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LIBYA

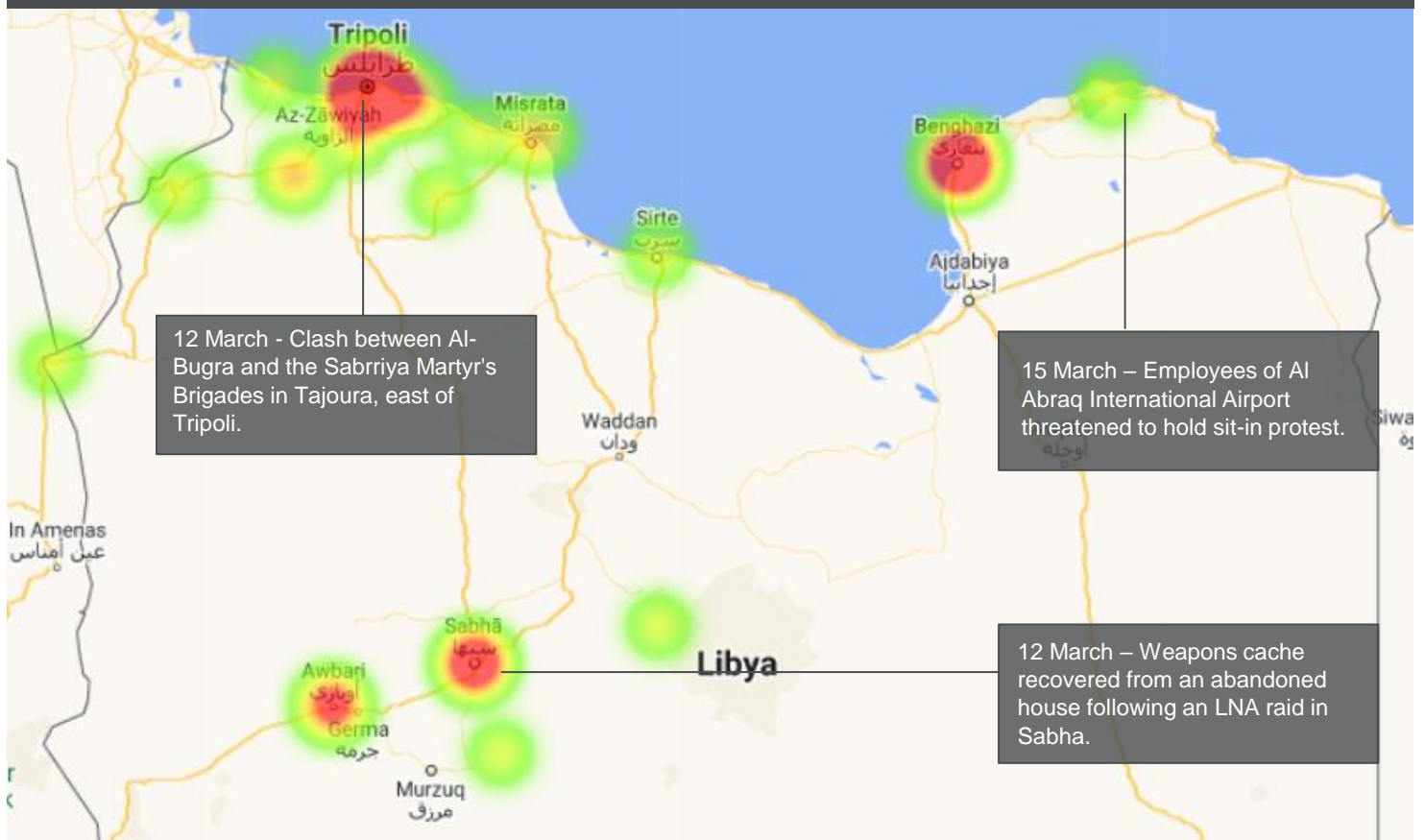
Weekly Political Stability,
Economic And Security
Threat Assessment

11-17 MARCH 2023



COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

FIGURE 1: HIGHLIGHTED INCIDENTS IN LIBYA 11-17 MARCH 2023



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- UNSMIL head Bathily continued his efforts to foster the political process. On 16 March, US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland stated that GNU PM Dbeiba needs to step down from his position in case he aims to run in the elections.
- Low-level militia tensions were reported in Tripoli in the past week.
- On 13 March, the Zintan Security Directorate arrested Muhammad Bashir Al Qarj. Al Qarj is responsible for closing the oil pipeline valve located near Riyayna, northeast of Zintan, multiple times to blackmail Tripoli-based governments.
- Employees at Labraq International Airport (LAQ), east of Al Bayda, on 15 March demanded salary increases and threatened to stop working on 21 March if their demands are not met.

OUTLOOK

- As Bathily's plan is gathering low support in Libya, Norland's statement might be an attempt to reduce the distance between Bathily's plan and the HoR's alternative proposals to reach elections. However, Norland's statement will decrease Dbeiba's support to the political process.
- Low-level militia tensions will keep occurring. However, significant escalations or destabilizations are unlikely, since international stakeholders prioritize stability in this phase.
- Al Qarj's arrest follows recent threats to disrupt oil output due to financial grievances, for which Al Qarj might be responsible. Al Qarj's arrest underscores the active efforts of the GNU and local actors in Zintan to avoid disruptions in oil output.
- Flight disruptions are likely if the financial grievances of the airport employees are not addressed.

COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

UPDATES ON THE POLITICAL PROCESS

On 14 March, UNSMIL Head Abdoulaye Bathily met with members of the 5+5 JMC and other military leaders from the eastern and western blocs in Tunis. It was agreed that the attendees would communicate and coordinate with each other to ensure security during the electoral process. The development is part of Bathily's efforts to foster the political process, which seems to be facing increasing attrition.

Below is a summary of UNSMIL Head Abdoulaye Bathily's recent initiatives to foster the Libyan political process:

- 14 March: Bathily met with Qatari ambassador to Libya Khalid Mohammed bin Zabin Al Dosari in Tripoli. Al Dosari expressed his country's support to the Libyan political track. On the same day, HoR Speaker Aquila Saleh arrived in Amman and met with the Speaker of the Jordanian Parliament to discuss the political developments in Libya.
- 13 March: Bathily arrived in Benghazi, where he held separate meetings with LNA Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and GNS PM Fathi Bashagha.
- 12 March: Bathily met with German Special Envoy to Libya Christian Buck, who expressed support to the UNSMIL initiative for elections.

Bathily's initiative gathered significant international support. However, the continued overlapping and inconsistency between UNSMIL and the HoR's initiatives hampers efforts to agree on a framework for elections and ensure their result would be respected by the losers.

On 16 March, US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland stated that GNU PM Dbeiba needs to step down from his position in case he aims to run in the elections. This will decrease the commitment of Dbeiba supporting the political process in any concrete way. However, this might also be seen as a way for the US to reduce the distance between Bathily's plan and the HoR's proposal, which reflects Egypt's priorities. It remains true that the GNU's buy-in is necessary to hold successful elections.

THE GNU TRIES TO AVOID OIL DISRUPTIONS

As previously reported by Intelyse, one of the key priorities of the US and European stakeholders in Libya in this phase is to ensure the continued flow of oil and avoid export disruptions, given energy insecurity caused by the war in Ukraine. This manifested in efforts to de-escalate tensions between the eastern and western Libyan blocs, and with an increased international engagement with Libyan power brokers. Aside from high-level political tensions which might affect the oil sector, the GNU and other local actors in Tripolitania seem committed to preventing also local threats to oil operations and output.

On 13 March, the Zintan Security Directorate arrested Muhammad Bashir Al Qarj. Al Qarj is a fuel smuggler who is also part of western-based PFG structures in the Zintan area. Al Qarj is responsible for closing the oil pipeline valve located near Riyayna, northeast of Zintan, and disrupting oil output multiple times to blackmail Tripoli-based governments and obtain concessions.

Al Qarj's arrest follows recent threats to disrupt oil output made by western PFG members due to financial grievances. The threats were rebuffed by both the GNU and the western PFG leadership, indicating that they were launched by lower-level PFG members. Because Al Qarj was arrested, the threats might have come from him or some of his affiliates. Al Qarj's arrest underscores the active efforts to avoid disruptions in oil output. Cooperation from Zintan indicates that at all levels actors in Tripolitania understand that ensuring continued oil output is currently a priority.

