



# Conflict-Sensitive Assistance to Libya Forum

## Summary of Discussions | 45<sup>th</sup> Meeting

17 February 2022, Online

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 45<sup>th</sup> meeting (CSA 45) on 17 February 2022. The meeting was held online.

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 review potential scenarios relating to the situation in Libya and their impact on international assistance.

### Summary update of national peace and conflict analysis

This summary covers key changes in Libya's peace and conflict context over the period 10 December 2022 to 17 February 2022.

#### Political

The update period saw the postponement of elections and a contested process to establish a new interim government to replace the Government of National Unity (GNU).

On 22 December, the High National Electoral Commission (HNEC) announced the postponement of presidential elections that were scheduled for 24 December. In its address to the House of Representatives (HoR) following the delay, HNEC pointed to irregularity in the appeals process as well as claims of forged voter cards. It assessed that it would need 6 to 8 months to address these issues. In response to the postponement, UNSMIL urged to maintain focus on holding elections by June when the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) roadmap expires.

The announcement of the delay saw both Prime Minister Dbeibah and HoR Speaker Saleh resume their respective positions. The HoR tasked a Roadmap Committee with developing a new roadmap towards elections, including selecting a new interim authority to replace the GNU, arguing that its mandate has expired. On 7 February, the roadmap developed by the Committee was adopted by the HoR and, on 10 February, it was instated as an amendment in the Transitional Constitutional Declaration. The roadmap stipulates holding a vote for a new Prime Minister to form a new transitional government, holding of elections within 14 months, and the creation of a 24-member constitutional committee composed of representatives from the country's three regions to draft a new constitution. The new constitutional process was condemned by 43 of 58 Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) members, by the Supreme Council of the Amazigh as well as by Tuareg and Tabu representatives.

*The Conflict Sensitive Assistance in Libya (CSA) forum, 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.*

*CSA activities include: a regular forum bringing together international organisations, donors and implementers to consider how the changing context in Libya affects and is affected by their activities; 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.*

On 10 February, a contested vote in the HoR saw Bashagha, one of two candidates, elected as PM and tasked with forming a new government for a vote of confidence by the HoR. The appointment saw some celebrations in Misrata and was welcomed by the Libyan National Army (LNA), but was rejected by Dbeibah who, referring to the LPDF roadmap, said his government would continue in office and only hand over authority to an elected government. On 12 February, Dbeibah announced a plan to hold elections by June noting that he would describe the plan in full on 17 February and urged people to protest on that day. The day before saw protests against the move in Tripoli and Misrata. Regardless, Bashagha was able to travel to Tripoli following his appointment and has begun consultations to form a new government. On its part, the High State Council (HSC), initially confirming its support for the HoR, appears to be divided.

Internationally, Egypt announced its support for Bashagha and there have been indications that Turkey supports Dbeibah, however, most international actors have not come out in support for neither Dbeibah nor Bashagha but appear to adopt a wait and see position. UNSMIL initially appeared to maintain its recognition of the GNU but has since not demonstrated a clear stance. UNSASG Williams met with both Dbeibah and Bashagha in the capital and held consultations with other national actors.

The update period also saw a temporary extension of UNSMIL's mandate by the UN Security Council despite disagreements amongst its members, with Russia demanding the appointment of a new Envoy to Libya.

### **Security and Justice**

The update period saw isolated clashes between armed groups in different parts of the country and a mobilisation in Tripoli and the west.

The update period has not seen large-scale violence but incidents of clashes between armed groups in the north-west of the country, notably in Tripoli and Zawiya. Despite the absence of large-scale violence, the update period saw a general mobilisation of armed groups in Tripoli as rival national actors have sought to soar up support. There were reports of armed groups from Misrata moving to the capital in end December and following the appointment of Bashagha as a new PM by the HoR. There have been different statements signed by Misratan armed groups both in rejection of and in support of Bashagha's appointment. On 10 February an assassination attempt at Dbeibah was reported. On 12 February, armed groups were reported to prevent a meeting of the HSC in Tripoli.

