



THE LIBYAN MAZE

THE PATH TO ELECTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE
RECONCILIATION PROCESS

EDITED BY LORENZO MARINONE



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Libya at crossroads: between elections and instability

By Lorenzo Marinone (Ce.S.I.)

Since August 26, Tripoli has witnessed violent clashes between rival militias until UN brokered a fragile ceasefire on September 4. The dynamics and root causes of these clashes effectively sum up the main vulnerabilities of the Libyan reconciliation process. In fact, the struggle for control of the capital is not just a local contest, nor is it related only to dynamics inherent to a single region such as Tripolitania. On the contrary, it is rooted in different levels of the multi-layered Libyan conflict. Since 2014, when the institutional split between Tripoli and Tobruk emerged, and consequently two broad armed coalitions materialized (Libya Dawn in the west and General Haftar's Libyan National Army in Cyrenaica), this conflict has played both on the military and the internal political level, and it has incessantly involved other regional and international players.

While acting at cross-purposes, international players have adopted largely unilateral approaches, in an attempt to favor one faction at the expense of the others. This dramatic lack of cohesion in the international community remains to date one of the major obstacles to stabilizing the country. Without any political platform shared by the parties, every acceleration of diplomacy fatally risks fueling existing divisions, and may contribute to a new period of chaos in Libya. One example is the distrust many local and international actors displayed when faced with the decision to rush for parliamentary and presidential elections in a very short period of time (by December 10), which is the cornerstone of the French diplomatic initiative launched in May.

Clashes in Tripoli have concretely threatened the survival of the Government of National Accord (GNA). This has highlighted once again the extreme weakness of the executive led by Fayez al-Serraj and the constant uncertainty surrounding the slow process of formation of the new Libyan institutional architecture. Settled in the capital in March 2016 under the Skhirat Agreement, from the very beginning the GNA has had huge difficulties in gaining legitimacy. Not only it has never received explicit approval from the Parliament in Tobruk, but several members of its highest body, the Presidential Council, soon defected, including Vice-Presidents Fathi al-Majbri and Ali al-Gatrani, both from Cyrenaica, the Fezzan's representative Musa al-Koni, and



Minister Omar Ahmed al-Aswad from the city of Zintan. Thus, the GNA became less representative, a highly needed quality in a fragmented Libyan landscape, where the patchwork of actors who actually are in control on the ground prioritises the defense of personal interest, not to mention the suspicion it shows towards any strong central authority after four decades of Gaddafi's rule.

