



INSIDE LIBYA

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FOREWORD

The Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean (PoDiMed) of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) in cooperation with LIBYA DESK™ is delighted to continue our monthly reports on Libya for 2021. This format examines the most important political, economic and social developments of the previous month, which are of central importance for understanding the situation in Libya. The report is based on reliable Libyan sources and provides a summary and a contextualisation of developments in the wider Libyan context. The report is usually being published every first week of each month.

While much attention has been paid to the external and geopolitical dimensions of the situation in Libya, voices from within Libya are central to understanding local developments and the evolution of the Libyan conflict as well as its impact on the wider Mediterranean region. As an inclusive Libyan-led and Libyan-owned mediation with regards to the political, economic and military tracks are without alternative, these monthly reports emphasise the most important events within Libya and aim to give a better picture of what happens “Inside Libya”.

Based on existing KAS-PoDiMed formats such as the Libya Brief and the Libya Task Force, we consider it necessary to shed light on the dynamics within Libya and to emphasise the importance of continuing and facilitating a national dialogue process in the spirit of the UN-led Berlin process.

We hope that these monthly reports will give our readers a better picture of the dynamics of the ongoing Libyan conflict, its actors and multiple dimensions.

Thomas Volk

Director
Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.** Divisions in Libya are still vivid and continue slowing down progress toward guaranteeing the timely holding of elections and the necessary withdrawal of foreign mercenaries.
- 2.** The policy of appeasement adopted by the Government of National Unity (GNU) has faced backlash from both sides of the political spectrum.
- 3.** The GNU's mandate and tools at hand are not sufficient to reconcile national divisions. Instead, piecemeal efforts are made to listen to grievances and defuse potential tensions.
- 4.** The High National Election Commission (HNEC) has given a tight deadline to the House of Representatives (HOR) and High Council of State (HCS) to clarify the elections' legal basis. However, disagreements could lead to critical delays and force the UN to propose alternatives.
- 5.** The announcement of the Second Berlin Conference to be held on 23 June raises hopes of a united international front to support Libya's political roadmap. However, several issues could harm the Conference's significance.
- 6.** The Government of National Unity and House of Representatives are locked in a silent battle of wills over the budget's adoption.
- 7.** Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt are accelerating political and commercial ties to Tripoli in the hope of sharing Libya's large economic potential.
- 8.** Momentum to remove mercenaries and reopen the coastal road is stalling. Nonetheless, attempts are ongoing to limit the presence of sub-Saharan mercenaries in Libya.
- 9.** Interior Minister Khaled Mazen has increased visits to security directorates and devised preliminary plans to gain relevance and secure the 24 December elections.
- 10.** June promises more diplomatic discussions over the Libyan file and could bring about much needed solutions to the current military and legal deadlock in the country.

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LIBYA'S EXECUTIVE AUTHORITY CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF PAST FAULT LINES

The policy of appeasement adopted by the Government of National Unity (GNU) has faced backlash from both sides of the political spectrum.

[The tenth edition of Inside Libya](#) argued that the Government of National Unity (GNU) and Presidential Council (PC) do not represent a cohesive executive authority and that they are faced with rival stakeholders who expect contradictory actions from them. This situation demonstrates that instead of overcoming Libya's divided political scene, the executive authority has been caught in the middle of old fault lines in an attempt to strike a delicate balance between eastern and western factions through appeasement and outreach. For instance, a few weeks after being portrayed by hardline eastern factions as an entity beholden to Tripoli-based militias, Libya's executive authority was accused of harbouring "anti-revolutionary" elements by western armed groups. On May 7, these accusations culminated in the storming of the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli, the temporary seat of the PC. The incident was subsequently played down by the executive authority's leadership, whose top officials were not present in the landmark building when it was stormed.

