



Unity Resources Group

LIBYA MONITOR OCTOBER

Key Developments and Local Insights into the Security and Political Climate



INCIDENT REPORTING



Tripoli

Misratah

Surt

Gulf of Sidra

Benghazi

Tubruq

Numerous attacks occurred in Tripoli this month. See Flashpoint Areas and Special Focus for further details.

Islamic State militants attacked a court in Misrata this month. For more information see Flashpoint Areas.

In late October, 36 bodies were discovered in al-Abyar district in Benghazi, prompting widespread condemnation. Several of the victims had been held in LNA prisoners, and were filmed confessing to crimes before their bodies were found. With the massacre occurring in Benghazi, responsibility ultimately falls to Haftar who has shown little interest in instituting rule of law and prosecuting human rights abuses.

On 29 October US forces conducted a raid over Misrata and captured Mustafa al-Imam, a militant involved in an attack on US government facilities in Benghazi in 2012. The attack left four Americans dead, including the US Ambassador. Al-Imam was transported to a US navy ship at Misrata port, suggesting some level of complicity from Misratan leaders. Although the Misratan Municipality condemned the bombing of Derna and the massacre at al-Abyar this month, it has not released a statement regarding the extraordinary rendition of al-Imam.

Islamic State claimed an attack on an LNA checkpoint 60km south of Ajdabiya which took place on 25 October. Militants reportedly used several armed vehicles in the surprise attack, which left three LNA soldiers dead. IS recurrently target LNA checkpoints in small scale attacks.

Although the siege in Derna was alleviated slightly this month, airstrikes struck residential areas in the city on 30 October. The aerial bombardment killed 15 people, including women and children. A few days prior to the attack, Haftar was in Egypt requesting air support. Egypt has conducted similar aerial offensives in the past. LNA forces have retained the advantage over other local militias that have been ill-equipped to counter Haftar's army as a militarily superior force.

FLASHPOINT AREAS

Islamic State Attack in Misrata

A group of IS militants wearing suicide vests targeted the courts complex in Misrata on 4 October. There was a sustained exchange of gunfire with security guards, which led to two of the militants blowing themselves up. The police killed a third assailant trying to escape after the failed attack. The incident resulted in the death of four bystanders and injury to 40 others. Unity sources believe the shooting was an attempt by IS to disrupt a scheduled trial of IS suspects, which was verified by local media on 5 October. Foreign consulates were on high alert in Tripoli following the attack, which was the first IS expedition into an urban environment since losing Sirte at the end of last year.

IS is already working hard to exploit the security vacuum in central Libya, and while the attack in Misrata was unsuccessful, it served a purpose of demonstrating that it still has some unconventional reach. The targeting of Misrata will also have been symbolic given some of the most powerful militias dispatched to liberate Sirte were from the city. Since the attack, IS has remained relatively underground, excluding the raid on an isolated checkpoint in Ajdabiya. A subsequent crackdown on Islamist militants in the city, who are likely only nominally associated with IS, nevertheless reduces the opportunity for other sleeper cells to activate.

Militias Clash in Tripoli

Several battles broke out between Tripoli's multitude militias, amidst skirmishes for control and influence within the city. On 1 October, the Nawasi Brigade clashed with the TRB and attempted a takeover of Tajouri's headquarters in the corniche, allegedly because Tajouri was due to hold talks with Haftar. The Nawasi Brigade is Islamist and previously supported Libya Dawn, although it now supports the PC. The TRB retaliated by successfully evicting members of the Nawasi Brigade from their base in Gurji district. The clashes killed three civilians.

Two weeks later on 17 October, the Nawasi Brigade successfully took over the Tripoli port from Brigade 50. RADA forces were present around 300 metres from the naval base, including with ten technicals, and provided support to the Nawasi Brigade during the takeover. To read more on this relationship, see the Special Focus.

In mid-October clashes broke out in Ghararat in Tripoli between RADA and a group of local armed youths. The fighting was reportedly motivated by a RADA raid and the subsequent arrest of a youth from the neighbourhood. Mitiga airport was temporarily closed and flights suspended. Although RADA has a degree of de facto legal authority within Tripoli and controls airport security, the impact of the clashes on airport

operations suggests that RADA's forces remain thinly stretched and unable to exert a continuous presence in strategically valuable areas.

UN Plan Faces Setbacks

Salamé's plan to move Libya beyond its political stagnancy has experienced problems as the warring HoR and GNA fail to find common ground. Talks between the State Council and the HoR were initially progressing, with some changes agreed to the LPA. The most prominent of these changes was reducing membership of the PC from nine to three persons. However, as soon as more complicated issues arose, such as determining the status of Article 8 of the LPA, the drafting committee fractured. The HoR seeks to amend the LPA by removing Article 8, which currently affords the PC power to appoint military leaders. Removing Article 8 would establish the military as a far stronger and independent institution, and would pave the way for Haftar to secure leadership of Libya's military.

Setbacks within discussions are entirely expected, particularly with regard to Article 8 which has no common consensus between the different factions. Unless discussions can at the very least continue, growing inertia will ultimately undermine any further attempts by the UN to broker an agreement. Inevitably, Libya's political future will then be determined by force.

FIELD NOTES

In this edition of Field Notes, we speak to our team in Libya about events inside Tripoli over the last month.

The landscape within Tripoli seems to be changing. Could you tell us more about this?

“There is without a doubt some significant ‘posturing’ happening within the militia landscape in the capital and the west of the capital over the past month. There’s been an increase exchange in night-time gunfire in south-eastern Tripoli, especially over the last seven days. There are far less police on the streets, and no military at all. On Saturday, the Janzour checkpoint was abandoned. There has been even less of a presence the last two days as well. It is odd.”

