



NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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Issue: Countering hybrid warfare threats in Libya

TIMUN '25 

Turkish International Model United Nations



THIMUN Affiliated
Conference



Committee: North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

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I. Introduction

Hybrid warfare refers to the simultaneous use of multiple types of warfare through military and non-military tools. While there is no clear accepted definition, methods of hybrid warfare can be listed as political warfare blended with conventional warfare, disinformation, economic coercion and the deployment of mercenaries are some examples of hybrid warfare. Means of hybrid warfare are designed to destabilise a target while staying below the threshold that would trigger military response. Such campaigns are utilised by state or non-state adversaries to fracture public trust in the government, cause confusion among political actors, and hamper the decision making process of the opposition. Effective countermeasures against hybrid warfare can be difficult to implement due to the corrosion of state capacity and public trust in institutions. Therefore it is indispensable to strengthen coordination, combat disinformation, and enhance cyber defence mechanisms.

Post-2011 Libya happens to represent a prime example of an environment under the effects of hybrid warfare. Its fragmented security landscape, weakly monitored borders, and the presence of strategically valuable resources enable a conflicted environment through contractors, mass manipulation and economic pressure rather than conventional battles. Since the 2011 uprising against the oppressive rule of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya has been under the threat of volatile fragmentation. Libya has remained divided amidst the conflict between the Government of National Unity (GNU)

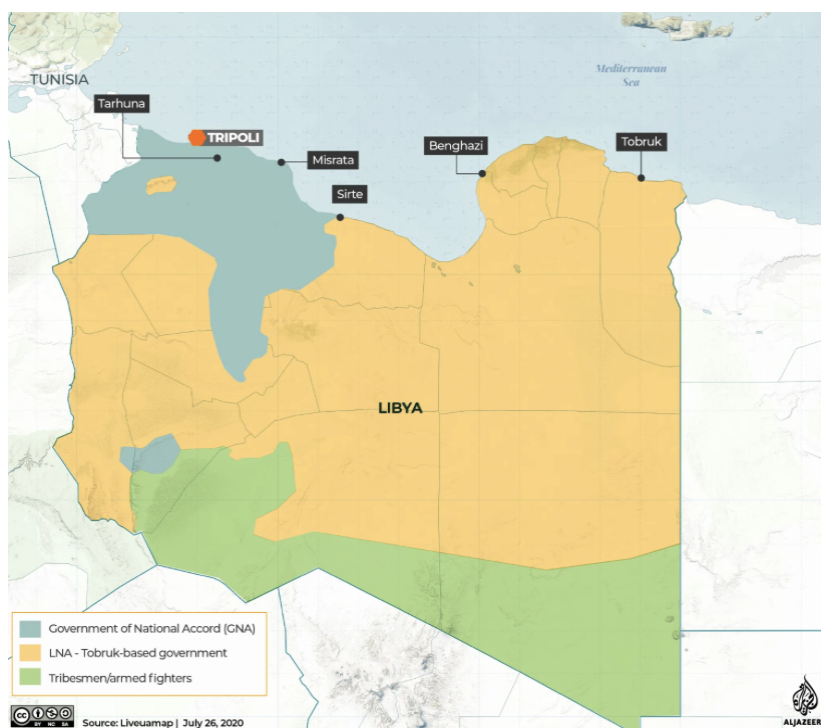


Image 1: Areas of control of the GNU and LAAF (Al Jazeera)



based in Tripoli and the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF) in the east. The 23 October 2020 nationwide ceasefire was meant to put an end to the active conflict between the two opposing forces within Libya. Even though the formation of the Libyan 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) did indeed halt the active conflict and committed the parties to withdraw their mercenaries and foreign fighters, it has led to the opposing parties to adopt hybrid strategies against each other. The implementation of the JMC remains uneven as hybrid tactics endure. Libya's instability shows its effects rapidly across the Mediterranean and, in turn, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies on the Southern flank via maritime security and information flows.

