



# INSIDE LIBYA

**ANNUAL REVIEW ON LIBYA 2020**

## FOREWORD

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean (PoDiMed) in cooperation with LIBYA DESK™ is pleased to present our Annual Review on Libya for the year 2020. This format looks back at the most important political, economic and social developments that have taken place in Libya over the past 12 months and that have had a decisive impact on the country and wider regional events. The report is based on reliable Libyan sources and provides a summary and contextualisation of developments in the Libyan context.

While the year began with promising successes for facilitating a national dialogue process during the UN-led Berlin Process, it quickly turned to the opposite with an escalation of violence throughout the country. As international involvement in the fighting increased, the situation on the ground only became more complicated to resolve. As hardship worsened for the civilian population and the economic potential of the resource-rich country was undermined, a reconciliation process was urgently needed during the past year that also addresses political grievances. The promising successes in the recent reconciliation talks, which are taking place at the political, economic and security levels, give much hope for the year ahead.

In 2020, we established a new format with the monthly reports, which provide up-to-date and monthly coverage of the most important political, economic and social developments in Libya. In this way, we want to contribute to broadening perspectives and, above all, shed light on the internal Libyan dynamics. Based on existing KAS-PoDiMed formats such as the Libya Brief and the Libya Task Force, we believe it is necessary to underline the importance of continuing and enabling a national dialogue process in the spirit of the UN-led Berlin Process for the coming year. So for Germany, this was a crucial year in which important directions were set thanks to the country's multidimensional diplomatic efforts.

Nevertheless, it is essential to emphasise the need for a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned process in order to move forward and once again become a stable and prosperous country for the citizens in Libya. Therefore, looking at past events, what happened «inside Libya» can enlighten future actions, what can be achieved in 2021.

We hope that this annual review will give our readers a better picture of the dynamics and multiple dimensions of the many challenges, but also opportunities, that Libya will face in the coming year 2021. We will continue to closely follow developments in 2021 and report back to our readers on a monthly basis.

Thomas Volk

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.** In 2020, Libya's conflict intensified and was increasingly internationalised before reaching a stalemate opportune for political talks. In this annual review, we look at how international actors, civil unrest and domestic dynamics shaped these developments.
- 2.** The first half of the year saw a reversal of the military terrain, with Turkish military support securing a successful Government of National Accord (GNA) pushback against the Libyan National Army (LNA).
- 3.** Political developments in 2020 succeeded in bringing warring parties together despite lingering issues. However, the persistence of these issues suggests that political achievements could yet be eclipsed by renewed fighting.
- 4.** Starting the year with slim chances of survival and decreasing international legitimacy, the GNA has managed to maintain itself in place. However, its lack of cohesion remains a large impediment for political stability.
- 5.** Privy of popular sentiment and ruling over a wide array of economic interests, the LNA has developed a solid tribal network and strengthened its security credentials to bolster its resilience on Libya's political scene.
- 6.** Turkey's intervention and the LNA's campaigning on the social front prompted a tribal awakening in Libya, which progressively led tribes to take calculated actions to deal with the country's stalemate and leadership crisis.
- 7.** While the battlefield entered a stalemate, protests occurring in August 2020 were also decisive in pressuring warring sides to lift the oil blockade and resume talks with each other.
- 8.** The peace process' most direct guarantor might be the security track in the Joint Military Commission's (JMC) hands. However, the current tacit agreement to lift the oil blockade in exchange for more transparency in disbursing oil revenues remains the cornerstone of that process.
- 9.** In addition to problematic affiliates of the GNA or LNA, Libya has continued to be on the frontline of transnational crime such as terrorism, smuggling or kidnappings.
- 10.** In 2020, upheavals have made alliances more fluid and opened the way to drastically different scenarios. The most likely is one where known fault lines persist and take the form of a rat race whereby each malleable camp seeks to consolidate its position, with obvious risks of occasional showdowns.

# CONTENTS

<b><u>Foreword</u></b>	<b>02</b>
<b><u>Executive Summary</u></b>	<b>03</b>
<b><u>Contents</u></b>	<b>04</b>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<b>05</b>
<b><u>The failure of the LNA's offensive on Tripoli: from close victory to hasty retreat</u></b>	<b>08</b>
<b><u>Shifting conflict lines: from military offensive to political battlegrounds</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>The politics of the Government of National Accord</u></b>	<b>13</b>
<b><u>The social dynamics of the Libyan National Army</u></b>	<b>16</b>
<b><u>The political empowerment of Libyan tribes</u></b>	<b>18</b>
<b><u>Civil unrest and its impact on Libyan politics</u></b>	<b>20</b>
<b><u>The economy as an essential starting point to a political solution</u></b>	<b>21</b>
<b><u>The ever-widening security risks to Libya and the region</u></b>	<b>24</b>
<b><u>Conclusion &amp; Recommendations</u></b>	<b>26</b>
<b><u>Policy recommendations</u></b>	<b>27</b>
<b><u>What to watch for in 2021</u></b>	<b>28</b>

## INTRODUCTION

By late 2019, the Libyan National Army's (LNA) Tripoli offensive had transformed into a bloody war of attrition that saw both sides of the conflict engage in atrocities and an increasingly alarming level of international involvement. It is telling that 2019 ended with reports emerging of Russian private military contractors (PMCs) fighting alongside the LNA and of Turkish-backed Syrian fighters being prepared for deployment in Libya to fight alongside the Government of National Accord (GNA).

Nevertheless, if 2019 was the year in which militaristic ambitions catapulted Libya into a destructive conflict, 2020 was the year in which even the most cynical domestic and international actors realised that there was indeed no possible military solution to the conflict. This is perhaps best exemplified by the fact that the year opened with a high-level international summit – the Berlin International Conference on Libya that was held in January 2020 – that saw the Governments of Algeria, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, the Republic of the Congo, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as High Representatives of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the League of Arab States commit to a 55-point communiqué that continues to inform Libya's peace process to this day.

Even still, the past year was an overwhelmingly difficult one for Libya. In January, despite commitments made at the Berlin Conference, Turkey commenced an unrelenting deployment of military assets to western Libya that would ultimately succeed in repelling the LNA's Tripoli offensive and force Khalifa Haftar's troops to retreat to the city of Sirte, in central Libya, where the frontlines were redrawn. Turkey's forceful intervention in Libya had two major consequences on the Libyan conflict. As this paper examines, from a domestic perspective it triggered a wave of nationalism that was easily co-opted by the LNA not only to strengthen its social legitimacy amongst existing constituents but also to extend its support base to previously sidelined moderate power brokers in Libya who, if not fully supportive of Khalifa Haftar, were fully opposed to a former coloniser openly intervening in domestic affairs. Likewise, from an international standpoint, Turkey's intervention rewrote the rules of a game that up until then had seen a plethora of foreign actors support one side or the other via covert military operations or silent acquiescence.