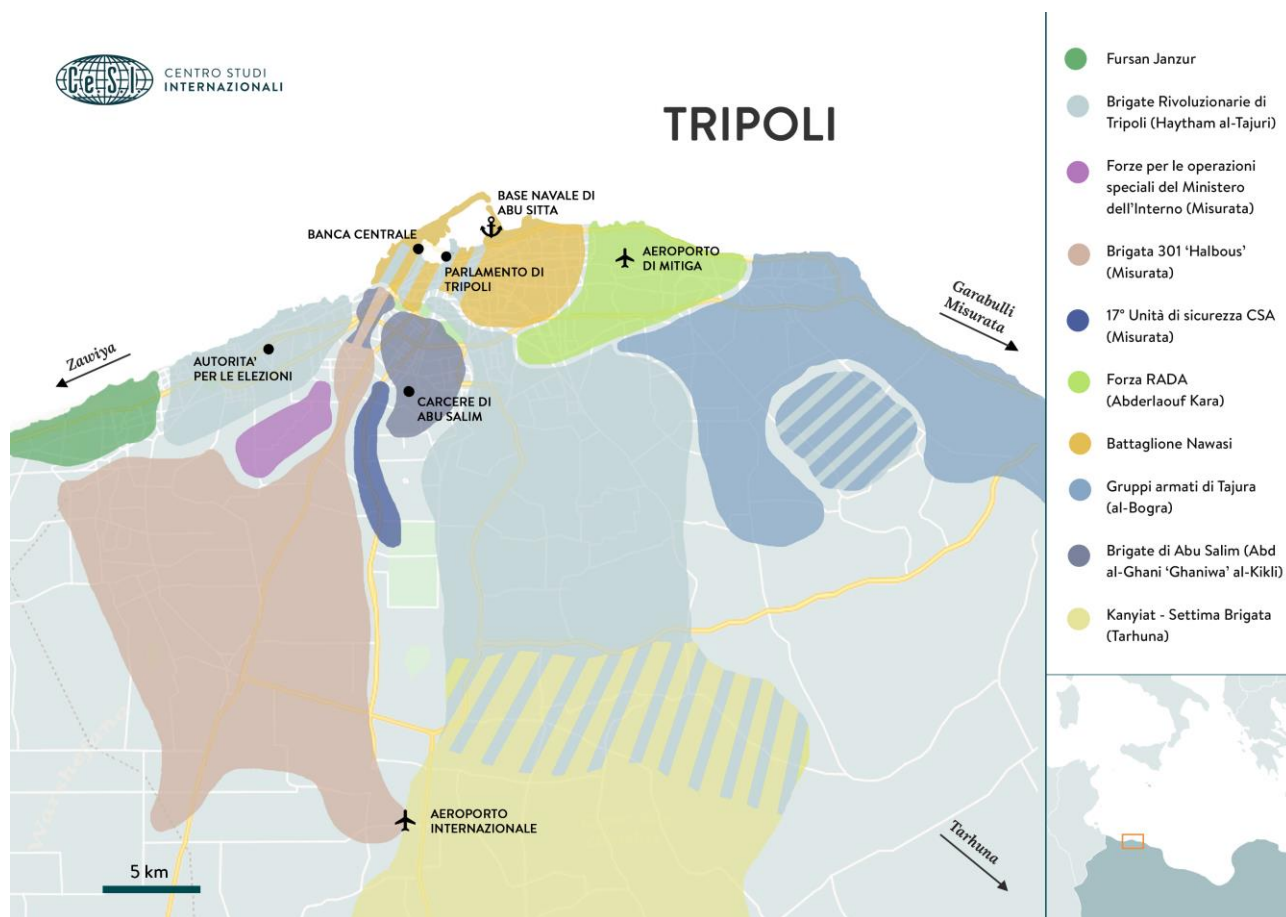
Serraj's weakness is emphasized even more clearly by GNA's relationship with armed groups in Tripoli, where militias benefit from an undisputed position of strength over political institutions. In fact, in order for the minimum security conditions to materialize and allow the establishment of the GNA, Serraj made a deal with some militia leaders in Tripoli, who in turn got an "institutionalized" status and legitimacy. Thus, several armed groups were integrated into the organizational charts of the security forces under the Ministries of Defense and Interior. But this controversial step did not disrupt the militias' chains of command, thus granting each group wide margins of autonomy.

This four main militias have their founding pillar in the mutual defense in case of attack by rivals, and may enter into tactical alliances with smaller armed groups. Thanks to its privileged role, this "cartel" has been able to deeply penetrate into both the political and the economic fabric. In fact, the proper criminal dimension of this consortium is based on its position of strength. It has parcelled the city into zones of influence and it has successfully planted its members within bureaucracy apparatuses and key ministries.

“By often resorting to intimidation and the violence, these militias are able to influence political decisions.”

By often resorting to intimidation and the violence, these militias are able to influence political decisions, secure substantial funding (including through the fraudulent use of letters of credit, obtained through compliant banking operators), and exercise widespread territorial control.

The "cupola" of this typically mafia-like consortium consists of the Special Deterrence Force (Rada Force) led by a Salafi named Abdelraouf Kara, who controls the Mitiga International Airport; the Abdellatif Qaddur's Nawasi Battalion, based in Suq al-Jum'a district together with Kara; the Tripoli Revolutionary Brigade led by Haithem al-Tajouri and Hashim Bishr, whose area of influence ranges from the southern suburbs of the capital to the old city and the naval base of Abu Sitta; and Abdel Ghani al-Kikli's Abu Salim Unit based in the eponymous district. These groups entertain more fluid relationships with smaller militias such as the Halbous Brigade (also known as 301 Brigade, which stems from Misrata), Fursan al-Janzour and the Bab Tajura Battalion.



As these militias grew stronger and enjoyed de facto the legitimate monopoly of force, a clear dividing line emerged between groups able to exert considerable influence on the GNA – thus, essential interlocutors in determining the future of the country –, and all those militias that have been excluded from this process. The latter include various



groups from Misrata, such as Salah Badi's Sumud Front, Bashir al-Bogra's militias and the Kani brothers' armed groups from Tarhouna. All of them have been progressively expelled from the capital over the last two years by Tripoli militias. It is therefore not surprising that the recent clashes began with an offensive led by Tarhouna militias, with the support of Salah Badi, towards Tripoli southern outskirts, in an attempt to reach the Abu Salim district, a gateway to the heart of the capital.

