



**INSIDE
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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.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.** The divisions between government and parliament, as well as between the House of Representatives (HoR) and the High State Council (HCS), have only worsened without any initiative able to bring concord ahead of elections.
- 2.** In a highly politicised move, the HoR withdrew confidence from the Government of National Unity (GNU), leading to a standoff between the Prime Minister and House Speaker.
- 3.** Both the HoR and the HCS have brought their own electoral laws on the table at a time when Libya urgently needs consensus on this issue.
- 4.** The electoral scene remains subdued due to lacking a unanimously approved electoral law, but politicians are moving ahead with inter-factional outreach and are hoping to elicit interest from a highly motivated electorate.
- 5.** While some high profile prisoners have been released, national reconciliation remains on the backburner and the international community finds itself with no means to change course on Libya.
- 6.** The ambitious projects unveiled by the GNU and its Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dabaiba do not conform with the country's political reality nor with electoral deadlines.
- 7.** Despite the uncertainty surrounding Libya's upcoming political transition, Libyan oil officials continue to promote foreign investment in the country's energy sector.
- 8.** In the current transitional context, both foreign and domestic figures with influence over the security sector are likely to have an impact on militia dynamics and cross-regional alliances.
- 9.** Positive statements from Turkey and Russia, as well as promising declarations from Libyan officials, point to the possibility of foreign mercenaries gradually leaving the country following progress at the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC).
- 10.** Under-the-table deal-making and public standoffs between politicians are likely to exacerbate ahead of elections as each side of the political divide will entrench itself further into its positions.

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LIBYA'S INTERIM GOVERNMENT LOSES PARLIAMENTARY CONFIDENCE

In a highly politicised move, the HoR withdrew confidence from the Government of National Unity (GNU), leading to a standoff between the Prime Minister and House Speaker.

On 21 September, the HoR announced it had rescinded its vote of confidence given on 10 March 2021 to the GNU. The motion of no-confidence was presented eight days earlier by 45 MPs hailing mainly from eastern Libya and belonging to the anti-Dabaiba bloc. These MPs echoed House Speaker Agila Saleh's prior comments that the GNU had deviated from its main tasks of unifying state institutions, implementing national reconciliation and preparing for elections. They also argued that the Prime Minister had become a party to the conflict by neglecting the eastern Libyan region of Cyrenaica whilst splurging on business deals with foreign countries, particularly Turkey, to win international favor. It is the same group of MPs that had frontally rebuked the Prime Minister during a parliamentary questioning session on 7 September in Tobruk, which brought government-parliament relations to a new low.

The no-confidence vote itself did not reach consensus within the HoR as about 40 MPs later questioned the closed-doors session and remained doubtful as to which threshold was required to form a quorum to remove confidence from the GNU. According to the HoR Spokesman Abdullah Blehiq, 89 MPs voted for the motion out of a total of 113 – but this was refuted by several MPs who claimed there should have been at least 120 votes for the motion to pass. Others even claimed the session had been fraudulent and that the voting process had not been respected. Moreover, the advisory body known as the HCS opposed the vote by claiming it was a unilateral move by the HoR which went against the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement – a legal reading which is itself rejected by Agila Saleh who believes the HoR is the only body able to legislate on the matter.

Overall, the no-confidence vote did not garner widespread support throughout Libya. Indeed, the reasons behind the vote are many but inconclusive: some MPs claim that they were seeking to prevent the Prime Minister or other figures such as Presidential Council (PC) Head Mohamed Menfi or HCS Chairman Khaled al-Mishri from postponing elections by two years, while others claimed their vote would block any long-term contracts between the GNU and foreign countries so as to avoid the depletion of government funds by a non-democratically elected government. Those critical of the vote rightly pointed at the political motivations of eastern MPs,

who sought to punish the PM for failing to placate Libyan National Army (LNA) Commander Khalifa Haftar by not appointing one of his close allies as Defence Minister. In fact, the vote reflects a political turn for Libya, one in which Agila Saleh returns to his pre-2021 opposition leader role and seeks to control the situation to benefit himself and his allies. In turn, the vote has galvanised the western Libyan factions with many political Islamists, mayors, and citizens protesting the HoR's actions. Demonstrations were also recorded against the HoR in central and western Libya, thus showing that Libyans are wary of the potential instability that could ensue following the no-confidence vote.

