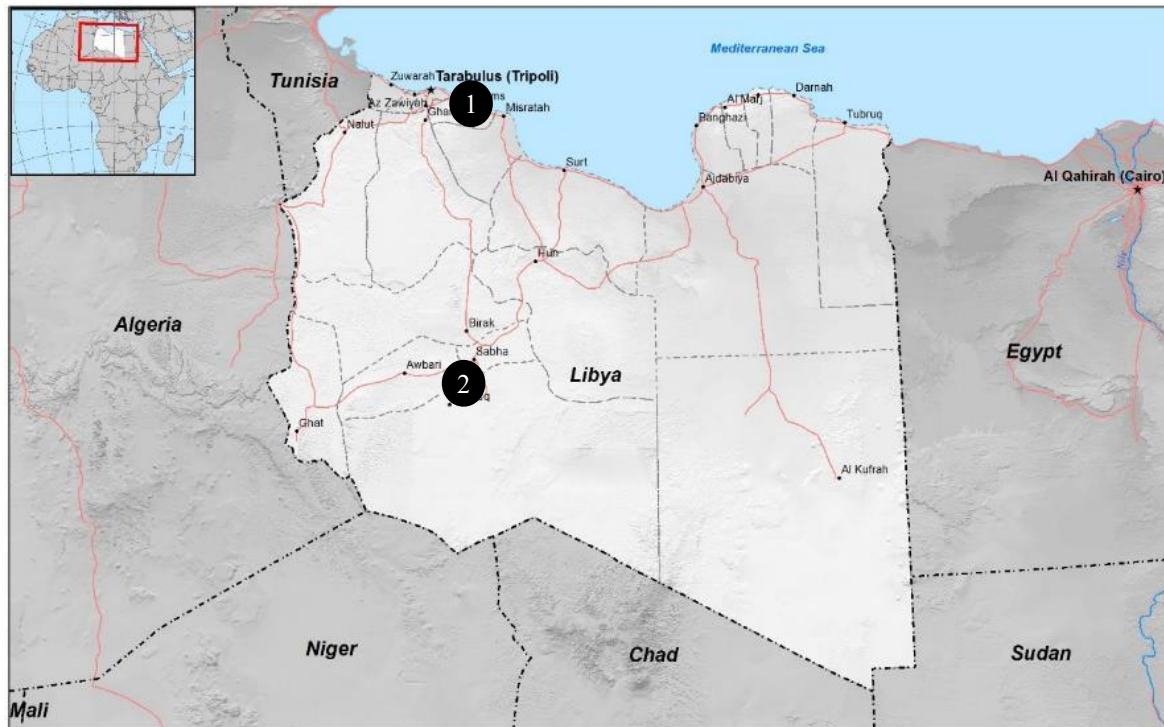


EU LIAISON AND PLANNING CELL LIBYA

Weekly Report 10 – 16 MAR 2022

Authors: LTC DEMANGE, MAJ HUERTA SANTOS, CPT VAN HOECKE

Revised by LTC ASCIONE - LTC VAN DEN HEUVEL



1	10-16 MAR22	Greater Tripoli Area (GTA): Bashagha fails to enter Tripoli
2	10-16 MAR22	Tension increases in the South

SUMMARY

Both the GNU and GNS like to be entitled as the legitimate Government while the International Community, that has not taken a firm position towards one side or the other, has proposed a new internal political process, which contributes to a balanced situation without any escalation. With different events, statements, attempts and denials to enter Tripoli through their military supporting forces, both Fathi Bashagha and Abdul Hamid Dbeibah tried to influence the public opinion and continue with their commitment to govern.

LNA is willing to preserve and increase its contested role and influence in the South by tackling border control, illegal immigration, drug trafficking, smuggling activities and antiterrorist operations, with the aim to consolidate a relevant stronghold and be able to influence revenues.

