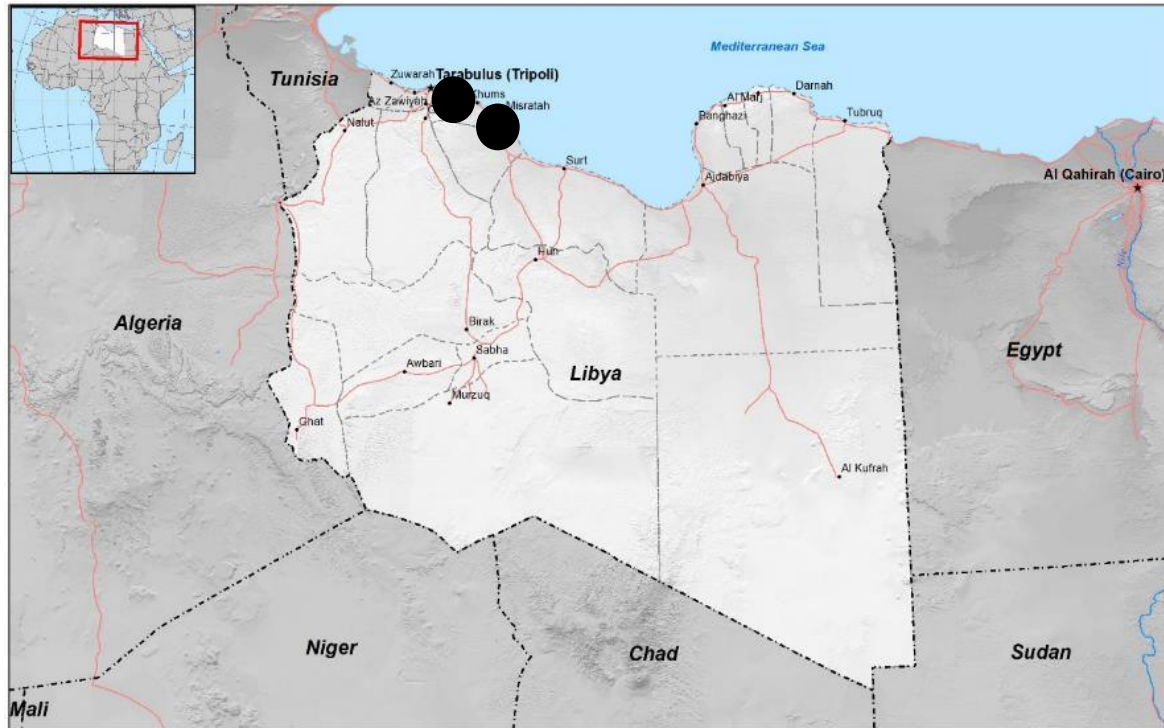


EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA

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SUMMARY

Last Tuesday 1st of March, the HOR has approved the new Government led by the designated PM Fathi Bashagha, while the incumbent Prime Minister Abdul Hamad Dbeibah is, for the time being, refusing to give up his seat in the capital Tripoli. Hereafter instability surged noticeably in the Greater Tripoli Area and Misrata and criminal related events occurred in both cities.

At the same time, hate speeches and statements coming from the armed grouped militias supporting both contenders multiplied, resulting in a challenging simmering environment.

Threats over the critical infrastructures, like the reported block/reduction of some oil provision, is relevant especially at this critical time when European energy procurement is simultaneously negatively influenced along both the Eastern and Southern European flanks by external regional actors, all at odds with the EU interests of a stable, prosperous, democratic and peaceful environment.

