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The Human Conveyor Belt Broken –
assessing the collapse of the
human-smuggling industry in Libya
and the central Sahel



THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE
AGAINST TRANSNATIONAL
ORGANIZED CRIME



Clingendael
Netherlands Institute of International Relations

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METHOD NOTE

This report is based on a mixed methodology. Open-source data relevant to human smuggling and trafficking is systematically collected and analyzed on a daily basis. This is coupled with ongoing monitoring of smuggling hubs as well as exchanges with a core field network based in Libya, Niger, Chad and Mali. Field researchers in turn collect data and conduct interviews based on requests for information formulated by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime analytics team.

The information requests are based on the open-source scanning, node monitoring and feedback received from the Clingendael Institute. In all, 27 core field network members employed for this research project tapped an estimated 250-plus contacts and key informants that include experts, politicians, community members as well as smugglers and middle-men. The report provides an assessment which is intended to provide rapid research and analysis. Great care is taken to triangulate the information presented; however, the document should be read as an ongoing analysis that will feed into more in-depth and paced research reports that are also envisaged to be delivered as part of this project.

This report is a synthesis of the research conducted between May and December 2018 for the monthly briefs under the 'Monitoring the Political Economy of Human Smuggling in Libya and the Greater Sahara' project funded under the North of Africa and Sahel and Lake Chad windows of the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa.

The project began in May 2018. However, this report benefits from prior research conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, which enabled us to set the findings in the context of developments that have taken place in the geographies of interest since mid-2017. It follows and is a companion to 'The Human Conveyor Belt – trends in human tracking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya', a document that traces the rapid expansion of human smuggling and trafficking between 2011 and 2016.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

LIBYA

Trends overview: Militias retreat from protection of human smuggling

Departures from the Libyan coast have continued their downward trend throughout 2018, despite a small seasonal increase over the summer, with Libya's human-smuggling industry experiencing a general and sustained retreat of armed groups from the protection of this activity. Key coastal smuggling hubs, such as Sabratha and Garabulli, in addition to inland logistical hubs, such as Bani Walid, Zintan, Shwayrif and Sebha, have all been affected by the decline in activity. The single greatest factor has been the collapse of the protection economy developed by various armed groups around the human-smuggling industry between

2012 and 2017. This dynamic has simultaneously driven the remaining smuggling operations underground, with migration now largely taking place out of view. While this has caused an increase in costs and limited the numbers travelling, it has also left migrants at risk of abuse as smugglers avoid law enforcement and increasingly seek to extract profits through extortion, ransom and forced labour.

Militias have been reassessing their exposure to human smuggling as a result of international attention placed on this activity, but the events that took place in Sabratha in October 2017 triggered a rapid paradigm shift. In the summer of 2017, the notorious human smuggler Ahmed al-Dabbashi (aka al-Amu) started cooperating with the Government of National Accord (GNA) in anti-human-smuggling efforts in return for official recognition. His abrupt conversion to government-accredited law enforcer upset the balance of power in Sabratha and triggered a war with his local rivals, the al-Wadi Battalion, who emerged victorious in the conflict and pushed him out of the coastal hub.

Despite their own links to the human-smuggling business, the al-Wadi Battalion continued to take an anti-smuggling stance, in a position emblematic of a broader trend towards law enforcement that was originally pioneered by the Rada Special Deterrence Force and adopted by the main militias in Tripoli. After the arrival of the GNA in the capital, these dominant Tripoli militias have formed a cartel that has enabled them to capture vital state resources while maintaining an outward posture as law-enforcement and security entities.

Over the course of 2018, this model consolidated itself and was adopted by militias outside of the capital – this in spite of a wider context of political and security upheaval in Tripoli. In September 2018, the inherent instability of this arrangement was exposed when militias that felt left out attacked the capital from the south.

Despite apparently emerging victorious from this war, the Tripoli militias have continued to come under pressure to reform in line with the ceasefire agreement and the Security Arrangements Committee plan that nominally bought the fighting to an end. Some progress has been made with this plan, which, among other things, calls for militias to hand over control of government buildings and release prisoners that they hold arbitrarily. However, there is a sense that the militias' concessions have been superficial and that they are resisting any real reform.

Simultaneously, the militias have been cleaning house in an attempt to improve their reputations and position themselves strategically for the emergence of a new order in Tripoli. The realignments taking place in Tripoli are fundamental to Libya's future, including as it pertains to law-enforcement systems and the management of people smuggling and migration. However, at present they have had a remarkably limited effect on the continuity of law enforcement.

The sanctioning of four Libyan human smugglers and militia leaders as well as international law-enforcement action against fuel smuggling during the reporting period have also hastened the retreat from smuggling



activities, at least from those placed under the brightest spotlight. However, these actions require constant follow up and monitoring to ensure their effect on the ground.

There have also been significant changes in coastal smuggling dynamics, largely as a result of the Libyan navy and coastguard taking back charge of Libya's territorial waters. While the Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) intercepted a roughly similar volume of migrants over the course of 2017 and 2018, this number in fact represents a far higher proportion of overall migrants making the journey, meaning that those who depart the coast are now less likely to make it to Europe.

With the withdrawal of European search-and-rescue (SAR) missions from the Libyan coast, there has been a notable shift among smugglers back to methods seen before the revolution. There has been a relative shift towards the use of more seaworthy vessels that are better prepared, or to resorting to other tactics, such as towing migrants behind fishing vessels. Prices have risen accordingly. However, the lack of search and rescue (SAR) capacity can also be linked to an increase in the mortality rate of the central Mediterranean crossing and could, in the event of a spike in departures, lead to significant loss of life.

The effective curtailment of departures from Libya's coast has also put migrants stranded in Libya at increased risk of abuse and mistreatment at the hands of smugglers. Mistreatment, theft, torture, sexual abuse and rape, and labour exploitation, including through inducement into sex labour, all remain rife throughout the course of a migrant's journey through Libya. Ransoming, in particular, appears to be on the rise as a result of a shift in modus operandi, with smugglers now seeking to extract greater profit through extortion, as the smuggling business proper becomes more challenging.

This is compounded by the chronic crisis in Libya's migrant-detention system. Mismanagement and corruption have led to dire conditions at the centres and weak provision of service, and the situation has been heightened by periodic overcrowding.

The disappearance of migrants from detention centres also remains a critical issue. And together, these overlapping crises have fuelled repeated protests at various centres throughout the reporting period, along with increased reports of suicide and suicide attempts. Desperate migrants have repeatedly tried to break out of abusive detention centres. There is also increased risk during the return to Libya of those migrants rescued in the Mediterranean, with one large group refusing to disembark in Misrata.

Nonetheless, after a period of instability, the leadership of the Department for the Combat of Illegal Migration (DCIM) has stabilized under the de facto rule of the Interior Ministry Undersecretary for Migration, Mohamed al-Shibani. Shibani's power consolidation within the DCIM will likely lead the Libyan side to negotiate the terms of access of the international humanitarian community to detention centres, as part of a much-awaited strategy for the detention system. This is a golden opportunity for donors and humanitarian actors to come together with their own negotiating position centred on such principles as transparency and accountability.

Focus on Tripolitania

Zuwara breaks blockade but contains human smugglers

There was a small resurgence of people smuggling in the coastal town of Zuwara during the reporting period, when the blockade imposed by the town's authorities towards the end of 2015 started being breached again.

Following the collapse of the Sabrathan smuggling system towards the end of 2017, some Zuwaran smugglers who had sought refuge from their town's law-enforcement campaign in 2015 returned to operate in Zuwara, mostly from a 20-kilometre stretch of coast between the city and the border settlement of Abu Kammash. However, this time around law-enforcement entities did not respond in an absolute fashion. This is partly due to a crisis within the town's security apparatus from the arrest of Zuwaran fuel-smuggling kingpin Fahmi Slim Ben Khalifa, which badly undermined the town's solidarity and led to the disempowerment of the Zuwara Counter Crime Unit – a Zuwaran armed group better known as the Masked Men – which had apprehended Fahmi Slim in the centre of town. The Masked Men had been at the forefront of Zuwara's law-enforcement campaign against human smuggling.

This security vacuum has been effectively filled by the Zuwara Security Directorate, whose efforts to intercept migrants on land and to raid warehouses in various parts of town are ongoing and have kept a lid on people smuggling in the town. However, a more decisive crackdown on people smuggling in Zuwara is unlikely to be attempted. The town's law-enforcement bodies have chosen to adopt a pragmatic enforcement strategy, aware of the divisiveness of coming down hard on an economic activity such as people smuggling.

Status quo in Sabratha holds

The status quo that has existed in Sabratha since the ejection of al-Dabbashi has been consolidated, despite the looming threat of his return over the summer and autumn of 2018. The hold of the Sabratha Security Room and the al-Wadi Battalion over Sabratha was most forcefully tested on 4 November with a surprise attack on the Jafara district to the south of the town. The attacking forces were comprised of fighters loyal to al-Dabbashi, as well as some allied Zawiyah and Zintani fighters. However, on the same day as the attack, the Sabratha Security Room announced it had regained control of the town, and increased security operations took place over the days following.

The brief conflict revealed how far al-Dabbashi has been weakened in exile. It also demonstrated the increasingly overt solidarity of the Madkhali Salafist armed groups in western Libya with units of the Libyan National Army (LNA). While underlying contradictions within the Sabratha Security Room and al-Wadi alliance remain, due to the latter's association with Musab Abugrein, it seems clear that the Sabratha Security Room and the al-Wadi Battalion are now firmly in control of the city and will continue to keep a lid on people smuggling.

Kani Battalion takes over Garabulli and disrupts east-Tripoli system

Over 2018 there was a shift of smuggling activity to the east of Tripoli, reflecting the pressure on the former smuggling hubs in the west and the attractiveness of the coastal towns of Garabulli and al-Khoms as historic



hubs with established and experienced smugglers. Garabulli had already played a key role as a smuggling hub prior to 2016. In 2017 there was a gradual resumption of business, which accelerated notably after the collapse of departures from Sabratha.

However, this process was dramatically reversed when the Tarhouna Central Security Forces – essentially acting as a front for the Kani Battalion – took over the coastal town on 8 July 2018. The Kani Battalion, which has dominated the town of Tarhouna and been aggressively expanding over the past few years, was among the first militias to adopt a law-enforcement agenda in Libya, particularly taking aim at the smuggling routes connecting the neighbouring town of Bani Walid and coastal embarkation points. The battalion's takeover of security in Garabulli took this campaign a step further and allowed it to virtually shut down departures from this coastal town.

Despite the battalion having been a protagonist in September's war in Tripoli, this commitment of resources has not had a notable impact on its position in Garabulli, where it remains firmly in control. One consequence of this has been the displacement of departures to the east. The rugged and inaccessible area of Ghnema, located between Garabulli and al-Khoms, has not been secured so far and so remains a point of departure. However, there have also reportedly been more departures from points east of al-Khoms.

Bani Walid's waning business and the sharp shift to ransoming

The law-enforcement actions of the Kani Battalion over the past two years have compounded the problems that East African smuggling networks operating from Bani Walid had already been experiencing. Bani Walid, which has been an important migratory node for many years, surged in significance in the summer of 2015 when an ISIS attack on East African migrants on the route connecting Ajdabiya and Misrata led important Eritrean and Ethiopian brokers to relocate to there. Although some of these brokers subsequently fled the country under pressure from international arrest warrants, a slowing down in the movement of East Africans, partly due to the law-enforcement activities carried out at the Libya–Sudan border by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has led to a more sustained decline in Bani Walid's significance.

This slowdown has led criminal actors in Bani Walid to switch from monetizing the movement of migrants to their ransoming. Although these practices occur elsewhere in Libya, they are arguably most prevalent in Bani Walid. However, major smugglers are reportedly winding down their business even further, particularly after the Prosecutor General's office issued arrest warrants in March for 200 suspected smugglers and traffickers, including key players in Bani Walid.

Focus on the Fezzan

There were significantly fewer migrants travelling through the Fezzan in 2018 compared to previous years, due in large part to law-enforcement actions instituted in Niger and Sudan in 2016. The sudden collapse of the people-smuggling networks on Libya's west coast was also significant, as it essentially blocked the system of transit hubs connecting Libya's south to the coast. The Fezzan's smuggling landscape was further



degraded by the outbreak of a conflict between the Awlad Suleiman tribe and the Tebu in Sebha in January 2018, which significantly disrupted the already reduced migratory flows.

There was a second flare up of violence in mid-October, when Libyan Tebu militias conducted an offensive against foreign armed groups in areas around Um al-Aranib. This also temporarily blocked migration routes through the area. Unlike the rest of the Fezzan, there was no reported decline in migration flows in Tuareg areas to the west, principally because these routes have not recovered from the war between the Tebu and the Tuareg around Ubari in 2015.

Against a backdrop of falling living standards and rampant banditry, there have been continuing efforts to secure the Fezzan, driven by domestic competition and the concern of neighbouring countries over the security vacuum in southern Libya. The most dynamic outside efforts to secure the Fezzan are being made by the LNA. However, after establishing a dominant position north of Sebha in 2017, the LNA has been unable to impose itself effectively. When these efforts began, the LNA was strongly opposed by other Tebu groups, which have nonetheless deemed it too dangerous to publicly denounce Haftar. This political back and forth is emblematic of the current situation in the Fezzan, with the presence of continuing opposition to the LNA, accompanied by a sense that its influence will inevitably continue to grow. There is also considerable regional interest in securing southern Libya. The most prominent initiative is an agreement to cooperate on border control and monitoring signed by Libya (the GNA), Niger, Chad and Sudan in June 2018.

Focus on Cyrenaica

During 2018 there was a steady increase in migration routes from eastern and south-eastern Libya converging on Ajdabiya, after a period in which this former hub had lost some of its importance as a result of insecurity in the region. This increase was mainly driven by a large group of East African asylum seekers, who had been stranded in Cairo and Alexandria, crossing the Egyptian border in the hope of reaching Europe from the Libyan coast. The flow has since diminished, however, likely because Eritreans are less willing to travel to Libya due to the difficulty of onward travel to Europe.

In the south-east, the LNA has been trying to impose its control through the Kufra Military Zone. Competition between the Tebu and the Zway in the region since 2011 has led to numerous wars, creating a dynamic and complex history of control or influence over the vast desert areas of south-eastern Libya. In the current disposition, the the Kufra Military Zone holds sway over Kufra town, the routes to its north, and a large stretch of territory from the intersection of the borders of Libya, Egypt and Sudan to the al-Sara airfield, located approximately 300 kilometres south-west of Kufra town.

The force has recently issued a number of decrees targeting people smuggling and has also conducted unusually pointed interceptions at a checkpoint north of Kufra town. However, its ability to suppress smuggling in Kufra effectively is severely hampered by its reliance on local armed groups, such as Subul al-Salam, that are involved in smuggling. While the Kufra Military Zone's recent efforts may prove divisive locally, they are likely an attempt to signal to European countries that the LNA is a valuable partner in managing migration.

SAHEL

Niger: Migrant-smuggling industry shrinks and adapts to new normal

Migrant flows have reduced drastically since the enforcement of a law criminalizing human smuggling in mid-2016 and 2017. Fewer smugglers are in operation, and those remaining have adapted their methods: transporting fewer migrants, departing at night, avoiding city centres and driving along remote routes. Out of hundreds of actors in the migration industry, local smugglers interviewed in October estimated there are only 15 to 20 smugglers who are still active in Agadez city, which remains the primary focal point for migrants headed to Libya and, to a lesser extent, Algeria. The large ‘ghettoes’ that formerly housed migrants in Agadez have also given way to smaller, more clandestine accommodation. Some actors formerly involved in human smuggling have switched to other forms of criminal business, such as drug trafficking.

The economic blow to the region, compounded by the closure of a major gold-mining site in Djado has caused resentment, particularly among Tebu communities. Gold mining in northern Niger, if regulated properly, could be a viable solution to counterbalance the negative economic effects and perceived segregation that the war on human smuggling has had on the region, as well as providing a sustainable alternative to criminal activity. Reopening the Djado goldfield would also address the grievances of the Tebu community. This is one of the ambitions of the Tebu rebel group Movement for Justice and the Rehabilitation of Niger (MJRN), which is in the process of finalizing a peace agreement with the government.

Considering the imminent security threats closer to the capital, with increasing attacks by jihadi armed groups on the borders with Mali and Nigeria, Niamey will be looking to avoid provoking a rebellion in the north. Niger has a history of mainly Tuareg-led rebellions, and Tebu communities have joined forces with the Tuaregs in the past. Frustration with both the government, which is perceived as serving Western interests before those of locals, and with foreigners, who are seen as receiving more international aid than local communities, is a bubbling issue that requires informed and grounded action.

Chad: The rise and (potential) fall of gold mines as Sahelian transit hubs

Over the past two years, goldfields in the Tibesti region in north-western Chad have developed into important nodes in the northbound transit of migrants from eastern Chad and Sudan. Chad’s role as a transit destination grew during 2017 and 2018 as a result of displacement from Sudan and Niger, but migratory flows through the country have been modest. Nevertheless, human-smuggling activity has been consolidating, particularly around the gold-mining sites in the country’s north.

This was especially the case for the Kouri Bougoudi site – a large goldfield that spans over some 50 kilometres and straddles the Chad–Libya border – before its closure in August 2018. The goldfield was closed down by Chadian authorities as part of a general clampdown on artisanal gold mining in the region. Although northbound migratory flows do continue, they have been reduced due to an escalation of military activity as part of this clampdown. Insecurity in the Tibesti and a government embargo on the

gold-mining area of Miski is likely to remain a source of instability and could result in the displacement of people towards Libya.

Mali: Migrant flows reduce as peace-enforcement efforts increase insecurity

In spite of ongoing instability and conflict in the north of Mali, where many migrants journeying north attempt to cross over into Algeria and Niger, the operations of smuggling and trafficking networks involved in a range of shadow-economy activities continue apparently unimpeded. In particular, routes from Gao that traverse Algeria headed mainly for Borg Badji Mokhtar, travelling via official border crossings in In Khalil and Timouane, remain in regular use.

Nonetheless, while Gao has continued to retain its status as an important hub for migrant flows, recent law enforcement targeting smugglers operating in the city, the increased insecurity along the routes between Gao and Kidal, and Gao and Niamey, as well as the continued taxation of convoys by armed groups, have led to the emergence of different routes and/or experimentation with difficult desert treks not normally associated with human smuggling. We have corroborated information on two such desert routes that leave from the environs of Timbuktu and bypass established routes.

The involvement of Malian non-state armed movements in the migrant-smuggling business is still poorly understood at this stage, but it appears to be limited. Nevertheless, these groups are well positioned to organize robust migrant-smuggling corridors connecting Mali to Algeria and Niger should the business become as lucrative as other illicit activities, such as drug trafficking.

LIBYA

TRENDS OVERVIEW: MILITIAS RETREAT FROM PROTECTION OF HUMAN SMUGGLING

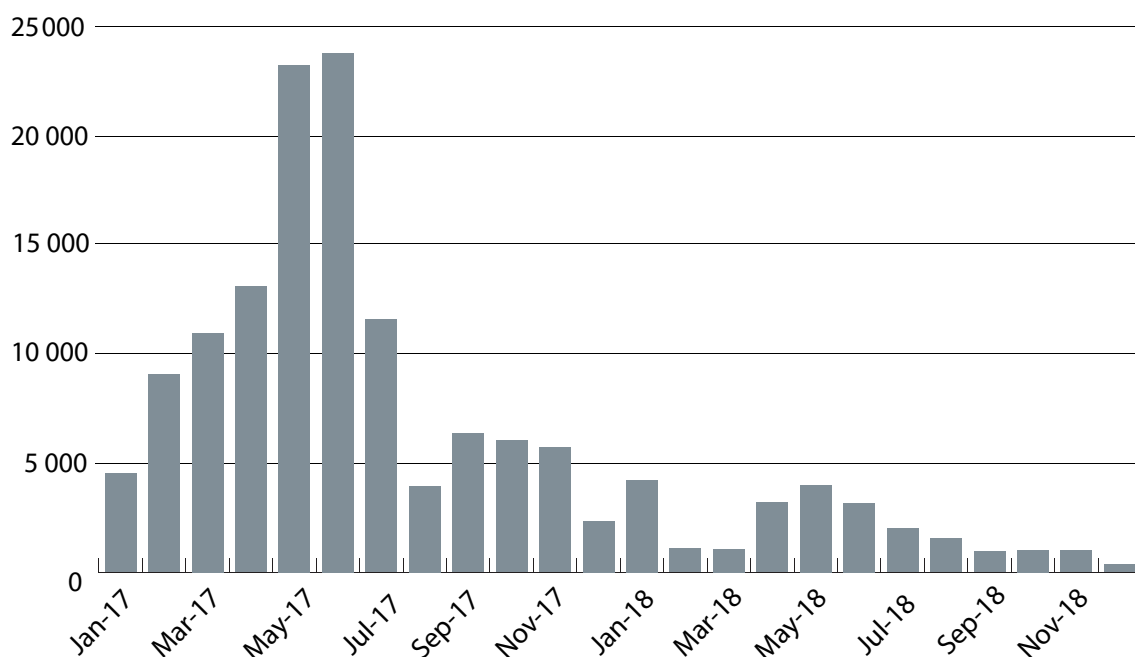
- Departures from the Libyan coast have continued the downward trend that started abruptly in July 2017, confirming that the new dynamics on Libya's coast are likely to endure.
- This shift is the result of a general retreat of militias from the protection of human smuggling and trafficking, reversing the capacity-enhancing role they played in the business after 2012.
- Simultaneously, law enforcement around human smuggling has been consolidated, despite ongoing turmoil in the security sector.
- Western sanctions, imposed on Libyans involved in smuggling, have played a role in supporting these trends and conditioning the behaviour of armed groups in Libya, but they must be sustained.
- The Libyan Coast Guard (LCG) is intercepting a higher proportion of migrants, even if absolute numbers remain the same as in previous years. Nonetheless, the LCG has not played a critical role in the reduction of departures, which is overwhelmingly the result of events on land.
- The retreat of European search-and-rescue (SAR) missions off the coast of Libya has impacted the behaviour of coastal smugglers who have returned to pre-revolution methods.
- The lack of SAR capacity can also be linked to an increase in the mortality rate of the central Mediterranean route and could, in the event of a spike in departures, lead to significant loss of life.
- Migrants stranded in Libya continue to face abuse and exploitation. In particular, as the movement of migrants becomes more challenging, elements of the human-smuggling industry appear to have shifted towards ransoming as a means to make profit.
- The formal detention system remains in crisis despite coming under firmer management during the reporting period. A planned reform of the system will provide an opportunity to address principles that would improve accountability and undermine the ongoing interface between some DCIM officials and the human-smuggling industry.

Number of migrants transiting through Libya decreases as human smuggling becomes clandestine again

Over the 18 months between July 2017 and the end of 2018, Libya's human-smuggling industry has experienced yet another radical transformation through a general and sustained retreat of armed groups from the protection of this activity.

Key smuggling coastal hubs such as Sabratha and Garabulli, but also further inland, for example Bani Walid, Zintan, Shwayrif and Sebha, have seen a sustained decline in activity, which was in large part driven by the collapse of the protection economy developed by various armed groups around the human-smuggling industry after 2012.

Figure 1: Sea arrivals of irregular migrants in the central Mediterranean between January 2017 and December 2018. Source: UNHCR



Most obviously, these changes translated themselves into a continuation of the downward trend in the number of arrivals of migrants and asylum seekers journeying irregularly across the Mediterranean, which started abruptly in July 2017. There was an unnatural peak in January 2018 (see Figure 1) proportionate to activity in the previous three months. This was largely the result of adjustment after hundreds of migrants, many of whom had already paid up for their sea crossing, found themselves stranded in Sabratha, Zawiya and Tripoli, as a result of sudden upheaval at embarkation hubs.

There was another increase in activity over the summer between April and July, but this largely followed normal seasonal patterns resulting from more favourable weather conditions. Moreover, various units of the LCG, principally from Tripoli, Zawiya and al-Khoms, reacted by stepping up their activity with the rate of interception rising above 70% in July, the highest it has been since records started being kept in 2015. Nonetheless, the spike was far smaller in absolute terms than in the previous two summers, confirming that the changes that occurred in the summer of 2017 are likely to endure for the foreseeable future.

This is not to say that militias no longer profit from human smuggling in Libya. Various players retain an interest in the migration business, particularly in the detention system. However, in general this is much more low profile and camouflaged than previously. A paradigm shift has taken place, which has degraded the capacity of the human-smuggling industry and driven it back underground.

During 2018, in particular, there has been a return to clandestine methods of smuggling that hark back to the period before the revolution. The protection offered by militias had vastly improved the efficiency of the business because it provided a greater measure of flexibility as a result of impunity.

After the revolution, departures from places such as Sabratha, Mutrud, al-Mayya and Garabulli at times took place in the daytime, especially during 2015 and in the first half of 2017. In many cases, several vessels were launched from various sites at one go because the operations on the beaches benefitted from a wide perimeter guarded by militias controlling strategic stretches of coastline. Some large migrant warehousing facilities were located in the middle of urban areas or very close to embarkation points, shortening the distance to launch areas and generally facilitating logistics, while highways were frequently used to transport migrants in plain sight.

Since 2017, there have been changes on all of these fronts. During 2018, we received no credible report of a daytime departure. On the contrary, departures now typically take place late at night, often from remote beaches that are more logistically challenging. Critically, mass departures, where multiple vessels are boarded by large groups of 1 000 migrants or more in a single operation, have ceased altogether.

Further inland, the transportation of migrants between hubs has become more difficult as more militias and law-enforcement entities have started targeting warehouses and transportation. On the highway between Brak al-Shati and Shwayrif, for instance, this has meant that migrants are no longer driven along the tarred road. In this particular case, the shift was largely a question of visibility as the route is still used but instead smugglers drive a few kilometres away from the highway into the desert.