Although the assault substantially failed to date, the dynamics with which the clashes took place led to important developments in Tripoli militia landscape. In fact, in order to stop the insurgents Serraj requested Misrata and Zintan to intervene. Both of them had not had a military presence in the capital for some time. Specifically, the Anti-Terrorism Force, led by Mohammed al-Zain, is said to have reached the Mitiga airport area, while the Zintani militia led by Emad Trabelsi reportedly entered the western part of the city. Thus, the arrival of these new players is likely to trigger a necessary revision of Tripoli security management system, a rather complex development since no militia leader will agree to cede his privileges without adequate quid pro quo. At the same time, it should be emphasized that both Zintan and part of Misrata's manifold militia landscape have cleverly exploited the recent conjuncture to recover influence over centres of political and economic power. In fact, the former had been driven out of Tripoli in 2014, while most of Misrata militias were expelled in the following years. Moreover, both these cities were not involved in the Paris summit last May. Therefore, they have a clear interest in taking a leading role again, also through alliances of convenience. In this sense Zintan's stance is emblematic, because it shifted from expressing support to Haftar in order to counter Tripoli forces, to forging an alliance with its traditional rivals of Misrata, last March, based on their shared status of forces excluded from the capital.

“The next balance of forces in Tripoli is likely to be structurally more unstable than before precisely because of the extreme fluidity of alliances.”



In this context, the next balance of forces in Tripoli is likely to be structurally more unstable than before precisely because of the extreme fluidity of alliances, which continue to be based not on ideological or religious motivations but rather on the continuous quest for each player's own benefit. In this sense, it cannot be ruled out the possibility that, in the near future, the settling-in period in Tripoli will involve actors that have been sidelined so far, or a deep reshaping of alliances among armed groups will take place, even along unprecedented paths.

In this context, Serraj has limited tools to ease tensions and expand its legitimacy. His inability to gather support needed to advance and deepen the UN-sponsored dialogue with the authorities of Cyrenaica has forced the GNA to pursue a minimalist, partial and short-term strategy. This strategy has been basically limited to the co-optation of important military leaders from different cities of Tripolitania, including Osama al-Juwaili (former head of the Zintan military council) and Mohamed Haddad (commander of Misrata's Halbous Brigade). Juwaili and Haddad were given the command of western and central military sectors. However, these appointments did not result in tight alignment to the GNA by neither Zintan nor Misrata, both having anything but a monolithic militia landscape.

The practice of distributing appointments and privileges among militias may have resulted necessary to allow the establishment of the GNA. But ultimately it can only trigger a vicious circle with deleterious effects. In fact, armed groups are encouraged to consider institutions as a preferential channel for access to financial resources, which, on the other hand, allow them to maintain their autonomy and, above all, their position of strength over the GNA. After all, both the strictly predatory behaviour and these militias' reticence to shift the competition to a merely political level, are closely linked to the fear of not being able to carve out a role in the future structure of the country. In this sense, both the prospects of stabilization of the capital and the ability of the GNA to launch economic reforms are also affected by the quality of the dialogue between Tripoli and Tobruk, as well as by how the institutional fracture that took place in 2014 is being mended. Therefore, it is difficult to hypothesize a significant improvement of the situation in Tripoli if any effort is not matched with adequate political guarantees within the reconciliation process, and a deep reform of the country's economic governance. In brief, a volatile security framework in Tripoli



acts as a real bottleneck that undermines efforts of political and economic reconciliation.

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Against this background, it is quite clear that the acceleration impressed by the French diplomatic initiative, with the Paris summit on May 29, contributed to destabilizing the situation in Tripoli. As mentioned earlier, the conference brought together a small number of actors (Serraj, Haftar, the President of Tripoli’s High Council of State, Khaled Mishri, and his counterpart in the Parliament of Tobruk, Aguila Saleh), who agreed on a short timeline to hold elections by the end of 2018. Inevitably, the simple fact of holding elections would result in a new landscape of actors legitimated by the international community. However, it is precisely the quest for a form of legitimation (and the attempt to prevent rivals from obtaining it) the main cause of conflict in a country that still has multiple poles of sovereignty, such as Libya. The rush to the polls, therefore, risks turning out to be an ill-advised stretch, with the potential to reproduce the same post-elections scenario as in 2014, when the outcome was not recognized by the defeated parties.

This eventuality is made even more concrete by the ambiguity surrounding some legal aspects of the path that would lead to the polls. The Paris summit stipulated that the provisional Constitution, drafted in 2017 by a devoted assembly, named Constitution Drafting Assembly (CDA), and possible legal basis of the vote, will be approved through a referendum. CDA then requested the Parliament of Tobruk to promulgate a law that regulates this public consultation. In theory, the referendum should be held by September 16, but Tobruk has yet to pass the law because it repeatedly failed to reach the needed quorum. On this legal basis the parliamentary and presidential elections would then be called for December 10. A first potential obstacle emerges here, since the Parliament of Tripoli has not been directly involved and could contest the validity



of the procedure followed so far, as well as a referendum law approved by an assembly, Tobruk's, that Tripoli deems without any legitimacy.

