



Intelyse



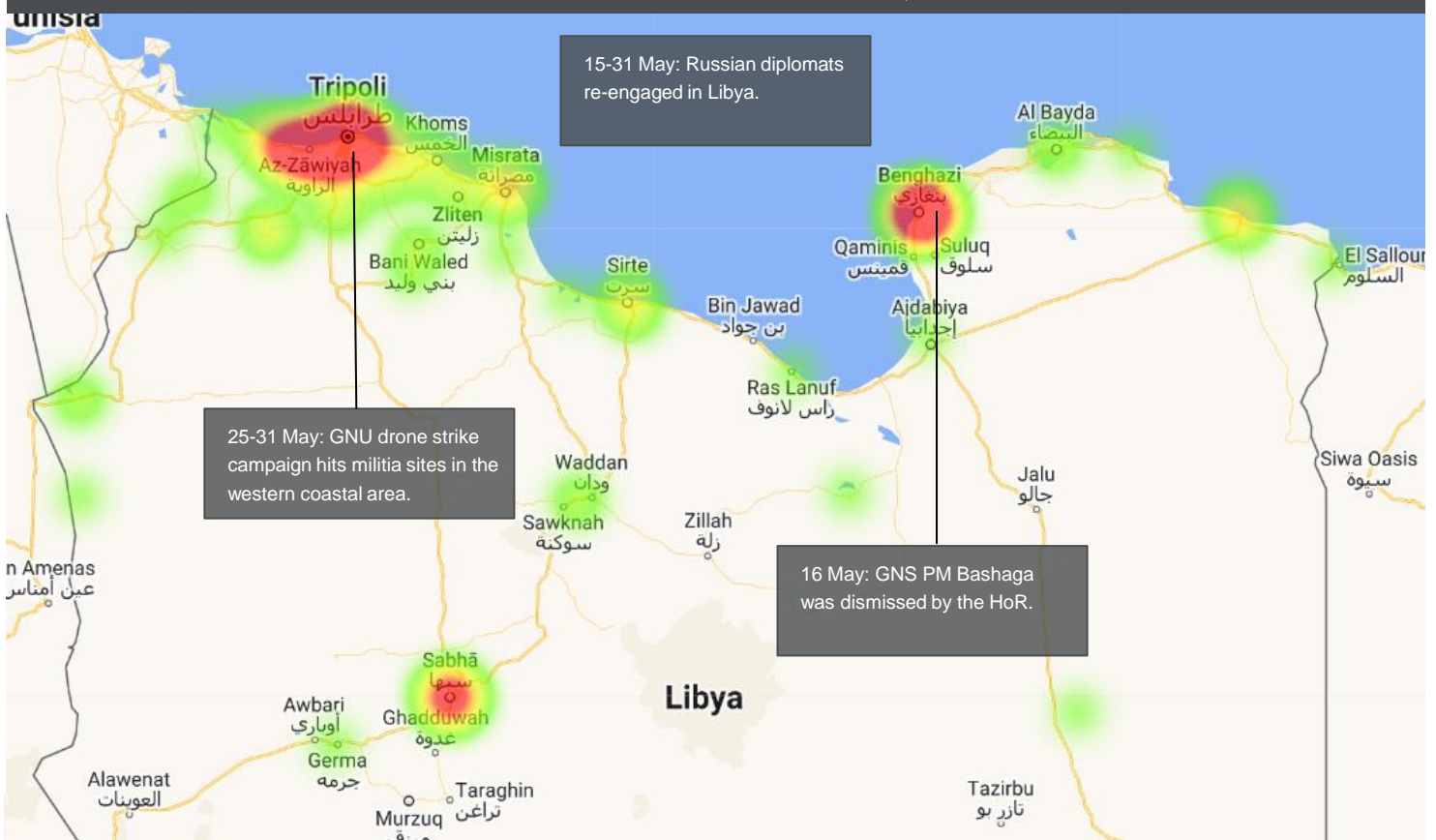
LIBYA

Monthly Political Stability,
Economic And Security
Threat Assessment
MAY 2023



COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

FIGURE 1: INCIDENT ACTIVITY IN LIBYA, MAY 2023



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- In May, Russian diplomats re-engaged with Libya at a high level after a long pause due to the conflict in Ukraine. Libya is key in Russia's geostrategic vision, as a platform to project influence in and across the Mediterranean, the Sahel and East Africa. Therefore, Russia is now trying to catch up.
- The GNU has been conducting drone strikes against multiple militia sites in the northwestern coastal area since 25 May, to target the militias' illegal businesses. The strikes are likely a GNU coercive measure for Zawiyah-based militias to stop causing insecurity in Zawiyah. In the last three months, Zawiyah residents staged multiple large protests blaming the GNU for failing to provide security in the city. PM Dbeiba cannot afford for skirmishes between Zawiyah-based militias undermine his political support base.

OUTLOOK

- The renewed open involvement of Russia in Libyan politics signals a change in Moscow's recent approach to Libya and likely increased Russian political and diplomatic involvement in the months to come. If Russia intends to progressively re-engage with Libya in the short-medium term, this will provide a further opportunity to Libyan parties to hedge between Russia and the West to obtain political support and concessions in exchange for loyalty and business deals.
- The deterrent of the strikes will likely be effective in temporarily hampering militia activities in the short term but has caused widespread popular criticism in the area. The issue has also been seized upon by the Abuzreiba family, which is trying to build dissent against the GNU. The militias which have been targeted will grow increasingly hostile to the GNU in the coming 3-12 months. This will make it hard for the GNU to manage them, but it is still too early to say whether the strikes have been counterproductive. The GNU probably counts on the fact that this show of force will deter Zawiyah-based militias in the long term.

RUSSIA DIPLOMATICALLY RE-ENGAGES LIBYA