1 CURRENT SITUATION

1.1 Greater Tripoli Area (GTA): Bashagha fails to enter Tripoli

Government of National Stability (GNS) PM-designate Fathi Bashagha failed to enter the capital on 10 Mar, thus averting an escalation. Pro-GNS convoys peacefully retreated after being denied entry by factions loyal to the Government of National Unity (GNU).

Key security events and statements related to this event are:

- on 09 March, Pro-Bashagha armed convoy arrives in Tajoura from Misrata;
- on 09 March, SSA establish a new CP at entrance of Al-Kabeer St. leading to Zintan-controlled Edraiby;
- on the same day, 444th Bde conduct military drills at Al-Tekbali Camp;
- on 10 March, Pro-GNU forces repel pro-Bashagha convoys from entering Tripoli via the East;
- on 12 March, shortly after he failed to enter the capital, Bashagha headed to Tunis where he met with US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland;
- on 14 March, East-West flights remain suspended;
- on 15 March, Bashagha stated that his government would work from Tripoli even if the current Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah should remain in office. Bashagha confirmed that he wanted to move to Tripoli in the most peaceful way possible, reiterating that his government wouldn't be engaged in any type of violence or conflict. The only reason why he did not enter Tripoli was to avoid any conflict or escalation.

COMMENT

Despite a high potential of risk, this face to face did not lead to any escalation. No shot was fired, with the exception of warning shots as the pro-GNS convoy transited via Msallata in the afternoon. Pro GNS forces manoeuvre aimed at testing the capacity of pro GUN forces to control the main access to the capital.

The initial plan was to enter Tripoli via its Eastern and Southern gates, before heading to Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport. However, units affiliated with the MoD's of 444th Bde refused to grant a safe passage to the convoy, reinforcing Ankara's pro-GNU stance. On the other hand, pro-GNS forces moved from Wershiffanah and Al-Zawiya to join the pro-Bashagha forces from Misrata. In addition, a pro-Bashagha convoy affiliated with the Stabilisation Support Agency (SSA) and Abu Zreiba (Al-Zawiya) was spotted near Bridge 27 moving eastwards.

This main event shows that each camp exercises operational control of their forces on the ground and tasked them not to escalate.

ASSESSMENT

Bashagha remains coherent, stating he wants to enter Tripoli in a peacefully way. Doing this, he gains the confidence of public opinion and the international community with the possibility for mediation. Looking ahead, Bashagha will likely double down on his attempts to enter the capital, even if it is just to gain a limited foothold in an area from where he could operate.

From a security perspective, and even if local skirmishes may occur, it is likely that no escalation will take place in the upcoming days as no one side has interest in that. Militias remain in a waiting position, although some of them seem now internally divided. Allegiances could change in the

upcoming days, pending the result of the negotiation and the capacity of Bashagha to gain a foothold in the capital.

1.2 Tension increases in the South

No major clashes took place, but tensions are not appeased among institutional/tribal and military representatives in the area. The following events have been reported:

- on 10 March, unconfirmed sources claimed the mobilisation of forces linked to Masoud Jedi supported by unidentified Western and Southern units, allegedly to target LNA forces in Sabha;
- on the same day, some Fezzan`s representatives in Sabha issued a statement backing House of Representatives (HoR) and GNS;
- on 10 March, TBZ Bde confirmed the deportation of 407 illegal migrants, in the Border Crossing point with Niger after its operation in Sukrah, North-East Sabha;
- on 11 March, GNU allocated 600M euros to NOC in order construct a new oil refinery and a gas plant at Sharara Oil Field. Nevertheless, on the same day the Tuareg Movement reported the closure of the road leading to Sharara Oil Field, aiming to prevent access for trucks into the area with the exception to the ones carrying foodstuffs;
- on the same day, the 173rd Bn of the LNA, with a large participation of Tuareg in its ranks (led by Col. Ighles Ahmed), reported its adherence to the demands expressed by that tribal movement;
- on 15 March , some clashes were reported in Sabha, allegedly resulting in two TBZ members death.

