10 luglio 2012

Libya – Perspectives for the Security Situation after the Elections

Wolfgang Pusztai[*]

According to UN DESA (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) Libya is a country with a population of at least 6,355 million (2010)[1]. Around 2,3 million are under the age of 18. This means roughly 4,1 million potential voters (excluding several Libyans living abroad who are also eligible to vote). Based on the UN DESA figures the 2,865,937 registered voters are only about 70% of all the potential voters. According to initial statements of the High Election Commission finally 1,805,540 people voted (= 44% following the UN DESA figures). Keeping in mind that the participation in the greater Tripoli area (more than 2 million inhabitants) was particular high it's still not a lot for the rest of the country…

But we have to keep in mind that we are talking about a country less than a year after the end of a civil war. Therefore the quite successful conduct of the **elections** for the General National Congress has been **a major leap forward** for Libya.

Nevertheless **many crucial questions** for the way ahead of the country remain. One of the most important one is the future development of the security situation. Major challenges in this area are the build-up of reliable security forces, several tribal conflicts, remaining loyalists and organized crime.

The **build-up of security** forces did not yet bring satisfying results. The presence of the police on the roads is still quite limited, in several parts of the country virtually non existent. Police training in Libya and abroad is way behind schedule. Under the umbrella of the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) a paramilitary "Supreme Security Council" with 17 subordinated SSCs in major cities was established. These SSCs are providing an "umbrella" for (mainly) smaller militias that are willing to be coordinated by the MoI. Their main mission is the support of the police. The build-up of the "National Army" faces also significant problems. At the beginning the intention was to take in individuals and form out of them units whose loyalty is with the government. As the recruiting numbers were way behind expectations the "National Army" was forced to take in several militias altogether (e.g. some Misrata Brigades or the "Libyan Shield Brigade"). Their reliability is at least doubtful. For the time being there is no significant improvement in sight.

The most important **tribal conflicts** in Tripolitania are between the Misrata and the Tawurgha, between various Jabal Nafusa Militas and the Mashashiya, the Zawia and the Wrishifana, the Sia'an / Mahamid and the western Berber / Zawia, the people from Souk al Jouma / Zliten and the

---

[1] The frequently mentioned figure of 5,7 million originates from the 2006 census. It seems to be that this number is also used in the High Election Commission voter statistics.

The opinions expressed herein are strictly personal and do not necessarily reflect the position of ISPI and of the Austrian MoD.

(*)*Wolfgang Pusztai is a Colonel in the Austrian Bundesheer.*

Warfallah, the Misrata and the Tarhouna and beween the Berber / Ghadamsiyya and the Touareg. In the Cyrenaica the most important tribal conflict is the Zuwayya and other Arab tribes against the Tooboo. Major conflicts in the Fezzan are between the Zintan and the Maqarba, between the Hasâûna / Hutman / Zintan and the Touareg and between various Arab tribes (including again the Zuwayya) and the Tooboo. In the capital Sebha the Awlâd Sulaymân, Hasâûna, Zuwayya, Maqarba and Ghaddadfa are fighting against each other in sometimes changing alliances for the domination of this important city.

The reasons for these conflicts range from historical problems to disputes over terrain – Qhadafi used to settle supportive nomads in the tribal areas of non supportive tribes – to major atrocities during the war and support to the Qhadafi regime until the very end to smuggling. Unfortunately there is not a single of these conflicts with a real solution in sight.

During the run-up to the elections several **loyalist cells** were identified and eliminated in the greater Tripoli area. In many of the former main loyalist areas like Bani Walid, Tarhouna and Mizdah "self-defense" militias were established in order to protect the population from other militias. But there is no indication that the former loyalists will try to trigger a major conflict. As the surviving sons of Qhadafi have a lack of leadership skills there is also no real leading figure for them. Moreover as the remaining more competent aids of Qhadafi are (currently) neutralized there is also nobody to lead from behind.

The problem with **organized crime** is increasing. The smuggling of weapons, drugs and other kinds of goods is well organized and in many areas of the country supported by the local tribes. This makes it quite difficult for a powerless government to deal with it. Human trafficking is getting again more important and better organized. In due time more and more illegal immigrants can be expected to depart from Libya.

To further complicate the situation the current Cyrenaica federalist movement as well as Islamic extremism could (and probably will) turn more violent.

The **federalists** are supported by about one third of the population of the Cyrenaica – whereas many of the others (including the Islamists) are firmly against their ideas. They have already established a "Barqa Army" which gives them some military capability. Tripolitania cannot accept any kind of federalist solution with a border at the Wadi al-Ahmar as claimed by the "Barqa Army". This would leave the important Tripolitanian oil harbors of Ras Lanuf and As Sidr to the Cyrenaica.

Islamic extremism finds a fertile ground in north eastern Libya. Some of the extremists are probably disappointed by the results of the elections. Several Salafi Groups conducted already their first attacks on western targets. According to several media sources Al Qaeda is building up forces in the coastal area of the Cyrenaica. The AQIM (Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) is using western Libya as a safe haven and as a logistic base. It can be expected that Islamic extremists will become more violent – also against western targets – in the near future. This will be in particular a threat in the northern Cyrenaica, southern Tripolitania and in the Fezzan (oil facilities!).

A precondition for facing all these challenges is **the establishment of a stable and strong government**. But due to electoral system of Libya this will be quite difficult to achieve. Unfortunately, even if a stable and widely accepted government can be established, the perspectives for a positive development in many of the problem areas mentioned above, are not too bright.

Therefore it will take some more time until Libya gets stable. Patience is necessary!