
LIBYA SEMI-BESPOKE MONITORING REPORT

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HIGH POLITICS AND THE ALLIANCE STRUCTURE

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GNA GAINS TEMPORARY AND RISKY ADVANTAGE OVER RIVALS IN TRIPOLI

On 13 March, clashes between rival militias broke out in the west of Tripoli and quickly escalated into a military campaign by pro-Government of National Accord (GNA) militias to oust mainly Misratan anti-GNA militias from their bases in the capital on 14 and 15 March. They succeeded in ousting coup leader Khalifa al-Ghwell from the city. (*See Conflict Section for more details on the clashes.*) This has at least temporarily increased the GNA's political standing and bargaining power, leading some GNA supporters within the House of Representatives (HoR) to advocate for relocating the House to Tripoli, while some anti-GNA militias in western Libya appear to have shifted their support to the GNA.

To avert further military escalation, a joint agreement was signed by some (but not all) pro-GNA Misratan and Tripoli militias late on 15 March. Senior officials from the municipal councils of both cities attended and security provision for key locations in the capital were distributed among them. One of the attendees for Misrata was Hasan Shaba, who is seen by many Misratan militias as a former collaborator with Gaddafi and who is therefore a highly controversial figure.

This joint offensive against broadly anti-GNA militias was led by an alliance of Tripoli's most powerful GNA-aligned militias. However, it is unlikely that the GNA itself took the decision to attack but rather is trying to extract as much political advantage from the developments as possible. Yet, by sanctioning control of the capital to be divided up between militias as a means to de-escalate the conflict, the GNA is ceding greater power to the militias and making its own position more precarious in the long run. The political winds are very likely to shift again in the short term and this could leave the GNA in an even riskier position than before.

MISRATAN RIFTS DEEPEN BETWEEN ANTI AND PRO GNA FACTIONS

The wave of anti-Misratan sentiment being expressed by Tripoli residents on social media and through protests last week has left Misratan forces in Tripoli feeling that they were the real target of the attack by pro-GNA forces. On 17 March, protestors in Tripoli's Martyrs Square openly denounced Misrata, protested against the presence of militias in Tripoli and some even called for Khalifa Haftar to take control of the police and army. Unknown gunmen opened fire on the protestors, causing

them to disperse. No casualties were reported. Haftar himself threatened the militias in the capital and promised to 'liberate' Tripoli. This led to claims by anti-GNA Misratans that the GNA is a plot by Tripoli militias to install Haftar in the capital by scapegoating Misrata.

As a result, pro-GNA militias found themselves in the difficult position of being perceived by their former allies as Haftar's agents, forcing them to issue a statement on 17 March denouncing Haftar and his Operation Dignity. On 18 March, Misrata's senior politicians in the House of Representatives (HoR) and High State Council (HSC) said they were suspending relations with the Presidential Council (PC) until it corrects the situation. A twenty-four hour deadline was given on 20 March for the Misrata Local Council to resign. Misratan politicians also called on the Misrata Local Council to prepare for elections and called for Misratan unity.

On 19 March, local militias reportedly stormed the GNA's Abu Setta compound next to Tripoli port and apparently pressured PM Fayez al-Serraj to issue a televised statement condemning the Libyan National Army's (LNA) mutilation of dead jihadist fighters in Benghazi (*see below for more details*) and muting its condemnation of the attacks against the anti-militia protestors in Tripoli. Reports about this incident are unclear and have not been independently confirmed.

The situation is currently highly fluid and volatile. Misrata cannot successfully fight both the GNA and Haftar, and may not be able to take on either of those forces if Misrata itself remains divided. Therefore, much will depend on whether Haftar and the LNA use their recent momentum in the Oil Crescent to push further west, and whether the anti-Misrata rhetoric and attacks in Tripoli are dialed back and negotiations are able to take place between the Misratan and Tripoli militias.

INTERNATIONAL LIBYA QUARTET FORMED IN CAIRO

On 18 March, the League of Arab States (LAS), the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) held a meeting in Cairo to discuss the situation in Libya. The four organisations decided to establish a Quartet to coordinate their efforts and in a statement they 'reiterated their commitment to the sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Libya and its institutions under the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in Skhirat.' The Quartet also condemned the recent fighting in the Oil Crescent. At the meeting, UN envoy to Libya Martin Kobler claimed that 70 percent of Libyans support the Skhirat agreement and congratulated the Presidential Council (PC) for negotiating last week's ceasefire in Tripoli.