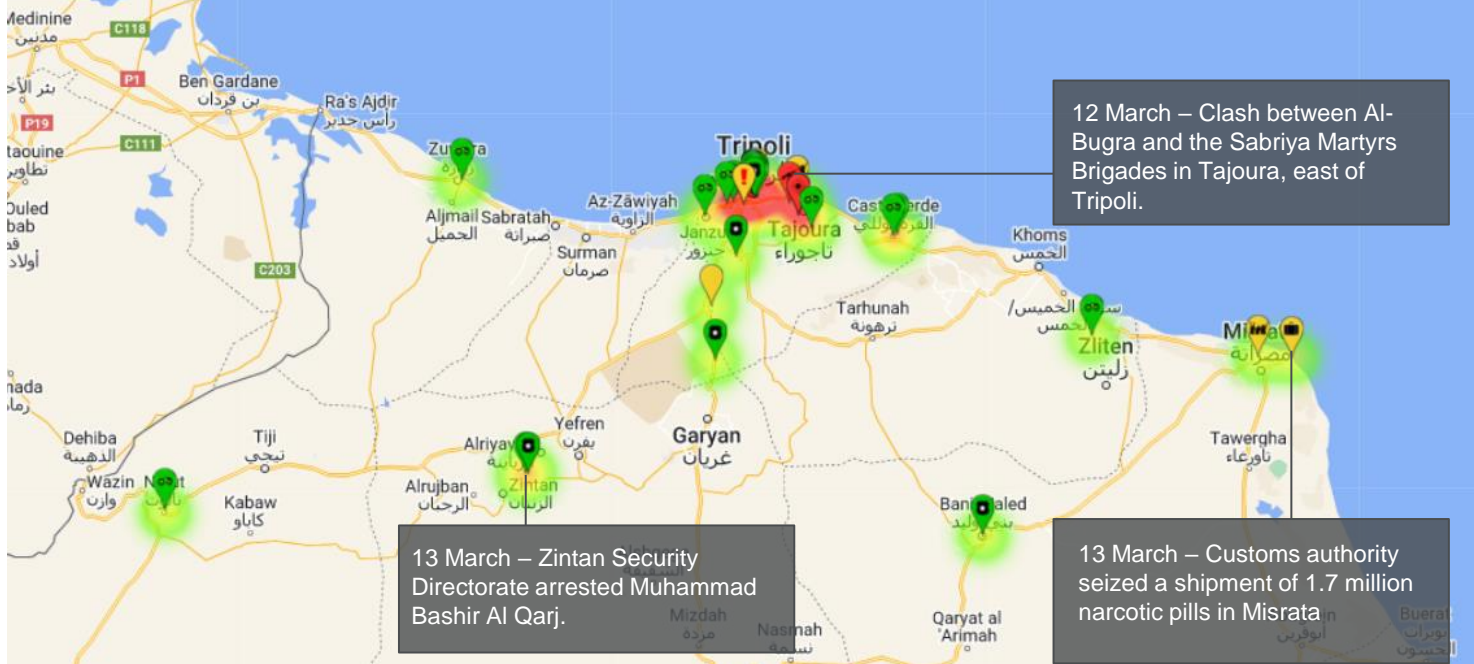


Above: Stock photo of Mohammed Bashir Al Qarj

Below: Photo purportedly showing Al Qarj at the moment of his arrest



FIGURE 2: INCIDENT ACTIVITY IN TRIPOLI, 11-17 MARCH 2023



MILITIA DEVELOPMENTS AND STANCE IN TRIPOLI

Below is a summary of the militia tensions recorded in the Tripoli area during the past week:

- **12 March:** Clashes broke out between Al-Bugra (51st Brigade) and the Sabriya Martyrs (Lions) Brigade in the Bir Al Usta Milad area, Tajoura. The clash was triggered by the murder of an Al Bugra militiaman on the previous day. The intervention of the Council of Elders and Notables of Tajoura managed to avoid further clashes.
- **13 March:** A spike in militia tension was reported after units of the Anti-Illegal Immigration Authority (AIIA) under Mohammed Al Khoja deployed in several areas of Tripoli. No clashes were reported and the tension subsided after the intervention of SSA commander Ghneiwa Al Kikli. The episode was supposedly triggered by a dispute between Al Khoja and GNU Interior Minister Imad Trabelsi, over the latter's decision to reassign specific powers and the associated financial allocations from Al Khoja to another Mol-affiliated force.

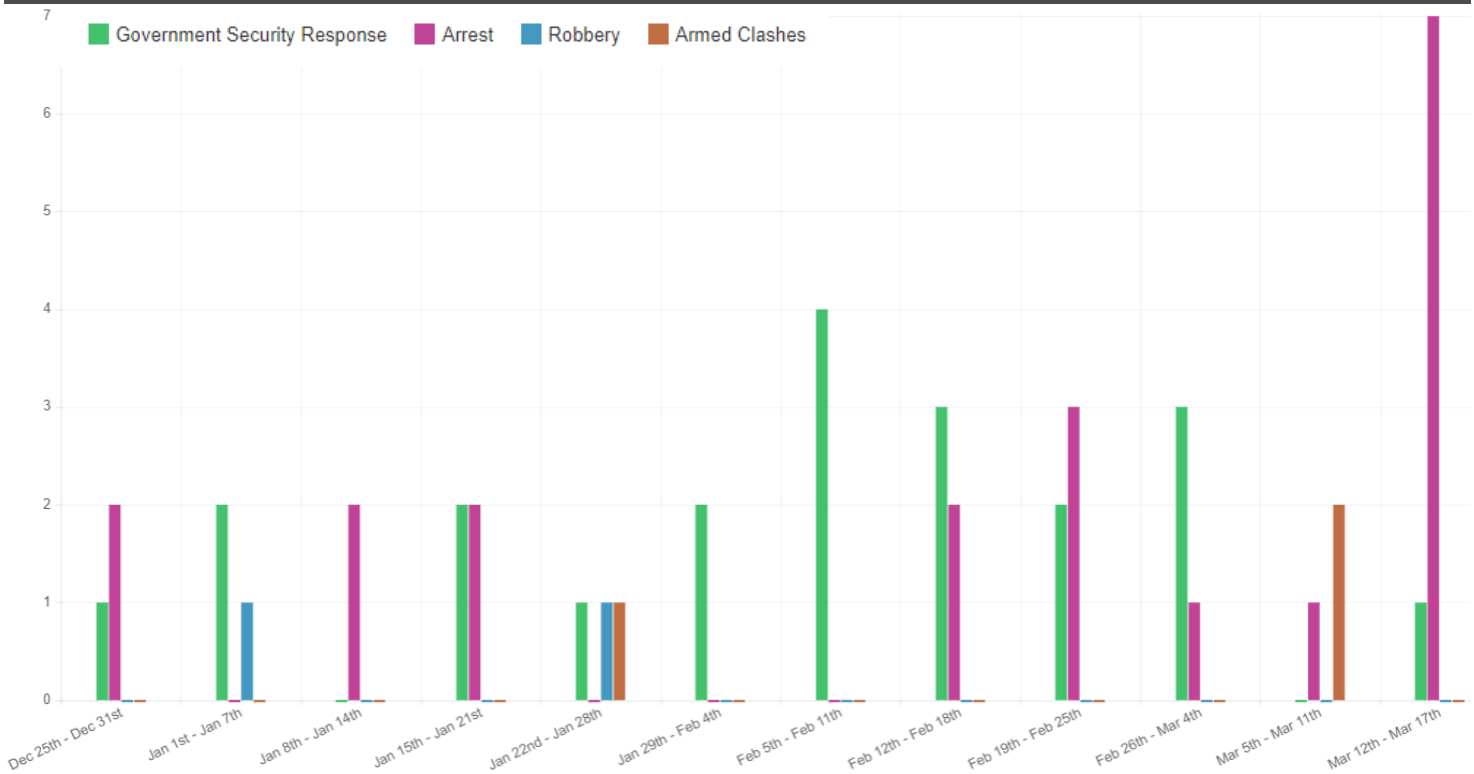
The two incidents above fall inline with usual low-level militia dynamics in Tripoli.

The militias understand that international players in this phase prioritize stability in Libya and in Tripolitania, and continued oil exports. Low-level militia clashes are not going to undermine these priorities, hence low-level tensions will keep occurring in the medium term, largely driven by militia attempts to expand their sphere of influence and competition over access to resources. These tensions can disrupt traffic and operations for time periods which are not expected to exceed 72 hours.

The Zawiyah area will remain at risk of more frequent tensions than Tripoli. Tensions in Zawiyah are not expected to expand into Tripoli and destabilize the capital in the short term.

The militias cannot afford to take any action which would destabilize the GNU or the political and security situation in general. Significant escalations of violence in Tripoli therefore remain unlikely in the foreseeable future.

FIGURE 3: INCIDENT TRENDS IN FEZZAN, 25 DECEMBER 2022 - 17 MARCH 2023



LNA SECURITY OPERATIONS CONTINUE IN FEZZAN

No significant deviations from normal trends were reported in Fezzan. Below is a summary of security-related activities reported in the region during the last week:

- 14 March:** The LNA announced the arrest of a suspected member of a “terrorist group” in Ubari. The suspect is reportedly part of the media arm of the group. With "terrorist group" the LNA might be referring to ISIS, whose activities in the region have largely been reduced to photo ops. It is difficult to verify if the arrest targeted an active ISIS operative or the LNA is only highlighting its role as key counter-terrorism actor.
- 12 March:** The LNA Tariq Bin Ziyad Brigade (TBZ) raided the homes of suspected narcotics traders in Ubari and arrested several individuals. Local activists alleged that the TBZ stole money and items from their homes, resulting in a spike of tension between the LNA and local residents, who later set several car tires on fire and demanded the departure of the TBZ. The TBZ later complied to local demands and withdrew from the area.
- 10 March:** The LNA raided a warehouse used by fuel smugglers in Gaberoun area, 70 km northeast of Ubari. The raid resulted in a clash between the LNA and the smugglers.