On its part, the LNA launched a security campaign in the south of the country to strengthen its position there. The campaign has involved raids on fuel stations and smugglers, closing the border with Chad and Sudan and has seen clashes between LNA-aligned armed groups and local GNU-aligned armed groups in Sabha. There have also been several attacks on LNA-aligned armed groups claimed by Islamic State in the surrounds of Sabha.

The update period has also seen several meetings of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission and 7 January saw the first meeting between GNU-aligned Chief of General Staff Mohammed al-Haddad and LNA-aligned Chief of Staff Abdelrazak al-Nadhori to discuss the unification of the military institutions.

### **Economic**

The update period saw shutdown of oil fields due to strikes by several Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) factions, but generally no major development in terms of structural economic drivers of conflict<sup>1</sup>.

The month of December saw PFG forces in the south and west announce closure of oil fields ostensibly due to lacking salary payments. Disagreements between Minister of Oil Aoun and National Oil Company (NOC) Chairman Sanallah have continued with both being accused of

making moves to strengthen their own positions, such as making new appointments and building support from PFG units. This has reportedly also led to temporary shutdown of oil fields.

The broader economic situation continued to worsen in line with global economic pressures. In 2021, Libya saw an increase in inflation reaching 21.1% compared to 2.8% in 2020 and 0.2% in 2019. This has likely had a negative influence on the cost of living and thereby living conditions.

Following a meeting held on 15 January between the eastern and the western CBL administrations, the CBL published a statement on 20 January announcing the launch of the unification process with the signing of a contract with Deloitte. The statement also mentioned that the process consists of four steps without clarifying what they involve nor the timeline for the process.

*The complete CSA national peace and conflict analysis, as well as a more detailed overview of the updates for this period including updates to individual peace and conflict factors, 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 [libyacs@peacefulchange.org](mailto:libyacs@peacefulchange.org). Only organisations participating in the forum have access to the online platform (one login profile per organisation).*

## **Social**

The update period witnessed frustration and disappointment among the public across the country after the postponement of elections.

The postponement of elections saw protests in several cities across the country. 76 candidates from the southern region encouraged people to protest and launch a strike until a date for elections is specified.

The update period saw continued limitations to civic space. On 8 February, the GNU-aligned Civil Society Commission Abdul Haq al-Qarid reportedly disappeared with reports suggesting he was abducted. On 11 February, news reporter and founder The Libyan Woman's Forum for Peace Mabrouka al-Mesmari was attacked by an armed group in Benghazi following the broadcast of a political sensitive programme.

## **Conflict sensitivity considerations related to projected scenarios for peace and conflict in Libya**

Following the presentation of the summary update covering the changes to the context since the last CSA forum, PCi presented different scenarios outlining different trajectories the conflict in Libya could take over the following 6 months.

The scenarios are constructed around an analysis of possible developments in key variable peace and conflict factors. Due to uncertainty around the electoral process, the usual 12 month scenario projections were reduced to 6 months. Scenarios are intended to represent the range of outcomes which Libya may experience, and which international assistance providers should consider when planning, without assessment of probability. Scenarios are also intended to be indicative, representing broad possibilities – actual events are likely to differ to greater or lesser degrees.

Working in groups on each of the scenarios, participants reviewed the scenarios, assessing whether they present plausible developments given the current context and recent trends. The groups also discussed which implications the given scenarios may have for delivering assistance and identified conflict sensitivity risks and opportunities arising out of each scenario, including who should take actions to leverage the identified opportunities. The scenarios and summaries of discussions are outlined below.

## **Scenario 1: Ongoing governance uncertainty**

### *Scenario description*

This scenario is characterised by ongoing confusion over governance arrangements and the political situation.

During the scenario period, Bashagha is unable to propose a government which is accepted by both the HoR and the HSC. Dbeibah refuses to step down without elections having taken place. This leaves an uncertain political situation where the GNU governs in an ongoing temporary capacity, with limited support from the HoR and the HSC.

