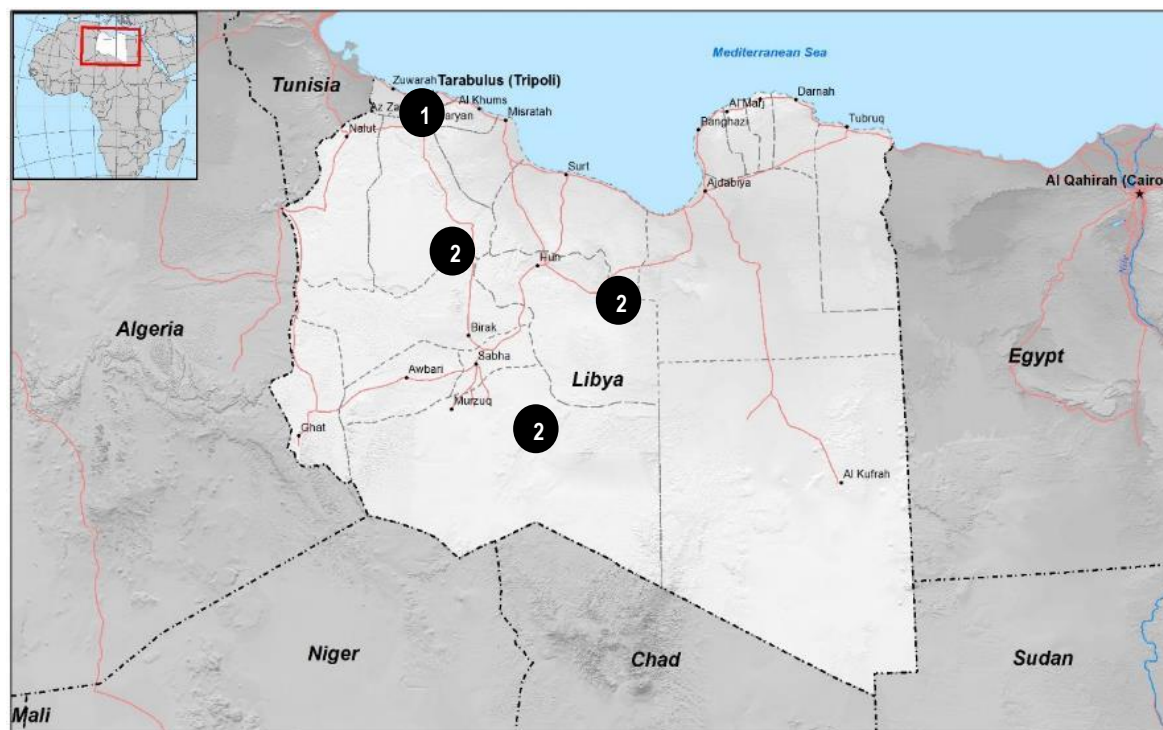


EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA

Weekly Report 04 – 09 FEB 2022

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1	04 – 09 FEB22	Consolidation of alliances along the Western/Central Regions and the Great Tripoli Areas
2	04 – 09 FEB22	Resumption of CT activities

SUMMARY

During last week, important meetings have taken place in the Western Coastal Region and in the Great Tripoli Area to strengthen the cooperation between relevant security institutions.

Together with the reported mobilisation of a potential Joint Operations Force under command of Lieutenant General Juweli, and the declared loyalty to the GNU of 25 Militias (mostly from Zawiya), as well of other units of the Nafusa Mountains and Western/Central Regions, they allegedly supporting a new executive. These developments have supposedly consolidated different commitments along quite sensitive operational areas, at a critical term, set for that same GNU.

In the meanwhile, the terrorist threat seems to increase with a focus in the South and the Eastern part of Libya, but not only. This regional challenge and the possibility of spill over could also represent a great concern for the neighbouring countries, like Tunisia.

1 CURRENT SITUATION

1.1 Consolidation of alliances along the Western/Central Regions and the Great Tripoli Areas

Minor clashes between militia occurred in Tripoli, while the control of the main accesses to the capital remains contested. In this perspective:

- on 3 February, a meeting was held in Sabratha involving:
 - Abdullah Al Lafi, Presidential Council (PC) vice President;
 - Major General Salah Al-Namroush¹, Western Coastal Military Region Cdr;
 - LTC Ashraf Issa, Security Directorate Support Force Western Region Branch Cdr;
 - Security Directorate directors from Zawiyah, Sorman, Sabratha, Zuwara, Al-Sahel West, and Ajaylat.

Reports stated that the aim of the meeting was to strengthen the security cooperation between the “Libyan Army” and the Western Coastal Region Security Directorates;

- on 5 February, the mobilisation of a potential Joint Operations Force under command of Lieutenant General Juweili was reported in the area of Qaser Bin Ghashir, Espiaa, Asbi'ah, and Souq Al-Khamis, down to the outskirts of Tarhuna;
- on the same day, 25 militias, mostly from Zawiya, announced their support to the electoral process under an appropriate constitutional framework, declaring their loyalty to the GNU;
- on 9 February, a coalition of military units/ militias of the Western/Central Regions released a statement, allegedly informing of their support for the HoR's approval of the new Roadmap and for the initiative to form a new executive.

BACKGROUND

- On 20 January, 18 armed groups/Military Council issued a statement and announced their affiliation to GNU Chief of Staff, naming themselves as “Supporting Effective Forces” and including the Counter-Terrorism Force (CTF), the Hattin Bde (allegedly loyal to Bashaga) and Misratan Military Council (see Weekly Report 20-27JAN22).
- On 26 January, Security Directorate Support Force, and Misrata 166th Bn mobilised along the Airport Road area, South Tripoli.
- On 31 January, Zawiya based 103rd Bn, under Western Coastal Military Region Cdr, Salah Al-Namroush, deployed to Zawiya, Sorman, Sabratha and Ajaylat to mitigate tensions among Zawiya militias and to secure the area.

COMMENT

No major clashes occurred, despite a high potential of “ready to fight tonight” forces in Tripoli.

The presence of the IPC Deputy, Al-Lafi, at the meeting in Sabratha highlights the high relevance given by the IPC to the consolidation of the security forces. Creating a common base linking “Libyan army” assets and Western Coastal Region Security Directorates, could be aimed at creating a Joint Military Security Room extending from Janzour to Ras Ajdir border.

On the opposite, the statement released by the 25-militia representatives on 5 February, does not apparently impact within the current balance of forces because no major militias were part of the signatures, so that they were mostly seeking to protect their vital interests.

¹ Under the Government of National Accord (GNA) Major General Namroush was Minister of Defence and Fathi Bashaga was Minister of Interior.

On the opposite, the military coalition stated in favour of the new executive is aimed to support a political solution and to possibly counter the contested ground.

ASSESSMENT

As for the reported events, the aim appears to be the necessity to build up controlled and secured areas under Governmental forces' command in the GTA, in close cooperation with the MOI and MOD.

With the Misratan and Zintani forces gaining control of the access from the East and the South (see Weekly Report 28JAN-03FEB22), the recent alliance between the Security Directorate Support Force of the Western Region (MoI) and Western Coastal Military Region have sealed the control along the surrounding access to Tripoli.

Therefore, despite a possible confrontation between SSA and 444th Bde, it is likely that the situation will remain calm but precarious. Possible skirmishes are likely to occur, linked with the struggle for territorial and business control within the current political dispute.

These new alliances could farther deter political affiliated militia from escalating whenever damaged by next developments.

1.2 Resumption of CT activities

Libya has been experiencing a resumption of terrorist warnings, which have triggered tailored operations led by both Western and Eastern security forces. Recently, the Libyan National Army (LNA) has reportedly killed 19 ISIS fighters in Qatrun and in the West, while the GNU launched an intensive security counterterrorism operation in the Nafousa Mountains and Sabrata. Despite this efforts, IS' threat is still present and connected, not only within Libya but also in the region and an uprising in activities aiming to finance terrorist activities in Libya has been observed.

