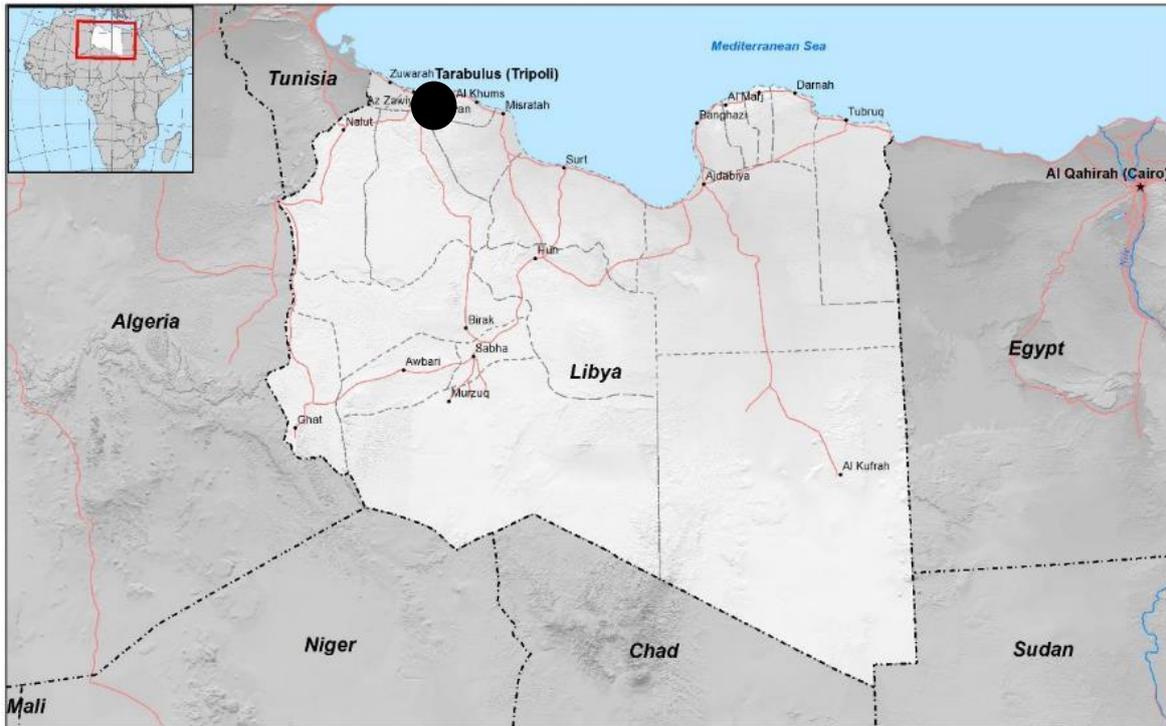


EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA
Weekly Report 28 JAN – 03 FEB 2022

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● 28 JAN – 03 FEB22	Tension persists in the Greater Tripoli Area
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SUMMARY

Strengthening of Tripoli militia & forces seems likely balanced, although this could change amid political affiliations, financial interests and the scenario finally undertaken. Monitoring both the security situation and the progress in the political dispute should best portrait the overall scene and the quite unpredictable effects and interactions.

The struggle to confine the illegitimate activities is a persistent challenge. Regional contrabands of precious human and material resources could benefit from porous borders and the regional instability. This complex basket has not changed since years and is a source of additional concern able to challenge both the Libyan internal balance of power and the role of external regional national and multinational actors as well.

1 CURRENT SITUATION

1.1 Tension persists in the Greater Tripoli Area

Despite minor clashes, Great Tripoli Area (GTA) security remains precarious as the position of politically non-aligned forces strengthens. Following events have been reported:

- on 28 January, 166th Bn gave an ultimatum to the SSA and the 777th Bde to evacuate the Ministry of Culture and the General Authority for Telecommunications. This demand was expected to expire on 29 January;
- on the same day, the GNU Minister of Justice, Halima Al-Bousifi`s vehicle was shot by unknown elements, close to Swani-Aziziyah Road (Jafara District). No casualties reported. The Ministry of Justice released a statement condemning the event;
- on 30 January, localised sources reported SSA withdrew from the Salah Al-Deen area. Special Deterrence Force (RADA) established a Vehicle Check Point (VCP) nearby, at Madar Traffic Island;
- on 31 January, clashes were reported among Zawiya`s local groups (Kardamin and al-Shawish) at al-Dib intersection;
- on the same day, Zawiya based 103rd Bn, under Western Coast Military Region Cdr, Salah Al-Namroush, deployed to Zawiya, Sorman, Sabratha and Ajaylat to mitigate tensions and secure;
- on 1 February, unconfirmed sources reported a meeting in Misrata with the participation of local units representatives, coordinating Tripoli security setting.

