



# Conflict-Sensitive Assistance to Libya Forum

## Summary of Discussions | 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting

2 May 2019, Acropole Hotel, Tunis

The Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya (CSA) forum, convened by the Embassy of Switzerland to Libya and the European Union and facilitated by the Peaceful Change Initiative (PCi), met for its 30<sup>th</sup> meeting (CSA 30) on 2 May 2019 at the Acropole Hotel in Tunis.

The objectives of the meeting were to:

1. Update the joint conflict analysis of the CSA process and apply the analysis to specific areas of practice;
2. Identify key conflict sensitivity considerations and responses arising from the assault on Tripoli and changes in the Libyan context as a whole.

### Summary update of analysis

In the first session of the forum meeting, PCi presented an update to the ongoing context analysis. The update covered the period since the last CSA meeting on 21 February 2019.

Working in groups based on sectors, participants reviewed the update, identifying issues that had been missed. A summary of the update, incorporating participants' comments, is included below.

The update period saw a significant worsening of the overall conflict situation in Libya, driven primarily by forces affiliated with Khalifa Haftar advancing on Tripoli and follow-on impacts on the political process, social relations and local dynamics. While the situation is evolving, it appears that this represents a paradigm shift in the peace and conflict context in Libya.

### **Political**

The update period saw a significant worsening of prospects for a resolution of Libya's transitional situation in the short and medium terms.

In late February, within the context of the takeover of the South West of Libya by forces affiliated with Khalifa Haftar (see last update), international and Libyan political actors showed an increased recognition of the need to find some accommodation with Haftar within the political process.

At the end of February, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), Ghassan Salame, convened a meeting with Prime Minister Serraj and Haftar in Abu Dhabi. The meeting reportedly included tangible discussions about transition arrangements in line with the holding of elections in 2019. The meeting itself was supported by some political actors affiliated with the Government of National Accord (GNA) while others condemned it.

On 20 March, UNSMIL announced the date for the National Conference, aimed at reinvigorating the political process and laying foundations for presidential and parliamentary elections in 2019. The UN Security Council and other international actors endorsed the holding of the National Conference as a necessary step to overcoming the political impasse in the country. However, the Conference was also seen by some political actors as a potential effort to reshape the framework

of the Libyan Political Agreement, with consequences for institutions and political actors in the country. Countering this possibility may have been a contributory factor to the timing of the move towards Tripoli by Haftar-affiliated forces in early April. As fighting escalated, the UN was forced to announce that the National Conference would be delayed until the situation was suitable.

Haftar's move on Tripoli poses a significant challenge to the role of the internationally mediated political process as the primary mechanism for trying to resolve Libya's transitional situation. It reveals a shift towards a perspective that the situation can be resolved through military action. Efforts by UNSMIL and other international actors calling for a cessation of fighting have been ineffective. In response, the political environment in Libya is polarising quickly and it remains difficult for any actor to avoid being seen as taking one side or another.

At the same time, international diplomatic and other support for armed actors on the ground, including by a number of regional and international actors who have been accused of providing military assistance to Haftar's forces, represents an intensification of international involvement in conflict in the country and increasingly divergent positions of international actors.

Elections were held in twenty-three municipalities in the South and West of the country during the update period. Haftar-affiliated Libyan National Army (LNA) authorities subsequently declared that the elections were illegitimate and that they would not recognise the results, setting up potential disputes between local actors in areas under LNA control.

### **Security and Justice**

The update period saw a significant worsening of the overall situation with regard to security and justice, with continued clashes in the South and significant escalation in Tripoli.

In the South, Haftar-affiliated LNA forces consolidated and expanded their positions after their advances in February, moving into a broader area of the South, including Ghat and Traghen. However, LNA forces were unable to secure Murzuq where clashes between the LNA and local Tabu forces saw several hundred displaced and the withdrawal of LNA forces.

On 3 April, Haftar-affiliated LNA forces announced that they were advancing towards Tripoli. Their advance saw them take Gharyan by 4 April followed quickly by clashes in the outskirts of Tripoli. The GNA announced a counter-offensive, bringing together Tripoli militias with some other armed groups such as the Benghazi Defence Brigades, to counter the LNA advance. Over the course of April, significant clashes were seen primarily, but not exclusively, around the Aziziyah area and the Tripoli International Airport. Airstrikes, rocket attacks and shelling also took place, including in civilian areas and against Mitiga airport. Towards the end of April, it appeared as though neither side had sufficient momentum to seriously advance against the other side.

In mid-April, forces under the control of Ali Kanna, the commander of the South Protection Force affiliated with the GNA, launched an attack against the LNA controlled Tamenhint airbase north of Sabha. While initial reports emerged that he had taken the airbase, it was subsequently retaken by the LNA.

