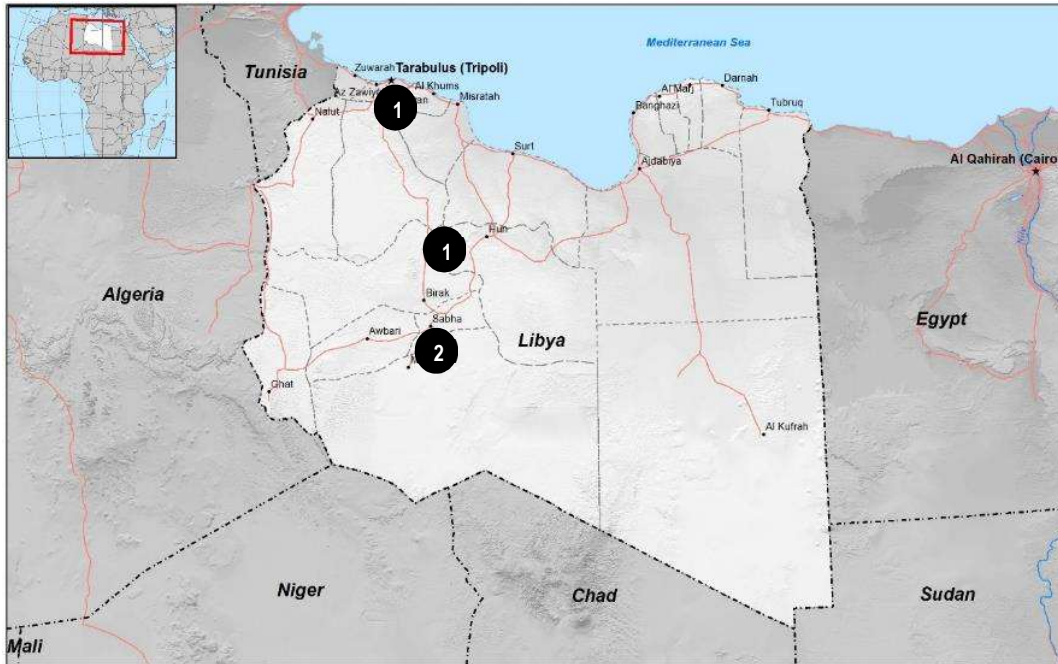


# EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA

## Weekly Report 22-29 SEP 2021

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1	23-27SEP	Increased movements of mercenaries/foreign fighters on both sides
2	23-27SEP	Potential increase of terrorist activities, mainly in Eastern and Southern Libya

**SUMMARY:** The Western coalition has been affected by an increasing number of Turkish movements towards Al-Watiya Air base, confirming the GNU's ally intention to consolidate its presence in the area. Conversely, on the Eastern side, the Russian activity appears to be focused on a possible demobilization or redeployment maneuvers from Al Jufra Air base, eastward. Overall, the International Community prove its willingness to push, among other issues, for the combined withdrawal of the foreign forces in the Country and the election to be held in due time as well, as essential requirements for security conditions to be maintained and political commitments to be respected. In the South, LNA widens its outreach, increasing border patrols and counter criminal/terrorism activities, aiming to tackle a likely surge of terrorist threat in the area.

## 1 CURRENT SITUATION

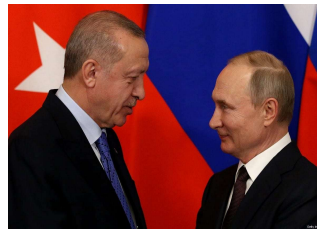
### 1.1 Increased movements of mercenaries/foreign fighters on both sides

Turkey maintained a high frequency of flights during this week. Therefore, transfers or redistribution of forces have been carried out. In particular

- on 23 September, localized sources reported continued external force movements in the Western Region, including an armed convoy heading West through Sabratha;
- on 27 September, a Turkish aircraft with approximately 250 Western-affiliated Syrian mercenaries arrived at Al-Watiya.

Eastern-alleged Russian Private Military Contractor (PMC), Wagner Group forces have also increased their activity, pointing out:

- on 25 September, there was an increase of troop movements outside Brak air base;
- on 27 September, numerous convoys were depicting demobilization or redeployment of equipment, including radar and air defense systems (Pantsir S-1), from Al-Jufra and Ghardabiyah Airbase.
- from 25 to 27 September, several convoys were reported towards Temanhaint and Ajdabya.



**COMMENT:** Mercenaries movements in Western Libya linked to the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) have been carried out on a regular basis, taking advantage of Turkey's continuous flights. However, the movement of mercenaries associated with the Eastern Libyan National army (LNA) has not been so evident since the ceasefire agreement.

On 28 September, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) informed about a plan for the withdrawal of all foreign troops and mercenaries from the country by the end of October (very likely to be disclosed during the Stability Conference on 21<sup>st</sup> October).

On 29 September, a bilateral meeting was held between Russia and Turkey in Sochi (RUS) to tackle, between the other points of common interest, Libyan crisis with the aim of reaching a unified outcome.

The international community is greatly encouraging the process for the withdrawal of mercenaries/foreign fighters/foreign forces. UN estimates, there are over 20,000 foreign fighters and mercenaries in Libya. On the other side, JMC reiterates the request to the IC and to the Berlin Conference countries for the support on the removal of foreign forces and mercenaries, requesting a direct contact with those countries who have a direct role in supporting foreign forces and mercenaries and underlining the importance to put pressure on the Libyan political institutions.

