166 members accused of carrying out criminal activity.
- On 3 February 2021, during afternoon hours, in southern Tripoli, heavy explosions reportedly heard, after the explosive ordnance disposal team detonated unspecified quantities of explosive remnants of war (ERW) in the area of Al-Heera.
- On 3 February Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov held a meeting with Chief of the General Intelligence Service of Libya's Government of National Accord (GNA), Emad Al-Trabelsi.
- On 3 February 2021, in Mizdah, an armed group affiliated to GNA Western Military Region reportedly closed the Mizdah-Qaryat road at the Sakraig "Boutma" Checkpoint in protest of delayed salary payments.
- On 4 February, the Protection Company belonging to 106th Mechanized Infantry Brigade (LNA) arrived at Sidra airport to secure the area prior to the arrival of the 5+5 JMC and UNSMIL delegations.