However, a substantial part of the Parliament of Tobruk is clearly dissatisfied with the new Constitution, despite being the outcome of a transversal body such as the CDA, created in February 2014 and composed of 60 members, equally originating from the three historical regions of Libya. In fact, it bans dual nationals from political roles, and it confers the role of Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces to the President. These provisions actually exclude Haftar, who has Libyan and US passports, both from the presidential race and from the top of military apparatus, thus condemning the General to a subordinate position in the future Libyan state.

So, in order to fix the Constitution before elections, Tobruk appears to have deliberately drafted the referendum law in such a way as to assign a veto power to the electoral district of Cyrenaica (where, presumably, Haftar has the ability to influence the vote). Thus, if the referendum fails, according to article 8 of this law, it would be up to Tobruk, and not the CDA, to draft a new Constitution. This new Chart would likely closely reflect Haftar's aims, but it also risks being rejected by the General's staunchest rivals.

Furthermore, the President of the Parliament of Tobruk Saleh has threatened to bypass the referendum on the new Constitution, and then to resort to the law No. 5 of 2014, which in his view would allow him to call for elections for a temporary President without the approval of the legislative bodies and, above all, without the restrictions that at the moment ban Haftar from the political arena. Obviously, this path would be absolutely unacceptable for Tripoli.

In any case, a prolonged impasse would further erode mutual trust between Tripoli and Tobruk, and risks exacerbating frictions. In particular, the ongoing disputes concerning the control of crucial institutions for Libya's oil-rentier economy, such as the National Oil Company (NOC), the Libyan Central Bank (CBL) and the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA). The authorities of Cyrenaica have already created a parallel NOC and CBL and rekindled the threat of secession, even if these institutions did not get international recognition. So far, the dispute has therefore been limited to calls for a reshuffle of top managers (the Cyrenaica authorities have long called for the



removal of Sadiq al-Kebir, head of CBL in Tripoli), or for greater transparency. However, Haftar has already demonstrated that he is willing to use his position of strength in the Oil Crescent to fuel Cyrenaica's autonomist and separatist tendencies, and to add pressure to the Government of National Accord. In fact, last June, after repelling an offensive in the Oil Crescent by militiamen loyal to the former head of the Petroleum Facilities Guard, Ibrahim Jadhran, the General briefly put the management of the hydrocarbon plants in the Gulf of Sirte under the "separatist" NOC in Benghazi, and blocked exports from Zueitina and Hariga terminals for a few days.

In this context, where local actors struggle to converge towards a shared approach to shape the future structure of the country, the absence of a cooperative logic in how the International Community acts undermines its crucial support to the UN-led reconciliation process.

Against this background, Italy can contribute concretely to tempering tensions. In fact, Rome maintains open channels of dialogue with a wide range of local actors. In addition to the support granted to Serraj's GNA, discreet contacts with the authorities of Cyrenaica and Haftar have never ceased. Moreover, since 2011 Italy has cultivated relations with Misrata, not least launching Operation "Ippocrate" in September 2016.

Regardless of potential changes in Tripoli militias landscape, recent clashes could provide an opportunity to both reaffirm GNA as a key institution in the national reconciliation process, and make it more inclusive and representative via a consultation with Tripolitania's marginalised players and Eastern actors. In this sense, Italy could mediate and support that replacement of GNA leaders requested by many local players and hinted at by UN Special Envoy for Libya Ghassam Salamé.

“Italy could mediate and support that replacement of Government of National Accord leaders requested by many local players.”

To this end, the relationship between Rome and Misrata could play a central role. In fact, the prolonged political impasse pushed many in Misrata's civil and military



institutions to take on a neutral stance regarding the conflict between Tripoli and Tobruk. In this sense, it was emblematic Misrata's open dialogue with Cyrenaica military leaders launched in 2017 and mediated by Egypt, with the aim of laying the foundations for a reunification of Libyan Armed Forces. In light of these contacts, Rome's room for maneuver in the reconciliation process could widen if the recent Italian attempts at rapprochement with Egypt, a traditional supporter of Haftar, were successful. So, at this stage, Rome can exploit a valuable window of opportunity to underline shared concerns, from regional security to the urgency of preventing a new phase of chaos in Libya that could provide fertile ground for a growth of jihadist organizations. Although the resumption of this dialogue may irritate France, hitherto relying on the axis with Egypt, it is quite clear that no lasting political solution for Libya can be put in place effectively without the consent of a regional actor as important as Egypt.