**ASSESSMENT:** It is highly likely that Turkey will continue increasing its supporting role in order to accomplish and enforce its footprint in Libya and will delay, as much as possible, a reliable withdrawal of its forces.

Despite the efforts made, no major achievements are likely to be reached, whenever not combined with fair and credible elections held on time. It is likely that, after the bilateral meeting in Sochi, some limited agreements between Turkey and Russia could be implemented, mainly affecting Syrian, Sudanese and Chadian fighters, which would justify a balanced and sequenced withdrawal of non critical assets.

A decrease in Russian and Turkish activity is likely during this pre-electoral period. However, it is highly likely that both countries will not withdraw their forces before the elections, whenever convened next 24<sup>th</sup> December or later.

### 1.2 Potential increase of terrorist activities, mainly in Eastern and Southern Libya

LNA continues playing the role of security guarantor, focusing its operations and borders surveillance in Eastern and Southern Libya.

On 23 September, localised sources informed that, after an operation carried out by military intelligence at the Tobruk Seaport, an Egyptian person, identified as Saad Al- Daesh, was arrested. He had the purpose of joining Daesh in Tripoli or in Southern Region.

On 26 September, it was reported the discovery of a Zodiac boat in the Ras Hilal area. Based on the boat's registry details, armed elements could be infiltrating areas in the Eastern Region to highly undermine security conditions and carry out hostile acts.

On 27 September, the LNA 110th Battalion reported the launch of a counterterrorism operation in the South-Western Region. No further details have been provided.

On 27 September, Islamic State (IS) claimed an attack in the Southern city of Sabha – at the LNA manned Checkpoint 17. Only material damages were reported. Unconfirmed sources reported that the IED was vehicle-borne.



This latest failed attack suggests that Daesh-Libya has not reached yet a full capability to perform successfully. Nevertheless, Daesh has the possibility to activate human resources to do so, namely facilitators to acquire the materials, IED makers and perpetrators.

**COMMENT:** There has been a relative increase in attacks in the last four months. Recently, on 22 August, IS attempted a vehicle-borne IED (VBIED) attack<sup>1</sup> against an LNA checkpoint in Zillah, Jufra District. Before that, on 6 June, IS conducted a suicide vehicle-borne IED (SVBIED) attack at an LNA checkpoint near Sebha, murdering four LNA personnel.

**ASSESSMENT:** Daesh will likely continue to carry out further attacks in Southern and Eastern Libya over the incoming period, mainly against security forces, particularly as the LNA increases its presence in that area and separated Libyan institutions are lingering.

## 2 OTHER SECURITY RELATED FACTS/EVENTS

- a. Abdullah Al-Lafi, Deputy Head of the Libyan Presidential Council, presided over a military ceremony at the naval academy in Janzour. He met with Abdel-Rahman Milad (Al-Bidja) who has been on the UN Security Council's Sanctions Committee List since June 2018, for his involvement in human trafficking and fuel smuggling. Al-Bidja was appointed as an Officer at the Naval Academy, and assigned to head the Coast Guard in the Western region by the outgoing Government of National Accord (GNA).



- b. On 23 September, EU appointed Rear Admiral Stefano Turchetto as EU Operation Commander of EUNAVFOR MED IRINI. He will take command from Rear Admiral Fabio Agostini on 1 October. The IRINI main task is the implementation of the arms embargo on Libya under the relevant UNSCRs. Secondary tasks include monitoring illegal oil trafficking from Libya, contributing to countering human trafficking and smuggling activities (through air monitoring) and contributing to the training of the Libyan Coast Guard and Navy.



<sup>1</sup> (from EULPC 20210722 Weekly Report).

- c. On 27 September, IGNU Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and Libyan Army Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant-General, Muhammad Al-Haddad, met United Kingdom Defence Delegation, including Adviser for North Africa and the Middle East, Jan Martin Smeaton in Tripoli. The meeting included discussions on assistance and support for security sector and 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC). Later the British informed about an initiative to have a Conference in the upcoming future in Wilton Park, gathering all the most important stakeholders, especially the GNU and the JMC, discussing, among the main issues, the SSR and the DDR process in Libya.



- d. On 28 September the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) Cdr, General Stephen Townsend, and US Special Envoy and Ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland attended a session with the 5+5 JMC, after attending a meeting with the IGNU PM and Head of the PC.



The meeting's focus was on the withdrawal of foreign forces from Libya, the unification of the Libyan military institution and counterterrorism efforts in southern Libya. The meeting took place after General Townsend visited Algeria and Tunisia.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

During current period, lingering the contrast between different Libyan institutions to held credible elections on the 24<sup>th</sup> December, no major change has been highlighted from a security perspective, having no side the interest to detract from the formal commitment to appease and respect international commitments.

With such a background, the anticipated Stabilization Conference expected to be convened next 21<sup>st</sup> October, and concerning the implementation of the other provisions included into the Cease Fire Agreement, appears to be used as a tool to shift the attention from the critical electoral process to the commitment expressed by the relevant parties in respecting a gradual, coordinated and balanced withdrawal of mercenaries/foreign fighters.

However, such a transparent, balanced and organized withdrawal does not appear to be feasible whenever:

- the electoral process could not proceed as expected;
- no unified Libyan institution and/or International Organization could be empowered for its unique direction, supervision and coordination;
- the activities of disarmament, withdrawal, arms embargo and border control are not effectively synchronised within the same architecture.

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