

## NSA Security update - Libya: Threats to shipping. 06.02.2015

The security situation in Libya is chaotic and deteriorating. Since Gadhafi's fall in 2011 a large number of militias and factions have fought for power. In Tripoli a major opposition grouping (General National Congress) is in relative control, while the internationally recognized government (and parliament) has taken refuge in Tobruk, in the east.

The risk of terrorism and kidnapping is severe.

The conflict is mainly over power and resources, and between groups based in eastern and western Libya respectively. But the conflict lines are not drawn along ethnic or religious differences, and therefore this internal conflict has not been classified as a "civil war" in the traditional meaning of the term. Still, national institutions are collapsing, and peace talks have yet to succeed. Personnel belonging to foreign embassies and UN institutions have been evacuated.

Some suggests that an alliance is developing between certain Libyan armed groups and Islamic State in Iraq. Islamists, now with ties to IS, are in control of the port city Derna, traditionally an Islamist stronghold. This may complicate the conflict even further.



A luxury hotel in Tripoli was attacked by three gunmen on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> January, leaving 9 dead including several foreigners. An IS affiliated group claimed responsibility for the attack. While some experts and Libyan officials suggest that IS exaggerates what power they have in Libya, others underline that IS does not normally take responsibility for attacks they have not partaken in.

### Current risks and threats relevant to shipping

In a 4 February report, one Western government source warns of the possibility of an impending attack against maritime target(s), in the **Bay of Sirte** (where large oil terminals are located). While the Libyan navy may be the most likely target, the report suggests that commercial vessels could be targeted as well. There are no further details on the time and nature (airborne, seaborne, method) of such a potential attack, or who may plan such an attack (government, islamists, other group).

Since September 2014, the Libyan National Army (LNA), controlled by the internationally recognized government, has warned that ports controlled by the rival General National Congress (GNC) based in Tripoli could become targets for the air force.

This warning was reinforced on 8 January 2015 when the Libyan Air Force threatened to strike any ships bound for **Misrata port**.

On 9 January, two crew members were killed and two injured in an attack (by military aircraft) against the Greek owned, Liberia flagged tanker Araevo, near **Derna**. The vessel was on its way from Brega to Derna, laden with heavy fuel oil. The recognized Libyan government claimed the vessel was attacked because it had no clearance to enter Derna port and acted "suspiciously". The incident may also be result of misunderstandings. The attack proves that commercial foreign vessels may get caught in the cross fire between conflicting parties in Libya.

The recognized government fears that merchant vessels may carry arms, supplies or personnel belonging to islamists or other armed groups, from ports in western Libya to ports in the east of the country. It is unclear whether this particular attack was carried out by Libya's air force or with the assistance of fighter aircraft from other nations that are known to operate against targets in Libya.

### **ISPS level**

Some flag states have recently raised the ISPS security level to level 2 for all Libyan waters and ports. Vessel owners have been notified directly.

NATO Shipping Centre encourages vessels transiting through the eastern Mediterranean to stay well clear of Libyan waters. Vessels calling at Libyan ports are advised to exercise increased vigilance and maintain close communication with port and flag state authorities and local shipping agents, in accordance with the ISPS code.

### **Port security:** (this information may be subject to rapid change)

Recently, several oil ports were attacked by the Libya Dawn militias (that are affiliated with the GNC / Tripoli based government). The ports were later closed. Check for updates if necessary.

**Sidra, Ras Lanuf and Es Sider** ports were reportedly shut due to nearby clashes or pipeline blockages. Brega port remains open.

All of the ports held by Libya Dawn are threatened by the forces of Operation Dignity (the former Libyan army elements that are led by General Haftar and affiliated with the Libyan National Army). The oil terminals held by Operation Dignity are targets for Libya Dawn attacks.

**Benghazi port** remains shut and the latest reports suggest heavy fighting around the city, and that Libyan armed forces (Haftar's forces and / or LNA) attempt to retake the city and its port.

**Tobruk port**, where the internationally recognized government is based, operates normally. Note that a tanker on its way to off load fuel in Misrata port was diverted to Tobruk recently. The vessel was held by Libya's recognized government authorities on suspicion of arm trafficking. The ship was later released after it was searched.

A [Skuld report](#) of 14 January 2015 provides additional information on Libyan ports.

### **Refugees / migrants at sea:**

In 2014, some 230 000 refugees and other migrants crossed the Mediterranean on their way to Europe. Some 170 000 of these ended up in Italy. 83% of these migrants arrived from Libya. 99% of

migrants arriving by sea to Italy were rescued by Italian navy or coast guard vessels, or by commercial vessels, or (more recently) by Frontex/Triton. Norwegian owned vessels took part in the search and rescue of approximately 5000 refugees / migrants in 2014.

When operating in the Mediterranean, there is a likelihood of encountering refugees at sea, in particular near Libya.

It is expected that high levels of migration will continue into 2015, with volumes picking up again in the spring, including via the Central Mediterranean route (Libya/Tunisia to Italy/Malta), as well as from Eastern Mediterranean ports towards Greece, Cyprus and Italy.

Please see our [suggested guidelines](#) for large scale SAR operations as a preparatory measure.

### **NSA advice**

- In line with the travel advice by most countries we strongly discourage travel on shore and crew change in Libya. See [www.landsider.no](http://www.landsider.no) for links to Norwegian, UK, US and other travel advice.
- We strongly suggest shipowner's take every possible step to check which group is in control of the port of destination.
- Any port call to Libya should be preceded by a thorough risk assessment. Check with your local agent for the most up to date information on the situation before the port call.

### **Useful contacts:**

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**Your comments and questions are welcome.**

With kind regards

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