This situation has given the opportunity for Dabaiba to openly strike back with no qualms and turn public opinion against the HoR. The PM has been apt at tapping into the frustrations and hopes of Libyans by projecting himself as an agent for development and democracy who can counter the many Libyan spoilers that have fueled war and economic stagnation in the last ten years. Whilst reminding that not all MPs were to blame, the PM lambasted the HoR for being ineffective and blocking the path to Libya's development, describing the no-confidence vote as "not legal, not constitutional and not moral." The LNA was indirectly targeted for favouring "war and destruction" in contrast with the GNU which, according to the PM, champions growth, peace and youth. Overall, the rift between the GNU and parts of the HoR was always political. Of course, technical issues over distribution and budgeting took centre stage as some MPs genuinely feared unrestricted and arbitrary government spending over a short period of time, but each side has used this issue to bolster their own camp. By highlighting state expenditure going above 50bn LYD (€9.3bn) and the GNU's unwillingness to amend the draft budget, Dabaiba's political opponents wanted to paint the PM as an autocrat in waiting. Conversely, by claiming the HoR postponed his ambitious development budget for over four months, Dabaiba wanted to differentiate himself from his predecessors and paint the HoR as the sole obstacle to Libya's development.

As seen in the [fourteenth issue of Inside Libya](#), Dabaiba recently doubled down on promises and initiatives to increase his popularity. Beyond investing a lot to raise his profile on social media, the PM introduced in early September a marriage support programme giving 40,000 LYD (€7,500) to spouses in a country where more than four million people are below 30 years of age. Dabaiba also recently took steps to advance decentralisation and unveiled the "Reviving Life" development plan, which should create/maintain roads, schools, hospitals, clinics, 300+ water wells, as well as power and desalination plants throughout Libya. These two promises were

also an opportunity for him to acknowledge that eastern and southern Libya lacked good public service compared to the rest of the country. The PM also took the time to remind that he was not opposed to the National Oil Corporation (NOC) moving offices from Tripoli to Benghazi and that he was open to travelling extensively in Cyrenaica. According to him, he has been prevented from doing so due to the LNA's uncooperative attitude. Despite his proactiveness, the motives behind such actions and statements are not lost to Libyan and international stakeholders alike, many of whom believe that the PM is simply attempting to use his post to win over support and weaken his opponents in order to prolong his stay in power beyond 24 December 2021.

LIBYA'S FUTURE IN THE BALANCE BETWEEN COMPETING ELECTORAL LAWS AND FAILING POLITICIANS

Both the House of Representatives and High Council of State have brought their own electoral laws on the table at a time when Libya urgently needs consensus on this issue.

On 8 September, the HoR issued a presidential electoral law consisting of 11 articles outlining the prerogatives of the Libyan executive and the path to take for presidential elections. Four days later, the law was presented to the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), while 24 political blocs and organisations voiced their support for this “historic achievement.” The law not only gives broad powers to the president but also maintains large prerogatives for the HoR to supervise the executive. Interestingly, it also forbids candidates who hold another passport from being elected – thus raising the question of whether Khalifa Haftar might renounce his U.S. citizenship to become a candidate and escape the many lawsuits against him in the United States. Additionally, the law does not hold that the president must garner a majority in each of the three Libyan unofficial regions as the country would serve as a single constituency – which begs the question as to whether Agila Saleh has given up on quota systems that would have helped the lesser inhabited regions of Fezzan and Cyrenaica in the ballots.

Nonetheless, the presidential electoral law failed to create consensus as several MPs felt bypassed by its opaque issuance. Likewise, the HCS rejected it on the basis of not having been consulted despite opposing claims from HoR sources. Moreover, the law would enable anyone who resigned from sovereign or military positions three months prior to the December 24 election deadline to become a candidate, and to regain their position should they

lose in the electoral contest. This is seen as an attempt by Saleh to enable his own candidacy, as well as that of Haftar, and ensure both would be able to fall back on their feet should they not be elected. In turn, the HCS proposed its own electoral law consisting of 63 articles, with paragraphs outlining that holders of sovereign or military positions should have resigned two years prior to becoming candidates in elections. This electoral law was brought forward by HCS Chairman Khalid al-Mishri as an alternative to holding a referendum on the draft constitution, which remains a favoured option for several political figures – many of whom would like the referendum to cause the postponement of general elections planned on 24 December. The Constitution Drafting Assembly recently filed a lawsuit before the Tripoli Court of Appeals against the heads of the executive and legislative bodies in addition to HNEC for failing to hold such a referendum.

With less than 100 days before the elections, there is no conceivable scenario in which both a referendum and general elections can happen. The continuing stalemate over the elections' legal basis is a direct result of politicking between Libyan factions, with both the HCS and HoR presenting electoral laws that would benefit their political allies. As former Special Representative of the Secretary General Ghassan Salamé pointedly observed, “the problem in Libya is not a question of electoral law but a question of political will,” and some analysts have pointed it is becoming more probable for the UN to impose an electoral law by basing itself on past Security Council resolutions. In the meantime, MPs not aligned with Agila Saleh have agreed to meet the HCS in Morocco to reach consensus on the electoral law without any hard deadline. Considering that similar meetings have taken place in the last several months, a consensus is highly unlikely in time for the smooth holding of general elections and some figures believe such a meeting is meant to further postpone progress by giving the international community the illusion that national institutions are working to mend their differences.

POLITICAL FIGURES GEAR UP FOR UPCOMING ELECTIONS

The electoral scene remains subdued due to lacking an electoral law, but politicians are moving ahead with inter-factional outreach and are hoping to elicit interest from a highly motivated electorate.

As seen with the breakdown of relations between Abdulhamid Dabaiba and MPs aligned with Agila Saleh, electoral stakes further motivate politicking and risk exacerbating instability in the country. Taking the example of Deputy

Minister of Oil and Gas Refat al-Abbar who left office in late September, it is likely that more personalities from the GNU will start resigning before the holding of elections - particularly those more beholden to the eastern bloc such as al-Abbar. Equally important, key figures such as Agila Saleh and Khalifa Haftar are believed to have left their positions to respect the rule that candidates must have left their sovereign or military position 90 days before elections. Much secrecy remains as to whether Haftar and Saleh will compete in elections, especially considering that Saleh has taken a hit in opinion polls following his non-confidence vote and that Haftar would take a dangerous gamble by side-stepping from the LNA at a moment when the force is reorganising itself. The Commander knows he is controversial and might not have made up his mind yet as to whether he should directly run or support a candidate close to him. Likewise, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi was meant to make an announcement regarding his candidacy which did not go through as he might also be in the finetuning stage of his electoral strategy.

The electoral scene is active but remains subdued due to the lack of an electoral law and growing uncertainty over the holding of elections. Whilst Libyans have shown their enthusiasm for elections, particularly the youth which makes up the majority of new registered voters, it seems that the link between voters and political parties remains feeble. Political parties are lacking members and are on the lookout for donors; they do not seem able to focus on their political programme nor to create meaningful alliances. This is partly explained by the fact that key individuals remain the primary focus of Libya's political landscape. In this context, the social support base or political experience of a candidate is more important than their programme and the creation of a coalition is meant to be tactical and short-term to win the ballots. This does not remove from the fact that key figures are trying to reach out to one another, going above regional and political blocs as they know they cannot win over Libya as a single constituency by only sticking with their own political formation. As such, we have seen former Minister of Interior Fathi Bashagha reach out to Greens in Cairo, former Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeq has sent an open letter to Agila Saleh to propose a unified initiative to ensure elections take place, and Aref al-Nayed's party Ihya Libya has managed to build a coalition with 20 other political parties.

The current political scene also opens up new opportunities for forgotten stakeholders such as the Greens and royalists. For instance, Prince Mohammed al-Hassan al-Ridha al-Senussi addressed Libyans by arguing that a constitutional monarchy would be the only system capable of ensuring stability and security in Libya. Whilst royalists remain a fringe and cannot explain how they would prevent the constitutional monarchy's parliament

from being the locus of politicking in Libya, Greens are poised for a political comeback - particularly in parliament. Although they remain highly divided, some formations such as Mustafa Zaidi's Libyan Population National Movement created in 2012 are likely to present themselves as capable statesmen and lawmakers to Libyans, and enjoy much influence within Libya's next parliament. Other factions such as political Islamists are in a more difficult position, with the Justice and Construction Party facing divisions and the overall Muslim Brotherhood movement experiencing setbacks in Tunisia and Morocco. Another important point in Libya's current political scene is also the fear shared across the board that a presidential system can only lead to a one-man show in Libya, thus further motivating factions looking to postpone at least presidential elections.

In the current context, each political stakeholder hails himself as supporting general elections and blames others for being spoilers. This is the case of Abdulhamid Dabaiba who has himself a hard time disproving accusations of wanting to remain in position after December 2021. In fact, the PM wants to craft the image of an individual close to the people, outside from the political clique which has controlled Libya since 2011, and able to circumvent bureaucratic hurdles to quickly bring policies beneficial to Libyans. The PM could tighten ranks with political Islamists, who fear to lose big in coming elections, and argue for an extension of the interim period in addition to spinning the HoR's non-confidence vote as a power grab attempt. Such links between Dabaiba and political Islamists already exist, particularly through Minister of State for Communications and Political Affairs Walid al-Lafi. Alternatively, the PM still has good chances of being elected president should he become a candidate and let Libyans decide whether they want someone perceived as effective but not very regarding of democratic procedures.

In all this, one thing remains certain: there is no technical reason for not holding Libyan elections this December. There are 2,865,624 registered voters, 43% of whom are women and 10,712 who registered abroad this month. The majority of Libyans support elections being held in December so as to bring more legitimacy and stability to their political system, and they are increasingly vocal of their views on both social media and public places.

NATIONAL RECONCILIATION AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY PLANS FOR ELECTIONS

While some high profile prisoners have been released, national reconciliation remains on the backburner and the international community finds itself with no means to change course on Libya.

The post-revolutionary realities of Libya are slowly shifting as seen with the rise in profile of several Gaddafi-era figures in the past year. In September, the release of Saadi al-Gaddafi, the son of the late Libyan strongman, and his personal secretary Ahmed Ramdan shows that political taboos surrounding former regime figures are slowly eroding. Saadi al-Gaddafi had remained in prison despite being acquitted in 2018 for the alleged murder of the late Libyan football player Bashir al-Rayani in 2005. The Minister of Justice, Halima Ibrahim, also informed that a lawsuit was brought by the Gaddafi family asking the Attorney General to reveal the circumstances of Muammar and Mutassim Gaddafi's death – about the same time when al-Samoud Brigade chief Salah Badi said he was ready to reveal where his forces had buried the former Libyan leader. With electoral stakes in sight, it is understandable that key figures such as Dabaiba have made efforts to appeal to the Green factions and use the release of a few high-profile prisoners as important national reconciliation steps.

The LNA also released eight civilians in early September, as well as a former Minister of Interior Omar al-Sinki, who had been arbitrarily held in the Qarnada prison for more than four years. Nonetheless, calls by civil society and tribal leaders to have a systematic release of political prisoners are still left unheard as the latest governmental statistics show that 5,043 prisoners are still in pre-trial detention across the country. The early September announcement by PC Head Mohamed al-Menfi launching the Comprehensive National Reconciliation in Libya does not seem serious enough to bring progress in the coming months, especially considering that al-Menfi had more or less made a similar announcement in July. The PC also hopes to hold an international conference in October to activate its Libya Stability Initiative to implement the Berlin Conference's conclusions – an objective that some observers say could be misleading as the PC might want to use the conference to convince international partners that elections are not feasible by the end of the year.

In this context, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya's (UNSMIL) role has been rather subdued. The Mission has opposed the HoR's non-confidence vote and reminded that electoral laws should be reached by consensus between the HoR and HCS, but it has not brought any initiative to calm current tensions and make December general elections a fixed event in Libya's political agenda. Instead, UNSMIL has itself had leadership issues linked to its double tiered system having Special Envoy Ján Kubiš operating from Geneva and Mission Coordinator Raisedon Zenenga working from Tripoli. The weakness from the Mission does not remove from the fact that the UN is absolutely key in ensuring that Libya's political roadmap reaches fruition, since any other stakeholder will have its own agenda to pursue or fail to reach

an international consensus over Libya. For instance, the United Kingdom has at times defended the view that Libyans should first go through parliamentary elections, then undergo a constitutional referendum, before electing at a later stage their president. This option would clearly violate the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) roadmap and benefit a particular political faction in Libya. Other countries are preparing international conferences, such as France on 12 November, to safeguard the political roadmap.

As seen in Geneva between 15-17 September with the gathering of 70 Libyan legal and political personalities under the guise of the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (HD), it is rather clear for observers that a failure to hold general elections – meaning both presidential and parliamentary elections on 24 December – would lead to dangerous consequences for Libya. UNSMIL itself has recognised that imperfect general elections would be better than no general elections since foregoing this agreed-upon vote would likely force several factions to rebel and destabilise the country again.

WHY THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT IS BETTING ON PROMISES IT CANNOT HOLD

The promising projects unveiled by the Government of National Unity do not conform with the country's political reality nor with electoral deadlines.

With his “Reviving Libya” plan, Dabaiba continues to promise the establishment of a competent Libyan developmental state able to maximise the country’s tremendous hydrocarbon wealth to finance reconstruction and economic diversification over the next decade. For instance, the government gave the green light to the Organisation for the Development of Administrative Centres (ODAC) to reactivate 70 stalled projects in eastern Libya, worth a cumulative 460 million LYD (€86.5m) in fields such as health, education, sports and social affairs. The Ministry of Oil and Gas as well as the Ministry of Industry and Minerals also unveiled a plan to construct an industrial complex between Mizda and Bani Walid, in western Libya, to provide key building materials like cement, moulds and heat insulators to create domestic supplies for the country’s reconstruction. The Minister of the Economy also expressed that Libya’s current GDP of €35bn could reach its potential of €170bn through development projects – without giving more detail apart from the need to develop the agricultural sector and improve food security, optimise the disbursement of subsidies, stabilise the local currency, create free economic zones, and strive to strengthen the private sector which according to him represented 71% of the economy in 1999, but

now only accounts for 40% of Libya's GDP due to wars and a centralised system of governance.

Trade figures from the first half of 2021 are highly positive compared to the previous war-ridden year as commerce with Turkey increased by 65% and trade with Italy grew by 88%. Despite fears that Egyptian firms might postpone investment deals in Libya, a consortium gathering Orascom Construction, Rowad Modern Engineering, and Hassam Allam Holding signed several multi-billion dollar MoUs with ODAC, the Housing and Infrastructure Board (HIB), and the General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) to build or maintain roads, bridges, power and water desalination plants. It has also been decided that the Ministry of Labour from both countries will be linked through a platform called Wafed to create more synergies and better prepare for the expected inflow of up to 3 million Egyptian workers who might work in Libya over the next few years for the many vocational jobs that Libyan graduates eschew. According to some GNU estimates, Egypt will remain a prime partner in reconstruction and could snatch up to 70% of contracts in Libya. Importantly, Libya is also continuing to be more linked to the world as flights have started again with Malta after 10 years of hiatus, the Tunisian Intercity Transport Company has resumed its service between Tunis and Tripoli, Cairo is once again reachable by plane from Libya and there are plans for cruises to link Misrata to Izmir.

Despite these positive developments, there is still too little progress regarding the unification of state institutions, particularly the Central Bank of Libya (CBL). The two branches met on 9 September to brief the Economic Working Group and observer countries of their progress and it is believed that technical teams might be appointed soon to carry out the unification. However, considering the upcoming elections and the likely reshuffling of cards in Libya, such a step is unlikely. The CBL is still not listening to recommendations from the Libyan Economic Experts Committee to remove severe restrictions on the sale and distribution of foreign currency to commercial banks. The economic outlook therefore remains uncertain. Many of the policies unveiled by Dabaiba are unlikely to see the light of the day due to stringent political timelines, and the same might be true of foreign deals for reconstruction. Without the HoR's confidence, the GNU is now technically unable to sign long-term contracts with foreign countries and the next Libyan government is likely to review many of the GNU's foreign deals if the Dabaiba camp is defeated in December.

LIBYA'S ENERGY SECTOR SEEKS TO DRAW MORE INVESTMENTS

Despite the uncertainty surrounding Libya's upcoming political transition, Libyan oil officials continue to promote foreign investment in Libya's energy sector.

In the field of energy, the GNU has also adopted a positive tone and struck an important deal worth €100 million with Britain's Petrofac for the Phase-1 delivery of the Zalaf-Erawan oil field-project. The NOC officially opened the Murzuq Oil Services Limited company in London, which is meant to be its overseas arm, drive deals with British companies and help Libyan oil companies improve their business processes and corporate performance. The Minister of Oil and Gas, Mohamed Aoun, attended the 15th Sustainable Energy Conference in Italy where he invited foreign companies, particularly American international oil corporations (IOCs), to further consider Libya as an investment destination – thus paving the way for the Libya Energy & Economic Summit planned for 22-23 November in Tripoli. PM Dabaiba is also believed to have recently dispatched an envoy to the U.S. so as to garner interest from IOCs, including companies which formerly worked in Libya such as Marathon Oil or Occidental Petroleum. Similar to Gulf countries, Libyan oil officials know they need to double down on their hydrocarbon reserves in the next 15 years not only because this is the only tangible way the country can find a strong path to growth but also because the Middle East and North Africa region is likely to become the last bastion of oil production, thus making Libya a potentially attractive destination for US IOCs which struggle with decarbonisation and developing their own renewable energy departments.

During the conference, Aoun also argued that Libya was stabilising and that big shutdowns were highly unlikely in the future. However, this reading can be misleading considering the upcoming political transition, current tensions pitting the Ministry of Oil and Gas with the NOC, and insufficient funds to maintain the entirety of Libya's oil infrastructure in addition to paying the national companies' debts worth 2.5bn LYD (€470m). For instance, pipeline leaks in al-Waha cut Libya's production by 40,000bpd in early September and momentary demonstrations in es-Sidra and Ras Lanuf led to a 24-hours stoppage at those oil exporting ports. Albeit PM Dabaiba has put a stop to the dispute between Mohamed Aoun and NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanallah, the race to reform relations of power and hierarchies between the Ministry of Oil and Gas and the NOC will continue to create tensions in the near future. Until now, Mustafa Sanallah has been politically savvy enough to remain in his position and hold enough influence over local stakeholders to ensure

the continuation of oil output. However, he will remain the target of several groups who would want to see a new board of directors at the NOC.

UPCOMING POLITICAL TRANSITION MOTIVATES CLASHES BETWEEN MILITIAS

In the current transitional context, both foreign and domestic figures influential in the security sector are likely to influence militia dynamics and cross-regional alliances.

Despite claims by GNU officials that Libya is stabilising, the security landscape throughout the country remains volatile. In western Libya, electoral stakes and the upcoming political transition are adding to traditional turf wars between militias. This situation creates dangerous risks for activists and proponents of general elections. On 26 September, the head of Libya's National Youth League (NYL) Emad al-Harathi was abducted by unknown armed men after calling for a demonstration in front of the HNEC offices to call for the timely holding of general elections on 24 December. Clashes between armed groups affiliated to Libya's executive authority also fall within the political divide between pro-election supporters and status-quo actors. On 3 September, intense clashes happened between the 444 Combat Brigade affiliated with the GNU's Chief of Staff and Ghnewa al-Kikli's Stabilisation Support Apparatus (SSA) affiliated with the PC. The SSA sought to take control of the al-Takbali Camp in southern Tripoli but were cut short by the 444 Brigade. According to the Tripoli Military Region's Major General Abdel Basset Marwan, the SSA's actions were meant to correct the course of the 444 Brigade, which has not complied with military orders from the PC – a body that is technically the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces – including having an unauthorised banking account with 10 million LYD (€1.8m) or having unapproved members.

In the current transitional context, both foreign and domestic figures influential in the security sector are likely to influence militia dynamics and cross-regional alliances. There can be no tangible pathway to Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (DDR) or Security Sector Reform (SSR) in such conditions since stakeholders think armed forces might come handy at some point in the next chapter of Libya's political life. Of course, there are various DDR initiatives, often backed by foreign countries like France's Moutaalleg Training Programme to re-integrate 100 former militias in Zintan, but what is lacking in the country is the political will to raise the state above irregular armed forces. This political will, or at least the public appeal this might bring, could surface through figures like Khalifa Haftar and Fathi Bashagha who

might establish cross-regional alliances and strike down on unruly militias. In regards to foreign countries, Turkey is no longer the only player influencing Tripoli armed forces as some western and Arab states are supporting non-Turkey aligned groups in an attempt to break off Ankara's unchallenged position in the Libyan capital.

POTENTIAL DEPARTURE OF FOREIGN MERCENARIES BECOMES MORE LIKELY

Positive statements from Turkey and Russia as well as promising statements from Libya point to the possibility of foreign mercenaries gradually leaving the country following progress at the 5+5 Joint Military Commission.

In a rather tense domestic situation with a high likelihood of a return to conflict should general elections not be held as expected by 24 December, there seems to be a glimpse of hope regarding the departure of foreign soldiers and mercenaries. Whilst it is far too early for foreign stakeholders to have agreed upon a detailed withdrawal schedule, statements from both Turkey and Russia, as well as reports on military movements within Libya imply that at least parts of the 20,000 foreign mercenaries present in Libya according to UN data are starting to leave the country. In fact, Turkey is continuing its policy of detente with Arab countries and held a meeting with the Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister in Ankara on 7-8 September to discuss its willingness to withdraw Turkish servicemen and Turkish-backed foreign mercenaries from Libya. It is likely this issue was also raised between Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin during their meeting in Sochi on 29 September.

On 28 September, the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) held a meeting with officers from the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in the presence of PM Dabaiba, U.S. Envoy to Libya Richard Norland and AFRICOM Commander Stephen Townsend. This was the JMC's first ever meeting in Tripoli during which practical ways to remove foreign mercenaries were discussed, which has led many to think that the JMC may have already conceived a plan to remove mercenaries in a process that would be gradual and only be fully achieved after the holding of elections. This view was reflected by the Russian side, with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov saying that elections should not be a factor in the withdrawal's timeline and that such withdrawal should be done in a way that does not disrupt the current balance of power between Libyan factions. Of note, it is in many parts due to this balance of power that the Libyan conflict stopped in the summer of 2020 and that no conflict has yet erupted despite heightened rhetoric over the last months. Russia has also

voiced its support for the total withdrawal of foreign forces from Libya but has made sure to use its veto at the Security Council to change draft texts that explicitly pointed the finger at its direct role behind the presence of the Wagner paramilitary group in Libya. There have been reports that some of these Russian and Syrian fighters have started to leave Libya by the end of the month, and it is also believed that recent Turkish flights to the military airbases of al-Watiya and Misrata were meant to transport several Syrian mercenaries out of Libya. It has been months since such mercenaries have criticised their worsening conditions as Turkey has had to cut their salary and it might be that Ankara has become more anxious at the risk of mutiny from these mercenaries. Overall, it remains to be seen whether these flights out of Libya are definitive or whether fresh reinforcements will come in the near future.

Finally, the issues of the southern border with Chad and overall security in regards to the Sahel region are continuing to represent a threat for Libya and could be an avenue of east-west cooperation for the country. In mid-September the LNA's Tariq-bin-Ziyad brigade destroyed near Murzuq a convoy belonging to the Chadian opposition known as the Fighters of the Front for Change and Concord (FACT), who either operate from or cross into Libya's south to fight the government in N'djamena and benefit from smuggling revenue. Following complaints by the Council of Elders and Notables of Murzuq that the executive authority had remained silent regarding the clashes and FACT's continued presence in Libya, Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush met with the Chief of Staff of the Border Guard, Director of Military Intelligence Department, and Commander of the Operations Authority of the Libyan Army to form a technical committee tasked with developing a national action plan in regards to accelerating the Quartet agreement's implementation. This agreement inked in 2018 should bring Libya together with Chad, Niger and Sudan to secure the border regions of these four countries. Najla Mangoush should also be at the helm of the Libya Stabilisation conference in October which will look into the military track of Libya's political process, and seek to push forward the issues of border security, DDR, SSR, unification of militaries as well as withdrawal of foreign troops.

CONCLUSION & FORECASTS

Since the House of Representatives' no-confidence vote, the Government of National Unity is supposed to have been downgraded to a caretaker government unable to strike foreign deals and reminded of its sole responsibility to ferry the country to general elections on 24 December. Considering Abulhamid Dabaiba's character and the conflict pitting him against the HoR, he is unlikely to follow suit with the latter's actions. In fact, the no-confidence vote may have given him ammunition to further consider the postponement of elections or raised his public profile among Libyans. This situation adds a further layer of complexity to the current quagmire linked to the lack of a legal basis ahead of elections. With less than 90 days to go before the 24 December, Libya finds itself with no definite list of candidates, no electoral law, unknown armed men going after pro-elections activists and continuing debates over whether elections should be general or only parliamentary. This is exactly the situation that spoilers want Libya to be in, as they believe this complexity will persuade the international community to accept a postponement of general elections despite unquestionable data by the UN and others that shows that a large majority of Libyans want to go to the ballot box in December.

For external observers, it is easy to fall prey to the positive comments emitted by all sides of the Libyan political spectrum in support of general elections on 24 December. Both the Dabaiba camp and the Saleh bloc have pointed the finger at each other for being spoilers seeking to disrupt elections. Both have portrayed themselves as the obstacle to spoilers' plans and claimed to be supporters of general elections. However, it is true that the Saleh bloc has more to win from such an electoral contest compared to Dabaiba who is already well-entrenched in power and would be expected to lose his position (currently, per the political roadmap, he is not allowed to be a candidate). This is why accusations of him wanting to postpone presidential elections are not abating. In this context, the international community seems to give credence to above mentioned comments and could fall victim to naivete. Libya fatigue is also another culprit behind the international community's inability to find proper solutions meant to ensure general elections by the end of the year. Known initiatives, such as the French conference of 12 November, might come too late and fail to avert a scenario in which status quo stakeholders manage to deviate from the political roadmap.

UNSMIL has also been ineffective in this context and permanent Security Council members, particularly Russia, have started to voice their discontent regarding its leadership and created obstacles to the renewal of the Mis-

sion's mandate. Ultimately, it is likely that the issue of reforming UNSMIL's two-tiered system might spring up in the coming months so as to bring renewed impetus to the Mission and allow it to be more effective in ensuring that the political roadmap is respected in Libya. In the meantime, there remains the possibility for the Security Council to impose an electoral law on Libya should neither the HoR or HCS agree on which of their drafts becomes law. So far, national institutions have shown they have no political will to find a solution to the lack of a legal basis for elections. Instead, both the HoR and HCS have used their drafting prerogatives to advance their own interests in their respective electoral law drafts. For instance, Agila Saleh has made sure the terms of the HoR's electoral law allows him to be a candidate whilst the HCS' electoral law has made sure to cut MPs' time in office to only one term of four years and to propose a bicameral parliament which would cut down the HoR's influence in politics.

Whilst the political track is currently deadlocked and the unification of the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) remains uncertain, there seems to be significant progress on the military track with the 5+5 JMC potentially arriving at a plan for the removal of foreign troops and mercenaries. If proven true, this gradual withdrawal would be a double-edged sword as on the one hand, it would signal a detente between Turkey, Russia and Egypt but on the other hand it could also impact the balance of power between local forces. More details should come in October with the Libyan Stabilisation conference in Libya which should bring key international partners together to discuss key military issues.

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