In May, Russian diplomats re-engaged with Libya at a high level after a long pause due to the start of the conflict in Ukraine. On 13 May, the Special Representative of the Russian President for the Middle East and Africa and Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mikhail Bogdanov, met the Director of Libyan Affairs of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, Ahmed Abdul Majid. On the following day, a Russian delegation reportedly met Emad Al Sayeh, head of the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), at the HNEC HQ in Tripoli. The Russian delegation claimed to support elections and stability in Libya. On 18 May, the head of the Libyan National Security Council, Ibrahim Bushnaf, met with the Russian Ambassador to Libya in Tunis. One week after, Bushnaf visited Moscow to meet with his Russian counterpart, Nikolaij Patrushev, who is close to Vladimir Putin but more conservative than him.

The renewed open involvement of Russia in Libyan politics signals a change in Moscow's recent approach to Libya and likely increased Russian political and diplomatic involvement in the months to come. The change in approach matches the current situation in Libya and international context. Russia de-escalated its political and diplomatic involvement in Libya significantly after the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The US tried to fill the vacuum left by Russia, engaging all Libyan parties with the intent to deny Russia the chance to destabilize NATO and the EU's southern front in the short and long-term. However, Libya is key in Russia's geostrategic vision too, as a platform to project influence in and across the Mediterranean, the Sahel and east Africa. Therefore, Russia is now trying to catch up.

It is interesting that Russia publicly met with Al Sayeh, as opposed to some of the eastern power brokers which have historically been closer to Moscow, like Khalifa Haftar or Aqila Saleh. This might indicate that the US engagement with Haftar has been effective in undermining his relationship with Moscow. Alternatively, Moscow might have chosen to engage Al Sayeh to re-enter Libyan politics softly, with the pretext to support elections. These official meetings held by Russia will draw attention from the US and NATO. If Russia intends to progressively re-engage with Libya in the short-medium term, this will provide Libyan parties with a further opportunity to hedge between Russia and the West to obtain political support and concessions in exchange for loyalty and business deals.

GNS PM BASHAGA REMOVED FROM DUTY

As anticipated, on 16 May the House of Representatives (HoR) dismissed GNS Prime Minister Fathi Bashaga. He was replaced with GNS Finance Minister Osama Hammad.

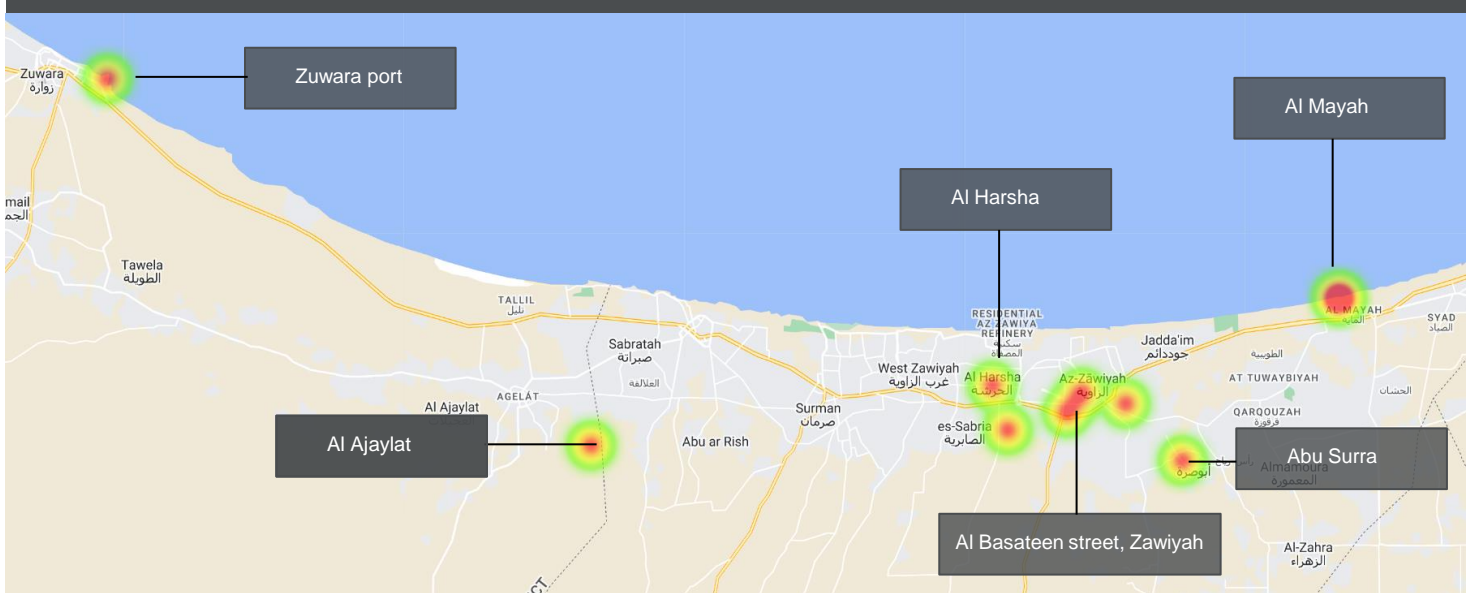
- Hammad is close to Khalifa Haftar, hence his appointment is unlikely to encounter any significant opposition.
- Bashaga has not enough political clout or armed support to challenge the decision.
- As expected, this development did not have negative repercussions on the security or political environment in Cyrenaica.

While this development might mark his definitive political demise, Bashaga has found himself in similar situations in the past, and he just withdrew from the public scene while waiting for a new opportunity and thinking to the next move. He might do the same this time. He retains a small support base in Misrata, where he might go back to. He might also attempt to engage anti-GNU networks in Zintan or Zawiyah in the coming weeks and months, capitalizing on the discontent caused by the recent airstrikes and the marginalization of influential actors like the Abuzreiba's and Osama Juwaili. The airstrikes hit properties of the Abuzreiba family which, with Juwaili, had supported Bashaga in his attempt to take over from Dbeiba in late 2022.

Some observers argued that the removal of Bashaga might create the conditions for the formation of a unified government. The HoR-HCS 6+6 Committee also supports this plan, and there are unconfirmed reports of ongoing talks between Belkacem Haftar and some Tripoli-based militia leaders. On 31 May, unconfirmed sources claimed the Committee agreed on a path to elections. There is strong skepticism about this; the HoR and the HCS claimed many times to have found a deal in order to remain relevant on the Libyan and international political scene, but without ever achieving anything. Moreover, planning elections does not mean that their results will be respected.

THE EVENTS IN ZAWIYAH

FIGURE 2: AIRSTRIKES ON THE WESTERN COASTAL AREA, MAY 2023



DRONE STRIKES IN ZAWIYAH SERVE AS A WARNING TO MILITIAS

The GNU has been conducting drone strikes against multiple militia sites in the northwestern coastal area since 25 May, targeting the militias' illegal businesses. The airstrikes are expected to continue as the GNU MoD announced the start of the second phase of the air operation on 29 May.

The strikes are a GNU coercive measure for Zawiyah-based militias to stop causing insecurity in Zawiyah. Insecurity in Zawiyah has been causing significant discontent among residents in the city, who blamed the GNU. In the last three months, residents staged multiple large protests blaming the GNU for failing to provide security. PM Dbeiba cannot afford for skirmishes between Zawiyah-based militias to undermine his political support base.

Drone strikes are the only means that the GNU can use against Zawiyah-based militias, because they are asymmetric. The GNU does not have the capability or the intention to eradicate Zawiyah-based militias, which would result in heavy fighting in urban areas, destruction and significant civilian casualties. The GNU can only try to keep the militias in check by targeting their interests when they overstep the mark. The militias have no means to defend themselves and their businesses from drone strikes.

The deterrent of the strikes will likely be effective in temporarily hampering militia activities in the short term, but has caused widespread popular criticism in the area. Aside from multiple road blocks being established east and west of Zawiyah since the beginning of the drone strike campaign, an armed group also closed the Zawiyah refinery on 29 May as a sign of protest. At least initially, the drivers of the blockade are unlikely to be political, and are likely a mere consequence of the shock caused by the unexpected strikes on the local population.

However, the drone strikes have been seized upon by the Abuzreiba family, from Zawiyah, which is trying to build dissent against the GNU. The militias which have been targeted will grow increasingly hostile to the GNU in the coming 3-12 months. This will make it hard for the GNU to manage them, but it is still too early to say whether the strikes have been counterproductive. The GNU probably counts on the fact that this show of force will deter Zawiyah-based militias in the long term, and that he will be able to rebuild support for the GNU in Zawiyah in the meantime, also given the lack of political alternatives. Still, the militias might interfere with energy or road infrastructure as leverage against the GNU.

Dbeiba will likely retain the support of the UK and the US. The US and UK Embassies in Libya expressed concern for the events in Zawiyah but did not mention the GNU or PM Dbeiba explicitly. This indicates that Dbeiba is unlikely to suffer any consequences from the US and the UK, and confirms that the two foreign actors want Dbeiba to remain in place as GNU PM.

INFORMATION AND ADVISORY SERVICES

Intelyse believes timely and actionable information is fundamental to a resilient, informed and effective organization.

We specialize in providing critical information, data led analysis and advisory services to businesses, NGOs, governments and their partners.

Clients choose Intelyse to get in-depth situational awareness from an accessible and reliable source who truly understands the complexity of the environments in which people operate.



Incident Alerts | Spot Reports | Daily Updates | Threat Assessments | Bespoke Reporting

INTELYSE SOLUTIONS

Focused Risk Intelligence

24/7 Global Assistance Center

Enterprise Resilience Services

Risk Management Advisory and Consultancy

Multi-Domain Due Diligence

Supervised Journey Management