



Intelyse



LIBYA

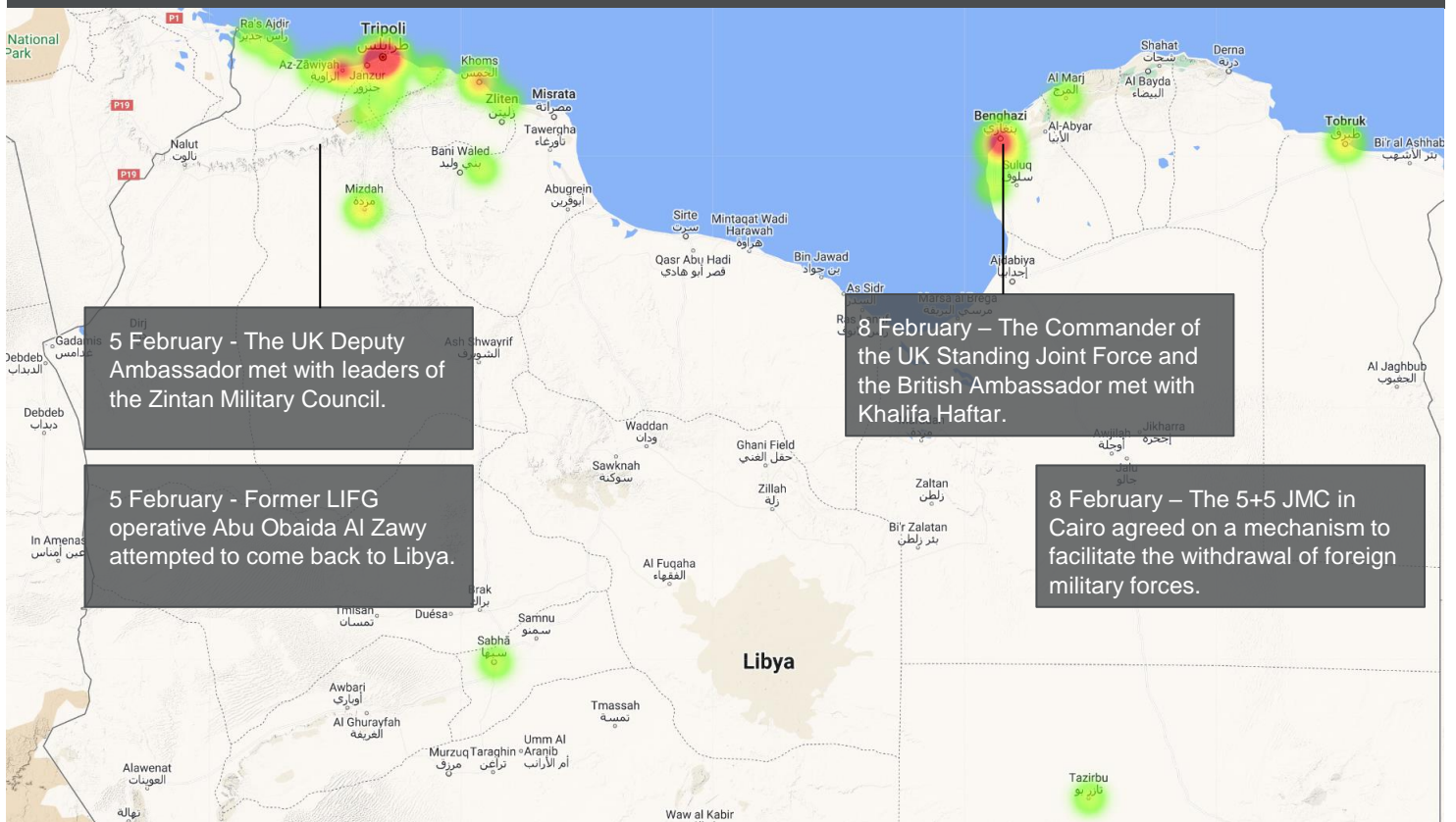
Weekly Political Stability,
Economic And Security
Threat Assessment

