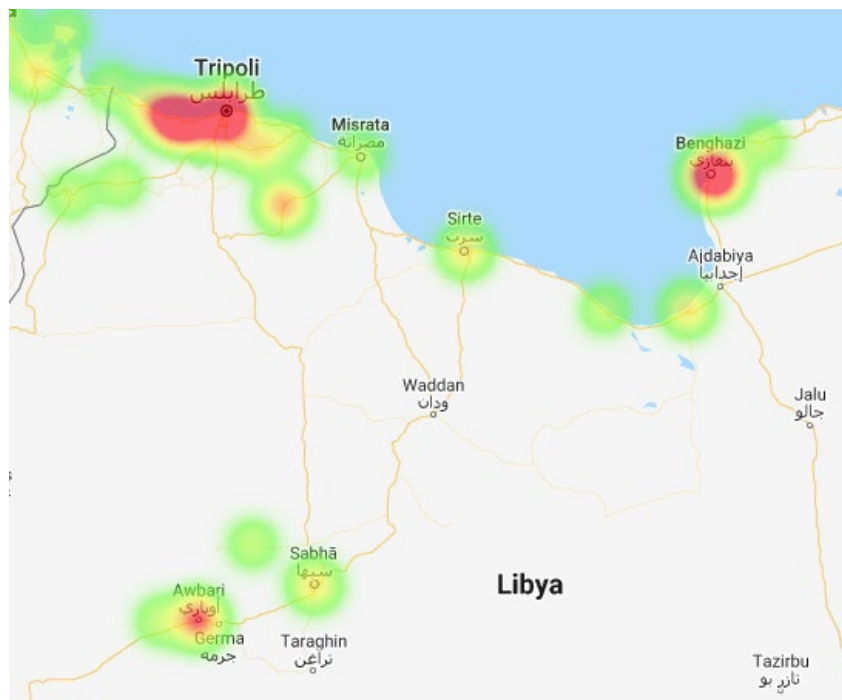


SECURITY AND DUTY OF CARE DEPARTMENT

5Security & Covid-19: WEEKLY SECURITY REPORT

Country: Libya & Tunisia Period: 18/03/2022 – 24/03/2022

## SECURITY SITUATION OVERVIEW



EUBAM Libya \_ Heat Map Intelyse 18 Mar 2022 – 24 Mar 2022

### 1. Key developments

- **Tensed security situation within the GNU - GNS power struggle:**
  - Armed factions' deployments, static and mobile security operations in Tripolitania
  - GNS MoD statements aimed at winning support from West region based armed factions
  - GNS took office in East and South Region
- **Other security developments**
  - Military developments in Western Region
  - Increased tensions between LNA representatives in 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) – GNU
  - Resumption of domestic flights between West and East of Libya
- **Tunisia security update**

### 2. Findings

#### 2.1. Tensed security situation within the GNU - GNS power struggle

##### Armed factions deployments, static and mobile operations in Tripolitania

The reporting period saw increased military activity in strategic areas – 444th Combat Brigade deployment (500 military personnel) Tarhuna on March 19, followed by Misrata 166th Battalion deployment to several areas in Bani Waled on 20 Mar.

A military gathering affiliated with the 3rd Company “Al-Lefaa militia” (Wershiffanah) led by Ramzi Al-Lefaa was spotted gathering at Al-Sahla Crossroads in Wershiffanah’s An-Najila area at approximately 2130hrs on 21 Mar. Unconfirmed



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reports allege the gathering is to pre-empt any attempt by GNS PM-designate Fathi Bashagha to enter Tripoli amid rumours he will do so via the Ras Ajdir border crossing on 22 Mar.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) 444 Fighting Brigade announced the deployment of forces across south Tripoli on 22 Mar. At approximately 1700hrs, a convoy of 50 vehicles with mounted anti-aircraft guns (a.k.a. technical) and armoured personnel carriers (APCs) affiliated with the brigade was spotted on Khallat Al-Furjan's main road. The brigade has deployed across Salah Eddien, Al-Sedra, Khallat Al-Furjan, Wadi Al-Rabei, Al-Khallatat, Wildlife Garden, Al-Ramla, Qaser Bin Ghashir, Espiaa, Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel, Sidi Al-Sayeh and Al-Heera.

