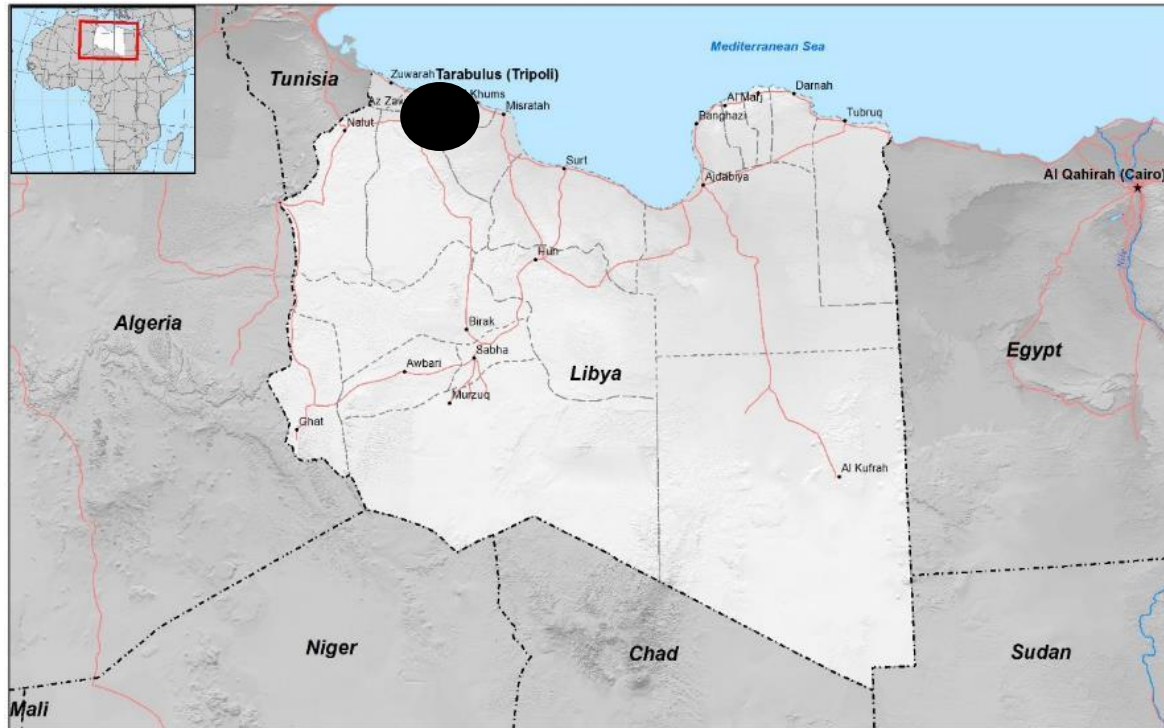


EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA

Weekly Report 18 – 24 FEB 2022

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●	18 – 24 FEB22	Tension in the Greater Tripoli Area
ANNEX: Layout of Militias in the Greater Tripoli Area (as of 24 Feb 2022)		

SUMMARY

No significant clashes have been reported during current week, probably linked to the fact that the political situation remains undefined since the designation of Fathi Bashaga as PM. However, the tension is still present and the proximity of political decisions could fuel and sharpen the differences, and finally destabilize.

The allegedly new force called “*Constitution and Elections Support Force*”, established under the authority of the GNU PM/acting MoD, confirms the trend within Libya politics to easily create new formations and the challenge to pursue a SSR process. Not clear if any militias is supporting this initiative.

The electoral objective remains at distance, no matter the different solutions envisioned. The noticeable hate speeches and the rejections of rival candidates will be a recurring limiting factor for its celebration.

1 CURRENT SITUATION

1.1 Tension in the Greater Tripoli Area (GTA)

No major security events took place throughout the reporting period.

