



Unity Resources Group

# LIBYA MONITOR SEPTEMBER

Key Developments and Local Insights into the Security and Political Climate



# INCIDENT REPORTING



Tripoli

Misratah

Benghazi

Tubruq

Surt

Gulf of Sidra

A political demonstration was held on 25 September at Martyrs' Square in Tripoli following a call by presidential contender Basit Igtet. It attracted up to one thousand people who protested both for and against Igtet. The GNA and Tajouri had previously banned the demonstration and enforced a state of emergency, most likely to prevent Igtet from gaining traction and to deny a platform to political rivals. Although the demonstration went ahead, the following day, a security detail of Igtet's was reportedly shot and killed outside his home by unknown assailants. Igtet has a number of rivals and has called for public opposition to both Serraj and Haftar. Although unconfirmed, it is possible that this shooting is a response to Igtet's disregard for the political establishment in Tripoli and is intended to send a message to other potential candidates.

In response to Trump's ban on Libyans entering the USA, on 28 September the al-Thinni Government banned US nationals from entering Libya. This ban may affect Americans wishing to acquire visas to Libya through HoR-aligned embassies, and could prevent Americans travelling to east of the country.

Saif al-Islam has slightly come out of the woodwork, with a defamation case brought by his lawyer against member of the HoR, Abu Bakr Buera. The case relates to his PhD from LSE, which Buera claims Saif received assistance in writing.

US forces under Africom have conducted a number of strikes against ISIS on 22 and 26 September. Air strikes were carried out 160 km and 240 km southeast of Sirte. In the first raid, Africom reported hitting a camp, killing 17 militants and destroying three vehicles.

The siege on Derna has continued, with shortages of fuel, food and medicines affecting residents. Four trucks with flour were allowed into the city in late September after severe shortages. It was the first flour cargo to be allowed in since July. Flour is a necessary staple, and its admission suggests some recognition of the negative impact that the siege is having upon the civilian population.

# FLASHPOINT AREAS

## Armed Clashes in Sabratha

Fighting has been ongoing in Sabratha since mid-September between the LNA-linked Anti-ISIS Operations Rooms (AIOR) and the Amu Brigade/48<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The local Amu Brigade has been historically involved in smuggling activities, but is now linked to the GNA and claims to be combatting smuggling. Clashes reportedly began after a member of the Amu Brigade was killed when he refused to stop at a checkpoint commanded by the AIOR. Fighting has been at times intense, with tanks stationed in the town and random rocket fire in civilian areas. Many local residents have fled, with 26 killed and over a hundred wounded in the fighting.

Efforts have been made to end the conflict through the intervention of local elders from the surrounding towns of Zintan and Zawia. However, a fatwa by the Awqaf Committee in the east ordering jihad against the 'kharijites' (ie. Amu Brigade) in Sabratha suggests that the east is by no means seeking to calm the situation. Sabratha is a poorly secured town; in July clashes occurred between LNA-linked militias and the Amu Brigade after a pro-Haftar demonstration in the town. Ultimately, Sabratha is a strategic town and offers a base from which to launch attacks into Tripoli. With LNA-linked militias within and near the town, clashes will likely continue sporadically as the LNA seeks to further its control.

## Haftar Seeks Political Legitimacy

Video footage from Haftar's recent visit to Tunisia, released through the LNA's Media Office, has raised the ire of the Tunisian government. The country's General Director of the Security Forces, Anas al-Maqadi, has dubbed the video "media propaganda." Haftar was in Tunisia to meet Tunisia's president and discuss how to end Libya's political problems. Such meetings with foreign parties and key Libyan figures are a regular occurrence. However, Haftar's team utilised the opportunity to demonstrate both his military strength and to suggest international legitimacy.

