



Unity Resources Group

# LIBYA MONITOR AUGUST

Key Developments And Local Insights On The Security And Political Climate



# INCIDENT REPORTING



Tripoli

An Italian naval ship attempting to stop the flow of refugees to Europe was sent to Tripoli, reportedly with the permission of Serraj. The al-Thinni Government condemned the move and portrayed it as foreign occupation, in turn implying that Serraj is a pawn to foreign powers.

Misratah

Surt

In late August, BAM and the LNA moved forces towards Sirte following reports of ISIS militants in the area. A suicide attack on 31 August at a checkpoint in Nawfaliyah, east of Sirte, was claimed by ISIS and killed several LNA soldiers.

Benghazi

Derna has faced an ongoing siege at the hands of the LNA. For further analysis, see the Special Focus report.

Tubruq

The LNA has detained a commander in its al-Saiqa Brigade, Mahmoud al-Werfalli. The move follows the issuance of an arrest warrant from the ICC. Given previous condemnation of al-Werfalli for human rights' abuses and the failure of the LNA to act, it is likely that the LNA is seeking to deflect international involvement or criticism, rather than engage in actual disciplinary measures.

Former Prime Minister (2012-14) Ali Zeidan was detained by the TRB for ten days in Tripoli. Armed men took Zeidan from the Victoria Hotel. Zeidan had informed Serraj that he was visiting the city, and the TRB's abduction appears to be a show of force by Tajouri to reinforce his significance ahead of the proposed elections.

Sabha

Awbari

Marzuq

An LNA battalion just south of Brak al-Shati airbase was attacked by unknown assailants on 18 August. Three soldiers were wounded, one of which died from his injuries.

Nine LNA troops and two civilians were killed in an attack at al-Fuqaha checkpoint on 23 August. The victims were reportedly beheaded. ISIS claimed the attack, stating it had killed and wounded 21 members of Haftar's militias. The attack is in line with ongoing reports of ISIS' presence in Jufra.

At Taj

# FLASHPOINT AREAS

## Islamic State Renews Attacks

IS has renewed its operations in Libya after several months of relative quiet. Militants who had fled Sirte were long rumoured to be present within the Jufra desert area and maintaining a low profile. Currently, IS is operating as an insurgent force engaging in hit-and-run attacks on security forces, although the group is also reasserting its presence in the villages surrounding Sirte. In Wadi al-Ahmar, 90 km east of Sirte, IS militants briefly appeared during Eid and threatened Libyans who had turned their backs on the group. In a similar attempt at instilling fear, in late August IS released a video showing the group operating a checkpoint between Abu Grain and Jufra and holding two captives.

IS' resurgence is an attempt to demonstrate the group's ongoing relevance as it faces defeat in Iraq, and coincides with growing international attention on Libya. The group will seek to exploit security voids and demonstrate the inefficacy of security forces. Although IS will likely face resistance from villagers who are by now well aware of the group's brutal tactics, IS' presence could nevertheless grow. Libya's borders are porous with multitude human smuggling routes, and foreign recruits could be attracted to again join the fighting, as has occurred in the Philippines. At the same time, the group will be competing with AQIM for recruits, which is growing increasingly popular in the

competition for global jihad.

An equally pressing problem is the movement of BAM and LNA forces towards Sirte. Both militias will seek to claim credit for fighting IS and will likely use the opportunity to undermine the other. Because both forces are sizeable and well equipped, there is a potential for confrontation even as they will seek to avoid hostilities.

## Resurgent Commercial Interest

This month saw international economic interest in Libya increase. A Syrian cargo plane arrived in Benina Airport in Benghazi for the first time in seven years, and returned to Syria with a Libyan trade delegation. The move was likely organised with Russian support. Increased trade links will further entrench Russia's presence, Haftar, and Syria's al-Assad.

Major energy powerhouse Siemens has meanwhile signalled its return to Libya after signing an MoU with GECOL. The conglomerate signed a \$135.6 million contract with GECOL in 2013 and has a number of unfinished projects in Libya. With Libya facing a huge energy crisis and its power plants suffering from maintenance problems, Siemens' return is much needed.

Representatives from three major South Korean companies (Hyundai, Doosan, and Daewoo) also

visited Libya to assess whether it is safe to return following their withdrawal in mid-2014. Although reportedly eager to return, the South Korean government currently bans its citizens from travelling to Libya. Deputy of the PC, Ahmed Maetig, subsequently flew to South Korea and requested that the government lift its ban.

## Libyan Embassies Divided

Although foreign investment is essential to reinvigorate Libya's economy, companies seeking to operate within Libya may run into challenges securing visas for their business operations. According to *Libya Herald*, these challenges result from the ongoing political problems with differing allegiances amongst embassy staff to either the HoR or the GNA. Unity has recorded cases of businesspeople being refused visas depending on the proposed area of operation and the embassy involved. The refusal likely stems from a reluctance to see the corresponding region with its alternative government prosper.

This month it was revealed in Libyan media that for the most part only staff supportive of the GNA were receiving their salaries, suggesting that the GNA is trying to exert its authority internationally. Some states have also sought to empower differing governments, as in Jordan which has made moves to empower the GNA within the Amman embassy.

# SPECIAL FOCUS REPORT

The LNA's Omar Mukhtar Operations Room intensified its siege on Derna this month after the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council (DMSC) shot down an LNA jet at the end of July. The pilot was executed, an act for which the DMSC later issued an apology. The DMSC has been in control of Derna since it kicked out ISIS in 2016. The group comprises Islamists and has fought against the LNA.

The city of Derna has experienced a longstanding blockade by the LNA which has seen restrictions on goods allowed into the city and regular confrontation with civilians entering and exiting, as well as occasional air strikes. In May, Egypt also conducted air strikes on Derna under the auspices of retaliating for attacks against Copts in Egypt – though these attacks were claimed by ISIS. Yet the city has a long history as being an Islamist hotbed; a disproportionate amount of men from Derna signed up to fight for al-Qaeda in Iraq during the American occupation.

The siege on Derna has seen collective punishment for its residents, as Haftar seeks to fore the population to capitulate. The LNA has closed all main roads into the city. Residents are allowed to enter or leave solely as displaced people on foot. According to REACH, within two weeks the cost of basic goods rose between 14

to 30 percent. Shortages are expected to increase, with truckloads of flour stopped from entering Derna in early September. The slight easing of the siege by allowing in medical supplies appears intended solely to deflect criticism of the collective punishment experienced by Derna's residents. Indeed, Haftar has subsequently confirmed his intent to 'choke' the city to defeat the DMSC.

The Derna local council has held both the GNA and the HoR responsible for the plight of its residents. In a press release in which the council called for international intervention, the council noted that 'the silence of these bodies is considered participation.' International bodies and actors have largely remained silent on the siege, seemingly unwilling to become involved in what is being put down to merely another element of the ongoing political conflict.

From a military perspective, Haftar's decision to implement a siege is saving his forces from engaging in the costly fighting that characterised the battle for Benghazi. For a siege to be effective it requires the complete support of troops. Although the siege has lasted so far, there have nevertheless been accounts of dissent within the LNA ranks as to the treatment of Derna's residents. This discord will doubtless grow as the impact upon civilians increases.



Looking down towards Derna. Source: *Wikimedia Commons*

On another level, while Haftar is saving his forces from combat, the joint humiliation of Derna's residents is highly likely to ultimately backfire and cause long-term problems. Indeed, the story of a bride being forced to walk towards another town to meet her husband highlights the social repercussions of Haftar's measures that will not soon be forgotten. Derna has few economic opportunities, ensuring difficulty for young men hoping to establish livelihoods and to marry. Historically, the city is proud for representing resistance and this resistance has found expression in Islamism. Choking the city is unlikely to endear the population towards Haftar's secular thinking. Though it could secure Derna in the short-term, it is rather more likely that this action will antagonise a movement.

# GLOSSARY

BDB	Benghazi Defence Brigade
CSA	Civil Status Authority
DMSC	Derna Mujahideen Shura Council
GECOL	General Electricity Company of Libya
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