BACKGROUND

- on 18 January, a meeting took place between 444th Bde and Misrata Halbous Bde at Takbali Camp (444th Bde HQ), allegedly to form a Joint Security Room on South of Tripoli to secure Ain Zara, the Airport Road, Al-Kremiyah, and Al-Swani;
- on 20 January, 18 armed groups/Military Councils issued a statement and announced their affiliation to GNU Chief of Staff LTG Al-Haddad;
- on 23 January, a ceremony took place at Hamza Camp celebrating the graduation of the first batch of newly formed 111th Bde forces, which would allegedly incorporate elements of Misrata`s 301st and Halbous Bde;
- on 26 January, unconfirmed sources reported a consistent deployment of the 166th Misratan Bn forces to Tripoli, estimated by some sources at about 300 armed and armoured vehicles, as well as mobile operations room(s);
- on 27 January, Stephanie Williams met with LTG Mohammed Al Haddad regarding the efforts to unify the military institutions and advance the withdrawal of mercenaries, foreign fighters and foreign forces.

COMMENT

Recently LTG Haddad`s role/influence has been increasing through:

- enhanced credibility from the outcomes of the JMC 5+5.
- increasingly cooperation with LNA forces, in the aftermath of the LTG Al Nadouri meetings and by means of Joint Operations;
- loyalty directly pledged by prominent armed groups/Military Councils.

At the same time, it is noteworthy that 444th Bde operability has decreased in an apparently acceptance of external militias, present in Tripoli area since a few weeks.

On the other hand, clashes in Zawiya are to be considered as a turf war over Zawiya's main infrastructures (port, power plant, refinery) as well as docking points for migrant and fuel smuggling, and related revenues impacting on 55th Company (SSA loyal) and Zawiya CID activities.

ASSESSMENT:

The militias in control of Tripoli's main accesses are:

- East (Airport road): 166th Misratan Bn;
- South: 166th Bn, 301st Bn and newly formed 111th Bde;
- West: the Joint Operation Force (Zintan forces under LTG Osama Juweili).

It is likely that the overall security situation will remain stable but precarious, as long as no political decision will be taken. Nevertheless, the consolidation of the armed forces in GTA is likely to:

- reduce and balance the main militias' influence;
- limit their freedom of movement in order to isolate and hinder their effort .

The sensitive step could be to gain control of the main critical infrastructures and institutional buildings in the centre of Tripoli.

The latest deployments could be seen as an increased presence aiming not only to reinforce Misratan militias' role in Tripoli, but also to bolster their position under the legal cover of the current GNU Chief of Staff LTG Haddad.

The deployment of the 103rd Bn (MOD) is likely aimed to control critical infrastructures and deter militias' activities in Western Tripoli (Coastal Region).

It is likely that MOD units (including Misratan and Zintan forces) will be enlarging their deployments towards Tripoli aiming to reduce militias' influence and activities. Furthermore, in such a context, clashes among SSA and Misratan Units (mainly 166th Bn and 301st) cannot be ruled out.

2 OTHER SECURITY RELATED EVENTS

a. Smuggling crude oil

On 29 January it was reported a consistent load of crude oil, outside the legitimate umbrella of the Libyan National Oil Corporation (NOC), at the Marsa Al-Hariga (Tobruk) seaport (as occurred on 27 January). The shipment is allegedly being smuggled to an un-known country.

COMMENT: In the Eastern region, where 80% of Libya's oil fields are located, LNA regularly attempts to illegally export crude oil, in order to fund Eastern side activities and balance the reduced public fund allocations by the GNU. Within this financial debate, LNA recently reported that GNU had suspended the payment of LNA personnel salaries (Weekly Report 6-12JAN22) and PFG employees blocked four oilfields located in the oil crescent (Weekly report 17-22DEC21) . The discrepancy between the location

of critical infrastructures being under the LNA control and the financial and political institutions mainly concentrated in the capital represents an unbalancing issue. Therefore, the smuggling of oil constitutes an advantage in the LNA hands to strain the tension between the sides. Money, energy and security are interlinked dimensions with oil smuggling being a tool to cultivate external relationship and sustain the military effort.

- b. On 30 January, the Ambassador of the European Union to Libya, Jose Sabadell, had a meeting with the First Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein Al-Qatrani, who stressed that *“the peace of Libya will reflect positively on the countries of Europe, given the location of Libya, which is considered a starting point for illegal immigration”*.
- c. On 31 January, UN Security Council extended UNSMIL’s mandate until 30 April 2022.
- d. On the same day, SSA reported that they had managed to rescue nearly 500 migrants in operations carried out from Harsha, Sabratha, Ras Youssef and Abu Kamash. By the same token, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that from 23 to 29 January 872 migrants were rescued/intercepted and returned to Libya.
- e. In southern Libya, LNA aligned Desert Patrols Company reported the deportation of “illegal immigrants” through the Al-Tom (Libya/Niger) border checkpoint. (No figures Known).
- f. **Turkey and Russia continue increasing their footprint**

During the reporting time, Turkey and Russia have continued increasing their presence and influence in Libya, both in Western and Eastern sides.