Arab League chief Ahmed Abul Gheit said "We agreed on supporting the Presidential Council in its efforts to exert security control in the capital, including the implementation of the truce agreement". Egypt's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Hegazy also met with Kobler on 19 March to discuss the situation in Libya. Hegazy asserted the importance of all political entities in Libya reaching a peace treaty, adding that this agreement should be based on preserving Libya's unity and stability.

This international meeting is part of Egypt's ongoing efforts to broker a political power sharing deal between rival Libyan factions. Although key international organizations and countries continue to pay lip service to the LPA and the political dialogue process, a viable peace deal

appears more elusive than ever in the short term as conflict and hostilities remain at boiling point in Libya and the balance of power on the ground appears as precarious as ever.

SERRAJ REQUESTS EQUIPMENT TO HELP WITH MIGRATION

On 20 March, Prime Minister Fayed al-Serraj attended a meeting in Rome between interior ministers from the central Mediterranean to discuss efforts to curb migration from Libya. Aid agencies are reporting a sharp uptick in the numbers of migrants making the dangerous crossing as weather conditions improve and the security situation in Libya deteriorates. According to Italy's *Corriere della Sera*, the Government of National Accord (GNA) has requested 800 million Euros worth of equipment to help patrol its coast and territorial waters, including radars, boats, helicopters and all-terrain vehicles.

The issue of migration from Libyan shores is very likely to continue being a key area of concern for European nations, yet it is a low concern for most Libyan actors given the scale of the other political, economic and military problems that the country currently faces. Furthermore, the authority, legitimacy and power of the GNA remains limited and fragile therefore any contribution of equipment is unlikely to be effective and could easily make the situation far worse for migrants.

CONFLICT

- **GNA-aligned militias seize Rixos from Ghwell and drive anti-GNA militias to outskirts of Tripoli (p.3)**
- **Misratan rifts threaten to tip balance in favour of anti-GNA hardliners (p.4)**
- **LNA seize Oil Crescent from BDB (p.4)**
- **LNA exhumation of jihadist corpses sparks widespread condemnation (p.5)**
- **LNA launches offensive near Sebha (p.5)**
- **LNA completely 'liberates' Ganfuda for the final time (p.6)**

WESTERN LIBYA

GNA-ALIGNED MILITIAS SEIZE RIXOS FROM GHWELL AND DRIVE ANTI-GNA MILITIAS TO OUTSKIRTS OF TRIPOLI

Tensions between militias aligned with the Government of National Accord (GNA) and anti-GNA militias loyal to the former Prime Minister Khalifa al-Ghwell in Tripoli escalated into intense clashes using heavy weaponry on 13 and 14 March over control of Hay al-Andalus, Gergarish and Hadba in western and central Tripoli. This resulted in some of the heaviest shelling the capital has witnessed since 2014. GNA-affiliated militias, including the powerful Tripoli militias led by Haithem al-Tajouri, Abdurraouf Kara and Abdulghani Kikli aka Ghinewa as well as the Misratan Halbous and Mahjoob militias, joined forces to evict anti-GNA militias from key positions in the city.

On 15 March, pro-GNA militias seized the Rixos Presidential Palaces, which Ghwell's forces had seized in October 2016 from the High State Council. Pro-GNA militias also attacked the Hadba prison on 15 March, which is controlled by Islamist factions, but did not manage to take it. Anti-GNA forces

were driven back to bases in Salaheddin and Airport road in south Tripoli where they are currently re-organising their forces. Al-Ghwell was injured in the fighting and transported back to Misrata (his hometown) for treatment. A fragile ceasefire has held since the evening of 15 March. On 18 March, al-Ghwell warned he would launch a large counter operation to take back the capital, saying that his legitimate government will retake all the premises from the illegitimate GNA.