In turn, these two developments had a transformative effect on the Libyan conflict in 2020: on the one hand, in January 2020, the LNA was able to enforce a nine-month blockade on Libyan oil assets by leveraging the na-

tionalist sentiment of Libyan tribes; on the other hand, following the LNA's defeat in western Libya in June 2020 and fearing a permanent Turkish military presence in the region, Egypt and Russia respectively threatened overt military intervention and deployed fighter jets in order to stop the GNA's and Turkey's counteroffensive on Sirte and the Oil Crescent. This last development effectively drew a "red line" in the sand dividing western Libya from eastern Libya at the city of Sirte and ushered the conflict into a prolonged stalemate that eventually culminated in the signing of a formal ceasefire agreement brokered by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in October 2020.

In the backdrop, a deteriorating economic crisis and a latent liquidity crisis — amplified by the oil blockade, its negative externalities on adjacent sectors such as the electricity file, and by anxiety linked to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has made over 1,300 victims in Libya this year — resulted in a summer of civil unrest that peaked in August 2020, when demonstrators across the country took to the streets to protest a lack of basic services and systemic corruption in state institutions. As this paper argues, in the eyes of Libya's political actors, the social movements that erupted in August 2020 were a stark reminder of the power of the people they were supposed to represent and had a stabilising effect on the country's political class, which suddenly recognised it had to appease large segments of society in order to ensure its continued relevance.

The combination of these developments led to the culmination of a process that was kicked off by the Berlin Conference in January 2020 and came to fruition in November 2020 as the UN convened the first round of the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF). Although many Libyans criticised the UN for not being more transparent with regards to the processes by which LPDF participants were selected, the forum succeeded in convening 75 Libyan representatives, including women and youth, to produce a roadmap toward Presidential and Parliamentary elections to be held on 24 December 2021. The latter will be preceded by a yearlong transitional phase led by a National Unity Government and a tripartite Presidential Council representing Libya's three regions (Tripolitania, Barqa and Fezzan).

Overall, in 2020, Libya went from the heights of armed conflict to now being on the cusp of political realisation — albeit not without continued foreign meddling and domestic instability. The silencing of guns in itself should be recognised as a monumental achievement; much credit is due to the unwavering efforts of the UN, including by former SRSG Ghassan Salamé and Acting SRSG Stephanie Williams. Nevertheless, the road to elections

remains long and fraught with challenges that could still plunge the country back into conflict given the fragile realities on the ground. The following pages examine some of the biggest developments that happened in Libya in 2020 so as to inform readers on where the country is today, how it got there, and what to expect as it transitions into 2021.

## THE FAILURE OF THE LNA'S OFFENSIVE ON TRIPOLI: FROM CLOSE VICTORY TO HASTY RETREAT

*The first half of the year saw a reversal of the military terrain, with Turkish UAVs securing a successful Government of National Accord (GNA) pushback against the Libyan National Army (LNA).*

In early January 2020, the LNA had taken control of Sirte with support from local groups and had furthered its air superiority by occupying the al-Gardabiya airbase about 15km south of the city. In doing so, Khalifa Haftar had achieved a key objective and sought to capture towns within reach so as to surround Tripoli and more specifically Misrata, whose capture the LNA had bet on to destabilise the GNA coalition. Up until April 2020, the LNA maintained the upper hand on the battlefield, carrying successful counter-offensives against a resurgent GNA and seizing additional towns in western Libya to further flank Tripoli from the west in addition to its positions south and east of the capital city. The LNA thought itself to be close to victory. Turkey's decision in late 2019 to intervene militarily in Libya had ushered in a wave of nationalistic support for the LNA while the state of the GNA's coalition heralded a likely implosion. Tripoli's political leadership had not managed to create a military hierarchy or discipline its military coalition and suffered from intra-coalition competition along the lines of militia, town and political party. Additionally, the GNA was racked by severe intelligence deficiencies that directly impacted its battlefield performance and notably had several pro-LNA informants, sleeper cells and defectors that strained internal cohesion.

However, the ever-growing threat of an LNA victory prompted Turkey to act on its promise to escalate its intervention and repel Khalifa Haftar's advance. Even if Ankara had already signed two memoranda of understanding (MoU) with Tripoli on maritime demarcation and military cooperation in November 2019, and the Turkish parliament had approved a bill to deploy troops to Libya on 2 January 2020, Turkey's military advisors had mainly focused on withstanding LNA pressure instead of carrying their pushback plans. This approach fundamentally changed in April 2020 when the GNA, supported by Turkish-backed Syrian mercenaries, launched a multi-fronted military operation to overwhelm the LNA and deprive it from quick reinforcements and cut off its supply lines. To do so, the GNA substantially improved its air campaign with the help of Turkish Bayraktar TB-2 drones and followed the LNA-backed oil blockade's precedent by cutting off the delivery of key commodities to western Libyan towns that were not under its control, which resulted in several trucks carrying foodstuffs, fuel, and other necessities to be bombed for not following this coercive measure.



After several tries, the GNA finally captured the strategic airbase of al-Watiya on 18 May 2020, which prompted more territorial gains in the Western Mountains and the eventual withdrawal of LNA forces from Tarhuna in June 2020. By then, the focal point of the conflict had shifted to the central region and Turkey, now the primary partner of western Libya, had started to share GNA hardliners' view that Sirte, the Oil Crescent and eventually the whole of Libya could fall under their control. This threat prompted a last mobilisation from the LNA, with several influential Dignity Operation officers like Special Forces Commander Wanis Bukhamada joining Haftar's rank in a battle that, in their view, had shifted from an internecine conflict to a defensive war. Both Russia and Egypt made it clear that the Sirte-Jufra front was their so-called "red line", not to be crossed for fear of triggering a full-blown international military escalation that would have catapulted Ankara in a direct confrontation with Cairo and Moscow. This stalemate froze the conflict and encouraged attempts to find a political solution, with the UN successfully managing to mediate between top military brass of the GNA and LNA, who in turn were able to coalesce into the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC). The latter has sought to de-escalate tensions by planning to remove mercenaries from the battlefield, exchanging prisoners and eventually unifying forces.

Practically running from April 2019 to June 2020, Haftar's assault on Tripoli led to many crimes, committed on both sides, which have solidified grievances. For instance, the LNA arbitrarily shelled Tripoli and allegedly allowed its foreign backers, nominally the United Arab Emirates (UAE), to strike targets such as Tripoli's military cadet academy – leaving 26 dead in January 2020. Despite relative internal cohesion, al-Rajma<sup>1</sup> also depended on unrestrained militias such as the Kaniyat, which were responsible for mass executions that are still being excavated in Tarhuna to this day. In turn, the GNA also carried out revenge attacks on the populations and public property of LNA strongholds in western Libya – such as Sorman, Sabratha and Tarhuna – after seizing them. In fact, none of the parties to the conflict represent conventional armies. On top of relying on powerful armed groups from Tripoli, Misrata, Zawiya or Zintan, the GNA has heavily relied on Syrian mercenaries in its war against the LNA. Likewise, the latter drafted Sudanese, Chadian, Russian and even pro-Assad Syrian mercenaries in its battles. The result, according to Acting SRSG Stephanie Williams, is the presence of some 20,000 foreign mercenaries in Libya that, if not demobilised, could further entrench transnational terrorism, organised crime and violence in the North African country.