Meanwhile, concerns over food supply will continue to dominate the security environment ahead of Ramadan amid rising prices across the local market and speculation by traders and distributors. In fact, GNU Economy Minister Mohamed Al-Hweijj met with the head of Internal Security Agency (ISA) Lutfi Al-Harari to establish a mechanism to control retail food prices on 19 Mar. Meanwhile, reports allege pro-LNA assailants are continuing to arbitrarily detain youth that have joined protests in Sirte. Reports allege at least five locals have been detained. In Misrata, long queues and rising prices were reported across fuel stations throughout the week. According to Misrata security directorate, the fuel crisis was resolved on 21 Mar after patrols were formed to monitor distributors and petrol station owners. The southern region will continue to see intense GNU/GNS competition. GNS Interior Minister Essam Abu Zreiba dismissed the pro-GNU head of Sabha Security Directorate Ali Bishr and appointed Ibrahim Al-Asfar. Sources confirmed Ali Bishr had long been absent from Sabha. Separately, Tuareg civilian and military elements continue to threaten to block the road leading to/from Sharara oil field.

### **SDCD COMMENT**

*Tarhuna and Bani Waled serve as strategic areas along connection routes between Tripoli, and the Eastern Coastal and Central Regions. Bani Waled can be used as an alternative route from Misrata to Tripoli via Tarhuna. 444th Combat Brigade deployment across South Tripoli and South Tripoli District on March 22, including Salah Al-Deen, Sidra, Khamis, Al-Furjan, Wadi Al-Rabei, Wildlife Area, Al-Khallatat, Ramla, Qaser Bin Ghashir, Espiaa, Souq Al-Khamis, Al-Sayeh, and Al-Hira. Note, the majority of the latter areas, as well as Tarhuna, played prominent roles during the LNA 2019-2020 Tripoli offensive. As such 444th Combat Brigade deployments on March 19-23 can be interpreted as possible preparation indicators, including for response to potential GNS-linked movement in the Western Region.*

### **GNS MoD statements aimed at winning support from West region based armed factions**

GNS Defence Minister, Ahmed Houma issued a statement dated March 20, outlining the GNS Ministry of Defence (MoD) objectives:

- a) Integrating armed factions/militias into programs to “reorganise and unify the Libyan Army”, to “preserve the homeland, protect its borders, and defend the civil democratic state based on the February 17 Revolution”.
- b) Affirm support for the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) in “all its decisions and work”; invite “all actors” to participate in the national reconciliation project.
- c) Files of the wounded, disabled, and retired military veterans will be “taken care of”, and everything related to MoD employees will be addressed.
- d) Positive cooperation with neighbourly and brotherly countries.
- e) Ensure “stability of the country and combat regional and international threats such as terrorism, organised crime, human trafficking and illegal immigration”.

### **SDCD COMMENT**

*The statement can be precepted as significant, and described as both a strategic policy outline of GNS MoD and an outreach to opposition actors, particularly to military/ security and armed factions in the Western Region.*

*The latter relates to GNS Defence Minister Houma directly addresses “Revolutionaries” i.e. armed factions/militias, and military unification via Security Sector Reform (SSR) and possible aspects of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR). The first point aims at removing misunderstandings by underlining that processes will be based on a*



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*“civilian democratic state”, and the “February 17 Revolution” - two arguments essential in the rhetoric of certain Western Region military/ security and armed group, as well as political actors, who are, or have been opposed to the LNA, and the GNS. The second point expresses the support for the ceasefire agreement, including withdrawal of external forces, as well as LNA-Western Region rapprochement. It also includes the intent of Point (a) by inviting “all actors” to participate in national reconciliation. The rest of the points ((c), (d), and (e)) treat consensual internal and external objectives for all parties. nevertheless, Point (e) is reflects more the LNA’s security policy objectives, with a pronounced focus on border security and protection, and counterterrorism.*

*The statement comes as part of the GNS’s campaign to create political, security, legal and information conditions that can facilitate non-contested taking over of power and start operating from Tripoli by demonstrating capability of national governance, while presenting future perspectives to military/ security and armed group actors via outreach, who may harbour ongoing resentment. In similar modus operandi, the GNS Ministry of Interior (MoI) on 08 Mar, postured the GNS’s strategic policy objectives, followed by coercive statements, which called for MoI employees to disregard the GNU orders, while threatening disciplinary measures. It would be possible similar approach may be adopted by the GNS MoD, which would coincide with previous suggestions that military/ security and armed group actors who maintain opposition to the GNS, including in pre or post executive control scenarios, would be labelled and classified as terrorist or extremist organisations, and targeted accordingly.*

*Commentators insist that from practical perspectives, sustainable elections and the unity of Libya can be achieved only through military unification, and SSR, all of which are currently unfeasible without inclusion and participation of the LNA. Military leaderships in the Western Region have previously indicated preparations for attempted facilitation of objectives, similar to the one in GNS MOD statement. Common assessment of commentators prompts that although the GNS -GNU power struggle is growing in its complexity, the likelihood of a forced GNS entry to the capital continues to decrease. In comments to local media, GNS Defence Minister Ahmed Houma confirmed that his government will not enter Tripoli by force, opting for political manoeuvring instead to convince Dbeibah to peacefully cede power.*

### GNS took office in East and South Region

After the unsuccessful attempt to enter the capital, PM designee Fahti Bashagha doubled down on efforts to seek international recognition in meetings with foreign diplomats and officials in Tunis, engaging in what is becoming an increasingly complex GNU/GNS power struggle.