The LNA's media footage shows Haftar arriving in Tunisia aboard a military plane flanked by approximately 30 militiamen, and subsequently receiving a presidential welcome. Secretary of the al-Irda party, Anan Munasser, stated that "since the last visit of the former Iraqi president Saddam Hussain to Tunisia no other official guest had come with such forces." Al-Maqadi, however, noted that Haftar was in fact accompanied by only four security personnel to the meeting who were dressed in civilian attire, while the rest of his party were required to wait at the airport – though this fact has been notably excluded from the video.

The footage portrays Haftar as both a strong military man and a politically legitimate figure. Although the Tunisian government was frustrated

with the video, it is not in fact the first time the LNA's Media Office has sought to capitalise upon such meetings. Indeed, earlier this month similar footage of Haftar receiving the French foreign minister and his delegation was released. The video shows the French foreign minister walking along a red carpet and shaking hands with military personnel. The delegation is also shown jotting down notes during a meeting, as is Haftar's team, suggesting high level co-operation.

Until recently, the LNA's Media Office has released videos documenting military victories or recording security incidents. Although such videos continue to be published, as in a video from August showing Haftar and the LNA's operational planning to seize Derna, the uptake in videos with a more political focus suggests Haftar is attempting to secure a form of de facto political legitimacy through his meetings with high profile political figures. His attempt to force residents in eastern Libya to sign a recommendation letter that he become president of Libya further demonstrates such intent. With speculation that Haftar seeks to emulate Gaddafi in creating a military dictatorship, his Saddam-like arrival and propaganda campaign merely add further fuel to the fire that his political intent is antithetical to a democratic Libya.

# FIELD NOTES

In this edition of Field Notes, we speak to our team in Libya about the potential contenders for Libya's presidency.

## **Any thoughts on the new UN envoy Ghassan Salamé's initiative to move the country forward?**

*"Well they're having intense meetings in Tunis at the moment and he is present and pushing it along which is good. I'm sure Kobler and León faced a lot of problems with mistranslation in these sorts of meetings. Because of his Arabic he can understand exactly what's being said so he should be better at negotiating and reaching an agreement. But in terms of the Libyan public, most people haven't really responded to Salamé's proposal because they don't really care anymore."*

## **Basit Igtet has recently put**

## **himself forward as a presidential contender, and he conducted a demonstration in Tripoli this month. How have Tripolitarians reacted to him?**

*"To me it wasn't a surprise that he came and held a demonstration, because he has been insinuating that sooner or later he will be coming in and that he's supported by the US government. Igtet has very good political connections. Many Libyans think that he is related to John McCain through his American wife. But either way he is not a new political figure. He's been there for the last two or three years but has been playing a low profile, but real followers of politics know him because he visits the country often and meets with people."*

## **You mention American support for Igtet, has he played this up?**

*"Yes, he told the people to come*

*out on 25 September and that the White House would be observing them. He was sending an indirect message to the Libyan people and leaders that he has very strong support behind him, whether that's true or not."*

## **Do Libyans mind that key political figures such as Igtet have spent so much time abroad?**

*"No, this happened with Ali Zeidan too. He lived a big part of his life in Germany, but he became the prime minister. Some liked him, some hated him. Many of the Libyan players have lived abroad, look at Haftar, or Mahmoud Jibril. Living abroad also has its positives with making connections. It's not a big thing against him. People who don't like him will use it against him but it won't make Igtet die politically."*

## **Do you think that Igtet stands a**

## **chance at being elected?**

*"At this stage it's hard to tell. His popularity in the country isn't clear because he's kind of a newcomer for most Libyans, he's the unknown. A lot of Libyans are talking about him now, but it can be very speculative. Then again there's rumours about all political figures so it really depends."*

## **Can you give us a brief profile of Igtet? He seems to be drawing support from a lot of random places, some say has the support of Islamists or a segment of BAM.**

*"He is trying to show that he is not affiliated with any stream, and that he's for all parties and not against anyone. Enemies will try to invent stories about him. People should listen to his speeches and interviews, not what is said about him."*

# SPECIAL FOCUS REPORT

On 20 September, Chief of UNSMIL Ghassan Salamé unveiled his action plan for Libya. It is the latest in a series of initiatives that seeks to end the political crisis in Libya. The most recent framework, the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), was presented in 2015 to end the dispute between the GNC and the HoR. The LPA created the GNA, which the HoR has refused to work with just as it refused to pass the LPA. The GNC alternatively refused to dissolve, ultimately leading to three rival bodies.