On the other hand, Rome seems willing to adopt a markedly inclusive approach in dealing with the Libyan dossier. In fact, the format envisaged for the Italian conference on Libya scheduled for next November, includes the Arab League, China and the United States. This initiative could be perceived by Paris as an attempt to dilute its weight in determining the future of Libya, and therefore is exposed to the risk of fueling an Italian-French rivalry that has already grown significantly in recent months. This could consolidate one of the main hindrances in the reconciliation process, that is the tendency of each country to support certain factions, also and above all to safeguard specific national interests in Libya. So far, these national interests resulted into supporting certain actors partly in light of their geographical location. Consequently, in order to gain greater overall stability of the country, any negotiation process cannot ignore the specificities and demands of each Libyan region. In this sense, it is crucial to delineate an institutional architecture that, while being adequately representative of Libyan regionalisms, is to be based on a unitary framework that would allow any local actor to have a voice in crucial decisions such as the management and redistribution of oil&gas revenues.

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Will the December elections succeed in bringing together a divided country like Libya?

By Rhiannon Smith (Libya-Analysis)

In brief, the elections planned in December, as part of the French-led peace initiative in Libya, are very unlikely to heal the underlying social, political and economic rifts that are driving division and conflict in the country.

Elections can only facilitate non-violent transfers of power¹ if the electoral process is supported by a broader democratic structure and a coherent institutional framework. This requires a justice system that can enforce accountability, an education system that encourages freedom of thought, and a security architecture that allows citizens to vote without fearing for their lives. Furthermore, in order for elections to stand a chance of healing social divides, all parties must accept the election results and allow elected officials to pass legislation, exert a monopoly over force, and hold the state's purse strings. These conditions do not exist in Libya at present.

“Libyan authorities are working within an unrealistically short timeline.”

Instead, Libyan authorities are working within an unrealistically short timeline (less than four months at present) during which an electoral law must be passed, a referendum on the draft constitution organised, the draft accepted, and parliamentary and presidential elections held. So far none of the technical prerequisites for elections have been met and achieving them by December seems a near impossible feat. If workarounds are found and elections forced through regardless, the outcome is likely to be another period of escalated conflict, confusion and chaos.

¹ R. Smith - J. Pack, “Libya’s House of Cards: Elections without Institutions”, Lawfare, August 19, 2018 <https://www.lawfareblog.com/libyas-house-cards-elections-without-institutions>



The victors of any election are likely to become Libya's new, internationally-recognized powerbrokers - with the opportunity to shape Libya's political structures to benefit themselves and disadvantage their rivals for years to come. In particular, the victors will have control over the state's vast economic resources. This lack of clarity over what powers the newly elected officials will hold, combined with a lack of trust that elected officials can or will be held accountable for their actions, is creating fresh drivers of conflict and in some cases deepening existing divisions in Libya. For actors who currently have access to power and wealth, the priority is to protect their positions if, or when, elections happen. For actors who are currently excluded from power, the priority is to shake up the status quo in order to establish greater influence through 'facts on the ground' prior to elections happening.

The recent fighting which has engulfed Tripoli² can be interpreted in this vein, with militias from outside the capital attempting to break the stranglehold the Tripoli militias have on the country's most important state institutions. Recent Libyan history shows that control of such resources can be used to leverage political alliances, international legitimacy, and military dominance - and win elections.

“Libya currently lacks the democratic institutions and frameworks that would allow elections to be a unifying force.”

In conclusion, Libya currently lacks the democratic institutions and frameworks that would allow elections to be a unifying force. Holding elections in these conditions can only temporarily paper over the cracks, and threatens to accentuate divisions rather than heal them.

² A. Lewis - A. Elumami, “Clashes shatter illusion of security in Libyan capital”, Reuters, August 29, 2018 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/clashes-shatter-illusion-of-security-in-libyan-capital-idUSKCN1LE1JU>



Why Europe struggles to develop a concerted approach to Libya?

By Lisa Watanabe (Center for Security Studies, ETH)

Europe has struggled to speak with one voice when it comes to resolving the Libyan conflict. The unity of purpose that it showed when fighting broke out in mid-2014 and the UN first established a political process to unify Libya's warring factions, rapidly dissipated, giving way to tensions over how best to navigate a way out of the conflict. A number of factors have contributed to this disarray.

Although the EU and European states put their weight behind the UN political process when the conflict began, and played an important role in laying the groundwork for the signing of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in December 2015, concerns about the rise of Islamic State in Libya caused the EU and its member states, especially France and the UK, to push the deal through when there was still insufficient support for it on the ground.