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1. Al-Rajma is a city located in eastern Libya, approximately 27km east of Benghazi, that currently houses the headquarters of the Libyan National Army (LNA).

Noteworthy, the conflict has been characterised by 21st century warfare, with the use of drones, private military contractors (PMCs) and a brazen use of misinformation and hate speech on media platforms. Foreign actors, their interests, and their interactions behind closed doors have also become the conflict's main drivers. In fact, Russia and Turkey exerted considerable influence over the Libyan file in early 2020 and managed to cease battles as soon as they reached tacit agreements between each other. On the ground, the current situation is one of mistrust and careful manoeuvring. Despite the signing of a permanent ceasefire on 23 October 2020, both sides continue receiving military equipment and mercenaries through aerial and maritime means despite an arms embargo ratified by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and enforced by the European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation IRINI. Both sides continue to be on maximum alert and observers are starting to realise that the UN-backed peace process could quickly unravel.

## **SHIFTING CONFLICT LINES: FROM MILITARY OFFENSIVE TO POLITICAL BATTLEGROUND**

*Political developments in 2020 have achieved the exploit of bringing parties to the conflict together despite lingering issues. However, these issues hint at the fact that talking has taken the place of fighting and that the reverse could happen again.*

In 2020, political developments have reflected realities from the battleground and evolved depending on who had the upper hand as well as which of the two, between Russia and Turkey, held the levers. Nonetheless, over time, the UN-backed peace process managed to put those two powers on the backseat and allow Libyan actors to cut a deal that was made necessary by the battlefield's stalemate, international mediation and domestic popular pressure. With the UN-mediated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF), the country's political field further atomised as main actors stepped away from their traditional affiliations to work toward securing their personal interests with new allies on the political front.

In January 2020, eastern authorities were effectively readying themselves to win the war and present a new government of their own will. Surprisingly, Haftar accepted a Russian ceasefire initiative that month, which the GNA also responded favourably to. Albeit fruitless, the Moscow peace talks highlighted three recurrent points from the LNA in negotiations: first, the LNA accepts to talk despite its deep mistrust toward the GNA because its

primary goal is to discredit the Tripoli administration by showing the world that it is too fragmented to abide by commitments made at the negotiating table; second, the LNA generally sees itself as the sole worthy military apparatus in Libya to implement Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR); and third, Haftar does not have much trust in Libya's political field and backtracked from the Moscow talks for fear of legitimising the Tripoli-based House of Representatives' (HOR) MPs who were also convened. This group, along other political Islam-aligned GNA factions, is highly mistrusted by the LNA and perceived as overly supportive of Turkey.

After the 13 January's Moscow talks, Libyan parties found themselves in Berlin on 19 January for the UN-backed Berlin International Conference on Libya, which ended in a 55 points-communiqué that was signed by the Governments of Algeria, China, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, the Republic of the Congo, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as High Representatives of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the League of Arab States. In February 2020, following the outcomes of the Berlin Conference, Geneva became the host to the first and second meetings of the JMC, bringing together 5 top military officers from each camp. Continuous fighting throughout the month, however, prompted the end of the Geneva talks with a blueprint on renewed governmental institutions, as well as a preliminary structure for UNSMIL's political process. This structure, which gave 13 seats each to the High State Council (HCS) and HOR to participate in a deliberative process that would select a new executive, was criticised by eastern Libyan factions for being skewed in favour of the Muslim Brotherhood-led HCS, which has 145 seats in total, whilst giving the same number of seats to the HOR, which has 200 seats in total and represents wider constituencies. On 16 February, the International Follow-up Committee on Libya (IFCL), which set up working groups to monitor progress on the Berlin Conference's military, political and economic tracks, was set in motion and continues to coordinate crucial efforts on these three topics. In March 2020, the European Union unveiled its IRINI mission tasked with implementing the Libyan arms embargo. Meanwhile, SRSG Ghassan Salamé resigned due to health concerns and was replaced by his deputy, Stephanie Williams.

By late May 2020, the state of the battlefield had completely changed. Russia had temporarily stopped its air support to the LNA and was seeking to reach an understanding with Ankara. However, Egypt flexed its diplomatic muscle, invited HOR Speaker Agila Saleh and Khalifa Haftar to Cairo and subsequently announced the so-called "Cairo Declaration" on 6 June. This development revived the Berlin Conference's outcomes, including the idea

of the Presidential Council's positions being divided between Libya's three regions. Around the same time, Turkey and the GNA launched an offensive to take Sirte and secure control over oil facilities. Russian airstrikes and the threat of Egyptian mobilisation led to the freezing of the conflict following this offensive, with few skirmishes happening in spite of the 8 June truce called for by Cairo. On 10 June, the JMC's third round took place virtually. The next diplomatic steps came from North African countries, with Algeria calling for a realistic approach through which influential Libyans would be consulted instead of sticking to the increasingly powerless officials that took office following the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). On 21 August, HOR Speaker Agila Saleh and Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj instated a new ceasefire and brought new life to political discussions. Morocco sponsored the Bouznika talks, which created a rapprochement between the HCS and HOR from September onwards, and later enabled the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum hosted by Tunisia. Egypt also extended a hand to the GNA and hosted the Hurchada talks, which were central in reviving the JMC.

On 23 October, the JMC held its fourth round of talks in Geneva and signed a permanent ceasefire, thus making an important step toward creating an independent foundation for DDR and Security Sector Reform (SSR). Subsequently, the JMC met twice in Libya and sought to develop their cooperation in key areas like DDR and setting sub-committees to address key security issues, which up until now have solely succeeded in initiating prisoner exchange. Between 9-15 November, the LPDF ran its course in Tunis and produced a roadmap toward Presidential and Parliamentary elections on 24 December 2021 that would be preceded by a transitional phase led by a National Unity Government and tripartite Presidential Council, as well as clear mechanisms and deadlines to ensure the running of processes like constitutional arrangements. To this day, the LPDF continues to convene virtually in an attempt to put the roadmap into effect and elect a ticket of people who would lead the country through 2021.

There, however, personal ambitions and behind-the-scenes manoeuvring have dented hopes that Libya could eventually find a comprehensive political system where individual interests and political affiliations would be accommodated but not rewarded by incentive structures. In spite of the LPDF participants' 60% vote in favour of banning those holding office since 2014 from running the show in 2021, the dialogue has allowed the very same "political dinosaurs" to top the charts. Out of three proposals, one of the currently leading tickets couples Agila Saleh and Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha as President and Prime Minister respectively, while another is the business-led ticket of Abdulhamid Dbaiba and Abdul Jawad al-Abidi, which

has received the highest number of votes with 39 ‘yeas’. Despite important efforts by UNSMIL to improve representation and give a platform to women and youth groups, there are strong indications that 2021 will be characterised by the same fault lines as 2020. Indeed, none of Libya’s political elite would have entered talks without first securing their chances of winning. For many, the LPDF simply represents the shifting of conflict lines from open warfare to a political battleground that is not necessarily defined by the GNA-LNA duality. What is still absent is a common and genuine approach to finding solutions.