Why is Janzour a measure of deterioration or otherwise?

“Because that checkpoint is controlled by the Janzour Knights, and they have in the past tried to

be on the winning side. Janzour is the last main checkpoint before you have access to the rest of Tripoli. In the week that Zawiya was experiencing fighting – which had very little press which I was surprised about – but the posture of that checkpoint was wrong, it was stopping people going to Zawiya but it was also letting eastern bound traffic into the city unchecked. There was a decreasing militia presence, and one day at the end of last week it was like it had disappeared entirely. I didn’t see a single militia element in the city.”

What about the military build up we are seeing in Warshefana? Who is behind this?

“I don’t think the activity down in Warshefana is GNA related. There are conflicting reports in the media and people are saying different things, but they’re guessing that Haftar is in this somewhere. There were reports that Serraj put this together as a combined

Zintan/Tripoli move, because Warshefana is known as a den for kidnappers and criminal activity. But Serraj has publically denied that, and one of the key stakeholders behind the Zintan push said he was with it then not, then with Serraj then Haftar.”

How is the public responding to these developments?

“There is a growing sense of anxiety in Tripoli which has been heightened over the past 10 days or so. A lot of people here believe Haftar is behind all of this – even if his fingerprints are only on a fraction of this activity it is a worrying trend. People are saying it feels like it did before the revolution. It’s that level of tension and they are fully expecting something to happen.”

Do you see that large scale conflict could be on the horizon?

“There are a few conflict indicators that suggest something is going to

happen. But we haven’t seen a large scale movement of assets. Things in Tripoli are also cyclical. When the battle for the port was going on, three blocks back things were going on as usual – people were out shopping, sitting in cafes and so on. It wasn’t so unusual in a sense, just another battle in Tripoli. If it goes on for longer than a day then people get worried.”

What about social changes, have you seen anything different over the last few months?

“I have noticed more conservatives (Salafists) on the streets in Tripoli. It looks visibly different from just a few months ago. In the coffee shops there is talk of banning women from driving. This is by no means the majority, but it is a growing dynamic.”

SPECIAL FOCUS REPORT

Shifting Allegiances and Undisciplined Militias

The ascent of military and political powers within Libya has at times created the impression of relatively sound, co-operative arrangements between the most powerful political leaderships and numerous militias on the ground. Serraj, as head of the PC, draws support from Tajouri's TRB, RADA, and a host of Tripoli-based militias. Haftar's LNA is more streamlined as an institution, though still comprises disparate 'units' within it. This month, however, it was clear just how tenuous these arrangements are.

Within Tripoli, numerous groups under the GNA engaged in clashes. The Nawasi Brigade sought to expel the TRB from its headquarters allegedly over differing political viewpoints, although both groups are theoretically aligned with the GNA. On 6 October, clashes also broke out in Arada neighbourhood between two GNA-aligned militias: the 42nd Battalion from Ein Zara, and the Abdul Raouf al-Jabari Brigade based in Arada. The cause of the clashes is unclear, but the fighting killed four people and wounded at least 15.

On 17 October, the Nawasi Brigade evicted Brigade 50 from the port of Tripoli with the assistance of RADA. Brigade 50 had guarded the port for years. Reflecting the same dynamics of in-fighting, Brigade 50 is also nominally aligned with the GNA. The Nawasi Brigade portrayed the advance as necessary

to depose a criminal group, which likely does have some truth; Brigade 50 was reportedly extorting the port authority and charging a fee for goods to enter and exit the port. The Nawasi Brigade also stated it would hand over control of the port to the authorities, ie. RADA. Although RADA is now in control, the two are in close alliance, both ideologically and operationally. At the same time, control of the port offers strategic control over the main supply route into Tripoli, and the advance reinforces RADA's growing influence and presence.

If rumours of extortion by Brigade 50 are true, the question remains as to why the PC legitimised the group and did not move against it earlier. A similar question arises when considering the Amu Brigade's smuggling activities in Sabratha. Following the victory of the Anti-ISIS Operations Room against the Amu Brigade in early October, Serraj publically praised the crackdown against the group, even though it fell under the banner of the PC. His praise adds further support to the notion that in real terms, Serraj is little more than a figurehead under whom a mix of militias wantonly operates.

Meanwhile, in the east of the country, the HoR is facing similar issues within the LNA. On 4 October, heavy clashes broke out in al-Majuri in Benghazi, allegedly over a dispute between the al-Msallaty and al-Barasi families. A member of the al-Msallaty family is part of the Sahawat group, and members of al-Barasi are in the Saiqa Force. As fighting broke out, further members of each militia joined the conflict.



The Saiqa Force reportedly burned down four houses of the al-Msallaty family. Tribal disputes that escalate to armed confrontation are not uncommon throughout Libya. However, the two warring sides are both aligned to the LNA – raising questions about the LNA's authority of militias supposedly under its control.

Ultimately, the militia scene in Libya is inherently dominated by self interest. Because Libya's institutions have failed to achieve cogent or widespread legitimacy, there is no real reason for the militias to act in any other manner. To this end, in-fighting will not be solved until formalised processes and institutions exist. In recent months, competing powers within Libya have sought to alter the military landscape by dividing the country into formalised 'zones.' Yet these zones, which are competing and overlapping, do little to alter the issue of legitimacy and rather highlight the absurdity of Libya's current state of affairs.

GLOSSARY

BDB	Benghazi Defence Brigade
CDA	Constitutional Drafting Assembly
CSA	Civil Status Authority
DMSC	Derna Mujahideen 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
PFG	Petroleum Facilities Guard
PC	Presidency Council
RADA	Special Deterrence Forces (Interior Ministry Special Forces)
SCBR	Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries
TRB	Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade
UNSMIL	United Nations Support Mission in Libya