



The Second Libyan Civil War

Security developments during 2016-2017

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Sammanfattning

Denna studie analyserar den libyska konfliktens huvudsakliga utveckling och fredsinitiativ under perioden 2016-2017. En betoning läggs på den interna dynamiken, med referens till huvudkonflikten såväl som säkerhetsutvecklingar i södra Libyen. Studien finner att den militära utvecklingen pekar på ökade våldsnivåer och fortsatta konfrontationer samt hot från islamistiska grupper, varför vägen mot stabilitet kan komma att ta många år. Säkerhetsutmaningarna i landet och i regionen är omfattande och hindren till fred är fortsatt stora.

Nyckelord: Libyen, Nordafrika, jihadism, väpnade grupperingar, inbördeskrig, säkerhetspolitik, Mellanöstern, Tripoli, Tobruk, Afrika, ISIS, GNA, LNA, EUBAM, UNSMIL.

Abstract

This report analyses key developments of the Libyan conflict during the period 2016-2017. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis, ongoing peace efforts are examined. Reference is made to the internal dynamic of the main conflict as well as security developments in southern Libya. The report finds that the dynamic of increasing violence across Libya points to continued confrontations and threats from Islamist armed groups. In the end, Libya has many political hurdles and security challenges to overcome before a more durable situation of stability can be achieved, a slow development that can take years.

Key words: Libya, North Africa, Jihadism, armed movements, civil war, security policy, Middle East, Tripoli, Tobruk, Africa, ISIS, GNA, LNA, EUBAM, UNSMIL.

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Preface

This report was commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Defence and has been produced within the African security project at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). However, this report does not represent the view of the Swedish government nor of FOI, but the views of the authors.

FOI is an assignment-based state agency under the Ministry of Defence. It undertakes assignments from a wide range of actors in the public sector, including the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Swedish Armed Forces, the United Nations, and numerous academic institutions.

This report builds on previous FOI studies on Libya, for example: *A Fratricidal Libya and its Second Civil War: Harvesting Decades of Qaddafi's 'Divide and Rule'* (Eriksson 2015); *Setting the Stage for the Military Intervention in Libya – Decisions Made and Their Implications for the EU and NATO* (Lindström and Zetterlund 2012); and *International missions in Libya 2011 – an analysis of the military campaign against Qaddafi's regime* (Lindvall and Forsman 2012, in Swedish).

Given the ongoing security developments in the country, in North Africa, and the Sahel, we anticipate that there will be continued interest in monitoring events in Libya and the region.

Acronyms

AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
BAM	Bunyan al Marsous
CSDP	Common Security and Defence Policy
EU	European Union
EUBAM	EU Border Assistance Mission
GNA	Government of National Accord
HoR	House of Representatives
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham
LNA	Libyan National Army
LPA	Libya Political Agreement
UN	United Nations
UNSMIL	UN Support Mission in Libya

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Figure 1 Map of Libya (source: University of Texas Libraries)

1 Introduction

Military and political instability in Libya has taken different shapes and forms since its eruption with the Arab Spring in 2011. It is generally difficult to measure how far-reaching a conflict is in terms of its destruction of the quality of governance and social fabric. There are indicators, however, that suggest an intensification of conflict in Libya.

The level of violence in Libya remains high compared to other places of instability in North Africa and the Sahel.¹ According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, there were 2,087 deaths in 2011 as a result of conflict in Libya during the Arab Spring, also known as the first Libyan civil war. Violence thereafter dropped during a shorter period of time until the second Libyan civil war erupted in 2014, when it reached 1,457 deaths. Since then, the level of violence has continued to increase. In 2016, the Libyan conflict resulted in 2,223 deaths, suggesting a continuous intensification since 2014.²

In addition to the level of violence, Libya is ranked 23rd out of 178, in the Failed States Index, indicating how far the country is from being a functioning state.³ By another measurement, Libya is placed 170th out of 174 in the Corruption Perception Index.⁴ Both poor rankings suggest that deep structural challenges currently exist at state level.

If the Libyan conflict continues to intensify, interdependencies between political parties and armed parties risk evolving. This situation feeds a militarisation of political life and further deepens the divide between citizens and the state.

In its extension, the conflict in Libya strains regional security, as the national security vacuum allows armed groups to operate in and out of the country. The conflict has spill-over effects along all of Libya's borders. The transnational character of the conflict suggests that the international community will have to deal with this regional instability for many years to come.

1.1 Purpose and sources

The purpose of this report is to analyse developments of the Libyan conflict during the period 2016-2017. This includes identifying events that have contributed to the increase in violence and developments in conflict resolution efforts during the selected period.

