



NATO Warsaw Summit Decisions Regarding Libya

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One outcome of NATO's Warsaw Summit was a decision to strengthen the Alliance's Southern Flank, by, among other things, declaring a readiness to act for the internal stabilisation of Libya and intensifying the anti-smuggling operation off the Libyan coast. Two positive decisions reverberated in the summit communiqué: unequivocal support for the new Libyan government and the need to coordinate NATO's actions with the EU. The Alliance's declarations, however, require a formal request from the Libyan authorities and specifications for Operation Sea Guardian. The Libyan government is most likely to ask individual countries for help with more urgent military tasks, such as the recent U.S. airstrikes carried out in Sirte after an official Libyan request.

Libya is the second most unstable country in the neighbourhood of Europe and the transatlantic area. Since the civil war of 2011, however, there has been no better time for NATO's involvement in Libya than now. Unexpected successes of the new Government of National Accord (GNA) finally make the stabilisation of Libya a real possibility, but the GNA needs urgent support. The importance of Libya for the security of NATO members was reflected in the communiqué after the Warsaw Summit. The country is referred to both in the general points on countering terrorism, including Islamic State (IS/ISIS/ISIL), arms proliferation and smuggling (points 5, 7, 25) and in specific decisions about recognising the GNA as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people, the need for the unification of the Libyan forces under its leadership, NATO's readiness for a long-term partnership with Libya, and assisting EU's *Operation Sophia* off the Libyan coast (points 30, 93, 97).

The Situation in Libya. The Libyan crisis has two interconnected dimensions: the internal one (involving security, political, humanitarian and economic crises) and the international one (the proliferation of threats beyond the country's borders and to the Mediterranean Sea, including human trafficking, arms smuggling and terrorism).

The political and security crises stem from the weakness of the central authorities, the existence of multiple centres of power, internal conflicts of unevenly developed tribal territories and historical parts of Libya (Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan) the existence of around 2,000 local militias, the vitality of radical Islamist and jihadist groups (such as the IS and Al Qaeda) and the proliferation of weapons and smuggling networks. A small but meaningful easing of the political dimension of the crisis in Libya occurred with the arrival in Tunis of the GNA (supported by the UN and the EU) and its accession to key ministries in April. Humanitarian and economic crises are caused by an inability to translate the current low level of extraction and production of crude oil into the provision of basic services to Libya's population of seven million. More than 60% of hospitals are inoperative, many villages are without electricity, and more than a million people have been internally displaced.

The international dimension of the conflict in Libya consists of intensive arms smuggling and human trafficking through maritime and land borders, resulting in terrorism being exported to neighbouring Tunisia (the attacks on the Bardo museum and tourists in Sousse in 2015 were carried out by men trained in Libya), and potentially to Europe. Two major migratory routes that lead from sub-Saharan Africa through Libya are confluent of the Central Mediterranean route to Europe. Its capacity is currently bigger than that of the route from Turkey to Greece. Africans migrating through Libya are subject to inhumane treatment by the traffickers: 2,500 died in the sea this year alone. The international dimension of the crisis extends to the intervention of third countries in favour of the one or other side. Turkey and Qatar are supporting the Islamist General National Congress in the West, while Egypt and Saudi Arabia back General Khalifa Haftar, an anti-Islamic, authoritarian former associate of Muammar al-Gaddafi. Haftar

leads the strongest military organisation in the east of Libya, although it is most likely that he resides in Egypt. The GNA has the task of uniting all of these forces.

Until March of this year NATO was considering a direct operation in Libya. The expansion of terrorist organisations, including the IS (which was then recruiting more in Libya than Syria and was in control of over 250 km of the coastline), and key migration routes that cross the country were an explicit threat to the security of Europe, located only 450 km from Libyan shoreline.

Libya at the NATO Summit. The NATO Warsaw Summit Communiqué embraces both dimensions of crisis in Libya, although solutions to the international aspect depend solely on Libyan decisions. And correctly, for in recognising the GNA, NATO can only act in Libya upon its request. In the Communiqué, Alliance members expressed their support for Fayez al-Sarraj, the prime minister of the GNA and the chairman of the Presidency Council (PC, acting as the head of the state) in its efforts to achieve an inclusive political process, national reconciliation and the establishment of state structures (point 30). Unification of all Libyan forces under the leadership of the GNA was fittingly perceived as “key” to Libyan anti-terrorist capacities, which is a sign of the realisation that only stronger central authority, not external players, can in the long term ensure Libya’s stabilisation. Plans for future Libyan membership of the Mediterranean Dialogue (a framework for cooperation between NATO and Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania and Morocco) were announced in Warsaw, as well as NATO’s readiness to assist and advise the GNA on security sector reform (point 97).

Arrangements concerning international aspects of the crisis in Libya include the transformation of the 2001 *Operation Active Endeavour*. Initially intended to control the Mediterranean Sea in order to fight terrorism, the change broadens its scope as *Operation Sea Guardian*. NATO will, upon the EU’s request, assist the European *Operation Sophia* through the provision of a range of capabilities including intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, as well as logistic support. Upon Libyan and/or EU request NATO will also contribute to improving the capacities of the Libyan coastguard and navy (point 93). These actions are based on UNSCR 2292, which permits the inspection of vessels suspected of violating the Libyan arms embargo. However, the precise scope of *Operation Sea Guardian* has not been specified. NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg suggested that its objective would be to disrupt human trafficking routes, most probably by using warships and drones. Moreover, the creation of a NATO intelligence “fusion centre” in neighbouring Tunisia will be beneficial for more detailed reconnaissance of the situation in Libya and for border control.

How to Implement the Summit Decisions Successfully? Increased interest in Libya as shown in the Warsaw Communiqué should be assessed positively, although internal developments in NATO countries (such as terrorist attacks in France and an attempted coup in Turkey) could render the Warsaw declarations empty words. The GNA is the only chance for a more stable Libya. On top of that the government has already shown its effectiveness by combating the IS in Sirte. However, if it cannot deliver basic security and services to Libyans, it may fall. In order to maintain the pace of reform and secure crucial international aid, the GNA should turn to NATO for help as soon as possible, thus providing the Alliance with the legal framework and impetus for action. Until now the new Libyan government has preferred the EU over NATO as a partner. Therefore, it should be the EU and UNSMIL that convince the GNA that NATO is a better provider of certain forms of aid, such as the SSR or border surveillance.

The most effective scenario for the Libyan security sector, albeit not mentioned in the Communiqué, would be the simultaneous development of the government’s capacities in SSR and DDR (disarmament, demobilisation, reintegration), accompanied by efforts to improve the potential of the defence ministry or training of officers at the NATO Defence College or the NATO school in Oberammergau. Training soldiers in Libya remains a high-risk tactic as weapons and skills may fall into the wrong hands.

As the key global security alliance, NATO will have to act politically in order to show leadership in the Euro-Mediterranean region by making sure that Libya’s neighbours are included and cooperating in achieving the most favoured outcome for Libya and the region, namely a unity government that takes control of the whole country. Ensuring that states bordering Libya refrain from any form of military interference in Libyan affairs and respect its territorial integrity will be NATO’s most pressing diplomatic challenge.

NATO’s fundamental problem in Libya after the intervention of 2011 has been its negative image. All sides of the political spectrum—the winners and losers from *Operation Unified Protector*—view the West unfavourably. The trend can be seen in the negative reaction of conflicting Libyan factions to U.S. airstrikes in Sirte, carried out upon request from the GNA and in order to support it in the fight against the IS. NATO should not get involved in direct military operation—if such outside involvement is necessary, it will be individual states that will be asked for help.

Long-term political acceptance of NATO in Libya will be bolstered only by clear pro-Libyan non-military action such as preventing the smuggling of oil out of and weapons into the country, preventing assets of Libyan state abroad from being used for the benefit of individuals, or ensuring that arms sales to third states are properly tracked and do not end up in Libya despite the embargo. The conditions and preferences of the civilian population eventually determine the strength of warring factions and central authorities. In order to demonstrate the understanding of such a link, and to disprove accusations of securitising the conflict in Libya, NATO members, while reformulating *Active Endeavour* into *Sea Guardian* and augmenting its presence off the Libyan coast, must increase humanitarian aid to Libyans.