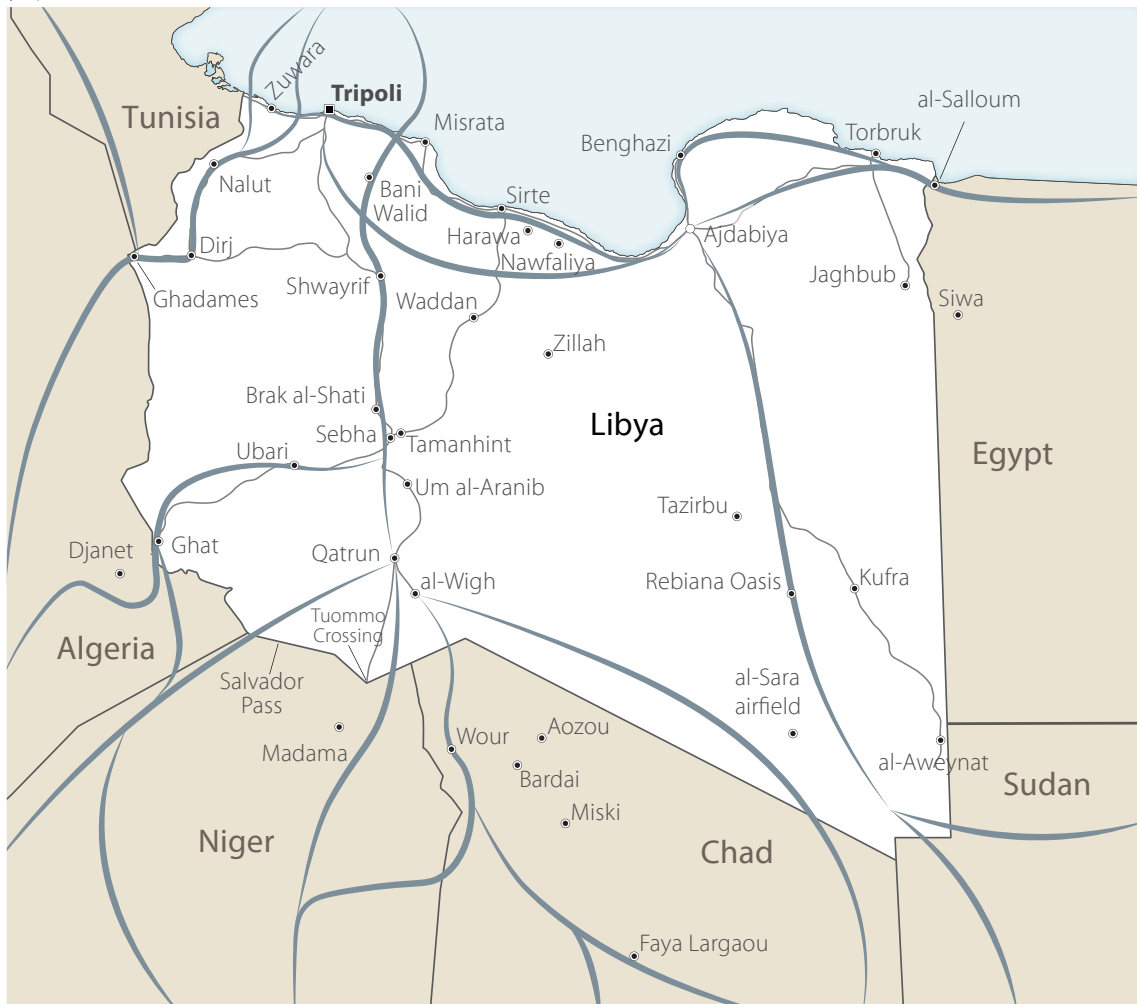
Nonetheless, when taken together, these changes have significantly challenged the business and made it costlier, which in turn has had an impact on demand but also caused a shift in business models of certain smugglers and traffickers. Smugglers who have seen their warehousing-business contract during this period, in Bani Walid and Shwayrif, for instance, are clearly leaning more heavily on ransoming and extortion to make money, this is particularly the case in Bani Walid, as will be discussed.

These hubs were also affected by dwindling numbers arriving from sub-Saharan African (see the Fezzan and Sahel sections for more detailed discussion). However, the most immediate shock came from the sudden jamming of coastal embarkation hubs between July and October 2017, which had a disruptive effect on connection points all the way to the southern borders.

The catalyst event took place in the summer of 2017, when Ahmed al-Dabbashi (aka al-Amu) started cooperating with the GNA in anti-human-smuggling efforts in return for official recognition.¹ Al-Dabbashi was a major regional human-smuggling kingpin, whose forces held sway over much of Sabratha when the town was Libya's most important embarkation point in 2016. His abrupt conversion to government-accredited law enforcer upset the balance of power in Sabratha and triggered a war in September and October 2017 with his local rivals, the al-Wadi Battalion – a militia dominated by Madkhali Salafists – and the Sabratha

Security Room, led by Colonel Omar Abduljalil. The war resulted in al-Dabbashi's forces being kicked out of the city and seeking refuge in Zawiya, where they remained in exile at the time of writing.

Map 1: Migratory routes through Libya

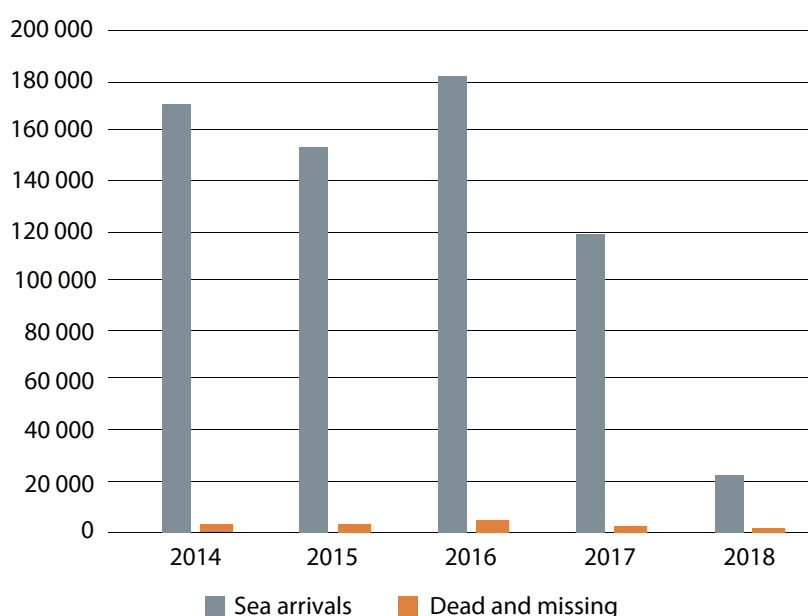


In the aftermath, the Sabratha Security Room, supported by the al-Wadi Battalion, positioned itself as the town's leading force. But in spite of the al-Wadi Battalion's association with rival kingpin Musab Abugrein (aka Doctor Musab), the alliance maintained a robust and consistent posture, keeping migrant departures from Sabratha down throughout the second half of 2017 and all of 2018.

Contacts close to the al-Wadi Battalion and the results of ongoing monitoring revealed consistently during the reporting period that there was a concerted effort on the part of the group's leadership to keep departures to a minimum. This entailed reaching an arrangement with Abugrein, who is widely regarded as one of the group's major financiers.

Of course, this positioning has not been without its discomfort for the Sabratha Security Room. When the UN Security Council added both Dabbashi and Abugrein to a sanctions list in June 2018 (see further discussion below), the Sabratha Security Room was quick to claim the action as vindication of its war against the Dabbashi alliance, but had no comment to make about the inclusion of Abugrein on that same list. When asked about the association between Abugrein and al-Wadi, in an interview conducted by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime in November 2017, Colonel Abduljalil did not confirm nor deny Abugrein's activity but simply said that there would be no human-smuggling activity in Sabratha under his watch.

Figure 2: Yearly sea arrivals of irregular migrants as well as recorded dead and missing in the central Mediterranean between 2014 and 2018. Source: UNHCR



This point is instructive of the the drivers behind al-Wadi's stance but also of the awkward compromises underpinning the widespread strategic shift by armed groups away from people smuggling and towards adopting a law-enforcement business model in the areas they control. Over the course of 2018, this trend has continued to consolidate itself despite setbacks and outbursts of conflict.

As argued elsewhere, the general cooption of militias into law-enforcement positions relates to the political landscape and how different militia leaders see themselves in it.² Militias have been seeking to secure a future for themselves in whatever new political order emerges from the current impasse, and legitimizing their outfit is crucial in this regard.

This dynamic has been shaped by two important external elements. The first is the conditioning of international (mostly European) donors around migration, which rendered human smuggling a toxic liability in the pursuit of legitimacy. The second is the establishment of a security- and law-enforcement model following the arrival in Tripoli of the GNA in March 2016 by the handful of militias then dominating the capital.

The Tripoli militia cartel³ as they have been called, established a business model predicated on an outward law-enforcement posture while turning their predation to state institutions.⁴ This is no novelty in itself, militias that had access to the capital had, since the revolution, been leveraging their proximity to strategic-sites-turned-cash-cows, such as airports, government buildings and banks. It is this very dynamic that precipitated the involvement in the protection of illicit markets and human smuggling of some militias from outside of Tripoli that did not have access to state coffers.⁵

However, the strategic cooperation adopted by Tripoli's largest militias – the way they managed to embed themselves at the intersection of politics, business and security, as well as their resulting expansion and consolidation – provided a unique and compelling example against which militias across Libya could measure themselves.

The Rada Special Forces, led by the Madkhali Salafist commander Abdulrauf Kara, was possibly the first and most successful militia to pioneer this posture in the west of Libya, developing what is arguably the most copied model. The amplification of Rada's example was aided by the growing network⁶ of Madkhali armed groups in Libya, of which Rada is the foremost representative in the west of the country. These armed groups follow a Saudi Arabian school that advocates strict social conservatism and respect for existing powers, making them naturally disposed to play a role in the policing of society. During 2018, the groups began gaining the upper hand, along with pro-Haftar and some pro-Qaddafi elements, in the national-level confrontation against those armed groups that form part of the alliance formerly associated with the Fajr Libya war.

Law enforcement model consolidates despite political and security turmoil in Tripoli in 2018

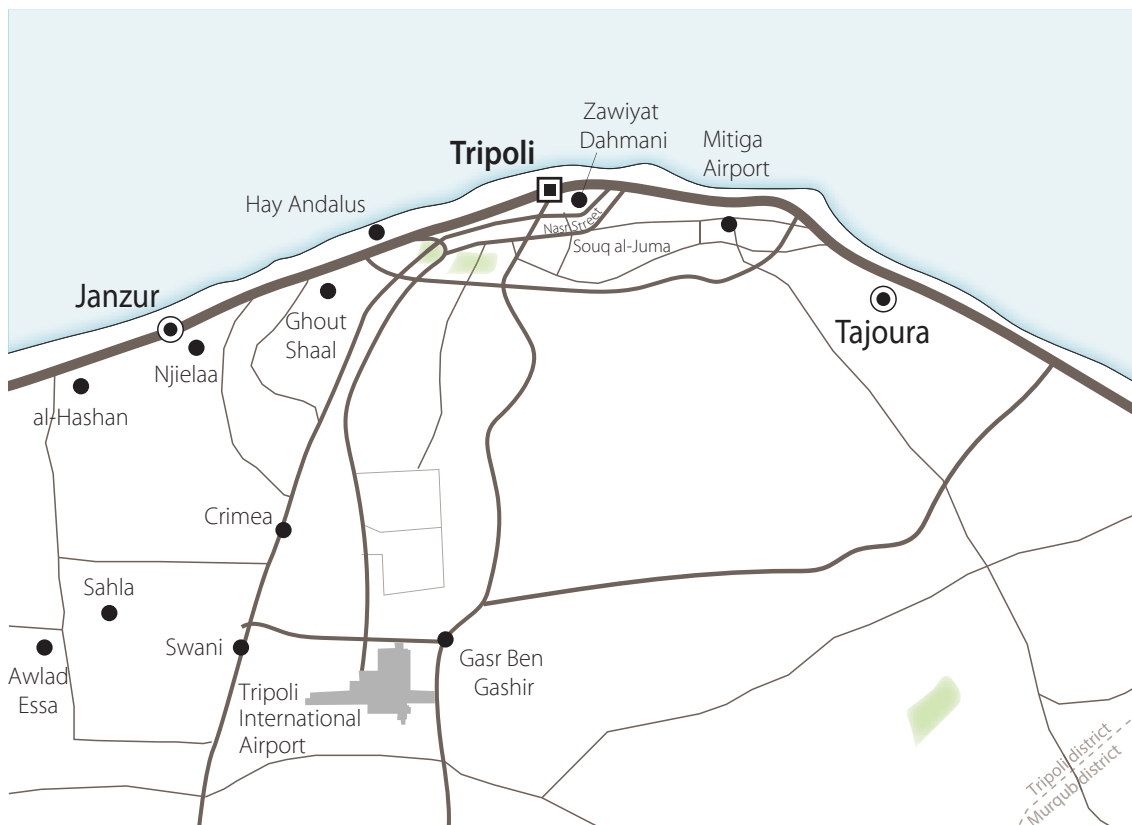
In September 2018, the inherent instability of the security arrangement provided by the Tripoli militias was exposed when armed groups that were left out of the deal attacked the south of the capital. The campaign was started by Tarhouna's Kani Battalion, which was later joined by the Liwa al-Sumoud from Misrata and other armed groups.

While the attackers were themselves partly motivated by pursuit of power, their actions tapped into genuine public dissatisfaction with the way the capital's militias had captured the state and were using their power to steal public funds. After a broad-based meeting⁷ in Zawiya on 4 September, a ceasefire agreement was put in place, which called for security reforms and the dismantling of militia power in the capital. However, fighting broke out once again and continued until the night of 24–25 September, when the attacking forces abruptly withdrew from the capital and the Tripoli militias appeared⁸ to emerge victorious.

Despite this apparent victory, the attack on the capital exposed the unsustainability of the status quo, and the Tripoli militias have been under pressure to reform since then. The formal mechanism for this reform is the Security Arrangements Committee plan, which broadly calls for militias to withdraw from state institutions and for security inside Tripoli to be taken over by an empowered police service. The plan was adopted⁹

by the GNA on 23 October, and under the newly appointed Interior Minister, Fathi Ali Bashagha, some efforts have been made to put the reforms into effect.¹⁰

Map 2: Greater Tripoli area



For example, in October various locations have been handed over from militia control, including Tripoli Port, which the Nawasi Battalion officially gave over to the Office for Guarding Vital Objectives of the General Directorate of Central Security.¹¹ Similarly, there were plans for Rada to hand over security of Mitiga Airport to the General Administration for Central Security, which toured the airport on 27 September in preparation for this.¹²

However, the Central Security force appointed to take over the airport is formed of officers primarily drawn from Tripoli's Souq al-Juma neighbourhood, over which Rada has influence. This reflects a broader sense that the militias are engaged in a charade, with the objective being to retain as much real power and influence as they are able to, while defusing public outrage at their dominance over the capital. The efforts to train a new police force – for example, with the reopening of three rehabilitated police-training colleges in Tripoli – are also often dismissed as posturing, with militiamen simply changing uniforms.¹³

Speaking in the wake of a terrorist attack on the Foreign Affairs Ministry building in Tripoli on 25 December, Bashagha admitted that the plan had not yet been implemented.¹⁴ Earlier, on 18 December, a high-level meeting of four important militias had formally announced the unification of their forces under the Tripoli

Protection Force (this body had already been established during the war) and stated that they would secure government institutions, confirming that they are pushing back against the pressure on them and are engaged in an arm wrestle with Bashagha.¹⁵ Notably, the Tripoli Protection Force does not include Rada. Contacts reported that while Rada has privately supported the force, it has not publicly endorsed it because it is not official policy of the Interior Ministry. Rada is also confident that its future is guaranteed under the Security Arrangements Plan, and is wary of alienating other important forces from Misrata and Zintan.

Many of the most substantial changes appear, in fact, to have taken place within and between the militias. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the September war, tensions emerged between Rada and a layer of Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) commanders, with elements of Rada suspected of being behind a number of attacks on prominent TRB members. On 15 October, Khairi al-Kikli (aka Hankoura) was assassinated outside the Radisson Blu hotel in Dahra. Al-Kikli played a controversial role in the Tripoli war in September; a video of him and fellow militiamen behaving like thugs has been widely disseminated.¹⁶ On the same evening, there was an attack on the base of TRB commander Mohammed Bakbak in Zawiyat Dahmani. Bakbak was formerly considered one of TRB commander Haithem Tajouri's trusted men. On 6 November Rada also arrested senior TRB leader Ziad Kafu.¹⁷

Rada, which came under particular pressure during the Tripoli war for its role in the theft of public funds and arbitrary detentions, is likely seeking to launder its reputation through targeting unruly and unpopular militiamen. However, it has also been acting in coordination with Tajouri.

Tajouri was in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) during the September war and only returned in October. Contacts reported that his absence from Libya was due in part to the fact that he was losing his grip over his men; after his return from the UAE, he moved to reimpose control forcefully with a clean up of staunch Fajr Libya commanders within his ranks.¹⁸

On 23 October, Tajouri ordered military operations to retake control of several locations in central Tripoli, including the headquarters of Central Security in Zawiyat Dahmani, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Planning, the Ministry of Communications, the Central Post Office and the Waddan and Mahari hotels.¹⁹ He claimed that these operations had been conducted in coordination with the prime minister and were part of the security-arrangements plan, but this has not been confirmed by the Presidential Council.²⁰

On 26 November things took a deadly turn when a senior and well-respected commander in the TRB, al-Hadi Awainat, was killed along with two others after arriving at Mitiga Airport from Tunisia.²¹ Another militiaman, Jalal Warshefani – the face of the TRB during the September war – escaped and is now thought to be in Tunis. Tajouri had gone to arrest the men when a firefight broke out.

Nonetheless, whatever the outcome of this clean-up campaign, the power of the Tripoli militias is under check. Bashagha's appointment in itself is a challenge, representing another strong step towards the city-state's successful re-establishment of an operational foothold in the capital.

The former fighter pilot and founding member of the Misrata Military Council by no means represents the whole of Misrata – indeed his openness to reconciliation with regime-era officials as well as with the east – over the past years saw him break ranks with the cadre of Fajr Libya militia leaders he formerly was part of. However, his personal standing and the fact that he can call upon considerable military power, particularly through the Hattin Battalion – which he founded even though he no longer leads it – give him real clout and a fighting chance at lessening the grip of the Tripoli militias on state institutions.²²

Zintan is playing a similar counterbalance role, which came about after a process that was first given real impetus in June 2017 with the appointment of Major General Usama al-Juwaili – longtime leader of the Zintani Military Council – as Military Commander of the Western Region under the GNA, and then consolidated with the appointment of the Emad Trabilisi as head of the Public Security and Security Deployments Unit, and Mohamed Shibani as under-secretary for migration.²³ Furthermore, Zintani forces entered some coastal neighbourhoods during the Tripoli clashes in September at the invitation of the GNA, and subsequently entrenched their presence there and in the suburb of Warshefana.

Similarly, the September crisis provided the spur for the GNA to implement a long-awaited reforms package, which goes some way to address the currency profiteering engaged in by militias able to use their position to access foreign currency under fraudulent means and then trade it on the black market.²⁴

These realignments taking place in Tripoli and across the west are inherently destabilizing. They are also fundamental to Libya's future, including law-enforcement systems, and the management of people smuggling and migration. However, at present they have had a remarkably limited effect on the continuity of law enforcement, reflecting the fact that legitimacy is increasingly dependent on the appearance of state-like behaviour rather than revolutionary bona fides. The flipside is that the law-enforcement stance adopted by militias is interdependent on developments in the political landscape and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

The role of international sanctions

While the turn away from protection of people smuggling and towards law enforcement has been largely driven by internal considerations, the power of the international community to offer funding and legitimacy, on the one hand, or impose sanctions and isolation, on the other, is a critical implicit driving factor.

The international community has been relatively cautious in its exercise of this power, reflecting divisions over which Libyan actors to support, as well as the complexity of targeting human-rights abusers who nonetheless might be needed as partners in stabilizing the country. This notwithstanding, on 7 June the UN Security Council announced the unprecedented imposition of sanctions (a global asset freeze and travel ban) on four Libyans and two 'Eritreans' (one is in fact an Ethiopian national) for involvement in human smuggling and trafficking activities. On 14 June, the EU had imposed sanctions on the same six individuals.²⁵

The four Libyans are all well-known: Musab Abugrein and Ahmed al-Dabbashi (both mentioned above); the head of the Petroleum Facilities Guards stationed at the Zawiya Oil Refinery, Mohammed Kushlav (aka al-Gsab); and the commander of the Zawiya Refinery Coast Guard, Abdulrahman Milad (aka al-Bija).

Research conducted during the reporting period, including interviews with three of the people on the list, leave no doubt as to the fact that the sanctions have had a sobering effect on the targeted individuals. Shortly after the sanctions were announced, our network learned that Milad was seeking advice on what steps to take to be removed from the list. Milad subsequently defended his actions in a telephone interview with Reuters.²⁶

Although Milad was formally suspended from the post on 22 June, he remains very much in charge of the Zawiya Refinery coast and retains a relationship with the Libyan coastguard and navy command. It is our assessment that Milad's inclusion on the sanctions list was problematic from the start, principally because his alleged infractions and profile in the human-smuggling industry pale in comparison to those of the other people targeted by the UN Sanctions Committee, creating an imbalance. However, his resumption of work as a coastguard undermines the value of future sanctions as a credible deterrent.

This notwithstanding, sanctions have also helped to reinforce the message being received by a wide audience of militiamen. The timing of the listing was especially effective as it came at the end of a series of unconnected events that together had a compounding impact on several actors forming part of criminal consortia with interests in fuel and human smuggling along the west coast of the Tripolitania.

The series of events started in 2015 with press exposure²⁷ and multiple reports²⁸ by the UN Panel of Experts on Libya, and was then followed by arrests as part of the Italian operation Dirty Oil, which in October 2017 helped dismantle what was arguably the biggest fuel-smuggling network operating in the west of Libya.²⁹ Two months earlier, Fahmi Slim, the Libyan head of this network – which included Maltese actors as well as members of the Sicilian mafia – was arrested in Zuwara and handed over to Rada (see also Zuwara section). The action, which reverberated across the region, undermined large-scale sea-bound fuel smuggling – the most lucrative illicit activity in the area – and hastened the retreat from smuggling activities, at least in those areas under the spotlight. However, perhaps the most important watershed came with CNN's publication of a video in November 2017, which depicted an apparent slave auction of sub-Saharan Africans in Libya.³⁰ This video sent shockwaves around the world and dramatically altered perceptions of accountability and impunity in Libya.

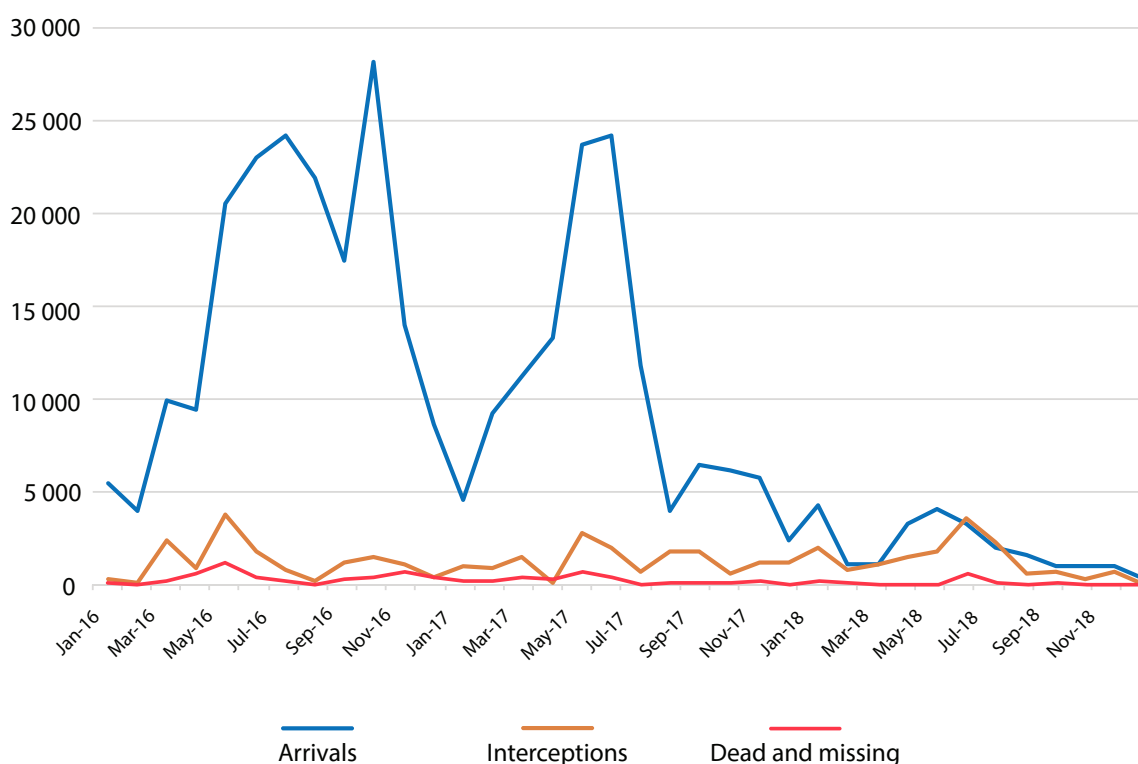
Contacts in Sabratha, for instance, relayed consistently during the reporting period that some militiamen compensated for the loss of revenue by moving significantly into other activities, including the large-scale import/export of Moroccan hashish, a commodity that is eventually directed towards European markets.

While the Sanctions Committee made an effort to broaden its scope beyond a blinkered focus on human smuggling and trafficking, recognizing the interdependence of various illicit markets, such targeted actions

require timely follow-up that is reactive to the effect that sanctions have on the ground, as is also illustrated by the case of Milad.³¹

Libyan Coast Guard intercepting higher proportion of migrants at sea

Figure 3: Rate of arrivals, interceptions by the LCG, and dead and missing migrants in the central Mediterranean for January–December 2018. Source: UNHCR.



In large part this reflects the assistance and capacity building of the LCG by the EU and member states, particularly Italy, including through the transfer of 10 refurbished patrol vessels and an undertaking to donate another 12 boats and deliver further training to the coastguards.³²

Overall, however, the most significant changes relate to the transfer of responsibility for SAR missions near the Libyan coast to the LCG, which took place between 2017 and 2018.³³ Through the Libyan Joint Rescue Coordination Centre (LJRCC), which consists of Libyan officers liaising with a small Italian contingent at the naval port in Tripoli, the Libyan navy and coastguard benefit from Italian radar coverage and capability.

Moreover, since Italy and Libya signed a memorandum of understanding in February 2017, Rome’s Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre started consistently directing requests for assistance to the LCG rather than coordinating rescue efforts directly, as it had in previous years. A concomitant development concerns the withdrawal of SAR missions – both private and naval – from the Libyan coast under pressure³⁴ from

European governments but also as a result of the increasing confrontation with the Libyan coastguards that the arrangement described above brought about.³⁵

Beyond the politics surrounding the sea borders of the Mediterranean, which are beyond the remit of this research project, these changes together have had the effect of returning search and rescue dynamics in the central Mediterranean to a scenario similar to that prior to the launch Italy's Operation Mare Nostrum in October 2013.³⁶

Despite Mare Nostrum ending in 2014, subsequent naval missions to the central Mediterranean as well as private search and rescue missions, more or less maintained the search and rescue line drawn by that mission to the waters just outside Libyan territorial waters, well into 2017.

Coastal smugglers return to pre-revolution methods

This proximity of SAR missions to the Libyan coast has had an impact on smuggler behaviour. Smugglers previously tended to use larger vessels, often wooden, which would be captained by low-level smugglers or migrants with some seafaring experience. Patterns started changing between 2012 and 2013 with the rise of young, inexperienced smugglers looking to make quick money.³⁷

However, these trends were accelerated when rescue operations moved closer to Libya. Low-quality rubber dinghies started to become much more common than wooden boats, and smugglers began loading on more and more people, with flimsy 15-metre boats often carrying between 170 and 190 people in 2016 and 2017. In fact, between 2014 and 2016, rescues actually started moving closer to Libya, in part as a reaction to the growing precariousness of boats, with more people being loaded on board.