The celebrations of the 11th anniversary of the Libya Revolution Day on 17 February did not lead to significant critical circumstances as well. Some isolated activities took place, reported as follows:

- on 19 February, local sources reported the blockage of the coastal road in the Jadda'im area where dirt barricades were built up across the route, close to Check Point (CP) 27, which is the main entrance point into Tripoli from the West. Allegedly, the blockage was related to the recent arrest of an al-Far militia member named Rabei Halila, by either Nawasi or SDF/RADA units;
- on the same day, Tripoli Military Region HQs issued a statement calling for "*maximum levels of caution and readiness*" claiming that "*strange and big preparations*" from the LNA would take place to enter Gharyan. It was demanded that the Chief of Staff (COS) must take immediate measures, including the prohibition of LNA's movements in the area;
- furthermore, Check Points were established in the Hush Al-Sitiyn area (located between Bi'r al Ghanam and Aziayah, Jafara District) to prevent other military and security forces and armed groups from reaching Tripoli;
- on 20 February, unconfirmed sources reported that an unidentified assailant arrested/kidnapped the Head of the Internal Security Agency (ISA) at the Ra's Ajdir Border Crossing Point (BCP) between Libya and Tunisia;
- on 22 February, sources reported that the dirt barricades were removed and Al-Zawiya's Coastal Road was reopened;
- on the same day, localised sources reported the deployment of an Al-Salmoud Bde's armed vehicle convoy in the Tajoura area in South-East Tripoli. The convoy mobilised in Misrata;
- on 23 February, a new force called "*Constitution and Elections Support Force*" was established under authority of the MOD. The new force rejected the House of Representatives (HoR), the High Council of State (HCS), and the LNA Cdr Khalifa Haftar;
- on 24 February, LNA units headed towards the Oil Crescent and other LNA units mobilised in Shwayrif.

COMMENT

There are some speculations that LTG Juweili (a key figure at this stage) was in charge of directing the above mentioned CP to prevent the entrance in Tripoli with the aim to limit any additional support to the GNU. He could also be trying to dissolve military councils as part of JMC 5+5 (including Zintan).

Furthermore, no clashes occurred during the last 10 days and only minor show of forces were reported. Armed groups probably are awaiting for political decisions.

Forces have continued to reinforce their positions to be able to control their area of interest (see **Annex**).

ASSESSMENT

This time can be assessed as a "*wait and see period*", during which main actors are consolidating their influence and allegiances. It is expected that this situation will continue.

Furthermore, clashes in Tripoli are less likely to escalate due to the high risks associated with

the instigation of violence, such as:

- losing institutional affiliation;
- negative consequences for social embeddedness;
- labelling by the international actors.

However, whenever a critical amount of armed groups would feel marginalised in the new political framework, they could more easily resort to violence, being that an “*ultima ratio*”.

Regarding LNA, elements were observed moving in the vicinity of both Gharyan and Shwayrif. However, it is unlikely these are troop concentrations in preparation of an attack. In Gharyan these observations could be linked to coordinated operations between the LNA and MOD aligned units in the context of the Joint Force. In Shwayrif, these movements of troops are likely linked to normal troop rotations as observed in the past. Furthermore, LNA continues deploying to ensure control of critical infrastructures.

2 OTHER SECURITY RELATED EVENTS

- a. On 17 and 18 February, the Heads of State or Heads of Government of the Member States of the African Union (AU) and the European Union (EU) met for the sixth European Union - African Union summit in Brussels with the presence of PC President Mohamad Al-Menfi.

The main topic of this meeting was cooperation on the immigration file. The PC President stated that the migration crisis “drains *Libya’s security and economic resources*”.

To note, that Libya PM has signed agreements with Palestinian Minister of Labor (17 Feb) and demonstrating interest in signing a MoU with Bangladeshi authorities (20 Feb) on sending their workers to the North African country, meant to say that Libya is able to regulate working migrants, in according to their specific political agenda.

- b. On 18 February, LNA (TBZ Bde) reported that 3 SIAI-Marchetti SF.260 aircrafts entered in service after their refurbishment. These aircrafts should be used for patrols along borders and in desert areas.
- c. On 19 February, Vice-President of the Presidential Council Abdullah Al-Lafi met with the Turkish Ambassador to Libya Mr. Kenan Yilmaz. The latter urged Libyans not to resort to the use of force and support the efforts for unifying the country.

The Turkish ambassador pointed out that:

- Turkey plans to host a meeting for key Libyan parties as part of Turkey's contribution to the reconciliation process in Libya. Allegedly, this meeting would take place next week with the presence of PM Dbeibah, HCS chairman Al Mishri and Government of National Stability (GNS) PM-designated Bashaga;
- Turkey's position does not differ between the regions.

ASSESSMENT: Turkey will continue to consolidate its footprint in Libya and it is highly likely that Libyan representatives will not take further decision until the above-mentioned meeting takes place, because of the sensitiveness of the memorandum of understanding concerning their military presence and the maritime deal.