On 4 February, MG Al-Mabrouk Sahban, the Southern LNA Operations Room Cdr, called for an international support to combat terrorism in Libya.

On the same day, Tunisian security forces arrested 4 terrorist members in Bizerte and dismantled a network allegedly involved in terrorist financial activities.

On 4 February, Spanish sources reported that the "Policía Nacional", in close coordination with Europol, arrested in three different Spanish cities, three people in charges of financing an international terrorist network in Libya.

On 6 February, unconfirmed sources reported a new LNA operation carried out by 110th LNA Bn in the area south of Zillah (Harouj Mountains). Furthermore IS presence in Umm Al Aranib area (Fezzan) was reported.

On the same day, Darfur (Sudan, close to Libyan borders) authorities announced the formation of a security force aiming to protect the zone.

On 7 February, Misrata's Counter-Terrorism Force (CTF) reported large-scale security patrols against IS activities.

On 8 February, a Joint operation by the Nalut Branch of GACS and Nalut Security directorate allegedly took place in the Nalut Area near the Libya-Tunisia border.

Moreover, from a wider regional perspective:

- on 3 February, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has released the 29th Report of Analytical Support and Sanctions Minority Team on Terror Groups, concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Daesh), Al-Qaeda and associated individuals, The report states that Al-Qaeda retains about 50 members across several towns in Libya, with its

stronghold in Awbari and Ghat, areas that could also provide logistical support and safe havens to other groups throughout the Sahel;

- on 7 February in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune recommended, in his capacity as African Union (AU) coordinator against terrorism, several measures to be enforced.

COMMENT - It is noteworthy that:

- although major terrorist activities have been tackled by LNA operations, IS presence has also spread out in Western and Northern Libya (mainly in Nafusa Mountains);
- terrorist activities have been increasing along the porous borders with Sudan, Niger, Algeria and Tunisia (see Weekly Report 13-19JAN22);
- regional cooperation among security services has increased as shown in the last operation carried out by Libyan (GNU) and Tunisian authorities. As a result, a Tunisian terrorist, Bilel Ben Abdelwaheb Ben Trad, was detained in Tripoli. Nevertheless, an undisputed unified approach involving LNA and GNU, has yet to be undergone;
- an increasing presence of prominent Tunisian terrorists in Libya (Achref Ben Fathi Guizani, in the West of the country, and Hamza Ben Salem Ayéb and Hédi Ben Dhaou Ghouil in the village of Takut, close to the Tunisian border) has been reported;
- foreign fighters remain in Libya and are linked with terrorist activities as a source of income.

ASSESSMENT: The precarious political situation in Libya continues to be perceived as a “safe heaven” condition for the terrorist cells to be able to perform their preparatory activities for operations to be potentially conducted in the region, including the politically unstable Tunisia.

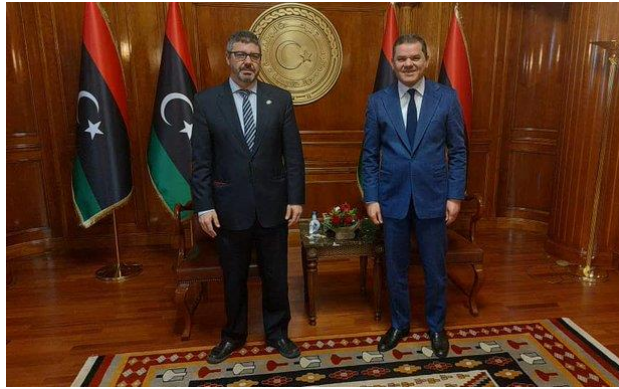
2 OTHER SECURITY RELATED EVENTS

- a. On 3 February, unconfirmed sources reported the return of Syrian external forces (approx 300) from Benina Airport (Benghazi) to Hmeimim Air Base (Latakia, Syria). This batch was allegedly deployed as oil facility guards under Wagner Group's 42 Bde in Jufra.

In similar terms, on 4 February, 250 Syrian external forces were withdrawn for Western Libya to Turkey. Nevertheless, on 8 February, the Syrian Observatory for Human Right (SOHR) reported that a new batch of Syrian mercenaries (150) were allegedly deployed to Libya.