At the start of 2017, 70% of the boats used were rubber dinghies, in most cases piloted by the migrants themselves.³⁸ Other costly strategies, such as providing migrants with satellite phones for making emergency calls, had also been dropped. In reality, these vessels had no prospect of reaching Europe and were simply intended to reach international waters, from where the migrants could be rescued.

With the withdrawal of most European vessels from the waters outside of Libya's sea borders, smugglers have had to adapt back to methods that are intended for migrants to be able to journey greater distances at sea. There has been a clear shift back to relatively seaworthy wooden or fibreglass boats. Even when rubber boats are used, these are less crowded, in many cases carrying around 100 people or less.

Satellite phones are also being used more commonly again, but migrants are often instructed not to make emergency calls unless they are forced to, or to hold off for as long as they can to ensure they are out of the range of the LCG.

The result has been a return to a pattern more akin to the smuggling dynamics at sea that existed before the revolution. As they did then, in fact, vessels now go further, in some cases entering Maltese³⁹ and Italian territorial waters around Lampedusa.⁴⁰ In some rare cases, migrants actually managed to make landfall, a phenomenon not seen in years with respect to departures from Libya.⁴¹

A joint operation undertaken in November by Italy's Guardia di Finanza, the Italian navy and the EU border agency Frontex, led to the arrest of six Egyptian suspected smugglers, aged between 25 and 38, who were filmed towing⁴² a smaller boat carrying 68 migrants using the so-called 'mother-boat' or 'mother-ship' method; a system that was widely used prior to the revolution but which has not been used in the central Mediterranean in many years.⁴³

Italian authorities were alerted to a series of landings on beaches in the coastal town of Agrigento, Sicily in September and October 2018. Subsequent air surveillance by Frontex allowed investigators to establish the pattern adopted, and on 23 November a raid was conducted by the Guardia di Finanza and the Italian Navy about 40 nautical miles south of Lampedusa, where the boat carrying migrants had been released after being towed from Zuwara.

Italian and Maltese security sources said that similar transfers using these methods are believed to have taken place in respect to other arrivals to Italy and Malta on vessels departing from Tajoura and al-Khoms.

Overall, departures are being conducted in a more clandestine manner, and with higher prices charged. Interviews conducted with migrants who arrived in Malta over the summer of 2018 indicate a price increase compared to previous years.

It is still difficult to give a definite assessment of pricing in the coastal areas in such a situation of flux; however, information collected from migrants and contacts in Zuwara, Tripoli, Garabulli and Bani Walid since May 2018 shows that the price of the sea crossing was consistently above LYD1 500 (around €300, at black-market exchange rates at the time of writing), from departure points both east and west of Tripoli, with the average price hovering around the LYD2 300–LYD2 500 mark (€460–€500). This represents a significant increase from the same period in 2017, when the price had dropped to below LYD1 000, when the black-market exchange rate meant this sum was the equivalent of about €100.

There have also been increasing variations in price, in some cases reaching LYD6 000–LYD7 500 (around €1 200–€1 500). This variation, which typically reflects the nationality of the migrant (Eritreans tend to be among those who have to pay the most, Sudanese the least), the type of boat, or simply the particular demands of different smugglers, is in itself important.

Variations in pricing according to nationality are well established, but the level of disparities currently in the market underscore the fragmentation of the smuggling system on Libya's coast since the withdrawal of

militia protection and involvement in mid-2017. Prior to this, prices had become far more consistent, even if differentiated by nationality and/or ethnicity, in addition to being lower.

This period of upheaval has also seen a marked rise in the number of deaths as a proportion of departures. As with the interception data, the absolute number of deaths in 2018 is less than half what it was in 2017, 1 311 dead and missing, compared to 2 872 in 2017. However, based on data collated by UNHCR, the mortality rate of the sea crossing as a percentage of departures has risen from an average of 2.1% in 2017 to 3.3% in 2018.

We believe it is premature to make narrow assessments of what this means in light of the multitude of changing variables. Although the mortality rate has been consistently high throughout 2018, with a lower rate of departures, accidents will have greater proportional relevance in the statistics, with many more thousands of migrants crossing successfully.

This is especially worth noting given the particular challenges presented by Libyan coastal smuggling dynamics to rescuers. At the height of asset capacity in 2016, when the Mediterranean benefited from assets deployed under the Italian Navy and the coastguard, EU operations Triton and Sophia, as well as a fleet of 14 ships and two drones deployed by nine private SAR organizations, more people died at sea (both in absolute and proportional numbers) than in 2015, the year of the infamous 18 April tragedy in which an estimated 700 people lost their lives in a single shipwreck.⁴⁴

Nonetheless, rescue dynamics have become more complex and sparser at a time when the number of assets in the central Mediterranean has decreased considerably. Moreover, although the Libyan Coast Guard does contain a core of professional officers who put their lives at risk to save others and see lifesaving as a central part of their duties, their work is obfuscated by the chronic problems within the Navy, Coast Guard and Coastal Security units.

Aside from the fact that a significant portion of the units that actually carry out operations in the west of Libya remain infiltrated by militiamen who follow their own chain of command and agendas, these bodies remain inconsistent in their capacity and professionalism. This in turn, further erodes the overall chain of command reflecting itself in incidents such as that of 6 November 2017, when a helicopter from the Italian navy had to fly low in front of an LCG crew that was towing a migrant hanging on to its side ladder while steaming away from a rescue scene.⁴⁵

As already discussed, the primary driver leading to the collapse of arrivals in the central Mediterranean has to do with shifting dynamics on land and the retreat of militias from the protection of human-smuggling activity, and increased law-enforcement efforts. While the changing make-up of the rescue effort at sea has continued to shape dynamics it has not contributed significantly to the reduction in numbers.

The shifts that have taken place in Libya are deeply enmeshed in the country's broader political landscape and, as such, are not cast in stone. We assess that it is unlikely that there will be consistent rise in the number of departures in the short to medium term. However, if there were to be a rapid surge in departures, the chances of disasters at sea would be high with the current lack of SAR capacity.

Migrants stranded in Libya face abuse and mistreatment

The documentation of abuse and human-rights violations is not a core focus of this research project. However, the violence perpetrated on irregular migrants transiting through Libya, by smugglers and traffickers as well as by state officials and sanctioned armed groups performing state functions, particularly those who have a role in the broader migration business, is part and parcel of the political economy of human smuggling in Libya and for this reason needs to be factored into an analysis of trends in this sector.

As extensively documented in other reports⁴⁶ dealing with human-rights violations during the reporting period, including, most recently, by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the situation in Libya remains dire in respect to the treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.⁴⁷

Mistreatment, theft, torture, sexual abuse and rape, and labour exploitation (including through inducement into sex labour) remain rife, particularly at critical journey points where migrants are more vulnerable and most at the mercy of smugglers and traffickers, such as at relay points where they are switched from one group of smugglers to the next or more frequently in warehouses; logistics depots where migrants are kept, typically while preparations are made for the next leg of the journey, on land or at sea.

Ransoming in the latter context (see also Bani Walid section) appears to be on the rise as a result of a shift in modus operandi seeking to extract greater profit through extortion, as the smuggling business proper becomes more challenging. Other important centres flagged to us during this reporting period where this type of activity is pronounced include Sebha and Brak al-Shati, and Shwayrif. Tripoli itself, which in previous years was rife with clandestine prisons used specifically for the ransoming of migrants, is reported less and less in this respect.

General conditions inside warehouses also appear to be worsening, with both Libyan contacts and migrants reporting situations where migrants are forced to go without food for days at a stretch. In many cases, they report being given only bread and water.

People inside are routinely beaten, shot at, and systematically tortured; whipped with electricity cables, sticks or rubber pipes or electrocuted with cables or, in some cases, electroshock weapons. While conditions in warehouses have long been known to be bad, there appears to be a general deterioration in conditions as part of the readjustment to reduced business (see also discussion of Abu Salim detention centre below).

Similarly, there have also been more consistent reports of migrants having to pay multiple ransoms before being released. Sometimes this happens when released migrants are intercepted at sea or even on land and brought to a detention centre, where the same smugglers who previously held them in captivity would 'purchase' their release from detention-centre staff and then extract a second payment from them. Again, these are not entirely new patterns but they appear to have become more systematic and are being reported with greater frequency.

In one case, a 33-year-old Cameroonian migrant, whom we will call Abas, reported being swindled of most of his money at the Algeria–Libya border between Debdeb and Ghadames. A smuggler leading them across the border disappeared when the group was intercepted by Algerian border guards on a night shift, only to reappear on the Libyan side after all their belongings had been taken by the Gendarmerie. After that, the group was taken to a warehouse where they were asked for a ransom. After paying it, they were transported north to the west coast of Tripolitania where they were detained again and asked for a second ransom. This migrant eventually made the sea crossing and was rescued and taken to Malta on 14 August 2018:

'We stayed [in the first warehouse] for two days and then three armed guys came. They let the migrants sit down, brought telephones and told us to ask their families for US\$1 000. [One of us] asked, 'What is the money for?' and they punched me in the face in response. They said it's for the transport, but I [told them] it's kidnapping. One of the guys came with an electric gun, took it out and zapped me until I was unconscious. I fell [to the ground and] the guy stopped. After about 20 minutes they splashed water on me to wake him up.'

Abas managed to put together US\$800 by calling friends, but the next leg of the journey more or less took him back on square one: that is, to another warehouse, only this time closer to shore – likely between Zuwara and Sabratha – where he had to pay a second ransom. '[We] were all brought directly to a second warehouse. The building was about the same size as the living area of [the] Marsa [Open Centre in Malta]. Inside people [there were 130] were ill, almost dead, some were not moving anymore and there was blood everywhere, and a smell of torture.'

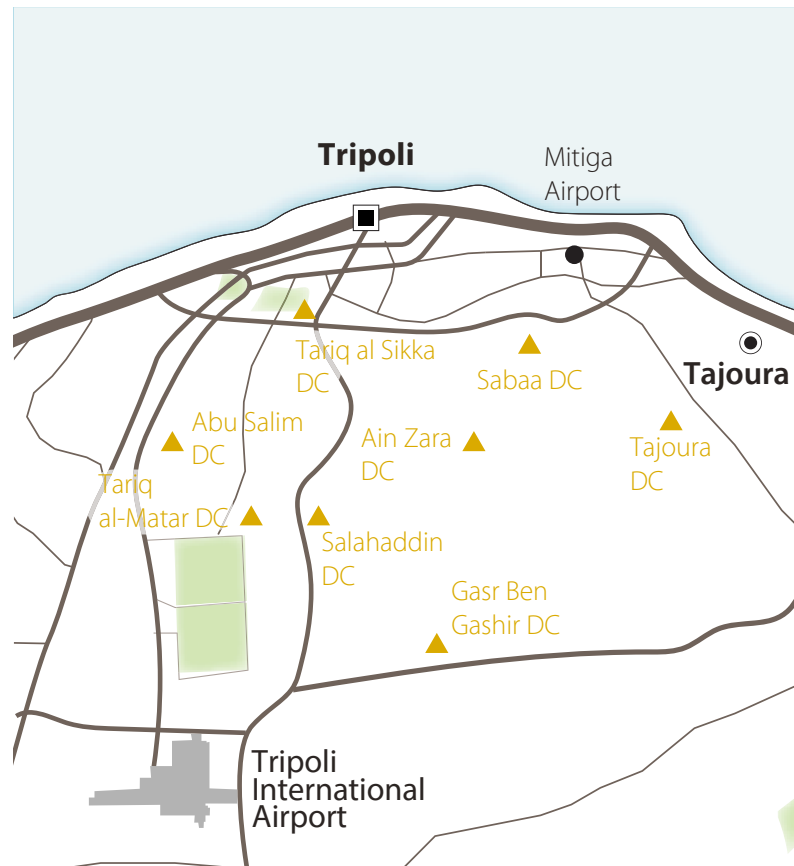
The ongoing crisis in detention centres is a core policy challenge

Although the situation inside formal detention centres is generally better than that in the private prisons kept by some smugglers and traffickers, the system remains plagued with similar patterns of physical and sexual abuse and exploitation as well as sustained interface by some officials with the human-smuggling and -trafficking industry.⁴⁸

Moreover, chronic problems pertaining to the conditions of the facilities, including poor sanitary conditions and weak provision of service, are made worse by overcrowding. During the reporting period, the system faced three major crises of the sort. The first came in the aftermath of the war in Sabratha, in the last quarter of 2017 and beginning of 2018, when the population of detained migrants grew to between 15 000 and

20 000 following the discovery of thousands of migrants in warehousing in the Sabratha region and environs when the conflict was over.⁴⁹

Map 3: Select detention centres in Tripoli



Between January and July 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) removed 10 950 migrants from Libyan detention centres through its Humanitarian Voluntary Return programme, bringing the population down to about 5 000. But as the LCG started intercepting more migrants at sea in the summer months, as a result of a seasonal increase in departures, the numbers again grew to reach between 8 000 and 9 000.

Between January and August 2018, 12 945 migrants were intercepted at sea on top of those migrants arrested on land during raids or turned in by from checkpoints or simply by civilians reporting them to the police. The critical turning point came in June and July when 5 620 were intercepted at sea, 43% of the total for the year up to that point.

Subsequently, in September the situation was exacerbated again by the war that broke out in Tripoli, with hundreds of migrants being stranded in facilities close to the fighting. On 4 September, 1 500 migrants, including hundreds of women and children, fled the Tariq al-Matar detention centre after guards from the DCIM abandoned the facility when fighting moved close by. After wandering in the streets for some hours, the migrants were eventually rounded up and redistributed. At least six migrants suffered gunshot wounds.

Most of the people in this group were sent to a detention centre in Zintan, which was completely overwhelmed – the facility has four bathrooms for the entire population held there. Another 440 migrants were abandoned by DCIM officials at the Abu Salim detention centre, where heavy fighting engulfed neighbourhoods near the centre after 18 September. The group, which included more than 60 children, survived on dry food provisions that the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) managed to send in before fighting isolated the entire area.

These crises fuelled repeated protests at various centres throughout the reporting period, along with increased reports of suicide and suicide attempts.⁵⁰ The chaos caused by these crises created further opportunities for corrupt officials, smugglers and traffickers.

The Abu Salim detention centre, for instance, has not been manned by guards since they abandoned it during the conflict in the capital in September. Despite this situation, and the fact that there have been no official transfers of detainees to the centre, the population of migrants has grown from 370 to more than 500. Contacts report that, although DCIM officials conduct regular visits, the centre is actually unguarded. The migrants are not locked up and take care of themselves to a large extent, purchasing and cooking their own food. However, this is also the case at other manned DCIM centres.

While some of the migrants at Abu Salim claimed to have made their own way to the centre, many of them were brought there by at least two smugglers we managed to identify: one of them is Eritrean and normally operates between Bani Walid and Garabulli, while the other is a Libyan trafficker, who, according to our previous research, is normally based around Shwayrif. The latter is accused by migrants of severe abuse and of being a serial rapist. A number of the migrants were left at the centre very sick and weak.

For the migrants, the motivation to stay at the Abu Salim detention centre is clear. It offers them a refuge where they can access medical treatment and food and where the risk of being kidnapped is reduced. For the smugglers, it appears that the centre may be a way for them to offload migrants they can no longer be sure of extracting a profit from, not even through the extortion of family members back home. In this way, they avoid the costs of maintaining migrants. Several migrants dropped at this centre were left there in a very poor physical state with reports of some migrants having died after arriving there.

At the same time, the centre is also being targeted by smugglers and traffickers. During October and November, some migrants left the detention centre and were smuggled over the border to Tunisia from points around the Dehiba crossing. This is not unusual; several centres are targeted by smugglers in this way. The key difference in this case is that the centre is not apparently under the control of any person or group.

Disappearances from detention centres remain critical in this respect, and the detention centre in Tajoura is of particular concern in this regard. During the reporting period, we received information concerning the disappearance of between 100 and 150 men from Tajoura detention centre between the months of August and October.

Issues at the Tajoura detention centre have emerged previously. Earlier in 2018 visiting aid workers at the centre discovered a hidden underground storage area in which a group of Eritreans had been held in terrible conditions. When asked, the detention-centre management said that the migrants were being punished for trying to escape.

Our investigations point to a connection between the Daman militia, which runs the security at the Tajoura detention centre, and a smuggler from Sabratha, whose business was displaced towards the end of 2017.

We also triangulated information that, during August, between 10 and 15 Eritrean migrants were taken from Tajoura by traffickers based in Bani Walid. These are not unique events. The uncertainty surrounding unaccounted-for migrants in detention centres highlights a major issue with the lack of a comprehensive and accountable registration as well as with the data-management system keeping track of migrants after their disembarkation.

DCIM leadership stabilized and its reform offers an opportunity

As the crisis in Libya's detention system has ground on, the leadership of the DCIM has been rocked by uncertainty, with different blocks competing for control. Towards the ends of July, Mohammed Bisher, then the head of the DCIM, was being sought by Rada for large-scale embezzlement and corruption. Bisher is a former police officer from Sebha who was relatively unknown prior to his appointment, which was orchestrated by the TRB as part of its efforts to capture the detention business. The TRB's plans were never realized and by mid-2017 contacts were complaining about Bisher's mismanagement and alleged corruption.

After being sidelined and moving into virtual exile in Tunisia, Bisher's role was assumed by the Undersecretary for Migration, Mohammed al-Marhani (al-Shibani), who established himself as the de facto leader of the DCIM. This new leadership has actually been given a boost with the appointment of Fathi Ali Bashagha as Interior Minister of the GNA on 11 October, as the two men from Zintan and Misrata respectively appear to have neatly delineated their responsibilities to avoid stepping on each other's toes: Shibani maintains the migration file while Bashagha focuses on security.

The relationship between the two men is friendly and precedes Bashagha's recent appointment. Al-Shibani also has strong backing in his own right. He is the number two in Emad Trabilsi's Zintani armed group, the Special Interference Force, and his appointment was negotiated by the GNA's Western Military Zone Commander, Major General Usama al-Juwaili.

During his tenure, Shibani has shown himself to be a dynamic operator intent on bringing the DCIM under real centralized control. For instance, Shibani's administration has had a prolonged standoff with the leadership of the Tajoura detention centre over some of the concerns raised above and its general lack of compliance with commands.

This drive towards centralization is a worthwhile objective, however the real motivations are doubted by some officials as well as by detention-centre commanders who stand to lose in the process. Contacts within the agency report growing tensions between detention-centre commanders and the management of the DCIM, which essentially reflects competition over the control of a lucrative business. The competition over the profits that can be extracted from detention centres will affect all efforts to reform the system or introduce improvements.

This drive also offers opportunities to the donor and humanitarian community. Al-Shibani and his close collaborators are aiming to centralize control of the DCIM as part of a much-anticipated strategy for the detention system that was meant to be launched on 20 November but has now been postponed to the first quarter of 2019. The DCIM has given every indication that it plans to draw red lines that will regulate access to detention centres more strictly. This is a golden opportunity for the donor and humanitarian community to draw up a common position based on fundamental principles of access, accountability and improvement of service provision.

Outlook

The developments that have taken place in Libya over the past 18 months have radically reshaped the landscape of the human-smuggling and -trafficking industry. As discussed, the key triggers have to do with events that have taken place on land both in Libya and in neighbouring countries, principally in Niger and Sudan, where border control activity has reduced the flow of migrants journeying into Libya.

The sharp shift seen in the middle of 2017, however, developed from the intersection of the international spotlight placed on human smuggling with local political dynamics, where militiamen involved in human smuggling understood that involvement in such activity had become too toxic.

Consequently, this dynamic is inevitably vulnerable to shocks or reversals in Libya's transition, which could tip the balance for militias away from the law-enforcement model and back towards the protection of people smuggling, or even fragment the security landscape to such an extent that effective law enforcement becomes impossible.

The first risk is perhaps the most complex. The processes by which militias turned to law enforcement as a core source of legitimacy contain contradictions and costs that could trigger a reversal, should the perceived benefits diminish or rivalries flare up once again. However, our assessment is that the current trends will continue. The fading of the revolutionary moment, the clear yearning of most Libyans for a return to order, and international pressure all mean that Libyan players seeking legitimacy and longevity must try to present themselves as credible governors, and at the very least avoid being seen as criminals.

This process can also be seen in the gradual re-emergence of Qaddafi-era officers in security structures over the past few years. It is also evident in the consistency with which parties to localized conflicts have tried to adopt, or even competed over, law-and-order functions. Just as the Sabratha Security Room and the

Wadi Battalion took on al-Dabbashi's anti-people-smuggling role in Sabratha upon their victory, so the Kani Battalion sought to challenge the Tripoli militias on the basis of their illegitimate usurping of state power. In fact, the Kani Battalion has proven to be a powerful anti-people-smuggling force to the east of Tripoli (see below). Under current conditions, providing governance and policing for society, at least to some extent, is necessary for a group's survival – no serious players will be likely to neglect this. However, the current emphasis is on the targeting of migrants rather than people smugglers, which means that the consolidation of law enforcement will not necessarily end the suffering faced by migrants in Libya. International assistance and capacity building to Libyan law enforcement would be made more ethical, sustainable and effective if it came with strong pressure to shift the focus on dismantling the remaining smuggling and trafficking networks, in particular ransoming gangs.

The clearer risk to the emerging law-enforcement structures is therefore political collapse and a return to widespread conflict, re-creating the conditions for warlords who are reliant on the protection of illicit economies for resources. Given the challenges that Libya faces – political fragmentation between and within the east, west and south of the country; regional and global rivalries over determining the country's future; the continued dominance of a mosaic of militias and armed groups over towns and regions; and the looming threat of ISIS – such a collapse is still possible.

However, some political observers are cautiously optimistic that resolving these crises could be within reach.⁵¹ There is now less room for spoilers to disrupt Libya's transition, while political, economic and security reforms are being dealt with in a relatively active and coordinated fashion, under UN leadership. Barring a major shock to the system or the reckless intervention of an outside power, we do not assess that a total collapse is likely (though partial reversals or stagnation are very possible).

In fact, the current landscape, particularly in Tripoli, presents an opportunity that more than ever calls for international cohesion around key principles. The impetus for reform in the economic and security sectors achieved by UNSMIL and the international community in the wake of the latest conflict in Tripoli must not be lost.

The recent financial sanctioning by the US and the UN Security Council's Libya Sanctions Committee of Misratan militiaman Salah Badi for his prominent role in the war in Tripoli in September, and his forces use of grad rockets in densely populated areas, shows an increasing willingness to isolate those who threaten to spoil Libya's transition.⁵² However, there should be parallel efforts to condition the behaviour of militias whose cooperation is required – but who may feel that their best interests lie in maintaining the status quo – by reaffirming red lines and taking steps to implement demobilization and/or genuine integration into state-security bodies.

This is central to the analysis of where Libya's human-smuggling and -trafficking industry stands today, as the retreat of militias into a law-enforcement stance camouflages a lean to the further predation of state resources,

as well as other hidden illicit economies, such as drug trafficking, which can only be reined in with a concerted effort by legitimate Libyan state actors aided by a coherent agenda by the international community.

The Libyan coast and the growing role of the LCG will continue to limit and influence coastal smuggling operations, though the overall impact will be far smaller than developments on land, unless it is accompanied by a carrot-and-stick approach that values law enforcement that targets smugglers and traffickers on land, as opposed to migrants. Meanwhile, the unnecessary and harmful targeting of what remains of the humanitarian rescue missions in the Mediterranean achieves little in the way of migration management, distracts from these more pressing goals, and generally further deteriorates the lot of migrants stranded in the country.

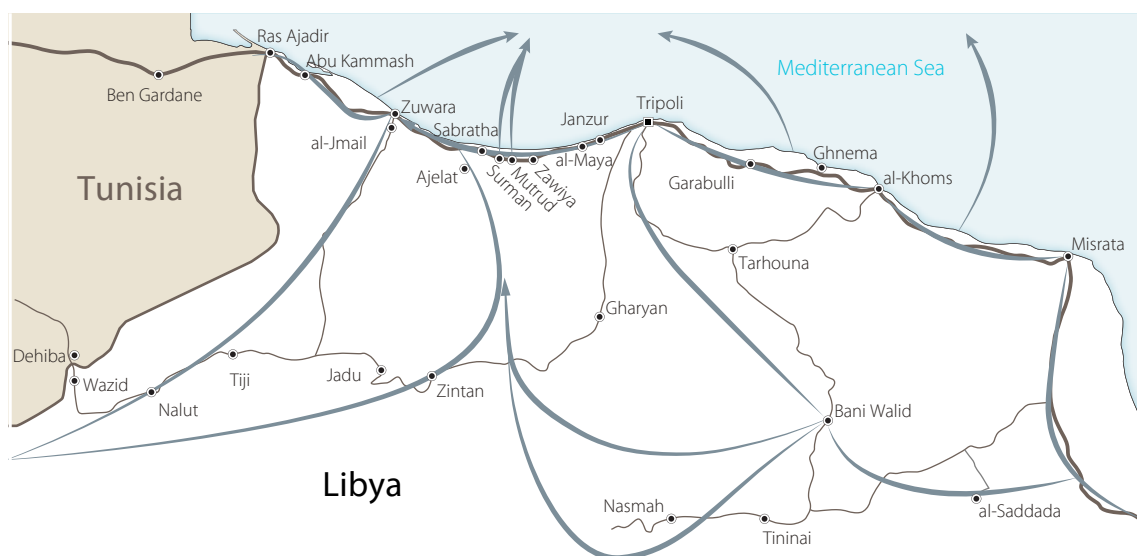
The crisis in Libya's detention of migrants is an example of this related set of challenges and opportunities. This crisis has become clearly established as the most pressing concern for the international community in respect to migration management.

The reform of the DCIM in the offing presents opportunities to address challenges in this area that will have wider ramifications for the political economy of human smuggling and trafficking. The DCIM has given every indication that it plans to draw red lines that will regulate access to detention centres more strictly. This is a golden opportunity for the donor and humanitarian community to draw up a common position based on fundamental principles of access, accountability and improvement of service provision.

TRIPOLITANIA

- While there has been a slight increase in departures from Zuwara, after a previous prohibition lost some of its force, the Zuwara Security Directorate has struck a balance to keep a lid on people smuggling without exacerbating local tensions.
- The security arrangements that emerged in Sabratha after the autumn of 2017 have held firm, despite a failed attempt by al-Dabbashi to return in November 2018. The status quo now appears solid, with anti-smuggling activity likely to continue.
- The West Zawiya Anti-Crime Unit effectively drove smuggling from the former hub-town of Mutrud in April 2017 and the situation has remained relatively stable since then, with localized actions against some remaining outfits further east in Warshefana.
- There has been a noticeable shift of smuggling activity to the east of Tripoli over 2018, however the actions of the Kani Battalion have obstructed Bani Walid and secured Garabulli, leaving al-Khoms as the most active stretch of coast.
- Bani Walid, an important inland logistics hub for people smuggling in past years, has declined due to reduced migrant flows from East Africa and the targeting of key players by Libyan and foreign governments. Criminal actors here have increasingly turned to extortion and ransom to extract profit from stranded migrants.

Map 4: Migratory routes, Libya's west coast



Zuwara breaks blockade but contains human smugglers

During 2018 human-smuggling activity crept back into the coastal town of Zuwara. The town has historically been the primary embarkation point for migrants seeking to make the sea crossing to Europe. However, it instituted an unprecedented ban on the human smuggling towards the end of 2015, following three catastrophes in which more than 600 migrants drowned and many bodies washed up on the town's local beaches.⁵³ This ban was remarkably successful, owing primarily to Zuwara's homogenous nature as an Amazigh town. In fact, the blockade was almost entirely a community-driven action supported by the municipality, which saw the town arrest, prosecute and jail some 60 smugglers through an adhoc judicial structure.

Following the collapse of the Sabrathan smuggling system towards the end of 2017, some Zuwaran smugglers who had sought refuge from their town's law-enforcement campaign in 2015, returned to operate mostly from a 20-kilometre stretch of coast between the city and the border settlement of Abu Kammash. However, the reason the response of law-enforcement entities was not as absolute as it had been in the past was largely the result of fallout from the arrest of Zuwaran fuel-smuggling kingpin Fahmi Slim.

Slim was officially reported to have been arrested on 24 August by the Rada Special Forces in Tripoli.⁵⁴ In reality, he was handed over to the Rada Special Forces by the Zuwara Counter Crime Unit, a Zuwaran armed group better known as the Masked Men, after being apprehended in the centre of town.

The Masked Men had been at the forefront of Zuwara's law-enforcement campaign against human smuggling. However, while the execution of the campaign against human smuggling was a consensus decision, borne out of a collective realization that human smuggling was hurting the town's image, Slim's arrest was a unilateral decision taken by elements within the leadership of the Masked Men.

Added to the fact that Zuwara's stand against human smuggling had lost a lot of its original support because many felt that the town's act hardly received any recognition in Libya or internationally, the Masked Men's actions were seen as a betrayal of the community: not only was Slim an important patron to the town, but he was arrested and handed over to a Tripoli militia instead of being dealt with in Zuwara itself.

The result was that the Masked Men were disempowered and largely restricted to carrying out a security function at the Tunisian border. To a significant extent, the vacuum left by the Masked Men has been filled by the Zuwara Security Directorate, whose efforts to intercept migrants on land and to raid warehouses in various parts of town, are ongoing.⁵⁵ This has effectively kept a lid on people smuggling in Zuwara.

A tragedy in the summer illustrated the extent to which smugglers are now engaged in a game of cat and mouse with law enforcement in the town. On the morning of 16 July, a Zuwara Security Directorate patrol found a refrigerated truck abandoned just west of the Mellitah Oil & Gas facility. Inside they discovered 98 migrants locked in a storage area smaller than 2.5x6 metres, with about a dozen jerrycans of fuel, some life jackets and wooden cut-outs used to reinforce rubber boats. Eleven people suffocated to death due to toxic fumes released by the fuel.

Contacts in Zuwara reported that the vehicle is believed to have been abandoned while the migrants were being transported overnight to an embarkation point west of the city. This caution on the part of smugglers – with regard to law enforcement rather than the welfare of migrants – is part of a broader pattern. Contacts all along the Libyan coast report that people-smuggling activity has generally gone underground, under pressure from law enforcement, often with similar results from migrants. For example, a recent UN report describes the death by suffocation of seven migrants after they were abandoned by smugglers in a truck outside Garabulli on 4 July 2017.⁵⁶ The truck had been discovered in the evening by officers of the Libyan Interior Ministry, but was left unopened until being towed to the Tariq al-Sikka detention facility in Tripoli.

At the same time, a more decisive crackdown on people smuggling is unlikely to be attempted. While there have been frequent reports detailing the interception of hundreds of migrants, no key smugglers have been arrested and departures from the coast have continued, albeit at reduced rates. It is likely that the town's law-enforcement bodies have chosen to adopt a pragmatic enforcement strategy, aware of the divisiveness of coming down hard on such a profitable economic activity.

'Now is not the time to rock the community by arresting smugglers, I think what [the Zuwara Security Directorate is doing] is good. [They are] undermining human smuggling but at the same time keeping the interests [or cohesion] of the community in mind. In the absence of a state, this is the best we can hope for from law-enforcement entities.'

– *An activist from Zuwara, July 2018*

Status quo in Sabratha holds

The status quo in Sabratha since al-Dabbashi's ejection from the town has been consolidated, despite the looming threat of his return over the summer and autumn of 2018. In May, the Sabratha Security Room went on high alert after receiving information that a convoy of fighters belonging to al-Dabbashi's battalion and allied militiamen from the Awlad Buhmeira tribe of Zawiyah were approaching Surman on their way to Sabratha. The attack never materialized and contacts in Zawiyah reported that, in fact, the mobilization had been a ruse to flush out a mole in the ranks of Mohammed Kushlav, al-Dabbashi's ally in Zawiyah.

However, the hold of the Sabratha Security Room and the al-Wadi Battalion over Sabratha was tested on 4 November with a surprise attack on the Jafara district to the south of the town. The attacking forces were again comprised of fighters loyal to al-Dabbashi, as well as some allied Zawiyah and Zintani fighters. They attempted to enter the city from the south to avoid facing the Western Criminal Investigations Directorate in Surman. The Madkhali Salafist leadership of this group is broadly allied to the al-Wadi and had protected Sabratha's eastern flank from the al-Dabbashis before. However, on the same day as the attack, the Sabratha Security Room announced it had regained control of Sabratha. There were increased security operations in the city over the following days.⁵⁷

The conflict revealed how far Dabbashi had been weakened in exile. Importantly, it once again showed the increasingly overt solidarity of the Madkhali Salafist armed groups in western Libya. On 6 November the 78th Battalion of the LNA, a Madkhali Salafist outfit led by Tawfik Imkika, deployed to Sabratha from Zintan and al-Watiya to support the Sabratha Security Room and the al-Wadi.⁵⁸ In October 2017, this Madkhali network was also a critical factor with a unit from the LNA-aligned Saiqa Special Forces lending its assistance to the al-Wadi.⁵⁹ However, this was possibly the first time that LNA- and nominally GNA-aligned forces had cooperated so openly.⁶⁰

Nonetheless, this broad solidarity between armed groups led by Madkhali Salafists, which is core to the law-enforcement paradigm that has been adopted so widely by militias across Libya, has not been without its problems. Towards the end of September, Mustafa Abugrein⁶¹ along with a collaborator were arrested by Rada in a Tripoli suburb. Mustafa is the nephew of Musab Abugrein, aka Doctor Musab, one of the six human smugglers put on the sanctions list by the UN Security Council in June 2018.⁶²

On the surface, the arrests are uncontroversial for Rada, which has targeted hundreds of militiamen connected to illicit markets over the past years. However, the action raised eyebrows in light of Abugrein's well-documented proximity to the al-Wadi Battalion, whose leadership includes Madkhali Salafists.

Following the war in October, Abugrein had been persuaded by the leadership of the al-Wadi Battalion to abandon his human-smuggling business due to the political implications of the activity – a move that is reported to have led to his shift to other, less sensitive illicit markets. However, in general, the coalition has been unable to take any action against smugglers within its ranks – a glaring inconsistency made even more so by the inclusion of Abugrein's name on the sanctions list.

Exchanges with contacts in Sabratha, Zawiya, Zuwara as well as Tripoli, concerning the arrest of Mustafa Abugrein, suggest that the action was the result of two concurrent factors. The first relates to tensions between the al-Wadi Battalion and the Western Criminal Investigations Directorate (CID). While the conflict is in essence one of power, there is also a religious element to it: the al-Wadi Battalion follows a Madkhali Salafist sheikh from Yefren, called Majdi Hafala, while the Western CID follows Tariq Durman, a Madkhali Salafist sheikh from Zintan. Both the Western CID and Durman are closely aligned with Rada.

The second is that, in the wake of the war in Tripoli in September, Rada was in a drive to reassert its position in the capital and strengthen its credentials as a crime-fighting force free of the sort of criminal baggage that burdens other Tripolitanian militias.

There is no question that the Sabratha Security Room and the al-Wadi Battalion emerged stronger and more in control of the city following their showing in the November attack. However, the arrest of Abugrein is indicative of how delicate even the apparently solid network of Madkhali Salafists is. In spite of these complex interdependencies, the overall momentum and direction of the political process in Libya will ensure the durability of the law-enforcement paradigm in the short to medium term.

Zawiya and Warshefana remain fractured but stable, with people smuggling under check

The town of Mutrud, towards the western edge of Greater Zawiya, had emerged by 2016 as a major hub for embarkations on this stretch of coast. When migrants reported that they had left from Zawiya, they often would have actually been referring to Mutrud, which is also known as west-Zawiya.

However, as with other west-coast hubs, this activity was eventually stamped out by local militias with a law-enforcement agenda. The trigger for Mutrud's decline as a smuggling hub came on 6 April 2017, with a confrontation in coastal waters between a group of seven smugglers and Milad's Zawiya Refinery Coastguard crew, which saw four of the smugglers being killed and three arrested.

One of the smugglers killed, Yassin al-Aswed, and another who was arrested, Salem Mohammed Al-Aswed, came from the powerful al-Aswed family, a criminal clan with interests in fuel and human smuggling in Mutrud. The incident caused serious trouble for several months, with threats against Milad's crew both on land and at sea.

The Western CID, which is run by the Madkhali Salafist Mohammed Swissi and is broadly allied with the al-Wadi Battalion, took advantage of the chaos to enforce its authority on the town and move to disrupt people smuggling.

A meeting called by the municipality on 21 April 2017 and attended by the military council, community leaders and elders from the town officially repudiated the smuggling trade and tasked the Western CID with

clamping down on it. By the end of April, the unit had managed to drive out all warehousing activity, which eventually settled in an area about 60 kilometres from the town, resulting in a significant drop in departures.

One effect of this crackdown and other patrolling efforts was that smugglers in the Warshefana area, who normally sent their migrants to Mutrud, increasingly began to use the al-Maya area, which, although not a new embarkation point, had been used only infrequently in the past.

The situation since then has remained relatively stable. The Western CID continues to control areas to the west of Zawiya, and as far as Sabratha, with other areas under the control of forces nominally loyal to the GNA.

One of the last major law-enforcement actions came on 5 June 2018, when a base belonging to Tariq al-Abdali (who ran the people-smuggling operations of the infamous al-Subburto gang, based principally around coastal areas of Warshefana) was raided by Rada, with the Special Operations Force subsequently driving the group from the area.

The Special Operations Force is led by the Zintani militiaman Emad Trabilsi and controls Checkpoint 27, which is near al-Maya. The al-Subburto gang had been previously powerful in the area and was partly behind the increase in migrant departures from al-Maya noted above. In December, contacts reported that this group has now largely disappeared.

The few remaining people-smuggling operations in the area use the Dila fishing port, an area of central Zawiya controlled by the al-Gamodi tribe, which appears to be involved in the smuggling. There are also small embarkation points to the west of Zawiya in Jadam.

Kani Battalion takes over Garabulli and disrupts east-Tripoli system

During 2018 there was a noticeable shift of smuggling activity to the east of Tripoli, reflecting the pressure on the former smuggling hubs in the west and the attractiveness of the coastal towns of Garabulli and al-Khoms as historic hubs with established and experienced smugglers. This increase in departures has been particularly notable since the summer of 2018, with a key departure point being the area of Ghnema, located between al-Khoms and Garabulli.

Garabulli had already played a key role as a smuggling hub prior to 2016. However, in June of that year smuggling activity collapsed after the people of the town turned against the Bayou Battalion, a Misratan militia that ran security around human smuggling and other illicit activities alongside a protection racket.

The battalion's overbearing presence in Garabulli fostered growing resentment, finally leading to an armed altercation between a local and two militiamen, which grew into a confrontation that drew in many townspeople. This fight eventually drove the Bayou Battalion out of the town and temporarily disrupted the

smuggling networks it had been protecting. As in the case of Zuwara, this extraordinary event was given hardly any attention, let alone recognized outside of Libya, providing another potential missed opportunity for engagement with those grassroots initiatives that had an impact on human-smuggling dynamics.

A gradual resumption of business followed this, which accelerated after the collapse of departures from Sabratha. However, the gradual re-emergence of Garabulli as a smuggling hub was undermined again dramatically when forces from the Tarhouna Central Security Forces took over the coastal town on 8 July 2018.

While it was the Central Security Forces that officially made the move, the Kani Battalion (also known as the 7th Infantry Brigade), was the key mover behind the scenes. The Kani Battalion, which has dominated the town of Tarhouna over the past few years, is composed of various security forces with a high representation by Qaddafi-era officers. Although the battalion is led by Colonel al-Sharaf Buzaid, the al-Kani family, under Mohsin and Mohamed al-Kani, are the unit's true decision makers.

The battalion has been expanding aggressively from its Tarhouna base since its formation in 2016. It was among the first militias to adopt a law-enforcement agenda in Libya, and its active targeting of crime led to the widely held belief that Tarhouna is among Libya's most secure towns. From the human-smuggling perspective, the battalion took aim at the activity connecting the neighbouring town of Bani Walid and coastal embarkation points, particularly those in the east; a natural development considering not only the aforementioned focus on crime fighting but also the historic animosity between the towns of Tarhouna and Bani Walid as well as the Kani Battalion's expansionist agenda.

In fact, in the post-revolution years, Bani Walid became a nerve centre for smugglers operating on southern routes, receiving migratory flows from the east as well as the south-west west of Libya, in several warehouses to the south of the town, and feeding coastal hubs all along the coast, all the way from the east, especially Garabulli right up to the Tunisian border.

Beginning operations in 2016, and ramping them up in 2017, the Kani Battalion started actively targeting human- and fuel-smuggling activities on the route between Bani Walid and Msallata (a small town on the way to Zliten, al-Khoms, and Garabulli), with the specific intention of undermining the business of Bani Walid's smugglers. The scope of the activity was limited, but contacts in Tarhouna reported that these operations led to the arrest of more than 20 smugglers in the space of 12 months.

The battalion's takeover of security in Garabulli, took this campaign a step further and allowed it to virtually shut down departures from this coastal town. In the days after the takeover, five cars carrying migrants were intercepted in the town and several Libyan smugglers arrested. This was followed by further arrests and raids during August 2018, both inland as well as at the coast.⁶³

By the end of that month, contacts were reporting that control of the town was split between the local Garabulli Central Security Forces, which controls the area north of the coastal road; and the Kani Battalion/

Tarhouna Central Security Forces, which took control of areas south of the coastal road and the coast itself, while maintaining overall control of the security direction.

Although the battalion was a protagonist in September's war in Tripoli, this commitment of resources has not had a notable impact on its position in Garabulli, where it remains firmly in control. As with other areas that it dominates, the Kani Battalion makes use of force and intimidation to ensure security, with local residents in Garabulli being very wary of crossing the group. Contacts report that, since July 2018, at least 150 people have been arrested in this area in relation to various alleged crimes. Moreover, during interviews with locals, the coastal area was described as largely off limits.

One of the consequences of the Kani Battalion's takeover of Garabulli has been to displace departures to the east. The rugged and inaccessible area of Ghnema, located between Garabulli and al-Khoms, has not been secured so far and thus remains a point of departure. However, since this force's move in July, there have been more reported departures from points east of al-Khoms.

One result of this shift in migrant departures to the east has been a notable increase in the numbers of migrants arriving south of Malta. The Armed Forces of Malta (AFM) directly rescued/intercepted 329 migrants in five distinct operations between 22 July and the end of August. Boats continued to arrive in the waters off Malta throughout the autumn, and the migrants they carried were picked up by the AFM and brought to the island.⁶⁴

The location of these arrivals is an important indicator of the change in departure points, as boats leaving from the east of Garabulli have a greater chance of reaching Maltese territorial waters than do departures further to the west, which typically end up closer to Lampedusa. The absence of European military and private SAR vessels near the Libyan coast added to the chance of boats arriving close to Malta, since these vessels were previously acting as a shield of sorts, taking any migrants rescued from the waters east of Tripoli to Italy.

Bani Walid's waning business and the sharp shift to ransoming

The law-enforcement actions of the Kani Battalion over the past two years have also compounded the problems that East African smuggling networks operating from Bani Walid, and to a lesser extent Shwayrif, have been experiencing over the past years.

Bani Walid has been an important migratory node in northward journeys of sub-Saharan African migrants for many years. However, it really took its place as a central logistics centre in the post-revolution years in the summer of 2015, following the publicized execution of Eritrean and Ethiopian Christians by ISIS in Sirte, a coastal city that they held at the time.⁶⁵ The migrants had been kidnapped from checkpoints held by the terrorists in Nawfaliya and Harawa, two small towns on the route connecting Ajdabiya and Misrata.⁶⁶ These events forced East African *manadeeb* (brokers) to seek to divert their business. By autumn of that year, at least three important smugglers had struck warehousing deals with Libyans in Bani Walid and moved their

operations there, while others followed shortly after. However, the warehousing business established in Bani Walid suffered a series of setbacks over the past few years.

Several of the more important Eritrean smugglers who operated from Bani Walid fled Libya, starting with the notorious Mered Medhanie, who left the country in the second week of June 2015, three months after Italian prosecutors issued an arrest warrant for him and Ethiopian smuggler Ermias Ghermay. Medhanie's business remained operative well into 2017; however, his departure presaged the decline of a transnational criminal network that he had become a protagonist in.

By the end of 2016, the movement of East African migrants (particularly Eritreans and Ethiopians) travelling through the south-east border was being undermined by the law-enforcement activities carried out on the Sudanese side of that border by the RSF, a Sudanese paramilitary group that pools from the Arab Darfur Janjaweed militia. By 2017, the price of passage for a full package journey from Khartoum, complete with the sea crossing, had escalated suddenly to €6 000 (see also Cyrenaica section).

This slowdown reflected itself in a drop in the number of Eritrean migrants reaching Europe from Italy: from 20 718 in 2016⁶⁷ to 7 052 in 2017.⁶⁸ In 2018, the number of Eritreans climbed again to 10 006 at the end of October.⁶⁹ However, this is largely due to a flow of East African migrants who journeyed from Egypt to Libya in the first half of 2018 (see Cyrenaica section), but also because several migrants who were being held in captivity either escaped or were released after the ransom was paid.

In fact, the decline of Bani Walid's human-smuggling business, arguably more than in any other place in Libya, has seen criminal actors switch from monetizing the movement of migrants to their ransoming. The mass breakout⁷⁰ of 140 migrants from a clandestine prison south of the town on 23 May, in which 15 migrants were killed and 25 injured, is especially revealing in this sense.⁷¹ The warehouse – which was geolocated in the September 2018 report of the UN Security Council Panel of Experts on Libya, belonged to the brothers Musa and Mohammed Adyab (also Diyab).⁷²

Some of the migrants who escaped the prison – a group of whom were unaccompanied minors aged between 14 and 17 – said they had been held for two years while their captors sought to extract profit through torture, typically using electricity and molten wax or even waterboarding techniques.

While ransoms in 2015 typically amounted to between US\$2 000 and US\$5 000, contacts within the Eritrean and Somali diasporas revealed during the reporting period that some families paid as much as US\$10 000 to have captive asylum seekers released from warehouses in Bani Walid.

The Adyab brothers are politically connected to the town's authorities, and have played a major role in the people-smuggling business in Bani Walid in recent years, providing a guarded warehouse facility to the different Eritrean smuggling networks operating under their control. Nonetheless, their business has been

in sustained decline, as have other smuggling businesses in this region. Musa Adyab is believed to have left the country in the first half of 2018, while contacts in Bani Walid report that his brother Ahmed has been keeping a very low profile.

Contacts report that these changes came after the Prosecutor General's office in March issued arrest warrants in the brothers' names as part of a list of 200 suspected smugglers and traffickers.⁷³ The scale of the list and the profile of some of the names it contains make it unlikely that it will be pursued exhaustively, and there is to date no evidence to suggest that any major arrests have been made. However, contacts in Bani Walid report that the Adyab brothers have been conditioned by this development and are seeking to negotiate some sort of settlement.

These reports, and news of the skyrocketing ransoms being demanded, point to a winding down of business where criminal actors are trying to extract what they can out of the migrants already under their control rather than looking to do more business in the future.

FEZZAN

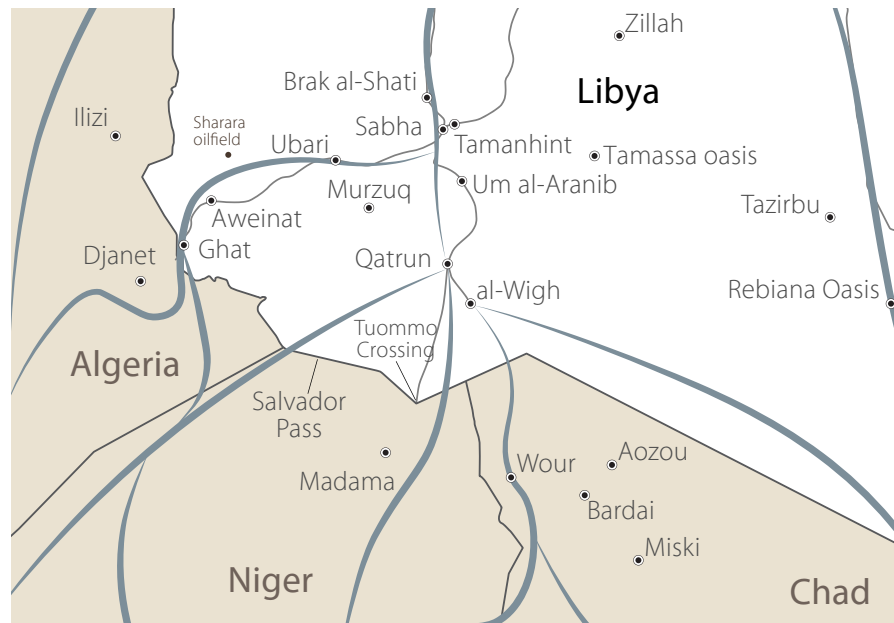
- Fewer migrants have been travelling through the Fezzan in 2018 compared to previous years, due in large part to law-enforcement actions instituted in Niger and Sudan.
- The sudden collapse of the people-smuggling networks on Libya's west coast has also been key, essentially blocking the system of transit hubs connecting Libya's south to the coast.
- The Fezzan's smuggling landscape was further degraded by the outbreak of conflict between the Awlad Suleiman tribe and the Tebu in Sebha in January 2018.
- There was a second disruptive flare-up of violence in mid-October, when Libyan Tebu militias conducted an offensive against foreign armed groups in areas around Um al-Aranib.
- There was no comparable decline reported for migration flows in Tuareg areas, principally because these routes had not recovered from the 2015 war between Tebu and Tuareg communities in Ubari.

War, banditry and reduced flows undermine human-smuggling industry in the south-west

There have been significantly fewer migrants travelling through the Fezzan in 2018 when compared to the level of activity in the previous year. There is no reliable data as to the exact volume of current migratory flows, especially since the law-enforcement activity that is in part responsible for the slowdown has driven human-smuggling dynamics underground. However, contacts in the region have consistently reported that overall migrant flows are significantly reduced.

This development is the result of a complex set of reasons that have to do with developments in the south-west itself as well as with events that took place in neighbouring countries and the coastal areas of Libya.

Map 5: Migratory routes through the Fezzan, December 2018



The primary factor is the law-enforcement actions instituted in both Niger and Sudan since the second half of 2016, which significantly reduced the number of migrants flowing into the region. Almost simultaneously, in about the middle of 2016, Niamey started enforcing a law criminalizing human smuggling that had been passed a year earlier, while the Khartoum government recruited the RSF to patrol the Libya–Sudan border (see Cyrenaica section).

The effect has been significant at both borders. Contacts in Niger’s northern Kawar region and in Qatrun, Libya, reported that the number of migrants coming through the Toummo crossing had decreased significantly by the end of 2016 and that it continued to taper off in the first half of 2017. They have remained low ever since.

The crossing itself is no longer the preferred gateway it used to be before Niamey’s law-enforcement campaign. However, Qatrun, Murzuq and Um al-Aranib remain key towns for human smugglers transporting sub-Saharan migrants from around the pass. These smugglers change entry point from one trip to another in order to avoid detection.

The activity of the RSF at the Sudanese border, on the other hand, has had a negative impact on smuggling routes that formerly cut across Libya’s southern border, connecting Sudan to Qatrun and Um al-Aranib via Kufra and Tazirbu. The slowdown was in part driven by a resumption of the route heading directly north from the Sudanese border and Kufra to the coastal hub of Ajdabiya (see Cyrenaica section). However, the most significant contributing factor was the actions of the RSF, which raised the price of the crossing between Sudan and Libya, reducing the overall number of East African migrants and asylum seekers choosing to travel this way.

'A group of Chadian and Libyan Tebu based in Um al-Aranib used to work only with the Habesh [Eritreans and Ethiopians] in 2015 and 2016. Last year and this year they hardly had any business. They are not even a group any more.'

– *Libyan Tebu from Qatrun, July 2018*

Another important effect relates to the sudden collapse of the people-smuggling networks on Libya's west coast (see Tripolitania section). The events in Sabratha in October 2017 caused a domino effect in transit hubs across Libya, all the way to the south.

Smugglers operating from Zintan and Bani Walid, connecting migrants coming from the southern borders directly to Sabratha, were the hardest hit by the sudden change. From Brak al-Shati, drivers would typically either head to Shwayrif, and from there move to Bani Walid, or cut a route west directly to Zintan, from where migrants would be taken to warehouses in the Ajelat or Surman areas. From these warehouses, the migrants would then be taken to others closer to the coast around Sabratha, Mutrud or Al-Harsha, or else transported directly to embarkation points in these same locations. When coastal departures collapsed, this flow of migrants became blocked.

The clogging effect in Bani Walid was compounded by frequent military operations targeting groups of ISIS operatives south of the town around areas used for human smuggling, and also by the aggressive law-enforcement operations by Tarhouna's Kani Battalion that targeted Bani Walid's interests (see also Tripolitania section).⁷⁴

For those smugglers who did not have the aptitude or the means to monetize migrants through transport, the migrants became a costly liability. During the reporting period, we received multiple credible reports from Sebha, Brak al-Shati, Shwayrif and Bani Walid that suggested an uptick in indentured- and forced-labour activity, as well as ransoming, where the sums of money that migrants and their families are being made to pay have been increasing steeply.

The landscape for the Fezzan's smuggling industry – already fragmented and complex – was further disrupted by the outbreak of a conflict between the Awlad Suleiman tribe and the Tebu in Sebha in January 2018. Sebha is a key hub for people smuggling, and the heavy fighting in the city significantly disrupted the already reduced migratory flows.

