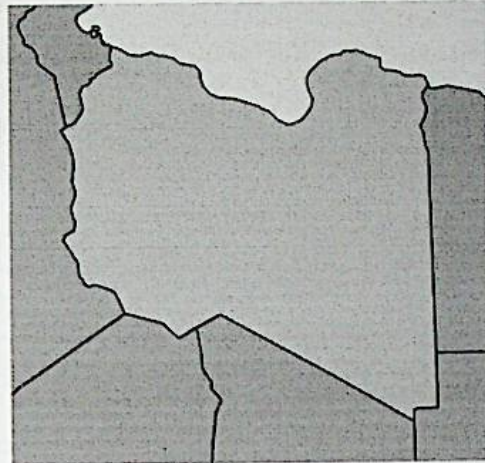

Libya

Apr 17-22

Abdelkader Messahel, Minister of Maghreb Affairs, African Union and the League of Arab States, visited various Libyan cities this week while clashes continued in the south of the country.



Diplomacy

Messahel began his tour of several Libyan cities and regions on Apr. 19. The tour is part of Algerian efforts to reconcile positions between the Libyan parties. According to a statement from the Algerian Foreign Ministry, Messahel will attempt to find a lasting political solution to the crisis through inclusive dialogue and national reconciliation while preserving Libyan territorial integrity, sovereignty, unity and the cohesion of the Libyan people. After the Libyan leg of his tour, Messahel will then travel to other countries in the region. Libya's neighbouring countries fear an infiltration of terrorists and weapons over their borders following the Islamic State's defeat in Sirte. The Libyan crisis has been strongly felt by Algerian authorities after suspected terrorists have repeatedly infiltrated the country. The head of the self-proclaimed Libyan National Army (LNA), Khalifa Haftar, met with Messahel and his delegation during a visit to Benghazi. Haftar's press office said the visit aimed to "discuss cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism". Messahel landed in the Labraq airport, eastern Libya, and met with the Speaker and Foreign Minister of the unrecognised Libyan transitional government based in al Bayda, Aguila Saleh and Mohammed al Dairi respectively. He also visited Zintan and Tripoli where he met with State Council President Abdel Rahman al Sahwili. Presidential Council member Ali al Qatrani, who suspended his own activity in the Council when it was created following the Skhirat agreements in 2015, officially protested to the Arab League over the positions taken by Government of National Accord (GNA) Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj and Qatar on the Libyan crisis. Al Qatrani met with Arab League Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Ghiet in Cairo this week during which he accused al Sarraj of "committing dangerous abuse, approving decrees and making speeches that undermine the security and stability of Libya and neighbouring countries". He also condemned the "comments made by Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim during the latest Arab summit in Jordan as an interference in Libyan affairs".

A US diplomatic source has told Libyan media that GNA Prime Minister al Sarraj has received an invitation from US President Donald Trump's Administration to travel to Washington on an official visit as part of political efforts to find a solution to the Libyan crisis. The source added that the visit may take place in June and did not exclude the possibility that a similar invitation had been sent to Haftar and that the LNA head may have met with a US figure during his recent visit to the United Arab Emirates. Speaking to "al Ahram al Arabi", Haftar's envoy to Egypt Abdel Basta al Badri said that "the general will soon visit the US capital". Libya's Ambassador to the UN, al Mahdi al Maghrabi, has defined Haftar's attack on the Tamanhint airbase, controlled by Tripoli-affiliated militia, as "unjustified". He added: "This attack pushes the country towards civil war" and that this escalation of violence "has nothing to do with the war on terrorism". Speaking during a UN Security Council meeting this week, al Maghrabi said that "we are seeing continuous violations of

international laws with these attacks”.

Politics

The UN-backed GNA Presidential Council has decided to form a committee led by the Minister of Local Governing, Baddad Gansu, to communicate with conflicting parties in southern Libya and reach an agreement for a ceasefire. In a statement released by “The Libya Observer”, the Presidential Council stressed that the decision aims to consolidate efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the region and avoid further bloodshed. Clashes in southern Libya continued this week after forces affiliated to Haftar attacked the Tamanhint airbase located 20 kilometres north of Sabha with over 20 howitzers. GNA-affiliated 201 Brigade Spokesman stationed at the airbase said his forces are expecting further clashes over the next few days. On Apr. 11, Tripoli forces regained control of the Tamanhint and Samnu (54 kilometres east of Sabha) airports in southern Libya after heavy fighting with Haftar’s forces. The Libyan Manghisaten tribe, that belongs to the Tuareg in southern Libya, gathered to call on the sides involved in the fighting around the base to agree on a ceasefire. In a statement, the Tuareg tribe said: “We do not want to join the political conflict that doesn’t serve the interests of anyone and we support peaceful cohabitation and peace between tribes”.

Security

On Apr. 17, Haftar’s forces bombed the Tamanhint airbase located 30 kilometres north of Sabha in southern Libya. Haftar’s 12 Brigade, led by Colonel Mohammed Bin Nayel, attacked the base controlled by the Tripoli-affiliated Third Force with several Grad missiles. GNA-affiliated forces and Haftar’s troops have been engaged in fighting for weeks for control of the Fezzan area.

An armed group appointed with surveying energy infrastructures in western Libya has blocked a gas pipeline linking the al Wafa field with the Mellitah terminal over salary demands, said “Libya Observer”. The pipeline had been re-opened two days earlier after militia blocked gas and oil pipelines linking al Wafa and al Sharara at the end of March over salary demands to the Libyan National Oil Corporation (NOC). NOC has announced that the pipeline supplying the al Rawis power station in Jebal al Gharbi, south of Tripoli, has been blocked once again. According to “al Wasat”, a group of militants closed the pipe at Badr, near the number 12 station. Italian oil and gas company ENI owns 50 percent of the Wafa treatment facility. NOC announced that the el Feel oil field in south-west Libya, operated together with ENI, is “still closed”. “We have not lifted the force majeure measure set after protesting militants blocked its activity”, said the company. In a statement, NOC denied reports regarding the re-opening of the el Feel oil field following an agreement between Murzuch mayors and tribal chiefs and GNA Defence Minister al Mahdi al Barghathi who visited the area this week and promised to bring the local population’s requests to the attention of the central government. “As the field depends on electrical power sourced from al Sharara, there is an impossibility of operating el Feel in isolation from al Sharara which itself remains closed as a result of closing the al Rayyana valves”.

Based on news from the following Libyan newspaper and websites: Ean Libia, al Wasat, Libya al Mustakbal, Libya Herald, Libyan News Agency Lana, al Hayat, al Quds al Arabi, al Arabiya, Sky Arabia, al Youm.