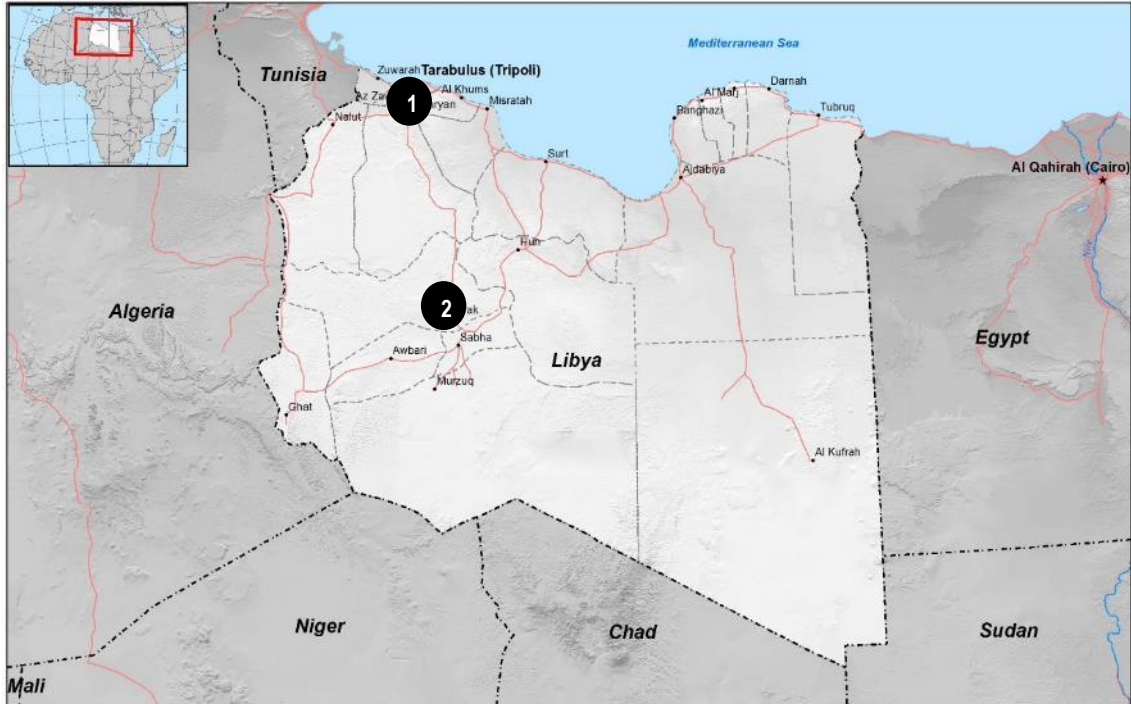


# EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA

## Weekly Report 01-08 SEP 2021

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1	03SEP	Clashes between rival militias contribute to the deterioration of Tripoli's security
2	03SEP	The LNA forces have dismantled a workshop allegedly to manufacture IED

**SUMMARY:** Militia competition continues to represent a source for instability in Western Libya, with a significant risk of escalation in the near future. The proximity of the electoral period and the personal interests of certain actors in this process, may fuel further tensions. At the same time, this instability feeds Khalifa Haftar's narrative against the presence in the capital of uncontrolled armed groups affiliated with security institutions. Security operations targeting terrorist militants are also a good approach to promote the capability of armed actors as security providers. These LNA operations in Southern Libya, together with the presence of mercenaries, are igniting social disturbances, especially in Sebha or Murzuq. If confirmed, the ability of terrorist groups to assemble complex IEDs indicates their firm intention to increase their terror attacks.

## 1 CURRENT SITUATION

### 1.1 Clashes between rival militias contribute to the deterioration of Tripoli's security.

On 3 September 2021, elements from the Stability and Support Apparatus (SSA) tried to storm the 444 Unit headquarters at Tekbali camp, located 10 km away from Tripoli's downtown. Unconfirmed reporting argued that the trigger was the detention of some SSA members by the 444 Unit.



The fighting affected also civilian areas north of the Tekbali military camp. Unconfirmed reports stated that several armed groups mobilized to Tripoli. The Misratan 301<sup>st</sup> Battalion, affiliated with the MoD Tripoli Military Region, and the Counter Terrorist Force (CTF), aligned to the Presidential Council, joined the fighting in support for the 444 Unit.

After the clashes, the casualty balance was of two people killed on the SSA and one on the 444 Unit, and a number of SSA fighters affiliated captured. According to the latest unverified information, there were 12 members arrested.

The Tripoli Military Region commander, Abdulbasit Marwan, ordered the attack on the 444 Unit and accused its commander, Mahmoud Hamza, of disobeying his orders<sup>1</sup> and obtaining financial support of unknown origin. The 444 Unit rejected these accusations and assured its right to self-defense.