COMMENT

At this stage, it is worth highlighting the re-appearance of a controversial figure such as Masoud Jiddo. He hails from Awlad Suleiman tribe (predominant set in Sabha area) and frequently lined as shown in his last actions:

- on 19 June 2021, after allegedly defecting from LNA, the PC announced the appointment of Masoud Jiddo as 'Counter-Terrorism and Organized Crime Force' Cdr in the Southern region (Weekly Report 16- 23 Jun 2021);
- on 14 December 2021, PC issued a decree aimed to reshape the 116th Bn into the 116th Bde and promote its commander, Masoud Jiddo, to the rank of Colonel;
- nevertheless, on 16 December 2021, unconfirmed sources reported that, following the mediation between tribal elders and LNA leaders, Masoud Jiddo allegedly handed over vehicles and positions within Sabha to LNA.

As observed during the last months, LNA is increasing its role and influence in the South by endorsing some former MOI activities such as:

- border control: LNA took the control of most of the CPs with Chad and Niger, and closed border crossings with Chad and Sudan (JAN22);
- struggle against illegal immigration: on the border with Niger, as shown with the operations carried out on 15 January where LNA gathered more than 1,000 illegal immigrants at Tamanhint Airbase, and on 31 January as well. After these operations, illegal migrants were sent to the Al-Tom border crossing – Niger for repatriation and allegedly handed over to Niger authorities (Weekly Report 13 – 19 JAN 2022);

- large operations targeting terrorist cell against drug traffic and smuggling activities along the Southern borders (in the area of Zilla and Umm Al Aranib mountains - Weekly Report 04-09 FEB 2022).

ASSESSMENT

It is likely that the recent alleged re-appearance of Masoud Jiddo is supported by the GNU in order to increase tensions in Sabha with the LNA, thanks to his tribal linkages and influences in the area. These tensions could also be used to divert the attention from the quarrelling of the institutions in Tripoli.

It is possible that LNA, whenever its political and financial expectations are not met, could threaten an oil blockade to compensate the lack of funds and force the Libyan Western Institutions to accept its claims. On the other hand, LNA could also leverage on illegal migration to carve out a relevant position aimed at being considered a trustful actor for future negotiations.

2 OTHER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- a. On 09 March, Acting Undersecretary of Libyan Foreign Ministry, Mohamed Issa participated in the work of the 157th regular session of the Council of the Arab League at the level of foreign ministers, held in Cairo. During the meeting, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry represented concern with following up Turkish interference in Arab domestic affairs.
- b. On 09 March, a US Federal Court has agreed to the plaintiffs' request to resume the trial of Khalifa Haftar, which was interrupted due to the elections that were to take place on 24 December last year".
- c. On 10 March the Reserve Division of Misrata's Counter-Terrorism Force (CTF) Cdr, Mukhat Al-Jahawi called on all western region's forces to agree on a common framework and form a Joint Force given the current complex situation.
- d. "On 10 March, HoR Speaker Saleh sent a letter to NOC Chairman Sanalla requesting to freeze transferring oil revenues to the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) and instead deposit the funds into an escrow account at the Libyan Foreign Bank (LFB)".
- e. From 11 to 13 March, PM Abdulhamid Dbeibah allegedly met with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Qatar's Foreign Affair Minister, Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman, in Turkey. Dbeibah arrived at Turkey in order to attend at the Diplomatic Forum along with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Najila Mangoush.

COMMENT: On the sidelines, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Mevlut Cavusoglu stated Turkey's support for the GNU as the legitimate Government of Libya.

- f. "On 12 March, the assistant head of the Russian Wagner group, Maxim Shugaley, expressed support for the steps taken by Bashagha, describing them as drastic measures to protect the country's unity and the interests of its citizens, including the threat of Haftar loyalists to shut down oil exports, considering this step as a reaction to the actions taken by UNSMIL and its envoy Stephanie Williams".
- g. On 12 March, Security Directorate Support Force - Western Region Branch carried out a counter illegal migration operation in "the Western Region" resulting in the arrest of an unspecified number of migrants, some of whom were "ready to migrate by sea". The arrested were transferred to the Security Directorate Support Force - Western Region Branch Headquarters.

- h. On 13 March, IS in Libya pledged allegiance to the Organisation's new leader via Amaq Media, entitled "allegiance of the Soldiers of the Caliphate to the Commander of the Faithful, Abu Al-Hassan Al-Hashemi Al-Qurashi, Zaid al-Iraqi". He was appointed as Daesh's Caliph, succeeding Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi who was announced dead by United States on 03 February.
- i. On 14 March, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that 162 Nigerian migrants returned from Libya to Niger (Tripoli - Lagos). This is the 94th (4th this year) charter since April 2017, when the Joint Initiative for Protection and Reintegration of Migrants, as supported by the European Union, took place.
- j. On 15 March, Ukrainian Defense Ministry's Intelligence Directorate revealed that Russia had been recruiting mercenaries from Libya and Syria to fight with its forces in Ukraine.
- k. On the same day, media reported that Ali Qatrani (GNS) took over the office of the Deputy Prime Minister for the east from Hussein Qatrani (GNU). Unconfirmed sources claimed that it was carried out with the aid of an armed group allegedly linked to LNA.
- l. On 16 March, unconfirmed sources reported an alleged LNA Naval raid (conducted on 1st March) on a commercial vessel off the coast of Derna, coming from Jordan. LNA forces allegedly seized the cargo made of armored vehicles (estimated 100-120). Unconfirmed sources reported that these armored vehicles were allegedly for the Special Deterrence Force (SDF-RADA) and the Stability Support Agency (SSA).
- m. **Bashagha increases his international agenda**
 - On 12 March, GNS designated PM Fathi Bashagha met with US Ambassador Richard Norland in Tunis.
 - On the same day, Fathi Bashagha met with Spanish ambassador to Libya, Javier Garcia-Larrache.
 - On 15 March, Fathi Bashagha met with German Ambassador to Libya, Michael Ohnmacht.
 - On the same day, unconfirmed sources reported that Bashaga arrived to Egypt and allegedly met with US Ambassador and senior Egyptian officials, including Egypt's intelligence chief Abbas Kamel.

COMMENT: Only Russia and Egypt supported in a public statement the GNS. Bashagha is trying to gain more international support by showing his predisposition not to escalate violent events in Tripoli and likely distancing from Russia.

CONCLUSIONS

The GNS tentative movement to enter Tripoli appeared mostly a testing ground between them and the pro Turkish entrenched GNU, willing not to escalate and therefore loosing external and political support to continue the quarrel.

In the meanwhile the UNSG Special Advisor initiative for a joint national effort towards the elections appears to be a longlasting process. This political stalemate might clearly be resolved internally through a roll out of leading mediating activities by the US Ambassador and TUR authorities.

In this fluid unstable situation, even the 5+5 JMC is suffering its assigned role to implement any possible provision of the Ceasefire Agreement, such as the withdrawal of external forces and the

unification of the military establishment, under the monitoring of UN Observers whose presence was never well sustained and received.

The confrontation will then be leveraging on the financial dimension of the crisis, with a view to the spike of oil/gas prices, the security of energy sources and logistics, the increasing cost of the food supply, the management of funds and the promise of subsidies.

Therefore, the leading presence of LNA and proxies in the Central-Southern part of Libya, could be likely subjected to renovating tensions, that will be also impacting the possible contrast to illegal migration.

The resurgence of large-scale warfare operations involving Libyan Eastern and Western forces continues to be considered unlikely, as the ground is overcome by the primary confrontation of the leading external actors in Eastern Europe, pending its evolution and relationships.

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.