## **THE POLITICS OF THE GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL ACCORD**

*Starting the year with slim chances of survival and decreasing international legitimacy, the GNA has managed to maintain itself in place. However, its lack of cohesion remains a large impediment for Libya’s political stability.*

In The GNA’s internal dynamics are often complex and hard to decipher. The coalition of forces tying western Libya together could be likened to other national governments as it contains various political affiliations, including opposing ones, which compete against each other for positions. The only difference is that this coalition missed the opportunity to strike a “sacred union” when faced with the LNA’s threat and is characterised by Libya’s idiosyncrasies, prime of which are the unique political influence of armed groups, towns and tribes. This multifaceted composition has meant that the GNA has been rocked by many divisions that have hurt its internal cohesion. Even if eastern Libya contains its own pluralistic dynamics and has experienced similar internal power struggles, the fact remains that the GNA’s fragmentation has been much more visible. Above all, this has impacted the coalition’s military operations and led to contradictory statements regarding detente with the LNA. Often, opportunities for de-escalation and dialogue accepted by moderates like Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj have been rebuked by more hardline figures like Presidential Council member Mohamed Ammari and High State Council Chairman Khalid al-Mishri.

Amongst its forces, a lack of hierarchical structures and discipline has led to many instances of intra-GNA armed clashes this year, even at the height of the LNA’s assault on Tripoli. These clashes have been between brigades from different towns and factions contesting each other’s credentials or simply fighting turf wars. Foreign mercenaries have also clashed with mainly Tripoli-based militias, who have become increasingly fearful of losing

power. Other times, self-interested politicians have allied themselves with one specific armed group to fight back against others; for instance, Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha has sealed an alliance with the Madkhali-Salafist Special Deterrence Force (SDF) against the umbrella organisation called Tripoli Protection Force (TFP) that includes the Abu Salim Brigade, the Al Nuwasi Brigade and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB). Divisions have also endured between cities like Tripoli and Misrata, and even prompted the TFP to refuse joining several anti-LNA offensives for fear of seeing Misrata's brigades regain their presence in the capital. Competition has also happened on political lines, with non-Islamists being generally more moderate toward the idea of a ceasefire and Islamists being generally more hardline, placing their bets on Turkey as Libya's key ally to victory. Even within "political camps" personal ambitions and disagreements have ensued. While non-Islamists like Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj and Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeq have seen each other as contestants for power, Islamists have been divided between the more progressive Muslim Brotherhood (MB) branch desiring to follow a national programme similar to Tunisia, and the more hardline branch following the firebrand Istanbul-based Mufti al-Gharyani.

This fragmentation within the GNA coalition has meant that the LNA was generally a few steps ahead in terms of domestic outreach. Aware of the negative impact of Turkish intervention on public opinion and concerned with the rise of tribal support for the LNA, the GNA sought to amass tribal support in a conference in Zawiyah but only could gather townspeople from its own deeply-entrenched territory. Seemingly, the GNA has also sought to court former regime supporters — so-called "Greens" — by starting negotiations with Saif al-Islam and issuing congratulatory statements when his family's UN travel ban was lifted in December 2020. However, the Greens remain divided between those still fiercely loyal to the previous regime and wanting to see the return of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi to power, and those who see the LNA as the closest entity to a "Libyan army" and have therefore supported it despite latent issues with Haftar. The GNA nonetheless has managed to maintain relative stability despite recurrent episodes of internal tensions. This is mainly due to al-Sarraj recognising the crucial role played by Misrata and Zawiyah in the war effort, and appointing key figures from the two towns as Minister of Defence as well as Chief and Deputy Chief of Staff.

Undoubtedly, one of the key figures embodying the GNA's volatile setting has been Fathi Bashagha. He started the year cultivating ties with Ankara and circulating Turkish talking points on the proximity between the two people. Whilst keeping a hardline stance on the need to fight the LNA, he

also initiated a PR campaign targeting Western capitals whereby he would portray himself as an ambitious and critical powerbroker able to carry out Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR). Originally from Misrata, he gradually lost the support of his hometown's non-Islamist factions after he was perceived to pursue his own agenda and endangered the state of the coalition through his comments against the TPF. As the GNA's survival became more likely by March 2020, he hinted that using Turkish support to bring Haftar to the negotiating table was the best option, a stance opposed to that of hardliners. Slowly, as the LPDF surfaced, Bashagha reaped the benefits of his Western PR campaign and travelled in November 2020 to both France and Egypt, which not only support the LNA in Libya but are also Turkey's primary challengers in the eastern Mediterranean. Bashagha is vying for the position of Prime Minister in the National Unity government, with the support of progressive Muslim Brotherhood members from the HCS. He has launched an alliance of convenience with Agila Saleh and reached out to al-Rajma, in vain, as Haftar would prefer to deal with current GNA Deputy PM Ahmed Maiteeq as PM.

In the view of the many divisions within the GNA and imperatives to tie DDR to the current security track, it is noteworthy that GNA figures have presented their own initiatives, albeit with little progress. In this case, the most important development has been the revival of the idea of a National Guard. This idea has mainly been suggested by figures from the GNA's hardliners, dubbing themselves "Volcano of Rage", and including figures like Western Operations Commander Osama al-Juwaili from Zintan as well as brigades from Misrata and Zawiya. The idea behind such a body resembles that of a "Revolutionary Guard", mandating itself with tasks such as anti-corruption, DDR in western Libya and more importantly the fight against any figure deemed to be "anti-revolutionary". However, here again, the suggestion is highly divisive as aforementioned groups have sidetracked militias from Tripoli and there are clear indications that growing calls for the formation of a National Guard will resemble the former attempts of 2012 and 2017, when militias used this new body to relabel themselves and assume a new identity to receive government recognition and funds. The return of Zawiya's Haitham al-Tajouri to the GNA fold, after being perceived as a traitor for his close links to the UAE, also heralds continuing tensions between militias from Tripoli and other cities, in addition to reflecting the plasticity of alliances within the GNA.

## THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY

*Privy of popular sentiment and ruling over a wide array of interests, the LNA has developed a solid tribal network and strengthened its security credentials to bolster its resilience on Libya's political scene.*

A recurrent misunderstanding regarding the LNA is that it represents a unique entity and effortlessly enjoys internal cohesion and discipline through authoritarian militarism. Rather, the LNA is a coalition of various interests that maintains a hierarchical structure revolving around Khalifa Haftar thanks to a careful and ever-evolving domestic outreach strategy. Indeed, for the major part of the year, the LNA has effectively controlled two thirds of the country, meaning that it had to carefully navigate a plethora of competing agendas and to back its claims to legitimacy by spending much effort to secure recent conflict-ridden zones that are still prone to tribal, criminal or terror threats. For instance, the LNA has had to share power with the legislative and executive authorities of eastern Libya, namely the House of Representatives (HOR) and Interim Government. Stemming from the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) of 2015, the HOR and Interim Government have been handled by the LNA as a political smokescreen. Case in point are the widespread protests against deteriorating livelihoods that struck eastern Libya this summer. Then, Haftar found himself lucky not to have proceeded to his October 2019 plans to take control of state assets from eastern-based Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thani. As a result, and in spite of his key role in the oil blockade, Haftar was largely exonerated by the population from any responsibility in eastern Libya's difficult economic situation. This even allowed him to back protesters' claims and theatrically urge eastern authorities not to crackdown on peaceful demonstrations.

Personal ambitions have also agitated the eastern bloc, albeit not to the extent experienced by the GNA. HOR Speaker Agila Saleh has been a key contender for power in Libya, which has frequently put him at odds with Khalifa Haftar. In the eyes of the international community, above all Russia and the United States, Saleh has represented a legitimate and more docile interlocutor for the whole of eastern Libya, compared to Haftar's stubborn positions. Against that internal threat, Haftar resorted to invoking popular support in some speeches by tying Saleh to the outdated and much-disliked LPA. He has also strongly opposed Saleh's proposition of temporarily moving Libya's capital to Sirte as this would have resulted in an LNA withdrawal from central Libya and the Oil Crescent. This proposition, clearly perceived as an attempt by Saleh to bypass the LNA and elevate himself to Libya's



next political round, resulted in a loss of popularity for the HOR Speaker. Subsequently, both Cairo and Abu Dhabi facilitated reconciliation initiatives between the two figures, which has currently allowed Saleh to re-enter the fold as an acceptable candidate to become Libya's next Presidential Council President. In return, Saleh has put an effective stop to self-interested manoeuvres that are outside of what is permitted by the LNA to achieve his personal ambitions.

To deal with its many groups, the LNA has to structure itself socially through a system that is heavily based on tribal associations. Of course, eastern Libya is also prone to the presence of Islamists or tribal tensions, as shown by the late August protests that happened in Sirte. Then, the pro-Gaddafi supporters were repressed by members of the Furjan tribe – which also happens to be Khalifa Haftar's tribe – as well as the Awlad Suleiman tribe. Nonetheless, the LNA has shrewdly navigated Libya's social tissue and pulled nationalist strings to not only pacify its territories but also expand them. In a way, Turkey's intervention has been a boon to the LNA. The presence of what was dubbed as "Ottoman colonisers" not only solidified cross-cutting support for the LNA's nationalist project but also mobilised such support through the "Anger of the People" movement, thus allowing the LNA to blockade Libya's crucial oil sector to hurt the GNA, with minimal repercussion to its standing. By contrast to the GNA, Al-Rajma focused on a domestic audience and managed to deflect much popular criticism on political and institutional leaders in Tripoli. Key figures such as the LNA's Southern Region Commander Bilgasim al-Abaj were important in securing the support of the majority of Libya's south for the LNA thanks to his tribal affiliations and negotiation skills. His task to pacify the whole south also demonstrates the LNA's approach to picking effective superintendents regardless of their political preferences - al-Abaj being a former Gaddafi-era General who still speaks fondly of the late Libyan leader.

Inside eastern Libya, the LNA is seen as an institution dubbed the "people's army", which is why a large number of tribes would like it to be the sole implementer of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) throughout the country. However, in times when defence against Turkey is not an imperative, the LNA is also perceived as Haftar's personal fiefdom, where nepotism and patrimonialism abound. Several civil society activists have laid out a critique of such traits, some paying the price of their life for it. Most recently, in November 2020, lawyer and activist Hanan al-Barasi was murdered in broad daylight in one of the busiest streets of Benghazi after she had spoken out against corruption in the LNA and directly criticised Khalifa Haftar's sons. In turn, Haftar has taken on himself to surmount the

challenge by preparing since July 2020 a law-enforcement campaign against organised crime and extremist activity as well as an internal Security Sector Reform (SSR) campaign. The latter, which has only been in full swing since November, aims to reorganise its command structure, maximise the ratio of professionally trained brigades and most importantly chase cases of power abuse within the LNA's own ranks, such as unlawful property expropriations. Notwithstanding, this campaign to improve the LNA's image places Haftar in a dilemma: uprooting some of his own allies involved in corruption and crime, or being accused of creating a smokescreen to evade criticism and personally benefit from his position.

## THE POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF LIBYAN TRIBES

*Turkey's intervention and the LNA's domestic relations campaign prompted a tribal awakening in Libya, which resulted in tribes being increasingly involved in the country's stalemate and leadership crisis.*

Following the Turkish parliamentary bill allowing troops to be sent to Libya, a wide array of tribes and political factions declared resistance against Turkey and held protests in LNA-controlled cities from Sorman in western Libya all the way to Tobruk in eastern Libya. In fact, people advising Haftar on the social front were quick to co-opt tribal anger toward the GNA's overtures to Turkey and advised him to not only allow for more direct lines of communications between tribes and the LNA but also push the HOR and the Interim Government to mirror the LNA's outreach strategy. Subsequently, Tarhuna's tribal leader Salah al-Fandi invited 3000 tribal representatives to attend a conference in the town on 19 February, which resulted in the formation of the Supreme Tribal Council (STC) – a non-governmental entity that would act as the sole representative of Libyan tribes. The STC would go on to cement a political platform based on support to the LNA as the sole military apparatus responsible for securing the country's territory and on a rejection of key institutional figures heading, for instance, the National Oil Corporation (NOC) or Central Bank of Libya (CBL). In addition to clearly pro-LNA tribes like the Furjan, the conference was also attended by neutral tribes like the Tebu, Tuareg, Wlad Sagir or Warshena, Awagir or Mgherba, thus reflecting a singular social movement dwarfing any of the LPA's institutions.

Flanked by Sheikh Al Senussi Al Heliq al Zawi from the Zwaya tribe, al-Fandi travelled the whole of Libya to formalise the STC and gradually took on a more assertive tone, pledging tribes to take matters into their own hands to ensure the interests and protection of sidelined actors and regions like Libya's long-forgotten south. When the war froze into a stalemate over the

summer, such tribes became vocal about initiating intra-Libyan talks and pushing for a Pan-Libyan movement that could do away with the stalemate and deteriorating leadership crises in both Tripoli and Benghazi. In this context, weaponizing basic services became the tribes' primary leverage over domestic and international actors. Albeit orchestrated by the LNA, the oil blockade mainly stemmed from long-lasting grievances among tribes which have been frustrated with Tripoli's monopoly over state funds and were therefore distraught that Libyan funds would go to pay foreign soldiers. Of course, such means of leverage were also abused by actors seeking personal objectives but cloaking their actions in terms of acting in the public good. For instance, in April 2020, the mayor of Shwerif cut off water supplies from the Great Man-Made River to over 2 million inhabitants in Tripoli in order to apply pressure on his brother's kidnappers in western Libya. Gas lines and electric transmission lines were also not spared by either localised tensions or national appeals.

