

APPROACH TO THE THREAT NETWORKS IN LIBYAN CONFLICT



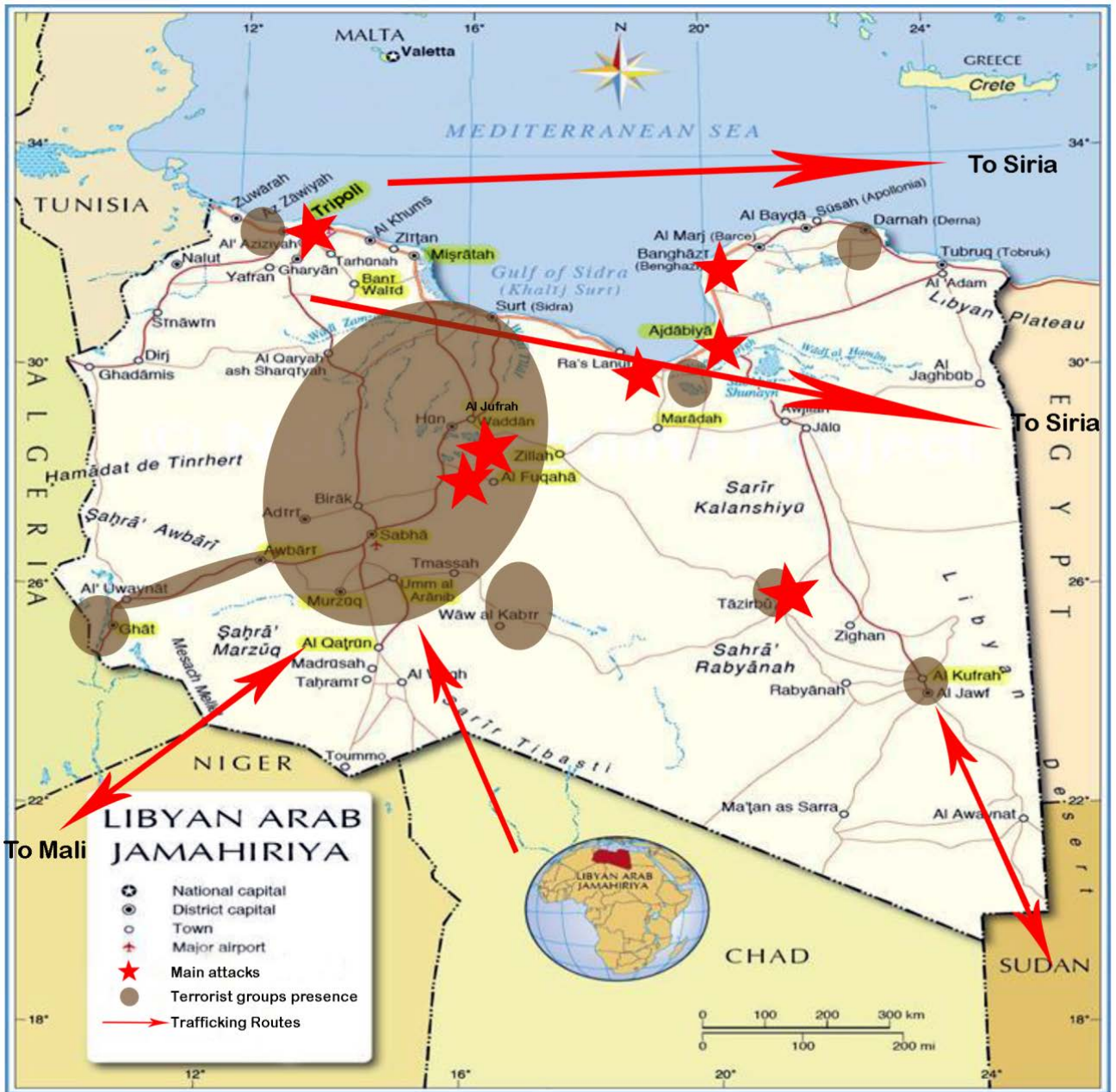
Madrid, June 2019



C
I
E
D

C
O
E

APPROACH TO THE LIBYAN CONFLICT



POLITICAL INSTABILITY CONTEST

The current terrorist threat in Libya had its beginning in the significant political instability existing in this country, which in turn comes from the political and social rebellion that broke out against the regime of Muhamad Gaddafi in 2011.