¹ Allansson, Marie, Erik Melander and Lotta Themnér, Organized violence, 1989-2016. *Journal of Peace Research*. vol. 54 no. 4 (2017).

² The Uppsala Conflict Data Program. Department of Peace and Conflict Research. Uppsala University.

³ Fund for Peace. Failed States Index. 2017.

⁴ Transparency International. Corruption Perceptions Index. 2017.

The analysis builds on previous FOI studies on the Libyan conflict, why the time period has been limited to include only recent conflict developments during 2016-2017. The previous studies offers more in-depth analyses of the different parties to the conflict, thus this report focuses on key events during the selected period.⁵

Both empirical and secondary data are used in the analysis. A key element of the data collection process was a field visit to Tunis in September 2017, where semi-structured interviews were conducted with Libya experts of different organisations.⁶

1.2 Outline of the report

Chapter 2 of this report identifies key conflict developments, with a focus on the balance of power between the main conflict parties, the threat from Islamist armed groups, the influence of militarised communities in southern Libya, and changes in trafficking routes. Chapter 3 investigates the peace process and the role played by intergovernmental organisations. Chapter 4 presents some concluding remarks.

⁵ For a conflict overview, see Eriksson, Mikael. A Fratricidal Libya: Making Sense of a Conflict Complex. *Journal Small Wars & Insurgencies*. vol. 27 no. 5 (2016).

⁶ Interviews have been conducted under anonymity. The interviews do not qualify as official views of the organisations involved, but constitute personal opinions. All interpretations rest with the authors. A list of interviews is provided in an annex to the report.

2 Conflict developments

This chapter provides an overview of recent key developments of the Libyan conflict. The first part analyses contributing factors of an evolving shift in the power balance between the conflict parties. The second part briefly examines the current status of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in Libya. The third part assesses the role of militarised ethnic communities in the larger conflict theatre. The fourth part analyses the effects of the Libyan conflict and regional counter-trafficking initiatives on migration.

Libya remains a country engulfed in a complex web of armed conflicts. Numerous stakeholders and perpetrators of violence contribute to the breakdown of the state. This chapter provides an overview of key conflict developments, 2016-2017.

2.1 Shifts in the balance of power

At the forefront of the main conflict in Libya remains the incompatibility between the Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, under Prime Minister Sarraj, and the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk, under the influence of Chairman Aguila Saleh Issa and General Haftar. These parties are commonly described as the main conflict parties, fighting each other with numerous local supporters. There are many incompatibilities between the main conflict parties, but in general the Libyan conflict remains a struggle for government.⁷

The HoR is supported by the so-called nationalist Dignity coalition, backed by the Libyan National Army (LNA) and various domestic military units, communal military councils, and political parties with an anti-Islamist agenda (although it is commonly known that these have Islamists within their own organisations). The LNA is by far the most important domestic military actor in eastern Libya.⁸

2.1.1 LNA takes territorial control

Experts estimate that during the second half of 2017, the LNA and its allies controlled about 70 per cent of Libyan territory.⁹ Compared to the situation in 2016, when the GNA exercised control over an area the same size, the balance of power has shifted dramatically.¹⁰ Pockets of violence characterised military confrontations between the conflict parties for most of 2017. These confrontations

⁷ Fitzgerald, Mary and Toaldo, Mattie. A quick guide to Libya's main players. *European Council on Foreign Relations*. 2017.

⁸ Pack, Jason, Karinm Mezran and Mohamed Eljarh. Libya's Faustian Bargains: Breaking the Appeasement Cycle. *The Atlantic Council*. 2014.

⁹ Interview, Tunis, 18 September 2017.

¹⁰ Ibid.

were intermittent rather than part of any clear offensive. The development is characterised by frequent stalemates and deadlocks.¹¹

In December 2017, military confrontations west of Tripoli (Wershefana district) were at the centre of the Libyan conflict. Armed groups, i.e. militarised communal councils, loyal to the LNA, had positioned themselves in the outskirts of Tripoli.¹² Fighting took place between militias aligned with the GNA and the LNA.¹³

The control of Tripoli is key to the Libyan conflict. Not only is it symbolically important, but the side that controls the capital is also likely to control the money moving in and out of the country. There is accordingly a risk of a final push on Tripoli by the LNA and affiliated forces. On the other hand, negotiating a way into Tripoli, by striking deals with local militias, appears cheaper for the LNA than pursuing a military option.