The personalities accused of being "anti-revolutionary" were Foreign Minister Najla al-Mangoush and newly appointed head of Intelligence, Hussein Mohamed Khalifa al-Aueb, who is known to have had strong ties with the former regime and later with the eastern-based Libyan National Army (LNA). Al-Mangoush was vilified in a vicious smear campaign portraying her as a die-hard supporter of LNA Commander Khalifa Haftar and was targeted for her leading role in demanding the removal of all foreign forces, including Turkish-backed soldiers. Similarly, armed groups from the "Volcano of Rage" coalition (Al-Bonyan Al-Marsoos in Arabic) called upon the PC to withdraw the nomination of al-Aueb, whom they consider an agent of Haftar and who has been accused of graft by the Audit Bureau. Notably, the storming of the Corinthia Hotel was carried out by Emad Trabelsi, the former Intelligence Chief, which shows that the government's strategy of apportionment does not always strike the right tone with every stakeholder and that the current political setting in Libya creates awkward situations for the executive authority.

A more recent cumbersome moment was the military parade to mark the 7th commemoration of the LNA's Operation Dignity in Benina's Military Base on May 29, a show of force for which Khalifa Haftar invited the PC,

the GNU, as well as House of Representatives' (HOR) Speaker Agila Saleh. Apart from Deputy PM Hussein al-Qatrani, none of the invitees showed up at the parade, with Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba and PC Head Mohamed al-Menfi excusing their absence due to their respective visits to Algeria and Tunisia. In contrast, Vice-President Abdullah Hussein al-Lafi, who is closer to western factions, was the only official to clearly reject the invitation by lambasting the event as “unilateral” and “dangerous” enough to motivate other armed groups across Libya to parade without the PC’s permission. Considering the tense oversight of the executive authority’s actions by western-based militias, Libyan officials chose the path of least resistance by not appearing next to Haftar on this day, but the LNA Commander may use this cold shoulder as an opportunity to delegitimize the executive authority amongst eastern factions and highlight some level of hypocrisy as such officials have publicly participated in ceremonial military events in Tripoli and Zawiyah. The fact that Agila Saleh also missed the event due to a meeting with UN Envoy and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Ján Kubiš shows that the parade failed to score its expected attendance and was generally perceived as an out-of-place event by the absent guests. However, those absentees also failed to clearly take a stance against the event in defence of their mandate to control and unify military institutions.

FROM THE GOAL OF NATIONAL RECONCILIATION TO THE REALITY OF DEFUSING TENSIONS

The executive authority’s mandate and tools at hand aren’t sufficient to reconcile national divisions. Instead, piecemeal efforts are made to listen to grievances and defuse potential tensions.

With memories of conflict still fresh in Libyans’ mindset and the promise of a political shakeup by year’s end, the North African country is not best placed for a genuine and comprehensive attempt at reconciliation. In fact, progress on this sensitive issue has been slow, with the PC receiving a fair amount of criticism concerning its lack of concrete action to tackle national divides. Criticisms range from the perception that the executive authority is too intent on pleasing the international community and expanding business relations at the expense of domestic affairs, to accusations of running a show where outreach meetings are mere photo-ops and attempts at reconciling the nation are tepid and half-hearted. Such views are understandable considering the fact that the executive authority now has to face its limits that currently include a 7-month mandate, the lack of an approved budget, a highly divisive political space where electoral stakes exacerbate tensions

and internal disagreements that severely hamper outreach efforts since many officials are either unable or unwilling to leave their regional enclaves. Additionally, sceptics have also raised the question of whether it is possible for the PM to distinguish outreach campaigns and apportionments from his potential electoral bid as Abdulhamid Dabaiba continues to increase the number of cabinet deputies either to appease key actors or solidify his allies' grip on key positions, as seen this month with the appointment of four deputies to the Foreign Ministry or earlier with the nomination of a Deputy Finance Minister who has direct ties with his nephew Ibrahim Dabaiba.

