

THE PROCESS FOR HUMAN & ENERGY SECURITY IN LIBYA

THE LIBYAN CONFLICT & INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUE EFFORTS

OCTOBER 2020



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"The foreign minister of Germany said 'the situation in Libya is a marathon and we have to have a long vision view to solve the problem'. It *cannot* be a marathon to solve the problem, it *must* be a 100m sprint. We do not have the luxury of long term."

- PARTICIPANT, 08.10.2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 8 October, the Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs (IISA) convened the third webinar of the process for human and energy security in Libya to discuss international dialogue efforts to resolve the Libyan conflict. The meeting was attended by participants from the General National Assembly (Tripoli-based), the House of Representatives (Tobruk-based), Turkey, UAE, Egypt, Italy, and regional experts. Most participants expressed hesitant optimism at the negotiations in Berlin, held three days before the webinar, and those of the 5+5 Joint Military Commissions (JMC). Participants noted a number of possible spoilers to a political settlement, citing militias and foreign mercenaries in particular. Participants expressed their ongoing commitment to the process and agreed to a meeting in November 2020.

INTRODUCTION

International dialogue efforts, such as the UN-facilitated Libya Political Forum (LPF) and the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC), have begun to make strides in negotiations. Following the Berlin conference on 5 October 2020, the Institute for Islamic Strategic Affairs (IISA) convened the third webinar of the process for human and energy security in Libya. The meeting was attended by participants from the General National Assembly (Tripoli-based), the House of Representatives (Tobruk-based), Turkey, UAE, Egypt, Italy, and regional experts. The meeting was held on 8 October 2020 and aimed to discuss how far the UN-led LPF can reach a settlement to the conflict, whether there is hope for its implementation, and whether this process can complement the efforts of the UN.

MEETING SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION BY REGIONAL EXPERT

At the beginning of the meeting, a regional expert gave a brief update on the developments that have taken place since the last webinar, which was held in September. In the overview, the regional expert focused on the outcomes of the Berlin conference and outlined potential drawbacks to the agreement. It was said that the potential deal tasks representatives within the UN-led LPF process to nominate representatives on a regional basis to form a new presidency council. The nomination would then go to the House of Representatives (HOR). If the HOR was unable to convene or the nomination was not able to go through, then it will go back to the LPF. The LPF representatives would then renominate another person and the process to go through the HOR would start anew. Once the presidency council is formed, it would then select a new prime minister for Libya as well as a cabinet, and will also decide on recommendations for the formation of a new constitution.

The regional expert said that the UN-led negotiations are welcome and that this agreement would provide factions with representation in the political sphere. However, they said, a number of drawbacks remain. The first drawback, the regional

expert argued, is the climate surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic. If the negotiations occur purely online, they explained, then these talks may be doomed from the outset. With repeated failed attempts at holding successful negotiations in person, which already undermines the chances of success, relying on an online discussion may further weaken the process.

The second drawback to this agreement, it was said, is the recent call for parliamentary elections by political figures associated with the state council. However, it was explained that elections would require greater international buy-in and would be a departure from what was agreed upon in the UN-led talks.

The regional expert then turned to the participants for discussion.

THE BERLIN CONFERENCE & OTHER DIALOGUES

Many participants expressed hesitant optimism at the Berlin negotiations and the 5+5 JMC, with most saying that they were "very encouraged" by the developments. A Libyan participant said that a unity government is "the only solution" and while a similar proposal was put forward last year, that the current situation in Libya is different. The participant said that the first change is the climate within Libya and pointed to the protests in Tripoli. Second, is the leadership shown by Stephanie Williams, the Deputy Special Representative for UNSMIL. UNSMIL and the UN at large, the participant noted, "has learned its lesson" from failed negotiations and have now pushed to bar representatives from within the process to vie for political power within the future unity government. The participant seemed to note this as a positive development.

The participant said that there is genuine interest on the Libyan level to find a solution, especially in terms of the 5+5 JMC process, where military leaders and field commanders are discussing pertinent issues. This could pave the way for partnership in a genuine Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) process, it was said.