The GNS is gradually escalating measures to compel the GNU into handing over power. These measures have included international efforts led by Bashagha to convince diplomats to accept the GNS as a fait accompli. The GNS is specifically focusing on financing in an effort to deny the GNU access to critical oil and gas revenues.

In the country the GNS took over government offices in the Benghazi and Sabha, removing the GNU structures and personnel from their positions and

On 17 Mar, GNS Deputy Prime Minister Qatrani took office in Benghazi in the presence of i.a. fellow Deputy Prime Minister Zadmā, and security directors, and former IGNU Ministry of Interior (MOI) Undersecretary for Technical Affairs, Faraj Aqim. Security support and control play crucial factors in facilitating the GNS’s gradual governance take over, and coincide with the LNA’s strategic security response in Fezzan, focal point being Sabha. The strategic security response focuses i.a. on creating a form of state monopoly on violence. This was elaborated on December 18, 2021 by LNA Sabha Military Region Commander, Major General Fawzi Al-Mansoori, stressing that the LNA aims to prevent the presence of weapons and armed formations in the Sabha area that are outside the “legitimacy of the LNA General Command”. This strategic response may now reap greater benefits as it can reduce security threats to the GNS’s presence in Sabha. Note, since the LNA’ strategic response in Sabha (also referred to as its strategic expansion into Fezzan) on June 17, 2021, recorded hostile and criminal activity levels (in Sabha) have declined.

On 22 Mar, GNS Deputy Prime Minister for the Southern Region, Salem Al-Zadmā, and GNS Deputy Prime Minister for the Eastern Region, Ali Al-Qatrani alongside a delegation of ministers and security directors in Sabha for the take-over of the Prime Minister’s Office. On the previous day 21 Mar, GNS Interior Minister, Issam Abu Zariba suspends Sabha Security Directorate Director, Muhammad Bishr, and replaces him with Sabha Security Directorate Assistant for Security Affairs, Colonel Muhammad Ibrahim Al-Asfar

### SDCD COMMENT

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*From a broader perspective of the GNS's objective of exercising executive power from Tripoli, the gradual take-over of governance in the East, and prospectively in the South, is likely part of GNS strategy to create impression and demonstrate their capacity to govern the whole country, while the GNU power is concentrated only in Tripoli and West region, subject to increasing pressure from factions supporting the GNS. If the GNS manages in maintaining political power in the East, and South, as well as potentially gaining a foothold in the West, the GNU's political power could be reduced to areas in Tripoli, and the Western Region, thus changing the political realities on the ground. For the moment GNS actions in East and South region appears not to face resistance from GNU, local communities and tribal elders and leaders. Considering recent statements of Tuareg tribal leaders supporting transition of power to GNS, it is unlikely GNS actions to deteriorate the security situation and trigger kinetic engagements in the south of Libya.*

## 2.2. Other security developments

### Military developments in Western Region

Western Coast Military Region Commander, Major General Salah Al-Namroush met Al-Jafara Security Directorate Director, Brigadier Abdul Nasser Al-Taif today, with whom he discussed the organisation and unification of security operations, including Vehicle Checkpoints (VCPs) in participation of security directorates, the Western Coast Military Region, and branches of the security services and administrations.

