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Shifting sands — Libya's changing drug trafficking dynamics on the coastal and desert borders

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Executive summary

This report provides an assessment of drug smuggling routes and dynamics in Libya and aims to establish areas for further in-depth research. It draws on a mixed-methods approach, which includes the analysis of relevant open-source data alongside data from interviews with a variety of key stakeholders in the region.

Libya's smuggling and trafficking economies have been in a tumultuous state of flux since the 2011 revolution, and drug trafficking is no exception. The initial post-revolution period was characterised by changes that opened the door to new players, and even new markets, and led to a huge increase in the country's internal consumption of illicit drugs, as well as to an expansion in its role as a transit point for drugs heading to Europe and countries neighbouring Libya.

The disruption caused by the revolution also reordered the control of this profitable criminal activity, in some cases resulting in wars between criminal actors, including several tribes. Much of this reorganisation was related to the involvement of armed groups in drug trafficking. Two concurrent and conflicting developments in drug trafficking have taken place in the past few years.

The first is that militias have enabled the development of sophisticated transnational criminal organisations with converging interests in high-value smuggling activities along the coast of Tripolitania. On the drug trafficking front, militias have enabled the large-scale import, storage and re-export of drugs in Libya. The second development has seen some militias set themselves against drug traffickers, at least as regards the local market. In the process, state law enforcement agencies, which had been seriously incapacitated in the immediate aftermath of 2011, have also been strengthened or at least given some space to operate.

In Libya's east, the evolution of drug trafficking has been more organic, with criminal activity expanding but following similar patterns and (tribal) systems of control as before the revolution. However, the coastal area of Cyrenaica is also a major landing spot for drugs en route to Egypt, Europe and other locations.

In southern areas, instability along the southern border, as well as in neighbouring Niger, Chad and Mali, appears to be having a disruptive effect on the north-bound movement of high-value drugs. This instability has been exacerbated by increasing levels of banditry along the borders between these countries.

The same cannot be said of the trafficking of prescription drugs, in particular tramadol, which is a growing business. The increasing supply of tramadol is in part a result of the criminalisation of migrant smuggling in Niger in 2015, which rendered the transport of prescription drugs a low-risk alternative to migrant smuggling. However, Libya's problem with the abuse of prescription medication is not confined to the south-west of the country. It is a growing problem across Libya, a country that to this day lacks adequate substance use prevention programmes or infrastructures.

Introduction

This report was prepared as a background paper to the EU Drug Markets Report 2019. It provides an analysis of the routes and smuggling dynamics in Libya, and pays particular attention to the drug flows most relevant to the export of illicit substances to Europe.

The report is based on a mixed-methodology approach. Open-source data relevant to drug trafficking were systematically collected and analysed between May and September 2018. These were then used to inform more detailed monitoring, which was conducted with a network of 21 field researchers based in key smuggling and trafficking hotspots across Libya, Niger and Chad. The report also draws on 22 exchanges and interviews with key informants, including Libyan, Italian and Maltese security sources, law enforcement officers, border officials, militiamen and community members based in Tripoli, Misrata, al-Khoms, Zawiya, Sabratha, Zuwara, Bani Walid, Sebha, Murzuq, Ubari, Tobruk, Benghazi and Ajdabiya, among other places. Finally, the report benefits from extensive fieldwork and interviews carried out for separate research projects with militia leaders involved in trafficking activities in Zuwara, Sabratha and Zawiya in 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The findings are organised into four main sections, the first three of which detail the smuggling dynamics of each of the three main regions of the country: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan. The fourth section discusses the increasing misuse of prescription drugs (particularly tramadol) in the country.

Tripolitania routes and smuggling dynamics

Western Libya has a historic drug trafficking connection with southern Europe that has evolved over recent years in line with the incessant changes that illicit markets have undergone in the conflict-riven North African state since the 2011 revolution. In particular, the joining up of militias with criminal actors in key coastal hubs has led to the development of sophisticated criminal organisations that have expanded the export of drugs to Europe using maritime routes that span the Mediterranean (Map 1).

Misrata and Zuwara, and particularly the port of al-Khoms, 100 km east of Tripoli, are important entry points for cannabis resin (hashish) shipped from Morocco, Lebanon and Syria, and, to a lesser extent, for cocaine shipped from Mauritania or directly from South America. These drugs are partly feeding the internal market, which has been growing across Libya (especially in urban areas), and are partly smuggled by land eastwards to Egypt via the hub of Ajdabiya. A significant portion of the drugs get stored in Libya before eventually being re-exported to southern Italy and the Balkans by sea. These Libyan ports also receive large quantities of prescription drugs for local consumption and export to Egypt. Smaller quantities of 3,4-methylenedioxy-N-methylamphetamine (MDMA) and hallucinogens from Europe, for consumption in Libya, are also reported.

The increasing shift towards maritime trafficking routes has emerged as Tripoli's internal market has been under pressure from militias seeking to develop grassroots support by fighting those drug dealers targeting the Libyan market. However, there has been no comparable action against large-scale international drug traffickers. Nonetheless, Tripoli, as well as hubs to the west of the capital, remains a key hub for the storage and onward distribution of drugs. On the Tunisian-Libyan border, hashish and small quantities of heroin are reported to be smuggled in from the coast at the official border crossing in Ras Ajadir, from desert areas further south, close to an area called al-Harsa, and from points around the Nalut Mountains. The town of Ghadames remains a primary entry point on the western Libyan-Algerian border for both hashish and prescription drugs.

Most of the cross-border transportation of drugs takes place through desert crossings. However, official border crossings, which are used for the widespread illicit movement of subsidised goods and contraband, are also believed to be gateways for the movement of drugs. Official border points have been undermined by the militias that run perimeter security. However, border guards working in both Ras Ajadir and Nalut have reported that when drug busts occur they are almost always the result of tip-offs, as there are no security scanners at these crossings.

Tripolitania is connected to the Fezzan region in the south-west, an important entry point for hashish, cocaine, heroin and prescription drugs. There are three primary routes leading north from Fezzan. One runs from the Tuareg-dominated deserts north of Ubari directly to Zintan, from where it heads either to towns west of Tripoli, such as Zuwara, Sabratha or Zawiya, or to the capital itself. The second route connects the capital of the Sebha region to the town of Shwayrif via Brak al-Shaati, from where drugs proceed to the capital or to Misrata, via Garyan, Bani Walid or Abugrein.

A third route from Sebha sees drugs transported to Tammanhint and eventually Waddan, before being moved to Sirte, Misrata or Tripoli, or otherwise to the eastern town of Ajdabiya, typically on the way to Egypt. This last movement is reported to have been reduced to a trickle.

Map 1: Indicative drug smuggling routes in Libya's coastal west, based on data collected by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. There is an overlap with similar routes used to smuggle different types of drugs. However, inside Libya, the trafficking of cocaine and heroin is considered a top-tier activity that normally involves specialised criminal actors.



Growing domestic drug markets put in check by militias

Libya's black market economy expanded rapidly after the revolution as a result of the involvement of, and protection racket created by, militias in various smuggling and trafficking activities ⁽¹⁾. The phenomenon was in part the result of criminal actors finding themselves in positions of power after the upheaval of 2011. However, it also stemmed from the broader pattern of resource predation that

⁽¹⁾ Shaw, M. and Mangan, F. (2014), *Illicit trafficking and Libya's transition: profit and losses*, United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/02/illicit-trafficking-and-libyas-transition-profits-and-losses>

various militias had based their business model on, particularly after 2012 ⁽²⁾. Drug trafficking was no exception, with domestic consumption (especially that of prescription pharmaceuticals) ballooning from 2011; this early post-revolution trend gained momentum with the outbreak of the civil war in 2014.

The societal taboo associated with drug and alcohol consumption in Libya conditioned somewhat the appetite for exposure to this particular criminal activity among the larger militias initially. However, the protection offered by militias at strategic trafficking points was crucial to the growth of drug trafficking markets.

The takeover of the Tripoli International Airport by Zintani armed groups is perhaps the best example of this. The airport was completely destroyed when the civil war (also referred to as the Fajr Libya or Libya Dawn war) broke out in July 2014. Along with destroying infrastructure, the fighting destroyed an entire fleet of aircraft that previously connected Tripoli directly to several African and European cities, through which drugs and other illicit goods were procured. These items had previously been smuggled through the airport with great ease as a result of the stake that various armed groups had in the business:

'At the time we were receiving a lot of declarations from the airport police but we could do nothing about them. We couldn't even enter the airport. We used to get drugs from Africa and even ecstasy and cocaine from European destinations, like Holland ... The only good thing to come from the destruction of the airport is that it also destroyed this distribution...'

At the same time, many drug trafficking gangs targeting the local market, some of which were led by veterans in the business who had escaped from prison during the revolution, were able to arm themselves with heavy weapons and take control of areas of the capital and towns in the region from which they were able to act within relative impunity. Other gang members had fought on the frontlines and returned to their former trades with a veneer of legitimacy granted to them by the fact that they were considered *thumar* (revolutionaries) or because they formed part of recognised militias. In parallel, law enforcement entities were debilitated, in part because they were tarnished by their association with the former regime, and in part because many officers understood early on that the new landscape was not safe for them to operate in:

'My uncle was a high-ranking member of the anti-drugs police in Tripoli before the revolution. After Tripoli was liberated he quickly realised that some of the criminals he had put in prison had basically become the law in Abu Salim, which is where he was based, so he stopped going to work.' ⁽³⁾

The situation has evolved considerably in recent years. The brazenness of drug traffickers and the growing impact of their activities on the civilian population has made them easily identifiable targets for those major militias that have made the decision to take on a law enforcement role.

The establishment of the Government of National Accord (GNA) ⁽⁴⁾ at the end of March 2015 in Tripoli was pivotal in reinforcing this trend. The GNA ushered in a new security order, which, over the next year or so, saw a small nucleus of four to six militias swallow up smaller armed groups and push competitors out of the capital, allowing them to monopolise control of the capital and gain

⁽²⁾ Rifaat Tabib (2014), *Stealing the revolution: violence and predation in Libya*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre (NOREF), https://www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/Tabib_Clingendael_NOREF_Stealing%20the%20revolution_Violence%20and%20predation%20in%20Libya_October%202014.pdf

⁽³⁾ Telephone interview with an officer from the Central Security Department in Zuwara, July 2018.