Even after hostilities settled following the takeover of the historic Sebha Castle by the Tebu in mid-May, contacts based in Ubari, Murzuq, Sebha, Shwayrif and Bani Walid reported that there continued to be fewer migrants travelling along these routes. However, the war did not kill off movement entirely. Even during the most intense fighting, contacts in Sebha and Murzuq – including those from the Tebu-majority neighbourhood of Hajara and the Tuareg-majority neighbourhood of Taiori (both affected by the fighting that took place) – reported a small number of migrants passing through their areas.

There was a second flare up of violence in mid-October, which also temporarily undermined northbound movement through the Fezzan. During this conflict various Libyan Tebu militias conducted an offensive against foreign armed groups (loosely identified as Chadian Tebu) accused of banditry in areas around Um al-Aranib, to the east of Sebha.

The offensive was spearheaded by the Khalid bin Walid Brigade (also known as the 104 Brigade) – a Madkhali Salafist-leaning Tebu militia from Um al-Aranib, commanded by Yousef Hussain Saleh – and the Waw Brigade for Border Protection.

Some of the fighting in October took place in the area of the Tamassa oasis, north-east of Um al-Aranib, and also at the ‘Chinese-company’ site on the edge of Um al-Aranib.⁷⁵ The latter, a large housing project developed by a Chinese company, was abandoned in an unfinished state during the revolution. After 2011, local communities moved in and took control, renting units out to Tebu and others from across southern Libya and the Sahel. Eventually the apartments were occupied by diverse groups from across the region, often those rejected by their own tribes who appear sometimes to be referred to as a single group – the Niqzaa. In this process, the apartments became bases for bandits operating in the region and generally seen as a plague to the south.

Other Tebu militias from across the Fezzan were sucked into the offensive against these foreign armed groups, most notably the Um al-Aranib Martyrs Brigade, led by Barka Sharfadin, and reportedly a long list of others from Wadi al-Shati, Sebha, Murzuq, Um al-Aranib and Qatrun.⁷⁶ The Khalid bin Walid Brigade even claimed that it had chased the Chadian gangs 130 kilometres into Chad before turning back due to lack of supplies and air cover.⁷⁷

Although the fighting was reportedly triggered by a series of escalating kidnappings and attacks over the previous weeks in the region, and in Um al-Aranib specifically, the breadth of the coalition reflected deeper anxieties among Tebu communities at the perceived involvement of Chadian Tebu and Guraan militiamen in the banditry crisis sweeping the Fezzan.

The Tebu had secured Sebha Castle in May following a battle that was fought against the background of aspersions by the coalition of Arab armed groups they were fighting, which branded virtually all Tebu fighters in that war as being Chadian mercenary groups causing trouble in the region.

This brought hostility to the Libyan Tebu and pressure had been building on them to act, both to defuse this hostility and to remove the justification for an outside intervention in their areas. Tebu contacts report that plans for an offensive of this sort had been coordinated over previous months. However, the emergence during the offensive of ties between the LNA and the Khalid bin Walid Brigade derailed this sense of common purpose.

The short-term impact of the fighting was to dramatically reduce the number of migrants, with the route from Qatrun being blocked completely on the Libyan side. However, the situation around Um al-Aranib now seems to have settled somewhat. Contacts report that many of the foreign fighters present in the area have not returned since the offensive in October, with some moving towards Chad to engage in the rebellion there. Others remain at the Chinese-company buildings; however, they have struck a deal with the local tribes in Um al-Aranib to limit their movement in exchange for being left in peace.

Migration through Ghat continues at low levels with a political changing of the guard

Unlike the rest of the Fezzan, the Tuareg areas were not reported to have experienced a dramatic decline in human-smuggling activity in 2018 over the previous year, but this is principally because the routes via Ghat and Ubari have never really recovered from the significant reduction in numbers that occurred as a result of the fighting between the Tebu and the Tuareg around Ubari throughout 2015.⁷⁸

During 2017, the crackdown in Niger was actually reported to be having a displacement effect on the routes to Libya going through southern Algeria. Migrants who follow this historic route typically cross from hubs like Agadez to the mining town of Arlit before reaching the town of Assamaka on the Niger–Algeria border. They then travel to In Guezzam, on the Algerian side of the border, before typically converging on the Tuareg hub of Tamanrasset, which is also a collection point for migrants crossing into Algeria from Mali.

From here, migrants travel through the Algerian towns of Djanet and Illizi headed for Ghat, Uweinat and eventually Ubari. From Illizi, migrants also journey to Ghadames, although reports received for this route indicate that movement of migrants through Ghadames is now minimal.

Throughout 2017, contacts in Sebha, Ghat and Ubari reported on an increase in the number of migrants transiting through Ghat and Ubari, both those stopping to work in the region as well as those journeying north. This corresponded with interviews with contacts in Niger who reported on experimentation by some Tuareg human smugglers using remote oasis towns like Timia in the Air mountains, or gold-mining sites like Tchibarakatene close to the Algerian border on their way to Ghat. Significantly, during this time, human smugglers were also reported to be using the Salvador Pass to transport migrants to Uweinat and Ubari, in spite of the fact that this area is considered a high-risk border crossing associated with high-end drug trafficking, and movements of terrorists and bandits.

However, targeted border activity in January and February 2018 at south of the Salvador Pass, coupled with an escalation of border patrols in key points of the Niger/Algeria border, appear to have dissuaded much of this activity.

This border has also seen the phenomenon of armed groups positioning themselves as law-enforcement partners against human smuggling. The Barrier Forces (Quat at-Tawq) led by Abdel Malik Fikki, a mixed but

predominantly Tuareg force based in Ghat, took upon itself an anti-crime role in 2018, modelling itself broadly on the Salafist militias of the Tripolitania, particularly Rada, with which it enjoys a working relationship.

Although the force cannot be described as a consistently Salafist body, it does include Madkhali elements in it. The group is made up of fighters from Ghat and Ubari who fought ISIS in Sirte under Bunyan Marsous in 2016 and which returned to the south-west with a significant addition of technical vehicles and weapons taken from fallen ISIS fighters in Sirte. There have been no signs, however, that their work has had any tangible impact on human smuggling in the area.

Meanwhile, there have been some realignments in Tuareg politics. On 27 August a Tuareg conference in Ubari merged the three bodies formerly representing the Tuareg into one: the Supreme Social Council of the Tuareg Tribes. On 31 August, Mulay Egededi, the former mayor of Ubari, was appointed as head of this new body. The move was a major blow to Hussein al-Koni, the former head of the Social Council of Tuareg Tribes and protégé of the respected Tuareg leader Ali Kanna. While al-Koni was widely recognized as the leading figure of the Tuareg, his inability to deliver after three years led to a loss of faith in his leadership. One major issue was his baggage as a pro-Qaddafi figure, which people felt left him unable to deliver for the Tuareg.

Part of the background to this appears to be fear among Tuareg about the presence of jihadists sheltering in their territories, a common sentiment that a contact summarized in this way: 'If we don't stand together and expel the jihadis from among us, we will be inviting a foreign occupation.' The appointment of Egededi and the general desire to address the jihadist presence in Tuareg territories may reinforce local support for a planned EU mission to enhance border-guard facilities and capacity in the area around Ghat – a project that enjoys significant support among armed groups and law-enforcement units in the area.

The great game to secure the Fezzan

The periodic outbreaks of violence in the Fezzan have taken place against a backdrop of chronic crises of banditry and collapsing living standards. These issues are affecting all communities living across the south-west and have led to deepening alienation from the north of the country, which they feel has abandoned them. Recently this anger fueled the emergence and popularity of the Fezzan Rage, a protest movement against the social crises led by Bashir al-Sheikh.

On 9 December, the Fezzan Rage succeeded in having the Sharara oilfield shut down, though contacts reported this was partly a cover for the guards at the site to put pressure on the authorities to pay unpaid salaries and accede to other demands.⁷⁹ Despite a visit to the field by Sarraj, and promises that the field would be reopened, on 17 December the NOC – which has taken a tough stance since the start – declared *force majeure*.⁸⁰ It has reportedly insisted on the field staying closed until alternative security arrangements are in place, as it does not want to encourage future takeovers.⁸¹

These crises have not had a direct impact on people smuggling. Unlike locals or even some government figures, people smugglers are organized and well-armed, which insulates them from the risk of low-level

banditry. This in spite of the fact that, unlike the way human-smuggling dynamics developed in the north-west before 2017, where militia protection had begun giving shape to hierarchical structures of control, in the Fezzan, the activity has largely remained horizontal, with various small- and medium-scale players acting as independent units.

Nonetheless, banditry and falling living standards are two important drivers in the game being played to secure Libya's south, which in turn could have lasting impact on the organization of the region's illicit markets.

Perhaps the most active and dynamic outside efforts to secure the Fezzan are being made by the LNA, particularly around the area of Greater Sebha, which it has been seeking to capture for some years. Up until early 2017, the LNA had been competing in this endeavour with the Third Force, a Misratan contingent that at the time controlled the Tamanhint airbase, which overlooks the main road from Sebha to Bani Walid, as well as the Sharara oilfield. For its part, the LNA controlled the Brak al-Shati base, which overlooks the main road from Sebha to Shwayrif. The definitive moment in this drawn-out competition came in May 2017, when the Third Force abruptly surrendered the Tamanhint airbase to the LNA.

Contacts in the region had been consistently reporting prior to this that the Third Force had overstayed its welcome. However, this dissatisfaction was catalyzed by the massacre of more than 100 soldiers and civilians at Brak al-Shati by a mixed group of Third Force and Islamist fighters on 18 May 2017, triggering demands from local communal leaders for the Misratans to depart. The LNA then consolidated this victory, expelling the Misratans and their Benghazi Defense Brigade allies from the Jufra Military Airbase in the beginning of June. In the process, the LNA consolidated control over the north of the Fezzan, most pertinently from a people-smuggling perspective as this included the main gateways to Sebha, from Hun to Tamanhint, and from Shwayrif to Brak al-Shati.

However, having expelled its rivals, the LNA encountered similar difficulties in establishing its authority, which would impinge on the interests of powerful local groups and threaten its foothold in the south. By mid-2018, the LNA's presence in this area remained patchy. While locals reported that security on the road between Brak Shati and Shwayrif, had markedly improved, the LNA no longer has full control of the road between Tamanhint and Jufra, which has become very unsafe. The Man-Made River infrastructure roads are also not secured.

In Sebha itself security has also become very fragmented, particularly following the war between the Awlad Suleiman and the Tebu in January. There are presently three joint security rooms in Sebha that we could identify. The first, led by Omar Suf al-Jin, is a pro-LNA, Magarha-dominated organization called the Sebha Joint Operations Room. This organization is mostly associated with the 12th Infantry Brigade led by Mohammed Bin Nayl. The second, the Sebha Joint Security Room, has a significant presence of militias from Awlad Suleiman, and the third, the Sebha Security Room (Triangle Formation), is principally but not exclusively Tebu-led (it also includes Gaddadfa and Tuareg fighters).

Over the summer of 2018 there was growing recognition that the divisions in Sebha were undermining the security of all and urgently needed to be addressed. During August and September there were openings between the Awlad Suleiman and the Tebu-dominated Sebha security formations, culminating in a meeting held on 21 September.⁸² However, there has been little progress since.

The LNA has been consistently seeking to play a part in this reconfiguring of a more coherent security structure and to enhance its power in the south. Previously, Khalifa Haftar had been relying on local figures, such as Mohammed Bin Nayl and Massoud Jeddi, to increase control on the ground. However, contacts reported that these figures were unable or unwilling to do so due to the cost and the division it would cause in their own communities. Partly in response to these difficulties, on 6 September Haftar issued a decree forming the South Operations Group, to be based in Tamanhint and led by Wanis Bukhamada, the veteran commander of the Saiqa Special Forces.⁸³

Bukhamada is very well regarded as a commander across the political and tribal divide. His appointment represented the best effort so far by the LNA to increase its influence in the Fezzan under the guise of eliminating armed groups and suppressing the smuggling of drugs, arms and people. However, this initiative has also run up against the opposition of powerful local interests, particularly among the Tebu. At the end of 2018, contacts reported that the South Operations Group had not been able to make an impact and that Bukhamada was not in fact based in Tamanhint.

The LNA has also sought to cultivate ties among Tebu groups further south, in Um al-Aranib. These efforts became particularly apparent during the discussed fighting around Um al-Aranib in October, after which the LNA published photos showing the leadership of the Khalid bin Walid Brigade, including Saleh, meeting with Haftar and other LNA-aligned figures from the south.⁸⁴ Prior to this, on 19 October Haftar had ordered operation 'Murzuq Basin' to eliminate foreign gangs in the south in support of the Tebu offensive taking place at the time.⁸⁵

However, the LNA's actions were strongly opposed by other Tebu groups, such as the Um al-Aranib Martyrs Brigade, which do not want Haftar to have a presence in the south; a sentiment that is diffused among Tebu armed groups especially after the support the LNA gave Awlad Suleiman during the January war.

On 24 October, in response to the meeting with Haftar, the Um al-Aranib Martyrs Brigade denied having any relationship with what it called the Karama militia.⁸⁶ Contacts reported that Saleh was seen to have crossed the line in facilitating the LNA's efforts to intervene in their areas and had ruined his standing. Out of the public eye, the Khalid bin Walid Brigade was told to break off public relations with the LNA.

However, when the Um al-Aranib Martyrs Brigade received no support from the GNA after distancing itself from Haftar in this way, they surmised that there must be an agreement in place between the LNA and the GNA over the Fezzan, likely with international backing. Facing this potential, and fearing that the moment

may be approaching when Haftar feels prepared to make another big move in the Fezzan, they backtracked from their public anti-Haftar stance and claimed that the original statement had been a fake.

This political back and forth is emblematic of the current state of the LNA's strategy in the Fezzan – there continues to be strong opposition to it from some local groups, but there is a sense that the LNA's influence will inevitably continue to grow.

What Haftar's growing influence over – and potential dominance of – Fezzan might mean for people smuggling is unclear and so far impossible to predict. Any efforts to close the border and end smuggling activities will be met with widespread opposition, as it is an economic lifeline for too many people, including key LNA allies, such as the Magarha. As a result, the LNA would face pressure not to suppress the already depressed migratory flows through the Fezzan. On the other hand, it is likely that the LNA will continue flying the flag of border security and smuggling as a way to attract Western support (see Cyrenaica section).

Simultaneously, there is also considerable regional interest in securing southern Libya. The most prominent initiative is an agreement to cooperate on border control and monitoring signed by Libya (the GNA), Niger, Chad and Sudan in June 2018. There have been numerous high-level follow-on meetings to hash out the details. On 8 August, a ministerial meeting in Khartoum on enhancing security and border control between the four countries resolved to set up a joint operations centre based in the Chadian capital, N'Djamena.

The initiative reflects the concerns that each of these countries has about the porosity of their shared borders. Sudan, Chad and Niger are primarily motivated by the armed groups operating inside Libyan territory, with the emphasis on border security and combatting smuggling primarily viewed as a means to attract international funding. Nonetheless, it is a serious effort to improve coordination of security in this area that will support future anti-people-smuggling efforts.

While this formal agreement has been concluded with the GNA, there have been various parallel diplomatic efforts involving Haftar and the LNA, reflecting the latter's greater capacity to deliver. On 7 August Haftar visited the Nigerien capital, Niamey, where he met with President Mahamadou Issoufou (a day before the ministerial meeting involving the GNA in Khartoum).⁸⁷ According to Libyan media, Haftar was invited by Issoufou and the talks were primarily military in nature, focusing largely on border security.⁸⁸ Haftar was also in N'Djamena around 17 October to meet with the Chadian president, Idriss Déby. According to the website of the president, they discussed the security situation in southern Libya – this was during the Tebu-led offensive against Chadian groups around Um al-Aranib.

CYRENAICA

- During 2018 the migratory flows from the east and south-east converging on Ajdabiya increased, after a period in which the former hub had lost importance due to insecurity in the region.
- This increase in flow was mainly driven by groups of East African asylum seekers, who had been stranded in Cairo or Alexandria, crossing the Egyptian border and heading for the west coast.
- However, the flow has since diminished, likely because Eritreans are less willing to make the trip to Libya due to the difficulty of onward travel to Europe.
- In the south-east, the Kufra Military Zone issued decrees in December targeting people smuggling and conducted unusual interceptions at a checkpoint north of Kufra town.
- However, the force's ability to effectively suppress smuggling in the town is severely hampered by its reliance on local armed groups involved in smuggling, such as Subul al-Salam.
- While recent efforts may prove divisive locally, they are likely an attempt to signal to European countries that the LNA is a valuable partner in managing migration.

Map 6: Migratory routes in north Cyrenaica, December 2018



Ajdabiya partially regains role as smuggling hub

Migration routes from the east and south-east converging on Ajdabiya have been relatively quiet in recent years, after being diverted by securitization and the threat of terrorism. The town was formerly a major hub on the East Africa route, with important Eritrean and Sudanese smuggling networks having had bases there.

However, the kidnapping and slaughter of Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants by ISIS near the town of Nawfaliya (on the route between Ajdabiya and Tripoli) in the summer of 2015 put migrants off using this route (see also

Bani Walid section).⁸⁹ Moreover, the securitization of the area due to terrorist activity, and during the conflict for control of the Oil Crescent, effectively shut it down as a smuggling hub during 2016 and 2017.

However, in the first half of 2018, contacts reported steady human-smuggling activity, which appeared to intensify during the summer months. These flows include some migrants smuggled from the Sudanese border to Ajdabiya via hubs in the south-east, such as Kufra and Tazirbu. However, the increase observed over the summer primarily concerned the movement of migrants crossing the Egyptian border. During this period, the route was reportedly used by a few hundred East African migrants each month.

Contacts in Bani Walid and Ajdabiya, as well as the East African diaspora, reported that East African migrants, especially Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers, were being smuggled along this route in steady numbers. Many of these migrants came from a large group of East African asylum seekers who were stranded in the poorer neighbourhoods of Cairo and Alexandria and unable to make an independent livelihood in the country, nor to proceed northward due to Egyptian law enforcement and the navy's prevention of departures from the coastal areas.

East African migrants were typically being charged US\$1 500–US\$2 000 (€1 280–€1 700) for a complete journey from Alexandria to Bani Walid or Tripoli. There are two routes that appeared to be used: the first loosely follows the coastal road from Ajdabiya to the town of Abugrein (100 kilometres south of Misrata), while the second route (likely the one most used by smugglers), follows the movement of cargo headed west from Ajdabiya and also includes some desert treks.

In both cases, the main entry point was from locations near the al-Salloum border crossing on the Egyptian side. However, contacts in Bayda, Ajdabiya and Bani Walid reported that the border area between the Siwa Oasis (in Egypt) and Jaghbub was also being used for migrant smuggling.

These flows have since settled, according to information received through ongoing monitoring. We assess that this is because the demand from Eritreans to travel to Libya has reduced, a reflection of the difficulty of onward travel to Europe from Libyan ports and the dangers Eritrean migrants face there.

During the summer of 2018, the IOM also recorded a relative increase in Egyptians crossing the border at Emsaed, both at the official crossing point of al-Salloum and at unofficial points.⁹⁰ However, this followed a period of relatively low figures and is likely the result of ordinary seasonal fluctuations.

The Egyptian military has heightened its presence on the Egyptian side of the Egypt–Libya border in an effort to control the movement of terrorists, drugs and guns. However, the vast border remains porous. As with other border areas, local communities who straddle both countries use their networks to dominate smuggling routes. On the Egypt–Libya border this role is played principally by the Awlad Ali tribe, a Bedouin community settled in a vast area that spreads eastwards from the coastal border.

In addition to involvement in other illicit flows, the Awlad Ali tribe is known to be active in people smuggling. In the first half of July, police officers in the village of al-Bidhan (30 kilometres east of Ajdabiya) arrested three Libyan smugglers and intercepted 131 Egyptian migrants who had crossed into Libya without documentation. One of the smugglers was from the Awlad Ali tribe. Under interrogation, the smugglers revealed they charged migrants 6 000 Egyptian pounds (roughly €290) to be smuggled across the border and delivered to Libyan cities in the Cyrenaica.

Kufra Military Zone forms a new border-control body and issues decrees, but will struggle to have an impact

Since the most recent set of regional conflicts, the Kufra region has been broadly divided between an alliance of mostly Zway armed groups nominally following the LNA's Kufra Military Zone, commanded by Belqasim al-Abaaj, and local Tebu groups. Although the Tebu consider themselves the original inhabitants of Kufra town, the Zway settled the oasis in the 1840s and have dominated the area since, now making up 40 000 of the local population to the Tebu's 10 000.⁹¹ Competition between the two groups broke out in the open after 2011. While the LNA was initially in an alliance with the Tebu, who fought alongside it in Benghazi, the LNA dramatically switched sides during a war between the two groups in the summer of 2015. This manipulation and the subsequent peace deal secured Zway support for the LNA and placed it as the central power broker in the region. It also led to the creation of the Subul al-Salam militia. Subul al-Salam, which is a largely Zway militia, has since come to be the dominant military force in the south east of Libya, playing a key but ambiguous role in the LNA's hegemony and its regulation of people smuggling (see below).

In the current disposition, the Zway forces have full control of Kufra town and the routes north of the town as far as Jaghbub. To the south, they are mostly in control of the area that stretches from the meeting point of Libyan, Egyptian and Sudanese borders, as far west as the al-Sara airfield (located approximately 300 kilometres south-west of Kufra town). The Tebu formerly held sway over much of the western stretch of this area, but internal Tebu frictions between the Teda (broadly speaking, a high-caste Tebu group) and others such as the Guraan/Daza and the Mirdiya, allowed Zway forces to expand westwards. We assess that this change in territorial control may be one factor in the undermining of the people-smuggling routes that previously carried East Africans westwards along Libya's southern border to hubs such as Um al-Aranib and Sebha (see the Fezzan section).

Tebu groups remain dominant in the areas to the west of the al-Sara airfield, right up to Tebu-majority towns in the south-west, such as Um al-Aranib and Qatrun. However, their connectivity to Sudan has been undermined.

The Zway areas of Kufra are nominally under the command of the Kufra Military Zone. Towards the end of November there were signs that the Kufra Military Zone was seeking to step up its efforts to target people smuggling and other criminal activity in areas it has leverage over in the south-east.

Perhaps the most significant development has been the formation of the Border Protection company, which is led by Marwan Labirush, who met with al-Abaaj on 3 December.⁹² Contacts report that this company

is intended to conduct border patrols in light of the 2018 UN Panel of Experts report that accused the Subul al-Salam militia of involvement in people smuggling on the border with Sudan (see below). Contacts reported that the company is active despite pressure on it from those who otherwise benefit from people smuggling, particularly the leadership of Subul al-Salam.

On 3 December al-Abaaj also issued a number of decrees concerning transport, which were designed in part to control people smuggling.⁹³ These included not transporting passengers to the north without observing formal procedures; not taking passengers and their families to the north unless they can be identified; the requirement for bus companies to prepare a list detailing passengers, bus number and the identity of the driver for the authorities to reference, and for departures to be restricted to between 6 a.m. and 2 p.m.

Prior to this, on 21 November the Kufra Military Zone issued a warning to drivers that they risk confiscation of their vehicles if intercepted outside the earth berm (rampart) constructed in about 2013 near Kufra town.⁹⁴ The berm was originally intended to control movement during the conflict with the local Tebu. This decree is likely an effort to canalize traffic and make monitoring of smuggling and other criminal activity easier.

There have also been a number of recent raids and interceptions that appear more focused and substantial than past efforts. On 29 November, the 452 Battalion of the Kufra Military Zone, based at the Buzurayq checkpoint located 200 kilometres north of Kufra on the main road, announced it had detained 50 migrants of Chadian and Sudanese nationality heading to northern cities.⁹⁵ They were reportedly travelling in small cars with tinted windows when they passed through the Buzurayq checkpoint. The Kufra Military Zone reported that the driver was from Kufra and the migrants were being smuggled from Kufra to the north.

On 3 December, the 452 Battalion once again detained 72 migrants heading from the south to northern cities.⁹⁶ The next day, the Kufra Military Zone announced⁹⁷ it had confiscated three vehicles being used for people smuggling, having reportedly confiscated⁹⁸ six trucks used for smuggling in two incidents in November.⁹⁹

Earlier in July, al-Abaaj undertook an aerial reconnaissance mission along the south-east border as far as Awaynat Mountain – a strategic area bordering on Egypt, Sudan, Libya and Chad.¹⁰⁰ The report stated that the Kufra Military Zone had confiscated eight trucks that were being used to smuggle fuel and goods to Chad, and that al-Abaaj instructed the Libyan air force to target any terrorist columns entering the military zone without the need for prior coordination.

Contacts report that al-Abaaj, who is Zway, is a relatively credible actor in law enforcement. He was appointed to head the Kufra Military Zone in March 2018 as part of an initiative called Operation Law Enforcement. He was the military intelligence chief in Kufra under Qaddafi, and had been responsible for dealing with opposition groups in neighbouring countries. The Tebu managed to detain al-Abaaj in November 2011, and he was imprisoned in Misrata and only released in 2017.

Nonetheless, while it has been al-Abaaj's mandate to target smuggling and criminality in Kufra since he took up the post, his ability to achieve this is severely limited by the social realities on the ground and the compromised assets available to him. The formation of the Border Protection company underlines the desire of the LNA to be seen as a potential partner on the migration issue. However, there is not yet any evidence that the company will help al-Abaaj overcome these basic challenges.

Contacts also doubted that the recent decrees would be particularly effective in suppressing people smuggling to the north of Kufra. Smugglers use small vehicles with tinted windows to transport migrants outside of the earth berm to isolated areas where monitoring is very hard, and from there north. In the absence of a reliable law-enforcement body, it will be difficult to address this. Contacts were also concerned that the measures could exacerbate existing tensions in Kufra.

In fact, it seems likely that the recent surge in operations and the issuing of decisions was connected to a visit made by Haftar to Italy in early December, during which he met with Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and the American ambassador.¹⁰¹

There was speculation that Haftar was meeting with Conte to discuss, in part, the LNA's ability to address Italy's migration concerns. The 'Between Libya and Italy' blog noted that Haftar had previously shown plans to Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Enzo Milanese during his visit to the east.¹⁰² The plans reportedly described a system involving patrol forces, barracks and air transport to control the southern border.

These plans, the formation of the Border Protection company and the series of interceptions of migrants fit a well-established pattern of attracting western support and funding by posing as effective bulwarks to migration.

Some LNA-aligned forces in Kufra remain compromised

The Kufra Military Zone's efforts to target smuggling are often treated with a degree of scepticism by observers, due to the compromised nature of the forces it relies upon, particularly the Zway-dominated Subul al-Salam militia. Subul al-Salam has doubtless played a part in law enforcement in remote areas, for example targeting¹⁰³ foreign fuel smugglers during desert patrols and providing security against foreign armed groups.¹⁰⁴ However, it also partially controls people smuggling on the Sudan-Libya border, along with the RSF, led by Mohamed Hamad Dagolo (aka Hemmeti).

This paramilitary organisation, which was given a border-force task in 2016 by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, is mostly composed of former Janajweed fighters from Sudanese Arab tribes that led a violent counter-insurgency effort against insurgent fighters as well as civilian populations during the Darfur war of 2003–2010.

The combined anti-smuggling activity of these two groups on the Sudan-Libya border has led to an increase in prices over the past few years. Research conducted during the reporting period indicated that full

packages from Khartoum to Libya, with the sea crossing included, sold by Eritrean and Ethiopian smugglers, had gone up from €2 500/€3 500 in 2016 to €5 000/€6 000 in 2017.

However, the 2018 UN Panel of Experts Report accused Subul al-Salam of involvement in migrant smuggling, claiming it provided escorts to migrant convoys from the Sudanese border to Kufra.¹⁰⁵ It also reportedly holds migrants at the al-Himayya camp in Kufra, where there have been accusations of extortion and forced labour.

The Kufra Municipality and the Kufra Shura Council denounced these accusations. Civil society groups also reportedly rejected the UN report's findings. However, information received from contacts during the summer of 2018 supports the claims of the UN Panel of Experts. Moreover, we received credible reports of cooperation between Subul al-Salam and the RSF, whereby they relay migrants across the territories they control with the Libyan militiamen reportedly wearing police uniforms and driving police cars. Independent research carried out by the Clingendael Institute and Global Initiative independently in 2017 and 2018 also strongly indicated that elements of the RSF have been involved in human smuggling both directly and indirectly, taxing and transporting migrants across the Sudan–Libya border.

The ambiguous roles of both Subul al-Salam and the RSF likely reflects the fact that their engagement in human smuggling is opportunistic and not a central strategy. Both groups also receive funding from their patrons – the LNA and the Sudanese President's Office respectively – which may be more important to them than revenues derived from people smuggling. On the other hand, contacts reported in December that Subul al-Salam is still involved in people smuggling, showing it may be unwilling or unable to discipline its forces to break more decisively with criminal activity.

SAHEL

NIGER: MIGRANT-SMUGGLING INDUSTRY SHRINKS AND ADAPTS TO NEW NORMAL

- Migrant flows have reduced drastically since the enforcement of a law criminalizing human smuggling in mid-2016 and 2017.
- Fewer smugglers are in operation and those remaining have adapted their methods: transporting fewer migrants, departing at night, avoiding city centres and driving along remote routes.
- Some actors formerly involved in human smuggling have also switched to other forms of criminal business, such as drug trafficking.
- The economic blow to the region, compounded by the closure of a major gold-mining site in Djado, has caused resentment, particularly among Tebu communities.
- Peace negotiations between Niamey and the Nigerien Tebu rebel group MJRN could be an opportunity to smooth over some of these grievances.

Near the beginning of 2017, northern Niger suffered two consecutive blows to its economy, resulting in a profound transformation of the region. The first happened in the summer of 2016, when the Nigerien government started enforcing law 2015/036, a legislative measure that effectively criminalized human smuggling by ratifying the 2000 protocol on human smuggling supplementing the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime in May 2015.¹⁰⁶

Up to that point, Niger's human-migration industry within the country's territories was to a large part legal and supported a sizeable migration-related industry that had been developed over decades. Much of that activity came to a halt in the country's primary hub in Agadez, when Niamey launched its law-enforcement campaign, which reached a peak¹⁰⁷ towards the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017 when hundreds of actors involved in the migrant industry were arrested.¹⁰⁸

The second blow occurred around this same period, when the Nigerien government shut down the Djado goldfield, a vast gold-mining complex 240 kilometres north-east of Dirkou and 170 kilometres south-west of Madama, between February and March 2017.¹⁰⁹ As the country's largest artisanal-mining area, the Djado goldfield contained about 60 sites spread over more than 200 square kilometres and hosted up to 50 000 miners, according to some estimates.¹¹⁰

Officially, the closure of these important mining sites was justified on the basis of public security and the need to regulate extraction from these mineral-rich areas. In particular, Niamey pointed to the magnetic effect that the mine was having on armed foreign miners and bandits from neighbouring countries, destabilizing the area. While this is true, the Djado goldfield also happens to sit on the primary migratory route connecting Agadez with hubs in southern Libya, which means that if it remained open, policing movement in the areas around it would have been all the more difficult.



As in other parts of the Sahel, for many miners the gold rush did not deliver the windfall promised by the rumour mill that captivated thousands of workers from all over the region. However, it did provide an alternative source of income for many Nigerien communities. Critically, gold mining also provided an alternative to individuals who were previously involved in the migration industry and had decided to stop in order to avoid problems with the law.

The strategy had the desired effect of drastically reducing the northward flow of migrants, in particular to Libya. While there is no data with which to verify Niamey's claim that northbound flows have been reduced by 90%, it is clear, based on several interviews with smugglers, middlemen, community leaders as well as migrants in Niger and Libya throughout the reporting period, that the smuggling industry shrunk dramatically during 2017 and 2018.¹¹¹

In the process, however, these changes have had important implications for the region and have fuelled strong grievances among northern Nigeriens – especially within Tebu and Tuareg communities – which intensified in 2018 as Agadez and other towns were transformed from transit destinations to the recipients of migrants from neighbouring countries as well as expelled migrants from Algeria.

Human smuggling goes clandestine

Although smugglers no longer join organized convoys, which was what used to happen at the height of the migration crisis in 2015, Niger's human-smuggling system still exists, only it now involves a fraction of the smugglers and they have moved their business underground. From hundreds of smugglers, local smugglers interviewed in July and August estimated there are only between 15 and 20 who are still active in Agadez city, which remains the primary focal point for migrants headed to Libya and, to a lesser extent, Algeria.

The most immediate shift that resulted from the 2016 law-enforcement campaign relates to the visibility of operations. The owners of so-called ghettos inside the city of Agadez, where hundreds of migrants would stay while waiting to make their journey north, were the first to be hit. This business was almost entirely above board, considering that many of the migrants journeying through Niger would have been from countries within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

However, as the transportation of migrants to the borders started being targeted, accommodation for transiting migrants became more clandestine. Accommodation is now much smaller in scale than some of the facilities previously associated with this business. Ghettos do still exist in suburban Agadez districts such as Misrata, Pays-Bas, Dagmanet, and Tedrassa, but they are smaller and ghetto owners will often switch between different locations so as not to attract attention. Smugglers often host migrants on their own properties or in houses belonging to close connections, and in many cases they have moved out of the city itself.

Smugglers have also changed the timing of departures, specifically choosing periods when law-enforcement presence is weaker to make their journeys. Again, prior to the criminalization of human smuggling, the

transportation of migrants was organized to the point where convoys typically departed on Mondays with the official trade convoy and its military escort.

Departures now take place at night, or on days or times of the day when there are fewer officials on duty, such as on weekends. Moreover, there has been some overlap with the gold-mining industry in the region, with former smugglers turning to transportation jobs in this industry but also at times using this activity as a cover for human smuggling – mixing West African irregular migrants with Nigerien miners and then using mining sites as stop overs for the onward journey. This is done both on the routes from southern hubs, such as Niamey and Zinder, as well as on legs north of Agadez.

One of the more consequential shifts concerns the experimentation with desert routes that are far more dangerous than the more predictable convoy trail followed by drivers prior to the law-enforcement campaign of 2016. Recorded migrant deaths in the desert increased sixfold between 2015 (71) and 2017 (427), according to IOM data.¹¹² Although this may be indicative of a greater number of accidents taking place in the desert, it could also be the result of increased rescue missions in the region by IOM.

The convoys still depart from Agadez every Monday and head out to a military base in Turayatt, a town 80 kilometres north of Agadez city. However, migrants no longer join these convoys, apart from the few exceptions of Sudanese or Hausa-speaking migrants who join the convoys on their way to gold-mining sites in the north.

Instead, smugglers have been venturing further out into the desert (see below more detailed discussion of routes) where the risk of being attacked by armed bandits has grown over the past two years. For instance, in the first quarter of 2018, triangulated reports from contacts on both sides of Niger's border with Libya reported that some migrants were being transported through the Salvador Pass – a remote strategic crossing point on the Niger–Libya border.

Banditry has been a reality in northern Niger for several years, but the criminal and mercenary opportunities created by the conflicts in Libya and Mali, as well as the discovery of gold across the Sahel, have exacerbated the problem.

During the reporting period, we have also received notice of former human smugglers turning to banditry after their business was undermined by law-enforcement activity. However, this does not appear to be a significant phenomenon. The more significant trade change relates to drivers turning to the more 'discreet' drug trafficking, to make up for lost profits.

Prior to 2015 some drivers working in the migration business could earn roughly between FCFA2 million and FCFA3 million a week (€3 000–€4 500). Nigerien security officials in Niamey and Agadez corroborated this information, particularly in respect to the market for prescription drugs, especially tramadol, which is an opioid that has grown in popularity in Niger itself, as well as in Libya.

Tebu and Tuareg smugglers have taken advantage of the opportunity to import tramadol principally from Katsina State in Nigeria, zigzagging through Maradi or Zinder, up to Agadez.

Beyond this displacement into drug smuggling, the operational changes that human smuggling has undergone have meant significantly higher costs for migrant smugglers. For instance, one Tuareg smuggler who has been operating on the Agadez–Sebha route for more than 15 years reported that his fuel expenses have doubled. The trip to Sebha requires about 400 litres of fuel, costing him about FCFA220 000 (€145 000), while the return leg costs less, as fuel in Libya is cheaper and he normally travels back with a cargo of people, tramadol and subsidized goods that pay for the journey.

Another factor impacting smugglers' cost base is related to bribes paid to security forces. Smugglers interviewed between July and October reported paying between FCFA200 000 and FCFA500 000 (about €300–€760) to escape arrest when they are intercepted by military patrols in the desert. Overall, different smugglers report that the situation is far more stringent than it used to be and also that they are now asked to pay bigger bribes.

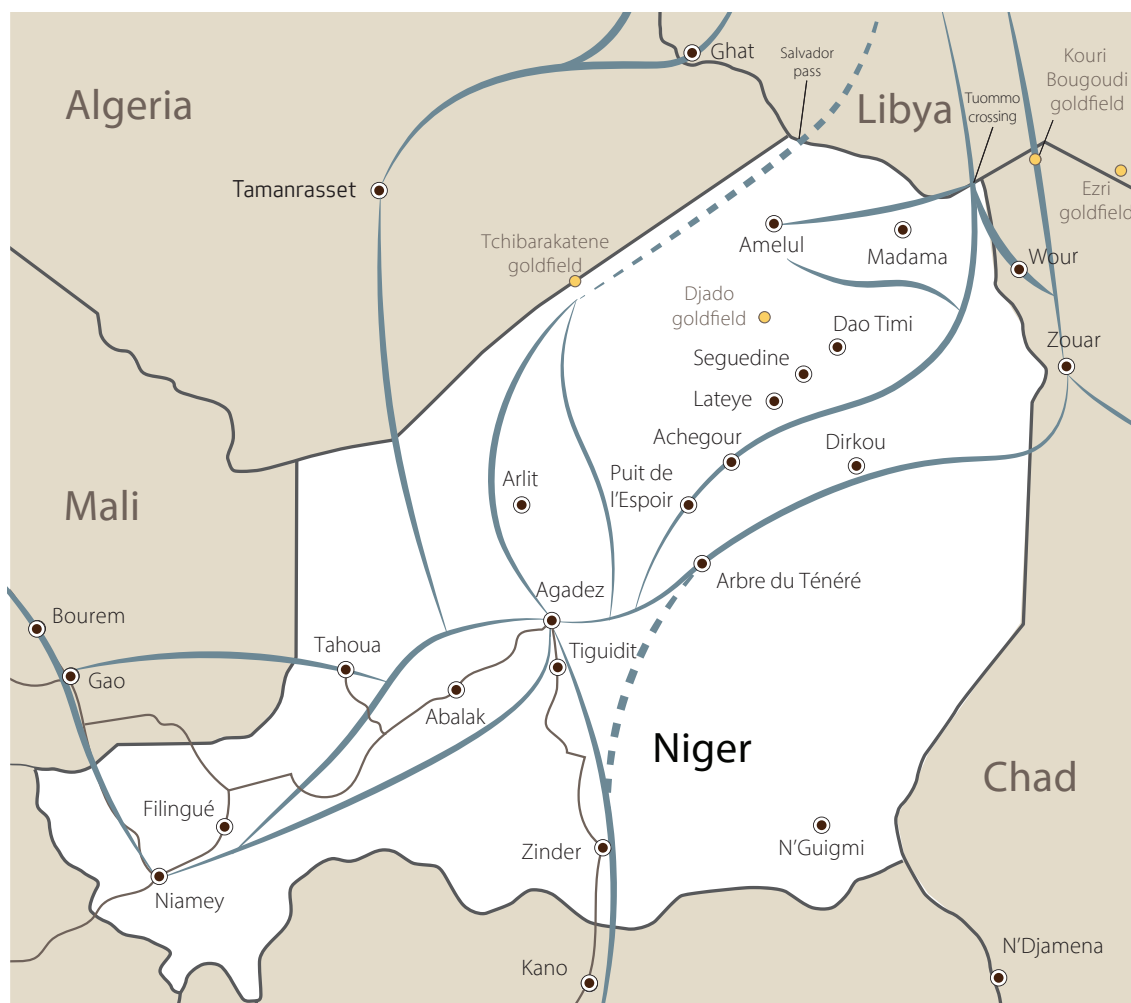
At least 280 smugglers and *coxeurs* (low-level actors who link migrants with transport agents) were arrested between July 2016 and April 2018, of which 101 were arraigned in court while 74 vehicles and motorcycles were confiscated. It has not been possible to obtain more recent data. However, interviews carried out as late as November 2018 with smugglers, *coxeurs*, and Nigerien law-enforcement officers, as well as officials from the Ministry of Interior, suggest that the intensity of the law-enforcement activity has decreased, in part to provide the region with some breathing space. Nonetheless, at the time of writing we had not received any reports that this easing of the government's position had led to any change in smuggling activity.

Smuggling industry in flux as routes multiply

As a consequence of these shifts in *modus operandi*, routes have undergone drastic changes and the cost of travel for migrants both before and after Agadez has increased. With the market being in flux and smugglers testing different routes and methods, there is still significant inconsistency in the prices cited. Moreover, prices tend to vary per nationality of migrant – one smuggler mentioned that Ghanaians, Nigerians and Ivorians were asked to pay more, while migrants from neighbouring Mali and Burkina Faso paid less, for instance.

For routes leading to Agadez, the migrant-smuggling process often starts as early as Niamey. In the past migrants would make their way to Agadez through public transport, only necessitating smuggling services to cross the geographical barrier that is the desert before Libya. More non-Nigerien travellers are now reported to be forced to use smuggling services and travel on Toyota HiAce '19 places', due to increased scrutiny at the checkpoints en route to Agadez.

Map 7: Niger human-smuggling system, December 2018



Although many of these migrants transiting Niger are from ECOWAS and are therefore nominally entitled to travel freely within Niger for up to 90 days, they often travel undocumented. Moreover, if stopped, they normally need to justify why they are travelling to the north which is why only a trickle of migrants now arrives to Agadez by bus and most of these are Hausa-speaking migrants who have travelled from Nigeria and mix with Nigerien southerners migrating north to work.

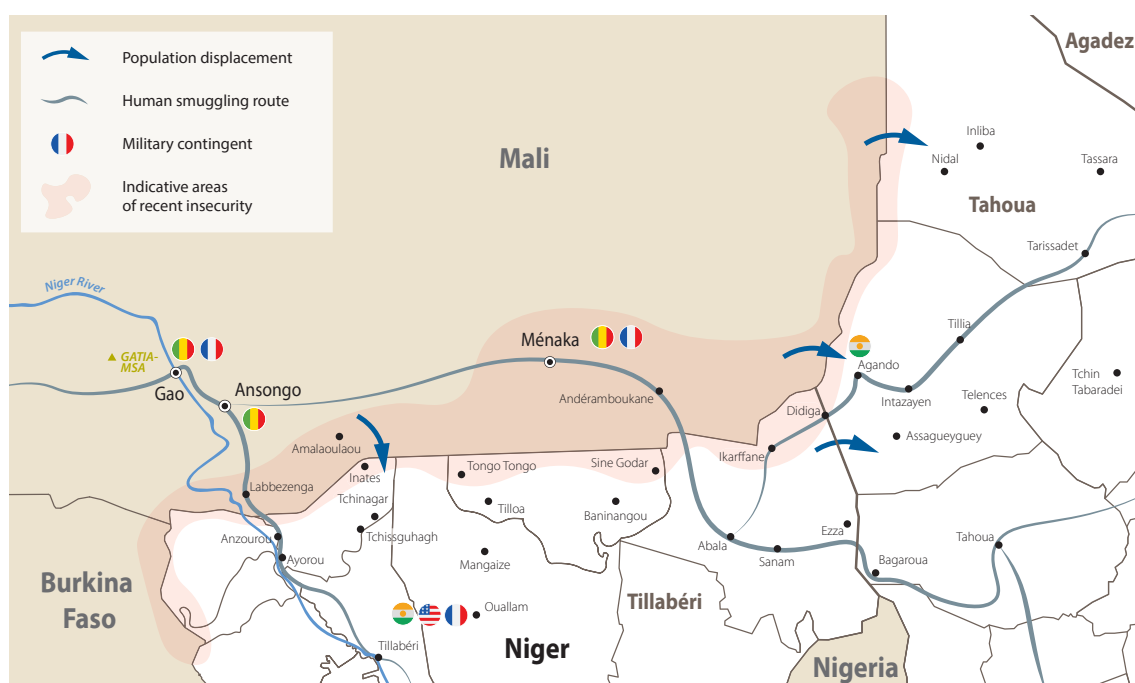
As a result, the town of Zinder and its surrounding areas have developed into significant collection points for migrants seeking to be smuggled north. Migrants typically leave from Zinder and travel to Tiguidit before reaching Agadez. Information collected on prices on these routes is inconsistent but seems to be in the range of FCFA50 000–FCFA60 000 (€75–€90).

The town of Tahoua has also become an important hub for migration in recent months. Routes bypassing checkpoints and national roads usually run from Niamey to Tahoua, and on to Abalak and Tiguidit before arriving to Agadez. This route was an established one for West African migrants en route to Libya and Europe,

but now, as highlighted above, migrants use smugglers instead of public transport. Smugglers are reported to charge about FCFA50 000–FCFA70 000 (€75–€100) on this route, while the Niamey to Agadez journey using public transport costs FCFA24 000 (€36).

Domestic migrant flows from Tillabéri to Tahoua and from Tahoua to Agadez have notably increased since the beginning of 2018 and intensified towards the end of the year as a result of rising insecurity at the border with Mali. Intercommunal clashes, tax-levying jihadists and raids by Malian non-state armed groups, such as the Imghad Tuareg Self-Defense Group and Allies (GATIA) and the Movement for the Salvation of Azawad (MSA), are cited as the main causes for these displacements.

Map 8: Population displacement and human-smuggling dynamics in the Mali–Niger border area



Over 51 000 people have been displaced in Tillabéri and Tahoua, of which more than 10 000 displacements occurred in the last three months.¹¹³ At this stage, these flows seem to be intra-regional, and migratory flows involving West African migrants along the Mali–Niger routes remain low.

On the other hand, local contacts reported that the general insecurity has facilitated a considerable increase in goods smuggling to and from Algeria and Libya. Although these goods are mainly licit, the routes are commonly used by drug smugglers often involved with or controlled by GATIA–MSA members.

Tahoua is also an important departure point for migrants travelling to Algeria along a route leading from Niamey to Tahoua, and then directly reaching In-Khalil and Assamaka, avoiding Agadez altogether. This route

and similar variants often see West African migrants mixed with Nigerien passengers, around 4–5 migrants from a total of 15–20 passengers per vehicle.

Routes to Tchibarakatene

Activity at some of the gold mines in the north of Niger has also overlapped with the changing dynamics of migrant smuggling. The Tchibarakatene goldfield (380 kilometres north-east of Arlit) became the most important in Niger after the closure of the Djado goldfield in 2017. A ban was also issued on mining in Tchibarakatene, but it was never enforced.

One of the routes through Tchibarakatene that was reported to be in use in the first quarter of 2018 left from Agadez or In-Khalil, travelling directly to the goldfield and then on to the Salvador Pass. Smugglers indicated this route was being used by a small number of Tuareg smugglers protected by Libyan militias operating around the Salvador Pass.

Operation Barkhane (whose base in northern Niger is in Madama) and the Nigerien military have been carrying out patrols in the area across 2018, including night-time aerial-reconnaissance missions. Smugglers interviewed reported the pass to be the domain of Al-Qaeda militants, hardened bandits and high-value traffickers of narcotics and weapons.

Beyond Agadez

After Agadez, routes are much more diverse, have multiplied, and were constantly changing during the reporting period. Nevertheless, they can be divided into three main groups: those going to Algeria, those towards Libya and those towards Chad.

The main routes to Algeria broadly follow the Agadez – Arlit – Assamaka – Tamanrasset itinerary which costs migrants about FCFA150 000–FCFA250 000 (€225–€375). This historic route from Agadez (and surrounding areas) to Tamanrasset was still traversed during the reporting period although its usage has been in decline due to the increased risks at the Algerian border, where border forces have tightened their activities.

Routes to Libya tend to run mostly from Agadez to Qatrun. However, the journey connecting these two points has now changed significantly from the historic pattern. One alternative departs from south of Agadez and follows the desert trek to Arbre du Ténéré (the Tree of Ténéré; although the tree was knocked down about fifty years ago, the location is still used as a landmark for locals). From there, the smugglers travel to Achegour, and then Lateye and east of Dao Timi before reaching Madama. From Madama, smugglers then make their way to Qatrun. Prices range between FCFA150 000 and FCFA250 000 (€225–€380) per migrant, increasing to more than FCFA450 000 (€685) if the route goes as far as Sebha.

Vehicles either head directly to Libya or passengers are delivered to another driver at the Arbre du Ténéré. Contacts reported that smugglers driving from Agadez to Madama are mostly Tuareg, because they have

more contacts and protection in Agadez, while Tebu drivers tend to be more dominant on the route from Madama to Libya.

Another variant on the old route from Agadez to Qatrun goes through Puit de l'Espoir, Achegour and Lateye. One smuggler reported that this route is sometimes favoured because Nigerien soldiers are particularly lenient and allow passage in exchange for a bribe. Security forces in Seguedine, Dao Timi and Madama are reportedly much more difficult to bribe.

Finally, one of the routes towards Libya cuts eastwards through Chad before traversing the Tibesti (see Chad section). Some smugglers reported that this route has been popular among tramadol smugglers journeying northwards from Nigeria, and following the border with Chad before crossing into the Tibesti. According to smugglers interviewed, Barkhane's aerial surveillance on the Niger–Libya border encouraged the creation of the route cutting through Chad towards Libya.

Waves of returnees put pressure on local communities

In 2018, parts of northern Niger – in particular Agadez and Arlit – received an influx of migrants returning from Algeria and Libya, who have increased pressure on local resources and are perceived as a burden by local communities.

Deportations to Arlit and Agadez from Algeria have continued to put strain on the two towns. Expulsions from Algeria to the Assamaka border town in Niger began in 2014 and now reportedly take place at least once month, according to local contacts in Tamanrasset.

Algerian authorities state that 37000 Nigeriens were repatriated to Niger between December 2014 and November 2018, as part of the 2014 return agreement with Niger.¹¹⁴ Around December 2016, convoys of deportees started including non-Nigerien migrants – who are not covered by the return agreement – and some of them were abandoned at desert locations about 20 kilometres east of Assamaka and forced to walk towards Niger.¹¹⁵

Agadez also received a high number of these Nigerien deportees, but the most significant pressure on the town followed the mass arrival of about 2000 Sudanese asylum seekers travelling from Sudan, Chad and, in some cases, Libya. Large flows arrived during the first five months of 2018, attracted by the prospect of resettlement to Europe.

The first asylum seekers arrived in November 2017 after failed attempts at making the sea crossing to Europe, and were hosted by UN agencies in Agadez. Numbers snowballed to about 2000 in May 2018, after the first arrivals contacted relatives and friends (many of whom are long-term refugees and IDPs in camps in Chad and Sudan) and encouraged them to join.

As soon as UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) guest houses – and later a hangar – opened in January 2018 to host new arrivals, many invited relatives and other migrants in Libya to join them. Due to insufficient space, hundreds camped on assigned plots of land on the outskirts of Agadez. In August 2018, the UNHCR opened a reception centre 15 kilometres away from Agadez with 1 500 capacity. Despite initially refusing relocation to the new centre, as many feared worsening living conditions, around 500 asylum seekers were transferred from the land plots to the new centre by the end of November 2018.

Misinterpretations of actual events gave false hopes to migrants and encouraged this migration to Agadez; these included false rumours that UNHCR were flying migrants from Agadez to Europe. In fact, as part of their Emergency Transit Mechanism, UNHCR were working to resettle screened refugees from detention centres in Libya, via Niger, to agreed destination centres in Europe. Between the start of the evacuation operation from Libya in late 2017 and 10 December 2018, a total of 2 776 people were evacuated to Niger, of which only 574 were resettled in Europe.¹¹⁶

A small proportion of Sudanese arrivals was made up of fighters based in southern Libya and gold miners who were already in the area. With the surge of banditry experienced in northern Niger – often involving Chadian and Sudanese mercenary-type gangs – the fear of bandits staying in the city was a lightning rod for the already tense situation. On 2 May, the Nigerien army rounded up 160 migrants who were (largely arbitrarily) deemed trouble makers and eventually expelled 132 of them, abandoning them near Madama, 80 kilometres from the border with Libya. Since these events, the numbers of Sudanese arrivals, which had been in the hundreds each month before May 2018, fell to very low figures.

The prolonged presence of migrants has created cohabitation challenges in both Arlit and Agadez. This is especially true for migrants not receiving assistance, who often linger in the town and seek sources of revenue to either avoid returning to their origin country empty-handed, or attempt another crossing to Algeria or Libya. Where before migrants represented revenue and wealth for locals in these towns, now they represent a drain on resources and added costs:

‘There are too many of them [...] maybe three, four, five thousand. All from Sudan, Ghana, Nigeria, and all those countries. In Agadez, the poor suffer; even just drinking water is difficult. Foreigners, however, are better perceived; they get more than us. [...] Up until now there is no hatred of migrants, but if this continues, it will come. Even killings could happen. People have been patient, but we are honestly tired now, tired of foreigners.’

– *Tebu ex-passeur in Agadez, October 2018*

The decision by the UNHCR to build a new centre outside Agadez to host asylum seekers was key to the temporary easing of tensions over the group of Sudanese asylum seekers in the city and was preceded by a debate that took place in Agadez on 4 July at a forum organized in the wake of an intensive lobbying campaign by the UNHCR in Niger.

Other community efforts preceding the forum also helped to ease some of the local resentment felt towards new arrivals since the May 2018 events. These included an information campaign on the plight of asylum seekers, with radio messages issued by the Sultan of the Air, Omar Ibrahim Omar – a traditional, government-aligned figure who has significant moral authority.