2.1.2 Misrata loses its grip

The main fighting parties are to a large extent local militia configurations. Militias operate either independently or in larger coalitions depending on political and economic interests. The majority of militias are located along the coast, not least in the Tripoli area.¹⁴

The two main militia configurations in Libya are the Misrata militias, loyal to the GNA, and the Zintan militias, operating on the side of the LNA. Misrata has proven to be the strongest militia throughout the conflict. However, they suffered severe losses in 2016, in confrontations against the LNA as well as against ISIS, in Sirte and Derna. Consequentially, Misrata lost much of its previous influence over the GNA in Tripoli.¹⁵

Since 2015, the GNA has not been able to exercise executive functions without the consent of local militias. The main influential militias include the Salafi, the Special Deterrence Force (or Rada), and the Tajouri militias. These armed groups are profiting from the political chaos in Tripoli while lacking specific military objectives. Furthermore, an ambivalent stance towards the GNA is prevalent

¹¹ The Anti-ISIS Coalition. May 30, 2017. *Eye on ISIS in Libya*. 2017-05-30.

¹² Maghreb Confidential. *Africa Intelligence*. no. 1269 November 9 (2017).

¹³ The Daily Star of Lebanon. Nearly 30 bodies found with torture marks after Tripoli clashes. 2017-11-13.

¹⁴ In western Libya, many of the militias supportive of the GNA are paid through government programs. See Interview, Tunis, 18 September 2017.

¹⁵ While usually referred to as one group, the Misrata militias constitute a coalition of different forces. Some of these are loyal to influential business families, such as the Bunyan al Marsous (BAM) coalition that was instrumental in fighting ISIS in 2016 (BAM includes the 604 Battalion and other local armed groups). Other important groups from Misrata include the Halbous and the Mahjoub brigades. See Fitzgerald and Toaldo. A quick guide to Libya's main players; BBC World News. Guide to key Libyan militias. 2016-01-11.

among their leaderships.¹⁶ Dealings between the GNA and militia leaders in Tripoli are quintessential for government to function. Accordingly, the GNA must provide economic compensation in order to execute its political power. This symbiosis is compromising for the government because militias often engage in illegal practices, such as human trafficking.¹⁷

By the end of 2017, Tripoli was a complex scene of rivalries between different GNA-affiliated militias. The shift in power balance can partly be attributed to developments during May, when the Misrata militias were ousted from Tripoli by the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade and the Abu Salim Brigade. Overnight, Misrata lost much of its previous control over the city. Up until then, the Misrata militias had traditionally been the informal powerbase of the GNA vis-à-vis the LNA and the Zintan militias.¹⁸

The Misrata militias are still among the most experienced armed groups in Libya. They are also well-financed, supported as they are by wealthy local elites. According to one interviewee, Misrata is seeking ways to re-enter Tripoli with backing from the allied 301 Brigade (about 1500 man strong) that is positioned in the south of the city.¹⁹

2.2 ISIS remains a threat

There are numerous Islamist armed groups in Libya. Some of these aspire to local influence, while others seek national or transnational influence. Key actors are al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al-Sharia, the Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council, the Ajdabiya Revolutionaries Shura Council, and the Derna Mujahidin Shura Council. These groups seek to establish sharia law in certain cities and villages across Libya, or to gain influence over political agendas. While some support political candidates, others represent the interests of external actors or religious scholars.²⁰

One of the most important groups affecting the conflict dynamic in Libya is ISIS. The group established control in the coastal cities of Sirte and Derna in 2014. With ISIS penetrating the Libyan security vacuum, conflict parties temporarily set aside other interests in order to oust the group.²¹

Due to mounting military pressure, ISIS was successfully ousted from Derna and Sirte in 2016. In November, ISIS leader al-Baghdadi called on the group to re-

¹⁶ Fitzgerald and Toaldo. A quick guide to Libya's main players.

¹⁷ Interview, Tunis, 19 September 2017.

¹⁸ The ousting of the Misrata militias from Tripoli was supported by the newly-formed Fakhri Libya political coalition. See The Anti-ISIS Coalition. May 30, 2017.

¹⁹ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

²⁰ Fitzgerald and Toaldo. A quick guide to Libya's main players.

²¹ Ibid.

establish control in Libya, as the situation for the group in Iraq and Syria deteriorated.²²

In early 2017, ISIS presence was reported as being pockets of fighters outside Sebratah and south of Sirte. However, its previous strength of 3000 was downgraded to approximately 500.^{23 24} A future relocation of ISIS elements to southern Libya could, however, prove difficult, as they will have to compete for influence with local communities and other armed groups.