Generally, local notables have voiced their dissatisfaction at the lack of concrete action to swiftly empty prisons from political detainees or implement basic reforms for social and economic development. This is particularly true of the Fezzan region, Libya's marginalised south, where a large part of the political leadership remains imprisoned due to their perceived loyalty to the former regime. In this case, the executive authority can only hope to take a stand to defuse tensions and mitigate grievances through meetings with local notables and policy discussions at the ministerial level. For instance, tribal representatives from the Qadhadfa, Magarha and Awlad Suleiman have previously met with Deputy PC Head Abdullah al-Lafi to discuss the prompt release of those arbitrarily detained and better treatment of their kin in the rest of the country – without much progress by the end of May. The Minister of Economy and Minister of State for Economic Affairs also started consultations over the inclusion of the south in their Investment Map, which would see the construction of new refineries, free economic zones, solar energy plants and agricultural developments in the region. Deputy PM Ramadan Ahmed Boujenah has also led discussions to improve fuel deliveries to the south, where commodity prices are subsequently higher than the rest of the country.

It remains to be seen whether such efforts will bring actual results or are just piecemeal attempts at defusing tensions. A reactive policy toward peace and reconciliation from the executive authority will not be enough to overcome Libya's challenges. More proactiveness is needed so that the PC/GNU not only reach out to stakeholders but also develop long-lasting trust and follow up more constructively with them. The PC still has the time to follow through and officially launched the work of its National Reconciliation Committee in late May. This augurs a new series of meetings that could potentially accelerate political detainees' release and prepare the ground for a national peace conference. Despite shortcomings, the executive authority's current work still is a great improvement from the policies of the Government of National Accord (GNA) considering that officials from the GNU/PC have actually co-

vered ground throughout western, eastern and southern Libya. For instance, al-Menfi's visit to the eastern city of Derna in early May was the first by a high profile official since the 2011 revolution, and Minister of Local Government Badraddin al-Toumi managed to review the needs of the eastern municipalities of al-Bayda and Benina. Additionally, prisoners of war were also exchanged between the LNA and Volcano of Rage this month, which is the sixth batch of such prisoner releases since the end of the conflict last year.

THE CLOCK IS TICKING FOR THE GENERAL ELECTIONS' LEGAL BASIS

The High National Election Commission (HNEC) has given a tight deadline to the House of Representatives (HOR) and High Council of State (HCS) to clarify the elections' legal basis. However, disagreements could lead to critical delays and force the UN to step in.

With the July 1 deadline set by the HNEC fast approaching, establishing an electoral framework and constitutional basis for elections has been the priority for not only UNSMIL but also foreign powers supportive of the 24 December general elections. According to the HNEC's Chairman, Emad al-Sayeh, the elections' legal basis represents 30% of the remaining work to prepare the electoral process since technical, logistical, and training tasks are already well underway. In late April, the UN Envoy Ján Kubiš had convened the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum's (LPDF) Legal Committee (LC) to write down a draft proposal on a constitutional basis for elections, which was later discussed virtually by LPDF members between 26-27 May. In his opening remarks, the UN Envoy adopted a stronger tone than usual by reminding LPDF members that the electoral date was non-negotiable and that most Libyans surveyed by UNSMIL supported the holding of elections before organising a referendum on the 2017 draft constitution. Additionally, he reminded LPDF members of their narrow mandate and called upon them to review the LC's proposal in an expedient manner, so as to solve outstanding issues instead of coming up with new ones.

