

Libya weekly security analysis preview

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Executive Summary

- This week saw a significant shift in the stance of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) regarding Libya's political future. During Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Abdoulaye Bathily's regular update to the UN Security Council on August 22, he stated that "a unified government, agreed upon by the major players, is imperative for leading the country to elections." This change in position lends newfound support to the 6+6 Roadmap, a plan initially proposed by the House of Representatives (HoR) and the High Council of State (HCS).
- This week's Russian diplomatic mission to Benghazi could be interpreted as a watershed moment, not only in Moscow's ongoing relationship with the Libyan National Army (LNA) but also in its recalibration of control over the Wagner Group following the sudden death of Yevgeny Prigozhin. The Deputy Minister of Defence's visit to the eastern region of Libya underscores the Kremlin's intent to both consolidate and perhaps broaden its influence, amidst a period of heightened scrutiny of Russia's foreign paramilitary engagements.
- The LNA launched a military operation aimed at securing the country's southern borders towards the end of the week. This came after Chadian rebel group FACT announced their ceasefire with the Chadian Government was over following several incidents. The LNA acted after the Chadian Government began encroaching on Libyan territory and comes at the same time as the Russian Defence Ministry delegation visited Benghazi.
- The LNA has also continued operations in the Abu Hadi area of Sirte as it seeks to suppress Eid al-Fateh celebrations on September 01. This has also affected other Gadhafi tribal-dominated neighbourhoods of Sirte as well as some areas of Sabha. This activity could intensify over the coming days unless a deal is struck. Non-LNA-controlled areas are likely to see pockets of celebrations around September 01 with green flags, fireworks and small gatherings which may be mobile. This may also include Tunis.

Outlook

Short Term Outlook

- A shift by key international actors towards the establishment of a new unified government to take the country to elections is a pivotal moment. It simultaneously allows the 6+6 Roadmap to make tangible progress while significantly undermining the GNU. The establishment of a new government, with international backing, will ensure heightened short-term instability in Libya as military, security and political actors position themselves for upcoming change. This will be most acutely felt in the capital with various armed actors beginning to manoeuvre triggering rising tensions.
- The ongoing crisis in Sudan coupled with the coup in Niger raises the risk of a destabilisation of Libya's southern borders. The LNA and Wagner Group have reportedly been supporting the Rapid Support Force (RSF) in Sudan while Wagner Group has offered its services to the coup leaders in Niger. A possible military intervention in Niger would risk a wider destabilisation of the Sahel which would have a significant negative impact on Libya's security in the longer term.

Medium to Long Term Outlook

- Political tensions remain on an uphill trajectory with key Libyan stakeholders becoming entrenched in positions which will likely lead to confrontation in the longer term. The international community remains steadfast in its refusal to endorse the only existing political track due to its lack of a broad consensus and inclusion of a new interim government. However, there has been no viable alternative proffered.
- Elections continue to be seen as the remedy to Libya's political crisis, but conditions conducive towards the holding of credible elections remain elusive and Libyan elites largely remain apathetic to the idea. Elections remain unlikely to occur in 2023 with the most likely scenario seeing a continuation of the transitional period.
- Both East and Western Libya are seeing efforts by the Haftar and Dbeibah clans respectively to consolidate their power while both remain engaged in bilateral talks, talks which may still impact the trajectory of the political process. Haftar is arguably having more success in his endeavors at present with Dbeibah contending with a fracturing support base.

- While the political process continues to falter, armed groups are exploiting the situation to increase their strength, influence and power across Libya which will likely have a longer-term negative impact on the political situation. These groups will continue to benefit from political divisions and remain key influencers of the political process in the country.
- The resurgence of Jihadist Salafism in Tripolitania remains a potential source of destabilisation with indications of renewed tensions between adherents and those of Madkhali Salafism. This competition between the opposing ideologies seeps into the political as well as the military spaces and is expected to slowly intensify as the Jihadist Salafi adherents gain strength in the region. This could increasingly become a defining factor for various groups involved in the political and military spaces whilst simultaneously resulting in crackdowns on the civil space.
- Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Libya (ISIL-L) is growing its membership. After reorganizing its existing manpower which includes foreign fighters, into six cells, the group is adding to its numbers locally by infiltrating local tribes. The group is also looking to develop its weapons capability and recruiting scientists “capable of handling biological materials or handling sophisticated technological devices to use in terrorist attacks.” Increasing levels of instability in the Sahel, including the coup in Niger on July 26, could present opportunities for terrorist groups to further strengthen their presence and capabilities in the region, including Libya, in the longer term.

Threat Matrix

Region	Political	Terrorism	Militancy	Crime	Kidnap	Civil Unrest
Tripolitania	High	Moderate	High-Extreme	High	High	High
Tripoli	High	Moderate	High-Extreme	High	High	High
Cyrenaica	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Benghazi	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Fezzan	High	High	High	High	High	Low-Moderate
Sabha	High	Moderate	High	High	High	Moderate

Threat Scale
Minimal
Low
Moderate
High
Extreme

Weekly Assessment

UNSMIL shifts position towards supporting creation of a new unified government

This week saw a significant shift in the stance of UNSMIL regarding Libya's political future. During SRSG Abdoulaye Bathily's regular update to the UN Security Council on August 22, he stated that “a unified government, agreed upon by the major players, is imperative for leading the country to elections.” This change in position lends newfound support to the 6+6 Roadmap, a plan initially proposed by the HoR and the HCS.

Up until now, the international community (with the exception of Egypt) and UNSMIL have been sceptical about the idea of forming a new unified government. Their hesitance was rooted in concerns that this would merely extend the transitional period without significant change, echoing the creation of the GNU in 2021.

The international community's prior resistance had allowed the GNU to strengthen its foothold over the years. However, the tide seems to be turning against it. With UNSMIL's revised position, momentum appears to be building for the 6+6 Roadmap.

Moscow signals closer relations with eastern Libya

This week's Russian diplomatic mission to Benghazi could be interpreted as a watershed moment, not only in Moscow's ongoing relationship with the LNA but also in its recalibration of control over Wagner Group following the sudden death of Yevgeny Prigozhin. The Deputy Minister of Defence's visit to the eastern region of Libya underscores the Kremlin's intent to both consolidate and perhaps broaden its influence, amidst a period of heightened scrutiny of Russia's foreign paramilitary engagements.

Deputy Minister of Defence Yunus-bek Yevkurov's landing in Benghazi on August 22 was planned as part of a high-level discussion on counter-terrorism cooperation and joint strategies. However, it took on new weight the next day when news broke of Prigozhin's fatal plane crash. This comes at a time when Prigozhin had evolved from being a Kremlin asset to a quasi-autonomous actor with his own geopolitical agenda—a dynamic that reached its zenith with his recent coup attempt against Moscow in June.

LNA launches operation in Southern Libya

This week, the LNA initiated a military operation aimed at securing Libya's southern borders. The action follows the termination of a domestic ceasefire by the Chadian rebel group FACT and reported territorial encroachments by the Chadian government. These developments coincided with the Russian Defense Ministry delegation's visit to Benghazi, indicating a complex interplay of local and international actors impacting LNA decision-making.

Libya's southern borders have long been a source of concern. These anxieties have heightened recently, following the coup in Niger, the ongoing war in Sudan and now, renewed tensions in Chad.

While concerns remain over the Sudanese and Nigerien borders, at present it is the border with Chad which is proving to be the most destabilising after FACT abandoned their ceasefire this week with the Chadian Government.

Acronym List

AQ - Al-Qaeda
BDB – Benghazi Defense Brigade (Al Qaeda-aligned – AAS and RSCB associated/umbrella group)
CBL – Central Bank of Libya
CESF - Constitution and Election Support Force
CNI – Critical National Infrastructure
DACOCT - Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism (SDF)
DDR - Disarmament, demobilising and reintegration
GASO – General Administration of Security Operations
GACS – General Administration of Central Support
GECOL – General Electricity Company of Libya
GMMR – Great Man-made River
GNA – Government of National Accord (2016)
GNC – General National Congress (2012)
GNS – Government of National Stability (2021)
GNU – Government of National Unity (2021)
GTUC - Greater Tripoli Union Council (Tripoli militias and others, established in June 2020)
HCS – High Council of State (Tripoli-based)
HNEC – High National Elections Commission
HoR – House of Representatives (Tobruk-based)
IDF – Indirect Fire (mortars/rockets)
IDP - Internally Displaced Persons
IED - Improvised Explosive Device
IOC - International Oil Company
IS - Islamic State
JMC – Joint Military Commission
LIFG – Libyan Islamic Fighting Group
LNA – Libyan National Army
LPA – Libyan Political Agreement (2015)
LPDF - Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (2020)
LROR - Libyan Revolutionary Operations Room
MoD - Ministry of Defense
MoF - Ministry of Finance
MoFA - Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MoI - Ministry of Interior
MoJ - Ministry of Justice
MoO - Ministry of Oil
MoT - Ministry of Transportation
NFDK - No Further Details Known
NGO - Non-Governmental Organisation (aid/charity)
NOC – National Oil Company
NSG – National Salvation Government (GNC)
NSTR - Nothing Significant To Report
P3+2 – France, Germany, Italy – UK, US
PC – Presidency Council
PG – Presidential Guard
PFG - Petroleum Facilities Guard
RPG - Rocket Propelled Grenade
RTA - Road Traffic Accident
TIP – Tripoli International Airport
SSA – Stability Support Authority
SAF - Small Arms Fire
SDF – Rada Deterrence Force/ Special Deterrence Force/ Rada
UXO - Unexploded Ordnance

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