Reports of ISIS presence signal a shift in the group's operational approach in Libya. Rather than moving in large convoys, thus displaying strength and location, ISIS elements have switched to a modus based on infiltration, low-key presence, and hit-and-run tactics.²⁵ Furthermore, ISIS has managed to redirect financial support from Ansar al-Sharia to itself. This funding could provide ISIS with much needed leverage towards communities and other armed groups in southern Libya.²⁶

ISIS will likely continue to pose a security challenge in Libya, which attracts external actor interests in the country. In general, Islamist armed groups not only pose a future challenge for stability in Libya, but in North Africa and the Sahel at large.

2.3 Developments in the south

While the main armed conflict was concentrated along Libya's Mediterranean coast in 2016-2017, local conflicts over political control and fixed economic streams were unfolding further south. These conflicts drew in conflict complexes from the Sahel, adding to the level of violence. On the other hand, some of these conflicts have ended in separate peace deals.

2.3.1 Local peace deals

There are three main ethnic groups in southern Libya: the Toubou, the Tuareg, and the Arab. Each are divided into a plethora of different communities and ethnic constellations, made up of clans, families, villages, etc., forming economic

²² Pack, Jason, Rhiannon Smith and, Karim Mezran. The origins and evolution of ISIS in Libya. *Atlantic Council*. 2017, 42.

²³ Despite the return of ISIS to Libya, its strengths and numbers must be treated carefully. In the violence-conducive environment, it is difficult to verify who ISIS actually is, and, in general, what actors are labelling armed groups with jihadist names (e.g. ISIS, al-Qaida, Anshar al-Sharia); Interview, Tunis, 19 September 2017.

²⁴ Pack, Jason, Rhiannon Smith and, Karim Mezran. The origins and evolution of ISIS in Libya, 40.

²⁵ Interview, Tunis, 19 September 2017; Morajea, Hassan and Faucon, Benoit. In Libya, Islamic State Seeks Revival in Gateway to Europe. *The Wall Street Journal*. 2017-09-17.

²⁶ Maghreb Confidential. *Africa Intelligence*. no. 1269 November 19 (2017).

networks and military alliances based on common ethnic belongings.²⁷ According to the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, local armed conflicts between communities have been frequent for a long time in southern Libya.²⁸

During the Gaddafi era, local governance in southern Libya was primarily administered by community leaderships. The power vacuum that emerged post-2011 was filled by these traditional local governing structures, which formed military councils and empowered local leaderships at municipal level along ethnic lines.²⁹ The militarisation of traditional civil governance institutions has contributed to the empowerment of previously marginalised ethnic groups. However, other groups have been left out, creating local conflicts and new coalitions between militarised communities. This development has implications for the larger military dynamic.

Two local conflicts came to an end during 2016-2017. An armed conflict between Toubou and Tuareg groups in Ubari, in south-western Libya, broke out in 2015.³⁰ Toubou armed elements joined forces with LNA-affiliated militias from Zintan that were tasked with guarding the strategically important oil fields around Ubari. As a result, Misrata militias under the GNA joined forces with the Tuareg in order to seize the oil fields. The conflict affected the whole of Libya economically. After forces from Misrata captured the oil fields, the LNA closed the pipeline between Ubari and the port of Zawiya on the Mediterranean coast, thereby limiting Libya's oil export capacity.³¹

Mediation efforts to build peace between Toubou and Tuareg communities around Ubari were pursued by both LNA and GNA representatives, often with the help of communal interlocutors. However, these early mediation efforts failed. A contributing factor was that both the LNA and GNA were themselves – if not parties to the conflict – instigators via proxies.³² New mediations by Qatar and Algeria, and by Italy, respectively, have met with success in 2016. Efficient mechanisms for cooperation were identified through negotiations between communal leaderships. As a result, Toubou and Tuareg communities agreed to reinstate a division of territorial control around Ubari.³³

²⁷ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

²⁸ The Uppsala Conflict Data Program.

²⁹ Cole, Peter and Mangan, Fiona. Tribe, security, justice, and peace in Libya today. *United States Institute for Peace*. 2016, 5.

³⁰ Micallef, Mark. The human conveyor belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya. *Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime*. 2017, 25-26.

³¹ Wehrey, Frederic. Insecurity and governance challenges in southern Libya. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. 2017, 7.

³² Ibid.

