



Militancy/Terrorism

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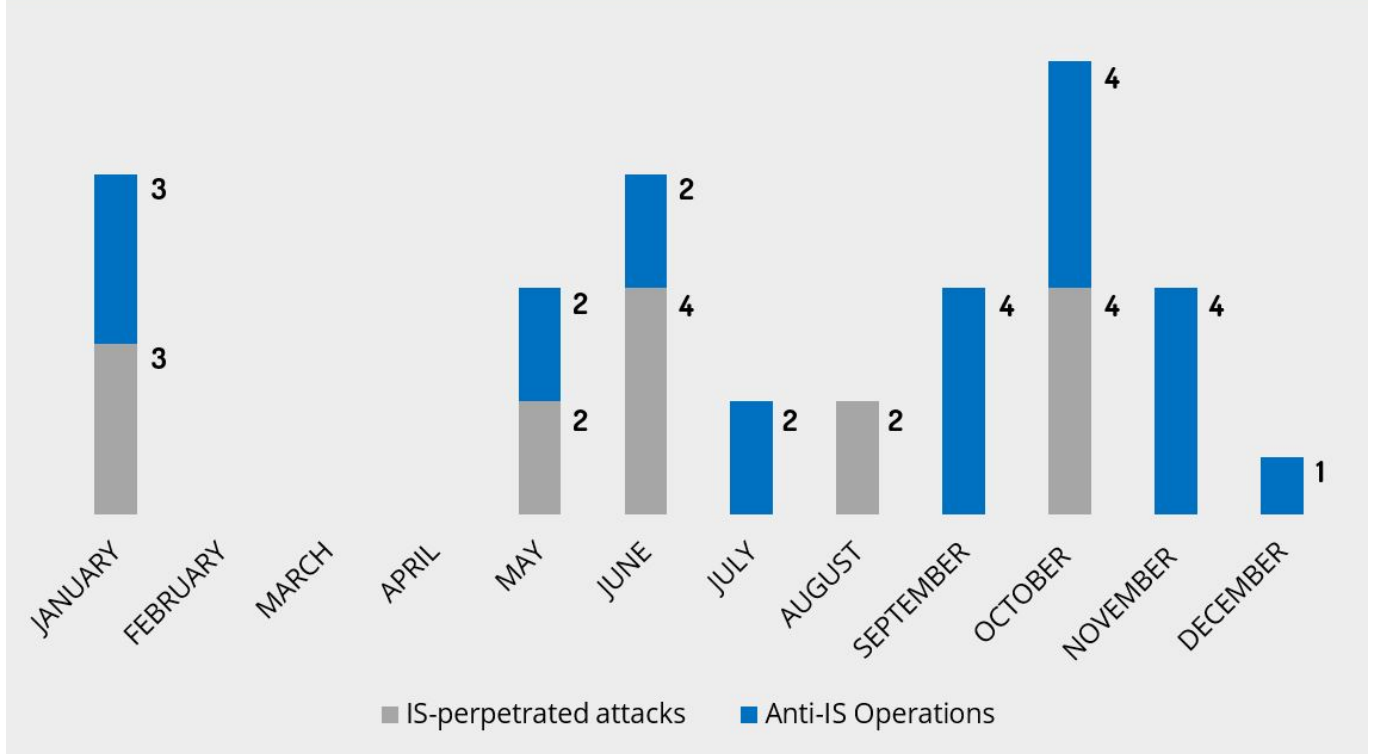
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Libya Analysis: Resurgence of Islamic State (IS) in Libya likely facilitated by bolstering of group's ranks with fighters fleeing Syria and Iraq; trend liable to continue

Executive Summary:

- Recent months have witnessed an increase in Islamic State (IS) activity in Libya, during which the militant group has conducted numerous attacks, and has established operational bases and checkpoints in central Libya. This has likely been facilitated by a bolstering of the group's ranks with fighters fleeing IS's territorial setbacks in Syria and Iraq.
- IS has portrayed Libya as a viable alternative for these fighters by publicizing its attacks, including through releasing footage of these operations, and of its militants carrying out administrative and religious functions. This has presented IS militants in Libya as both highly capable and as maintaining control over territory.
- Furthermore, over recent months IS has attempted to target Libya's economic and governmental installations. Such attacks are likely aimed at further destabilizing the country, thereby allowing the militant group to entrench itself in Libya amidst a volatile environment.
- Overall, as IS continues to lose territory in Syria and Iraq over the coming weeks and months, concurrently, it is likely to further intensify its operations in Libya. This will include additional attacks for which the group will issue claims of responsibility. Additionally, IS will persist in its attempts to establish checkpoints and bases in central Libya, especially in the Sirte Basin and Jufra District,
- **It is advised to defer all travel to Tripoli and Benghazi at this time due to a recent uptick in violence, threats against foreigners, and the risk of a broad deterioration of security conditions. We advise at this time that those remaining in Tripoli and Benghazi should initiate contingency and emergency evacuation plans due to deterioration in the security situation. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434 for itinerary and contingency support plans.**

IS-Related Incidents in 2017



Current Situation:

- On December 6, 2016, following a months-long campaign aimed at dislodging IS from the territory under the latter's control in the Sirte Basin, Misrata forces announced the full capture of Sirte from IS, after which the jihadist group remained mostly dormant. However, on May 6-7, IS-linked media reported an ambush by the militant group targeting Misrata forces during the overnight hours in Wadi Allod, located south of Sirte. Two Misrata forces personnel were killed, and one other was wounded in the attack.
- On August 22, IS claimed responsibility for killing and wounding 21 Libyan National Army (LNA)

soldiers in an attack targeting the latter's checkpoint near the Jufra District's al-Fuqaha area, of which the group eventually produced video footage.

- On August 31, IS claimed responsibility for a suicide vehicle-borne IED (SVBIED) attack targeting an LNA checkpoint near Nawfaliyah, located in the Sirte Basin. Four LNA soldiers were killed and an unspecified number were wounded in the attack.
- On September 3, Libyan Air Force (LAF) aircraft conducted airstrikes targeting IS militants in Wadi al-Ahmar, located approximately 100 km east of Sirte. According to reports, IS had established checkpoints in Wadi al-Ahmar, as well as in nearby Um al-Gendel and Um al-Khanfes, and the airstrikes forced the militants to flee towards the southwest of Sirte. In late September, the group also released photographs of IS militants manning checkpoints in the Jufra District and in the aforementioned areas of the Sirte Basin and leading Eid al-Adha prayers in broad daylight, as well as of daily life in IS encampments.
- On [September 22](#), US aircraft conducted airstrikes against an IS camp, killing 17 militants, in an unspecified locale 150 km southeast of Sirte. On [September 26](#), US aircraft conducted two rounds of airstrikes targeting IS militants approximately 100 km southeast of Sirte, killing an unspecified number of militants. On both occasions, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) stated that the airstrikes were carried out "in coordination with the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA)".
- On October 4, IS claimed responsibility for a [multi-pronged attack](#) targeting the city of Misrata's Courts Complex. In its claim of responsibility, the group stated that the attack targeted "the most prominent stronghold of the Reconciliation Government", which is a reference to the GNA. At least five individuals were killed, and 35 others were wounded in the attack. Reports state that two assailants detonated suicide belts following an exchange of fire with security personnel. Additionally, a vehicle-borne IED (VBIED), which had failed to detonate, was dismantled at the site. Moreover, the attack was reportedly conducted during the trial of IS prisoners at the courthouse.
- On October 25, IS claimed responsibility for an attack that killed two LNA soldiers, wounded three others, and destroyed three military vehicles, at al-Qunan/Gate 60, 20 km southeast of Ajdabiya.
- On November 15, LAF aircraft conducted two airstrikes targeting an IS storage facility, and a hideout after days of monitoring by the LNA.
- On November 17 and November 19, US aircraft conducted airstrikes targeting IS militants near Jufra District's al-Fuqaha area.
- On December 26, the National Oil Corporation (NOC) reported an explosion on an oil pipeline running to Sidra oil terminal. The NOC announced that the explosion, which sustained heavy damage to the pipeline, was recorded 15 km north of Marada and 130 km south of Sidra. In addition, reports quoting the LNA, which polices the area in which the event occurred, state that the explosion was caused by IED detonations, and that the devices were planted by unknown militants.