In many ways, the rush to broker a deal was understandable. Islamic State in Libya had, after all, managed to establish its most significant territorial presence up to that date outside Syria and Iraq, with Sirte being set up as a capital akin to Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq. Yet, failing to patiently build broad-based support for the LPA ultimately sowed the seeds of disunity among Europeans.

“Failing to patiently build broad-based support for the Libyan Political Agreement ultimately sowed the seeds of disunity among Europeans.”

When implementation of the LPA predictably floundered and Fayez Al-Serraj, head of the executive under the UN-brokered deal, failed to impose his authority, European states began to act at cross purposes, even though all continued to publicly support the LPA. When French military advisers were killed in July 2016, France was forced to disclose that it had been providing support to General Khalifa Haftar, an opponent of



the LPA and ally of those politicians in Tobruk, who had refused to approve the LPA and rejected two attempts by Al-Serraj to form a government.

France had come to view Haftar as a valuable ally in Libya, with considerable influence in the east of the country, a counter-terrorism agenda that intermeshed with its own, and support from key regional powers, not to mention Russia. As Haftar's domestic and international profile grew over the course of 2016, the UK too came to see him as part of the solution and not just part of the problem. This placed France and the UK at odds with Italy, which had staunchly supported Al-Serraj and saw him as key to furthering its interests in Libya, not least those connected to migration.

The relative absence of the US in mediation efforts has also exacerbated disunity among Europeans. The vacuum that it has left provided France with an opportunity to attempt to dominate mediation efforts and to undercut those of Italy. This has enabled France to set the agenda in a way that advances its own interests in Libya, regardless of the views of other European states. Over the past year, Macron has used France's role as mediator to try ensure that presidential and parliamentary elections will take by the end of the year, presumably to promote Haftar while he and his allies still have traction.

Should the rush to elections take place in the absence of prior agreement fundamental issues, such as the role of Libya's institutions, it could deepen divisions and precipitate even greater instability, proving once again that Europeans would do well place the interests of Libyans before their own.



Can economy be the key to revive the Libyan reconciliation process?

By Tim Eaton (Chatham House)

Libya's political, security and economic crises are interconnected and cannot be separated. An economic track thus must operate in conjunction with political and economic tracks. Arguably, none of the three currently exists. There are major disagreements over the path of political discussions, while the security track has been largely absent since 2015. Yet, the economic track has been the most under-developed, and must be moved beyond technical discussions if it is to be utilised as a tool of reconciliation.

Despite the UN Special Representative Ghassan Salamé's emphasis on undermining the "economy of predation" international efforts have been focused upon re-unifying state institutions that split in 2014 and instituting economic reforms. International efforts have sought to bring together the Central Bank of Libya based in Tripoli with its rival based in Bayda with a view to forming a reunified Central Bank. The US-brokered economic dialogue has, meanwhile, sought to provide a forum for the UN-backed Government of National Accord to work with the Tripoli CBL to agree and institute economic reforms. These include measures to devalue the Libyan dinar and reform the subsidy regime which would undercut some of the profiteering of those engaged in what has become a burgeoning shadow economy. Despite repeated indications that the announcement of reforms is near, they are yet to materialise.

“Libyan Central Bank reunification cannot make up for the absence of a unified government and economic reforms do not address the distribution of resources.”

Such goals are laudable and would provide clear benefits, yet they do not address the core of the problems that Libya faces. CBL reunification cannot make up for the



absence of a unified government and economic reforms do not address the distribution of resources. Competition for resources is a key driver of the conflict. The hyper centralised nature of the Libyan state means that those who control Tripoli have by far the greatest access to the state's financial resources, meaning that the city will continue to be subject to power struggles, as the recent fighting indicates. Similarly, the dispute over Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar's refusal to allow the National Oil Company based in Tripoli to market crude from the oil crescent was over the Central Bank in Tripoli's control of the distribution of state funds.

Thus, what is needed is a means of making the distribution of resources a core element of settlement negotiations. In the absence of such a settlement (and/or in the aftermath of elections should they occur) rivals will continue to seek to abuse existing structures to compete over resources. This is a lesson that should be learned from the Skeirat process, which did not address resource distribution.



What's the impact of smuggling networks on local communities in Libya?

By Max Gallien (London School of Economics and Political Science)

Contrary to common perception, smuggling in Libya predates the current crisis. Carefully controlled by the ruling regime, it had been a part of Libya's economic and political management for decades. Therefore, smuggling today affects local communities in Libya through both its expansion, in some places, and its decline in others. In addition, the effects of various smuggling networks on local communities has depended on the goods they transport, and their relationship with local power structures.

“For the Libyan state, the smuggling of subsidised goods has been an increasingly politicised drain on its budget.”

For the Libyan state, the smuggling of subsidised goods has been an increasingly politicised drain on its budget. Gasoline has been particularly controversial: refined and sold cheaply at an enormous cost to the central state, huge quantities have been smuggled across the country's land and maritime borders. For local communities, especially in the borderlands, the economic impact of smuggling networks has been more complex. On the one hand, they can function as employer in a time of economic crisis, as a window of social mobility, especially in the economic periphery. At the same time, smuggling networks often function as a root cause of that very crisis. As goods are diverted from domestic consumption and towards smuggling activities, prices tend to go up locally, and may directly induce supply shortages of essential goods such as oil or gas. In the past year, in the context of a worsening economic crisis, these effects have been triggering active campaigns against smuggling networks within communities, both on a grass-roots and higher political level. The city of Zuwara, for example, made headlines in 2015 when its community pushed



human trafficking networks out of its city. In 2017, it was also the sight of increasing pressure against networks smuggling gasoline to Tunisia. At the same time, however, local actors are benefitting from the fees collected from smugglers at the nearby border crossings.

“Smuggling networks are a crucial actor at the intersection of war economies, crisis and political power.”

This relates to another crucial aspect: smuggling networks do not only have economic effects on local communities in Libya, they are also a crucial actor at the intersection of war economies, crisis and political power. They are integrated with, or dependent on, militias and other local providers of protection, while control over key routes can provide crucial incomes to local and national political actors. As local actors are vying for legitimacy, the question of how tolerable local communities find different forms of smuggling, and at what cost, will become more important. This leaves some hope that in the future, local communities may be able to re-gain some influence over the effects that smuggling networks will have on them.



Divided we stand – the position of the Tebu vis-à-vis potential elections in Libya

By Floor El Kamouni-Janssen, Fransje Molenaar, Al-Hamzeh Al-Shadeedi (Clingendael)

Libya's south has been the stage of waves of violence since 2011 due to the tense relationship between its main tribes – the Tebu, Tuareg and Awlad Sulaiman – and the inability of the Libyan state to control this part of the country and provide security and services. Armed conflict between the Fezzan's tribes about oil resources, strategic sites, and smuggling routes has been compounded by the influx of militant groups from Niger and Chad.³ In recent years, initiatives to end armed conflict were successful in bringing peace to the Tebu and the Tuareg, but they failed in achieving the same outcome between the Tebu and the Awlad Sulaiman.⁴

In the midst of this tense environment, the two rival Libyan governments in Tripoli and Tobruk have attempted to make gains out of the instability in the Fezzan by using tribal forces as proxy powers. During the last conflict that erupted in Sebha early this year, for example, both Haftar and the Presidential Council (PC) of Tripoli launched military operations to cleanse the south from foreign mercenary forces and restore peace and stability. The GNA was able to gain Awlad Sulaiman to its side by incorporating their tribal brigade into the PC military forces. In the face of this materializing alliance, some Tebu factions from Sebha grew more sympathetic with the LNA⁵. However, to this point the Tebu have not built any one-way alliances with either the GNA or the LNA.⁶ Tebu relations with outside forces have been largely instrumental, and best explained by local conflict dynamics and competing armed group interests.⁷

³ <http://www.aljazeera.net/programs/behindthenews/2018/3/5/الجنوب-الليبي-بؤرة-صراع-جديدة/>

⁴ <http://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/movementsandparties/2016/5/12/قبائل-التبو/>

⁵ <https://aawsat.com/home/article/1199821/الصراع-على-الجنوب-الليبي-يفاقم-أزماته/>

⁶ <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/working-papers/SAS-CAR-WP43-Chad-Sudan-Libya.pdf> [Pages 120-21]

⁷ Interview with a Tebu intellectual, location undisclosed, 4 September 2018.



“Tebu dealings with national actors remain cautious and pragmatic because Tebu grievances with the Libyan state run deep.”

Tebu dealings with national actors remain cautious and pragmatic because Tebu grievances with the Libyan state run deep. Marginalized under the previous regime, subsequent post-revolution governments have failed to address Tebu demands, such as over equal access to citizenship rights. Key to understanding Tebu relations with northern powers, therefore, is a general level of distrust with non-Tebu agendas while at the same time wanting to be recognized as a regular and legitimate force by external actors. Also key to understanding the ambiguity in Tebu allegiances are internal divisions. The Tebu should not be seen as a unified entity: an array of Tebu (armed) groups roam the Fezzan that display diverging affiliations and loyalties.

“Tebu disunity on the ground translates into Tebu disunity in the face of potential national elections.”