³³ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

Another local conflict, between Toubou and Arab communities (e.g. the Awled Suleiman, Al-Ahsawna, and Magarha), ended in 2017.³⁴ Awled Suleiman efforts to establish control over the city of Sabha met with fierce local resistance from the local Toubou community in 2012. The conflict intensified into all-out battles within and around Sabha. In order to quell the fighting, the GNA attempted a number of interventions. However, the intervening forces were pulled back due to deteriorating security in Benghazi in 2013 and in Sirte in 2016.³⁵

In late 2017, a new influx of armed groups from Chad, around Murzuq, forced Toubou and Arab communities in Sabha to a settlement. A combined communal force to repel the new threat, led by Aboubaker Abdallah Damoud, received support from Tripoli, putting both communities under GNA authority.³⁶

Since the start of the second Libyan civil war, state absence across the country, in general, and in southern Libya, in particular, has been growing, and during 2016-2017 the communal component of Libyan securitisation increased in significance. As noted by one Libya expert, “[communities] have re-emerged and reinvented their role in the public sphere since the revolution, including in the domains of justice and security provision, conflict management, and conflict resolution.”³⁷

2.3.2 Strategic coalitions

The communal networks and local conflicts in southern Libya have proven to be effective power tools for the GNA and the LNA. Often, underlying grievances (or merely the economic greed of communal leaderships) are redressed as ‘revolutionary,’ ‘Salafist,’ ‘pro-Gaddafi,’ or ‘anti-ISIS,’ in order to fit within the discourse of the larger Libyan conflict.³⁸

GNA interventions into communal conflicts via armed groups from Misrata and Benghazi have met with mixed results. If not siding directly with the parties to the conflicts in Sabha and Ubari, these government-led armed groups have nevertheless had to withdraw in order to provide for military offensives along the coast, thereby re-escalating local conflicts in southern Libya. GNA efforts to stabilise Sabha were partially motivated by the need to seize control over strategically important airfields and lines of supply (the smuggling routes) from

³⁴ Wehrey, Frederic. Insecurity and governance challenges in southern Libya, 11; Lamma, Ben. La structure tribale en Libye: facteur de fragmentation ou de cohésion? *Fondation Pour la Recherche Stratégique* (2017), 53.

³⁵ Wehrey, Frederic. Insecurity and governance challenges in southern Libya, 5-6.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Cole, Peter and Mangan, Fiona. Tribe, security, justice, and peace in Libya today, 5.

³⁸ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

the Sahel. The denying of LNA access to southern gateways into western Libya was another motivation for the intervention.³⁹

According to one interviewee, political actors are well aware of the strategic soundness of forming coalitions with militarised communities in order to seize control over peripheral territories in southern Libya. This has led the GNA and LNA to deal cautiously with the community leaderships in order to secure their support.⁴⁰ Consequently, the Libyan conflict has developed into a theatre of coalition warfare, where coherent armed forces seldom exist within the two camps.⁴¹

The influence of these communities is especially strong in terms of territorial control, which makes it difficult for both LNA and GNA armed elements to hold terrain in southern Libya.⁴²

2.4 Changes in trafficking routes

During 2016-2017, migration through Libya was affected by domestic conflict developments as well as by counter-trafficking initiatives by France and Algeria. The Libyan conflict is accordingly part of ongoing regional complexes. The illicit economy in Libya, following the breakdown of the state, has furthermore created new opportunities and dependencies for cross-border communities throughout the Sahara-Sahel.

2.4.1 French and Algerian influence

The conflict between Toubou and Tuareg communities in Ubari was partly affected by larger regional dynamics that relate to France's military intervention in the Sahel under Operation Barkhane. These communities have indirectly been pressured by French counter-trafficking operations in Niger. In particular, France's aid to Nigerien border control has hampered Toubou and Tuareg cross-border movements, thereby locking regional communities to Libyan territory.⁴³

The main south-western migratory route into Libya passes through the town of Qatrun, under Toubou control. During 2016-2017, Nigerien and French army counter-trafficking operations around the town of Agadez, in Niger, had a scattering effect on communal networks working this route, and subsequently

³⁹ Wehrey, Frederic. Insecurity and governance challenges in southern Libya.

⁴⁰ Interview, Tunis, 19 September 2017.

⁴¹ Military councils are pressured to opt for one or the other side in the political struggle, by which political actors grow more powerful. This is how the LNA managed to seize control over Jufra, by forging alliances with key councils in the region, rather than by deploying its own forces. Ibid.

⁴² Micallef, Mark. The human conveyor belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya, 25-26.