Notable Incidents involving Islamic State (IS) across Libya in 2017

- 1 **Wadi Allod**
IS-linked media reports ambush against Misrata forces during the overnight hours of May 6-7.
- 2 **Abugrein**
IS reportedly attacks Misrata forces during overnight hours of June 9-10.
- 3 **Al-Fuqaha**
IS claims to have killed and wounded 21 LNA soldiers in an attack targeting the latter's checkpoint on August 22.
- 4 **Nawfaliyah**
IS claims a SVBIED attack targeting an LNA checkpoint on August 31.
- 5 **Wadi al-Ahmar**
LAF directs airstrikes against IS checkpoints on September 3.
- 6 **Location of US airstrikes**
US aircraft conduct airstrike against an IS camp on September 22.
- 7 **Misrata**
IS claims multi-pronged attack targeting Misrata's Courts Complex on October 4.
- 8 **Al-Qunan/Gate 60**
IS claims attack that killed two LNA soldiers, and wounded three others on October 25.
- 9 **Al-Fuqaha**
US aircraft conduct airstrikes against IS militants on November 17 and November 19.



Assessments & Forecast

1. IS activity has resurged in recent months in Libya, particularly in the Sirte Basin and Jufra District, during which the militant group has conducted attacks targeting both the LNA and Misrata forces, while also establishing checkpoints and bases of operation in these regions. Although the first half of 2017 witnessed a sharp decline in IS's activity in Libya, following the group's complete loss of territory in the Sirte Basin in [December 2016](#), May-June witnessed sporadic instances of reported IS activity. While the May 6-7 attack targeting Misrata forces in Wadi Allod reported by IS-linked media demonstrated a communication link maintained between IS fighters in Libya and the group's central organization, the majority of IS activity reported in the region during this period, which included the hijacking of fuel trucks and small-scale attacks remained infrequent and unclaimed by IS.
2. However, beginning with the August 22 attack, a significant upward shift in the rate of IS activity was recorded in Libya, with the militant group conducting as well as claiming responsibility for relatively larger-scale attacks in the Sirte Basin and Jufra District. This was likely facilitated by a bolstering of the group's ranks with fighters fleeing IS's territorial setbacks in Syria and Iraq. Announcements by both local and regional military and political authorities indicate that several IS militants have been successful in infiltrating Libya over the past months. Furthermore, the claims and footage released of these attacks are likely aimed at displaying the group's prowess in Libya, in turn presenting it as an attractive branch of IS to join, which could attract fighters to augment IS's personnel and thus strengthen the group in Libya.
3. Furthermore, IS's increased efforts to publicize its administrative capabilities, largely through the use of photographs of IS militants manning checkpoints, is likely part of the Sunni jihadist militant group's strategy of conveying that the group continues to maintain territorial control in Libya, despite its previous loss in its Sirte Basin stronghold. This would present Libya's IS affiliate as an attractive alternative for fighters fleeing Syria and Iraq. Moreover, the scenes having been photographed in broad daylight was likely a calculated decision, as it would indicate that the group can act with impunity as an authority, and does not need the cover of darkness to be concealed from domestic security forces. Furthermore, the group's leading of prayers could potentially appeal to observant Muslims both inside and outside of Libya, who would be drawn to this display of piety, and in turn, support the group and perhaps even join its ranks.
4. The locations of the checkpoints established by the militant group are notable, given that many of them were established near the LNA-controlled oil infrastructure in the Oil Crescent, located in the eastern Sirte Basin. This would not only position the militant group to hijack fuel trucks operating along these routes but also to establish bases of operations which could serve as launching points for attacks targeting the oil infrastructure in eastern Sirte Basin as witnessed on December 26, when IS militants likely detonated IEDs on an oil pipeline running to the Sidra Oil Terminal. Furthermore, regarding IS's recently claimed attacks in the Sirte Basin, it remains possible that the militant group had intended to target the oil terminals, but determined that it could not do so given a bolstered LNA presence implemented in light of IS's buildup in the area, and settled on attacking LNA personnel not surrounding the oil sites instead. Overall, this would align with IS's strategy of destabilizing the security environment surrounding vital infrastructure in Libya, thereby compelling foreign companies to withdraw their investments in Libya's oil industry, which are key to improving Libya's economy, in turn hindering Libya's economic recovery and stabilization process. Furthermore, if Libya is seen as economically unviable, then the military entities in Libya could be deprived of oil revenue supporting its anti-IS operations, thereby allowing the militant group to further entrench its foothold in the country.
5. That said, the recent increase in IS activity has not been limited to the Sirte Basin and Jufra District. The October 4 IS-claimed attack targeting the Misrata Courts Complex is indicative of the militant group's abilities to operate outside of its primary area of operations. This is particularly in light of the fact that while limited IS activity has been previously recorded in areas surrounding Misrata until this attack the militant group had been unable to establish operational cells within the city of Misrata itself. The October 4 attack's sophisticated modus operandi, along with the high number of IS fighters arrested in subsequent counter-militancy raids in the city, further underscore

the substantial presence, as well as the relatively high capabilities of operational IS cells within the Misrata area. Additionally, the militant group's claim of responsibility for the October 4 attack was noteworthy as it targeted "the most prominent stronghold of the Reconciliation Government", which is a reference to the GNA, and some Misrata forces' units are linked to the GNA's Ministry of Defense (MoD). Thus, aside from aiming to destabilize Libya by attacking such administrative installations, the October 4 attack was likely aimed in reprisal for the September 22 and September 26 US airstrikes, which the US stated were coordinated with the GNA, indicating that IS holds the GNA and entities linked to it such as Misrata militias as partially responsible for this US military action. The UN-backed government is likely an especially attractive target for the Sunni jihadist group, given that Western actors, some of whom are IS's strongest opponents, support the GNA rhetorically, and in many cases, have provided it with various types of assistance. Thus, IS likely seeks to damage Western interests by attacking a Libyan governmental entity that is valued by the West, and is intended to be the administrative body that would govern a Libya in a stable environment.

- 6. FORECAST:** Overall, while IS will likely intensify its efforts to establish a foothold in Libya over the coming months, particularly as the group continues to lose territory in Syria and Iraq, given the heightened security measures launched by the LNA and Misrata forces in the Sirte Basin, the group is unlikely to establish a significant foothold in Libya, as recorded prior to December 2016. These measures include the designation of the Oil Crescent as a "closed military zone" by the LNA, erection of additional checkpoints in minimally-governed, desert areas, as well as airstrikes by both the US and LAF aircraft targeting IS bases and convoys, mainly in the Sirte Basin and Jufra District. Meanwhile, Misrata forces will maintain heightened security measures in and around Misrata as well as in the Sirte Basin to prevent IS fighters from establishing sleeper cells in the region, that may be utilized by the latter to target sensitive sites in Misrata-controlled territory. However, sporadic IS activity, including attacks targeting LNA-manned checkpoints near oil infrastructure facilities, is likely to be recorded over the coming weeks and months, nonetheless.

Recommendations

1. It is advised to defer all travel to Tripoli and Benghazi at this time due to a recent uptick in violence, threats against foreigners, and the risk of a broad deterioration of security conditions. We advise at this time that those remaining in Tripoli and Benghazi should initiate contingency and emergency evacuation plans due to deterioration in the security situation. Contact us at Operations@max-security.com or +44 20-3540-0434 for itinerary and contingency support plans.
2. For those operating in or conducting business with oil facilities, it is advised to consult with us for itinerary-based travel recommendations and ground support options.
3. Westerners, particularly US citizens, operating in Libya are advised to maintain a low profile and exercise heightened vigilance in light of prevailing anti-Western sentiment and increasing attacks against foreigners.
4. Nationwide, take precautions to mitigate the risk of being targeted for kidnapping. Refrain from traveling in luxury vehicles and maintain a generally low profile. Routinely alter travel routes and refrain from divulging sensitive itinerary information to strangers.