Although the latest conflict and displacement of military forces in the capital has helped the GNA bolster its position in the city, this advantage is likely to be fragile and temporary. A counteroffensive by anti GNA forces against Tripoli militias nominally supporting the GNA is possible in the coming days. In the short term, the GNA may be able to retain its position and strengthen its alliances with Tripoli and Misratan militias, keeping the anti-GNA forces at bay. However, it is as likely that the drivers of conflict between different factions will continue to increase, leading to escalated conflict in Tripoli.

MISRATAN RIFTS THREATEN TO TIP BALANCE IN FAVOUR OF ANTI-GNA HARDLINERS

The successful assault by pro-GNA militias against anti-GNA militias in Tripoli last week has fuelled rifts once more between pro and anti-GNA supporters from Misrata. On 18 March, the Misrata Local Council, the main actor responsible for coordinating security measures among the city's powerful stakeholders, came under attack from protestors, and there is a growing momentum inside the city to remove the council. On 19 March, a Misratan radio station was stormed by protestors and militias closed the Dafniya checkpoint on the road between Misrata and Tripoli.

Fast-paced developments on the ground will dictate if Misrata will tip towards a more anti-GNA position, or retain its supportive position for the GNA and the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). A new round of conflict between Tripoli and anti-GNA Misratan forces in the capital may well drag in other pro-GNA Misratan forces. Likewise, an attack by Haftar on vital locations for Misrata in Jufra, Temenhint or Sirte may also push Misrata towards a more anti-GNA position. However, if the momentum of these conflicts dies down due to new negotiations, then Misrata is likely to retain its broadly pro-GNA, pro-LPA position.

OIL CRESCENT & SIRTE

LNA SEIZE OIL CRESCENT FROM BDB

The balance of powers in the Oil Crescent made a significant shift again last week in favour of the Libyan National Army (LNA), after a large counter offensive by LNA forces powered westwards on 14 March, successfully retaking Ras Lanuf and Sidra oil ports from the Benghazi Defence Brigades (BDB). The BDB had managed to take and control these ports for 11 days. The LNA advanced all the way to the 50km checkpoint east of Sirte, where the GNA's Misratan-led al-Bunyan al-Marsus (BM) forces are based. The LNA retook the Sidra and Ras Lanuf oil ports without intense fighting taking place or significant damage being sustained. This was partly because the BDB forces withdrew from their positions as the LNA advanced.

The LNA has regained the military advantage in the Oil Crescent, however it doesn't appear that the BDB has been defeated but rather temporarily driven back. Although the LNA has a stronger military force than the BDB and will likely focus on fortifying its control of the area it has retaken,

its influence in the Oil Crescent remains fragile and the BDB may yet anticipate an opportunity to catch the LNA off guard or re-attack the Oil Crescent.

EASTERN LIBYA

LNA COMPLETELY 'LIBERATES' GANFUDA FOR THE FINAL TIME

On 18 March, the Libyan National Army (LNA) announced they had 'liberated' the '12 Flats' area in Ganfuda, in south-west Benghazi. Despite the LNA declaring the whole of Ganfuda had been liberated two months ago, LNA fighters have continued to fight a war of attrition against an enclave of jihadist fighters in the 12 Flats area. Reports indicate that 7 LNA fighters and 43 jihadist fighters were killed in the final assault, including Ansar al-Sharia commanders Fawzi al-Faydi and Salem Shatwan. On 18 March, an LNA Mig-21 fighter plane crashed in Benghazi but the pilot ejected unharmed. There are conflicting reports about whether it was shot down or suffered a mechanical fault. The Mig 21 was reportedly launching a strike against jihadist fighters in the Sabri area at the time.

According to the LNA, the only remaining jihadist forces in Benghazi are now in Sabri and Souq al-Hout areas, in the city's central district adjacent to the port. On 17 March, there were reports that heavy airstrikes and shelling had already started in these areas. On 19 March, local LNA sources reported that Benghazi port is now under LNA control and is being used as a staging point from which to launch operations against the remaining jihadists.

Although the LNA declared victory in Ganfuda prematurely, it does now appear that they have taken full control of the area now. It may be that the LNA forces were boosted by their victory in the Oil Crescent and were able to use this to their advantage for a final assault. The Sabri and Souq al-Hout area is likely to be the scene of major conflict in the short term as jihadists fight against the LNA to maintain control.