The LNA will continue to conduct security operations in Fezzan. These activities are intended to expand the LNA’s control and influence in the region and to portray the LNA as a security provider to locals, rather than to address the root causes of security challenges in the region. Therefore, criminality trends in the region are not going to change in the foreseeable future.

FIGURE 4: UNREST TRENDS IN CYRENAICA , 1 AUGUST 2022 - 17 MARCH 2023



BATHILY ARRIVED IN BENGHAZI

On 13 March, UNSMIL Head Abdoulaye Bathily arrived in Benghazi, where he met separately with LNA Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar and GNS PM Fathi Bashagha. The meetings discussed Bathily's intention to bring together leaders of the HoR and HSC to resolve the political stalemate in Libya.

During the meeting, Haftar affirmed his support to the political process in Libya and the importance of the task of the 5+5 Joint Military Committee. Haftar also highlighted the importance of the HoR and HCS agreeing on a constitutional amendment which enables elections. Bashagha also affirmed his support for the UN efforts in Libya and confirmed a continued commitment to the unity and stability of Libya.

THREATS OF FLIGHT DISRUPTIONS IN EASTERN LIBYA

Employees at Labraq International Airport (LAQ), east of Al Bayda, on 15 March demanded salary increases in accordance with the unified salary scale. They threatened to hold a sit-in protest and stop working on 21 March if their demands are not met, which might cause flight disruptions at the airport.

UNREST IN CYRENAICA

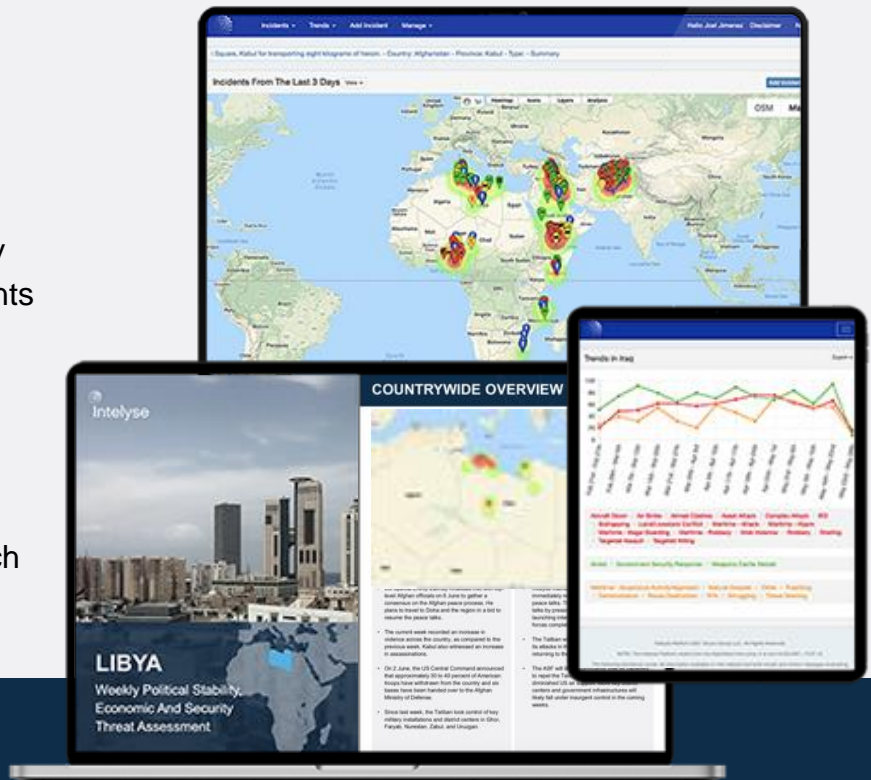
- **14 March:** The Shahat Security Directorate closed the Municipal Council headquarters in Shahat, between Al Bayda and Labraq, for fear that residents would storm the building during a protest. The protesters were accusing the mayor of corruption. The situation is unlikely to escalate.
- **14 March:** Supporters of the Al Ahly football club started fires inside the stadium to protest the scarce performance of the football team. The situation is unlikely to escalate.

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