After eight years of internal conflict in Libya, which even gave rise to an international military intervention in 2011, under the auspices of NATO, the current situation is still far from its resolution and the consequent political stability that leads to a security environment.

The current conflict framework is defined by different parameters, some of which are expressed below:

1.- **The Libyan territorial polarization**, particularly between the regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, already existed in the days of Gaddafi, although the dictator appeased the territorial anxieties and generated some national cohesion through the purchase of loyalty among the main local leaders.

2.- **After the regime of Gaddafi, the regions of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica are confronted both politically and militarily**, reflected the latter case in the intermittent fighting of the militias that support the respective regional authorities.

3.- **The United Nations is sponsoring the Libyan political agreement** that achieves peace and national unity. This agreement was **finally reached in 2015**, under which a government body called the Presidential Council / Government of National Agreement (PC / GNA), based in Tripoli and supported by the international community was created. The National Chamber of Representatives has its HQ in Cyrenaica

4.- In absence of regular Army and Police in Libya, the PC/GNA has based its security and **the security of Tripoli on the hands of gangs of thugs** operating in every Tripoli district. These security militias hinder any attempt to organize a regular security apparatus in Tripoli that does not accommodate to their own benefit, taking hostage the CP/GNA.

5.- **Cyrenaica is also military organized in a heterogeneous mosaic of militias**, some former soldiers of the Libyan Army with Gadhafi, some mercenaries coming from Sudan and Chad and ALSO supporters of the old dictator. All of them configure what is called Libyan National Army (LNA), far away of a conventional Army, despite its name. It is commended for Halifa Hafter, a former General of Gadhafi, who nevertheless went into exile in USA and who has vocation to unify militarily the entire Libyan territory, even if he is rejected by the main Tripolitan militias.

6.- **The political weakness of the PC/GNA and its very important ineffectiveness, as well as the progressive military success of General Hafter, not only in Cyrenaica but even in vast Libyan regions, have contributed to change the focus of some actors of the international scene.** Because Hafter is supposedly taking the fight to the terrorists and he's doing it very effectively and moving forward, he's now starting to be viewed not as a part of the problem but as a part of its solution.

Hafter's tactical approach is based most of the times on the **scope of economic and security agreements with the main tribes and clans affected in every region** (loyalty is hard to get maintained in Libya, due to the changing interests of the small and dispersed militias).

This mentioned polarization in the international support to the CP/GNA could have some consequences in the instability of Libya.

CURRENT SITUATION OF THE TERRORIST THREAT IN LIBYA. DAESH SUBSIDIARY IN THIS COUNTRY

The **control of Sirte by DAESH during 2015 and a big part of 2016** as well as a remarkable coastal strip around this city coincided with the apotheosis of the existence of the DAESH in Syria and Iraq. However, the DAESH Caliphate shot the national and international alarm. **An alliance of several Tripolitan militias**, mainly coming from the town of Misurata, to which were added some other militias of the capital, **defeated finally the DAESH in Sirte at the end of 2016. US air support was decisive** in this offensive.

Although the main effort was coming from Misurata, the CP/GNA reaped some success, becoming the promoter and coordinator of the war effort against the DAESH.

After the fall of Sirte, the DAESH was dispersed into different areas of the national geography of Libya, trying in this way to protect against US air incursions. **Dispersion by desert zones, clandestinely, the structure in small cells, the autonomy of every one and the constant mobility are usual principles in its action**, which conditions its activity and, at the same time, makes its neutralization difficult.

At present, **DAESH is estimated at around a little less of one thousand combatants**, scattered throughout different areas of Libya's national geography.

The leadership of the terrorist organization, as well as about half of its fighters, are foreigners, mostly Maghrebis. There are also people from Syria and Iraq who, using the Somalia-Eritrea-Sudan route, have going into Libyan territory from Sudan to the locality of Kufra using local facilitators integrated in the illegal trafficking routes.

Some of the DAESH fighters, coming in this case from sub-Saharan countries, have also entered Libya from Chad. Both of them, whether they come from Sudan or Chad, are taken to the so-called Black Mountains of Al Haruj, in the central region, and from there they are taken to Bani Walid.

Bani Walid and its Southern areas around are one of the main enclaves of the Daesh in Libya. The area was and is a refuge for the leaders of the DAESH after the fall of Sirte, as well as remains one of its main bastions.