The UNSMIL led political process continues and the lack of political progress means it continues to be at the heart of politics. Within the scenario period it is unable to make progress either in addressing the governance situation or towards organising elections. Nevertheless, the UN is able to provide technical support for preparations for elections and the drafting of a new constitution.

Progress on the HoR's roadmap gets tied up in renewed discussion about the process between political actors, particularly related to the drafting of the constitution. By the end of the scenario period, there is no clear idea about when a new constitutional draft might be ready or when elections might be held.

There is limited insecurity in the country over the scenario period, as armed groups continue to wait and see how the political situation evolves. Nevertheless, armed groups maintain significant influence through the threat of use of force. Little progress is made in reforming security structures within the scenario period.

Some local violence occurs, particularly in the south, where inter-communal tensions gain prominence in the absence of wider national tensions.

Economically, the political situation allows some attention to shift towards recovery and development, though this is hampered by political wrangling over budgets and the GNU's authority. The broader economic situation faced by Libyans worsens in line with global economic pressures, including inflation. Some protests occur, placing pressure on the government.

*This scenario was not discussed during the meeting.*

## **Scenario 2: Governance transition, short term stability**

### *Scenario description*

This scenario is characterised by a relatively orderly transition in governance from the GNU under Dbeibah to the HoR nominee Bashagha. However, severe structural challenges remain which threaten instability in the medium term.

During the early part of the scenario period, Bashagha proposes a new government. Through clever allocation of government positions, promises of future benefits and intimidation, the make-up of this government is able to, at least temporarily, satisfy the interests of major political and armed actors in the west and east of the country. Dbeibah is left with limited support and agrees an orderly transition. Any potential spoilers are either discouraged or dealt with by armed groups supporting Bashagha.

Despite the transition, there exist tensions within the government, particularly between actors in the east and west, which require constant attention and threaten to destabilise it.

The new government is recognised by most international and regional actors. European states, the US and the UN maintain a cautious engagement while continuing to make statements pushing for new elections to be held. Regional actors seek to quickly engage with the new government to secure advantageous relationships.

The UNSMIL led political process continues to exist but is de facto eclipsed during the scenario period by the new government and the HoR's transitional roadmap. The UN's role focuses on supporting the drafting of a new constitution and preparation for elections.

Progress on the HoR's roadmap gets tied up in renewed discussion about the process between political actors, particularly related to the drafting of the constitution. By the end of the scenario period, there is no clear idea about when a new constitutional draft might be ready or when elections might be held.

There is limited insecurity in the country over the scenario period, as armed groups are temporarily satisfied by the new political arrangements and feel that they have most to gain through cooperation for the time being. Nevertheless, armed groups maintain significant influence through the threat of use of force. Little progress is made in reforming security structures within the scenario period.

Some local violence occurs, particularly in the south, where inter-communal tensions gain prominence in the absence of wider national tensions.

Economically, the political situation allows some attention to shift towards recovery and development, though this is hampered by political wrangling over budgets. The broader economic situation faced by Libyans worsens in line with global economic pressures, including inflation. Some protests occur, placing pressure on the government.

