



The Ceasefire in Libya: Its Implications for the Region?

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BACKGROUND

- On [October 23](#), the UN has announced that military representatives of Libya's warring parties agreed on a permanent ceasefire in Geneva and praised this agreement as a "historical development".
- According to [the deal](#),
 - All military units will pull back from front lines and a joint police operation room will secure the withdrawn areas.
 - All foreign forces, trainers, and mercenaries have to be withdrawn in 90 days
 - Until the establishment of a new unified government, all military agreements with foreign countries will be suspended.
- While the US, the EU, Russia and other countries praise the agreement, Turkey's Erdogan supporting GNA actively is sceptical about it. He [states](#) that "Today's ceasefire agreement was actually not made at the highest level, it was at a lower level. Time will tell whether it will last. So, it seems to me that it lacks credibility."
- On [October 27](#), Libya reopened the oil fields and airports for operation, and the UN launched the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum that brought the parties together virtually.

ANALYSIS

Libya

The military negotiations between the committees of the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libya Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) are a part of the post-Berlin 5+5 process. The meetings of the military representatives of the Libyan groups, held in Egypt, also contributed to achieving this deal.

The agreement is definitely a crucial step towards achieving lasting peace, but it is too early to celebrate or to name it as a historical moment. In the decade of post-revolution, Libyans witnessed many such agreements, which aroused great expectations but ended up with failure. Usually, either those delegations at the negotiations were not representative enough, or parties did not honour their commitments following the agreement.

Similar difficulties exist in this case, as well., The people signing the deal for GNA act under the control of Feyaz al-Serraj, who has the authority over only a small part of the GNA coalition consisting of various groups, e.g. militias, Misratans, Zintanis or Islamists. Some of them has already started to voice their objections. Thus, the negotiators of GNA, who signed the agreement may not be

representative enough to implement the deal on the ground. For the LAAF side, the more significant risk comes from Haftar, who is infamous for not honouring his commitments.

This ceasefire deal is helpful on the security dimension of the crisis in Libya. However, the security aspect heavily depends on the economic and political causes, which are way more complicated and competitive issues for the warring parties and particularly their external backers. Political negotiations will start in Tunis at the beginning of November. Therefore, without seeing a settlement in political expectations, and more importantly agreeing on how to govern Libya's economy and share its revenue, it is too early to be hopeful. If it was only Libyans that needed to negotiate to find a compromise solution, the problems could have been way easier to solve.

Speaking about the positions of the external actors, it is promising that the UN, African Union, Arab League, EU, France and Italy, UAE, Russia, US, Egypt and Libya's other neighbours declared support to this permanent ceasefire. Such a high level of support means a lot.

Russia

Geneva agreement is heavily sponsored by acting UN Libya envoy, former US diplomat, Stephanie Williams. Clauses regarding the withdrawal of foreign military groups aim to decrease Russian influence, as well. Russian private military company (PMC), Wagner Group, is also supposed to leave Libya. Officially, Moscow supports the Geneva process and urges Haftar and Serraj to comply with the deal. Russia, however, has never accepted an affiliation to Wagner and its actions. Thus, Putin still has a space to manoeuvre inside. Making their intervention overtly, the backers of the GNA do not have such a space.

Israel

Israel will benefit from the deal if the transition from conflict to lasting peace is materialised. Sudan's strategic position along the Red Sea and Libya's strategic location at the heart of the Mediterranean make them **vital maritime links for Israel**. The Sinai Peninsula has strategic importance for Israel, and it always tracks the movement of jihadists from conflict zones of Libya to the Sinai.

Israel supports field marshal Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) through clandestine means. There are also strong assertions of different authorities that Haftar and Mossad have clandestine collaboration in Libya, they had some secret meetings in various countries like Jordan and Egypt, and Haftar has promised safe zones for the Israeli military and intelligence personnel to train LNA militias.

The coordination between Haftar and Israel began in 2015 and was conducted through UAE and Egypt. **Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt share the same perceptions of security** in the region and in the Libyan crisis, that put them into the same boat with Israel. Israeli support to Haftar brings it into greater de facto alignment with them. UAE is the most prominent military backer of Haftar's confederation of militias and foreign mercenaries.

Yedioth Ahronoth – a national daily newspaper published in Tel Aviv has revealed on August 26, 2020, that Israel has been selling advanced military systems and equipment to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) for more than eight years. According to the SIPRI Fact Sheet (2020) that presents global trends in arms exports and arms imports:

“Israel was the eighth-largest arms supplier in 2015–19. Its arms exports accounted for 3.0 per cent of the global total and were 77 per cent higher than in 2010–14. Although Israel has ranked higher than eighth in some earlier five-year periods, the volume of Israeli arms exports in 2015–19 was the highest ever.”