Other areas of terrorist activity have been Fuqaha, the southern outskirts of Ajdabiya and the south of Sirte, where it operates from its bases in the so-called Black Mountains of al-Haruj and the town of Jufrah. Sebha, the capital of the southern region of Fezzan, is similarly the scene of their performances.

Most of the DAESH attacks are perpetrated by surprise ("*hit and run*" model). Ambushes and machine-gun attacks against **opportunity targets, mostly assigned to the LNA.**

The presence of DAESH in the Southern region of Libya, Fezzan, takes place around the towns of Sebha, the district of Murzuq, as well as the communication route between Awbari and Ghat.

DAESH in **Fezzan** is characterized by their clandestine support activities; the area is a **scenario for logistics supply, withdrawal and recruitment of some of its fighters**, despite the fact that one feature of the group is its **low rooting with the local people**, unlike from AQIM in this case.

Unlike to AQIM also, which use illegal traffics for its own benefit and for its financing, DAESH is not involved in the abundant illegal traffics existing in Fezzan region, although it organise some illegal road checks in order to stock up on gasoline and some other resources. Some steps and routes of smugglers are however used by the terrorists of the DAESH, albeit autonomously.

Financing, in the case of the DAESH, is adapted to the survival and autonomy patterns of each of their cells, as well as to the financial support from the central Libyan structure, which still has some gold reserves for financing some special operations, coming from the assault to the Libyan central bank during the capture of Sirte.

Although it is estimated that the Libyan faction of the **DAESH does not have a propaganda apparatus**, its connection with its core structure in Syria has been demonstrated, given the promptness in which some of its attacks have been claimed.

TACTICS, TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES OF LIBYAN FACTION OF DAESH

The migration of tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) from Syria and Iraq has been identified. The use of IEDs from the start of the conflict has been mostly related to;

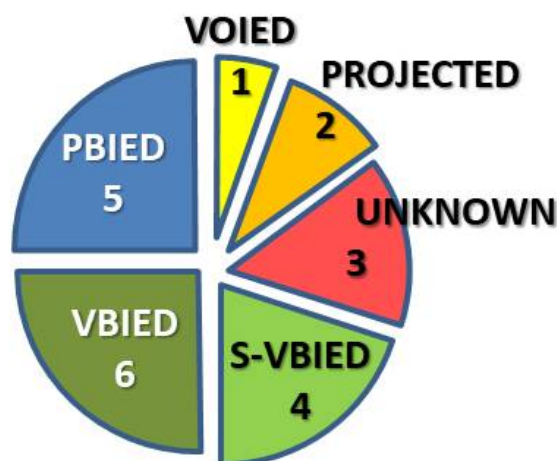
- **Victim Operated IEDs based on pressure plates** looking for indiscriminate targets, although the limited use of crush wire as firing switch armed by a Radio Control (RC) switch is showing some sort of target selection;
- **Magnet Attached IEDs** with mechanical Time delay switch or RC initiation system;
- Passive Infrared (PIR) initiation systems;
- Use of **military ordnance** as main charge;
- Use of **Suicide Vehicle Borne IEDs (VBIED) & Person Borne IEDs (PBIED)**, sometimes combined in a complex attack (Courts of Misurata on October 4th 2017).

During 2018, the DAESH strengthened its logistical and operational capabilities, being able to organize an attack in a Benghazi mosque in January, as well as two other well-organized attacks in Tripoli, which remains a **priority objective for this terrorist organization** and where it has support cells (one attack in May against the headquarters of the Electoral Commission, as well as, in December, against the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

The trends in the use of IEDs are mostly based on VBIED (suicide and emplaced) and PBIED, as the IED-attacks' metrics from 2018-2019 are showing as follows;

IED TRENDS IN LIBYA 2018-2019

21 IED INCIDENTS



SOURCE: Open Sources

Note: One single IED-attack could content several IEDs (e.g. four PBIEDs in the same attack).

HOAXs, false IEDs, caches, found IEDs... have not been considered for trend's analysis

AQIM IN LYBIA

There is **no relationship between AQIM and the DAESH in Libya**. Both terrorist groups coexist, each group with its own interests and without clashes despite the rivalry.

The presence of AQIM in Fezzan is very important. It is strengthening its smuggling networks in the country to facilitate the movement of fighters and weapons to support its operations in the Maghreb and the Sahel. As a neuralgic space for transit, logistics management, recruitment, training and resting in relation to its usual operational space, not in Libya, but in Mali, Niger and Burkina-Faso. Libya is consequently the rear-guard and logistic centre of the AQIM and JNIM groups operating in the Sahel.