⁴³ Interview, Tunis, 20 September 2017.

forced human trafficking underground. Consequently, the actual extent of migration into Libya via Qatrun remains unclear. As communal networks managing the trafficking in humans have become clandestine, investigations of illegal migration are also made difficult.⁴⁴

Another flow of migrants is trafficked into Libya via the town of Ghat (from Algeria), under Tuareg control, and intersects Sabha before it turns north towards the Mediterranean coast.⁴⁵ This route was affected by the communal conflict around Ubari, as it isolated Ghat from the rest of the country. Algeria reinforced border control during 2016, which limited migratory flows into south-western Libya even further.⁴⁶ Both Algeria and Niger have strengthened their security presence in the border areas with Libya, following conflict and state absence in the southern peripheries. Border control has aimed at hampering illicit flows of goods and contraband, as well as stopping migration flows. These efforts have had both direct and indirect effects on Tuareg communal networks in Ghat, as well as in Ghadames, further north.⁴⁷

2.4.2 A new east-to-west route

The control of the border along eastern Libya's coast was improved during 2016-2017, leading to a redirection of migration flows from the east to the west of the country, around the city of Sabratha. The best way to reach Sabratha and surrounding areas is via southern Libya. This migration route crosses different areas of communal territorial control, not least Toubou. Because of the conflict environment, and the security vacuum that it creates, communities have gained economic influence from engaging in this inland coast-to-coast flow of migrants.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Micallef, Mark. The human conveyor belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya, 25.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 25-26.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 27-28.

⁴⁸ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

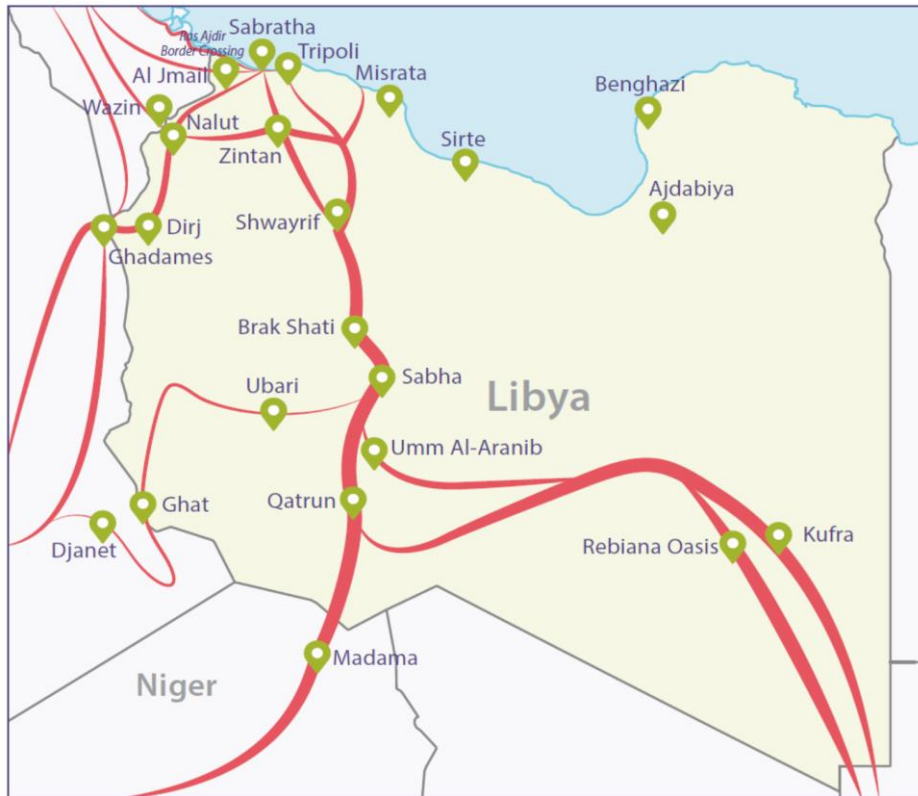


Figure 2 Main migration routes in Libya (source: Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime)

3 Peace efforts

Peace efforts in Libya are complex, given the many issues and stakeholders involved in the conflict. This chapter focuses on the two main intergovernmental organisations engaged in peace negotiations and stabilisation efforts in Libya, the UN and the European Union (EU). During 2016-2017, the UN, in its role as powerbroker, has presented a new peace plan, to be initiated by its Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). During the same period, the EU has furthered its interests in stabilising Libya through the Integrated Border Management Assistance Mission (EUBAM).

3.1 UN initiatives

The UN has been involved in numerous peace efforts in Libya since 2014. The key development during 2016-2017 was the introduction of a new UN Action Plan. UNSMIL will likely continue to be an important instrument for the empowerment of the GNA. Furthermore, the UN seeks to revisit its defence white paper in order to establish a functioning security sector.

