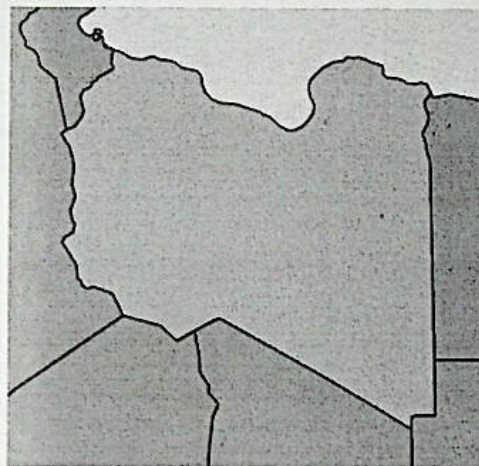

Libya

May 22-27

The Brak al Shati airbase was attacked this week while members of the Manchester suicide attacker's family were arrested in Tripoli.



Diplomacy

The Government of National Accord (GNA) Foreign Minister Mohammed Siala met with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri in Saudi Arabia this week to discuss the need to remove restrictions imposed on entrance visas to Lebanon for Libyans. Both were in Riyadh to take part in the US-Muslim States summit. In a statement, Siala said the meeting also focused on bilateral relations between the two countries and ways to strengthen cooperation and diplomatic relations.

US Africa Command (AFRICOM) Commander Thomas Waldhauser has announced his command's support of the European Union Mission to secure Libyan borders and train Libyan personnel. At the end of a meeting with GNA Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj this week during a visit to Tripoli, Waldhauser said that "the meeting was a positive step towards attempting to restore security in Libya". He also offered full support to the Tripoli government for the reconstruction of its defence and security systems and announced continued cooperation with GNA officials to secure the capital.

Politics

The Libyan Presidential Council led by Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj has suspended GNA Defence Minister Mahdi al Barghati following the attack on the Brak al Shati airbase, southern Libya, on May 17. In the attack, Islamist militia killed at least 141 people, mostly soldiers from Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) linked to the Tobruk House of Representatives. In a statement, the Tripoli Defence Ministry denied ordering the offensive, although many of the Misrata forces responsible for the attack operate under Barghati's control. Barghati met with the heads of the "al Bunyan al Marsoos" operations at his ministry this week to discuss recent military developments in Libya. According to a statement from the Tripoli Defence Ministry, Barghati and the operation heads "studied the latest reports on the presence of Islamic State cells in certain areas, asking for the alert level to be kept high and ready to intervene to secure citizens and stop the activity of terrorists undermining the security of the state". The "al Bunyan al Marsoos" operation was established in May 2016 to liberate Sirte from the Islamic State. Barghati held the meeting on May 21 despite the fact he was suspended last Friday and an investigation was opened into his involvement in the attack launched by pro-Tripoli militia against Haftar's forces in Brak al Shati. There are fears in Tripoli that the meeting held in the nearby city of Misrata could lead to a rebellion against Prime Minister Fayez al Sarraj. According to "al Hadath", the meeting was called immediately after the Tripoli Presidential Council's decision to suspend Barghati and open an investigation to determine who ordered the Brak al Shati airbase attack on May 17.

Security

This week, southern Libya was the scene of possibly the worst massacre since the 2011 revolution. Misrata Third Force men attacked the 12th Brigade of Khalifa Haftar's self-proclaimed LNA at the Brak al Shati airbase, 60 kilometres north of Sabha. Reports on the number of dead oscillate from a few dozen to over 100, including civilians and the son of General Mohamed Ben Nayek, Commander of the LNA Brigade. The Tripoli Presidential Council has denied any responsibility and promised to open an investigation to punish those responsible. The GNA Defence Minister has also denied involvement and blamed the massacre on Haftar's men "who began the airstrikes on Tamanhint", a nearby airbase controlled by the Misrata militia. Libyan Speaker Aguila Saleh, a supporter of Haftar, has proclaimed three days of national mourning. The LNA Command has promised "harsh" retaliation, while the UN has urged all parties not to allow the situation to degenerate into further clashes. Al Qaeda terrorists may have played a role in the attack, said LNA Spokesman Mohamed Lifrais, adding that several soldiers were decapitated and most of the assailants captured by Haftar's men during the attack were foreign. "We are certain that we are fighting against al Qaeda", he said. LNA warplanes conducted further airstrikes in the al Jufra region, central Libya, where the Benghazi Defence Brigades (the Islamist militia accused of taking part in the Brak al Shati attack) base is located. According to LNA Spokesman Ahmed al Mismari on Facebook, "the warplanes inflicted heavy damage in terms of vehicles and men among the enemy forces". Haftar's forces said at least 141 people, including 15 civilians, died in the attack.

GNA Third Force militia withdrew from the Tamanhint airport, southern Libya, near Sabha on May 24. Local sources told "al Wasat" that Haftar's LNA forces entered the airport this week without engaging in fighting as they found it empty. The airport is considered strategic for control over the Fezzan region.

Tripoli's special deterrence forces (RADA) have arrested the brother of Salman Abedi, the Manchester suicide bomber (who is of Libyan descent), said RADA on Facebook. RADA added that Hashim Ramadan Abu al Qasim al Abedi confessed he was affiliated to the Islamic State and that he was in the UK during the preparation phase of the attack. According to "al Wasat", Abedi left the UK on Apr. 16 and stayed in contact with his brother who carried out the attack in Manchester. RADA forces issued an arrest warrant for Abedi on May 23, he was then arrested around 20.30 local time. Abedi was born on Apr. 8 1997 in Manchester and holds an engineering degree. Salman Abedi "fought with Libya Dawn and al Bunyan al Marsoos militia", said LNA Spokesman Ahmed al Mismari. During a press conference in Benghazi, al Mismari said that the Manchester bomber "was injured and treated abroad where he was taken under a false passport". He accused the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, to which Abedi's father Ramadan belongs, of training Salman in Libya. The Libyan press stressed that the Islamic State's claim to the Manchester attack contradicts this theory, as the al Bunyan al Marsoos fought and defeated the Islamic State in Sirte.

Economy

The Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) has announced it has resolved its legal dispute with French bank Société Générale (Socgen) with a payment of 1.1 billion dollars in compensation. Socgen announced a decrease in its profits from the first quarter of the 2017 financial year due to the agreement reached with LIA. The LIA accused Socgen of helping companies linked to Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif al Islam, to pass bribes equal to tens of millions of dollars. The accusation is part of a case presented to London's High Court in which the LIA is suing the French bank for 1.5 billion dollars in damages. According to the LIA, Socgen paid at least 58 million dollars to Leinada, a Panama-based company, for consultancy services linked to 2.1 billion contracts that the LIA signed with Socgen between 2007 and 2009. Socgen apologised to the LIA, saying it was due to negligence from several employees.

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.