



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

## Maghreb October 2018

### **NATO, Egypt and the rebuilding of Libya's security and military institutions**

On 4 October 2018 NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg reiterated the North Atlantic organisation's readiness to help Libya rebuild its security apparatus [Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Defence Ministers, 4 October 2018, NATO]. Speaking in Brussels after a meeting of NATO Defence Minister, Stoltenberg said that NATO was ready to help the North African country rebuild its security and military institutions, especially the defence ministry and the security forces. The announcement confirmed the North Atlantic Alliance's interest in assisting Libya. In June 2018 Stoltenberg had already said that NATO was ready to assist Libya creating a military force under the oversight of civilian authorities. In an interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*, the Secretary General confirmed that NATO officials were already in talks with the Libyan authorities to discuss the collaboration.

Since then two major developments occurred. Firstly, the North Atlantic Alliance had approved a Defence Capacity Building (DCB) package for Tunisia. The DCB package, approved at the NATO summit in July, includes a training mission for the Tunisian security forces, with a particular focus on the fight against terrorism and border control [Umberto Profazio, *NATO's Strategic Direction Towards Tunisia, Maghreb Strategic Trends*, July 2018, NATO Defence College Foundation]. Stoltenberg's announcement could have hinted at a similar package for Libya, but on 4 October Stoltenberg made very clear that a military training mission for Libya was not on the table and that only discussion were ongoing on possible assistance.

The second major development occurred inside Libya. The battle for Tripoli that started at the end of August between the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade (or Kani Brigade) from Tarhouna and the militia cartel controlling the

capital highlighted a persistent lack of rule of law. Once again the internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA) of Prime Minister Fayez al-Sarraj was unable to prevent the fighting, ease tensions and provide security to the people in Tripoli.

Combats ceased at the end of September, but the high death toll (117 deads and more than 400 injured) left serious doubts about GNA's overreliance on the 'super militias' in control of Tripoli [Sudarsan Raghavan, Surge in fighting among Libya's 'super militias' imperils Western peace efforts, 2 October 2018, The Washington Post].

In order to change the conflict's dynamics, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) promoted a set of economic and security reforms adopted by the GNA. UN envoy Ghassan Salamé and his recently appointed deputy Stephanie Williams have been particularly active in tackling the rule of militias in Libya, supporting plans for their disarmament and demobilisation. Their efforts resulted in new Security Arrangements for Tripoli, whose main goal was to replace armed groups and militias in control of the various parts of the capital with regular police and security forces.

For the plan to be successful, the reinforcement of the GNA's security apparatus is paramount. For this reason, support from external partners, such as NATO, could create the most favourable conditions for the success of the plan. Indeed, on 10 October Salamé and Williams were in Brussels, where they met with Stoltenberg to brief him on the political, economic and security developments in Libya [Safa Alharaty, Salame reviews with NATO Secretary General latest developments in Libyan arena, 11 October 2018, Libya Observer]. It is likely that the new Security Arrangements for Tripoli were also discussed, with UNSMIL's representatives testing NATO's readiness in playing a supporting role.

Nevertheless, other regional actors have already showed interest in rebuilding Libya's security apparatus. Since July 2017 the Egyptian government (which is considered supportive of the Libyan National Army-LNA of General Khalifa Haftar) has tried to mediate between Libyan rival factions in order to reunite the Libyan army [Umberto Profazio, A window of opportunity closing fast for Libya, Maghreb Strategic Trends, March 2018, NATO Defence College Foundation]. On 17 October talks resumed in Cairo, where the Libyan representatives reportedly agreed upon the establishment of three Command Councils for the army: the National Security Council, the Supreme Defence Council and the General Command Council [Sami Zaptia, Cairo Libyan army reunification talks making considerable progress, according to Haftar's spokesperson, 19 October 2018, Libya Herald].

However, Khalifa Haftar proved once again to be a divisive figure. As sources from Cairo confirmed a leading role in Libya's future military for the General Command of the LNA, the Presidency Council denied reaching a final agreement on the reunification of the Libyan military. The Islamist militia coalition Bunyan Marsous (born from Operation Solid Foundation) also announced its rejection of the Cairo talks, deeming the Egyptian government not neutral and biased towards Haftar. As a result, the latest round of talks proved again unsuccessful and Egypt's neutral stance in brokering an agreement increasingly questioned.

The upcoming Palermo conference (12-13 November), organised by the Italian government, could clarify if and how there is a door open to NATO's involvement in Libya's security sector reform. A fine tuning of NATO's assistance package with Cairo could be important in avoiding different or diverging security sector approaches in an already divided context. That said, it is highly likely that the LNA will continue to rely on the Egypt's mediation efforts, for obvious reasons, and that Palermo could witness some progress, but not necessarily a breakthrough at political and security level.

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