4 - 10 FEBRUARY 2023



COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

FIGURE 1: INCIDENT ACTIVITY IN LIBYA, 4 - 10 FEBRUARY 2023



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- A series of relevant developments which seem linked to each other have been recorded in the past week (see page 3). Such events can be summarized as efforts to:
 - Consolidate the militia environment of Tripolitania around a narrative highlighting the common revolutionary roots of the militia groups, also looping in eastern-based militant groups.
 - Boost the high-level dialogue between western and eastern-based military commanders.
 - Stifle the political and military capabilities of influential actors linked to Russia, such as Saif Gaddafi and the Wagner group.
- A split seems to be occurring within the Zintan Military Council, between the group led by Fathi Al Ghazil and the group led by Fathi Al Mahjoud. The UK coordinated with the group of Fathi Al Mahjoud, which is not seen as the legitimate leadership of the ZMC.

OUTLOOK

- Intelyse presents two Hypotheses on how such events could be interpreted and contextualized:
 - **Hypothesis 1:** The US and the UK are implementing a concerted strategy based on reducing east-west political and military divisions and consolidating militia networks to create a unified front. The goal of this strategy could be to minimize the influence of Russia-linked actors in Libya, namely the Wagner Group and Saif Gaddafi, or the chance of a nationwide east-west destabilization.
 - **Hypothesis 2:** New militia blocs in competition with each other are forming in the western coastal area of Tripolitania.
- Intelyse will keep monitoring in case further signs of tension emerge. Since the UK Deputy Ambassador reportedly incited Zintan against the supporters of Saif Gaddafi during the meeting, there will be the need to monitor how this reflects on the Libyan tribal environment. The Gaddafi is a large and influential tribe, and many of its members support Saif Gaddafi.

COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

MAKING SENSE OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: TWO HYPOTHESES

BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

A series of relevant developments which seem linked to each other have been recorded in the past week (see page 3). Such events can be summarized as efforts to:

- Consolidate the militia environment of Tripolitania around a narrative highlighting the common revolutionary roots of the militia groups, also looping in eastern-based militant groups.
- Boost the high-level dialogue between western and eastern-based military commanders.
- Stifle the political and military capabilities of influential actors linked to Russia, such as Saif Gaddafi and the Wagner group.

After summarizing each specific event, Intelyse presents two Hypotheses on how such events could be interpreted and contextualized, assuming that they are part of a coordinate plan. (see pages 3-4). The two Hypotheses can be summarized as follows:

- **Hypothesis 1:** The US and the UK are implementing a concerted strategy based on reducing east-west political and military divisions and consolidating militia networks to create a unified front. The goal of this strategy could be to minimize the influence of Russia-linked actors in Libya, namely the Wagner Group and Saif Gaddafi, or the chance of a countrywide east-west destabilization.
 - Hypothesis 1 reflects NATO attention towards the risks posed by Russian influence in Libya in terms of energy security for the EU.
 - Increased militia consolidation and improved east-west high-level dialogue would reduce the chances of a countrywide destabilization amidst low prospects for holding elections in 2023, which is another key priority of the US in Libya.
 - While this possible strategy would not directly aim to undermine the GNU or Tripoli-based militia groups, it might still face resistance from them and Turkey, because they would become relatively less influential than before.
 - Regardless of what the strategy is, there is no assurance that a potential new political/armed bloc in Tripolitania would follow it. There is a realistic possibility that it would end up pursuing an independent agenda and compete over resources with established militia groups, which would have destabilizing consequences.
- **Hypothesis 2:** New militia blocs in competition with each other are forming in the western coastal area of Tripolitania.
 - Tensions between new militia blocs and Tripoli-based ones would be likely.
 - Hypothesis 2 does not necessarily exclude Hypothesis 1.
 - If both Hypotheses are correct, the dynamics outlined in Hypothesis 2 could undermine the possible US-UK plan outlined in Hypothesis 1.

The dynamics outlined above currently seem unrelated to the Tripoli-centric dynamics mentioned in the 3 February Weekly Threat Assessment, namely the straining relationship between the SSA and the GNU MoI, and the increasing militia competition over the control of Tripoli International Airport (TIA).