Regrettably, the live-broadcast LPDF session was inconclusive as it included a lot of bickering over the issue of dual citizenship for candidates and demonstrated once again the divide between supporters and opponents of direct elections, as well as those who hope to avoid elections altogether. Cognizant of the fact that presidential elections would diminish the power of the HOR and HCS, as well as upend their positions within these national institutions, opponents of direct elections have turned a blind eye to UNSMIL's recommendations and called for holding the constitutional referendum be-

fore elections. This demand is made under the pretext of ensuring enough legislative oversight and defined presidential prerogatives, but it generally serves the interest of those defending the status quo or fearing that direct elections would lead to the victory of figures such as Saif al-Islam Gaddafi or Khalifa Haftar. Pro-referendum calls were also advanced by about 100 politicians and legal activists, including members of the Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA), who released a statement rejecting the LC's proposal and argued that holding a referendum would be the least complicated and shortest way to end Libya's transitional phase. A number of voices within Libya's Islamist political currents, particularly those close to HCS Chairman Khalid al-Mishri, have also warned against direct presidential elections and accused UNSMIL as well as foreign countries of lobbying for such elections. These attacks against direct elections corroborate claims from Emad al-Sayeh that hardliners from both the HOR and HCS seek to obstruct elections by pushing for an early referendum and changing the HNEC's board of directors. Ján Kubiš also chided LPDF members for mirroring positions from HOR and HCS members and warned that "political obstructionism to preserve the status quo is not an option and cannot continue."

These divisions do not bode well for the timely adoption of a legal basis for elections. Following the LPDF's indecisiveness, the ball is now in the court of the HOR and HCS, which have until mid-June to clarify the constitutional basis and electoral framework for elections. Failing this, a new legal battle is likely to arise with each of the HOR, HCS and UNSMIL having their own recourse at hand. In fact, should national institutions fail to make progress or decide to hold a constitutional referendum, UNSMIL has the option of tasking the LPDF with approving the constitutional basis on a voting modality similar to the one used to agree on the selection mechanism for the executive authority earlier in the year. However, nothing ensures that such voting modality would secure an agreement on time and national institutions might protest this procedure and further seek to control discussions over the elections' constitutional framework. For now, UNSMIL and HNEC seem to have garnered enough goodwill from HOR Speaker Agila Saleh to hold general elections first and foremost, but obstructionist voices within the HOR and HCS remain powerful and could lead to delays beyond the July 1 deadline. Should UNSMIL fail to prevent national institutions from scheduling an early referendum, there would then be a high probability for elections to be postponed and the political environment to decay.

INTERNATIONAL MOMENTUM TO SUPPORT ELECTIONS ON 24 DECEMBER

The announcement of the Second Berlin Conference to be held on 23 June raises hopes of a united international front to support Libya's political roadmap. However, several issues could harm the Conference's significance.

Since March 2021, when the GNU took office, the international community has demonstrated greater commercial and diplomatic interest for Libya. The confidence in Libya's political transition is high enough for an increasing number of countries to consider physical presence in Tripoli necessary to properly follow current developments. As such, the European Union's mission reopened its Tripoli office in May whilst Egypt, Austria and Spain declared they would soon reopen their embassies. Libya's foreign ministry is also pushing for the UN's humanitarian agencies as well as the United States to resume work from inside Libya, going as far as proposing the reopening of the American Consulate in Benghazi to demonstrate trust in Libya's newfound stability. Importantly, Washington has finally taken on a more prominent role to voice support for timely elections and push for the immediate withdrawal of foreign mercenaries from Libya. In May, the US Ambassador Richard Norland was not only appointed as Special Envoy to Libya but welcomed US Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Jeffrey Hood in a rare high-level visit to Libya, where they met Dabai-ba, al-Menfi and al-Sayeh to signify that the United States would apply pressure should elections be postponed.