Tebu disunity on the ground translates into Tebu disunity in the face of potential national elections. In the first week of September, prominent Tebu traditional and religious elders held various meetings to discuss their stance towards potential national elections. Broad agreement exists that the Tebu would need to embrace the potential elections to ensure their representation at the national political level – something they gravely lacked in the past. Agreeing on a unified stance towards potential candidates proved more difficult. In the meetings, a slight preference for a Haftar(-supported) candidacy was discernable. Other sources suggest that the Tebu will not put their weight behind the current power holders. It was mentioned that Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi's candidacy in the elections may be a game changer – as many



Tebu are nostalgic of previous times.⁸ Although generally supportive of the elections, the Tebu elders ultimately decided not to adopt a unified position on candidates. This means that if elections will take place, every Tebu can and probably will vote in line with his own preferences.⁹

⁸ Interview with a Tebu intellectual, location undisclosed, 4 September 2018. Also see: <https://www.ultrasawt.com/بن-خالد-تنته-لم-الغذافي-مع-المعركة-الانتخابات-باب-من-الإسلام-سيف-عودة/سياسة/متصل-سياق/الشريف>

⁹ Telephone interviews with Tebu elders, 4-5 September 2018.



How will the Salafi-jihadi threat in Libya evolve?

By Simon Engelkes (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung)

When the so-called Islamic State was ousted from its stronghold in the Libyan coastal city of Sirte in December 2016, the breakdown of its bureaucratic structures and the fall of the allegedly strongest outpost of the “caliphate” beyond its Levantine core initiated an organizational transformation of the group’s presence in Libya, which has been witnessed to a similar extent throughout the region. Despite the devolution of the jihadist proto-state with its three declared provinces into a covert network of dispersed mobile units roaming mostly the Libyan deserts, the Islamic State in Libya (ISL) still poses a threat to the country’s political, economic, and social stability as well as the desperately needed state-building efforts.

Remnants of ISL comprise numerous sleeper cells around Tripoli and Misrata in the West, Ghat and Al-Uwainat in the South, and Ajdabiya and Derna in the East. Resisting frequent airstrikes, the group, reverting back to insurgency and banditry tactics, continues to take advantage of the fragile security environment and sporadically coordinates with tribal and other jihadist groups to remain present in Libya.

“The ISL group, reverting back to insurgency and banditry tactics, continues to take advantage of the fragile security environment.”

ISL appears to be decentralized and act opportunistically, moving along the outskirts of cities and in the periphery of the capital where it launches raids and ad hoc SVBIED attacks on LNA checkpoints and police stations and sets up roadblocks to attack civilian passers-by and fuel tankers.



Following the loss of its physical “caliphate,” ISL adopted a strategy of disruption and has the capacity to spoil efforts to forge an end to the Libyan crisis. Attacks on vital oil infrastructure, the Libyan Investment Authority and the Central Bank of Libya can worsen the economic and humanitarian situation in the war-torn country, widen existing rifts between communities, and further drive local conflict.

The ISL attack on the High National Elections Commission in Tripoli in May showcases the group’s determination to sabotage plans to reunify Libyan institutions and exemplifies the fragile nature of attempted roadmaps towards a political solution.

Ongoing conflict in Derna, a historical hub of Libyan jihadism, and the lacking reconstruction of former Sirte leave parts of the Libyan population prey to ISL and other jihadist militants. The group could serve as a fallback option for marginalized segments of Libyan society as it did when it first emerged in the two cities. Recent clashes in Tripoli might shift the attention of security actors away from the group’s remote areas of activity and enable ISL to exploit the fragile situation in the capital to further destabilize reconciliation and peace-building efforts.

Nevertheless, ISL and remnants of al-Qaeda operatives share their destructive role in the Libyan conflict with the vast array of armed militias acting with impunity, causing power cuts, road closures and an increasing civilian death toll given the lack of any authority able to impose order on Libya’s unique kind of chaos.



Biographies

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Tim Eaton is a research fellow with Chatham House's MENA Programme, Libya. His research focuses on the political economy of the Libyan conflict. Earlier this year he authored a report on the development of Libya's [war economy](#) which illustrates how economic activities have become increasingly connected to violence. Prior to joining Chatham House, he worked for BBC Media Action, the BBC's international development charity. Tim worked across the Middle East on projects in Iraq, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. In Libya, Tim helped to set up and manage BBC Media Action's bureau from 2013-14. He is a regular contributor to the media, having written for the Washington Post, BBC, Newsweek, CNN, War on the Rocks and the New Statesman, among others. Tim was awarded the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies Departmental Scholarship to undertake his MA in Middle East politics at Exeter University. He also holds a BA in history from Nottingham University and a diploma in Arabic from SOAS.

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