

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	442
Land:	Libyen
Kilde:	Jamestown Foundation
Titel:	Libya's Persistent Political Polarization Amid Islamic State's bid to remain Relevant
Udgivet:	3. juni 2022
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	28. oktober 2022

Document #2075271

Jamestown Foundation

Libya’s Persistent Political Polarization Amid Islamic State’s bid to Remain Relevant; Terrorism Monitor Volume: 20 Issue: 11

By: [Dario Cristiani](#)

Introduction

Following the October 2020 ceasefire and successful United Nations-brokered Libyan Political Dialogue Forum Process (LPDF), Libya finally saw the formation of a new, unified government, which ended almost six years of division. During those six years, the country had two governments: the internationally recognized Government of the National Accord (GNA) led by Fayez al-Sarraj and the eastern-based government led by Abdullah al-Thani. This eastern-based government was supported by the House of Representatives (the parliament elected in 2014 and led by Aguila Saleh) and was de facto dominated by the Sirte-born warlord Khalifa Haftar, who was leader of the Libyan National Army/Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LNA/LAAF). [1]

However, after Haftar’s military failed, in spite of significant external support by several countries (the United Arab Emirates, Russia, Egypt, and France), to conquer Tripoli due to the Turkish military intervention in November 2019, conditions changed ([Al-Monitor](#), June 4, 2020, [The Daily Sabah](#), December 26, 2019, Al-Jazeera, November 13, 2019). Rapidly, the forces fighting alongside Haftar’s militia, including sub-Saharan African mercenaries primarily from Sudan and Chad, Russian Wagner Group fighters, and Syrians brought by Russia to Libya, had to retreat. By April 2020, it had become obvious that the offensive failed. In August 2020, Haftar also had to end the oil blockade he launched in January 2020, and in October 2020 the parties agreed to a ceasefire that paved the way for UN-backed political dialogue.

The success of the LPDF brought about the establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU). Abdel Hamid Dbeibeh, a businessman from Misrata, became the new interim Prime Minister. Mohammad Menfi became the head of the Presidency Council. The primary task of the interim government was to oversee the electoral process that should have brought Libyans to vote for a new president and a new parliament on December 24, 2021.

However, the elections were not held in the end because of mounting disagreements between different Libyan interest groups concerning procedures, timing and outcomes of the process. Moreover, the particularly pro-active and somewhat populist role that interim Prime Minister Dbeibeh played in using public money to strengthen his position, and the fact that he was ready to run for the presidency (even though he agreed not to when taking over his role), triggered adverse reactions from many of his rivals ([The Arab Weekly](#), March 31; [Asharq Al-Awsat](#), February, 19; [Majalla](#), November 21, 2021). This resulted in a new institutional and political stalemate as Dbeibeh’s opponents started working together to limit his power while hoping to force a change of government.

The Genesis of the Government of National Stability

This dynamic, as has often happened in Libya’s history, pushed former arch-enemies to cooperate against what they perceived as the common enemy, who in this specific case was Dbeibeh. Thus, in response to Dbeibeh’s political machinations, in December 2021 Fathi Bashagha and Ahmed Maiteeg, two other key political figures from Misrata and crucial personalities in the GNA as the Minister of the Interior and Deputy Prime Minister respectively, initiated a process of rapprochement with the eastern-based forces represented by Haftar and Saleh ([Al-Wasat](#), December 21). This process culminated in the appointment of Bashagha as the new Prime Minister in February and the launch of the new Government of National Stability (GNS) one month after Bashagha received a vote of confidence from a part of the House of Representatives ([The Libya Herald](#), March 2).