This greater US involvement ahead of the 23 June Second Berlin Conference is proof of tightened coordination between Washington, Berlin, Rome, Paris and London over the Libyan file. The challenge for them will be to reach an understanding with more recalcitrant powers like Turkey and Russia so as to ensure the eventual withdrawal of foreign mercenaries from Libyan territory. Germany has already started consultations with countries present in Libya and Chancellor Angela Merkel emphasized to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan how important a signal such as the removal of mercenaries would be for a return to normal in Libya. Nonetheless, facts on the ground are very different from what they were in January 2020 during the First Berlin Conference as the current status quo does not encourage any of the intervening actors to take the risk of reconsidering the extent of their military presence. Rather, Turkey continues to signal that it wants the centre stage in defining Libya's future security and military landscape through several high level meetings, one of which was held in early May with Defence Minister

Hulusi Akar and Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu in Tripoli. Ankara knows that its military presence and ensuing stability in Libya is bearing its fruits as Turkish exports rose 50% in the first four months of 2021, and is therefore not in a hurry to revise its position. Instead, Turkey continues to cultivate ties with western Libyan figures and to push forward Security Sector Reform (SSR) as well as Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) plans that would secure its interests even in the event of a troop withdrawal. Ankara's influence over figures such as Deputy PM Abdullah al-Lafi and Minister of State for Political Affairs and Communication Walid al-Lafi already shows that Turkey has cultivated its allies as the former called for a Libyan foreign policy drawing a fine line between countries that supported the civil state (i.e. Turkey) and those who supported oppression (i.e. pro-LNA countries). Walid al-Lafi is thought to have been heavily involved in the pro-Turkey media campaign against Foreign Minister Najla al-Mangoush.

In addition to likely non-cooperation from the likes of Turkey and Russia, the Second Berlin Conference could fall victim to delays in clarifying the elections' constitutional basis. The July 1 deadline given by HNEC for national institutions to clarify such a basis is very close to June 23 and would give international participants very little to work with should the legal deadlock continue. Finally, the conference will also be a test case for more benevolent powers to show that they wholeheartedly support general elections by December 24. Despite growing international support for elections, there is still the risk that countries take too much a liking to the current state of affairs and start dreading the upcoming elections as a potential disruption to their security and business interests. In fact, European powers are already pressing Libya's new leadership to bolster border security in the Sahel as well as the Mediterranean to tackle the migratory issue. This remains a tricky issue in Tripoli considering past experiences and the Foreign Minister has declared that "Libyans will not act as guards for the borders of Europe."

LIBYA FACES PROLONGED DELAYS WITH THE BUDGET ADOPTION

The Government of National Unity and House of Representatives are locked in a silent struggle of wills over the budget's adoption.

Despite the House of Representatives' (HOR) clear recommendations for amending the 2021 draft budget, the GNU's revised version of early May did not bring any major changes. In fact, the total of the amended budget was reduced by just 2.2bn LYD (€400m) – taken mainly from the development chapter – instead of being cut by 20% as recommended by the HOR.

Naturally, this amended draft was rejected during a parliamentary session between 24-25 May in Tobruk, where several MPs recalled that the 2021 budget should only be worth around 76bn LYD (€14bn), not have any emergency chapter and detail the expenses expected under the development chapter. This quagmire has been made worse by poor communication between the GNU and HOR as well as poor media coverage over this important matter. In fact, MPs are both uninformed and skeptical about the GNU's budget drafts, with many claiming that government accountability will be compromised should the budget be approved. For instance, the moderate bloc has already raised its concerns about the Prime Minister's announcement of reconstruction funds for Benghazi, Derna, Sirte and Murzuq worth altogether 3bn LYD (€555m). According to this bloc, the fact that no anti-corruption mechanisms or detailed development plan were presented or the fact that no one explained why these four cities were chosen over others shows the lack of transparency on the GNU's part as well as potential avenues for self-enrichment. Even more so, Dabaiba placing under his own office the Organisation for Development of Administrative Centres, which is headed by his uncle Ali Dabaiba, has further raised concerns that the Dabaibas are seeking avenues for kickbacks to contracts that the GNU is preparing itself to sign.

By the end of May, the results of the Tobruk parliamentary session were unclear due to several contradictory statements. Initially, it was believed that MPs had agreed to at least pass chapter one covering salaries while curtailing government access to state funds for broader expenses. However, MP Abu Bakr Saeed appeared on media to disprove this news by saying that the HOR could not approve only part of the budget and that subsequent parliamentary sessions would be held in June to pass the budget under certain conditions. Several MPs are still waiting for the HOR and HCS to reach an understanding on sovereign positions, following several meetings in May including in Bouznika, Morocco, and accelerate the unification of state institutions – a step they deem necessary to ensure enough parliamentary oversight over budget disbursements. Even more controversial in the budgetary debates is the attempt by eastern MPs to carve out a piece of the budget to finance the LNA and somehow institutionalise it as the “Army General Command” alongside the Defence Ministry, a highly unlikely step considering opposition to the LNA and the fact that this allocation would probably not buy Khalifa Haftar's obedience to the GNU.

REGIONAL COUNTRIES INCREASE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TIES WITH LIBYA

Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt are accelerating political and commercial ties to Tripoli in the hope of sharing Libya's large economic potential.

For neighbouring countries, Libya is an important factor in determining security and the health of the economy. Traditionally, the country has provided employment opportunities and remittances, been a large market for agricultural and industrial goods as well as a source of tourism revenues for the likes of Tunisia, Egypt and to a lesser extent Algeria. Now that the outlook for stability in Libya is relatively positive, these three countries are bolstering ties with the GNU to play their natural part in Libya's reconstruction - which has recently been estimated at 600bn LYD (€111bn) over 10 years by Libya's Minister of State for Economic Affairs. On 22nd May, Tunisian Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi visited Tripoli where he signed a memorandum of understanding to ease the movement of citizens and trade between the two countries - with Letters of Credit no longer required for Tunisian goods entering Libya by land. Ultimately, it is believed that up to 500,000 Tunisians could find work in Libya, principally in the services sector as long as the Libyan Dinar regains some of its value. In a show of solidarity, Libya also proposed to deposit €1bn into the Central Bank of Tunisia to help the fiscally-challenged country secure a much-needed loan from the IMF.

Egypt's large construction sector also aims at carving a large chunk out of Libyan reconstruction contracts and at easing freedom of movement between the two countries as it is believed that up to 3 million Egyptian workers could end up working in Libya. In addition to deep-rooted commercial and cultural ties, neighbouring countries also offer potential solutions to Libya's immediate problems, including the electricity shortage. Egypt's Electricity Transmission Company is already developing studies to double the linkage line's capacity to 500MW and would ultimately target a capacity of up to 3GW in the long-term. Algeria, which shares the characteristics of a hydrocarbon economy with Libya, also represents a potential source of electricity as well as technical cooperation in the oil and gas sector. In fact, the Libyan Minister of Oil and Gas as well as the General Electric Company of Libya's (GECOL) Chairman have accompanied PM Dabaiba in his visit to the Algerian-Libyan Forum in Algiers to potentially carve new partnerships in the energy sector. The Ministry of Transport and Foreign Minister were also present at the Forum and led to agreements on the reopening of the Debdab border crossing as well as resumption of air traffic between Algeria and Libya.

CHADIAN CRISIS PROMPTS A REFOCUS ON SOUTHERN BORDER SECURITY

Efforts to remove mercenaries and reopen the coastal road are deadlocked. Nonetheless, efforts are ongoing to limit the presence of sub-Saharan mercenaries in Libya.

Ján Kubiš, the UN Envoy to Libya, has clearly stated that efforts to remove foreign mercenaries from Libya have stalled. The proposition stemming from the International Follow-up Committee on Libya (IFCL) to have a sequenced withdrawal of Syrian mercenaries with UNSMIL monitoring was not received positively by either Turkey or Russia as it faced a sequencing issue. Specifically, Turkey relies more heavily on Syrian mercenaries than Russia and has therefore requested that Moscow remove its nationals present in the Wagner private military contractor as a first step – something that Russia, in turn, is only ready to do if Ankara removes its officers as well. Similarly, the coastal road remains closed despite growing calls from the inhabitants of Sirte to reopen this lifeline and gain access to much needed primary goods. The 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) is therefore left with little to work with but it is seeking to establish a unified and apolitical technical sub-committee focused on DDR to identify and categorize Libyan armed groups with the eventual goal of dismantling them.