- d. On 19 February, along the commemoration of the 11th anniversary of February 17 revolution, the spokesperson for the Libyan Army, Mohammed Gununu expressed that “**criminals should go to prison not assume power**”. It was also highlighted that the Libyan Army will continue to defend the country and build the military institution **away from**

dictatorship and the glorification of persons or the rule of the family and tribe, building a modern military institution via training programs within the agreements between legitimate governments and Libya's allies to fight terrorism and protect borders.

- e. On 19 February, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov spoke out against excluding any candidates from the Libyan elections process, adding that the Russian Federation has links with actors across the country.
- f. On 20 February, two batches (250p) for the General Administration of Central Support (GACS - MOI) graduated. The two undersecretaries of the Ministry of Interior for Directorates and Public Affairs, MG Bashir Al-Amin and MG Mahmoud Saeed were present.



- g. On 22 February, Vice-President of the Presidential Council Abdullah Al-Lafi met with JMC 5+5 (Western Side) in order to review the latest steps taken for the withdrawal of mercenaries and foreign fighters from Libya and the unification of the military institution.

It is noteworthy that this meeting took place after different contrasting opinions regarding the current political situation (Eastern and Western), which could affect the integrity of the JMC 5+5.

- h. On 22 February, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov state that he hopes a postponement of elections will not lead to an escalation of violence. This statement is ambiguous and hard to assess whether it implies a threat or support for postponing elections.
- i. On 24 February, Libyan HCS rejects by majority vote Bashaga's appointment while the PMD has proposed the cabinet formation to the HoR.
- j. Terrorist threat

On 19 February, the Misrata-based Joint Operation Force reported the arrest of four Islamic State (IS) members in Tripoli, which were allegedly planning an attack on the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, they released a video with statements indicating a possible IS-network between Libya's Southern Region, Tripoli, and Turkey.

On 20 February, unconfirmed sources reported that LNA carried out a counter-terrorist operation in the vicinity of Sabha.

COMMENT: Since last month, the terrorist threat has been increasing and also exploited by GNU and LNA as well, in order to gain legitimacy and discredit others.

It is likely, that IS maintains a residual capability in Northern and Western Libya aimed to support Southern operations from a logistical and financial perspective. It must be noted that no GNU security personnel has been targeted until now.

It is likely that IS maintains some degree of freedom of movement in Eastern and Southern Libya. Confrontations with the LNA are also possibly linked to competing interest in the illicit economy. In this perspective, it is reported that:

- latest terrorist attacks exclusively targeted the LNA and may have primarily been aimed at ensuring freedom of movement of IS;
- real combat operations have been carried out by the LNA, using all types of weapons, including air assets.

Furthermore, the terrorist threat could also be exploited to serve other specific interests (i.e. to hit targets of opportunity).

CONCLUSIONS

From an initial wave of apparent optimism about the possibility to merge national interests in a new unifying governmental authority, the divide between the two Prime Ministers has increased, with designated PM Bashaga struggling to seek internal and international backers, even within his Misratan inner circle.

In fact, it appears that PM Dbeiba has consolidated the ambition to remain at the helm of the GNU, as sustained by Turkish auspices, elaborating in a very short time an unrealistic election roadmap, expecting to lead to parliamentary elections before the end of June 2022. That, while contradicting his previous conduct, and discounting the many obstacles already highlighted.

The tension between the two contenders, not excluding the HoR and HCS, is surging and mirrored within the security domain, with some armed groups trying to sustain and influence the political balance while others still in a wait and see mood.

Initially envisioning the possibility to appease the contenders while distributing the different ministerial chairs, it appears now more possible the creation of a secondary executive authority.

Hate speeches, war of propaganda, the creation of “ad hoc” politicised forces, the control of sectors and the show of strength, those are some of the characteristics of the confrontation in the urban circle of the Greater Tripoli Area. That, while consolidation of positions and anticipated large scale military drills continue to broadcast the LNA mighty in the Central region and in the South.

Such a confrontation appears having frustrated the tentative rapprochement between Western and Eastern military leaders developed during the last couple of months, and their planning for Joint Operations.

From a wider perspective, the International Community is struggling to indicate a unique position over the political debate, under the mantra of the Libyan led and Libyan owned dimension of the problem, with a clear difficulty to retake the initiative able to reenergize the disrupted unifying political and security tracks.

The complication of the UKR crisis looms on the same Libya scenarios where both major external regional actors (TUR and RUS) could play a role in an encirclement of EU interests related to the provision of energy resources and the control of illegal migration.

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.

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