Within the context of broader insecurity, ISIS elements claimed credit for several attacks within the South and Centre of Libya, including an attack on Fuqaha in Jufra and ambushes of LNA forces near Sabha.

### **Economic**

Over the reporting period the connection between oil resources, public finances and conflict in Libya remained constant while the fighting in the South significantly worsened the humanitarian and services situation in the West.

After the take-over of the Southern oil production facilities by Haftar-affiliate LNA forces in February, the Tripoli based NOC appeared to be trying to position itself outside the escalating tensions

between Haftar and the GNA. Insisting that force majeure would remain in place on Sharara oil fields so long as 'civilian' armed groups continued to control the facility, the field was reopened again after the LNA took direct control. With the reopening of Sharara, oil production has returned to close to 1.2m barrels per day. Despite the clear leverage this provided, the reporting period did not see Haftar attempt to use his control of much of the country's oil production as an outright mechanism for applying political pressure.

The LNA take-over of the South saw initial improvements in services in several major centres, as LNA authorities immediately attempted to demonstrate the positive impact of their arrival to local communities. On the other hand, the advances into Tripoli saw a sharp deterioration in terms of the humanitarian situation, with over 40,000 IDPs fleeing fighting in the city, and temporary impacts on infrastructure including electricity and telecommunications.

## **Social**

The situation worsened regarding a number of social factors during the reporting period.

The fighting around Tripoli exacerbated existing identity cleavages and may have created new ones, not only on a national level (broadly speaking between the eastern and western regions of the country), but also between neighbouring communities. In particular, many of the large settlements around Tripoli (Tarhouna, Wershafena) sided with the Haftar-affiliated forces, while communities in the Western Mountains have aligned on opposing sides. There are also significant divisions within smaller communities such as Zintan, where armed units within the city have taken different sides on the conflict. It is reported that the increasing use of the term Libyan Arab Army – the Ghadafi-era name for the Libyan army – by LNA forces has caused unease among some of the country's ethnic component communities.

Narratives on national media have fuelled the broader military confrontation. Media in any case has been highly partisan, but over the update period largely lacked any form of peace messaging from its content. Broadcasts around the conflict expressly referred to regional or tribal affiliations, additionally reinforcing cleavages in Libyan society. The style of communication even by official channels brought into focus again the shortcomings in Libyan media of codes or practice or standards of professionalism.

The military confrontation has affected the space for civil society and NGOs in Libya. Both GNA and LNA authorities have appeared to, in practice, reduce restrictions on foreign and local NGOs. These moves represent a shift from moves by the GNA to impose more significant restrictions on civil society in March, however it is likely to be aimed at building credibility with international audiences and, so far, represents non-implementation rather than a reversal. At the same time, the military escalation and resulting political polarisation has also significantly narrowed the space for civil society to play a role in articulating independent positions about the crisis or providing nuanced perspectives. Civil society figures who do look to contribute to public discourse can easily be discredited as their positions are reframed in terms of being 'for' or 'against' one of the parties to the military conflict. There are also reports of a physical closing down of space, with cases of civil society figures being arrested for dissent or local protests being 'moved on' by members of armed groups with whom they are not in agreement.

*A complete overview of the updated analysis can be found by logging into the OPSECA online platform at: <https://opseca.humanidev.tech/opseca/#?p=dashboard?a=6>. To register a profile and use of the platform, please contact [tim.molesworth@peacefulchange.org](mailto:tim.molesworth@peacefulchange.org). Only organisations participating in the forum have access to the online platform (one login profile per organisation).*

## **Conflict sensitivity considerations**

Participants in the meeting worked in small groups to identify some of the key conflict sensitivity risks and opportunities emerging from the evolving situation in Libya. A number of these were then explored in terms of what could be done about them.

The list of risks and opportunities identified below is not exhaustive and focuses on those considerations which have shifted as a result of recent changes to the Libyan context.

### **Conflict sensitivity risks**

Conflict sensitivity risks are the ways in which assistance could contribute to conflict.

#### *International support for the GNA strengthens perceptions of marginalisation*

The current situation has sharpened political division in Libya and reduced the middle ground. As Libya becomes more polarised, it will also become increasingly difficult for international assistance providers to avoid being seen to be aligned with one side or another, locally and nationally.

The UN and much of the international community explicitly recognises and supports the Government of National Accord (GNA), manifesting as diplomatic support, institutional support and assistance to areas under GNA control.

However, within a polarised context, directing international political, humanitarian and early recovery assistance exclusively for or through the GNA is likely to strengthen feelings of marginalisation among communities in Libya who do not see the GNA as legitimate. This may reduce prospects for bringing people together across political divides and may reduce the perceived credibility of international actors amongst different sections of Libyan society. It may also practically reduce the capacity of international actors to deliver assistance to Libyans in areas outside the control of the GNA.