1 CURRENT SITUATION

1.1 Fissures in alliances and increased tension in the Greater Tripoli Area (GTA)

In the contest of recent rapidly-evolving political developments, the main events could be summarised as follows:

- on 24 February, HCS voted against HoR's constitutional amendment, and the change of executive;
- on 25 February:
 - SSA units deployed and increased its readiness in Abu Salim and Al-Madar areas (SSA area of influence);
 - unconfirmed sources reported that Haitham Al-Tajouri, the 777th Bde's Cdr, suffered an assassination attempt;
 - 444th Bde increased security deployment to Tarhuna, as well as to South Tripoli and Bani Waled where Check Points (CP) were set up;
 - General Security Agency (GSA), under Emad Trabelsi (Zintan), and the Western Region Joint Operations Room, under LTG Juwayli (Zintan) increased their deployment to South and West Tripoli;
- on 26 February, unconfirmed sources reported an alleged meeting between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and PM Dabaiba in Ankara;
- on 27 February, according to a news agency, a meeting took place between Belgassem Haftar and the Head of the High State Council, Khaled Al-Mishri, in Ankara. Allegedly, the meeting was reportedly short-lived;
- on 28 February, GNS PM designate Bashaga presented to the HOR his new government¹; and on the same day HCS Khaled al-Mishri claimed against the new proposed government;
- on 1 March, GNS was approved by 92 out of the 101 members present, and appointed by HOR; a strong statement supporting Dabaiba was released by several prominent militias;
- on 3 March, the GNS MoFA was kidnapped in the Eastern outskirts of Misratah when driving towards the East;
- on the same day, GNU PM Dbeiba, in his capacity as Defence Minister prohibited all military movements without prior permission. He also ordered MOD Bns to raise alert levels and deploy across entry ports and critical buildings. In addition, Dbeibah ordered the commanders of the MoD's 51st, 52nd, 111st, and 444th Battalions to securing the entry points to the capital and institutions from any security breach.

COMMENT

Controversy has erupted, concerning the main Ministries, such as Defence, Interior and Foreign Affairs. Factions from both the East and West have achieved key positions in the GNS. However, these groups only represent parts of the social fabric and the militia landscape. Consequentially, there might be enough other fringes that feel being left out so that could resort to more kinetic and violent means of coercion. Specifically:

- the new Ministry of Defence (MOD), Ahmid Houma, is currently HOR's Deputy representative and close to Aquila Saleh and Haftar, which could be seen as a clear LNA interference. Consequently, the key military commanders of the current GNU could consider this as unacceptable;

¹ The official session was postponed and unconfirmed sources reported some differences concerning GNS Cabinet of Ministers confidence vote.

- the new MOI appointed is Issam Abu Zariba², current directorate of financial affairs in the MOI, is the oldest brother of Hassan Abuzriba (SSA's Deputy Cdr) and Ali Abuzriba (member of the HOR and linked with Fathi Bashaga);
- nominated Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) is the previous Libyan ambassador to the EU - Brussels, Hafed Qadour, who is related to Nawassi Cdr's (Mustafha Qadour), was part of Muammar Gaddafi's diplomatic team and is allegedly a friend of Belgasseem Haftar;
- the deputy PM for the South, Salem Al-Zadmah, is related with LNA 128th Cdr, who allegedly was working in close coordination in Joint Operation in the area of Al Shariff.

On the other side, on 1 March, SSA's Cdr Ghneiwa (also known as Al-Kikli), 55th Coy Cdr (Mu'ammar Al-Dawi), Ayoub Abu Ras (TRB), Abdul Salam Al-Zobi (301st Cdr) and Mahmoud bin Rajab (52nd Bde), publicly represented their position in favour of PM Dbaiba.



Recent tensions in vicinity of the Tripoli port between SDF (RADA Special Deterrence Forces)/DACOT (Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism) and Nawassi could indicate that SDF/DACOT might not accept the GNS MoFA designate Qadour, probably because with this appointment Nawassi would gain too much influence in the capital. The Joint Operations Force – Counter Terrorism (JOF-CT), to whom, GNU PM Dabaiba has recently allocated the lavish sum of 100 million LYD, is allegedly considered responsible for having kidnapped Qadour. Throughout our previous reporting this unit has been active in the Misratah region in counter terrorism operations, however, previous high-profile kidnappings did not last very long in Libya.

It is remarkable that Misratan and Zintan militias have not been active so far, which could have a great impact. Furthermore, we have not observed yet a clear position as for the 166th Bn Cdr Mohammad Al-Hassan.

² The commander of the 777th Brigade, Haitham Al-Tajouri, sided with the Abuzriba's.

