

UN secretary-general says all foreign forces and mercenaries must leave Libya

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Secretary-General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres.

United Nations, February 18 (RHC)-- Secretary-General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres has called for the withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from Libya, which is moving toward the formation of a unity government ten years after the U.S.-NATO led invasion.

Speaking with Libya's newly-appointed Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah on Tuesday, Guterres "stressed the UN's support to Libya's elections, the monitoring of the ceasefire and the need for withdrawal of foreign forces," said his spokesman Stephane Dujarric.

"I have not gotten to hear any updates on foreign troops leaving. We want that to happen, obviously as soon as possible," Dujarric added. Libyan delegates at UN-facilitated talks in Switzerland on Friday selected an interim executive body to lead Libya until December 2020 elections.

Dbeibah, a businessman from the western city of Misrata, has been appointed as the oil-rich country's new prime minister. They also elected a three-member presidential council at the end of five days of talks.

Guterres spoke with the president-designate of the Presidency Council, Mohammad Younes Menfi.

The United Nations Security Council has unanimously agreed to support the new interim government in Libya, praising the move as "an important milestone" in the conflict-ridden North African country. Libya has been grappling with unchecked violence since the overthrow of Col. Muammar Gaddafi in an uprising in 2011.

After 2014, two rival seats of power emerged in Libya, and government forces constantly fought rebel militia aiming to overtake territory.

Foreign countries also dispatched troops and mercenaries to the country. The UN said in December last year that there were about 20,000 foreign troops and mercenaries helping the opposing sides in Libya. Under a UN-backed ceasefire signed in October last year, foreign troops and mercenaries were to pull out of Libya within three months.

Turkey, which backs the GNA, has a military base in al-Watiya on the border with Tunisia under a 2019 military accord. Ankara extended its authorization for its troop deployment in Libya by 18 months, in December.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, however, said last week that his country will discuss withdrawing its troops, if other foreign troops are withdrawn first. Erdogan said that Turkish forces were deployed in Libya solely to train units loyal to the GNA.

In a separate statement, Erdogan's spokesman Ibrahim Kalin said on Thursday that Turkish troops will remain there as long as a bilateral military agreement between Ankara and Tripoli is active and Libya's government requests it. He also said that Ankara would provide support to the newly elected interim government of Libya.

Meanwhile, Egypt has announced plans to reopen its embassy in Libya's capital for the first time in six years. The plan was discussed by an Egyptian delegation in Tripoli on Monday and Tuesday, in a second visit by an Egyptian delegation to Tripoli since 2014.

Cairo is one of the most prominent backers of rebel commander Khalifa Haftar. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and France and also back Haftar forces.

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