Overall, the political empowerment and institutionalisation of tribes in 2020 have not only shown us how durable Libya's tribal links are but also demonstrated an evolution in their approach to national politics, with a clear desire to act in defence of national sovereignty. Of course, tribal settings remain highly granular and hard to coalesce into a sustainable and cross-cutting national movement. Yet, we have seen steps towards more inter-tribal cooperation and international recognition, with Egypt being one of the first countries to officially invite tribal representatives in June. The Second Sirte Conference organised on 10 October, in remembrance to the 21 January 1922 conference that linked Tripolitania and Cyrenaica together, has been yet another reminder that at times of crisis, tribes and civil society can collaborate to promote political agreements. Tribes have also been important in terms of intermediation between the GNA and LNA. Although bold attempts to reach cross-cutting deals have not borne fruit, more localised and damage control actions have been highly effective. For instance, in early December 2020, an LNA affiliated officer endangered the frail ceasefire by attempting to capture a military camp near Ubari not too far from El-Sharara. Ubari's Social and Tribal Council swiftly interjected to ensure that this action would not escalate into conflict.

## CIVIL UNREST AND ITS IMPACT ON LIBYAN POLITICS

*As the battlefield entered a stalemate, international pressure and tribal intermediation allowed the resumption of the peace process. However, protests occurring in August 2020 were decisive in pressuring warring sides to lift the oil blockade and resume dialogue with each other.*

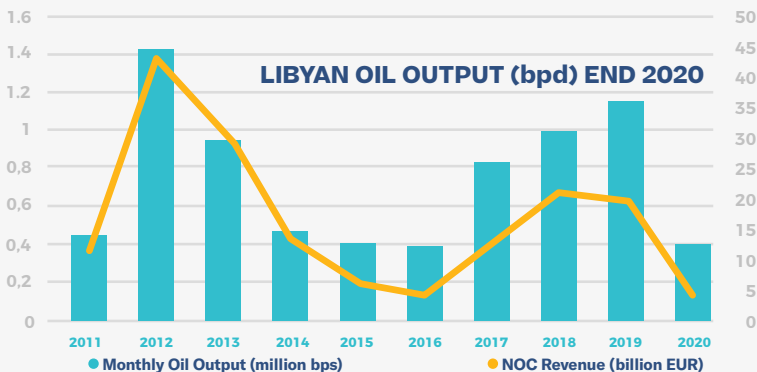
The many failures of the so-called Arab Spring have led many observers to think that authorities like the GNA or LNA are immune to popular pressure. Past episodes of brutal repression and the absorbing realities of daily life have certainly kept many Libyans away from the streets. However, the year 2020 was accompanied by a sizable deterioration of the standard of living. In addition to the brutalities of war, Libyans were hit by the amplifying economic consequences of the various basic services' blockades: electricity, fuel and water were difficult to access, even in the most-developed parts of the country like Tripoli. Increased demand over the summer exacerbated the crisis and led to widespread protests in both western and eastern Libya. Low supply meant that prices for gasoline, cooking fuel or foreign currency on the black market rose heavily. The low availability of cash and the difficulty for importers to access letters of credit to maintain business also impacted daily life in a way that was too noticeable, not to mention anxiety linked to the Covid-19 pandemic.

From June 2020 to September 2020, protests were held under banners such as Sebha's "Poor People's Revolution" or Tripoli's "23 August Movement". Cities like Zawiya, Sirte, Al Bayda, and Benghazi were also rocked by protests as Libyans from each side of the country protested the mismanagement of funds, the electricity crisis and overall livelihoods. In western and eastern Libya, repression was heavy-handed by government-aligned forces and led to several deaths. In Tripoli, Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj was first on the defensive and accused protesters of being infiltrated by violent individuals before backtracking and announcing his intention to resign. In the east, the Interim Government's headquarters were set on fire on 12 September, one protester shot dead in Al Marj and one social activist murdered by his kidnappers believed to be hardline LNA supporters. As aforementioned, Haftar took the defence of protesters and Prime Minister al-Thani also decided to resign. Both Prime Ministers unveiled reform plans and pledged to quickly solve the electricity crisis that was at the core of social upheaval this year. In Tripoli, al-Sarraj also called upon three oversight bodies to investigate corruption cases, which prompted a wide-ranging crackdown on GNA officials accused of mismanaging or embezzling state funds.

Even if al-Sarraj and al-Thani later backtracked on their resignation announcements to supposedly satisfy the demands of their supporters, this episode of protests has shown that Libyans can have an impact on the political realm and are seen by political figures as constituencies whose demands matter for their political survival. Protests resonated with the aforementioned tribal political empowerment by introducing a third way in Libya, one that is more interested in solving everyday problems such as lack of access to basic services than in conquering territory or positions. It is the fear of losing popular support that prompted Haftar to accept Ahmed Maiteeq’s extended hand and reinforced efforts to reach a permanent ceasefire by putting a temporary lid on the economic issue with the oil blockade’s lifting. Of course, popular mobilisation is not permanent and politicians have slowly reverted to their self-interest during the LPDF. Nonetheless, popular scrutiny remains important over the peace process. Many members of women and youth groups have worked to be included in talks while a majority of Libyans monitor the LPDF’s developments, from the sidelines, but with a desire to make their voices heard should it lead to yet another erratic political process or fail to prevent another war.

## THE ECONOMY AS AN ESSENTIAL STARTING POINT TO A POLITICAL SOLUTION

*The peace process’s most direct guarantor might be the security track in the JMC’s hands. However, the current tacit agreement to lift the blockade in exchange for more transparency in disbursing oil revenues remains that process’ cornerstone.*



Source: Middle East Economic Survey (MEES); Daniel Moshashai for LIBYA DESK.<sup>2</sup>

2. The data on Libyan oil output and revenues comes from the Middle East Economic Survey (MEES) Vol.63 - No.46. The 2020 figures are not definitive but reflect LIBYA DESK’s predictions with oil output averaging 400,000 bpd in 2020 and revenues being around €4.5bn. Note that our revenue prediction for 2020 differs from MEES’ own as they put it at €5.5bn. However, recent NOC data shows the country might not reach that amount – unless it gets close to €2bn euros for December 2020, which is unlikely in our view.

On a military and logistical basis, the LNA-backed blockade was pretty much unchallenged as al-Rajma kept control of key air bases such as al-Gardabiya, Jufra and Taminhint to control the Oil Crescent. Khalifa Haftar has always been apprehensive that, as soon as he would lift the blockade, the CBL would allocate oil funds to militias opposed to him. Consequently, the LNA made sure to thwart any attempt by the NOC to flip the allegiance of the mainly pro-LNA Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) until the 18 September deal with Ahmed Maiteeq. This deal, cutting the CBL out from oil revenue streams, lifted a blockade that lasted 9 months, cost €9bn and exacerbated the electricity crisis by limiting provisions of gas and diesel fuel crucial for the functioning of power-stations.