NATO's approach in the Southern flank area prioritises counter-hybrid measures without an active combat role inside Libya. Countermeasures such as the protection of critical infrastructure, strengthening cyber infrastructural integrity and coordinating with the United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU) help diminish hybrid coercion while respecting Libyan sovereignty.

II. Key Vocabulary

Hybrid Warfare: The use of a range of different methods to attack an enemy, for example, the spreading of false information, or attacking important computer systems, as well as, or instead of, traditional military action (Cambridge Dictionary).

Attribution: The act of saying or thinking that something is the result or work of a particular person or thing (Cambridge Dictionary).

5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC): Ceasefire mechanism of five officers from each Libyan side that negotiated the 23 Oct 2020 truce and oversaw foreign-fighter withdrawal.

Private Military Companies (PMCs): A commercial organization whose employees are paid to carry out military or security duties in cooperation with or in the place of regular military formations (Collins).

Critical National Infrastructure (CNI): Critical elements of infrastructure whose loss or compromise could severely impact the delivery of essential services or have significant impact on national security, national defence, or the functioning of the state (NPSA).

Confidence Building Measures (CBMs): In international relations, an action that reflects goodwill toward or a willingness to exchange information with an adversary. The purpose of such measures is to decrease



misunderstanding, tension, fear, anxiety, and conflict between two or more parties by emphasizing trust and limiting conflict escalation as a form of preventive diplomacy (Britannica).

Explosive Remnants of War (ERW): Unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance that are left by a party to an armed conflict following the cessation of warfare (UNDRR).

Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs): A military aircraft that is guided autonomously, by remote control, or both and that carries sensors, target designators, offensive ordnance, or electronic transmitters designed to interfere with or destroy enemy targets (Britannica).

Responsibility to Protect: An international law, officially recognized by the United Nations, which enshrines the principle that the international community has a responsibility to protect civilian populations from organized campaigns of violence and genocide when their own domestic government is either perpetrating these actions or is unable to stop them.

III. Involved Countries and Organizations

Government of National Unity (GNU)

The GNU is Tripoli's UN recognised main national partner for external security cooperation with Türkiye's advisory missions and migration coordination with European partners. In political terms, the GNU regards hybrid threats as a sovereignty and governance factor fueled by militias, disinformation, and embargo evasion that undermine the state and hamper critical infrastructure. The present strategy of the Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah is the establishment of one government which would gather ministries, the oil companies and security bodies under one unified civilian authority. They also aim to tame armed groups and militias by integrating them under the state. The Prime Minister also stated that the actions of anybody who continues to corrupt or extort will not be tolerated. The GNU values international partnerships with the UN, EU and other security partners to ensure economic recovery and election support. The formal policy is the maintaining of the ceasefire sustained by the 5+5 JMC, and emphasizing the importance of restructuring to implement these actions.

Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF)

The LAAF coalition is based in Cyrenaica, the eastern part of Libya. Under the leadership of General Khalifa Haftar, they control a considerable part of the east and the south and present themselves as the



anti-militia counterterror force. They also leverage their greater control over the state institutions and oil revenue management against the GNU. The LAAF aims to stress order before the formation of a unified state. They plan to disintegrate militant forces in an attempt to stabilise the country. They also happen to utilise their external ties to bolster their military presence. Haftar recently asserted that they were aligned with the will of the Libyan people. By claiming his forces “fought and defeated terrorism” they demanded international support in pursuit of defeating the militant groups. In practice, the LAAF’s approach to hybrid tools includes active partnerships with foreign security-centric actors and pressure on oil and other CNI nodes. The LAAF has also not been cooperative with the expulsion of foreign fighters and there currently happens to be PMC support to LAAF-held areas.

Wagner Group / Africa Corps.

The Wagner Group is a PMC that shows direct correlation with the characteristics of the external actor in a hybrid environment. They have carried out combat support, air defense, and mining placement operations on the withdrawal routes around Tripoli after the 2019–2020 active conflict. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has tied the mines and booby traps around Tripoli where the conflict occurred, to the Wagner Group. U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) officials made the statement that the group showed no regard for the safety and security of Libyans. They followed this claim up by publishing verified photographic evidence showing the landmines and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in Tripoli. Moscow continues to deny that Wagner exists as a legal entity. The Kremlin maintains

plausible deniability by tying Russia’s Libyan involvement entirely to Wagner and avoiding any formal state responsibility. The Africa Corps. was formed under the Russian Ministry of Defence with oversight from military intelligence. The African Corps. took over the operations of Wagner in 2023. With tighter management and greater involvement of the state, it is important to decide on the fact that whether the African Corps. should be treated as a continuity or a change from Wagner.



Image 2: Verified image of a booby trapped anti-personnel mine connected to the Wagner Group found within a residential area in Tripoli. (AFRICOM)



European Union (EU)

The European Union's naval mission aims to patrol the Central Mediterranean to enforce the UN arms embargo on Libya, with authority to inspect, hail and board ships suspected of carrying arms, provided that they have permission to do so with the authority of resolution UNSCR 2292 and its further renewals. In March 2025, the Council also tasked IRINI to gather intelligence on further related illicit activities, such as fuel smuggling and to help protect critical maritime infrastructure, making IRINI even more relevant towards hybrid threats. Practically, IRINI is limited by flag-state consent, meaning that it needs the ship's flag country to agree to a boarding. Considering the fact that many embargo breaches use multimodal routes such as land and air as well and sea. Brussels states that IRINI is considered a deterrent body and an information-sharing hub supporting the UN and other partners involved in ensuring stability in Libya. Whilst IRINI's targeted support of the CNI protection aids in ensuring a safer environment for the Libyan people, the structured information sharing with Libyan authorities so that sea findings trigger action on land and in the air is a step towards ensuring stability on all terrains.

Türkiye

Ankara has been the GNU's most prominent state backer with their impact being the shifting of the balance in the active conflict in Tripoli in 2019 and 2020. In 2019, Türkiye signed and the interim Government of National Accord (GNA) signed a Memorandum of Understanding that caused controversy in the international community. The agreement allows the two countries to carry out joint exploration operations in the eastern Mediterranean, fueling tension in a region already uneasy about Türkiye's drilling activities. They have supported the GNU with the Bayraktar TB2 drones along with other military equipment and vehicles, military training, advisors, along with maritime and security measures. Besides their

partnership with the GNU, they have also supported the negotiations between the GNU and LAAF during the UNSMIL peace talks. They have held the 1 Aug 2025 Istanbul trilateral where Türkiye stressed the importance of working towards implementing long-term and sustainable solutions with multilateral



Image 3: Turkish military equipment



coordination. Ankara intends to continue their partnership with Tripoli in expanding Libya's support programs. Ankara publicly states that they play their role in ensuring the legitimacy of the Libyan government whilst respecting Libya's sovereignty. Whilst Türkiye's involvement might have prevented a renewed assault on Tripoli by the LAAF, their involvement might also fuel the tension between the GNU and LAAF instead of achieving the opposite.

United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

UNSMIL ensures that the ceasefire in Libya is protected. They support the military commission called the 5+5 Joint Military Commission which has 5 officers from each side and pushed a UN-led path to the unification of state institutions. On hybrid threats, UNSMIL has warned that misinformation and hate speech are one of the primary factors that fuel tension, and strongly recommend fact-based messaging in the hands of the public. UNSMIL promotes independent verification, foreign-fighter withdrawals, and demining, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and security-sector reforms. These are practical areas where NATO can be supplemental without an active combat role through training, verification help, and strategic communications.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

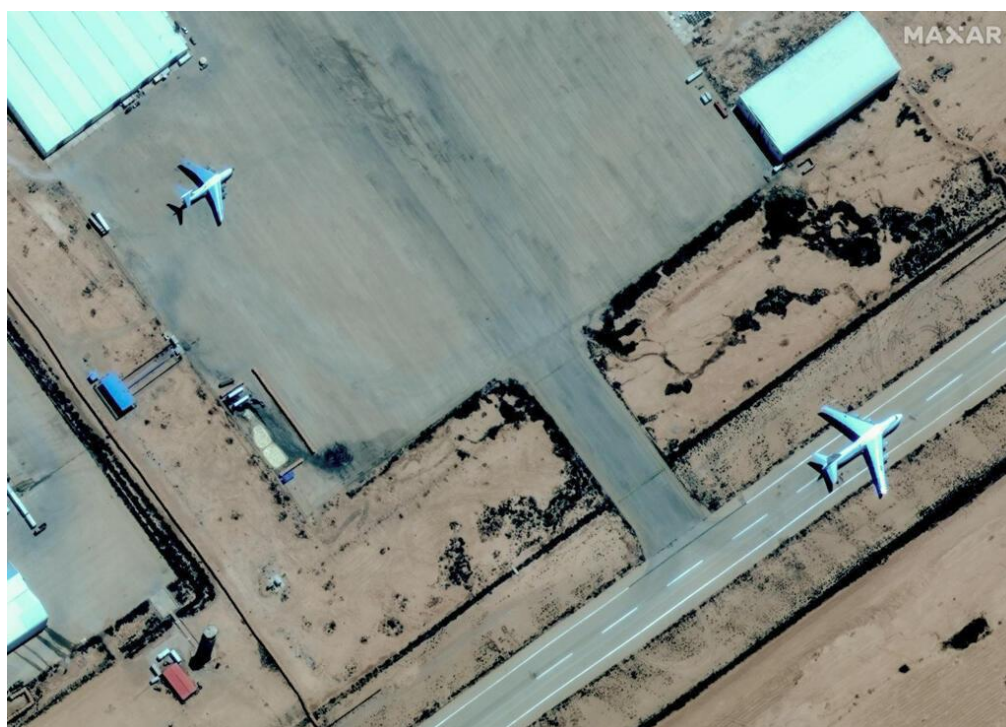
NATO became involved in the issue following the United Nations' call to the international community to protect Libyan people in 2011. Justifying its actions on the Responsibility to Protect principle, an international law that NATO cites as part of its mandate, it initiated Operation Unified Protector (OUP), composed of NATO allies and partners that enforced an arms embargo, formed a no-fly zone, and took civilians under protection from attack. NATO's stated interests were enforcing the UN Security Council Resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire to ensure civilian safety, however, Libya's natural resources also had strategic importance to individual members regarding energy acquisition. Although the NATO intervention brought short-term relief to civilians by stopping the brutal acts of the Gaddafi regime, the failure to set up a successful governing body led to internal polarization. The power vacuum at the end of NATO's intervention led to internal long-term instability. Currently, NATO's stance on hybrid warfare rests on a strategy that has been in force since 2015: prepare, deter, defend. For Libya, its strategies include continuing to support the political process in Libya and the efforts of the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Libya, since the principal path to reversing the instability trend is for Libya to unify its political institutions, form a unified military force, and regain sovereign control of its southern borders.



Russian Federation

Russia uses a wide range of hybrid threat tools in the Middle East and North Africa, especially in Syria and Libya. Its involvement in post-2011 Libya can be grouped into four categories: economic, military, political, and diplomatic. Regarded by the West as “opportunistic” Russia’s aims for Libya include accruing recognition from Europe as a great power, expanding its access to Libya’s oil and gas reserves, and securing lucrative reconstruction contracts once the civil war ends. Russia officially recognized the Tripoli-based GNA and GNU as Libya’s legitimate governments, while also engaging with Haftar-aligned House of Representatives (HoR) Speaker Aguila Saleh, GNA-aligned High Council of State head Khaled al-Meshri, and Saif

al-Islam Gaddafi. This balanced approach is strategically crafted to ensure a seamless transition from one power group to another. Russia also increased its military status in Libya. In early 2025, Russia took over the Al-Khadim Air Base in the Libyan Sahara. International open sources indicated



Picture 4: The Russian Antonov-124 (RA-82030) at the Al-Khadim Air Base

Russia is modernising the airbase and leveraging its alliances with key Libyan factions, particularly the Libyan National Army (LNA) under Khalifa Haftar.

IV. Focused Overview of the Issue

Since the 2011 uprising and the collapse of centralised authority, Libya has gone through attempts at unification. Rival administrations, GNU and LAAF, have competed for control over territory, oil revenues, and governmental institutions. The presence of foreign actors and a highly sanctioned environment has escalated the opposition of the two actors.



The active conflict in Tripoli from 2019 to 2020 included intensive drone warfare and the deployment of foreign mercenaries. The active conflict had ended with the 23 October 2020 ceasefire and the deployment of the 5+5 JMC reduced the large-scale fighting considerably but did not resolve issues such as the flow of arms, presence of foreign mercenaries and other less apparent acts of hostility. Currently, the GNU, LAAF and other actors such as PMCs exploit information ecosystems, cyber vulnerabilities, and economic chokepoints. Libya's geographical position and international role in energy distribution mean that these hybrid tactics are immediately visible for the Mediterranean and Southern flanks, even in the absence of a NATO combat mission.

1. How Hybrid Warfare Manifests in Libya

Libya's unstable internal state makes it vulnerable to external interventions and hybrid warfare threats. This issue stems from political divisions dating back to the 2011 intervention and the toppling of authoritarian leader Muammar al-Qaddafi. The following years were spent in contentious tension between rival groups in the country, further aggravated by foreign involvement. Throughout the decade, Libya faced internal skirmishes and transitions of power, finally erupting to a full fledged war in 2019. This state of instability was caused by the numerous factions within Libya competing for power.

During the 2019–2020 battle for Tripoli, Libya was subjected to a very intense drone war, with the GNU side being aided by Türkiye's Bayraktar TB2s and the LAAF side being aided by the UAE, Egypt and the Wagner Group's Wing Loong II armed UAVs. The UAV strikes were responsible for striking supply lines, air defence sites, and logistics hubs. Most notably the Bayraktar TB2s played a crucial role in halting Haftar's advance on Tripoli. As the conflict evolved and both sides began to draw their units back, they left mines, booby traps and other improvised devices around former fighting zones and residential areas. These ERW threats still shape the livelihoods of civilians and continue to cause casualties among deminers (mine clearing personnel) and other personnel working in restoring the former fighting zones to a habitable environment. Furthermore, online spaces became grounds for disinformation, provocation of the public and intimidation of communities through the spreading of recycled and exaggerated combat footage and rumor networks.

On 13 March 2025, the United Nations warned of a mass coordinated disinformation campaign including hate speech against refugees and migrants and other material that exploits existing social cracks amongst the Libyan society to divide the people, distract them from the ongoing division and hostility or



justify coercive actions by armed actors. Specifically, the disinformation campaign was regarding the falsehood that the GNU had made the decision to resettle the migrants and refugees in Libya. This rumour

quickly snowballed into posts regarding hate speech and calls for mass deportations. Following this statement; authorities, media, and influential figures called on platforms and the public to disregard the rapidly spreading rumour. For NATO, this highlights the importance of strategic communications and civil-society resilience as much as patrols and radars.

2. Arms Embargo Evasion and Maritime Flows

Under UNSCR 2292, states may inspect various vessels on the seas off the coast of Libya to enforce the arms embargo put in place by the UN. The EU's Operation IRINI puts this mandate into practice by patrolling the central Mediterranean and boarding suspected vessels whilst also communicating their findings to the UN sanctions framework. Operation IRINI's and the arms embargos' main aim is to halt the flow of weapons to Libya. Following a positive review, its mandate runs to 31 March 2027. At sea, IRINI raises the cost and visibility of illicit firearm shipments and improves maritime domain awareness including patterns such as automatic identification system (AIS) anomalies and ship-to-ship arms transfers. The authority of IRINI, however, is confined by maritime conditions and conditioned by state cooperation, while embargo violators try to overcome IRINI's efforts through taking routes through various fronts (air, land and sea), founding companies to front their illicit activities. The policy implication for delegates is to treat IRINI as a single layer in a wider response to hybrid warfare and to link its intelligence to many different fronts, such as the airport, border patrol, and financial controls; support targeted sanctions; and use its reporting to bolster protection of critical maritime infrastructure.

3. Ceasefire and the Withdrawal of Foreign Actors

Following the active conflict in Tripoli, the 23 October 2020 permanent ceasefire agreement calls for both sides to withdraw mercenaries and foreign fighters on their respective sides, begin demining operations, and agree upon initiating confidence building efforts under the supervision of the JMC. This framework continues to act as the



Image 5: Syrian mercenaries in Libya (SOHR)



backbone of the fragile stability and progress in initiating peace talks has been slow and partly unsuccessful. Some foreign fighters and contractors whether they be

deployed by the GNU, the LAAF, external actors like the Wagner group remain positioned in key areas. Unexploded mines, disengaged traps and ERWs continue to threaten the lives of civilians. The continuity of such threats allow for the outside actors to have a prolonged influence in Libya through training missions, information campaigns and heavy monitoring mechanisms. The high scrutiny and involvement of external actors within Libya continue to polarise the people against one another. The polarising environment allows for hybrid threats like coordinated disinformation campaigns. Even though increasing the relevance of the ceasefire might prevent the escalation of the tension between the two parties to an active conflict, follow-up measures also have to be addressed by considering the current broader risks like protecting energy sites and ports, securing airports, and combating the spread of disinformation to destabilise political processes. By expanding the ceasefire agenda in such ways, Libya's security arrangements would be better matched to the realities of hybrid threats.

4. NATO's Involvement

NATO's current position is to maintain a stabilising role while helping partners resist hybrid pressure without deploying Allied forces into Libya. On the Southern flank, NATO allies support the EU's Operation IRINI, and offer non-escalatory support only at Libya's request. In practice, this means NATO's role is sharing alerts that protect critical infrastructure such as oil terminals, ports and underwater links. Running operations in strengthening Libya through strengthening cyber systems, establishing various incident response exercises for key institutions and linking maritime checks in coordination with air and land to enforce the embargo has also been in NATO's focus. Additionally, NATO continues to support the JMC's confidence and peace building measures. The objective is to make interference even harder, and enable faster Libyan action while crucially avoiding escalation and respecting sovereignty.

V. Important Events & Chronology

Date (Day/Month/Year)	Event
17/02/2011	Protests and uprising against Qaddafi begin



20/10/2011	Qaddafi killed, the regime collapsed and power in the government fragments (GNU and LAAF division).
16/05/2014	LAAF launches Operation Dignity, the east and west division becomes even more apparent.
17/12/2015	The Skhirat Agreement sets the path to a UN backed unity government.
04/04/2019	LAAF offensive on Tripoli starts and proxy influence and UAVs enter the fight.
27/11/2019	Türkiye–Libya Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on maritime boundaries and security cooperation is signed.
03/02/2020	First 5+5 JMC talks commenced in Geneva under UNSMIL (JMC established).
31/03/2020	The EU launches Operation IRINI to enforce the arms embargo at sea.
23/10/2020	Nationwide ceasefire is signed by the 5+5 JMC.
13/03/2025	UNSMIL warns of a coordinated misinformation/hate-speech campaign.

VI. Past Resolutions and Treaties

- [S/RES/1970 \(2011\)](#) — Imposes the Libya arms embargo, travel bans, asset freezes, creates the Libya Sanctions Committee, and refers the situation to the ICC. It was strong on paper and had partial effectiveness due to the limited state capacity in Libya. Furthermore, adaptive smuggling networks blunted impact. Adopted unanimously by the UNSC.
- [S/RES/2146 \(2014\)](#) — Condemns illicit crude-oil exports; authorizes high-seas inspections of vessels designated for smuggling Libyan oil; adds measures on such ships and extends the Panel of Experts. Adopted unanimously by the UNSC.



- [S/RES/2292 \(2016\)](#) — Provides the legal basis for high-seas inspections enforcing the arms-embargo and was repeatedly renewed and implemented at sea by Operation IRINI. Was partly sufficient due to alternate routes being adapted by smugglers. Unanimously adopted by the UNSC.

