



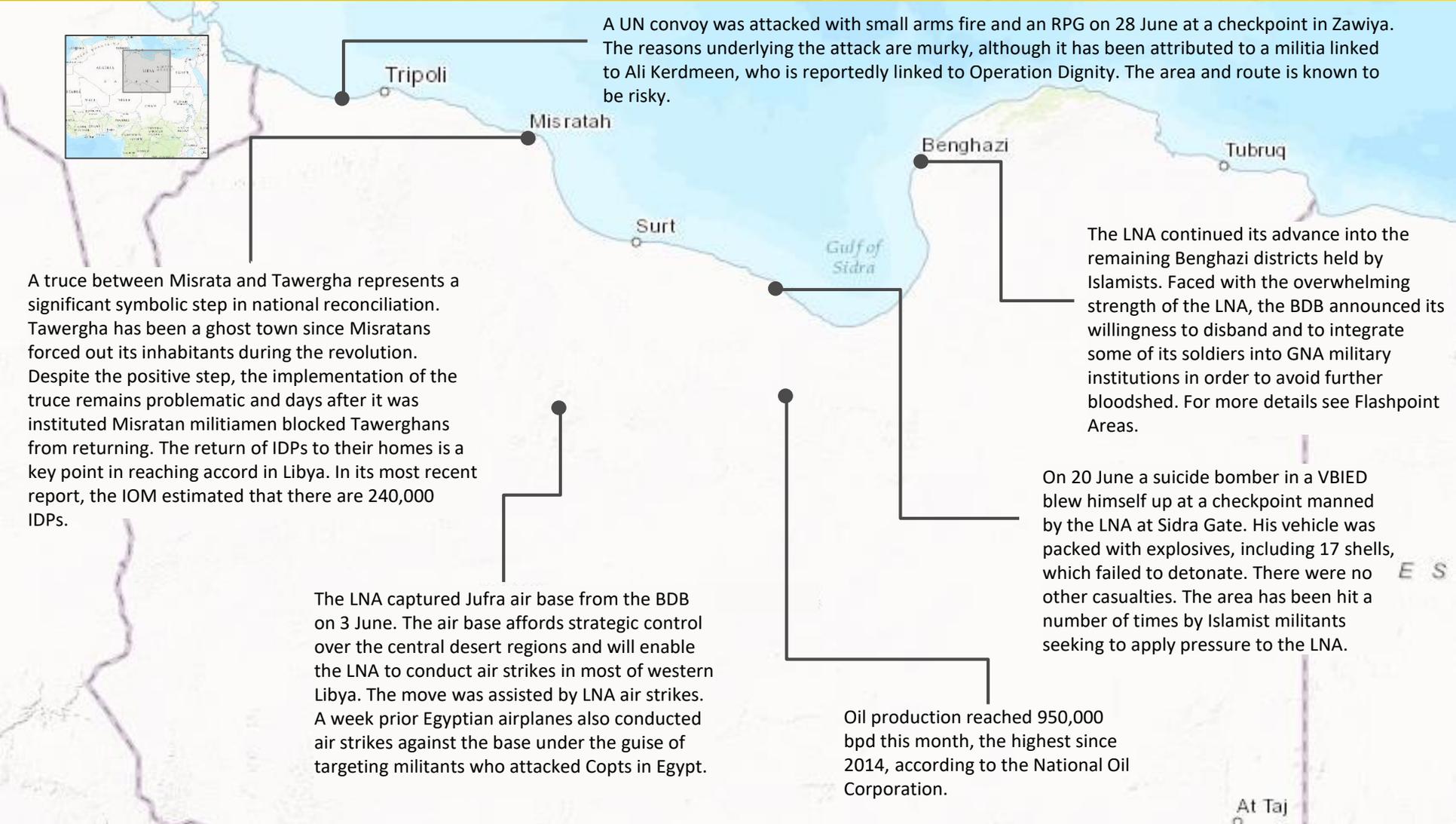
Unity Resources Group

LIBYA MONITOR JUNE

Key Developments And Local Insights On The Security And Political Climate



INCIDENT REPORTING



A UN convoy was attacked with small arms fire and an RPG on 28 June at a checkpoint in Zawiya. The reasons underlying the attack are murky, although it has been attributed to a militia linked to Ali Kerdmeen, who is reportedly linked to Operation Dignity. The area and route is known to be risky.



A truce between Misrata and Tawergha represents a significant symbolic step in national reconciliation. Tawergha has been a ghost town since Misratans forced out its inhabitants during the revolution. Despite the positive step, the implementation of the truce remains problematic and days after it was instituted Misratan militiamen blocked Tawerghans from returning. The return of IDPs to their homes is a key point in reaching accord in Libya. In its most recent report, the IOM estimated that there are 240,000 IDPs.

The LNA captured Jufra air base from the BDB on 3 June. The air base affords strategic control over the central desert regions and will enable the LNA to conduct air strikes in most of western Libya. The move was assisted by LNA air strikes. A week prior Egyptian airplanes also conducted air strikes against the base under the guise of targeting militants who attacked Copts in Egypt.