These actions managed to stave off tensions just as they were approaching a flash point. However, more such multi-level action is needed as part of a more comprehensive plan that takes seriously the needs and concerns of different communities in Niger's impoverished north.

Possible peace deal with Tebu rebel group brings some hope

With Tebu communities having been key actors in the migrant-smuggling business, the criminalization of this activity was perceived widely as an attack on the Tebu community by the government, particularly as a large proportion of the smugglers arrested were Tebu.

Tensions intensified with the government's closure of the Djado goldfield, which lies in Tebu territory. In addition, the Tuareg community, which was also heavily involved in the migrant smuggling, retained control over the Tchibarakatene goldfield, where former Tuareg rebel leaders all seem to have their share.

This dynamic has been the source of bubbling tensions that have connected with the broader discontent within the Tebu community in the region. However, in the last quarter of 2018, the Movement for Justice and the Rehabilitation of Niger (MJRN), claiming to defend Tebu interests in northern Niger, has come close to clinching a deal with the government that would alleviate these tensions.

Niamey and the MJRN have already been in this situation. The latter, created in 2008 as a Tebu civil-society organization, caught Niamey's attention after a September 2016 declaration of war against the state.

A peace agreement was signed later the same year following negotiations led at the time by Adam Tcheke Koudigan (commonly called Tcheke), a former member of the Sahara Revolutionary Armed Forces led by the famous Tebu leader Barka Wardougou. However, the deal was perceived by most in the community as a failure. Tcheke did not share the content or the proceeds of a reported FCFA70 million (about €105 000) peace settlement he received from the government with the 100 or so men he led.

As a result, the group split and the lead was taken by 49-year-old Mahamat Sallah Tournay. Tournay stems from the traditional Tebu leadership of Agadem and was Tcheke's military adviser. However, after weeks of negotiations beginning in late October 2018, Tournay and a small delegation from the MJRN reached an outline agreement with Niamey. The agreement is now being put to the rest of the organization, currently based to the south of Qatrun, Libya.

Contacts privy to the negotiations reported agreement on five main points. First, that Tebu members of the MJRN who are already enrolled in Nigerien security forces be deployed to Tebu- dominated regions, in particular in Tesker, Agadem, the Kawar region (Dirkou, Bilma, Lateye, Seguedine), Djado and Nguimi. The MJRN contend that their knowledge of both people and terrain would help stop banditry on the Agadez–Dirkou axis. They have also asked to conduct joint patrols with the security forces in these areas.

Secondly, the government has agreed to reopen the Djado goldfield. The site, which was discovered in 2014, closed in February 2017, officially due to repeated clashes and tensions between miners.¹¹⁷ Between 25 000 and 50 000 miners worked there at its peak.¹¹⁸

Thirdly, the government acknowledged that local communities should benefit from oil extraction in Agadem (330 kilometres south of Dirkou). When the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) started its operations in 2006, the then sitting president, Mamadou Tandja, asked Tebu militiamen to sell their weapons in exchange for a share of oil revenues. Senior MJRN members claim that no revenues were received by their communities.

Fourthly, the government pledged to compensate those communities suffering as a result of oil spillage, promising to negotiate compensation from the CNPC. Finally, the government agreed to return confiscated vehicles to all Tebu former migrant smugglers. In April and July, our local contacts visited the Agadez military camp where most of the vehicles are impounded. They counted about 100 vehicles. Contacts report that there are also vehicles being held in Bilma.

The array of senior members of government attending the meetings indicates at the very least a commitment to bringing an end to Tebu grievances. President Mahamadou Issoufou met the delegation on 6 November while Interior Minister Mohamed Bazoum was also influential in the negotiations.

Bazoum has been looking to avoid trouble in the north in order to facilitate the CNPC's exploitation of the Agadem oil fields – arguably the same reasoning was used when deciding to close the Djado goldfield. Bazoum, an Arab, is widely perceived to be anti-Tebu. More recently, a 7 November arrest¹¹⁹ of Mahamane Tar Choukou, a Tebu who has vocally criticized the government on social media, was described by contacts as feeding into this narrative.¹²⁰

Other members of government influential in the negotiations included the Minister in Charge of Relations with Institutions, Barkaï Issouf, who is the only Tebu in Issoufou's cabinet. He had already conducted the mediation in Dirkou in March 2017, when the MRJN was under Adam Tcheke Koudigan's leadership (see below). The Mayor of Dirkou, said to be loyal to Bazoum (both are Arabs and have close Tebu relatives), acted as a mediator for the peace process.

At the time of writing, the MJRN delegation had made their way back to Libya, escorted by Nigerien security forces.

If translated into action, the peace agreement with the MJRN could present a viable solution to the grievances experienced throughout northern Niger. Fundamentally, there is the obvious risk that released vehicles will be redeployed into smuggling activities, but the return of the vehicles needs to be seen in the context of a much-needed reaction by the government to give some breathing space to the north whose revenue streams have been cut for almost two years.

If the MJRN makes good on its pledge to engage in joint patrols, Nigerien security forces could increase their visibility at the Libya–Niger–Chad border and improve their chances of curbing both banditry activity as well as smuggling and trafficking activity. The government is trading on its tough stance against human smuggling in order to attempt to resolve a festering security problem directly with the MJRN as well as to tackle the broader problem of banditry in the region.

Outlook

Although migrant flows have been reduced in the short term, the adverse effects of migration-reducing policies in the region have not been mitigated; on the contrary, they have prompted ethnic-related grievances. In the long term, this could lead to political instability and more insecurity.

In particular, the economic downturn suffered since mid-2016 in northern Niger correlates with consistent reports of a rise in criminal activity in the region. Armed banditry has substantially increased, and other illicit activities, including drug trafficking, are reported to have attracted former actors in the migrant-smuggling industry.¹²¹

Gold mining in northern Niger, if regulated properly, could be a viable solution to counteract the negative economic effects that the war on human smuggling has had on the region, as well as the perceived segregation caused, and provide a sustainable alternative to criminal activity. The reopening of the Djado goldfield – an ambition of the peace agreement with the MJRN – would address some of the grievances of the Tebu community. However, it would only be a first step. Artisanal gold mining can only provide sustainable livelihoods into the future if it is secured and regulated by a framework that ensures a level of health and safety as well as equitable participation of the miners and the community.

Considering the imminent security threats closer to the capital, with increasing attacks by jihadi armed groups on the borders with Mali¹²² and Nigeria, Niamey will be looking to avoid provoking a rebellion in the north.¹²³ Niger has a history of mainly Tuareg-led rebellions, and Tebu communities have joined forces with the Tuaregs in the past.¹²⁴ Frustration with both the government, which is perceived as serving Western interests before those of locals, and with foreigners, who are seen as receiving more international aid than local communities, is a bubbling issue that requires informed and grounded action.

CHAD: THE RISE AND (POTENTIAL) FALL OF GOLD MINES AS SAHELIAN TRANSIT HUBS

- Chad's role as a transit destination grew during 2017 and 2018 as a result of displacement from Sudan and Niger, but migratory flows through the country have been modest.
- Human-smuggling activity has been consolidating in specific areas, particularly around the gold-mining sites in the country's north.
- This development is now threatened following an escalation of military activity around gold-mining sites in the Tibesti region after an attack on the Kouri Bougoudi gold mine in August.
- Insecurity in the Tibesti and a government embargo on the gold-mining area of Miski are likely to remain sources of instability, which could result in the displacement of people towards Libya.

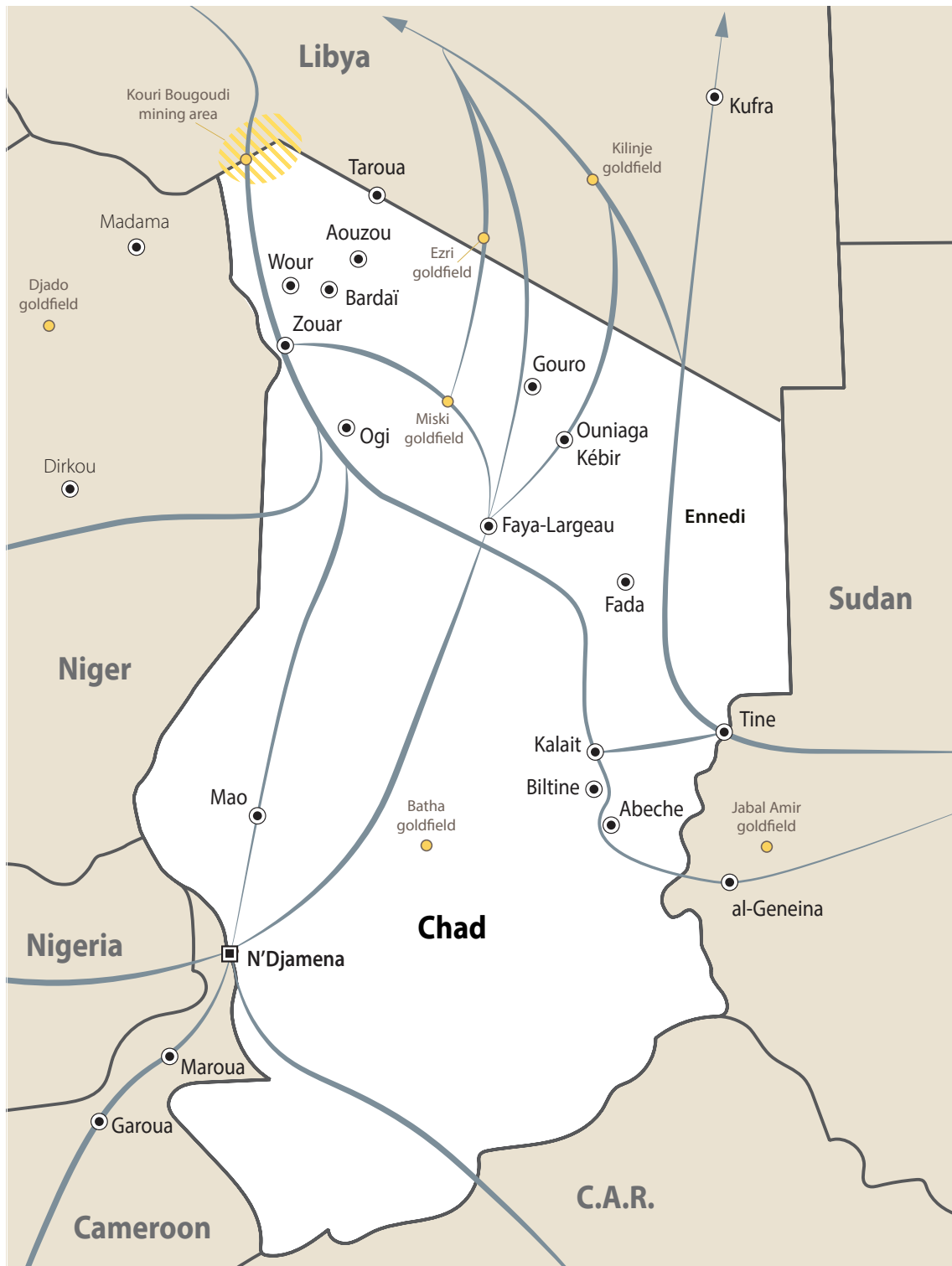
Over the past three years, Chad has witnessed an increase in migratory flows headed north, with greater numbers of migrants from the region transiting through the country on their way to Libya and beyond. The change resulted from two primary factors: displacement from neighbouring Sudan and Niger, where near simultaneous law-enforcement campaigns were launched in 2016, and the growing draw of gold discoveries, particularly in the country's north, which attracted both labourers and migrants who used mining sites as stopovers on their journey north.

There is no comprehensive available data giving a clear picture of the volume of irregular migratory flows through the country. IOM has three monitoring points in Chad – in Faya-Largeau, Kalait and Zouarké – but most of the flows avoid main cities. Moreover, our research shows that most routes and relay points are in remote locations, with smugglers meeting at rendezvous points based on exchanged GPS coordinates, which change frequently according to information on the whereabouts of military or law-enforcement actors.

Nonetheless, based on consistent information received from contacts with visibility in the north, south and east of Chad during the reporting period, it is clear that although the number of people travelling through the country with the intention of reaching Europe remains limited (particularly when compared to the situation in Sudan and Niger prior to the campaigns targeting irregular migration), human-smuggling activity has been on the rise and shows signs of consolidation on certain routes.

The picture is also complicated by the fact that human smuggling takes place within the context of established migratory patterns by Chadians engaged in circular migration to Niger, Sudan and especially Libya. Interviews with migrants who have transited through Chad before reaching Europe revealed that in some cases the decision to make the onward journey to Europe occurs while in transit, after reaching Libya, and would not have necessarily been the plan from the beginning.¹²⁵

Map 9: Chad human-smuggling system, December 2018



Chad's growing importance as a transit hub had to do with both internal and external factors. As elaborated in the Niger section, the criminalization of human smuggling and the eventual law-enforcement campaign launched by Niamey in 2016 displaced some human-smuggling activity to northern Chad, with some Tebu smugglers seeking routes in the Tibesti region to avoid detection by Nigerien forces on journeys connecting Agadez to Qatrun or Murzuq in Libya.

Similarly, in Sudan, the RSF were tasked by Khartoum in 2016 to restrict migratory flows, particularly where the borders of Libya, Chad and Sudan intersect. Although the RSF has an ambivalent posture at this border, with some elements of the RSF being involved in human smuggling themselves, the interception activity of the force undermined movement to Libya from Sudan on established routes from the Darfurian hubs of el-Fasher and al-Geneina as well as well as the Khartoum–Kufra route.¹²⁶ This led to a partial displacement of migratory flows to Chad, particularly of Darfuri refugees in Sudan’s eastern camps but also on some occasions of Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants seeking to avoid the route from Khartoum to Libya.

The impact of law-enforcement activities on the Sudan–Libya border was particularly damaging for Eritrean smuggling networks whose prices on entire package journeys from Khartoum escalated between 2015 and 2017 (see also Libya section).

While these shifts were taking place around Chad, the discovery of gold in the Sahel – in Sudan (Jabal Amir in 2011), Niger (Djado and Tchibarakatene in 2014) and southern Algeria (Ahaggar in 2014), had a transformative impact on human movement and Chad is no exception with the discoveries of the Tibesti’s goldfields (Miski and Kouri Bougoudi in 2012) and central Chad’s Batha goldfield in 2016.¹²⁷ The Tibesti’s goldfields, in particular, attracted thousands of miners from the rest of Chad as well as from Sudan and northern Niger.

According to miners tapped at various stages during the reporting period, at its peak of activity the goldfields in Kouri Bougoudi (which straddle an area of some 50 kilometres across the Chad–Libya border), counted between 20 000 and 40 000 miners. Miski (390 kilometres south-east of Kouri Bougoudi) enjoyed numbers on a similar scale.

Tension over the exploitation of the mines and the influx of miners to the Tibesti erupted in several violent clashes between miners and local Tebu who, in some cases, organized themselves in armed self-defence groups. One such clash led to the killing of 67 artisanal miners in August 2015.¹²⁸

However, as the conflicts settled following the expulsion of some Sudanese Zaghawa miners, Kouri Bougoudi again attracted new waves of miners from Niger, particularly after the closure of the Djado goldfield in February 2017.¹²⁹ Overall, gold-mining activity in the region generated a capillary economy providing work opportunities both in and around the artisanal-mining industry. Critically, it substantially expanded demand for the transportation of miners, equipment and supplies in this remote region.

This encouraged the growth of a human-smuggling activity that helped drive up the movement of migrants and asylum seekers using Chad as a transit alternative on northbound journeys to Libya and in some cases Europe. By and large, however, this remained a small-scale and opportunistic phenomenon, which piggy-backed onto the gold-mining industry and other smuggling markets.

The opportunities offered by the gold-mining sites themselves proved to be a draw, with migrants who have journeyed through northern Chad consistently reporting that they worked in the gold mines for varying periods of time to save up money for the next leg of the journey.

Government clampdown on gold mines disrupts smuggling system

The developments described above have allowed for the expansion of various migrant-smuggling routes between Libya, Chad, Niger and Sudan, and encouraged several young Tebu, Guraan and Zaghawa drivers who work on routes all the way from the east of the country and from N'Djamena in the south-west, along the Sudanese border, to the Tibesti in the north-west, to invest in 4x4 vehicles and GPS equipment (see below for detailed routes).

However, gold-mining operations across the north-west took a serious hit towards the end of the reporting period following a crackdown on gold mines by Chadian armed forces. This crackdown was officially prompted by a surprise raid on mines in Kouri Bougoudi on 11 August by the Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic (CCMSR), an important (albeit recently-formed) Chadian rebel group based in southern Libya. After this attack, the CCMSR claimed it had killed 73 soldiers and taken another 45 captive.¹³⁰ Resultant clashes with rebels in the area reportedly led to the killing of at least 10 civilians, as the government maintained its presence in the area and enforced a ban on illegal gold mining.

The Nigerien Tebu militiaman, Barka Sidimi, who in January 2018, had been recruited by Chadian President Idriss Déby, to manage checkpoints close to Kouri Bougoudi was nowhere to be seen during the CCMSR attack.

According to well-placed Tebu contacts in Chad and Libya, the deal followed Sidimi's failed attempt to receive funding to act as an anti-migration force under the banner of the Suqur al-Sahra (Desert Hawks) in southern Libya, in 2017. Various Tebu contacts reported that this initiative was largely a sham that enjoyed very little support within the Tebu community and that the Suqur al-Sahra did little besides raid gold mines on the Libyan side of Kouri Bougoudi and carry out some patrols targeting bandits operating in the area.

The agreement between Sidimi and the Chadian government was intended to prevent Chadian rebels active in Libya from re-entering Chad, dissuade them from engaging in hostile actions (and even recruit them), and to provide Déby with information from this area. However, even while on this assignment, the impact of Sidimi's militia was not really felt in any significant way, certainly it had no impact of note on human smuggling dynamics in the route between Kouri Bougoudi, Qatrun, Murzuq and Um al-Aranib on the Libyan side.

The same cannot be said of the actions of the Chadian military after the August attack by the CCMSR. The Kouri Bougoudi goldfield on the Chadian side was brought to a grinding halt during the month of September after Chadian security forces cleared the area of miners. Many miners moved to mining sites on the Libyan

side, which is less popular due to a lower amount of gold. Others joined the ranks of Chadian rebel movements operating in Libya along tribal affiliations. Many artisanal miners migrated south and returned home to their communities in Faya-Largeau in central Chad; others moved to mining sites in northern Niger.

The clampdown on Kouri Bougoudi was quickly followed by an enforcement of the artisanal-mining ban in Miski, which is reported to be home to Chad's most important gold resources. Since the end of October, the gold-mining town had seen intensified clashes after ground and air military offensives, some of which were led by Déby's son, Mahamat (also known as Kaka). Since mid-November 2018, contacts report that the army established an embargo on the town, placing landmines and manning all roads exiting the locality of Yebbi-Bou, of which Miski is the chief town.

Residents have called for international humanitarian support. The situation worsened towards the end of the reporting period, as both sides appeared to prefer a hard approach: a recently formed self-defence committee to represent locals in Miski, which denies any involvement with Chadian rebel movements, repeatedly said that locals would continue fighting to stop the government from seizing what they see as their gold.

The clampdown in the Tibesti takes place within the context of Chad's economic crisis, driven largely by a fall in oil prices and an unfavourable deal that N'Djamena signed with the country's main oil-extracting company, Glencore.¹³¹ In this context, the Chadian government has been looking at raising revenues from mining. A new mining code aimed at attracting foreign investment was introduced, combined with the appointment to Mines Minister of administration veteran Youssouf Abassalah (formerly oil minister).¹³²

This increased presence has taken on an ethnic dimension: locals perceive it as an attack led by the Zaghawa community (of which President Déby is a member) on Tebu sovereignty. The mines are believed to be among the most important gold sources in the country, and local Tebu communities have always opposed any foreign presence, fearing that industrial mining would damage the region's ecosystem and that they would be excluded from the proceeds of this resource.

Routes change and flows reduce

The clampdown on gold mines has substantially challenged the Tibesti's strategic position as a human-smuggling hub. Towards the end of the reporting period, we received sustained reports indicating both route changes and a general reduction in human-smuggling activity.

Smugglers still transport migrants northwards, but now they mostly bring them to sites on the Libyan side of the border. There are three main routes used to traverse the Chad en route to Libya: through the west, the south and the east.

The western route enters Chad through northern Niger. Smugglers cross the Niger–Chad border west of Zour using 4x4 pickups and continue north on the western flank of the Tibesti mountain range to reach

Kouri Bougoudi. From there, they usually travel to al-Wigh and ultimately Qatrun in Libya. Most of the people using this route are West African migrants crossing into Libya; however, flows remain low mainly due to the increased difficulty in accessing Niger.

One former Tebu smuggler in close contact with smugglers currently operating on this route explained that Barkhane's aerial surveillance on the Niger–Libya border in 2016 encouraged the creation of the route cutting through Chad towards Libya. Following the increased Chadian military presence in the Tibesti, the use of the western route appears to be waning. Contacts reported that in the last quarter of 2018, the Chadian army planted landmines on many roads entering the Tibesti. This has made travelling more difficult for both smugglers and locals. Security checks have also increased: as of December 2018, local contacts reported that there were checkpoints in Wour, Omou, Wadi Dowor and Towoune.

The southern route, which cuts through N'Djamena on the way to the Tibesti, is also reported to be far less active as a result of the conflict. The modus operandi is typically similar to the western route, with 4x4 pick-ups being the preferred mode of transport, although migrants sometimes journey on board larger trucks carrying goods north from N'Djamena, which is a primary hub for migrants arriving from Nigeria and Niger.

From N'Djamena, one route leads migrants to Kouri Bougoudi through Mao, Ogi and Zouar, and was reported to cost from FCFA200 000–FCFA300 000 (€300–€450) per migrant. Those who manage to leave Kouri Bougoudi with gold report paying between three and five grams of gold to get to the nearest Libyan town, typically Qatrun or Um al-Aranib or sometimes the capital of Libya's south-west Fezzan region, Sebha.

The primary route and the one that was developed the most over recent years is a track that cuts across the country, linking the eastern border areas to the north-west. It is used especially by Central African migrants looking for work opportunities in the Tibesti and southern Libya or by South Sudanese asylum seekers, some of whom embark on this route directly from refugee camps in Darfur or eastern Chad.

The route has not changed much over the past two years, but it was increasingly used in 2018, including by groups of Sudanese asylum seekers who eventually wound up in Agadez, Niger, in the first half of the year (see Niger section). However, movement along this route has also been impacted negatively by the conflict, leading – at least temporarily – to a shift eastward through the region of Borkou, east of the Tibesti.

Migrants following this route usually cross from el-Fasher or al-Geneina in Darfur, Sudan, before connecting with Chadian Zaghawa smugglers (or in a minority of instances, Fur smugglers), with whom they usually share a language, in the border town of Tine or the larger centre of Abeche in eastern Chad. From these two locations, the migrants journey to Kalait in small groups – sometimes under the protection of army units based in Tine and Kalait – and then cross the desert of Tigniliya to reach Faya-Largeau, a key hub for migration across the region. On these routes, lack of information and the general lawlessness of the remote mines, leaves migrants open to exploitation in the form of forced labour.¹³³ Migrants travelling on this route consistently reported paying

for their journey by stopping to work at various hubs. Those who arrive penniless at mining sites are especially open to severe exploitation there.

Now that most of the surface deposits have been extinguished, mining has switched to gruelling drill sites, narrow shafts 30 metres deep down which miners are lowered and then expected to break rock in shifts of four to six hours. Young migrants who have worked at the mines reported having little or no knowledge about the sort of work they would be required to carry out at the mining sites and recalled their shock at learning that they would be lowered down the shafts.

Other protection issues concern migrants who journey to goldfields on credit. The debt is then purchased by drill-site managers with whom migrants enter into a bond. One of the units of payments used, known as a beja, is equivalent to a day's work. Ten beja make one gram of gold, which equates more or less to between €20 and €25. Generally, migrants can expect to be paid, but the remoteness of and lawlessness at these sites means the risk of labour exploitation is very high, particularly as a result of arbitrary arrangements regarding debt.

Before the government's clampdown in August 2018, after Faya-Largeau many would pursue mining opportunities in the Tibesti converging on Wour, Bardai (which has several neighbouring gold mines but are mainly used by locals), and Zouarké, 250 kilometres south-east of Kouri Bougoudi. From there, they can reach the important gold-mining towns of Miski or Kouri Bougoudi. Prices from Tine to Kouri Bougoudi (including detours through Miski) would usually cost migrants SDG2 000–SGD3 000 (€95–€143).

Travelling is usually done in small convoys of two or three 4x4 pick-ups carrying 20 to 30 migrants between them. There are usually two drivers per car who alternate to minimize the amount of time spent stationary. Some migrants who have travelled on this route reported that two-man crews would rendezvous with their convoy's drivers in open desert areas to bring food and water (which the migrants were expected to pay extra for).

Contacts report that since November 2018, smugglers have favoured routes transiting Tine through the Borkou region, through Faya-Largeau and Ounianga Kébir or Gouro, to then access the numerous goldfields across the border in Libya, the main one being the Kilinje goldfield. This is a direct consequence of the more difficult mobility through the Tibesti, as highlighted.

Some migrants are reportedly being employed on caravans on this route to help escort on foot dromedaries destined for the meat markets in Libya. Routes leave Tine, Faya-Largeau, Kalait or Ounianga Kébir through Gouro to the southern Libyan cities of Kufra, Sebha and Murzuq. Caravans usually consist of up to 400 dromedaries, which require up to 40 herdsman, some of whom could be migrants with no past involvement in the business.

Updates received from local contacts in December inform that the old caravan route leading directly from Tine to Kufra is considerably less used than the above alternatives, as it is both more expensive (about €150–€200, paid in FCFA or SDG) and more dangerous than routes through the Borkou or Tibesti regions.

Outlook

Given the mounting pressure on Chadian rebels from both sides of the Libya–Chad border, we assess that the security situation in northern Tibesti is likely to remain volatile as Chadian forces consolidate their position in the region and fight off Chadian rebels fleeing southwards. The increased presence of security forces along major routes could further discourage migratory flows through the Tibesti, which are likely to be further displaced towards the east to Borkou and Ennedi.

A number of strategic moves with both short- and long-term consequences, initiated or supported by the Chadian government validate this assessment. First, recent moves suggest that the Chadian government has decided to maintain a long-term operational presence in the north. President Déby even encouraged the move¹³⁴ of the G5 Sahel's Chadian base from N'Djamena to Wour. Although the G5's mandate will be to fight regional armed terrorists and smuggling networks, Déby will be looking to the G5 force to help stabilize the region by clearing it of rebels.¹³⁵

The Chadian government also vigorously supported the June 2018 quadrilateral agreement with Libya, Niger and Sudan, for which the operations room is planned to be in N'Djamena. The agreement plans to have a joint-border force to tackle criminality and rebel groups. As of now, it formally underwrites the existing practice whereby troops pursue hostile militias in foreign territory without the need for prior permission.