However, another Libyan participant seemed hesitant. They said that the negotiations may not be a sign of genuine interest in solving the conflict, but rather, the participant hypothesised that these negotiations are perhaps a sign of

regional or international competition.

Another participant also said that the optimism is "premature". The participant pointed to the fact that there was no agreement to a ceasefire in Berlin and that the parties did not sign the communique, despite it being "a communique for beginners". The participant said that these negotiations are lacking a dominant leading figure and that "everyone is in a rush, everyone wants to make achievement, but they need time".

In response, another participant said that, "it is not about optimism or pessimism, it is an obligation. If there is failure in the political process, there will be bloodshed."

POSSIBLE SPOILERS

It was noted that a possible hindrance to a political settlement is that neither Haftar nor Sarraj were in attendance. One participant questioned whether Haftar would comply to any agreements made and said that it is necessary that Haftar and his followers align themselves to any solution that is agreed upon. Furthermore, the participant said that Tripoli must also ensure that the transition process to a presidential council goes smoothly.

However, all participants agreed that the biggest hurdle to overcome are the militias. One participant reiterated a point made in a previous webinar by saying that

"you cannot have a state with militias. Militias bring the government to its knees... If you cannot manage the militias on the ground, then any agreement that they come to will be very difficult to implement". Another participant underlined this and said that the problem with militias is that they do not merely exist in the East or the West but rather the whole region. "Each city has its own militias," the participant explained.

It seemed, however, to be a chicken-and-egg issue. A Libyan participant argued that "you need to have a unified government in Libya, without this you cannot get rid of militias, you cannot have an army, and you cannot fight corruption". On the other hand, another Libyan participant said that the only way to get rid of the militias is to have a unified army, by saying "some say elections. Okay. The unification of the army is the most important".

Another participant underlined this point by highlighting the importance of security sector reform (SSR). The participant said that SSR "is an urgent issue that must be carried out alongside the political process or else we will have more Haftars". The point was further emphasised by the participant who said that "If you want a united and sovereign Libya, you must have a political process alongside SSR".

Another participant brought an international lens to the militia issue and said that "everyone has their own concern about militias and mercenaries on both sides... all mercenaries have foreign patrons".

"I think there is blame to go around. One thing that is in oversupply is blame. No one is blameless."

- Participant

FOREIGN INTERVENTION & REGIONAL COMPETITION

Foreign intervention and the role that foreign actors play in the conflict was also discussed. One participant talked about regional competition and linked it to the militias. It was said that foreign powers "need those clients to have their political positions in Libya", which implies that foreign actors may be supporting militias on the ground to further their goals on a regional level. The participant noted that these interests may not be in line with Libyan political actors.

Discussions surrounding mercenaries sparked debate. It was said that there are Sudanese, Russian, Chechen, and Syrian mercenaries on the ground. One participant estimated the presence of foreign mercenaries to be between 15,000-17,000 and said that "they are a time bomb" and will be "an element of destabilisation" even if a political solution is agreed upon. Russian influence, in particular, was concerning to many participants. One participant emphasised that the influence of Russia has implications on both the side of Haftar as well as the GNA.

A participant pointed out that "foreign intervention has several shapes" with "one group monopolising oil resources" and

"others "punishing other Libyans". Another participant said that foreign intervention has been frequently mentioned in these webinars but said that "we have not talked about the regional engagement we have seen". The participant noted that "there is quite a lot of public engagement" and that "the entire region is contributing to a political process - a peace process". The participant underlined this point by saying that "many see competition, but we a lot of contributions too".

THE WAY FORWARD

Participants were divided on whether elections would be a step in the right direction. One participant agreed with the opinion of the regional expert and said that "it is like throwing a dice". Similarly, another participant said that elections are of concern, but what is more questionable is what happens after an election and whether the transition process goes smoothly. Contrastingly, a participant asked whether elections will increase the level of conflict and pointed to the stark divisions in the country that already exist and asked, "What is the risk?".

Participants agreed to discuss the implications of the dialogue processes and the conflict in future discussions and expressed commitment to the process. The next meeting was set to be held in the middle of November 2020.

"We cannot go with a marathon; we need a sprint - but we can walk and chew gum at the same time."

- Participant

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