Dbeibeh did not recognize the parliament’s vote and reiterated that he would only hand over power to a government elected by the Libyan people. Being also the interim Defense Minister, he then placed the armed forces on alert and closed Libyan airspace, which was reopened only two weeks later to prevent Bashagha’s arrival ([The Arab Weekly](#), March 23). A few days after the vote of confidence, Bashagha and the groups supporting him tried entering Tripoli, but were blocked by the militias that remained loyal to the GNU. Bashagha tried to enter Tripoli again in May, but this attempt triggered violent clashes with the city’s militias. The violence forced Bashagha to leave with an announcement that the GNS would work from Sirte instead ([The Libya Observer](#), May 17; [Asharq Al-Wasat](#), May 18).

Haftar’s Wild Card: The Oil Blockade

The return of political and institutional polarization created incentives for all actors involved to use their territorial control and military capacities to pressure rivals. As the political standoff continued, the Representatives of the Eastern Region in the 5+5 Military Committee, who were linked to Haftar, called for a ban on oil exports, the closure of the coastal road, and stopped their work in the committee ([The Libya Herald](#), April 10). A few days later, oil production stopped, with the National Oil Corporation (NOC) declaring force majeure at Zueitina, El Sharara, and El Feel. The blockade was justified as a response to the grievances of local workers and tribal groups, who launched protests and blocked production ([The New Arab](#), April 27).

The past has shown that there was a direct connection between Haftar’s decision and the situation at oil fields and terminals. In 2020, the oil blockade was lifted after Haftar’s intervention ([Libyan Express](#), August 19, 2020). As such, since his forces together with Russian Wagner mercenaries have continued to control most of the territory in which Libyan oil resources are located, there is a casual connection between his decisions and the return of the oil blockade. This decision to control the oil fields was even suggested by Wagner Group commanders a few weeks earlier ([Al Monitor](#), June 26, 2020, [The Libya Observer](#), March 12, 2021). The Libyan oil output thus went from one million barrels per day (bpd) to 450,000 bpd in the second half of April 2022. Immediately after the launch of the blockade, Dbeibeh called upon the public prosecutor to launch an investigation into the closure of oil facilities and export terminals ([Ain Libya](#), April 20).

Haftar already tried and failed to use an oil blockade in January 2020 to force the GNA to surrender. The current blockade will prevent Libya from taking advantage of the world’s high global hydrocarbon prices while at the same time forcing them to suffer the affects of inflation and food supply shortages due to the war in Ukraine ([al-Jazeera](#), April 26). Moreover, the freezing of oil revenues at the Libyan Foreign Bank, which was announced on May 14 and was a move to undermine the GNU’s ability to use oil-related funds, is exacerbating these problems even further.

According to a press-release issued by the House of Representatives, the freezing will last until “the establishment of guarantees and a mechanism for all Libyans to benefit from this income, in a manner that achieves justice and equality for all.” ([Libyan News Agency](#), May 14). While the blockade and the freezing inevitably put pressure on the GNU, it also risks backfiring, particularly in the areas in which Haftar and his forces are most present. Something similar happened in 2020 when the oil blockade launched by Haftar undermined power production in eastern Libya, leading to protests and riots. The oil blockade and the freezing of revenues may bring the same problems related to electricity production, but could also exacerbate issues related to food, goods’ shortage and mounting inflation.

Is the Islamic State a Real Problem in Southern Libya?

Against the above-mentioned backdrop, Libya is also facing a return of the Islamic State (IS). On April 19, LNA/LAAF sources claimed that a car bomb exploded near a military camp in Umm Al-Aranib in the southwest of the country, blaming IS for the attack ([Maghreb Voices](#), April 19). This violence followed similar operations that occurred in previous months. In January, two IS-claimed attacks targeted LNA/LAAF forces, prompting authorities to launch a security operation which resulted in the killing of several IS fighters ([Al Wasat](#), February 7).

IS had officially returned to operational status in Libya as early as June 2021 after an almost two-year hiatus. The group had become silent after airstrikes allegedly decimated its leadership in September 2019 and put an end to the operational revival that the group experienced in Libya between 2017 and 2019, particularly in the south. IS’s landmark attack was on June 6, 2021 when a truck exploded at a Mazig checkpoint north of Sabha, killing at least two people, including a senior police officer, and injuring four more people ([Libyan Express](#), June 8, [Al-Monitor](#), June 7).