Salamé's plan builds upon the existing LPA framework. The first step has seen the HoR and State Council meet in late September to make limited amendments to the LPA so that it can then be passed by the HoR. To date, the HoR has requested amendments to the LPA which are viewed as unnegotiable by Serraj and the GNA. The HoR's subsequent refusal to endorse the LPA has been perhaps the greatest impediment to moving forward with a new political framework. This initial meeting presents similar challenges in securing agreement, and it seems that Salamé is banking upon a renewed vigour for political progress to move through these initial stages.

Following the adoption of amendments, a National Conference will be held, described as the "epitome moment" of Libya's national reconciliation. The National Conference is envisioned as an inclusive event in which participants will vote on new

members for the executive institutions. The HoR in conjunction with the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, will then pass legislation to enact the appropriate political changes while taking into account the views expressed during the National Conference.

With the National Conference proposed as an inclusive event, controversial actors are expected to be included, such as former Gaddafi loyalists and Islamists. Salamé has stated that Gaddafi loyalists including Saif al-Islam Gaddafi should be included in the conference, a move which will likely face some opposition. The same has been said of Islamists. Though stating that "violence-advocating groups" will not be included, which groups will be defined as "violence-advocating" remains to be seen given that many Islamist groups have engaged in conflict with other Libyan parties and have been broadly painted by the LNA as extremists.

Overall, Salamé's plan appears not all that different than the existing framework outlined in the LPA. The proposal of a National Conference, however, is beneficial in potentially marking a turning point in reconciliation. It is also preferable to the creation of a new body, considering the numerous institutions which have since claimed legitimacy from previous initiatives and have refused to give up power. Responding to Libyans' exasperation with numerous 'transitions', Salamé's

short timeframe of a year limit on the adoption of a new constitution and election of a president and parliament has been aptly described by himself as a "qualitative leap."

In many respects Salamé's proposal does come across as ambitious – which he himself has admitted. But national reconciliation is inherently ambitious and difficult to achieve. While a political framework is essential to moving forward, complementary demobilisation and reintegration campaigns for the numerous militias are just as important. Even in the event that the first stages of Salamé's plan successfully progress, deep distrust between certain parties will remain.

What may also be missing in this plan is a concern for the international players backing various militias in Libya. Foreign involvement in Libya could mean that moving the country forward is no longer solely a matter of national agreement, as foreign backing for certain militias requires these groups to retain a degree of undue national influence and power to pay off the investment. Indeed, while contesting parties can perhaps agree to meet at a National Conference, the results of an eventual election and its acceptance by both Libyans and invested foreign powers is a different matter.

# GLOSSARY

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| BDB    | Benghazi Defence Brigade                                     |
| CDA    | Constitutional Drafting Assembly                             |
| CSA    | Civil Status Authority                                       |
| DMSC   | Derna Mujahideen Shura Council                               |
| GNA    | Government of National Accord                                |
| HoR    | House of Representatives                                     |
| IDP    | Internally Displaced People                                  |
| IOM    | International Organization for Migration                     |
| LNA    | Libyan National Army   |
| LPA    | Libyan Political Agreement                                   |
| PFG    | Petroleum Facilities Guard                                   |
| PC     | Presidency Council   |
| RADA   | Special Deterrence Forces (Interior Ministry Special Forces) |
| SCBR   | Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries                    |
| TRB    | Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade                              |
| UNSMIL | United Nations Support Mission in Libya                      |