Regarding this crisis, Acting SRSG Stephanie Williams recently pointed out that the country needed an immediate €825m of investments to avert total collapse. This is about the level spent in 2019 by the General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) and could very well be achievable should oil taps remain open. GECOL, which has faced severe criticism for failing to translate spending into results on the ground, has since the blockade's lifting redoubled its efforts to regain public confidence and gradually remove its problematic load-shedding programme which is more a patch than a viable solution. With less than half of Libya's power-stations operational, GECOL and other bodies have signed maintenance and new capacity agreements. Plans involving foreign firms, mainly from Turkey, are set to add around 1.8GW of new capacity through 2021. Recently a €313m deal between Tobruk's municipality and Greece's METKA for a 740MW gas power-station was signed and should be finalised in 2022. GECOL is also in discussions to add a 640MW gas power-station in Ubari, which sits in the Fezzan where basic services remain harder to access and more expensive than other parts of Libya.

The oil blockade not only cost Libya a lot of money but also created a hiatus for NOC's development plans. Luckily, the company has been active in ensuring that output capacity would be maximised in addition to putting in line different projects to boost production from 1.3m bpd by end 2020 to 1.6m bpd by end 2021. Before even thinking of medium-term plans, however, the point remains that Haftar will be central to the economic file and will seek to retain as much physical control as possible over oil fields. Although weaponizing oil remains a double-edged sword, there is nothing more potent in the country to make one's voice heard and total control in one hand remains more favourable than a free for all. No matter how nonpartisan the PFG is now supposed to be since its unification on 16 November, it will be relatively easy for Haftar to close oil taps should the UNSMIL economic track and

meetings by the Economic Working Group not lead to more transparency for budgetary processes. Additionally, Turkey's future in Libya will be a key factor in deciding the outcome of economic arrangements as Ankara sees long-term and would like to regain its economic foothold in eastern Libya. There is a dangerous collision course for the peace process, between Ankara, which seeks to avoid any political outcome endangering its commercial interests, and the LNA, which has an anti-Turkish stance.

On the economic level in Tripoli, there has been a tense intra-GNA competition which resembles that of many other rent-seeking and conflict-ridden countries where financial institutions become personal fiefdoms and budgets are in recurrent crisis-mode. In the Libyan case, we have on the one hand institutional figures like NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanallah and CBL Governor Sadiq al-Kabir who have sought to pursue their country's best interest. Sanallah has done so by boosting oil output, and al-Kabir by favouring austerity to prevent an increasingly likely scenario in which Libya would become an irredeemably non-diversified, debt-ridden and deficit economy. On the other hand, they have also entrenched themselves in their positions for the last decade and made a large portion of the political class envious of their influence, above all al-Sarraj. This year, the Prime Minister and his Finance Minister Faraj Boumtari have sought to call a full CBL Board of Directors' meeting, between the Tripoli and eastern branch, so as to empower the other board members over al-Kabir. The latter is indeed deemed too powerful as he effectively blocks much of the government's economic prerogatives through a conservative monetary policy and creating as a result a grave liquidity crisis. On top of that, he has placed himself at the heart of every Libyan financial institution's Board of Directors and used that position to thwart al-Sarraj from appointing his own allies in places like the Libyan Investment Bank (LIA).

As a result, al-Kabir has seen an onslaught from many GNA figures in 2020. In July, the State Prosecutor threatened legal action against him and his Audit Bureau ally, Khaled Shakshak, should he not allow an audit of the CBL's two branches. This audit is a first step to unifying the branches, something that might cost al-Kabir his position. In turn, al-Sarraj and his allies have become more brazen by accusing al-Kabir of corruption and using Gaddafi-era laws to bypass him in order to install allies at the Libyan Foreign Bank (LFB), now the placeholder for oil revenues after the 18 September oil deal removed al-Kabir as the oil revenues' gatekeeper. As a result, the CBL Governor has felt marginalised and sought to push his own institutional allies to launch investigations on al-Sarraj. He has also criticised both the GNA and Interim Government of spending too much, before being accused himself

by NOC Chief Sanallah of squandering oil revenues and giving credits to fat cats in specific regions, which oddly reflects the LNA's opinion. In view of additional pressure from the Libyan Chambers of Commerce and Business Councils to equally distribute letters of credits and unify the exchange rate, al-Kabir agreed to hold a CBL Board Meeting on 17 December, mainly to discuss exchange rate adjustments. Other Tripoli-based institutions, with representatives from the eastern-based Finance Ministry, have also agreed to activate a joint committee that would apply strict transparency standards and as a result welcome the CBL back into the fold. This would go a long way in easing tensions over oil revenue distribution with the LNA, but would likely not reform current patrimonial networks in Tripoli's financial institutions.

## **THE EVER-WIDENING SECURITY RISKS TO LIBYA AND THE REGION**

*In addition to problematic affiliates of the GNA or LNA, Libya has continued to be on the frontline of transnational crime such as terrorism, smuggling or kidnappings.*

Since the 2011 revolution, Libya has been rocked by insecurity, terrorism and most importantly the overbearing presence of militias. Most militias are nominally integrated in broader armed coalitions like the GNA. Most often, their allegiance does not go beyond neighbourhood, town, tribe or at most political affiliation. Financial motivations and rent-seeking top their list of priorities and often lead them to clash with one another in turf wars for control over key smuggling and money-making routes. Cutting deals with one or the other government institution also presents them with more legitimacy and growth opportunities as the alliance between Fathi Bashagha and the SDF demonstrates. For these reasons, it is very difficult to fathom how the SSR and DDR initiatives presented this year could lead to the state's monopoly on violence. As aforementioned, such initiatives are mainly renaming exercises or disciplinary action that do not tackle the most problematic elements of one's own armed coalition.

The proliferation of armed groups in the country has enabled political factions to add muscle to their threats and promises, as shown with the many politically-motivated kidnappings and targeted assassinations that have occurred against social activists in the east but also figures in the west that are deemed to cross a line such as GNA Media Office Head Mohamed Baio who was kidnapped for three weeks by the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade because of his attempts to tone down hate speech in the media. Additio-



nally, both Tripoli and Benghazi have experienced the creeping influence of Madkhali Salafists, who despite their non-political stance, have striven when possible to apply their own fundamentalist views of Islam on the population.

Importantly, the JMC's self-assigned deadline of 90 days to remove foreign mercenaries and demobilise militiamen will be passed on 21 January. Little progress has been made on that front, which further weakens chances of seeing effective SSR and DDR plans through. There is little chance Libyan parties will adopt the same pace in dealing with such plans as the LNA knows its rival side is too fragmented to be effective. Alternatively, there could be cross-cutting collusion in that instead of undergoing a complete and costly internal DDR, the LNA would contact potential allies within the GNA front to tackle common enemies. Organised crime in the south and terror groups already represent possible targets. Considering the state of intra-GNA competition, some armed groups within the coalition could also be taken down with the help of al-Rajma if the JMC continues to close ranks. These efforts would be carried out with extensive media coverage to draw popular support and could well fit into a patriotic fight against crime by tackling the hubs of illicit activities. This would have to be coupled with enough economic guarantees to such hubs so as to ensure that their powerful stakeholders would not oppose the loss of revenues from tobacco, fuel, car, weapons or human trafficking.