The LNA continued its advance into the remaining Benghazi districts held by Islamists. Faced with the overwhelming strength of the LNA, the BDB announced its willingness to disband and to integrate some of its soldiers into GNA military institutions in order to avoid further bloodshed. For more details see Flashpoint Areas.

On 20 June a suicide bomber in a VBIED blew himself up at a checkpoint manned by the LNA at Sidra Gate. His vehicle was packed with explosives, including 17 shells, which failed to detonate. There were no other casualties. The area has been hit a number of times by Islamist militants seeking to apply pressure to the LNA.

Oil production reached 950,000 bpd this month, the highest since 2014, according to the National Oil Corporation.

FLASHPOINT AREAS

Haftar Advances in Benghazi

This month, the LNA retook historic Souq al-Hout from Islamist militants. In early June militants intentionally blew up buildings in the district to create roadblocks to slow the advance, while rigging the area with IEDs. The LNA stated it destroyed more than 3,800 IEDs in a single week. Khalifa Haftar's forces began their assault in mid-June with the help of air strikes. The urban terrain ensured that progress was slow, with buildings retaken one-by-one. With Souq al-Hout now under LNA control, the militia has refocused its efforts on the last remaining Islamist stronghold of Sabri. Over a dozen LNA fighters have been killed in the fighting, with one medical source claiming 44 LNA deaths, mostly through IEDs or sniper fire.

With Haftar consolidating control over Benghazi, his position has never been stronger. Haftar's deployment of the Saiqa Brigade from Benghazi to Jufra this month suggests his focus increasingly lies on consolidating control in Jufra and surrounding towns, before progressing to Bani Walid. In the southern areas, residents appear more sympathetic to the LNA after the massacre at Brak al-Shati air base. Resistance towards the Misratans has grown, and the local population has evicted fighters from the area. In response, the Misratans strategically handed control of al-Shararah oil field to Tuareg Ali Kannah, who they perceived as preferable to Haftar.

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi Released

After six years in detention and having been sentenced to death in 2015, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi was reportedly released on 9 June by the Zintan-based Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Battalion. The Battalion, which supports the HoR, claimed that it was following the spirit of a HoR mandate from 2015 to provide amnesty to political prisoners. However, this mandate does not cover the charges levelled against Gaddafi, such as corruption charges. Further, the HoR's Defence and Security Committee criticized the move, noting releasing prisoners before a court has acquitted them will cause chaos.

The ICC has called for Gaddafi to be re-arrested and surrendered to the court. The request is in line with an outstanding June 2011 arrest warrant for crimes against humanity.

The reason behind the release remains unclear – namely whether it was financially motivated, to gain support from and unify former regime elements, or if it was part of a broader political deal with the HoR. Although the release has been somewhat brushed over as part and parcel of the current political chaos, any attempt by Gaddafi to enter the political arena will inflame tensions between East and West and complicate moves towards political reconciliation.

Zintan Tripartite Meeting

Two Zintani MPs have invited Head of the PC Fayed Sarraj, HoR President Ageela Saleh, and Haftar to a joint meeting to discuss a political accord. Though traditionally working with the HoR and LNA, Zintan has become more receptive to the PC for a number of reasons. In the first instance, there are some 20,000 Zintanis seeking to return to their homes in Tripoli following the ousting of Libya Dawn last month, and co-operation with the PC is vital to achieving this transfer.

At the same time, Sarraj is attempting to create the foundation for a future national army and foresees the Zintanis as part of this army. Sarraj's plan involves dividing the country into seven military zones of Tripoli, Benghazi, Tobruk, Sabha, Kufra, and the central and western regions. Each will be headed by a commander who trains his own forces while being responsive to the chief of the Libyan army under the control of the PC. This month Sarraj appointed a Zintani as a military commander of the new 'western zone.' The deal theoretically suits Zintan because it offers official recognition to an otherwise small town and relatively isolated militia. Although the Zintanis may have signed on to the plan, the proposed army structure is extremely problematic. Indeed, Sarraj's plan looks to create a series of security fiefdoms that are financially supported by the government but are able to operate independently.

FIELD NOTES

In this edition of Field Notes, we speak more broadly to our team in Libya about key political and security events this month.

What is the word on the street about Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's release?

"Many people think the decision to release him was motivated by money. Saif al-Islam has billions of dollars, and why release him now? Many Libyans think that people who were holding him were just paid off, especially because the economy is so bad right now. He wasn't just a political figure held captive, he is a very rich man."

We have seen pictures of Libyans queuing outside banks, how bad is the situation?

"At least 65-70% of Libyans haven't really been hugely affected but maybe 10-20% are facing a really bad situation.

People have been queuing overnight outside banks to withdraw money and are brought food while they wait. Often bank tellers will serve their friends and family first, which makes a lot of people really angry because then the wait is even longer. We had similar problems the last few years, but this year is particularly bad. Tripoli is the worst off."