3.1.1 A new action plan

At a high-level meeting in September 2017, the UN Special Representative for Libya, Ghassan Salamé, presented the new UN Action Plan. The new peace initiative includes a prolongation of the Libya Political Agreement (LPA), a constitutional referendum to be held in September 2018, and a general election by the end of 2018. The first stepping-stone must accordingly be to have the Higher State Council (the legislative body of the GNA) and the HoR agree on how the LPA can be amended and extended.⁴⁹

The main challenge to the UN Action Plan is the continued state of armed conflict in the country. The main parties are hesitant as to how the military dynamic will develop. Political actors in Tobruk will arguably be in no hurry to sign a peace deal as long as the LNA has the upper hand in the armed conflict.

If coming negotiations for peace do not include a wider array of conflict parties, omitted actors risk becoming spoilers of any brokered peace. The new UN plan is promising in this sense, as it could promote a more inclusionist process than previous negotiations did.

⁴⁹ United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Remarks of SRSG Ghassan Salamé to the United Nations Security Council. 2017-11-06.

3.1.2 UNSMIL

UNSMIL is an integrated political mission that supports GNA institutions and addresses structural short- and long-term challenges for state stability (control of arms flows, coordination of international humanitarian assistance, and stabilisation of post-conflict zones). Furthermore, mediation efforts are part of UNSMIL's responsibility. The current Head of Mission, Ghassan Salamé, acts as the main mediator between the conflict parties. UNSMIL headquarters has been relocated to Tunis because of continued insecurity in Tripoli.⁵⁰

The intent of UNSMIL is to focus on the selection of a new presidency and government as well as the convening of a National Conference (al-Multaqa al-Watani), expected to be held in mid-February 2018. The overall purpose is to form an inclusive dialogue process, with as many stakeholders as possible, in order to establish ownership and support for the adoption of a new National Charter for Libya.⁵¹

3.1.3 Defence white paper

A central incompatibility between the main conflict parties concerns the future Libyan national army. Both parties are keen to have their side commanding the armed forces. Between October 2012 and April 2013, the UN worked on mapping out a defence white paper on how a future Libyan national army could be organised, and how civilian oversight could be established. However, as the situation in Libya deteriorated in 2014 and the national army split into separate military structures, the project was halted.⁵²

In 2017, the UN revisited the defence white paper as part of the so-called Tripoli Security Plan. The focus will primarily be on developing the police force, the Presidential Guard, and a future regular army. The UN thereby seeks to incorporate all three security branches in one instrument.⁵³

Ongoing stabilisation efforts have more clearly brought in the security component as part of the peace package. The demobilisation of armed groups and a reintegration of militia members into a legitimate future national army are key for future stability in Libya.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview, Tunis, 20 September 2017.

⁵³ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

3.2 EUBAM

Libya attracts the attention of EU decision-makers because of the European migrant crisis. The crisis is based on decades of migration across the Mediterranean to Europe, totalling nearly 25 million people since the 1970s.⁵⁴ The sharp increase of migrants in 2015 took the EU off guard. Adding to the humanitarian tragedy, migration within Libya has recently seen the practice of slavery-like business that trades in humans.⁵⁵ Containing migration is one of the main drivers for the EU to stabilise Libya.⁵⁶

The EU is engaged in Libya through a number of areas, e.g. reconciliation efforts, preparations for elections, technical support to the constitutional process, protection of human rights, empowerment of women, security and justice, border management and security, and public administration reform.⁵⁷

EUBAM was deployed in 2013 as a civilian-led mission under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The goal of the mission is first and foremost to improve border control. The deteriorating security situation in Libya in 2014, following the start of the second Libyan civil war, forced EUBAM to relocate to neighbouring Tunisia. In 2017, EUBAM began planning for a way back into Libya.⁵⁸

In 2016, the prioritised EUBAM activity was to support the GNA in creating a Presidential Guard in Tripoli. The Presidential Guard was meant to become the embryo of a new national army. In 2017, the guard officially comprised approximately 2,000 troops, half of which were newly recruited. In reality, only about 200 can effectively be mobilised in order to perform modest guard duties. Due to increasing insecurity in Tripoli in 2017 (following the escalation in militia rivalries) and challenges related to the vetting of new recruits, the project is no longer at the forefront of the EUBAM agenda.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Between January and August 2017, 99 796 migrants came to Europe via Libya (the top three nations of origin were Nigeria, Guinea, and Bangladesh). Likewise, nearly 600 000 migrants reached Italy from North Africa in the period 2014-2017 (approximately 12 000 migrants have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean). See Frontex. Migratory routes map. 2017; Lewis, Aidan and Steve Scherer. Exclusive – Armed Group Stopping Migrant Boats Leaving Libya. *Reuters*. 2017-08-21.