### SDCD COMMENT

*Note, on March 16, Director Taif met with Western Military Region/ Western Region Joint Operations Room Commander, Lieutenant General Usama al-Juweili, discussing coordination between security and military authorities in Jafara District. On August 15, 2021, the Interim Presidency Council (IPC), acting as Supreme Commander of the Libyan Army, formed the Western Coast Military Region under command of Major General Namroush, with assigned areas ranging from Al-Ghiran Traffic Island, West Tripoli to the Tunisian border in the west, and from the Western Coast in the north to the Nafusa Mountains in the south. The IPC also restructured the Western Military Region to include areas ranging from Gharyan in the east, to the Tunisian border region in the west, to Ghadames in the south, and the Nafusa Mountain border in the north. Already during the Military Region restructuring last summer, Jafara District presented a point of interest, as its borders cut across contentious areas, where opposing military/ security and armed group actors operate, and have clashed on several occasions. The northern peak of Jafara District forms a spearhead across Warshefana, in the direction of Syed, located west of Janzour, in which the Stability Support Agency (SSA), other Warshefana based actors, as well as Zintani actors may compete over influence. In some aspects the restructuring of the Military Regions, and the resulting control ambiguity over Jafara District, may be fuelling the competition dynamic by possible unintentional design. It is currently unclear whether efforts towards unification and coordination vis-à-vis Jafara District are developing separately or within coordination of the Military Regions. Lastly, Jafara District also carries significance with regards to smuggling and trafficking routes that run across its territory, and that connect the Western Coastal Region and the Nafusa Mountain, which in turn connect to the Libya/ Tunisia border*

### Increased tensions between LNA representatives in 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) – GNU

LNA representatives of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) issued a statement, confirming delay in payment of LNA personnel salaries with three months, claiming GNU Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah responsibility for the non-payment and possible consequences, including potential collapse of the LPDF Military Track, and a return to division and instability. The declared goal of the statement was described to alert the Libyan people, and UNSMIL towards the GNU's passiveness.

In separate development on 22 Mar, the GNU held a meeting in Tripoli between Prime Minister Dbeibah, and Western Region representatives of the 5+5 JMC, during which Dbeibah asserted the need to support elections according to the proposed by GNU dates.

### SDCD COMMENT

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*The non-payment of LNA salaries is a reoccurring issue and source of tensions between LNA and GNU, the most recent of which was on January 06, 2022, when salaries had not been paid for a near four months, despite HoR and 5+5 JMC interventions.*

*Occurring only few days before the beginning of Ramdan (April 02), the current LNA triggered reaction for non-payment issue carries greater weight, both for the receiving parties, and as political message. The non-payment of salaries appears resume the opposition to the GNU amongst Oil Crescent actors, who threatened closures on March 11, and the GNU and NOC sponsored Development Plan 2022, which aims to increase production, and financial resources for NOC.*

*Political and military/ security interaction between Eastern and Western Region actors, including within the 5+5 JMC will be impacted, even if GNU makes the payments are made prior to Ramadan, due to the inflated by LNA perception of repeated malicious GNU intent.*

*Dbeibah's meeting with Western Region 5+5 JMC representatives can be interpreted as an attempt to secure their support for his political objectives.*

*In all likelihood the occurrence will contribute to stagnation of the relations between parties in 5+5 JMC, thus spilling over the tension's rhetoric from the GNU – GNS power struggle.*

### **Resumption of domestic flights between West and East of Libya**

After 02/03/2022 decision to suspend the domestic flights between East and West, GNU PM Dbeibah became under pressure to reopen airspace to east/west domestic by international community and local interlocutors. On 22/03/2022 announcement by Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport (MJI)/ Misrata International Airport (MRA) and eastern region airports stated that the resumption of domestic flights was approved by the GNU and confirmed both by MJI and Benina (BEN) airport management bodies. First reports indicated a flight was operated by the Benghazi-based Global Air and departed MJI at approximately 1700hrs towards BEN. On 23/03/2022 the flight tracking platform Flightradar24 independently confirmed flights between MJI and BEN operated by Libyan Airways, Air Libya, had resumed.

### **SDCD COMMENT**

*Resumption of flights comes after nearly 3 weeks of extensive efforts from international community and criticism from local parties, significantly reducing social tensions caused by it. It is reasonable to assume that significant role on reconsidering the GNU position might have the signals coming from GNS Defence Minister Ahmed Houma statement that GNS will not enter Tripoli by force.*

### **2.3. Tunisia security update**

On 20 Mar, suspected terrorists opened fire at the barracks of the National Guard in Kairouan. Security forces repelled the attack. The police press statements claim that the incident is a retaliatory attack by members of the terrorist cell recently dismantled in Kairouan and Sousse on 15 March. Twelve suspected terrorists were arrested.

The recent attack comes amid the designation of the Islamic State group's (ISIS) new leader on 10 March, Abu Hassan al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, after his predecessor, Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi, was killed in Syria on 3 February during an operation carried out by US special forces.