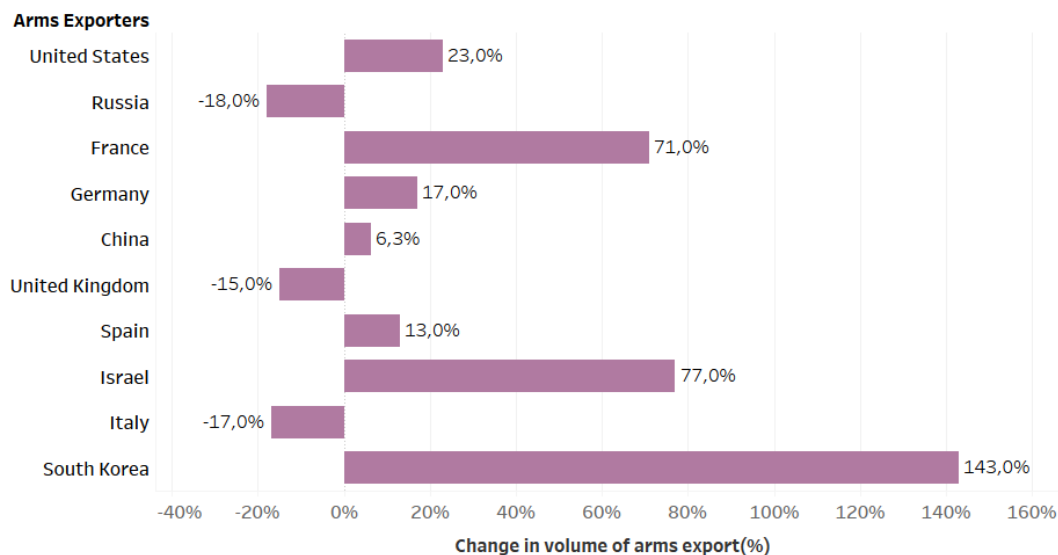


Figure 1. Changes in volume of major arms exports since 2010–14 by the 10 largest exporters in 2015–19

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, Mar. 2020.

According to the figure, evidently, Israeli arms export widens since 2015-2019. 2015 is the year Israel began to contact LNA through UAE, and 2015-2019 is the period UAE bought arms from Israel in huge volumes. Of course, selling arms to UAE in recent years in huge volumes does not mean that UAE is the only recipient of Israeli arms or Israel is the only supplier of UAE's arms import.

The more influential position in the decision-making process Khalifa Haftar after the ceasefire has, the more substantial hand Israel would have in Libya. Although Haftar has a lousy record when it comes to commitments, Jerusalem thinks that Haftar is the type of leader whom the Israelis can engage with an intelligence sharing. After a political settlement, Israel will highly likely play an essential role in different aspects in terms of defence, security reforms, building process and institutionalisation depending on Haftar's power.

Turkey

Erdogan's reaction to the deal implies that he does not want this deal to succeed, and it is understandable. He was expecting the GNA side to follow his plan during the negotiations process. Geneva deal, however, targets Turkish military presence and Syrian mercenaries brought by Erdogan. Despite its significant amount of investments, Turkey was left out of the negotiation. Libyan's and international community preferred to follow Egypt's agenda in this process. If the agreement goes into implementation, the influence of Erdogan's ideological partners – political Islamists on the new Libyan government- will be highly constrained. This situation will decrease Turkish influence over Libya, jeopardise all its political, military and economic expectations, and MoU regarding the maritime zones in the Eastern Med.

Egypt

Egypt and the gulf countries are a crucial part in the Libyan crisis. They were the prime supporters (both funding and military) of General Khalifa Haftar's push to overcome the Government of National Accord (GNA) centered in the capital Tripoli. They spent treasure and Egypt even interfered directly in the conflict, **with air support and strikes**.

At the doors of Tripoli, General Haftar was close to overcome his adversaries, but everything changed when in early 2020, Turkey intervened. In an impressive power projection, it was able to stop the advances of the General on Tripoli, pushing back General Haftar's forces from the outskirts of the capital to the eastern parts of Libya, despite the backing of Egypt and Russia. Despite all their efforts Egypt, the Gulf countries (mainly UAE), and Russia were unable to stop the GNA from rolling back all the advances made by General Haftar. Although, they were able to force the GNA and their Turkish backers to stop their advances at the outskirts of the eastern region of Libya.