The Chadian crisis erupting in April has motivated regional leaders to take the issue of armed groups' cross-border movements more seriously, with the Sudanese and Chadian governments holding discussions on arrangements to disarm their nationals operating as militiamen in Libya. The US Special Envoy to Sudan and South Sudan, Donald Booth, also called upon the Sudanese armed opposition to withdraw from Libya and Niger's permanent representative to the UN called on Sahel countries and Libya to bolster their security coordination as well as prevent the spread of terrorism. Mohamed al-Menfi also travelled to Nigeria for an extraordinary summit of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, focused on the current security situation. Generally, Sudanese and Chadian fighters have been less supervised and more mobile than Syrian mercenaries, which has given rise to several clashes with Libyan civilians such as those reported this month in the southern areas of Houn and Sukna where Janjaweed fighters encroached upon private farm lands. Considering the risk to national security that sub-Saharan mercenaries represent for Libya and the fact that sub-Saharan governments are becoming more willing to cooperate with Tripoli to solve this issue, there may be additional efforts in the coming months from the PC/GNU to remove these mercenaries by for instance solving their grievances over non-payment of dues.

MINISTRY OF INTERIOR SEEKS TO BECOME A FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH

Interior Minister Khaled Mazen has increased visits to security directorates and devised preliminary plans to gain relevance and secure the 24 December elections.

Over the last years, Libya's multiple poles of power and security providers have made it hard for the Ministry of Interior to enjoy state monopoly over violence and be a force to be reckoned with in Libya's security landscape. This has been true of the GNU's Minister of Interior, Khaled Mazen, who is generally not the first person to be called by high officials to ensure a strong security detail as western-based militias have most of the security cards in their hands. However, the minister and his undersecretaries have recently pushed for tighter coordination with security directorates all over the country, including in cities under the nominal control of the LNA as well as military powerhouses like Misrata. Their consultations are aimed at unifying the country's official security facilities and reinforcing their capacity so as to slowly regain state relevance in the security sector. On May 11, the Ministry of Interior announced an ultimatum of 1-month for any individual carrying unlicensed weapons to deliver them to the nearest police station and also called on every local security institution to establish a weapon licensing department. While it remains unlikely that the decree would do much to decrease the vast number of small arms in the country, it finally is a concrete action taken toward disarmament and further pacifying the country ahead of elections.

However, it is important to note that monopoly of state violence for the GNU is still a far cry as the LNA has time and again shown it considers itself to be Libya's armed forces and a major security provider in Cyrenaica, whilst other armed groups such as the 444 Brigade continue to further institutionalise themselves into the de facto security provider in Tripolitania. Days after Prime Minister Dabaiba visited Bani Walid on 20 May with a large ministerial delegation to discuss a wide range of issues including security, the 444 Brigade launched a security wall going from western Tripoli to Bani Walid involving about 1,000 soldiers to secure the area, which is a central node of human trafficking and smuggling in the western region.

CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

Partly due to the month of Ramadan's hiatus, April and May did not bring much constructive developments in regards to the establishment of a legal basis for elections, the adoption of the budget by the HOR or progress in the withdrawal of foreign fighters. Instead, the last weeks have shown that Libya's usual divides are still vivid and that major figures on both ends of the political spectrum lack the willingness to work toward genuine national reconciliation. Those figures are still engaged in a tug-of-war that has made it near impossible for the new executive to act as an overarching authority and transcend regional divisions. This has meant that the GNU has been caught in the middle of domestic power plays and now needs to let go of its grand ambitions to instead focus more seriously on the immediate requirements of the political roadmap for Libya.