On 4 September, Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba held a meeting with the Interior Minister, Khaled Mazen, the Land Forces Chief of Staff Ghribel al Fituri and the regional commanders Abdulbasit Marwan (Tripoli), Osama Juweili (Western Mountains), Salaheddin al Namroush (Western Coast) to constitute an investigative committee to analyze the Salaheddin district clashes.

Following Dabaiba's instructions, Mahmoud Hamza announced the acceptance of the ceasefire and the resume of the 444 Unit's activity.

<sup>1</sup> Marwan stated that Mahmoud Hamza travelled to Turkey without his knowledge.



*Tripoli Security meeting on 4 September*

Despite this meeting, the tensions between the 444 Unit and the SSA have continued on 8 September. The 444 Unit has stormed the Ministry of Health (MoH) headquarters, expelled the SSA security members and handed that building over the Ministry of Interior. The MoH is located in an area contested by the SSA, the SDF and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB).

**COMMENT:** The risk of escalation is significant since both sides are likely to receive support from others within and beyond Tripoli.

Even though these confrontations apparently reflect a lack of coordination between groups belonging to different ministries dealing with security, the reality on the ground is that these groups keep on acting following their own agenda, regardless their institutional affiliation.

**ASSESSMENT:** This fighting is highly likely related to the increase of power and influence of the 444 Unit in the Tripoli area, the continuous tensions between both groups.

The confrontation in the capital is likely to exacerbate the tensions in other zones, namely the Western Coastal Region, Warshefana or Tarhuna.

### **1.2 The LNA forces have dismantled a workshop allegedly to manufacture IED.**

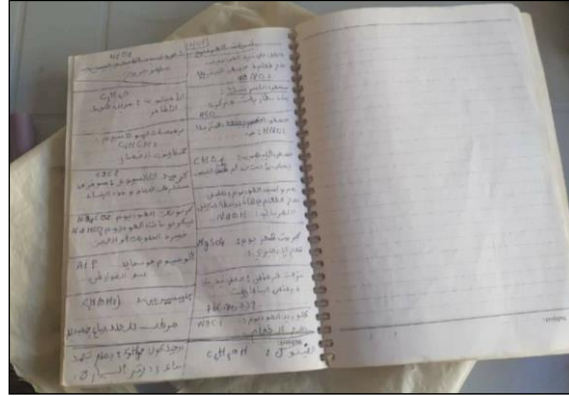
On 3 September, elements from the LNA Tarik Ben Ziyad Brigade carried out a security operation nearby Brak al Shati, and dismantled a workshop designed for manufacturing improvised explosive devices (IED).



*Diverse electronic devices*



*Unguided S-5 air-to-ground rockets, mortar shells and a box with S-5 fuses (bottom left)*



*Notebook containing some molecular formulas, such as hydrogen peroxide or acetone<sup>2</sup>*

The LNA arrested a suspect —Ali al Ajili al Hasnawi— and seized ready-to-explode bombs prepared to carry out terrorist acts, electronic devices and how-to-notes containing alleged information about different precursor chemicals.

According to the LNA, Ali al Ajili al Hasnawi is linked to Ahmed Abduljalil al Hasnawi, the main responsible for the Brak al Shati massacre on 18 May 2017<sup>3</sup>.

On 5 September, Ali al Ajili's tribesmen —al Hasnawi, also spelled Hisnawi or Hasawna—, have rejected LNA accusations against Ali.

**COMMENT:** Ali al Ajili's uncle is Mohammed al Ajili al Hasnawi, member of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), who has publicly stated that military personnel are ineligible candidates, in a clear opposition to Khalifa Haftar's candidacy. Unconfirmed information indicated that the LNA has fabricated this plot around Ali al Ajili in opposition to his uncle.



*Mohammed al Ajili al Hasnawi*



*Suspected Ali al Ajili al Hasnawi*



*Ahmed Abduljalil al Hasnawi*

<sup>2</sup> Both chemicals are ingredients to make TATP (Triacetone Triperoxide), also known as Mother of Satan.

<sup>3</sup> A force composed of the Third Force's 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, under the GNA MoD and led by Ahmed Abduljalil al Hasnawi and some elements from the Benghazi Defence Brigade, stormed the LNA Brak al Shati airbase and killed more than 140 LNA soldiers and civilians. This event provoked the suspension of the then Defence Minister, Mahdi al Barghati.

The equipment seized in this workshop seems to have a certain degree of sophistication and complexity, more than simple pressure plate IEDs.

Even though some IEDs are popular among terrorists because they can be prepared with little knowledge, some previous experience or training is still needed. This knowledge could have been obtained from technical experts travelling between areas in conflict, online forums, inspired attacks or members of terrorist experts already present in Libya.