Former air force official Ali Sharif al-Rifi returned from exile to his hometown of Waddan this month. How safe are former officials from arrest?

"It depends on what the official has done. If they were just working under the Gaddafi regime and are not responsible for huge human rights abuses then they will be safe in their town with their tribe. Their tribe will still consider them to be a son and won't hand them over for arrest. But if the person has committed huge abuses and is sought after by a legitimate

government, then the tribe would probably hand them over. They will do this because they know that justice is important, and because they have a sense that we are all Libyans and must play our part. Perhaps also they would worry that the costs for the tribe are too great not to hand someone over."

Moving to the crisis in the Gulf, we saw the HoR break relations with Qatar. What did Libyans think about the Qatar crisis?

"Anyone who is pro-Haftar probably supports the blockade and the HoR's statement. In the west we either don't care or think it is all just very hypocritical to take sides. It is true that Qatar was supporting certain movements in Libya, but so were other states. If you are a nationalist Libyan then you should want them all out."

Is there any intervention that could be positive?

"If there is any intervention it would be preferable that it is internationally agreed upon, perhaps to support the GNA, which is the internationally recognized government. In fact, I have noticed that when Libyans talk about foreign interference, we are talking more positively about the American and the European approach, because they are trying to stay fair and not really taking sides. This is what Libya needs."

Talking about divisions, the HoR terrorist list also seems very divisive.

"It is not so much divisive, just very silly. It is a list of political opponents and anyone who is thought to be pro-Qatar, not a list of terrorists. It's also not the first time they have made lists like that, they did it three to four years ago as well."

SPECIAL FOCUS REPORT

Although the LPA represented an international attempt to pave the way for a stable, unified Libya, foreign interference has strengthened disparate militia groups and increased arms on the ground. This month saw the release of the UN Security Council Report on Libya, written by a Panel of Experts in response to UNSC Resolutions 1970 and 1973 (2011). A central focus of this Panel has been monitoring the arms embargo imposed by the UNSC since February 2011. Within the report, the Panel observes an increase in external military support, despite this arms embargo.

As long noted by observers of the Libyan security scene, the report remarks that ‘two regional alliances have coalesced around Libya’; the first joins Turkey, Qatar and the Sudan, and the second unites Chad, Egypt and the UAE. Qatar and Turkey have broadly supported Islamist groups as part of their foreign policy, while Sudan has sought to counter Khalifa Haftar’s support for Sudanese rebels. On the other side, Egypt and the UAE have supported Haftar as a perceived strongman and anti-Islamist force, while Chad opposes the Misratan’s use of Chadian rebels.

Foreign support to the LNA in particular has been significant. The report emphasizes

assistance from the UAE, noting that it has ‘significantly increased the air support available to the LNA.’ The LNA has received aircraft from the UAE, including attack helicopters (Mi-24p) initially obtained by the UAE from Belarus in 2014, and fixed wing aircraft (AT-802i). Satellite imagery further details the development of LNA air bases, namely Khadim air base, which shows a build up in air craft and infrastructure. Air support has been vital to much of the LNA’s recent successes.

Although other militia groups, such as the Misratans, have also developed their air force capabilities, the international support provided to the LNA has seen the militia grow to such strength that it dominates eastern Libya and increasingly the southern areas. Though not detailed in the report, recent Egyptian air strikes in Jufra which appear to have been conducted in favour of the LNA represent an additional level of foreign involvement.

There are multitude implications for foreign involvement in Libya, especially when it comes to support for Haftar. Because the LNA can rely upon a near inexhaustible source of funds, arms, and even men through the use of mercenaries, there are few incentives to accept political concessions and abide by the LPA.

At the same time, the LNA has proven highly effective at capitalizing upon its military strength and territorial control to secure political gains. Italy, France and the EU have all voiced their support for Haftar. As the EU struggles with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrants from Libya, ensuring domestic security by installing a strong force on the other side trumps remaining neutral.

Similarly, the Conservative Middle East Council published a report in March 2017 which effectively glorified Haftar and called for the UK to support the LNA. Not only does the Council praise security in the East, but it also perceives Haftar as a nationalist force fighting solely to defeat jihadists with no ‘grand political strategy.’ Indeed, Haftar’s portrayal as a man fighting jihadists appears to have proven effective at garnering international support.

With Russia also jumping on board the Haftar train, itself long critical of the LPA, at this stage Haftar’s strategy of forcing a change in the LPA will likely succeed.

GLOSSARY

BDB	Benghazi Defence Brigade
CSA	Civil Status Authority
DMSC	Derna Mujahidin Shura Council
GNA	Government of National Accord
HoR	House of Representatives
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IOM	International Organization for Migration
LNA	Libyan National Army
LPA	Libyan Political Agreement
PGF	Petroleum Facilities Guard
PC	Presidency Council
RADA	Special Deterrence Forces (Interior Ministry Special Forces)
SCBR	Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries
TRB	Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade