Tripoli’s Residents Protest against Fayez al-Sarraj’s GNA

With crime on the rise on the territory controlled by the Government of National Accord (GNA), and amid growing discontent with how the GNA itself is operating, there has been a recent surge in protests against Fayez al-Sarraj in Tripoli.

Local residents are fighting for access to basic amenities, as the GNA has failed to distribute them fairly. Outraged civilians, who have had to put up with frequent power cuts, took to the streets to hold a spontaneous rally in Khoms, the capital of the Murqub District. The protesters believe that neighborhoods where militants supported by the GNA are based receive a greater power supply, while residents living in other neighborhoods have to make do without electricity. Local residents protested by blocking the main road leading to a power station and setting car tires on fire.

There have also been other recent protests against the GNA in Tripoli, where residents demanded that the government return their hard-earned tax money, which is being spent on recruiting Syrian fighters, while ordinary Libyans do not even have money to buy food.

GNA militants continue to suppress any form of protest expressed by local residents against Fayez al-Sarraj’s regime. Another protest took place on August 1 in the Abu Salim district of Tripoli, where residents of the capital marched towards Martyrs’ Square in the city center to demand their unpaid salaries, many of whom had salary cuts for some reason or another. A number of protesters have suffered injuries. GNA-backed militants from the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade and the Nawasi Brigade, widely listed as terrorist organizations, simply ambushed demonstrators and opened fire on them, leaving three people in a critical condition.
On August 3, some of these militants attacked the main power plant while another group seized ten other facilities between Tripoli and Misrata. On the same day in Sabratah, GNA militants broke into a residential building, beat a woman, and kidnapped a small child, which was reported by a number of sources through social networks.

On top of all this, the situation on GNA-controlled territory continues to deteriorate due to a growing number of disagreements between these gangs that are increasingly competing among themselves for spheres of influence, and a new conflict is brewing between the Libyan militants and Syrian mercenaries deployed to fight in Libya. The Al Arabiya news channel reported that according to a police source, one of the groups of foreign mercenaries from Chad was recently arrested due to widespread looting in Tripoli, and it was the Chief of the GNA Tripoli Military Zone, Maj. Gen. Osama al-Juwaili, who helped them reach Libya.

According to Libyan sources, an armed confrontation broke out on August 5 in Misrata between militants from the illegal armed groups loyal to the GNA. The exchange of fire was allegedly fueled by infighting between one of the gangs of militants, who could not agree on a weapons deal. The leader of one of the battalions had sold weapons that had been intended for the fighters themselves.

Moreover, the militants and mercenaries cannot come to an agreement on who should have influence in which neighborhoods, and their confrontation makes the situation worse for Libyan civilians, who are increasingly blaming the mercenaries for the rise in crime. For instance in Tarhuna, four fighters from the Abu Salim Central Security force commanded by Abdal-Ghani al-Kakli, known as “Ghniwa”, were killed during a shootout. The gangsters are fighting among themselves, filling up hospital beds in the Abu Salim district of Tripoli with their own wounded. Local residents are looking on in horror at this lawlessness.

Tripoli’s residents have already called on the GNA to withdraw all mercenaries from urban areas. According to local observers, the situation could spiral out of control at any moment, and could even descend into an armed conflict, given that a significant number of weapons are not only in the hands of militants and foreign mercenaries, but are now also in the hands of local residents.

The situation in Tripoli went beyond the point of no return a long time ago, and it is likely to continue to worsen. This is largely due to the fact that Ankara, which sends mercenaries to Libya, of whom there already 27,000 according to local estimates, often delays the salary payments Turkey has promised them, and has recently begun paying mercenaries less than the agreed salary.

It is worth recalling that the GNA was formed under the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement following the death of Muammar Gaddafi. The head of the GNA Fayez al-Sarraj and his henchmen were supposed to solve Libya’s problems and improve living conditions in the country. However, the powers vested to the GNA under the power-sharing agreement expired in 2018. At the same time, it became widely known that the government in Tripoli and its head Fayez al-Sarraj had actively recruited militants to support the work of the “government”, who came from DAESH, the Muslim Brotherhood, and al-Qaeda (all of which are banned in Russia - editor’s note). Representatives of the GNA’s Ministry of Interior were bold enough to use their power to kidnap, imprison, and demand a ransom from people’s relatives, and could open fire on residential areas of Tripoli. It is therefore no wonder the city’s residents are outraged by this situation, and have been taking to the streets to protest more and more frequently.

The Arab League has begun to express concern over the deteriorating situation in Libya, where there is a growing belief that Ankara’s intervention in Libya’s sovereign affairs has been the worst thing to happen throughout the entire Libyan crisis. The Arab League’s position, according to the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States at the UN Maged Abdelfattah, is that this has a lot to do with the fact that Turkey has not stopped sending Syrian mercenaries and military equipment to Libya. Throughout the entire crisis in the country which began in 2011, the most difficult period has been Ankara’s intervention.

Arab League observers point out that Ankara’s actions are unacceptable by recalling the arms embargo adopted by the UN, which prohibits the supply of weapons and ammunition to the North African state. However, Turkey is blatantly ignoring these restrictions by continuing to supply the Government of National Accord’s regime in Libya with mercenaries from Syria and other countries. It has also been noted that the election of Turkey’s Volkan Bozkir as the 75th President of the UN General Assembly, which was obviously not welcomed by representatives of a number of countries, does nothing to help improve the situation in Libya and bring the country out of the crisis it is in. According to Maged Abdelfattah, seven countries objected to the candidacy of the Turkish diplomat, yet despite their objections, Bozkir was still elected.
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