

JULY 2011

Libya Conflict: Weekly Recap

By David Witter

July 14, 2011

Security Concerns

The rebel campaign in the western Nafusa Mountains, Libya's most active battleground, has ground to a halt as both sides vied for control of Qawalish on Wednesday and Thursday. ([AFP](#), [Reuters](#)) The rebels appear to have regained control of the mountain town after Qaddafi's forces briefly seized it Wednesday. ([NYT](#)) This battleground remains contested a week after rebel forces first surged into Qawalish, which is one of the few settlements between rebel positions to the west and a key highway that reaches fifty miles north into the capital city of Tripoli. It is important to note that the rebels must go through the city of Gharyan – a sizable population center still controlled by Qaddafi – before they could advance north up the highway to Tripoli. The success of the rebel effort in the mountains, however, is threatened by increasingly serious shortages of food, fuel, and medicine. ([NPR](#)) Refugees fleeing combat in other mountain towns exacerbated existing supply scarcities, and the regime's constant shelling of a key border crossing with Tunisia further limits the flow of supplies. However, the National Transitional Council took steps to alleviate these shortages by flying supplies to a newly opened airstrip in the Nafusa Mountains. ([Reuters](#)) It's unclear as to whether this violates the no-fly zone instituted by NATO at the beginning of the conflict. Rebel forces in the mountains have also been accused of looting and pillaging four towns in the regime in the aftermath of recent battles; Human Rights Watch analysts believe that the violence may be directed at residents belonging to the pro-regime Mashaashia tribe. ([NYT](#), [NYT](#))

Security developments conclude with the first statements by a Western defense official regarding the involvement of al-Qaeda affiliates in the Libyan conflict. Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini told Algerian newspapers that "Extremists in the Sahel region have taken advantage of the conflict in Libya to get arms." ([Reuters](#)) The Sahel is a region across Africa located south of Libya where al-Qaeda's regional affiliate, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), is known to operate.

The Path towards Negotiation

The possibility of a negotiated end to the conflict looks more likely after Western and Libyan officials confirmed that the regime was exploring ways to bring the war to a close. On Tuesday, French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe claimed that regime officials had reached out to Turkey, the United States, and France to communicate that "Qaddafi is prepared to leave. Let's discuss it." ([Reuters](#)) U.S. officials also indicated that they have been contacted, though they noted that these representatives had delivered "contradictory" messages. ([AP](#)) Regime officials confirmed the outreach, with both Prime Minister Baghdadi al-Mahmoudi and Saif al-Islam both expressing an intent to negotiate. ([Al Jazeera](#), [AFP](#)) The rebel leadership, however, disavowed knowledge of any such talks; NTC Chief Mahmoud Jibril said that talk of negotiations with the regime were "totally false claims." ([AP](#)) The regime's increased willingness to negotiate may be a by-product of a shortage of key resources with which to prolong the conflict: Qaddafi's forces are reportedly low on fuel for their military vehicles and the regime is showing signs of running low on money. ([Post](#))

There is a strong likelihood that the NATO member states leading the mission would pursue such leads, as several European officials have recently indicated that they maybe shifting away from relying on the use of force to bring about regime change and instead turning towards a negotiated settlement. NATO officials have publicly discussed a possible pause in airstrikes out of respect for the month-long Muslim holiday of Ramadan, which would begin in early August. ([AP](#)) This pause would be part of a larger ceasefire, though NATO officials have indicated that they would continue to use force if regime forces continue to engage in combat. The timing of such a ceasefire coincides with the increased reports of international attempts to broker a political solution to the conflict. On Sunday, French Defense Minister Gerard Longuet referenced the efforts to facilitate talks during an television appearance, announcing that “We have...asked them to speak to each other” while Foreign Minister Alain Juppe stated that “We must now find a political outcome to the situation in Libya” while attending an African Union summit. ([Reuters](#), [AFP](#)) Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini echoed calls for a political solution to the crisis in a recent interview. ([Reuters](#)) The prospects for such a settlement will likely be discussed at the upcoming meeting of the Libya Contact Group, scheduled to take place Friday. In a new development, Turkey – the meeting’s host – has invited China and Russia to participate in the meeting. ([AFP](#)) Though neither country was active participant in the beginning stages of the conflict, both have recently increased their diplomatic outreach to the regime and the NTC.

Domestic Politics

Both the French and American legislative bodies voted during the past week on measures to sustain participation in what has become an increasingly protracted conflict, though they arrived at very different conclusions. The U.S. House of Representatives passed an amendment for the upcoming Pentagon budget that prevents funds from being used to “furnish military equipment, military training or advice, or other support for military activities” to the rebels, though a measure explicitly forbidding the deployment of U.S. forces within Operation Unified Protector failed. ([LA Times](#), [Post](#)) These developments are not final, as the bill must be reconciled with the iteration currently being developed in the Senate. Both French legislative bodies, however, provided President Nicolas Sarkozy with a clear mandate to continue operations, voting to extend funding for French participation in the mission. ([NYT](#))

Libya Conflict: Weekly Recap

By Anthony Bell

July 21, 2011

U.S. Recognizes Rebels, Meets with Qaddafi Officials

On July 16, the United States extended formal diplomatic recognition over the weekend to the National Transitional Council (NTC), the Benghazi-based rebel government. ([NYT](#)) The United States had previously stopped short of extending formal recognition to the rebel government, instead referring to the NTC as the “legitimate and credible interlocutor of the Libyan people.” U.S. officials have said that by recognizing the NTC, they will be able to provide it with access to the \$30 billion dollars of Libyan assets frozen as part of the U.S. and U.N. sanctions imposed on the regime at the start of the rebellion. Extending recognition may have been an urgent move to shore up the cash-strapped NTC, which recently said it was running short of funds for fuel, weapons and salaries.

Shortly after the United States extended recognition to the NTC, senior U.S. diplomats revealed they had held a secret meeting with Qaddafi officials in Tunisia for the first time since the rebellion began in February. ([Post](#)) The U.S. officials involved denied the meeting was a negotiation and claimed that they had simply reiterated the message that Qaddafi must leave power. They insisted that there were no plans for further talks. The Libyan government, however, said the meeting was the first-step in repairing relations with the United States and finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. ([LA Times](#))

Rebels Break Stalemate in the East

Rebel forces launched a large assault on the town of Brega on July 16 in a bid to break the stalemate that had developed in eastern Libya since early April. ([Al-Jazeera](#)) NATO warplanes recently intensified their airstrikes against loyalist forces at Brega, although the alliance officially denied coordinating its attacks with the rebel assault. ([Guardian](#)) Many loyalist troops reportedly retreated west towards Ras Lanuf, but two hundred soldiers are thought to be holding out in the city. Despite claims of a rebel victory at Brega, control over the city remains contested. The rebel attack has been hampered by the hundreds of landmines sown by loyalist troops across the area. ([AFP](#)) The attack on Brega has demonstrated that rebel forces are significantly better organized and equipped than several months ago. The rebels, however, have suffered heavy casualties—several dozen rebels have been killed and hundreds more wounded—raising questions as to whether they can sustain the offensive.

Across Libya, the rebels hope to make major gains before Ramadan begins in August, a time when fighting is expected to taper off. On Wednesday, a rebel delegation met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy and asked France to help secure additional arms from Qatar for their pre-Ramadan offensive. ([AFP](#), [WSJ](#)) In conjunction with the attack on Brega, rebel forces at Misrata have renewed their offensive to capture the city Zlitan, but have been hurled back loyalist counter-attacks. ([Guardian](#), [Reuters](#)) Additionally, there are reports that a small rebel force opened a fourth front by crossing the Sahara and attacking regime strongholds in southwestern Libya. ([WSJ](#))

Strategically, the rebels want to continue pressing the loyalist forces back on the eastern front and link up with their counterparts in western Libya around Misrata and the Nafusa Mountains. ([WSJ](#)) Yet formidable obstacles lay ahead. In order to reach western Libya, the rebels have to attack through a number of easily defendable coastal towns similar to Brega before reaching the regime stronghold of Sirte, the home of Qaddafi's tribe and a large military garrison. Overall, serious logistical problems, poor training and inadequate command and control continue to hamstring rebel efforts. Furthermore, the rebels on nearly every front are beginning to push towards areas where the population and tribes have remained loyal to the regime, threatening to ignite intertribal rivalries and invite reprisals against regime supporters. ([NYT](#))

Diplomatic Maneuvering

As the fighting on the ground has intensified this week, there has also been a flurry of diplomatic activity by all the sides to reach a political solution. A week after French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe revealed that Paris was in contact with officials in Tripoli, France softened its position on Qaddafi's exit and suggested he could remain in the country if he left power. ([AP](#), [Guardian](#), [WSJ](#)) The White House followed suit, suggesting that it was up to the Libyan people to decide if Qaddafi remained in Libya after he steps down. ([AP](#))