VII. Failed Solution Attempts

Over a decade, the UNSCR 2292 inspections and the EU's Operation IRINI attempts such as patrol surges, hailings, selective boardings raised costs and stabilised the arms flow at sea but left air and land routes less monitored in comparison. This caused arms traffickers to switch from general maritime solutions which utilise waterways to cargo flights, truck convoys and even ship to ship transfers to bypass the embargo at sea. Limits such as the state consent to board a vessel and a narrow maritime mandate meant that several shipments were delayed until it was too late and were never boarded. Contributing to the listed failures, coordination among external actors was insufficient. Factors such as unofficial and incomplete operation reports among IRINI, UNSMIL and potential NATO enablers, and informal calls caused further incompetence. Repeated renewals of inspection authorities did keep diplomatic pressure up but discouraged planning for multiple years on more stable frameworks and evidence continuity with Libyan counterparts.



Picture 6: IRINI's inspection of a vessel suspected of carrying military material jet fuel en route to Libya

While demining tasks in Tripoli after the 2019-2020 skirmishes reduced a considerable degree of the danger, explosives and mines linked to the Wagner Group around Tripoli still continue to cause casualties and restrict movement. On the information front, one time UN warnings, ineffective media training, and occasional platform takedowns proved too futile against fully coordinated hate speech and misinformation campaigns, leaving authorities without much capability to contain escalation in real time.



VIII. Possible Solutions

Delegates should work on the seemingly intractable political process, building on pre-disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) efforts to tackle Libya's armed group quandary. Given the current landscape, an effective course of action would be on establishing more transparent communication among actors to ensure more productive peace talks. It is essential to work with the Libyan parties' mutual consent and cooperation with UNSMIL to establish a greater control over the flow of arms via land and air similar to the maritime routes. It is also crucial to improve upon the information and warning systems between Libyan authorities and monitoring mechanisms like IRINI to ensure that agencies can act swiftly. More transparent and rapid warning systems can be a starting point. Strategic coordination across different monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are crucial. Ensuring response systems operate coherently by closing operational gaps and strengthening communication, as well as collaborative institutions can reinforce coherent responses towards evolving hybrid tactics.

Secondly, prioritisation of targeted training in ministries, energy sector, media space and port areas will improve the current infrastructure of Libya. The media space renovations such as newsroom workshops that improve verification will aid in halting the rapid spread of disinformation and other cyber attacks. Improvements in port authorities will lead to better identification of suspicious vessels. In addition, delegates can attempt to reinforce civilian resilience. Structured engagement with civil society actors, including media organizations and governmental bodies, may promote inclusive dialogue, rebuild public trust, and help combat disinformation. Delegates should reinforce Libya's internal capacities and work towards peacebuilding and national reconciliation to minimize foreign dependency and respect sovereignty. This can be achieved through strengthening institutional capacities like judiciaries, enhancing the security sector, and improving public services. Protection and centralization of national infrastructure such as oil terminals and having a hold on internal revenue mechanisms is also important for long-term stability and hybrid warfare resistance.

Finally, one of the most crucial aspects in an all-inclusive framework would be to maintain the ceasefire and initiate better mediated dialogue between the GNU and the LAAF. One of the main issues in the JMC dialogues was the inconsistency of meetings due to large time gaps and disconnected agendas. Establishing a tighter schedule and implementing an agenda planning mechanism would lead for more productive peace talks between the GNU and LAAF. Additionally, in an attempt to bolster the demining operations, a coordinated cleanup can be implemented.

In an attempt to unify the two parties, it would be essential to initiate conversations regarding fair elections. Agreeing upon mutual protection of the polling sites and the maintaining of an equal campaigning



program would be invaluable. Taken together, these measures will build resilience and lead to an environment of sustained peace if implemented effectively.

IX. Useful Links

[NATO](#) — Countering hybrid threats

[UNSMIL](#) — Permanent country-wide ceasefire

[EU Council](#) — IRINI mandate extended to 2027

[UN Press](#) — Embargo authorizations renewed

[Human Rights Watch](#) — Wagner landmines near Tripoli

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