LNA EXHUMATION OF JIHADIST CORPSES SPARKS WIDESPREAD CONDEMNATION

On 18 March, Libyan National Army (LNA) spokesman Ahmed al-Mismari said the LNA had found a mass grave of jihadist fighters, including the corpse of former Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) leader Jamal Makhzoum. The BRSC has confirmed Makhzoum was killed in Ganfuda. A video was widely shared on social media appearing to show the decomposing body of Makhzoum strapped to the front of a vehicle, then being paraded around by LNA fighters. Other photographs show the corpses of jihadist fighters, which also appear to have been exhumed, with LNA fighters posing and taking selfies with the bodies. Another video which has been circulated shows footage of a man, allegedly identified as LNA Colonel Mahmoud Warfali, executing three kneeling prisoners

The exhumation was condemned by the Libyan Nation Commission for Human Rights (LNCHR) as a 'heinous' war crime. On 20 March, UN envoy to Libya Martin Kobler and the UK ambassador to Libya Peter Millet both condemned the mutilation of corpses and urged all parties to respect international law. On 20 March, Mismari said that cases of abuse and murder of prisoners were being referred to the military police under the LNA.

The mutilation of corpses and apparent execution of prisoners carried out by LNA fighters has sparked widespread condemnation within Libya. However, the incident is unlikely to seriously

damage the LNA's reputation among its supporters as the actions will be blamed on a few individuals, while it will only ramp up hatred levels among the LNA's opponents. The incidents also highlight that despite calling itself the 'Libyan National Army', these fighters still lack the basic discipline of soldiers and are apparently unconcerned that there will be repercussions given these incidents were filmed and photographed.

SOUTHERN LIBYA

LNA LAUNCHES OFFENSIVE NEAR SEBHA

On 20 March, Libyan National Army (LNA) forces in southern Libya launched an offensive against Teminhint airbase near Sebha, where the Government of National Accord (GNA) affiliated Misratan Third Forces are based. The road from Jufra to Sebha has reportedly been blocked. Significantly, the LNA force includes the 166 brigade, a military unit commanded by Masoud Ben Jaddou who is a member of the powerful Awlad Suliman tribe in Sebha.

Fighting took place between the LNA and Misratan forces back in December 2016 as the LNA attempted to take control of key airbases following a thwarted attack against the LNA's positions in the Oil Crescent launched from Jufra. The hostilities eventually fizzled out, although many of the local tribes called for the Misratans to leave the south completely.

It appears the LNA is repeating the same tactics as it did in December. The LNA is not strong in the south-west region, but its efforts to take Teminhint and other strategic points may be bolstered by support from the 166 brigade as well as the current anti-Misratan sentiment in western Libya. If this offensive succeeds in pushing Misratan forces out of the base it could be damaging to the GNA-Misratan alliance with tribes in southern Libya, increasing the LNA's leverage in the area.

LOCAL SECURITY ANALYSIS WITH A FOCUS ON KEY INFRASTRUCTURE AND OIL

- Tensions between Zuwaran & Tunisian coastguards as migrant smuggling peaks (p.6)
- Oil and gas production from Mellitah disrupted by blockades (p.7)
- Oil exports expected to resume from Sidra and Ras Lanuf (p.7)
- Oil exports continue from Brega and Zueitina (p.7)
- Vessel boarded and detained by LNA (p.8)

WESTERN LIBYA

TENSIONS BETWEEN ZUWARAN & TUNISIAN COASTGUARDS AS MIGRANT SMUGGLING PEAKS

Tensions between the Zuwaran coastguard and their Tunisian counterparts are reportedly rising, following a number of recent incidents where Zuwarans have detained Tunisian fishermen and their boats. Tunisian sources report that Zuwaran fishermen and coastguard units threatened to kidnap Tunisian boats after the Tunisian coastguard detained a vessel (JENAN) from Zuwara on 19 March near Sfax in Tunisia. On 19 March, the Italian coastguard said that they had rescued around 3000 migrants off the coast of Libya in just one day as large numbers take advantage of favourable weather to make the dangerous crossing.