ASSESSMENT

After the appointment of the GNS and the Ministries, Bashaga is likely looking for the support of Tripoli militias. That, either directly or by dividing them through concessions in favour of factions within these alliances, as it could be the case for the SSA.

Although, the SSA is a coalition of forces that answer directly to the Presidential Council, it has become evident that the SSA is not a monolithic entity³ but has a heterogeneous dimension (see **Annex 1**). The Abuzriba's have made huge gains in the GNS, but due to a probable lack of trust within the SSA, the other factions within the agency are not at ease having received little. Consequently, strong fissures and diverging opinions are developing with reference to the GNS and the GNU.

Until now, the militias have been integrated into the institutions by accepting intermediate positions that provide them with essential affiliation and funding. With the appointment of some Ministers, those militias appear to have taken a further step to strengthen their influence. Whether or not these appointments will be accepted it remains to be seen.

Existing tensions within Tripoli will also be exacerbated. As previously mentioned, Nawassi and SDF/DACOT clashed recently in vicinity of the port. The clashes were most likely caused by influence over possible illicit operations at that critical infrastructure. If a close relative of the commander of Nawassi would now obtain a high position in the government, this might stir up previous issues.

It is most likely that the different militias that show their support are mainly acting out of self-interest. All these factions are attempting to maximise and/or consolidate their control of certain parts of the illicit activity (trafficking of fuel, humans smuggling, etc.) or access to high-level government positions.

Fragmentation remains a key characteristic of the current Libyan social landscape, where Zawiyah represents an example of division per se, and in which Mahmoud Bin Rajab is traditionally a counterbalance for the Abu Zriba family's influence (see **Annex 2**).

Similarly, it is very likely that Bashaga and Dbaiba (both from Misratah) are seeking the support of key figures who have not yet shown a clear stance, such as LTG Mohammed Al-Haddad (from Misratah as well) and LTG Usama Al-Juwaili (Zintan), which could swing the situation towards one of them.

In the next days it is likely that main actors will continue consolidating their influence and allegiances. They will also be looking for new possible institutional affiliations and if a critical amount of armed groups feels marginalised, they probably will more easily resort to violence.

The assessment is that the amount of clashes in the Western Region might increase, however the nature of these clashes will most likely not escalate. In fact, real resurgence of violence with dozens of casualties and heavy weaponry which will last for weeks remains less likely, and could be caused whenever large forces would feel fully marginalised or if the external relevant actors would think that the time to further destabilise Libya is ripe.

³ In it, we can consider that Mu'ammar Al-Dawi and his 55th company being from Warshefana, Hassan Abuzriba his militia is from Zawiya, Ghneiwa Abu Slim Central Security Force (Abu Slim, Tripoli), etc.

2 OTHER SECURITY RELATED EVENTS

- a. On 27 February, Stability Support Agency's (SSA) reported the return of 281 illegal immigrants to the Bangladesh Embassy, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

COMMENT: SSA is increasing its performance concerning illegal migration, as reported in previous Weekly Reports. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that SSA controls main refugee camps and likely obtains huge incomes from the illegal activities.

- b. On the same day, the GNU PM attended to a new batch of an Anti-Narcotics and Psychotropic Substances Control Agency graduation Ceremony in Ain Zara.
- c. From 28 February to 2 March, the 39th session of the Council of Arab Interior Ministers took place in Tunisia. One of the main topics was the security situation in Libya. The Libyan delegation included the MOI Office's Director MG Nouredine Abu Garida that expressed how security in Libya should derive from elections.
- d. On 1 March, the General Staff of the Libyan Army reported that the 53rd Infantry Bde deployed from the Eastern Coastal road to the Central Region (allegedly from Misrata to Sirte). Furthermore, unconfirmed sources reported that GNS intends to form a Joint Force to prevent the closure of the road by Misratan actors opposed to the GNS.

COMMENT: This could be the first act under the 5+5 JMC and the GNS. Nevertheless, it could be considered as a unilateral protection measure. It is noteworthy that no single declarations or statements has been expressed by JMC representatives (neither Western nor Eastern).

- e. On the same day, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Libya has confirmed that UN conducted its first humanitarian evacuation flight this year (100 pax). The evacuation flights from Libya to Italy have been suspended for more than two years now.
- f. On 2 March, GNS PM has condemned the Russian intervention in Ukraine and pledged Libyan commitment to supporting and stabilizing energy resources, and security in the Mediterranean.

COMMENT: As GNS PM Bashaga has built his government on a pragmatic approach founded on a tacit understanding with Khalifa Haftar, this might add extra stress on his coalition. The reaction of external actors and how they will steer Khalifa Haftar might be detrimental for Bashaga's coalition. In a worst case scenario this could lead to extra disturbance that could spill over into the oil sector, supporting the common intent of external actors in Libya, against EU interests.

g. Risk of leveraging control of Critical Infrastructures by marginalized groups

- On 27 February, the Senate of the Tuareg Tribes in Libya Spokesperson, reported the closure of the main road leading to El Sharara Oil Field, rallying about the lack of recognition of nationality. It is to notice that Tuareg has supported the GNS.



- On the same day, Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) Commander, Ali Al-Deeb met with tribal delegation from Tazirbu and Kufra aiming to discuss the work of the PFG in the Southeast Libya oil facilities.
- On 28 February, demonstrations were held at Zueitina Oil Port and Tibisti Oil Field, demanding implementation of salary increases.

Furthermore, General Electricity Company of Libya GECOL warned for the decrease of the production capacity in the North Benghazi station. Some protests were also reported in Ras Lanuf.

- On 1 March, the President of the General Syndicate of Oil (Oil Union) met with Oil and Gas Minister to discuss the demands of oil sector workers and informing that the Union plans to begin a strike this month.
- On 3 March, NOC announced the halt of oil exports in its major ports of Ras Lanuf, Brega, Zueitina, Al sidra and Al-Zawiya as well as Mellitah, citing bad weather along the coastline. The oil and Gas Ministry said that the shutdown of oil exports by the NOC has been an unilaterally decision taken by NOC, without coordination with the Ministry, which reiterated that the weather conditions were stable and there were no reports on any unexpected change of weather by the National Center of Meteorology.

COMMENT: It is noteworthy that:

- Closing down critical infrastructures is a continuous threat posed by LNA, but not only, to block the oil production in case of ignoring their political/financial demands. Furthermore, an increase of deployments in order to control Critical infrastructures has been reported (Weekly Report 18-24FEB22).
- The necessity to guarantee energy supply at affordable prices remains a vital interest of the international community/Europe, especially at this time.

CONCLUSIONS

The current situation of two parallel institutions is challenging, provoking the other side and the IC role as well. In fact, it also affects the balance of power within the security domain both internally and at regional/international level. As a result, the relations among the armed groups and militia, supporting either Prime Ministers, are increasingly unstable, especially in the Greater Tripoli Area (GTA), and could be exploited at will. This chaotic political and security backdrop is manifested in the given militia's statements and fluid adjustment of alliances.

As a result, local clashes, especially within the GTA, cannot be utterly ruled out in the short time, although the current GNU would formally expire its term by next June and its interest remains in the blaming of the opposite side for not being able to lead to the election.

Despite the hate speeches, voiced primarily by the Western representatives, a resurgence of large-scale warfare operations involving Eastern- and Western camp side forces, is currently considered unlikely, unless triggered by external international events and/or actors willing to relate the tension and/or their role along the Mediterranean coastline with the Eastern European crisis in UKR. At this moment a large conflict appears not beneficial, neither to the Libyan contenders nor to their foreign backers, and foremost to Europe.

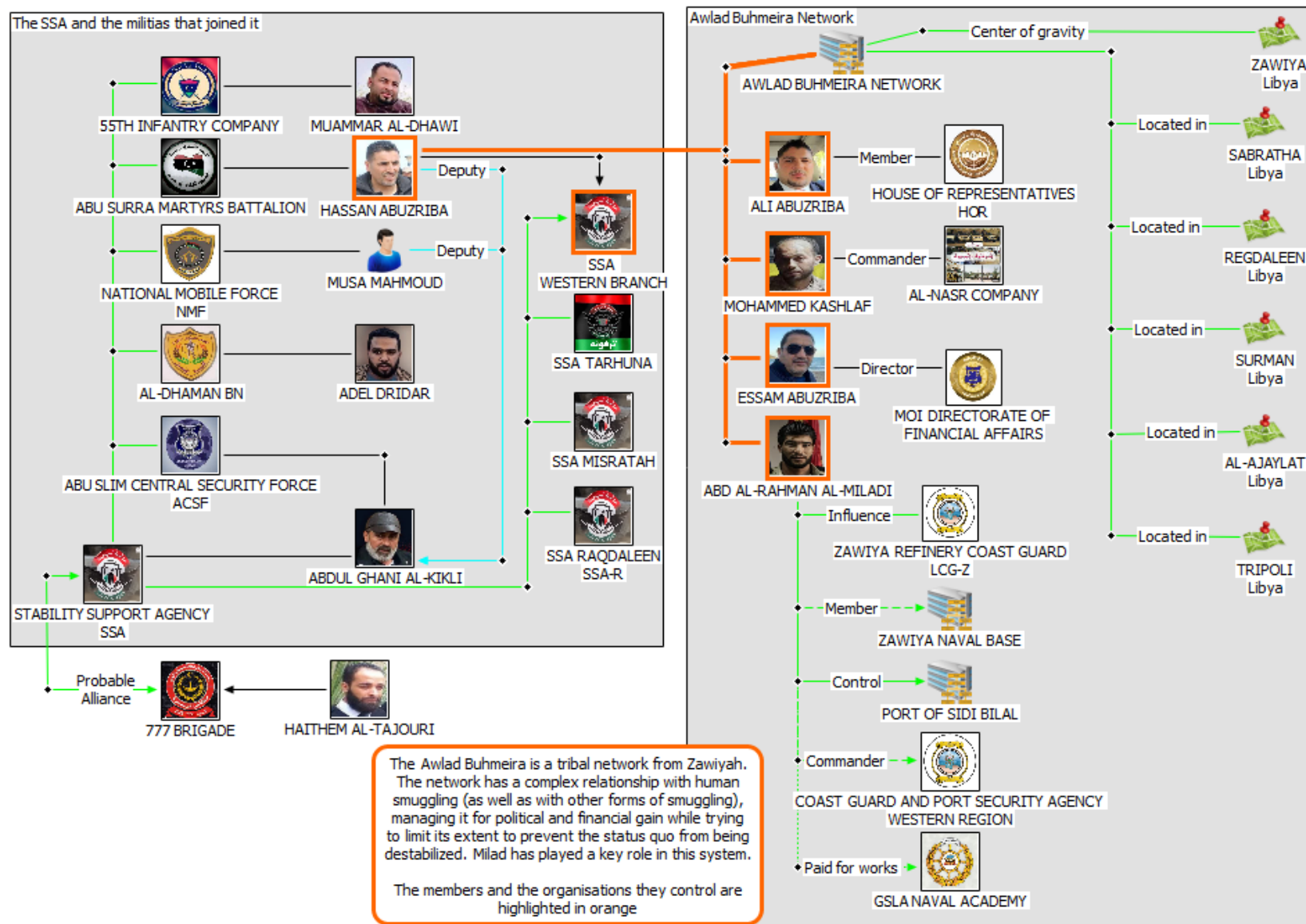
In this respect, the critical infrastructures, especially the oil fields and refineries, represent even more a hot issue. The block of the oil production, either for unrest linked to salary increases or caused by disputable induced claims, is a high risk that should be mitigated and constantly considered into the integrated plan.

From a wider perspective, it is considered positive that politics is still driving the security domain and the possible use of force. The International Community, the UN, and EU chiefly have to retain an active role in preventing any dangerous escalation, regaining the lost initiative in favour of external to the EU regional actors and refine a possible rejuvenated roadmap.

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.

Annex 1: Links between the Awlad Buhmeira network and the SSA



Annex 2: Internal Dynamics in Zawiyah