Russia is continuing its diplomatic role as an interlocutor between NATO and Tripoli to secure Qaddafi's exit. After Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov discussed the next diplomatic steps in Libya with President Obama last week, Russia expanded its contacts with officials in both Tripoli and Benghazi. ([AP](#)) While there has been little tangible progress amid the rebel offensive, President Dmitry Medvedev said on Tuesday that a compromise between Qaddafi and the rebels was still possible. ([Reuters](#)) Lavrov met with Libyan Foreign Minister Abdelati Obeidi in Moscow to discuss a deal, but Obeidi and other regime officials remain insistent that Qaddafi's departure from power is not on the table. ([BBC](#)) However, Russian officials have criticized the recent diplomatic support to the rebels given by the United States and other countries as being counterproductive and pursuing a "policy of isolation." ([Reuters](#))

Libya Conflict: Weekly Recap
By David Witter
July 28, 2011

Diplomacy and Aid

The Libyan opposition's governing body, the National Transitional Council (NTC), enjoyed an increasing level of political support this past week from its Western allies. British Foreign Minister William Hague announced Wednesday that Britain recognized the NTC as the "sole governmental authority," a diplomatic status that France and the United States have also granted to the opposition government. ([WP](#), [AP](#)) Increasing diplomatic recognition for the NTC has been accompanied by a joint effort by the United States and some European governments to make more financial aid available to the rebels. Since U.S. diplomatic recognition was bestowed on July 16, the Obama administration has worked to give the rebels access to the regime's \$34 billion that had been frozen by international sanctions. ([WP](#)) However, legal restrictions prevent all but a couple hundred million dollars from flowing to the NTC. Despite these setbacks, the NTC received aid in the form of a \$143 million pledge and the first installment of a pledged \$503 million in cash in fuel from Germany and Italy, respectively. ([Reuters](#), [AP](#)) The NTC also received 5,000 tons of free diesel fuel from Turkey last week, the second half of a 10,000 ton shipment.

Deal or No Deal

The lack of progress in brokering a negotiated settlement to the five month conflict has led to statements by U.S. and European political leaders that seemingly express a willingness to allow Libyan regime leader Moammar Qaddafi and his family to remain in Libya once he stepped down from power. Statements made by Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, British Foreign Minister William Hague, and French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé have indicated that they are in favor of letting the Libyan people decide Qaddafi's future. ([NYT](#), [BBC](#), [Reuters](#)) This linguistic formulation has been interpreted to mean that Qaddafi is no longer required to leave Libya after abdicating power, which until this point has been a non-negotiable condition. Allowing Qaddafi to remain in Libya would mean that the Libyan dictator could potentially avoid being prosecuted in accordance to the arrest warrant issued this month by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. ([CSM](#)) This position shift was publicly embraced by NTC chairman Mustafa Abdel Jalil in a statement made Sunday when he announced that "Qaddafi can stay in Libya but it will have conditions. We will decide where he stays and who watches him." ([WSJ](#))

These comments are vague and could encompass a broad array of outcomes for the Libyan dictator's future, ranging from a comfortable life amongst his tribesman to incarceration in a rebel prison.

On the Ground

Several hundred rebels launched an expansive attack on Thursday morning in the western Nafusa Mountain with the objective of driving Qaddafi's forces out of the low-lying foothills near the towns of Ghazaya and Nalut. ([AJE](#), [AP](#)) This offensive appears to have two objectives: drive out regime artillery and armor beyond the point where they can shell the rebel town of Nalut, and seize control of the main road that extends east from the Tunisian border.

The rebels are trying to open up a supply line between the Tunisian border and rebel-controlled town of Shakshuk; in their way is the regime-held town of al-Jawsh and the Qaddafi garrison at Ghazaya. Though this represents the largest and most coordinated attack in the mountains, a victory here would only have an indirect impact on Qaddafi's hold on power nationwide.

Ground combat remains largely stagnant on the eastern front and in the rebel enclave outside of the western port city of Misrata. The eastern rebel offensive into the coastal city of Brega remains bogged down as opposition fighters try to clear a path through thousands of land mines placed by government forces. Despite slow progress since the rebel push into the city two weeks ago, attempts to clear Brega will be aided by the shipment of Qatari mine-clearing to Benghazi late last week. ([WSJ](#)) In the west, rebels based out of Misrata have made little progress in advancing west towards Tripoli and remained stopped just beyond the town of Dafniyah. ([Reuters](#))

There are also reports that the chief of staff of rebel military forces, General Abdel Fattah Younis, has been arrested for having ties to the regime. ([AJE](#), [AP](#)) Al Jazeera reports that Fattah Younis was arrested on orders of the NTC. ([AJE](#)) Though there is little information available, the arrest of Fattah Younis would be a very significant development and would indicate major instability amongst the rebel leadership. Fattah Younis was initially treated with suspicion by the rebels after he defected due to his longstanding role as a high ranking regime official, as well as his leadership of security forces.