Two of the most important requirements are the adoption of a constitutional basis and electoral law for the 24th December elections, as well as the withdrawal of foreign fighters from Libya. In June, these two requirements are likely to be brought forward by the international community thanks to several events such as the G7 Summit on 11-13 June, discussions at the Security Council presided by France, the Biden-Putin meeting on 16 June and, more importantly, the Second Berlin Conference on 23 June. Both UNSMIL and Germany have spearheaded consultations with important foreign stakeholders in Libya, including Turkey and Russia, and the Conference will be crucial in not only assessing progress toward achieving the political roadmap but also devising failsafes should a legal basis for elections not be attained by July 1 and belligerent powers refuse to kickstart the demilitarisation process.

In this view, the work of the 5+5 JMC should be empowered by the international community so that its proposed solutions can materialize and bring change in the form of a unified battalion as well as a technical DDR sub-committee. Equally, the idea of a sequenced departure of foreign fighters should not be abandoned as Turkey and Russia cannot expect the current status-quo to last perpetually. There are still avenues to convince such countries that Libya's stability demands new security arrangements and that supporting the momentum for elections will benefit all countries involved since any delay has the potential to erupt in renewed conflict and the cancellation of contracts/MoUs currently under consideration. It is also high time for spoilers to bear the consequences of their actions through international sanctions, particularly if status-quo figures manage to derail the timely adoption of a constitutional basis and electoral law to delay elections into 2022 or even later. Eventually, if Libya does not regain momentum for its

political process, it could be envisaged for the PC to legislate elections by decrees with United Nations' oversight so as to guarantee popular sovereignty and avoid renewed conflict.

During his speech at the LNA's military parade on May 29, Khalifa Haftar made it clear that the alternative to elections would be war. This was one of his most coherent speeches politically, in which he expressed support for the further implementation of the political roadmap while threatening those muddling the work of the 5+5 JMC as well as legal developments to guarantee elections. As explained in the tenth edition of Inside Libya, this places Libya at a crossroad similar to the weeks running up to the 4th April 2019 Tripoli offensive, when Haftar had voiced threats against the GNA should they not follow through with their commitments to the political transition. The resumption of war would be catastrophic for Libya as it would further cement the national divides that the political roadmap has sought to allay over the last months. Importantly, the LNA is not in a position to win the war that its commander is warning about, but it is powerful enough to hold its ground and support the rise of another parallel government in the east.

On another note, June will also be the unofficial start of campaigning as the Parties Affairs Committee of the Justice Ministry will start granting permits to parties wishing to engage in political work. This is when the PC/GNU will need to be active in pushing forward a code of conduct for the 24 December elections, so as to ensure that each of the before, during and after phases of voting are free and do not lead to spoilers rejecting the end results. Adopting a code of conduct will require from the executive authority a more effective outreach programme so as to ensure that all stakeholders feel confident enough to participate in the elections and accept its results. Preparing a national peace conference in the coming weeks would be an important step to bring about a more conducive environment for elections, and institutions like the PC and HNEC should take the lead on such initiatives. Both institutions remain the best suited to reach out to the widest range of stakeholders and raise awareness amongst voters and candidates so as to make sure that the 24 December elections represent a landmark event capable of galvanizing a majority of Libyans to express their will through the ballot box.

Authors: Mohamed Dorda, Oliver Crowley and Daniel Moshashai from LIBYA DESK™.
Contacts: EDITOR@LIBYADESK.COM | WWW.LIBYADESK.COM | @LIBYADESK

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Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

Thomas Volk
Director
Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean
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Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.
Regional Program Political Dialogue South Mediterranean
Le Prestige Business Center, No. F.0.1
Rue du lac Windermere, Les Berges du Lac
1053 Tunis, Tunisia
Telefon: +216 70 029 460
E-Mail: info.poldimed@kas.de



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