#### *International actors provide recognition to conflict actors, strengthening their credibility*

In the opposite situation to the above, willingness of some international assistance providers to engage with authorities in *de facto* control over parts of the country, particularly the LNA, poses its own set of risks.

Delivering assistance in areas outside the control of the GNA is likely to require coordination with *de facto* authorities and thereby provide recognition and credibility to actors who have gained control through force and/or outside the formal political process. In some cases, assistance may provide credibility to the idea of military government.

#### *Instrumentalisation of assistance by conflict actors*

While already a significant conflict sensitivity risk, the evolving situation in Libya represents an increasingly conflicted environment in which conflict actors, particularly political or armed groups, are likely to increase efforts to use international assistance to support their own ends. This will occur at all levels, from the national level and interactions with government authorities to local communities.

The instrumentalisation of assistance is a risk for humanitarian assistance, where armed groups may seek to take control of supplies to support their own forces either directly or by selling them. Armed groups may also seek to limit international assistance to areas under the control of opposing forces. There are some reports that this is already occurring.

With other types of assistance, interference may be less direct, with political or armed groups seeking to influence the selection of beneficiaries or implementing partners in order to demonstrate their relevance for constituencies on the ground, redirecting assistance in order to gain political supporters while reducing it for areas under the control of opposing forces.

The instrumentalisation of assistance is likely to be unavoidable to a certain extent, especially in contexts where humanitarian needs require urgent attention. Nevertheless, international assistance providers should take note of the risk of instrumentalisation and continually assess its impact on

conflict when it occurs in order to inform decisions about whether to continue with assistance or to identify case-by-case approaches to mitigation.

#### *Focus on short-term priorities undermines efforts to address structural drivers of conflict*

The evolving situation in Libya represents a potential paradigm shift for international assistance in the country, raising questions about the political process and its interaction with other assistance, the relevance and efficiency of existing assistance programmes, and the ability of implementers to deliver assistance within the changing environment.

A shift of assistance towards addressing immediate short-term humanitarian or conflict management needs may mean that issues that must be addressed to promote medium- or long-term stability and peace in Libya are deprioritised. While it is essential to respond to immediate needs, work on addressing longer term conflict drivers cannot be stopped, or paused, without adversely affecting prospects for sustainable peace after the present crisis has been resolved.

#### *Shift to local governance as primary partners contributes to national fragmentation*

In a context where national government institutions face falling credibility and capacity due to ongoing violence, the international community will likely focus on local governance institutions as partners for delivering assistance. Local governance represents a significant opportunity to ensure that Libyans get access to responsive and relevant local services and to their political and economic rights. However, in an uncertain legal context for decentralisation, with an ineffective central government, and as local power structures adopt increasingly explicit affiliations with different sides in the national political conflict, insensitive support to local governance structures runs the risk of also contributing to Libya's fragmentation.

#### *International divisions and uncoordinated assistance strengthen Libyan conflict dynamics*

There is no simple solution, but the issue is worsened by a lack of consensus within the international community as a whole, as some actors direct their support exclusively to the GNA and others work 'practically' with *de facto* authorities on the ground. Further, without clear guidance from donors, implementers may improvise when responding to such issues, undermining the strength of a coherent message.

### **Conflict sensitivity opportunities**

Conflict sensitivity opportunities are ways in which assistance could contribute to conflict mitigation or sustainable peace, either directly or indirectly.

#### *Identify assistance needs that require cooperation across political divisions*

Such assistance needs may include: humanitarian access; management of public finances, including oil facilities and revenues; and repairs to infrastructure such as the Great Man Made River project and electricity network. Efforts to leverage such needs should take into account risks that one side may attempt to use responses to such needs as leverage over the other.

#### *Leverage the fact that assistance providers are reassessing assistance to enhance coordination*

The current situation may provide an opportunity to improve coordination. If the UN, donors and implementers adopt a collaborative approach to revising their analysis of the context and reassessing programming priorities, there is an opportunity to ensure that international assistance is more closely aligned, based on a shared understanding of needs and of the interrelations between humanitarian, development and peace assistance.

The Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya (CSA) initiative, funded by the Government of Switzerland and the European Union and facilitated by the Peaceful Change initiative, aims to support the ability of international assistance providers working in and on Libya to undertake their work in a conflict sensitive manner – minimising the risk of harm caused by their programming and maximising opportunities to promote positive peace.

The CSA activities include: a bimonthly forum bringing together international organisations, donors and implementers to consider how the changing context in Libya affects and is affected by their programming; the Leadership Group made up of senior representatives of diplomatic missions and the UN, which aims to consider policy responses aimed at enhancing conflict sensitivity; and technical support to implementers, through training and advice related to conflict sensitivity.