At the same time, the Chadian president sought help from LNA head Khalifa Haftar, in southern Libya where Chadian rebels are based, and has met with him on several occasions in the past few months.¹³⁶ LNA jets have launched airstrikes in the region from their base in Tamanhint (see Libya section).¹³⁷

Given this ongoing presence, which could increase, and the readiness for war by Tebu community leaders, the already dire security situation could worsen. This would have a direct effect on encouraging the displacement of locals towards Libya, along with an eastward shift of flows through the Borkou.

If the security situation further deteriorates, essential imports from Libya could be curtailed, with a consequent increase in prices, as has reportedly already been the case since the embargo on Miski. Northern Chad is dependent on Libyan imports for a number of necessity commodities, including rice, flour and oil. Local sources report that Tibesti locals are likely to seek refuge in southern Libya.

This could further feed into what different contacts have described as the development of a 'culture of migration to Europe' among Chadian youth, which did not exist previously. Well-placed contacts within the Chadian diaspora reported that northbound movements have taken place, both from the Tibesti as

well as from regions in mainland Chad. At least 50 Chadians from Kouri Bougoudi reached Italy in October 2018. From the information received, it seems that these migrants are arriving in small waves, organized by sophisticated Chadian networks operating between Sebha, Turin and Lyon.

MALI: MIGRANT FLOWS REDUCE AS PEACE-ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS INCREASE INSECURITY

- Human-smuggling activity in northern Mali is undermined by ongoing insecurity and conflict in the region.
- Migratory flows transiting Gao to Algeria continue, while those to Niger reduce considerably.
- Smugglers are experimenting with treacherous desert routes leaving from the Timbuktu area to Algeria.
- The involvement of armed groups in the migrant-smuggling business currently appears limited, largely because this illicit market is not lucrative when compared to alternatives such as drug trafficking.

In spite of ongoing instability and conflict in the north of Mali, where many of the migrants journeying north venture to cross over into Algeria and Niger, the operations of smuggling and trafficking networks, involved in a range of shadow-economy activities, continue apparently unimpeded. In particular, routes traversing Algeria mainly to Borg Badji Mokhtar, via official border crossings in In-Khalil and Timouine, remain in regular use.

Against this backdrop, Bamako has been considering criminalizing migrant smuggling in Mali. But given the lack of state control over the northern and central parts of the country, the enforcement of an anti-migrant smuggling law is unlikely to see much success, especially considering the failure of recent attempts to bring stability to the north of the country.

In the past few months, a number of peace efforts were introduced to enforce the 2015 Algiers peace process and attempt to improve the security situation in northern and central Mali. However, at least in the short term, these efforts have failed to bring about security and stability.

The mandate of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) was extended¹³⁸ and a '*Pacte pour la paix*' was signed on 15 October to reinforce the Malian government's commitment to implementing the Algiers peace accords under President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita's second term.¹³⁹ The disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process – seen as one of the key challenges in the implementation of the Algiers Accords – was conducted in Gao, Kidal and Timbuktu. The DDR process aims to reintegrate militiamen from armed groups into the Malian security forces, or into civilian life; however, contacts have noted inconsistencies in its implementation.

A number of peace agreements were also signed between rival groups: one in August¹⁴⁰ and September¹⁴¹ between Dogon and Fulani communities in the Mopti region, and another in November¹⁴² between Idoufane

and Ibogolitane communities from the Gao and Ménaka regions. Despite this, intercommunal clashes continue in both the Mopti and the Ménaka regions.¹⁴³

On the other hand, revamped French military operations against jihadi forces in northern and central Mali may help yield some stability-enabling results. Barkhane raided¹⁴⁴ the headquarters of the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) on 27 September, arresting suspected jihadi elements and reportedly killing¹⁴⁵ Ahmadou Kouffa and 35 of his Katiba on 23 November (although Kouffa's death was disputed by the Group to Support Islam and Muslims, JNIM, a few weeks later).¹⁴⁶ Kouffa has led the Fulani-dominated Macina Liberation Front (MLF), a jihadi group part of the JNIM umbrella movement, which had an active role in stalling peace efforts and fuelling intercommunal tensions.

However, an unintended effect of these recent peace efforts has been an uptick of violence in central and northern Mali, with intercommunal clashes involving civilians as well as other conflicts involving armed groups. This has discouraged migrants from travelling through northern regions and contributed to an overall reduction in flows in the past six months. The cities of Timbuktu, Gao and Kidal, key migrant hubs, have also seen very high levels of insecurity.¹⁴⁷ This has further discouraged migrant flows.

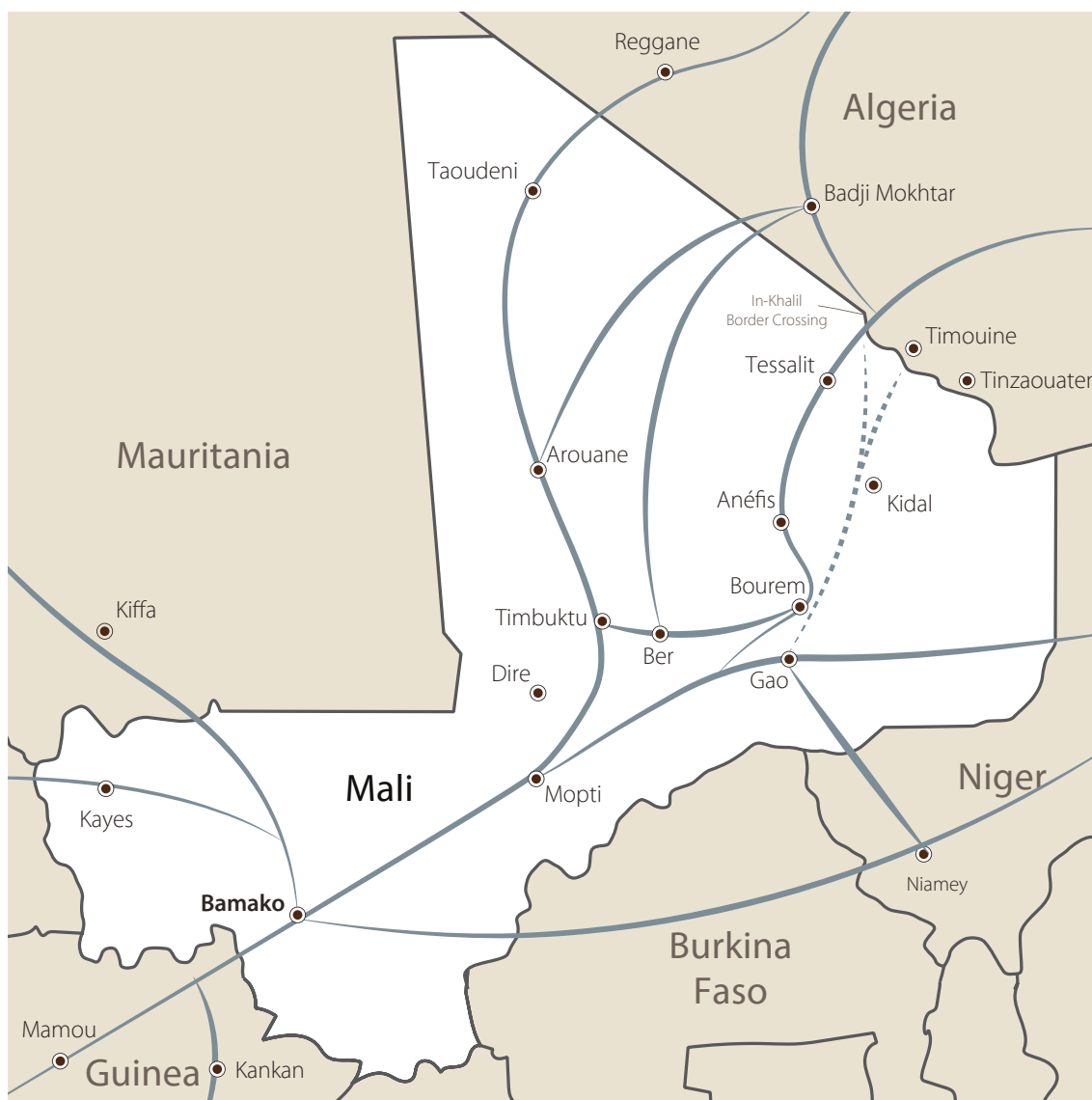
Movement from Gao to Algeria continues while flows to Niger reduce drastically

Gao, the largest city in northern Mali, has historically acted as a major hub from where migrants from across West Africa would transit before making their onward journey towards Niger and Algeria. In past months, however, we have consistently received information from several contacts in the region that the number of migrants passing through the city of Gao, towards Niger, has reduced, while those northbound towards Algeria appear to have slightly increased. This is also confirmed by IOM data (see above).¹⁴⁸

The Gao–Niamey route was still relatively well used at the beginning of 2018, and its use was even higher before the enforcement of the law criminalizing migrant smuggling in Niger which was really enforced throughout 2016 and 2017, but now only a few migrants risk the roads leading through the highly volatile Ménaka region. In early December, more than 40 Idaksahak Tuaregs were killed in the Ménaka.¹⁴⁹ Intercommunal violence, jihadist activity and battles by armed groups for control in the region have considerably disrupted eastbound transport. Instead, many migrants have opted for routes to Niger via Burkina Faso. Migrants crossing into Niger mostly hold ECOWAS citizenship (Senegal, Guinea, Gambia and southern Mali) and are therefore legally entitled to cross to Niger, although many still travel without documentation.

A new trend on the Gao–Niger axis, which concerns only a trickle of migrants, is the arrival of migrants from Niger to Mali through the Ménaka region. IOM reports that following the criminalization of migrant smuggling in Niger, some of the recorded migrants at the Ménaka flow monitoring point came to Mali to reach Algeria.¹⁵⁰ These flows have remained low and have slightly decreased, possibly because of the worsening security situation in the Tillabéri and Tahoua regions. Ninety-one outgoing flows to Algeria were recorded in Ménaka in June, 53 in July and 41 in September.

Map 10: Mali smuggling system, December 2018



During the reporting period, local contacts in Gao also relayed that, generally, migrants from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Guinea and the Gambia are trying to avoid Niger altogether, both as a result of the country's law-enforcement campaign against human smuggling and because they are more aware of human-rights abuses in Libya encouraging them to choose alternative routes to Europe.

The above appears to be encouraging a displacement to northbound routes through Algeria instead of Niger and Libya, as part of what appears to be the beginning of a larger shift from the central to western Mediterranean route.¹⁵¹ In the past six months, contacts regularly reported the use of routes going through Kidal and then onward to Algeria. There are two main routes that lead from Gao to Borg Badji Mokhtar: one goes past Kidal in Mali towards the Tinzouatene or the Timouane crossings, and is controlled and taxed by the CMA. Banditry further north is also a persistent problem. However, these conditions have been present for years.

The other route takes migrants from Gao to the Tal Handak or In-Khalil crossings, via routes that pass close to Anéfis and Tessalit. Contacts in Gao recently estimated that convoys of a dozen FJ60 or FJ80 Toyota Land Cruisers, usually carrying between 10 and 20 migrants, leave weekly for Algeria. From Gao to In-Khalil, migrants pay in the range of FCFA50 000 and FCFA200 000 (€75–€300) depending on the smuggler and on the nationality of travellers; northern Malians pay less than southern Malians and non-Malians. Migrants can incur additional costs on these routes, as some smugglers tax migrants and we have been informed of cases where migrants were threatened for money.

Migrants using this route will have usually spent a few days in Gao making travel arrangements following their 18- to 24-hour public-transport journey from Bamako. The cost of public transportation from Bamako to Gao is relatively cheap at around FCFA30 000 (€45). There is often a stop in Mopti, where travellers coming from Burkina Faso also join. The latter normally pay around FCFA14 000 (€21) for 4x4 transport to Mopti, with a premium paid by those wanting to sit in the cabin.

For Malians, crossing into Algeria is easier than for other migrants, despite land crossings being theoretically illegal (Maliens are however entitled to a three-month Algerian visa when travelling by air). Local contacts report that, given the historical and family ties with northern Mali, Algerian border guards are more permissive towards Malian entries. For non-Malians, smugglers pay bribes to officials or evade detection altogether. Once in Algeria, many migrants find jobs in construction, gardening, domestic help or work in shops.

Expulsions drop as Algeria changes tack

Forced expulsions from Algeria to northern Mali began in March 2018. Mali started receiving hundreds of migrants, many of whom were arrested in northern hubs of activity like Algiers or Oran, and then gathered in transit centres before being escorted by Algerian police on buses to Borg Badji Mokhtar, the last town before the Malian border. Many were then forced to walk 25 kilometres on a desert track to In-Khalil, the town closest to Algeria on the Malian side of the border.

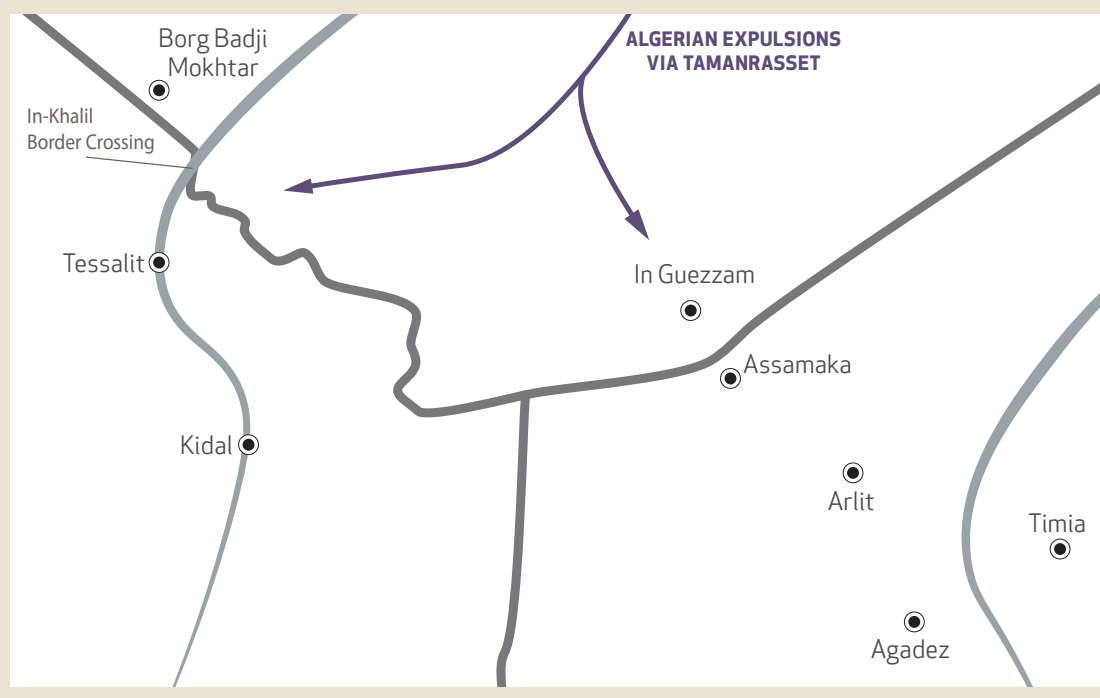
Towards the end of the reporting period, these expulsions at the border appeared considerably reduced. In the period between 1 August and 30 November, we received no credible report of a forced deportation at this border. It is our assessment that this represents a deliberate change in stance by the Algerian government at least in respect to expulsions to Mali.

Algeria and Mali do not have a bilateral agreement on returns, while one has agreed between Algeria and Niger since 2014. In addition, given the high levels of insecurity, leaving migrants in northern Mali would further tarnish Algeria's reputation. Algeria will also be

looking to maintain good relations with Mali and avoid another March 2018 incident, an episode in which Malian deportees attacked the Algerian embassy in Bamako.¹⁵²

Nonetheless, given the government's hard stance on migration, we assess that Algeria's arrests and deportations are likely to continue but that they will be directed to Niger, as it is in Algeria's strategic interest to reduce international attention while sending a strong message of dissuasion to migrants. However, we believe this message may be tempered by the ongoing lenient stance of border guards at official crossings with Mali.

Map 11: Algerian expulsion zones



Timbuktu's importance increases as opportunistic smugglers use new desert routes

Although Gao remains a primary transit point, the challenges it has been facing have led to smugglers experimenting with difficult desert treks around Timbuktu that are not normally not associated with human smuggling.

During the reporting period, we received corroborated information regarding two such desert routes, which leave from the environs of Timbuktu and bypass established routes.

The first leaves from Timbuktu and stretches through the desert directly to Borg Badji Mokhtar or Reggane in Algeria. Algerian and Malian Tuareg contacts report that this route is both riskier and more challenging

(particularly during the summer months) than the established primary route that takes migrants from Gao to Algeria via Kidal.

Contacts report that young, 'small-scale' smugglers typically travel from Timbuktu to Araouane, then towards the salt-mining site of Taoudenni. From there, they journey 160 kilometres to the Algerian border and then 380 kilometres to Reggane. The volume of migrants using this route still appears to be small. However, the use of the route is significant, particularly as in at least one reported case the migrants on this route had actually started their journey in Gao, where shorter and more established routes exist. Non-Malian migrants pay FCFA200 000–FCFA300 000 (€330–€500) for the journey from Timbuktu to Borg Badji Mokhtar.

This desert trek was used by Tuareg separatists to move clandestinely during the rebellion of the 1990s but was later abandoned after it was detected by Malian and Algerian intelligence services. Thereafter, it was mainly used by cocaine and arms smugglers. Local contacts report that, despite having seen decreasing levels of activity over the years, the presence of jihadi and criminal elements, known to have bases in the area, still makes it dangerous.

The second route leaves from the village of Ber, approximately 50 kilometres east of Timbuktu, and bypasses inhabited areas and the In-Khalil border crossing. Instead, migrants are led on a different route through the desert directly to Borg Badji Mokhtar in Algeria, more than 700 kilometres north. Contacts revealed that, during the reporting period, migrants from Ghana, Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Liberia and Nigeria (in addition to those from Mali) also journeyed from Timbuktu and Ber, headed for Algeria. Migrants pay between FCFA100 000 and FCFA200 000 (€150–€300) on this route.

According to two separate contacts in Timbuktu, this itinerary is primarily used by Arab smugglers who specialize in contraband (including fuel, weapons and narcotics) but who also transport migrants. They place migrants in the back of pickup trucks, which are loaded with enough food and water to make the entire journey and necessitating only brief stops at small desert encampments along the way (Ina Ghosmi, Teherdjé and Gasser-Cheikh are three such desert stops). Convoys are heavily armed and all carry contraband. It is unclear how many of these departures take place.

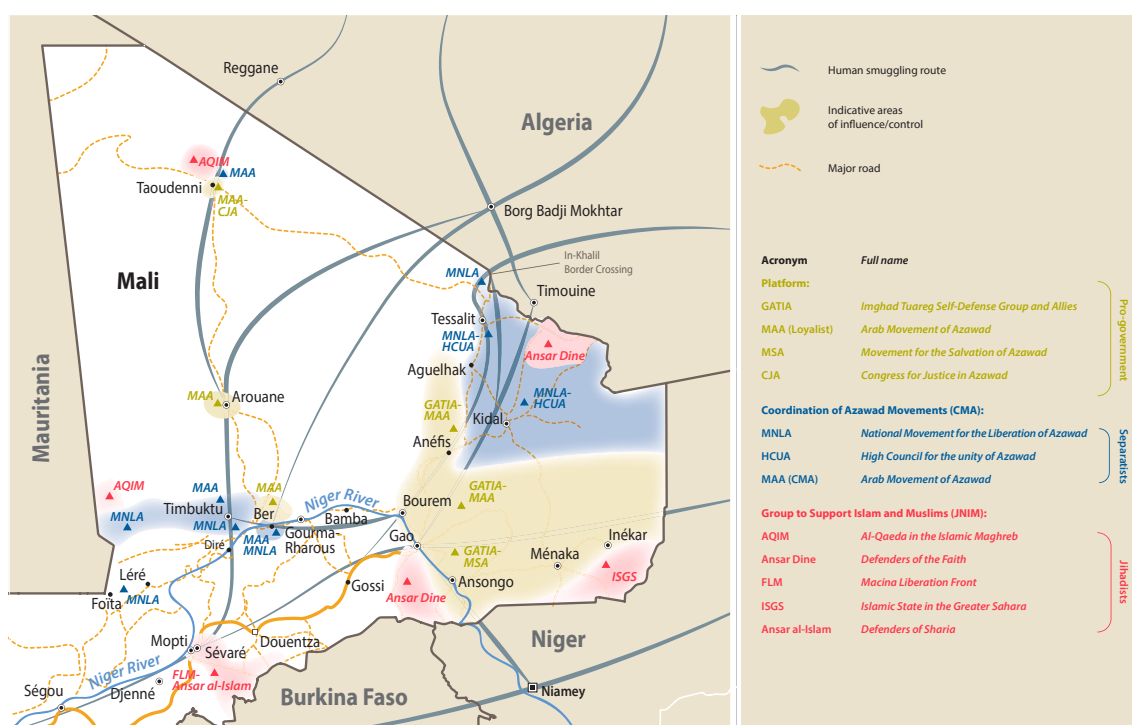
Involvement of armed groups in migrant smuggling is limited but could expand

The level of involvement of non-state armed groups in the migrant-smuggling trade in northern Mali is low, unlike with the smuggling of drugs and weapons. Although armed groups are not involved in the organizational aspects of migrant smuggling, some actors have ties with armed groups that are involved in this illicit trade.

One of the main smugglers in Gao, Baye Coulibaly, is allegedly associated with GATIA (See list of armed actors below) and enjoys protection from Malian security forces through family ties, according to a UN Panel of Experts report.¹⁵³ Coulibaly provides transportation from Gao to Tamanrasset as well as fake Malian travel documents to facilitate the crossing into Algeria of non-Malians. He allegedly hosted some of the Malian deportees from

Algeria for recruitment by GATIA and insertion into the DDR process in Gao. Further, the same UN report states that one of the nine smugglers arrested in February 2018 in the area around Gao was suspected of being linked to the Ganda Izo militia, now a member of the coalition Coordination of Movements and Patriotic Front of Resistance (CM-FPR).¹⁵⁴

Map 12: Human-smuggling routes and territorial influence of armed groups in northern Mali



Another example is that of Mahamadou Ag Rhissa (aka Mohamed Talhandak) a member of the High Council for the Unity of Azawad (HCUA), who controls migrant smuggling in Talhandak. He has reportedly held women captive and facilitated their sexual exploitation, and his houses were raided by Barkhane in October 2017 after suspected links with terrorist networks.¹⁵⁵

The migrant-smuggling business has not been captured by armed groups, as such. Many of these militias are heavily involved in others types of smuggling, which means that in theory they have the network and capacity to organize regular migrant convoys. However, the activity in the region is not lucrative enough, particularly when compared to high-end illicit markets, such as drug trafficking, and therefore engagement with migrant smuggling remains overall opportunistic. This dynamic will only change if armed groups re-evaluate the value of the human-smuggling industry to them, be it financial or political.

Elements of GATIA-MSA – the most powerful military alliance in northern Mali within the ‘pro-government’ Platform coalition – have notoriously been involved in drug smuggling, with networks spanning Mali, Niger

and Algeria. They enjoy unequalled influence over the routes linking Gao to Niger, both via the road that connects Gao to Labbezanga and the one from Gao to Andéramboukane via Ménaka. Similarly, in the same coalition as GATIA and MSA, the MAA (loyalist) (also known as MAA-Platform) holds considerable influence in Gao as well as on the northbound road to Anéfis.

Timbuktu is not controlled by any particular armed group, but the Malian military, MINUSMA, the Arab Movement of Azawad (MAA–CMA) and the Platform movements all have a presence there. In the vicinity of Timbuktu, however, groups aligned with the CMA coalition are able to exert considerable military influence over the aforementioned towns east of Timbuktu, which have emerged as hubs of migrant departures.

In particular, the alliance between MAA, HCUA and the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA) is in a position to provide the requisite protection necessary should the Timbuktu–Algeria routes further develop. On top of benefiting from the necessary connections and capacity to move migrants through the heavily contested and treacherous terrain, the MAA–CMA is also aligned with the MNLA and the HCUA, which control large parts of the Algeria–Mali border, including the In-Khalil border crossing. Currently, however, our local contacts report that it is only Arab traders with connections within these networks who are organizing transport from Timbuktu to Algeria, and not the armed groups themselves.

Finally, although we have received reports that the MLF was possibly involved in migrant smuggling in central Mali, we have not been able to investigate any substantial involvement beyond the role of facilitating migrant passage through the areas they operate in. It is possible that elements of this militia profit from this facilitating role, and that the local conflicts we see in central and northern Mali are partly turf wars over territorial revenue streams, which do not necessarily involve the smuggling of migrants. However, this is yet to be established with confidence.

Outlook

Insecurity and instability are likely to remain a reality in northern Mali well into 2019, particularly in light of legislative elections scheduled to take place¹⁵⁶ in April 2019 and a referendum on the creation of a senate.¹⁵⁷

The DDR process, which started in November 2018, is seen as one of the most promising initiatives for achieving long-term stability in the north, but has so far seen limited effectiveness. Only 1 500 weapons were handed over in Kidal (a low turnout, particularly as some of these weapons were also said to have been returned to their owners), and some non-signatory armed movements were not included in the process after having been refused entry to the town by CMA members.

Given the reluctant cooperation of many concerned parties in giving up on troops and weapons, armed groups are likely to remain dominant in the region in 2019. Although JNIM members will probably keep a low profile while they lick their wounds following recent defeats by French and Malian forces, they are likely to push back in the medium to long term.

The recent increase in the use of more remote routes and clandestine tactics increases the risk that migrants will face abuse. In general, the more asymmetric the relationship between migrants and smugglers becomes, the higher the risk of systematic abuse becoming part of the modus operandi. This is on top of the greater risk of breakdowns in desert areas and a greater chance of targeting of convoys by armed groups.

Table 1: Armed actors in northern Mali

Acronym	Full name	Category
Platform	Platform of the Movements of 14 June 2014 in Algiers	Pro-government
GATIA	Imghad Tuareg Self-Defence Group and Allies	
CM-FPR	Coordination of Movements and Patriotic Front of Resistance	
MAA (loyalist)	Arab Movement of Azawad	
MPSA	People's Movement for the Liberation of Azawad	
MSA	Movement for the Salvation of Azawad	
CJA	Congress for Justice in Azawad	
CMA	Coordination of Azawad Movements	Separatist/rebel
MNLA	National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad	
HCUA	High Council for the Unity of Azawad	
CM-FPR II	Coordination of Movements and Patriotic Front of Resistance II	
CPA	Coalition of the People for Azawad	
MAA-CMA	Arab Movement of Azawad	
JNIM	Group to Support Islam and Muslims	Jihadi
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb	
Ansar Dine	Defenders of the Faith	
MLF	Macina Liberation Front	
ISGS	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara	
Ansar al-Islam	Defenders of Sharia	

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