Later that same day, IS claimed responsibility for the Mazig checkpoint attack, with the Amaq news agency publishing photos and footage of the car bomb used and the suicide bomber, Mohammed Al-Muhajer ([The Libya Observer](#), June 13, 2021). Haftar’s forces used the series of attacks from the Mazig checkpoint onwards as a pretext to launch a renewed military campaign in the south ([The Libya Observer](#), June 19). This push into the south regained momentum shortly after Bashagha’s Tripoli fiasco and amid mounting tensions with some local groups, including several Tebu leaders. Haftar’s forces were also motivated by the need to fight Islamists and secure the Libyan borders with Chad, where instability is on the rise ([Akhbar Libya 24](#), May 31; [Libya Channel](#), May 31).

It is notable that Haftar did something similar during his military campaign in Western Libya in 2019 when he tried to strengthen his military positions in the south before launching the main operation. However, as noted by the wave of IS attacks that the LNA/LAAF forces suffered over the past few weeks, this attempt to strengthen the LNA/LAAF presence in southern Libya has come with a cost for Haftar. While IS in Libya is far from being the systemic threat it represented from 2014 to 2016 and, to some extent, 2018, the group can still inflict some damage. Haftar’s militiamen, who are more exposed than the Sirte-born warlords, will pay the higher price in human and logistic terms.

Conclusion

IS’s operational return must be monitored, although it should not be overestimated. According to Ibrahim Bushnaf, the GNU National Security Advisor, IS in Libya does not represent a severe concern at the moment, as the organization is trying to portray itself as more potent than it is in actuality, and its presence is limited to several outposts in the south of the country ([Libya Al-Hadath](#), April 3). In the past, IS exploited domestic fragmentation and

political polarization in Libya to make inroads into the country. Two examples from history include their attempts to strengthen their presence in Sirte in 2014 or reorganizing itself in the south after the group was dislodged from Sirte in late 2016.

It is clear that IS these days does not have the same capacity it had in 2014 or 2017-2018. The return of political polarization and institutional duality, with the relative incentives to undermine rivals as shown by the recent oil blockade, will nevertheless favor fragmentation and chaos, sharply increasing the risk of military confrontation between militias and groups supporting the GNU and the GNS, respectively. This bodes well for IS in Libya.

Although the operational capacities of IS in Libya have been so weakened that it does not represent a systemic threat, security fragmentation and political polarization can favor its bid to maintain a presence in Libya in line with its principles to “remain, attack, and expand” ([Terrorism Monitor](#), August 9, 2019).

Notes

[1] For some time, Libya had three competing governments, if one counts the so-called Government of National Salvation, headed by Omar al-Hassi from September 2014 to March 2015 and then Khalifa al-Ghwell from March 2015 to March 2017, despite some interruptions. The GNS was part of the General National Congress (GNA), which was the Parliament elected in 2012 that did not accept the election of the House of Representatives and remained in power by creating its own government.

ecoi.net summary:

Article on political and security-related developments and the role of the Islamic State (IS) group

Country:

Libya

Source:

[Jamestown Foundation](#)

Original link:

<https://jamestown.org/program/libya-persistent-political-polarization-amid-islamic-states-bid-to-remain-relevant/>

Document type:

Special or Analytical Report

Language:

English

Published:

3 June 2022

Document ID:

2075271

Austrian Red Cross
Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum
Research and Documentation (ACCORD)

Wiedner Hauptstraße 32, 1041 Wien
T (Telefon) +43 1 589 00 583
F (Fax) +43 1 589 00 589
info@ecoi.net

Contact
Imprint & Disclaimer
F.A.Q.
Data Protection Notice

ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