Information coming from the LNA, referred to this workshop as a chemical laboratory. Taken into consideration the pictures on social media, apart from a pair of microscopes and the annotations in the notebook, at first sight there is little evidence to confirm this, such as lack of precursor chemicals, laboratory glassware, grinders or protective equipment.

The information stored in the hard disks will be crucial to confirm the real purpose of this workshop and to identify any links with the last IED attacks in the Fezzan Region or with any terrorist organization in Libya.

**ASSESSMENT:** The presence of those S-5 rockets<sup>4</sup> suggests that the manufacturer highly likely tried to get the explosive from them, instead of obtaining it through chemical processes. In Libya, access to explosive charges and initiators is still cheaper, easier and safer.

If confirmed, the development of the IED manufacturing capacity highly likely increases the terrorist threat due to these kind of attacks.

## 2 OTHER SECURITY RELATED FACTS/EVENTS

- a. On 2 September, unverified reporting indicated clashes between Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries against LNA-affiliated forces nearby Hun, nearby Jufra airbase. These mercenaries were highly likely affiliated with the LNA.
- b. On 2 September, Omar al Megrehi, the commander of the Tarik ben Ziyad Brigade met the commander of the 177<sup>th</sup> Battalion to coordinate patrols along the Great-Man-Made- River (GMMR) system. In May, the 177<sup>th</sup> Battalion was assigned to patrol around the GMMR facilities at Jabal al Hasawna al Jafara. Despite these patrols, at least seven GMMR stations have suffered from vandalism in the Bani Walid area.
- c. On 4 September, a group of local people protested in Sebha requesting the Presidential Council to remove the LNA-affiliated forces from the region, accusing them of being responsible for smuggling activities.
- d. On 5 September, 15 prisoners from both rival camps took part in a new prisoners exchange held in the Gate 50, west of Sirte, with the presence of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC). UNSMIL praised both parties for this new exchange.

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<sup>4</sup> Depending on the type of rocket, each S-5 contains between 0.8 and 1.8 kg of A-IX-2 (73% RDX, 23% aluminium powder, 4% wax), a Russian explosive also known as 'hexal'.



- e. On the 6 September, the LNA 106 Brigade arrested a Daesh (ISIS) leader and a number of individuals affiliated with the group in Murzuq area.
- f. On 7 September, the Joint Operations Forces Counter Terrorism (JOF-CT) from Misrata announced the arrest of a Daesh (ISIS) prominent leader in Bani Walid, Embarek al Khazmi. Khazmi was a Daesh facilitator wanted by the security forces for years. He fled from Sirte in 2016 when al Bunyan al Marsous liberated the city.



*The Misratan JOF-CT*



*Embarek al Khazmi*

- g. On 8 September, a Zuwaran armed group close the access to the Mellitah Oil & Gas Complex in the Coastal road, demanding the liberation of alleged fuel traffickers arrested by the Special Deterrence Force.
- h. On 8 September, security patrols from the General Administration for Central Support and the General Administration of Security Operations continue to escort the fuel shipments towards Southern Libya.
- i. On 8 September, unconfirmed information indicated that personnel from the LNA 106<sup>th</sup> Brigade have returned from Egypt, where they have received military training.
- j. On 9 September, security elements from the Department Counter Illegal Migration have foiled an attempt by a group of migrants to cross into Libya from Algeria.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

The security domain in Libya continues to tailor approaches implemented by separated Western-GNU and LNA forces, both having the aim to consolidate and polarize their relevance and power in the respective areas of influence. Coordinated initiatives in favour of protection of critical infrastructures and/or release of detainees appears to be part of a general appeasement process in the context of the national elections campaign.

Tripoli areas maintains alive the possibility of disputes among institutional leaders, that could erupt in clashes on the ground both at the hands of institutional forces and supporting militias. That represents a strong detriment in the light of the preparation and management of the election and, a tailored security plan aimed at preventing any severe incident both before, during and after the election polls, is considered a requirement.

Concerning the implementation of the other provision included into the Cease Fire Agreement, the JMC cannot realistically push further before the elections, especially concerning the sensitive issues of the FF/Mercenaries withdrawal and DDR.

The polarized political contest and the leading international actors sustaining FF in Libya, both apparently supporting the electoral process, are mostly interested in consolidating their influence and their **hard power** in Libya, deferring to an unrealistic synchronized withdrawal plan, very difficult to be implemented in the medium-short term without the presence of an external third party. **Soft power** initiatives by other international agencies and institutions appears only a palliative to benefit the internal reconciliation process.

Concerning the terrorist threat, it seems that the latest CT operations confirm the possibility of relevant extremism initiatives that could be ignited by other international/regional interests.

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