



Conflict-Sensitive Assistance to Libya Forum

Summary of Discussions | 32nd Meeting

19 September 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 32nd meeting (CSA 32) on 19 September 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. Present and reflect on a CSA review of conflict sensitivity of local governance assistance in Libya.

Summary update of analysis and conflict sensitivity considerations

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 4 July 2019.

Working in groups based on sectors, participants reviewed the update, identifying issues that had been missed and considered conflict sensitivity implications. A summary of the update, incorporating participants' comments and outlining points of awareness for conflict sensitivity, is included below.

On balance, the update period saw a slight deterioration in the structural elements affecting peace and conflict in Libya compared with the previous update period.

Political

The update period saw a continuing polarisation and hardening of positions at local, national and international levels.

Among national actors, neither the GNA nor LNA-affiliated actors demonstrated willingness to deescalate fighting and move to talks and remain highly polarised. On 14 September HoR spokesperson Saleh announced the decision to strip the members of the HoR, who had set up the rival HoR based in Tripoli, of their membership. On 17 July, east-based HoR MP Sehan Sergewa disappeared after being confronted by armed individuals, shortly after publicly criticising the LNA. Continued polarisation at the local level has seen the space for local, municipal level actors to find a middle path shrink further. Increasingly, municipalities appear expected to publicly demonstrate which side of the national conflict they are on. However, statements of support by municipal authorities for national actors shroud increasing polarisation that is happening within municipalities, which have exacerbated local conflict dynamics.

The update period saw both sides put significant effort into strengthening and demonstrating international support. PM Serraj undertook a number of high-profile bilateral meetings and appealed to international bodies such as the AU, the UN and the Arab League to take a clear stance on the conflict. Repeated talks have also been held with Turkish officials, and on 3 September, the PC called for boosting cooperation between Libya and Turkey.

On the other hand, the LNA demonstrated the support of its main backers. In a statement given in mid-August, Egyptian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ahmed Hafez called on the UN to step up engagement with the East-based HoR, prompting rejection and condemnation from GNA authorities. The LNA spokesman, Mismari, visited Abu Dhabi for consultations and held a high-profile news conference.

Internationally, the UN brokered process has sought to deescalate fighting, but has struggled to overcome a demonstrated unwillingness of both the GNA and LNA forces to engage.

A primary UNSMIL-led effort was undertaken to foster a ceasefire around Eid al Adha beginning on 11 August. Both sides at various points appeared to commit to the ceasefire, albeit with some conditions about locations. While the ceasefire did appear to reduce violence in some areas, it did not really come into effect and broke down with both sides accusing the other of violations.

The update period saw three briefings to the UN Security Council by the SRSG. On 29 July, 29 August and 4 September. Each of these briefings included stark warnings of continuing escalation, an unwillingness on both sides to come to the table and the involvement of international, particularly regional, actors in supporting ongoing fighting. On 12 September, UNSMIL's mandate was renewed for another year by the UNSC, with additional components to the mandate included regarding the facilitation of a ceasefire.

In early September, Germany announced intentions to host international consultations on Libya. The focus of the consultations is expected to be addressing the supply of weapons by regional backers and a reinvigoration of the UN arms embargo on the country.

Forum participants made the following observations concerning the interaction between their work and the changing political context:

- The postponement of municipal elections, although necessary due to the circumstances, opens a space for more competition between the two rival governments, by for example appointing steering committees in municipalities where mandates have expired. This can increase polarisation, feed tensions and power struggles locally, and worsen fragmentation of governance structures. On the other hand, international assistance providers should monitor opportunities to revive local election processes.
- The series of talks announced to be held in Germany presents an opportunity for targeted high-level dialogue around reinvigorating the arms embargo and addressing international drivers of conflict in Libya. While this is welcome, concern was expressed around the need to ensure that it does not contribute to further fragmentation of international good offices efforts to reduce conflict in Libya.

Security and Justice

The update period saw continued fighting between the LNA and GNA affiliated forces around the vicinity of Tripoli and escalated armed violence in the South-west, marked by intensified use of foreign-supplied aerial and heavy weaponry.

The ongoing fighting has been marked by contradictory reports from the two sides on advances/outcomes and on the nature of targets. While both sides have made occasional gains or losses of small parts of territory, there appeared to be no significant shifts in overall positions.

Over the update period, fighting has shifted to an increased use of airstrikes and artillery. Airports have been a particular target. Mitiga airport, Zuwara airport and Misrata airport have all been the target of several attacks, including shelling, drone attacks and airstrikes. Flights from Mitiga have been suspended indefinitely since 1 September, following casualties and significant damage due to airstrikes and shelling. After GNA affiliated forces killed two senior LNA commanders in a drone strike in early September, Misrata airport was the target of an airstrike, allegedly launched by a foreign actor, which targeted drone capacity at the airport.

On 16 September, an airstrike, potentially foreign, in Sirte killed two members of the Sirte Protection Force. This is the first time the city has been targeted since the launch of Haftar's offensive in April.

Benghazi experienced two rounds of explosions during the update period. On 11 July, two car bombs exploded at a funeral for a commander associated with the LNA, killing four people and injuring 33. On 10 August, a car explosion killed three UNSMIL staff members and two others, injuring an unspecified number of people. Neither attack was claimed, and the latter was condemned by both the LNA and the GNA.

The beginning of August saw a significant escalation in violence in and around Murzuq. The GNA affiliated Southern Protection Force (SPF) launched an attack with the intent of pushing out LNA-affiliated forces. An airstrike on 4 August reportedly killed 42 people and injured another 60. By 18 August, the SPF claimed it had secured the town from LNA forces, though some clashes continue. The violence has taken on a particular ethnic angle, with the largest Tabu GNA affiliated forces having reportedly ejected every Arab Ahali from the town.

The update period saw continued, but limited, activity by violent extremist groups. In the beginning of July, the Islamic State (IS) group released a video to affirm their presence. Shortly after, LNA forces were placed on highest alert in Sabha after detecting IS movement in the city. On 24 July, GNA affiliated forces announced they had detained three members of Al-Qaeda in the Tripoli area.

Forum participants made the following observations concerning the interaction between their work and the changing security context:

- Despite the continuously severe security situation, participants noted a number of dynamics that assistance providers should monitor with a view to identify opportunities. The increased use of aerial warfare rather than on-the-ground battles and use of foreign troops may imply a general combat fatigue. Correlated with a general fatigue with the fighting among the population, this may provide openings for international assistance providers, which can be explored.
- On a local level, a number of NGOs are taking initiatives and developing in response to the fighting. International assistance providers should monitor and seek out opportunities to support them in preventing violence and improving the security contexts locally.

Economic

The update period saw a worsening in the provision of basic services, with key infrastructure being affected by the fighting and an ongoing fuel crisis. However, the structural drivers of conflict in Libya appeared to remain relatively constant.

Power shortages due to infrastructure damaged during fighting became more severe over the update period and has had significant knock-on effects on the water supply. This is exacerbated by a fuel shortage, reportedly as a result of distribution problems, which reduces supply for generators. During the first half of July, protests over extended power outages broke out in Tripoli and several southern towns. On 10 August, the valves of the river pipes pumping water into Tripoli were closed as a form of protest against power cuts in the South.

The unlawful closure of a pipeline valve of the El Sharara oil field, prompted the National Oil Corporation to declare force majeure on 21 July and again on 31 July, halting all shipments of crude oil from Zawiya port for a period.

Irregular migrants continue to face significant threats as a result of violence. Following the airstrikes on the Tajura detention centre in July, migrants held a protest rally demanding protection from the ongoing armed violence. On July 9, UNHCR released around 260 migrants from the centre. On August 1, Bashagha issued a decision to close three migrant detention centres in Misrata, Tajura and Khoms and deport the migrants.

Forum participants made the following observations concerning the interaction between their work and the changing economic context:

- Participants noted that the increasingly severe humanitarian situation and consequent rising needs pose both risks to assistance providers and potential opportunities.
- Increasing and urgent needs pose the conflict sensitivity dilemma of delivering quickly on those needs while establishing inclusive delivery processes to ensure that assistance does not exacerbate inter-group tensions or feelings of exclusion. Participants mentioned two opportunities to contribute to social cohesion when addressing humanitarian needs and providing basic services. Firstly, to establish inclusive interventions, which can contribute to diminish feelings of exclusion and marginalisation. Secondly, when possible to promote access to neighbouring facilities through participatory processes, rather than building new and separate facilities. To manage such time-consuming processes in light of urgent needs, the importance of managing expectations of delivery was highlighted.
- Another risk associated with urgent needs and quick delivery is that delivery bypasses governance structures, which can weaken their capacity to deliver services as well as the confidence of communities in their ability to do so. On the other hand, involving governance structures in service delivery presents an opportunity to model consultative approaches and promote trust, improving the social contract.

Social

The update period saw continuous polarisation between communities, restricted civil society space and contesting narratives in the media space.

Media remains highly polarised. On 16 July, eastern-based authorities made remarks that municipalities and associated service providers should not be cooperating with journalists from select TV channels, most of which are affiliated with key rivals.

The space for civil society appears to have shrunk further over the update period. Civil society actors continue to face threats and intimidation by armed groups on both sides, and it has become increasingly difficult for actors to communicate across the two sides. At least two letters have been issued by GNA security services addressed to Libyan civil society organisations which have stated that CSOs are forbidden from meeting international entities without informing security offices.

The national conflict continues to provide impetus for local level conflict. Where these are fuelled by inter-communal tensions, such as in Murzuq, violence has taken an acutely ethnic and inter-communal aspect.

Forum participants made the following observations concerning the interaction between their work and the changing social context:

- The conflict puts pressure on local peace capacities. Civil society space is becoming more restrictive and rising tensions put pressure on local conflict resilience mechanisms. Divisive narratives limit the space to engage in constructive initiatives and promote dialogue. Participants emphasised a need to balance priorities of assistance. Although it is necessary to address urgent needs, it is important to avoid shifting to exclusively providing emergency responses, but also to keep seeking out ways to support local peace actors and mechanisms, in the ways possible given the challenging security and operating environment.
- Participants also noted that in the context of rising humanitarian needs, access to limited services contributes to tensions and can exacerbate feelings of exclusion. It is necessary for assistance providers to ensure that services are delivered in an inclusive manner, and that opportunities to bring communities together are identified and leveraged.

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. Only organisations participating in the forum have access to the online platform (one login profile per organisation).

Conflict Sensitivity Considerations related to Local Governance Assistance in Libya

During the second half of the meeting, PCi presented a consultation draft of a report on “*Conflict Sensitivity Considerations related to Local Governance Assistance in Libya*”.

Participants reviewed the recommendations presented in the report and provided feedback on whether they are realistic and how they may be able to implement them.

The report outlines key conflict-sensitivity considerations relating to the provision of international assistance to local governance authorities in Libya. It identifies recommendations for donors and implementing organisations to strengthen the conflict sensitivity of their activities.

The report focuses on common conflict-sensitivity considerations relating to assistance provided to local municipalities in Libya and is intended to inform practical policy, programme design and implementation. The considerations represent issues faced practically by implementers and were identified through consultations and PCi's broader peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity work in Libya.

The report takes a broad interpretation of local governance assistance, not limited to activities focused on enhancing the governance capacities of municipalities, but also looking at assistance activities that are delivered through or to municipalities, including capacity building of municipalities as well as a set of activities around service delivery, reconstruction and rehabilitation – all of which have an impact Libya's broader local governance environment.

As the report addresses assistance to municipalities in general, it is unable to provide particular recommendations about conflict sensitivity in specific local areas. This remains something which is necessary for all implementers to review as part of their project activities.

The report is attached to this report for reference.

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.