*Conflict sensitivity implications identified during groupwork:*

- Participants noted that, on the one hand, it is unlikely that Dbeibah will step down easily and that all armed groups will accept the transition to Bashagha. On the other hand, Bashagha's entry to Tripoli shows that he has substantial influence in the capital. The determining factors will be which positions armed groups and foreign backers take. It is likely that the internationally led process will be eclipsed and that the scenario would push elections into the future. This means that fundamental questions around the latest electoral process and Libya's transition will still not be resolved.
- The governance transition may create new momentum for programming in Libya since depending on how open and cooperative new interlocutors are. At a least, it will likely mean stability in national counterparts. A stable unified national government enables the resumption of programmes around local governance and civil society and may enable more reconciliation work at a national and local level. On the other hand, with the prolongation of the transitional phase polarisation may increase and the space for civil society shrink. This would make it more challenging to hold authorities accountable and poses risks for Libyan staff and partners.
- There is a risk that actors that have adopted violent and undemocratic processes in the past will be incorporated into a new government. In their engagement with a new interim authority, international assistance providers may provide recognition to these actors and thereby to their approaches. In this case, it will be important to discuss potential trade-offs and agree on a collective approach to engagement seeking also to avoid appearing to favour certain actors over others.
- The transition outlined in the scenario inevitably involves Bashagha making deals with various actors to secure their support. As we saw with the GNU, this may strengthen a patronage-system in which there will be winners and losers. This can lead to increased tension and dissatisfaction for those who do not get 'a piece of the cake'. International assistance approaches could inadvertently feed into such dynamics and international diplomatic work should seek to hold the government accountable.
- There is a risk that such a new power sharing agreement may exclude women as it is not built on the LPDF roadmap that stipulated a quota for inclusion of women. It is important that international assistance, especially diplomatic work, advocates for participation of women along with inclusion of other population groups.

### **Scenario 3: Disputed governance transition, East-West split**

#### *Scenario description*

This scenario is characterised by a disputed governance transition, with a split between actors affiliated with the east and the west. This sets momentum towards the reestablishment of rival authorities in the East and in Tripoli.

There are two main paths towards the outcome of this scenario:

- a. Actors in the west reject the appointment of Bashagha, backing the existing GNU which refuses to step down. The HoR does not accept this and maintains the view that Bashagha, or another candidate, leads the legitimate government. With limited access to Tripoli, the HoR sponsored government sets itself up in the east of the country, though is limited by lack of funds.
- b. In attempting to establish his government, Bashagha recognises the influence that western political and armed actors have on the viability of government in Tripoli. Addressing their needs allows for a transition from Dbeibah to Bashagha but alienates eastern actors who withdraw approval of the new government. The HoR moves to appoint a different candidate to lead the government, but this is rejected by the new government in Tripoli.

The political focus during the scenario period lies on addressing the dispute over governance authorities. Little progress is made around elections or the constitution.

The UNSMIL led political dialogue process focuses on reunifying governance, including pressure to hold elections as soon as possible. However, little progress is made over the scenario period.

International and regional actors continue to de facto recognise the GNU in Tripoli as the government of Libya but adopt a wait and see approach in terms of formal support.

Some violence occurs during the period in areas where armed groups affiliated with the GNU and with eastern political actors are in close proximity. However, neither side has the capacity to launch a serious attack on the other.

Some local violence occurs where different groups within communities align with the new national political factions. In the South, the new national political divisions overlap with communal tensions with a continued risk of violence.

There is little scope to address economic concerns by authorities due to the political situation. The broader economic situation faced by Libyans worsens in line with global economic pressures, including inflation. Some protests occur, playing into the disputed national politics.

#### *Conflict sensitivity implications identified during groupwork:*

- Participants noted that the scenario is plausible, particularly if Bashagha is seen to favour eastern actors in the formation of a new government, which would be rejected by western armed groups and actors. Participants also noted that there is a question around how internationals will position themselves, which is not fully unfolded in the scenario. Regional actors do currently not appear to have an interest in supporting a solution that involves violence. This may provide momentum for a return to a political dialogue.
- The scenario will likely see a reduction in access due to the political division. A new eastern government may not have the same infrastructure in place as the interim government. It may be unclear who has authority in different areas and local actors have in the past shifted alignment between rival national actors. This will cause disruption to international assistance. Engagement approaches will need to ensure inclusive dialogue with different actors on the ground. International assistance may face trade-offs between being able to deliver assistance and providing certain actors with recognition.
- Generally, this scenario will increase the risk of conferring legitimacy to rival actors and playing into polarised narratives thereby contributing to worsening those dynamics.

International assistance providers need to agree on a collective approach on how to engage with and provide recognition to rival authorities.