- b. On 3 February, the Ambassador of the European Union to Libya, Jose Sabadell, had a meeting with Kalifa Haftar regarding the security situation and the withdrawal of foreign forces.

On 8 February, that same EU authority, met with PM Dbeiba and PC Al Menfhi, emphasising the need for stability, avoiding divisions in the current fragile context.



c. Joint Military Committee meeting in Sirte

From 4 to 7 February, the Joint Military Committee (JMC) met in Sirte with UNSMIL presence. The meeting focussed on:

- expediting the opening of the coastal road (demining experts were present);
- the deployment of UN monitors;
- Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) efforts, including the integration of some armed groups into security institutions.

d. On 7 February, Libyan Army COS LTG Al-Haddad paid a visit to the 53rd Bde HQ in Misrata with the assistance of important military figures such as:

- MG Ahmed Abu Shahma, Head of the 5+5 JMC;
- Central Military Region Cdr, MG Mohamed Musa.

e. On 8 February, PM Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, with the presence of Gen Osman Aytac, Head of the Turkish Military Mission in Libya, attended the graduation ceremony of a batch of Misratan's 166th Bn at the Omar Al-Mukhtar Camp.

Gen Osman highlighted that Turkish mission seeks to raise the Libyan Army's efficiency to international standards. It is relevant to point out that Gen Osman was also present on the graduation of the first batch of newly formed 111th Bde at Hamza Camp (23 January).

f. On the morning of 10 February, a suspected attempted assassination took place in West Tripoli, in which the PM was not injured. The timing of this event is noteworthy occurring the same day the HOR should vote a new Government. Furthermore, this event would likely imply an increase of security measures in Tripoli while it could be exploited in favour of the aggrieved Dbeibah.



CONCLUSIONS

While UN continues supporting the way forward a unified Libyan approach, its recommended timetable on holding the elections by the middle of current 2022 has been superseded by an expected longer term solution. In fact, the original plan of a political track leading to a specific electoral date has been extending, allegedly pending the solution of other controversial legal aspects, de facto disrupting the 2020 LPDF commitment.

At the same time, the original security track for the prompt implementation of the 2020 CFA has been staggering, allegedly because of the presence of foreign forces. Furthermore, external interferences have limited the development of a sound regional strategy and practical plans, together with the possibility of a genuine security unification effort.

Missing the possibility to re-energize any possible role for UNSMIL in the short-term, the Libyan led process has independently taken the way. Of course, the supporting role of external powers will be continuing influencing any national political appeasement, agreement and possible implementation.

Having said that, the Constitutional amendment, the Reconciliation process and the Unification of institutions, claimed as the new tracks to be dealt with, could be well extended accordingly.

Therefore, because of the disputes and long-term solution of such processes, either a newly selected Government or the confirmation of current GNU will be facing persistent security concerns and risks. That, unless the diverse political actors will be willing to commit in a shared Roadmap towards national elections, that does not appear the case yet.

Of course, the intensity of such security concerns and risks is directly influenced by the political sustainment of the external regional powers and their commitment into possibly avoiding getting embroiled in the domestic dispute. That appears still unlikely, as for last week visible commitment to support Libyan Army's efficiency in official ceremonies at the presence of current GNU PM by TUR military authorities.

The recent meetings among the Deputy PC Al Lafi, the Western Coastal Road Military Region Cdr Namroush and Western/Central armed groups leaders constitute farther steps for creating a common security thread connecting the MOD and the armed group around Tripoli, aimed at discouraging militia and/or armed forces relevant disrupting initiatives.

At the same time, it appears, currently unlikely, that political developments could trigger an escalation of major clashes due to the JMC 5+5/high level GNU Army CoS/LNA commitment for a de-escalating role. At the same time, foreign countries are not interested to be directly involved in direct major confrontations any longer.

However, terrorist activities and presence continue to represent a regional concern, even in relationship with the current political situation in Tunisia and the Sahel one at large, and the possibility for terrorists to exploit Libya logistic support.

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

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.