



Libya Instability Continues

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A Bad Week for Security in Libya

The first week in June saw two significant security incidents in Libya. On June 4, members of the Awfeia Brigade from the town of Tarhouna occupied and closed Tripoli International Airport, demanding the release of their leader, who the Awfeia claimed was being detained by Tripoli's security forces. After the Transitional National Council (TNC) intervened and addressed the concerns of the Awfeia Brigade, the group departed the airport, and flights resumed on June 5. Then, in the early morning of June 6, an improvised explosive device (IED), dropped outside the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi, exploded, damaging the building's exterior wall but causing no injuries.

These attacks were followed by another incident in Benghazi on June 11, in which a British diplomatic convoy was hit with a complex attack involving small arms fire and a rocket propelled grenade. The convoy was attacked by unknown assailants near the British consulate office in the al-Rabha neighborhood of Benghazi. Two British personal security guards were injured in the attack.

Security Situation Remains Fluid

Though the airport situation was resolved and flights through Tripoli International resumed within 48 hours and the explosive in Benghazi failed to cause major damage, these two incidents highlight Libya's unstable security climate. The incidents, especially the airport standoff, demonstrate the limited capacity of government security forces. The Awfeia Brigade cut through a chain-link fence in broad daylight and drove onto the tarmac as airport security officials looked on. One Austrian Airlines plane was forced to abort its flight just before takeoff, and a bullet damaged another plane on the tarmac. The Awfeia Brigade also drove 50 miles from Tarhouna to Tripoli with heavy guns mounted on their vehicles, encountering no resistance along the way and showing that a convoy of heavily armed trucks arouses little concern, can travel easily undetected on main roads, and/or is intimidating enough to deter government forces from intervening. After the airport incident, several airlines announced they would delay resumption of flights at Tripoli International.

The IED attack outside the U.S. diplomatic mission in Benghazi is another cause for concern. Media reports indicated the Prisoner Omar Abdelrahman group, named after the Egyptian "Blind Sheikh" imprisoned in the United States for his involvement in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, claimed the attack. The shadowy group had issued a letter threatening American interests in Libya, and the organization claimed credit for a May 22 rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attack on the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross in Benghazi. Some analysts speculate that this attack may have been in retaliation for the killing of al-Qa'ida leader Abu Yahya al-Libi earlier this month in Pakistan. Al-Libi, who has family in Libya, fought Qaddafi as part of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group in the 1990s. However, the short time span between the confirmation of his death and the IED attack makes it unlikely that the IED attack was connected to al-Libi's death. Omar Abdelrahman was a leader of Gama'a Islamiyya, a terrorist group in Egypt, but details about the nature of the Prisoner Omar Abdelrahman group, or its relation to other groups, are scant.

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Outlook and Impact on the U.S. Private Sector

The airport seizure in Tripoli and the attacks in Benghazi illustrate that the security situation in Libya remains highly fluid and subject to bouts of violence that are difficult not only to predict but also to counter. The U.S. government continues to “warn citizens against all but essential travel to Libya” in its [Travel Warning](#).

Libya’s security environment may, however, improve moving forward. Libyan authorities claim to have registered more than 90 percent of Libya’s eligible voters for the country’s first elections in 60 years, to be held later this month. The election of a new government may catalyze the process of rebuilding the country’s infrastructure and building the new political institutions that will define the Libyan state. Libya’s oil production is now at 90 percent of pre-war levels. If Libya’s ample oil revenues can be channeled toward productive uses by a government that is accountable to the population, the country may be able to make dramatic positive advances in coming years.

In the meantime, however, Libya’s fragmented security landscape, characterized by autonomous militant groups, hesitant to disarm or cede power to the Libyan government, will remain a serious challenge for the private sector in Libya. Without an accepted central authority and a functioning court system, militias are likely to resort to the use of force, rather than third-party arbiters, to resolve conflicts. Some of these militias are anti-Western in their orientation and are sympathetic with al-Qa’ida. Until Libya is able to field a unified, disciplined police and military force, the country will remain vulnerable to criminal and terrorist organizations like al-Qai’da in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), which may use Libyan territory as a safe haven. OSAC constituents should continue to monitor the [OSAC Website](#) for pertinent security updates and analysis.

For Further Information

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