⁵⁵ CNN's reports brought the Libyan slave trade issue to the top of the agenda of the EU-Africa summit in November 2017. See Said-Moorhouse, Lauren, Byron Manley, Henrik Pettersson, Mark Oliver, Muhammad Darwish and Edward Kiernan. People for sale: Where lives are auctioned for \$400. *CNN*. 2017-11-14.

⁵⁶ The migration flow to Europe is not only linked to the recent political and security turbulence of the Middle East. Migration across the Mediterranean already reached one of its peaks in 2007, three years prior to the Arab Spring. See Fargues, Philippe. Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe – A Review of the Evidence. *International Organization for Migration*. 2017, 13.

⁵⁷ Interview, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

⁵⁸ Interview, Tunis, 20 September 2017.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

4 Concluding remarks

This report is confined to examining developments of the Libyan conflict during the period 2016-2017. Developments that point to a continued intensification in violence include a shift in the balance of power between the main conflict parties, a continued threat from ISIS, ongoing militarisation of communal groups in southern Libya, and human trafficking into and across the country. Furthermore, peace efforts are being pursued by both the UN and the EU. While some have seen recent setbacks, others remain in the planning stage.

The report suggests that the level of violence in Libya continues to increase, with fighting occurring closer to Tripoli than earlier. The Misrata militias have lost much of their previous influence over the GNA in Tripoli, but could seek ways to re-enter the city. The recent shift in power balance makes it difficult to forecast specific conflict developments.

The continued presence of ISIS, alongside its shift in modus operandi, paves the way for a prolonged destabilisation of Libya. ISIS or other Islamist armed groups could infiltrate power vacuums in southern Libya, but the influence of militarised communities should constitute a deterrent. Nevertheless, ISIS will likely continue to pose a security challenge in Libya as well as in other parts of North Africa and the Sahel.

In parallel to challenges at the national level, militarised communities and networks have emerged in southern Libya, as informal governance institutions and security providers. On the one hand, ethnic power structures possess more legitimacy in Libya than any other government body, but their institutional capacity remains largely unexplored. On the other hand, armed competition between communities is fuelled by interference from the GNA and the LNA. In general, state absence across Libya is increasing and the communal component of Libyan securitisation has become more significant during 2016-2017.

Libyan communities have been pressured by counter-trafficking operations under France's Operation Barkhane in Niger and by increased Algerian border control. However, the actual extent of human trafficking into Libya remains unclear. As communal networks become clandestine due to the mounting pressure from Operation Barkhane, investigations are made difficult. Furthermore, due to improved border control along eastern Libya's coast during 2016-2017, migrants have been forced to travel inland, from the east to the west of the country. This new development has strengthened communities that engage in the trafficking in humans.

In parallel to the conflict developments, peace efforts are being pursued by the UN and the EU. UNSMIL has lately stepped up its work to bring the conflicting parties together by presenting the new Action Plan for Libya. However, these efforts largely remain at the planning stage and delays should be expected, given the shift

in power balance and the conflict's high level of violence. The convening of a National Conference in mid-February 2018 will likely provide indicators of how the parallel peace track is proceeding. Furthermore, a revisit of the defence white paper could bring in the security component as part of a coming peace package.

Developments in 2017 suggest that EUBAM is on its way back into Libya. At the same time, previous efforts to support the GNA with a Presidential Guard have largely failed, partly due to the escalation in militia rivalries within Tripoli.

As the balance of power shifts, the degree of mistrust between the main conflict parties is high, thereby limiting bargaining options in any future peace negotiations. Indeed, it remains unclear how the recent conflict developments will affect the upcoming peace efforts.

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Annex. Interviewees and informants

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Desk Officer, EU Delegation to Libya, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

Desk Officer, UNSMIL, 21 September 2017.

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NGO staff, Human Rights Watch, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

Desk officer, United States Institute for Peace, Tunis, 21 September 2017.

The Second Libyan Civil War has been ongoing since 2014. This report analyses security developments during 2016-2017. Reference is made to the internal dynamic of the main conflict, the presence of ISIS, communal conflicts in southern Libya, migration, and ongoing peace efforts by the UN and the EU.