Terror represents another potential point of convergence as the transnational phenomena costs the country an average of €412m per year and puts a large strain on the population and infrastructure. This year, the LNA has continued to present itself as the primary Libyan fighter against the Islamic State (IS) and Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), a messaging that has had great effect on foreign powers involved in anti-terrorism or engaged in a fight against radical Islamism. Similar to organised crime, most LNA anti-terror efforts have centred in Fezzan where porous borders and the proximity to the Sahel conflict has given way to a cat-and-mouse game between security directorates and terrorists' sleeper cells in the region. Of note, the Fezzan is the first to fall victim to any resumption of fighting in the country, as LNA troops that guarantee security vacate the terrain to fight up north.

## CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

In 2020, Libya was close to a precipice. The war between the LNA and GNA could have escalated into a regional conflict but a multi-fronted attempt to reach a comprehensive political settlement in the country managed to avert that scenario. This turn of events was made possible as a result of various factors, from military realities on the ground to popular pressure and international initiatives. More specifically, Libya averted a terrible war scenario thanks to the efforts of former SRSG Ghassan Salamé and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Their efforts culminated in the Berlin Conference, whose blueprint toward peace in Libya continues to inform all aspects of the country's peace process. Germany brought about the Berlin Conference and acted as an effective intermediary to serve the cause of de-escalation in 2020. It is now time to carry such efforts to the finish line.

The political, security and economic tracks pursued by UNSMIL are placing Libya at a crossroads and open the way to drastically different scenarios for next year. On the one hand, Libya's political field could prove to be too atomised and divergent political ambitions too powerful to allow the LPDF to succeed. In this scenario, growing hopes for a comprehensive solution would be squashed and fighting along previous lines erupt once more. Recent maximum alert levels have demonstrated how frail the ceasefire remains as both GNA and LNA hardliners mistrust each other. This scenario is not inevitable as Libyan politicians and military leaders have felt the popular ire and an increasing international scrutiny, but it remains within the realm of possibilities and should therefore not be discounted. The Libyan factions might be careful not to be accused of single-handedly leading to the collapse of the LPDF, but they would still jump on any occasion to deter their rivals by force if they manage to draw enough popular support and take advantage of the dialogue's weaknesses.

On the other hand, we could see the LPDF through, in 2021. A National Unity government would be formed and strive to adopt policies conducive to state and nation-building. Short termism and sterile power-sharing agreements would give way to more long-term planning and a greater platform to civil society actors seeking to improve Libyans' livelihoods. However, even if the LPDF has good chances of being successful, such "paradigm shift" heralded by Acting SRSG Stephanie Williams might not be one of its key characteristics. In fact, there are currently three likely outcomes that would hurt UNSMIL's high-minded objectives and give way to a rat race, whereby known fault lines would persist and motivate each camp to consolidate its stronghold, with obvious risks of occasional showdowns. The first LPDF

possibility, and by far the most problematic, would see Abdulhamid Dbaiba become Prime Minister, which would anger most Libyans and cost UNSMIL its legitimacy as the candidate has on several occasions been accused of corruption and bribery. The two other possibilities, seeing either Ahmed Maiteeq or Fathi Bashagha as Prime Minister would respectively anger western and eastern stakeholders in Libya, and lead to a poor outcome where factional competition impedes state-building and economic reforms. A last resort solution for the LPDF, which would see al-Sarraj stay at the helm of the Presidential Council to govern in tandem with a Prime Minister from eastern Libya would also not represent a successful outcome and fail to bring about much economic, institutional and security progress before the December 2021 elections.

These unsatisfactory outcomes mean that, on the cusp of 2021, Libya is at an awkward period reminiscent of the months preceding the LNA's 4th April 2019 war declaration. This seems to go unnoticed in foreign capitals as each turns a blind eye to the lessons of last year and tries to benefit from the current power vacuum to entrench itself in Libya. Unless responsible actors like UNSMIL take up the leadership challenge to fill the void, we might find ourselves in either a further deteriorating political setting or simply renewed conflict. This time, however, the option to conduct the war will not solely be in Libyan hands as foreign powers like Russia and Turkey have access to troops on the ground that respond directly to them.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Processes such as the LPDF, JMC, as well as the potential unification of the HOR and the CBL branches need to be supported and coordination needs to be pursued. This support can be brought through follow-up meetings but also more coercive measures like sanctions against spoilers.
- International intermediaries should also make sure that the middle ground wins out of Libya's peace process. Germany should leverage its privileged diplomatic position, be it with European partners, the US and more importantly Russia and Turkey, to make sure that each and every foreign actor feels included in discussions and understands the common stakes.
- Domestically also, this means that a middle ground candidate should gain the majority of support from the international community, instead of

betting on self-appointed powerbrokers. Libya does not need a saviour PM, it needs a savvy-enough politician, able to navigate the country's complex social and political dynamics to lead the transitional period with the help of technocrats.

## WHAT TO WATCH FOR IN 2021

### Foreign spoilers:

In Libya, Turkey has not wanted to strike total victory by invading the entirety of the country. Yet, it has been vital for it to ensure that its allies within the GNA can negotiate as equals with their rivals so as to maintain the existence of the November 2019 MoUs. Should EU and US pressure increase on Turkey with the incoming Biden administration, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's response might not lead to desired effects. If he feels cornered, this could prove dangerous for countries like Libya and lead to a situation where Russia and Turkey work together to regain unrivalled primacy like in the first half of 2020. Moreover, Russia could continue to cultivate independent groups within the LNA as well as the Greens to achieve its own goals and skirt Haf-tar - not to mention its communication lines with the GNA.

### Practical roadblocks:

The year ahead would be ridden with procedural and institutional roadblocks. Libyans have not voted since 2014 and the country's constitutional arrangements and electoral preparations might prove to be problematic, especially considering the fact that Libya's Civil Registry is faulty. 2021 will also be a test for the National Unity government and international NGOs in leveraging the country's newfound stability to improve its disastrous humanitarian situation and implement much-needed medical policies such as the Covid-19 vaccination campaign. These efforts will be absorbing and will require international support.

### SSR/DDR:

The current understanding that all armed groups will hand their weapons in a concerted way and remove foreign mercenaries from frontlines is highly doubtful. Yet, the issues of DDR and SSR are ever more important for Libya. Any rationalisation and professionalisation of government institutions like a national army or a well-audited central bank could prompt authorities to undertake crucial SSR and DDR steps to eventually have a state monopoly of violence in Libya. This file will crucially depend on the JMC's continuation and further consolidation.

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