Smugglers in western Libya appear able to act with impunity against vessels from which they wish to extract payment or want to detain for political purposes. Local militia rivalries and armed disputes over migrant smuggling are likely to increase as it is the peak spring season for migrants crossing the Mediterranean.

OIL AND GAS PRODUCTION FROM MELLITAH DISRUPTED BY BLOCKADES

Oil and gas production from Mellitah complex was disrupted temporarily last week due to industrial action by militias securing feeder oil and gas fields and pipelines. The Zintani security force at al-Wafa field blockaded the field's airstrip on 12 March, but lifted their blockade on 15 March after an intervention by elders from Zintan. On 14 March, the al-Wafa pipeline was also blockaded near Nalut (in the Nafusa Mountains) by local militias, reportedly in solidarity with a faction involved in clashes in Tripoli. However, the blockade only lasted for a few hours, with the pipeline reopening early on 15 March. **If wages are not paid and the liquidity issues in the banking sector affecting staff are not addressed, then protests and blockades are likely to reoccur in the short-medium term.**

SIRTE & OIL CRESCENT

OIL EXPORTS EXPECTED TO RESUME FROM SIDRA AND RAS LANUF

National Oil Corporation (NOC) Chairman Mustafa Sanallah said that the NOC is coordinating with the Libyan National Army (LNA) to restart oil exports from Sidra and Ras Lanuf within a few days after two weeks of suspension. The two export terminals suffered limited damage in the latest bout of fighting, despite sustained LNA airstrikes against Benghazi Defence Brigades (BDB) positions near these ports. The Ras Lanuf Crisis Committee announced that all facilities including the refinery, petrochemical plants and residential complex were undamaged. Sanallah said that Libya's total oil production is expected to increase to 800,000 barrels per day within one month. WAHA oil field, which was temporarily closed last week, restarted production on 18 March, supplying Sidra with 25,000bpd of crude, down from 80,000bpd before the recent clashes.

Libya's oil industry had become confused on 14 March after the House of Representatives (HoR) and the eastern-based NOC both declared Sanallah and the Tripoli-based NOC as illegitimate and announced the cancellation of the deal which had united the two different NOCs, stoking fears that the LNA would shut down the ports or hand them over to eastern authorities. However, the LNA's apparent handover of the ports to the Tripoli NOC has made this posturing inconsequential at least for now.

Threats to Sidra and Ras Lanuf port are now reduced but there is a moderate risk of another counteroffensive by withdrawing BDB forces or locals hostile to the LNA carrying out reprisal actions.

OIL EXPORTS CONTINUE FROM BREGA AND ZUEITINA

On 15 March, 600,000 barrels of crude were exported from Brega on board AMALTHEA destined for Italy. On 14 March, the port also received a large shipment of equipment for oil service companies

working in the Oil Crescent aboard MV SUN DISPATCHER. On 16 March, 630,000 barrels of Amina crude were loaded from Zuetina aboard M/T ABLIANI destined for Italy.

EASTERN LIBYA

VESSEL BOARDED AND DETAINED BY LNA

On 18 March, a Lebanese freighter MV EQUALITY was stopped and boarded by the LNA coastguard around 25 nm off the coast of eastern Libya, then detained at Ras al-Hilal, west of Derna. The vessel had been travelling from al-Khoms. **Seizures of commercial boats will also likely continue in these waters, with vessels travelling to or from western Libya likely to be at the highest risk as the LNA try to clamp down on supplies and fighters being brought in to reinforce the jihadist coalition in the east.**

OUTLOOK

Libya's political process remains effectively suspended despite international and regional efforts to bridge the gap between the rival power centres currently struggling for control of Libya; the pro-GNA forces in western Libya, anti-GNA forces in eastern Libya, and the hardline anti-GNA and anti-LNA forces who are currently whipping up support in Misrata for a counteroffensive against the capital. The implications of these latest developments mean that the political conflict is now being managed directly on the ground via military conflict, with offensive being followed by counter offensive, where no one faction is strong enough to control the whole country. Within this political and military tug of war, power, influence and alliances can shift rapidly, changing who controls a given region overnight and therefore creating uncertainty and instability. If these dynamics continue unchecked, then the political process will likely remain suspended and Libya could be headed for prolonged conflict.