### **SDCD COMMENTS**

*The incident is the first terrorist attack using firearms against the security forces in Tunisia in several years. Recent attacks on the security forces attributed to terror groups were essentially lone wolf attacks using cold weapons. Suspected terrorist cells operating in the mountains of Mghila and Chaambi have also targeted the security forces in several landmine explosions the last year.*

*The 20 March attack on the security forces in Kairouan be interpreted as indicator of increasing confidence among terror groups affiliated to ISIS after the nomination of its new leader earlier and a potential intent to return to the tactics adopted by the group in 2014. Local ISIS affiliates may seek to show force and credibility to carry out attacks to garner the support of ISIS-core anew, after years of a declining influence in the country due to the Tunisian forces' heightened counterinsurgency operations since 2014. Tunisian nationals were known to represent one of the group's largest contingent of fighters in Syria. The attack may potentially embolden other ISIS affiliates in the Tunisia to carry out sophisticated attacks*



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against the security forces in urban areas. This will trigger larger scale counterterrorist operations to identify potential sleeper cells.

## 5. COVID-19 Update<sup>1</sup>

Country	Cases in the last 7 days	Cases in the preceding 7 days	Weekly Case % Change	Cases in the last 7 days/1M pop	Deaths in the last 7 days	Deaths in the preceding 7 day	Weekly Deaths % Change	Overall Covid cases
Libya	<b>1,494</b>	3,160	- <b>53%</b>	213	40	45	- <b>11 %</b>	501,379
Tunisia	<b>2,835</b>	4,657	- <b>39%</b>	236	72	84	- <b>14%</b>	1,033,731

<sup>1</sup> Data from WorldOMeter. Source: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/> [online]. Last updated: 17/03/2022 16:00GMT

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LIST OF ACRONYMS / ABBREVIATIONS

AQ - Al-Qaeda  
AQIM - Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb  
BCP – Border Crossing Point  
BDB – Benghazi Defense Brigade / Saraya Defend Benghazi (SDB) (Al Qaeda-aligned – AAS and RSCB associated/umbrella group) CBL – Central Bank of Libya  
CNI – Critical National Infrastructure  
DACOCT - Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism  
DDR - Disarmament, demobilising and reintegration  
DPF – Derna Protection Force (an amalgamation of all militias in Derna, including the MSCD)  
GECOL – General Electricity Company of Libya  
GNA – Government of National Accord (UN-backed)  
GNC – General National Congress  
IGNU – Interim Government of National Unity (2021)  
GTUC - Greater Tripoli Union Council (Tripoli militias and others, established in June 2020) HCS - High Council of State  
HNEC – High National Elections Commission  
HoR – House of Representatives (Tobruk-based)  
IDF – Indirect Fire (mortars/rockets)  
IDP - Internally Displaced Persons  
IED - Improvised Explosive Device  
IOC - International Oil Company  
5+5 JMC – 5+5 Joint Military Commission  
IS/DAESH - Islamic State  
LNA – Libyan National Army  
LNG – Libyan National Guard  
LPA – Libyan Political Agreement (2015)  
LPDF - Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (2020)  
LROR - Libyan Revolutionary Operations Room  
MoD - Ministry of Defense  
MoF - Ministry of Finance  
MoFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
MoHE - Ministry of Higher Education  
MoI - Ministry of Interior  
MoJ - Ministry of Justice  
MoO - Ministry of Oil  
MoT - Ministry of Transportation  
MSCD – Mujahideen Shura Council of Derna (AQ aligned)  
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation (aid/charity)  
NOC – National Oil Company  
NSG – National Salvation Government (GNC)  
PC – Presidency Council (IGNU)  
PFG- Petroleum Facilities Guard  
RPG - Rocket Propelled Grenade  
RSCB - Revolutionary Shura Council of Benghazi  
RTA - Road Traffic Accident  
SAF - Small Arms Fire  
SDF – Rada Deterrence Force/ Special Deterrence Force/ Rada  
SSA - Stability Support Agency  
Technical - An improvised weapon-mounted pick-up truck  
TPF – Tripoli Protection Force (TRB, Nawasi 8 Force, Bab Tajoura Brigade and Ghneiwa umbrella group, established in December 2018)  
UNSMIL – United Nations Support Mission in Libya  
UXO - Unexploded Ordnance

**Disclaimer:** This report is based in security incidents reports from multiple sources, including international partners and open sources, whose accuracy may not always be fully verified. It cannot be assumed that all security incidents in Libya and Tunisia were reported to and/or tracked by EUBAM Libya. The Security and Duty of Care Department (SDCD) emails a daily security update (DSR) which includes a full description of the incidents that serve as the basis for this report. These documents may not be copied, forwarded or reproduced, manual, electronic, photographic to any other person or organization outside EU Institutions and EU Members States without further approval from the originator.