While the analysis provided on 3 February remains valid, there now seems to be yet another layer of complexity that will exacerbate the uncertainty Libya is going through in the short and medium term, and in turn will further contribute to tensions and possible skirmishes between militias in Tripolitania.

COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

MAKING SENSE OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: TWO HYPOTHESES

RECENT EVENTS

- **27 January:** US Deputy Ambassador to Libya Leslie Ordeman reportedly met Muammar Al Dawi, leader of the Al Dawi militia (a.k.a. 55th Infantry Brigade), in Tunisia (see 3 February Weekly Threat Assessment). Unconfirmed reports indicated that Ordeman and Al Dawi discussed a plan to unify militias of the western coastal area into a single bloc.

- **5 February:** Former LIFG operative Abu Obaida Al Zawy unsuccessfully attempted to come back to Libya. Unconfirmed reports claimed that he eventually succeeded on 8 February.

Comment: Al Zawy, who has links to the MB, likely came back to consolidate a network of Islamist-leaning militias in the north-western coastal area (see page 5). Hypotheses 1 and 2 below explain his possible endgame.

- **5 February:** The UK Deputy Ambassador met with leaders of the Zintan Military Council (ZMC) on 5 February, and incited Zintan against the supporters of Saif Gaddafi; it should be noted that the latter has ties to Russia. The UK Deputy Ambassador is also reportedly brokering the formation of a new group called "Union of Revolutionaries of Libya" (URL), which aims to "unify revolutionaries from all cities," according to its statement. The URL is expected to hold a gathering on 11 February at 12.00 in Zintan which was labeled "The Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries" (see page 6). Participation is mentioned as "an extension of the revolution and the protection of its goals." Unconfirmed information stated that UK Ambassador Caroline Hurndall or her Deputy, who met the ZMC, extended invitations to Abu Obaida Al Zawy (see above) and that the Derna and Benghazi Shura Councils. The Derna and Benghazi Shura Councils are remnants of the Al Qaeda network in Cyrenaica.

Comment: The Extraordinary Forum seems to be an attempt to consolidate different Libyan armed components and to gather political support against Russia-linked Saif Gaddafi.

- **7 February:** The Commander of the UK Standing Joint Force, Jim Morris, met with GNU Chief of Staff General Mohammed Haddad. On the same day, Morris also met Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi. UK Ambassador Caroline Hurndall joined the meeting. The two meetings reportedly discussed cooperation between the UK military and eastern and western Libyan military organizations.

Comment: The meetings are likely attempts to bridge the existing east-west divisions at the military level.

- **8 February:** The JMC 5+5 Committee met in Cairo. UNSMIL Head Abdoulaye Bathily and representative committees from Sudan and Niger also attended. It was agreed to design a mechanism to coordinate and share information to facilitate the full withdrawal of foreign and mercenary forces from Libya.

Comment: Such forces include the Russia-backed Wagner Group.

- **8 February:** Abdul Hakim Belhaj, another high-profile MB-linked former LIFG operative close to Al Zawy, claimed to have been in touch with Khalifa Haftar in the past; lauded the LNA's role in defeating ISIS; stated that military institutions in Cyrenaica and Tripoli are both legitimate; and claimed that the LNA's Karama Operation and the Tripolitania-based revolutionary groups share the same origins.

Comment: Such conciliatory statements from Belhaj also seem to be trying to bridge the east-west gap.

THE TWO HYPOTHESES

Hypothesis 1: US and UK efforts to curb Russian influence in Libya

The US and the UK are implementing a concerted strategy based on reducing east-west political and military divisions and consolidating militia networks to create a unified front. The goal of this strategy could be to minimize the influence of Russia-linked actors in Libya, namely the Wagner Group and Saif Gaddafi, or the chance of a countrywide east-west destabilization.

- This hypothesis reflects NATO attention towards the risks posed by Russian influence in Libya in terms of energy security for the EU, which were highlighted by Intelyse multiple times.
- The timing for NATO to take action in Libya is relevant, as the end of the 2022-2023 winter approaches. EU energy reserves have shrunk, and from this time onwards a potential Russian-backed oil blockade or sabotage in Libya would be most effective in crippling the EU's efforts to store energy reserves for the 2024-2025 winter, amidst the likely continuation of the Ukraine war in the foreseeable future.

COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

MAKING SENSE OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: TWO HYPOTHESES

- Increasing and managing the engagement between the different actors mentioned above (eastern-based Islamist groups, western-based MB-linked groups, and more pragmatic militias of the western coastal area), in parallel with high-level dialogue between eastern and western institutionalized military leaders (Haftar and Haddad) might reduce the chances of a countrywide destabilization amidst low prospects for holding elections in 2023, which is another key western goal in Libya.
- While Tripolitania-based militias close to the MB have probably retained Islamist-leaning tendencies and political beliefs to different extents, such tendencies currently do not seem strong enough to be classified as an ideology, which makes working with them a viable option for achieving the more pressing priority expressed above. A similar case can be made for hardline Islamists like the Shura Councils of Derna and Benghazi, Abu Obaida Al Zawy, and Hakim Belhaj since they have not been conducting violent operations in Libya for years.

While this possible plan would not directly aim to undermine the GNU or Tripoli-based militia groups, it might still face resistance from them and Turkey. This is why the GNU might have opposed the landing of Al Zawy in Zuwara (see page 5) and his entry into Tripolitania:

- If the efforts to unify militia groups in the western coastal area succeed, the GNU and Tripoli-based militia groups will become relatively less influential. This becomes even more true if eastern-based actors take part in the plan. Currently, large militias benefit from the fragmentation of the militia environment in the western coastal area, because small militias are easier to control, coerce or deal with.
- Tripoli-based militias would ideally avoid opposing a plan which has gathered Libyan and international consensus, but they will fight to defend their interests if they consider them to be at stake.
- Regardless of what the plan is, there is no assurance that a potential new political/armed bloc would follow it. There is a realistic possibility that it would end up pursuing an independent agenda and compete over resources with established militia groups, which would have destabilizing consequences.

Hypothesis 2: Al Zawi and Al Dawi are forming competing militia networks in the western coastal area

Al Zawy and Dawi's efforts to unify militias in the western coastal area are not coordinated. Thus, two competing militia blocs could be forming in the western coastal area, with the potential of tensions between themselves and Tripoli-based militia groups, for the same reasons explained above.

In this case, Al Zawy would likely aim at creating a bloc of Islamist-leaning militias which is not part of the wider plan expressed in Hypothesis 1. The plan could be part of an MB strategy to build influence and leverage vis-à-vis the GNU, amidst increasing dissatisfaction in Tripoli towards GNU PM Dbeiba.

Hypothesis 2 does not necessarily exclude Hypothesis 1. However, if both Hypotheses are correct, the US-UK plan expressed in Hypothesis 1 could not count on the support of Al Zawy. Rather, Al Zawy's efforts could interfere with US-UK plans and cause significant security concerns in Tripolitania.

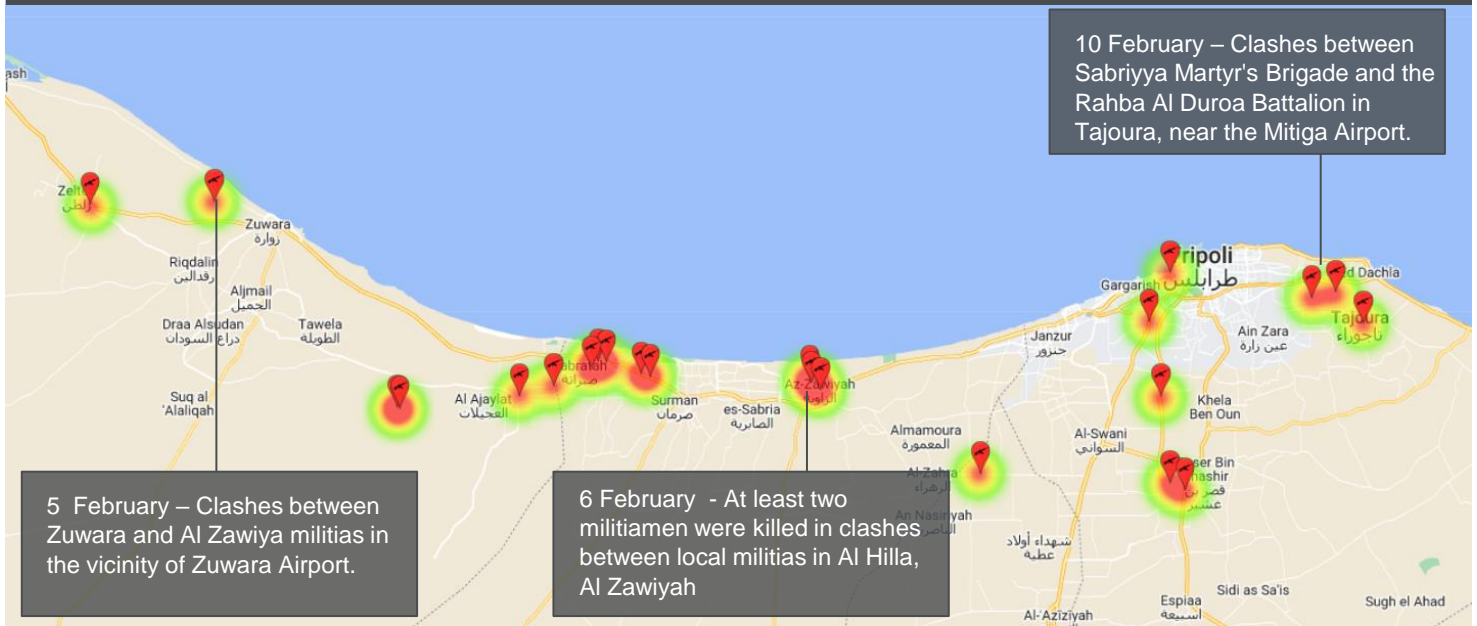
Unconfirmed reports say that Al Zawy was invited by the Deputy UK Ambassador to the Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries in Zintan (see pages 1 and 5). If confirmed, it could be explained in different ways:

- Al Zawi is part of the US-UK plan expressed in Hypothesis 1. This would invalidate Hypothesis 2.
- Al Zawi is acting independently from the US and the UK, and the UK might have invited him to the Forum to start a dialogue with him and try to manage him. However, there would be no need to invite Al Zawy to the Forum and legitimize him publicly if the goal is to limit his influence and control him. This also challenges the validity of Hypothesis 2.

Based on the above, Hypothesis 2 is considered less likely than Hypothesis 1 because it would imply that the US and the UK undertook delicate operations which involve engaging local and high-level stakeholders simultaneously but without coordinating with each other and with the risk of finding themselves at odds with each other. If the news about the UK inviting Al Zawy to the Forum in Zintan turns out to be fake, indicating that there is no cooperative relationship between Al Zawi and the UK, Hypothesis 2 would become more realistic.

TRIPOLITANIA

FIGURE 2: ARMED CLASHES IN WESTERN LIBYA FROM 1 NOVEMBER 2022 - 10 FEBRUARY 2023

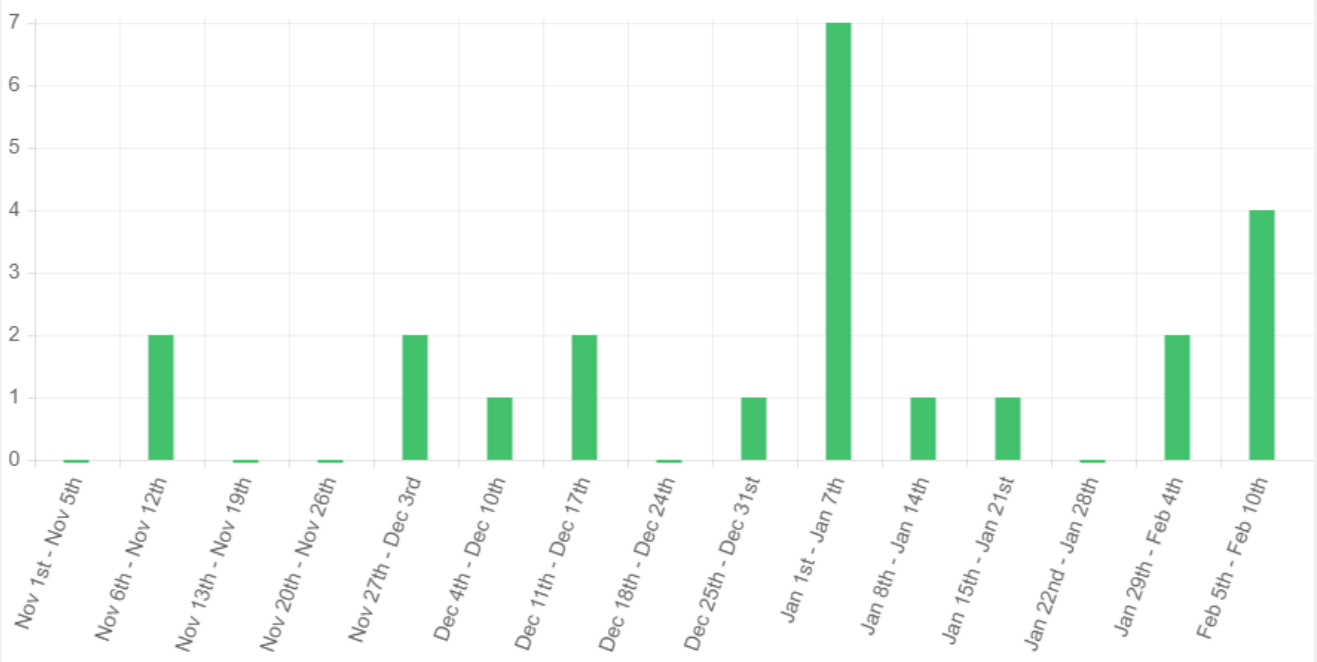


CLASHES IN TRIPOLITANIA

Several clashes were reported in Tripoli and the western coastal area during the reporting period.

- 5 February: Abu Obaida Al Zawy, former LIFG and Al Qaeda operative, attempted to enter Libya via Zuwara airport. Zuwara militias deployed to the airport to prevent him from landing, under GNU orders. A Zawiya militia group also deployed in the vicinity of the airport to secure Al Zawi's landing, which resulted in his flight being redirected to Malta.
- 6 February: Two militia clashes were reported in Zawiya and Warshefana on 6 February. Both incidents later subsided following mediations. Reporting suggests that both incidents were triggered by low-level disputes among militiamen.
- 10 February: A clash broke out between members of the Sabriyya Martyr's Brigade and the Rahba Al Duroa Battalion in Tajoura. The clash was triggered by the killing of a member of the Sabriyya Martyr's Brigade by members of the Rahba Al Duroa.

FIGURE 3: ARMED CLASHES IN WESTERN COSTAL AREA, 1 NOVEMBER 2022 - 10 FEBRUARY 2023



WHAT IS HAPPENING IN ZINTAN

Caveat: In this section Intelyse reports on information that currently remains unconfirmed. However, it seems to match with the higher-level dynamics outlined in the countrywide section of this report.

DIVISIONS EMERGE IN ZINTAN AFTER THE VISIT OF THE UK DEPUTY AMBASSADOR

The Deputy UK Ambassador met with the Zintan Military Council (ZMC) on 5 February and coordinated on the formation of the Union of Revolutionaries of Libya (URL) and the 11 February Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries (see page 1).

On 8 February, the Preparatory Committee for the Forum released a statement (see below) clarifying that:

- The Forum aims at "unifying the ranks of the Revolutionaries and rebuilding trust."
- Attendance is open to whoever wants to participate, regardless of political affiliations. This seems to support the idea that eastern-based actors like the Shura Councils of Benghazi and Derna might participate. The former was reportedly already assigned a camp in Zintan.



Left: Alleged invitation to the Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries; Right: Statement of the Preparatory Committee

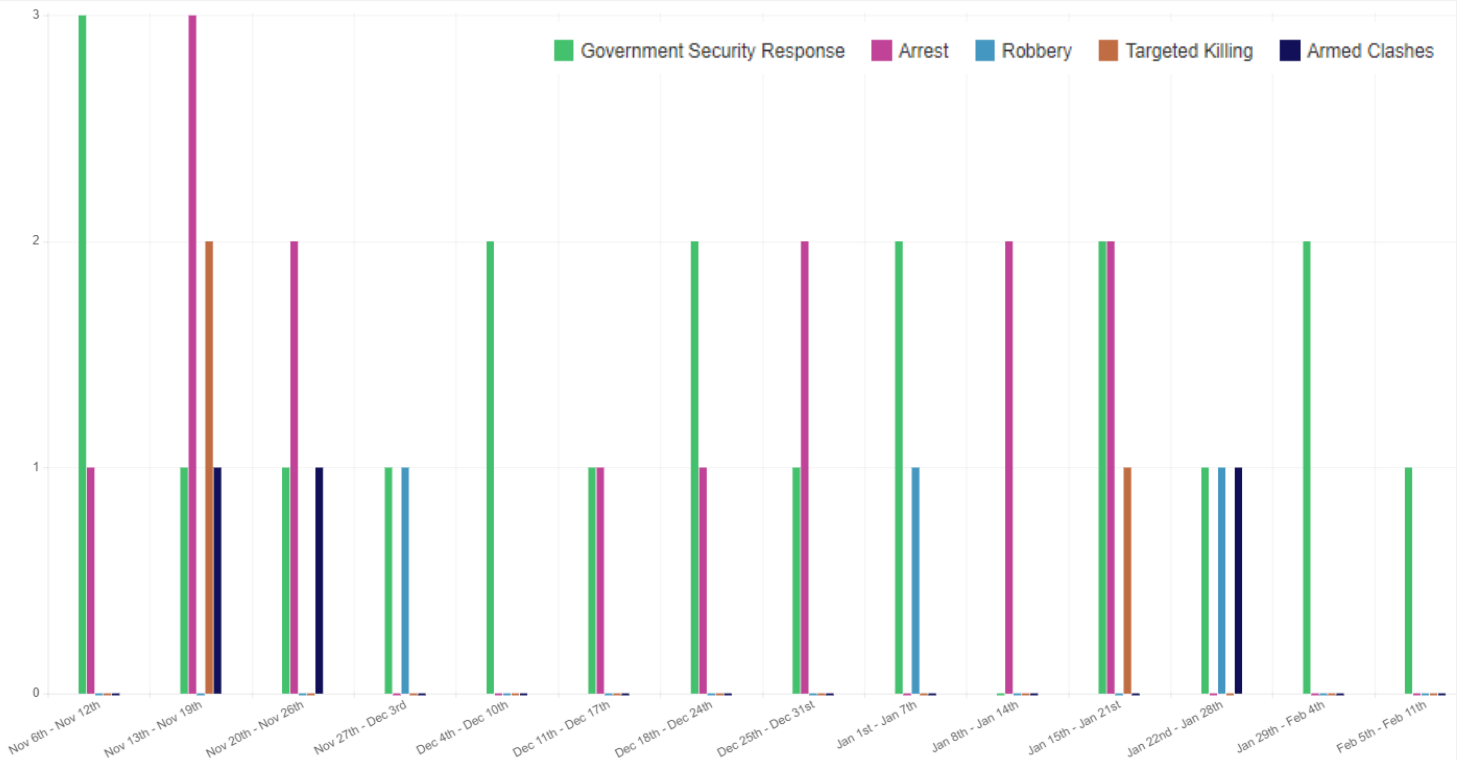
After the visit of the UK Ambassador, a split seems to be occurring within the ZMC between the group led by Fathi Al Ghazil and the group led by Fathi Al Mahjoud.

The UK coordinated with the group of Fathi Al Mahjoud, which is not seen as the legitimate leadership of the ZMC.

The group of Al Ghazil challenged the initiative and warned against taking part in it, labeling it a "suspicious gathering." Moreover, it added that "Fathi Al Mahjoud and his group represent only themselves, and the presidency of the Military Council will not be handed over to them, regardless of the pressures." It is unclear if Al Ghazil referred to UK pressures to hand over the leadership of the ZMC to Al Mahjoud. Intelyse will keep monitoring in case further signs of tension emerge.

Since the UK Deputy Ambassador reportedly incited Zintan against the supporters of Said Gaddafi during the meeting, there will be the need to monitor how this reflects on the Libyan tribal environment. The Gaddafa is a large and influential tribe in many cities of Tripolitania and Libya, including Sirte, Sabha, Bani Walid and, most notably in this context, smaller population centers in Tripolitania. The tribe has already taken disruptive action in the past to challenge unwelcome political decisions.

FIGURE 4: HIGHLIGHTED INCIDENTS IN FEZZAN, 1 NOVEMBER 2022 - 10 FEBRUARY 2023



GENERAL UPDATES ON THE SITUATION IN FEZZAN

No significant security developments were reported in Fezzan (see Figure 4). Desert patrols of the LNA's 10th Battalion deployed near the Libyan borders with Niger and Chad. The deployment might be part of the LNA's regular anti-smuggling and anti-illegal immigration operations. However, it is also possible that these units will be tasked with monitoring the borders in the context of the agreements that have been reached in Cairo to coordinate on the withdrawal of foreign and mercenary forces from Libya (see page 3).

GNU LOOKS TO EXPAND ITS INFLUENCE IN FEZZAN

The below developments indicate possible GNU's plans and efforts to expand its influence in Fezzan. For the GNU, being able to project military power in Fezzan is of the utmost importance. Controlling Sharara and El Feel oilfields directly would deprive other actors of the leverage that they can exert on the GNU if they decide to stop the flow of oil toward the coast. To achieve this, the GNU has to start building up its presence in the region, starting from areas which are more easily penetrated like Ghat and Ubari.

- 6 February: The GNU military Chief of Staff Mohammed Haddad met with Audit Bureau Head Khaled Shakshak in Tripoli. The two discussed the payment of salaries for members of the Southern Military Region.
- 7 February: The Head of the Ghat Security Directorate Head, Major General Ali Al Bahi Abdul Karim, met with GNU-aligned Border Guard Head Colonel Muhammad Al Marhani in Tripoli to discuss cooperation and joint coordination between the two forces. The meeting is presented as part of ongoing efforts to combat illegal immigration and smuggling operations in southern Libya.
- 7 February: Sources claimed that the UN Sanctions Committee has rejected a request by the GNU to allow the delivery of 45 armored vehicles for anti-illegal immigration missions in Fezzan. The request was reportedly rejected.

FIGURE 5: AMBASSADOR HURNDALL, KHALIFA HAFTAR AND COMMANDER JIM MORRIS



BRITISH OFFICIALS MET WITH HAFTAR

The Commander of the UK Standing Joint Force, Jim Morris, met with Khalifa Haftar in Benghazi on 7 February. This follows a similar meeting between Morris and GNU military Chief Staff Mohammed Haddad in Tripoli on the same day. Details of what has been discussed during the meetings have not been revealed, but the meetings look like the UK attempts to bridge the gaps between eastern and western military institutions. Pages 2-4 provide additional context.

HOR APPROVES 13TH CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

The House of Representatives unanimously approved its thirteenth constitutional amendment during a session in Benghazi on 7 February. The amendment focused on defining the powers of the President, the Prime Minister and the formation and competencies of the legislative authority.

The development comes amid persistent international pressure for progress in the political deadlock. The move is also seen as an attempt by the HoR to avoid being accused of procrastination. HoR-HS negotiations have not been proceeding in any meaningful way, and are unlikely to do so.

GNS-PM BASHAGHA MET WITH HAFTAR

On 4 February, Khalifa Haftar met with GNS PM Fathi Bashagha in Benghazi. The meeting discussed the Libyan political crisis, the security situation and the presence of foreign forces in the country. This is the first official meeting between the two leaders since Bashagha was appointed as GNS PM by the HoR in February 2022. This follows a petition by at least 65 members of the HoR for a government reshuffle due to the failure of the GNS to assume its duties in Tripoli.

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