- The political uncertainty and insecurity outlined in the scenario reduce space for long-term efforts that focus on addressing structural fundamental issues including those fuelling conflict. There is a need for flexibility and ongoing planning of international assistance priorities and approaches in response to different scenarios in order to seek to apply long-term strategic efforts when opportunities arise.
- There is a possibility that Dbeibah will push ahead with elections in order to demonstrate his legitimacy towards international actors. If elections are pushed ahead in disputed circumstances and without agreement on fundamentals this may worsen conflict dynamics. It is also likely that elections will not be able to take place in areas under disputed authority, which could feed into divisions and call elections into question.

#### **Scenario 4: Disputed governance transition, tensions in Tripoli**

##### *Scenario description*

In this scenario, tensions over the governance transition creates divisions between armed groups in Tripoli, sparking violence.

In trying to form a government, Bashagha is able to secure the support of a number of key armed groups in the west, including in Tripoli. However, other armed groups are unwilling to support him, due to lack of trust or unwillingness to support a government including rival groups.

With divided support between the GNU and Bashagha, Dbeibah does not step down, claiming that he will not step down until after elections.

The political situation triggers violence between armed groups supporting rival authorities in Tripoli. This violence does not lead to a clear outcome, with both Dbeibah and Bashagha continuing to claim authority.

Given the violence and instability, no progress is made towards elections or the constitution during the scenario period. Political efforts, including by the UNSMIL-led political dialogue, focus on trying to find a political solution to the tensions.

International and regional actors call for a political solution but increasingly align themselves with one side or the other, undermining international recognition of a single government.

Some local violence occurs where different groups within communities align with the new national political factions. In the South, the new national political divisions overlap with communal tensions with a continued risk of violence.

There is little scope to address economic concerns by authorities due to the political situation. The broader economic situation faced by Libyans worsens in line with global economic pressures, including inflation. Some protests occur, playing into the disputed national politics. Where violence is taking place, communities face conflict-driven humanitarian needs including displacement.

##### *Conflict sensitivity implications identified during groupwork:*

- Participants noted that the scenario is plausible as it is likely that neither Dbeibah nor Bashagha will be able to build enough support and satisfy all actors to enable a peaceful transition. There are such strong animosities between the armed groups, including those in the west, that it is unlikely that either side will accept a political deal that includes the other. Rather, both rivals seeking to soar up support will likely lead to increased tensions.
- The political uncertainty along with increased polarisation and insecurity will negatively affect access both in terms of physical access (entering the country and entering certain areas) but also in terms of political and armed actors instrumentalising control over areas to obtain benefits or to divert assistance. This disrupts international assistance and increases

the conflict sensitivity risk of empowering certain actors over others and feeding into conflict dynamics.

- Ongoing political divisions raises the risk of providing recognition to rival actors and thereby feeding into rivalries and polarisation. International need to navigate this division and seek to avoid being seen to support one side over the other to avoid contributing to worsening tensions.
- National political divisions and polarisation may further feed into and trigger inter-communal tensions and divisions locally, in particular in the south. Shifts in alignment between local and national actors have in the past fed into local rivalries and triggered tensions and violence locally. In this environment, it is increasingly important that international assistance is not seen to favour one group over others and thereby contributes to increasing tensions.
- Although the scenario poses a challenge to assistance planning and allows limited space to address long-term structural factors, it is important that international assistance is not only reactive to the follow-on effects (humanitarian etc.) of political tensions, but also try to plan according to different scenarios and to anticipate which needs and opportunities may appear. Proactive efforts to support local conflict management mechanisms are also needed to prevent tensions from triggering into violence.
- Participants finally noted the importance of current changes in international assistance frameworks for Libya. Rolling out the new UN Sustainable Development Framework requires a national counterpart which is not present in the scenario. There is a risk of too quick a shift from humanitarian to development funding which does not take into account the political reality of the context nor how that situation affects different population groups and how vulnerable groups may be instrumentalised.