Turkey:

- On 29 January, Turkish Ambassador to Libya, Kenan Yilmaz, paid a visit to Benghazi’s mayor, Saqr Omran Bujuari and some House of Representatives (HoR) members. He expressed the willingness to reopen the Turkish General Consulate in Benghazi. As a consequence of this visit, on 31 January the Benghazi municipal building was stormed (without significant damages) by some wounded and former LNA members due to their anger at the hosting of the Turkish Ambassador;
- On 30 January, the Syrian Observatory for Human Right (SOHR) reported that a new batch of Syrian mercenaries will allegedly be deployed to Libya. This comes after same source reported that on 27 January Turkey cancelled the repatriation of Syrians from Libya;
- On 2 February, the arrival to Al Watiya airbase (Western Tripoli) of a new cargo flight Airbus A 400 was reported.

Russia:

- On 31 January, Deputy Director of the Middle East Department at the Russian Foreign Ministry, Ivan Molotkov, expressed Russia’s intention to resume its diplomatic activity by reopening its embassy in Tripoli and the Consulate General in Benghazi. The statement was claimed during a recent HoR delegation presence in Russia, to coordinate the upcoming visit of the First Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein Al-Qatrani;
- on the same day, unconfirmed sources reported movements of allegedly Wagner Group forces from Sirte to Jufra.

g. International security meetings involving Libyan Authorities

- From 24 to 28 January, the 11th Annual African Air Chiefs Symposium (AACS) was held in Kigali, Rwanda with the presence of 32 countries and co-hosted by US. Main topic discussed was the use of military transport aircraft to carry out strategic transfer of material, weaponry and personnel as well as sharing knowledge of best practices for an enhanced partnership;
- from 2 to 3 February, Libyan Minister of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Najla Mangoush, attended to the 40th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, organized by the African Union Commission (AUC) in Ethiopia. He stressed the necessity to increase cooperation to tackle security challenges which are being faced by African countries;
- from 1 to 4 February, LTG Mohammed Al Haddad attended the African Chiefs of Defence Conference 2022, hosted by AFRICOM in Rome. The slogan was “*Joint investment for a common future*”, confronting the dangers of extremism and violence.



- h. On 3 February, Libyan GNU security services arrested a Tunisian terrorist (Bilel Ben Abdelwaheb Ben Trad) in Tripoli, as part of an intensive security counterterrorism operation conducted in the Nafousa Mountains and Sabrata. Unconfirmed sources reported the presence of other prominent Tunisian terrorist 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);
- i. On 3 February, media sources reported about Khalifa Haftar return to his post as general commander of the Libyan National Army (LNA).

CONCLUSIONS

Contrary to the focus on the elections, as stressed by the UN Special Advisor, the attention is currently focusing on the Government legitimacy and its impact on security.

However, with the problem remaining when and how celebrating the elections, Libyan factions/Civil Society appear distrusted of the International commitment unable to take to the vote, not confirmed as the main objective by the GNU.

The visit of TUR authorities to Benghazi, and the opening of RUS authorities with Tripoli highlight a more flexible approach towards both Eastern and Western authorities, having both Countries already consolidated their presence on the ground with external forces.

The renewal of UNSMIL mandate and the pending nomination of the UN Special Envoy depict and confirm a weakened international conduct.

With the population not willing to be drawn into military confrontations, and the PM apparently not able to control Tripolitania militias and monopolize security in the capital, no major intra clashes have been observed. However, security concerns persist in Tripoli with unpredictable criminal activities and consolidation of positions in and along the outskirts.

LNA led CT Operations in the South, confirm US support in efforts for combatting terrorism in the region.

Migration is and will continue to act as a major concern with responsibility revolving on EU Institutions and the narrative maturing from *Libya as a starting point for illegal migration*, to *Libya not as a source, but as a victim of migration to Europe*, to *Libya as a country to be helped to better regulate such an illegal smuggling* to its coast line, and then to Europe.

Instability, Terrorism, and human smuggling are confirmed as regional issue and if it is true that *without stability in Libya, there will be no stability in the Sahel region*, it is also true that *without stability in the Sahel region, there will be no stability in Libya*, and the International commitment in that regard could be developed.

Money, energy and security are interlinked issues, as the smuggling of oil represents the indispensable financial source for the LNA. That, as part of the overall security architecture in which arms embargo, withdrawal of mercenaries/FF, contrast to human smuggling and contraband are already interconnected.

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.