AQIM dodges the operational activity in Libya, without detriment to the fact that some of its fighters have enrolled, in a personal capacity, in the fighting and skirmishes that took place in some Libyan scenarios such as Benghazi and Derna, and even in the central zone of oil production, called "Oil Crescent". It is necessary to consider in this regard the remarkable implementation of Ansar al-Sharia in the eastern coastal strip of Libya (Cyrenaica region), mainly in the town of Derna, which was, more than it is today, the AQIM brand in Libya .

The counter-terrorist pressure against AQIM in Fezzan is progressively increasing. The advance and progressive control of the LNA on the global Libyan territory affects at the same way to the South region since the beginning of 2019. Since then, the LNA has taken control of the main aerodromes in the region, controls the main Southern centres of oil production, whose management, as it happened before in the area of the so-called Oil Crescent, has been offered by Hafter for its availability to the National Energy Agency in charge to the effect, which, paradoxically, distributes the dividends of the national production between the two parties confronted.

However, **the overall security control of the Southern region is extremely difficult**, given the geographic and social features of the region and the enormous difficulty of executing in it administrative and security tasks (continuity of the contingents, burdensome logistical tasks, etc.). This administrative and security vacuums are the main reasons why AQIM evolves so easily in Fezzan, creating also a symbiosis and empathy with local population. In this sense, tribal and family ties are important, in many cases at the highest level too, among terrorist and mainly local Tuaregs installed in Libya and Mali.

Although that difficulty for detection, the involvement of United States in counterterrorism is growing in Southern regions of Libya, mainly through selective air strikes, which are also directed against AQIM in Libya, as well as against the DAESH, since 2018.

Despite the absence of operational activity in Libya, AQIM maintain a considerable activity and presence in this country, which, as has already been pointed out, is aimed at supplying and supporting the Sahelian terrorist groups.

THREAT OVER WESTERN INTERESTS.

There have been several **kidnappings** by terrorists **against Westerners in the southern region of Fezzan**. This threat exists in the same way against people of the **facilities that several western oil companies own in Fezzan** (among them the Spanish REPSOL, the Italian ENI and the French TOTAL).

The risk exists in the same way against **Western citizens registered in international organizations that move to Tripoli**. On the contrary, there is a slight risk of security in the eastern region of Cyrenaica, controlled by General Hafter.

As a consequence of the current relative weakness of the DAESH in Libya, as well as the improvement of Tunisian counterterrorism capabilities and the security of the border between Tunisia and Libya, **the terrorist threat of the Libyan faction in Tunisian territory has been minimized**. It is therefore difficult to reproduce terrorist actions in Tunisia, similar to the great attacks that occurred in 2015. This does not exempt Tunisia to suffer terrorist attacks perpetrated by local terrorist groups evaluating in its own territory.

FUTURE PROJECTION

The Libyan political instability generates the favourable context in which the DAESH develops its activity. The evolution of the terrorist and security situations in Libya will depend to a large extent on political and security developments. A relevant indicator in terms of stability will be the achievement of a national agreement for holding elections in the country. Their absence shows the insufficient scope of the political initiatives so far adopted.

The lack of political unity on the part of the main Libyan and international actors in their support to the PC/GNA will have incidence in a political agreement **in the short term**.

It is also necessary to consider that in the worst case for terrorist activity, the terrorist groups can always remain in the Southern desert of Libya, making its neutralization difficult.

According to the presentation, it is considered that **a terrorist threat persists in Libya**, although it is focused substantially against members of the militias that support the main factions of the existing political and military power (CP/GNA in Tripoli and LNA in Cyrenaica), as well as elements which define the ruler power of PC/GNA.

The IED threat is currently present but mostly limited to Tripoli and other important cities, in which the visibility of the attacks has special media significance. DAESH reserves its most relevant resources (VBIEDs) to these targets.

ASSESSMENT

DAESH – due to their dispersion & isolation, the increase of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) activities around Bani Walid and Sebha areas would facilitate the current targeting initiatives.

AQIM – as they are strengthening the links with local tribes, Influence activities over local population are highly recommendable in Fezzan area, just in the aim of deny support from locals.

POC:

C-IED CoE

Ctra M-618, Km14, Colmenar Viejo-Torrelodones

28240 Hoyo de Manzanares

SPAIN

INFO@ciedcoe.org