With the signature of the ceasefire agreement, the Turkish support and pressure against General Haftar might subside and allow the Egyptians to reorganise their backing, and plan ahead. This agreement comes at an opportune point for Egypt that is being pressured on several fronts, and an additional setback in Libya would be very detrimental for them.

With all parties benefiting from the ceasefire, no escalation is expected in the near future, at least not **before the new US administration** take power in January 2021 and decide on a course of action for Libya (the current US administration sided with the GNA against General Haftar and his Russian/Egyptian allies). However, in the medium term, the Libyan theatre may be once more plunged into conflict, considering the growing enmity between the two regional powers Egypt and Turkey.

Yemen

The ceasefire has significant implications for Yemen. Both coalition partners aligned with the legitimate government to roll back Houthis are leading supporters of LAAF. Especially the UAE, and to a lesser degree, the KSA will be able to free up resources from Libya and focus more on building force and allocating more effort to the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

This reallocation seems to have been well-coordinated with other regional partners. Last week, an article on [Reuters](#) reported Israel would not oppose the sale of F35 fighters to the UAE and that Trump said the process was moving alone. Moreover, Israel and the UAE plan to build a regional intelligence collection base on Socotra island and the number of Arab countries normalise relations with Israel increases. These dynamics create a new regional alliance including Israel, the UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, and STC in the making against Iranian and Turkish (political Islam) influence.

The normalisation of trio's relations with Israel paves the way for an example with the other Middle East countries. Those high-tech systems could also include air-defence systems and armed UAVs that have proven their utility in the war in Libya.

Consequently, all these developments do not bode well for Yemen. On the contrary, they create favourable conditions that strengthen internal divisions within the country. One great benefit of this ceasefire agreement will be the creation of an example to be repeated for Yemen. If not for internal conflicts to have more say on the table, a similar ceasefire could be attained even earlier. If a compromise could be reached between the legitimate government and the Houthis, and if regional backers supported this, a similar agreement could be reached to give respite to the war-torn country to dress its wounds.

Strategic Foresight

Based on the analyses above, it is highly likely that:

- To sum up, this permanent ceasefire agreement is significant and has substantial **potential for attaining lasting peace** in Libya. Nevertheless, the high level of **distrust** between warring parties; the high level of **fragmentation** within the factions; the high level of **foreign meddling** and complex ideological, political and economic relations, and finally the **zero-sum game** approach existent among some actors renders it “**not enough**” to be hopeful.

- With or without making use of some trivial reasons, Haftar side will shun from fulfilling the obligations of the deal. That is why some speakers of GNA called the UN to monitor Haftar’s actions in accordance with the Geneva deal. For both sides; **implementation of the agreed clauses** requires cooperation between the GNA coalition and Haftar forces; considering the level of distrust between parties, it is going to be highly **problematic** if not impossible.

- Some groups inside GNA may try to **spoil** Geneva deals. As an example of this manner, some GNA-affiliated Twitter accounts started to broadcast fancy military training videos of GNA soldiers, which are being trained both in **Turkey** and Libya. However, the deal provides some time for Turkey, since it is **overextended** in the region.

- At this stage, rather than Libyan factions, their external allies are **not likely to abandon** their interests over Libya. Even if external backers like Russia and Turkey are given some economic benefits to compensate their investments to Libya, ideological and political wrestling will still exist. Political rivalry over reaping Libya’s **geopolitical benefits** between France and Turkey, or **ideological rivalry** between Abu Dhabi, Cairo, or political Islamist in Ankara is not likely to settle down quickly.

- The backers of LNA – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE and Israel as the éminence grise in the background welcome the ceasefire agreement. In order to be seen as pro-peace in the international arena, they will **compel Haftar’s forces** to honour their commitments following the agreement. Their so-called common stance for lasting peace in Libya will **isolate Turkey** more in the international arena, as Turkey trivialises the agreement.

- It is highly likely that while maintaining his official position in supporting the Geneva process, Russia will **continue its military presence** through PMCs and support to Eastern Libya factions. It is worth adding that it **does not seem realistic** to expect the departure of all foreign military groups, fighters or mercenaries **in three months**. (According to Stephanie Williams, there are mercenaries from nine different countries)

- In the short term, there is a high probability that the ceasefire agreement will hold, at least until the new US administration takes power next January 2021. However, in the medium term the chances for a conflagration of the conflict would significantly rise, considering the growing enmity between Egypt and Turkey.