⁽⁴⁾ The Government of National Accord is based in Tripoli and was born out of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in December 2015. It is the internationally recognised government in Libya. The GNA is still dependent on recognition from the House of Representatives (HOR), which is based in the eastern city of Tobruk and is associated with the competing but unrecognised eastern government based in Bayda. The Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar, is aligned to the HOR and the Bayda government.

considerable influence over other parts of greater Tripoli ⁽⁵⁾. Their hold on the capital, and its financial institutions in particular, also allowed them to shift their predation model away from overt illegal activities. The Rada Special Forces ⁽⁶⁾ were pioneers in this regard, fashioning themselves as a Special Branch-type police unit with a focus on vice (drugs, alcohol and prostitution), organised crime and terrorism.

Rada's particular anti-vice position was also influenced by ideological and religious considerations (the group's leadership includes many Madkhali Salafists, who follow a branch of conservative Islamist thought) but it was also a successful strategy, which enabled it to garner public support and establish legitimacy. As these large groups were being co-opted into official law enforcement entities, they in turn co-opted officials, including experienced members of different law enforcement and intelligence agencies, thereby improving their law enforcement capability.

The Rada case is especially instructive, as the group made a name for itself with high-profile raids on drug traffickers and kidnappers. In doing so, it addressed the primary security concerns of ordinary citizens and often garnered their support in the process, despite using heavy-handed methods that were considered outside the norms of due process ⁽⁷⁾. A raid in 2015 on well-known drug trafficker Khalifa Duzan in the Tripoli neighbourhood of Souq al-Juma (the area in which the militia is based) is arguably one of the most prominent early examples of this activity. Duzan died in the raid following an intense firefight. Two kilograms of cocaine and a cache of weapons and ammunition were found in the building used as one of his operation centres.

Figure 1: A cache of weapons, alcohol, drugs and drug-related paraphernalia (right) confiscated from a den of the Sherfaddin as-Saliema gang in Gargaesh. During a week-long raid on the coastal town, more than 1 000 sub-Saharan migrants were found in several sites belonging to the gang, where they were being held while waiting to cross the sea to Europe.



Photographs: Rada Special Forces.

More recently, in January 2017, the group led a campaign to clean up an area of the Gargaesh coastal neighbourhood, focusing especially on two gangs: one led by a 26-year-old drug trafficker known as al-Fox, who managed to rise quickly up the ranks of the Gargaesh criminal network, and another, more established network known as the Sherfaddin as-Saliema.

⁽⁵⁾ Lacher, W. and al-Idrisi, A., (2018), *Capital of militias — Tripoli's armed groups capture the Libyan state*, Security Assessment in North Africa, Small Arms Survey, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Tripoli-armed-groups.pdf>

⁽⁶⁾ Since May 2018, the Rada Special Forces have formally become the Anti-Terrorism and Organized Crime Agency, but they are still largely referred to by their previous name.

⁽⁷⁾ Dahan, N. (2018), 'Torture and arbitrary detention widespread across Libyan prisons: UN', *Middle East Eye*, 10 April 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/libya-widespread-torture-un-830798788>

Rada units targeted various sites in the neighbourhood between 14 and 16 January 2017, prevailing despite intense battles in which they were faced with heavy machine-gun and rocket-propelled grenade fire from makeshift turrets. The operation led to the seizure of large quantities of hashish, heroin, cocaine and prescription drugs, as well as alcohol, from various sites, but it also exposed the diversity of the operations run by these gangs (Figure 1).

Almost 1 000 sub-Saharan migrants were found in unfinished apartment blocks with little or no sanitation, along with vast inventories of illicit goods, drugs and alcohol. They were waiting for their departure by boat to Europe, organised by the Sherfaddin gang from the Gargaresh beach front or from a spot further west called al-Mayya. Several women, many of them Nigerian, were put to work in brothels administered for the Sherfaddin by fellow Nigerians.

Crucially, towards the end of the operation, Rada went after, and arrested, a militia leader known as Adel Sifou, aka Adel Shita. Shita headed a force that held checkpoints on the roads into Gargaresh, and was claimed to be protecting the business of these and other criminal gangs operating in the area⁽⁸⁾:

'What Rada is doing isn't correct at all, I am personally against it. But on the other hand, I recognise that there was such a distribution of weapons that you had to be heavy handed. I don't tolerate what they do but given the situation in general, we would be in a much worse situation today had they not intervened'⁽⁹⁾.

Box 1: Indicative street prices for drugs

Cocaine: LYD 550 (EUR 87)⁽¹⁰⁾ per gram.

Heroin: LYD 250 (EUR 40) per gram.

Tramadol: LYD 100 (EUR 16) per 10 tablets, normally sold in a blister pack typically called *shareet* (tape) in Libya.

Cannabis: resin is normally sold in blocks of 250 g, which are referred to as gorzas, but can also be bought as a half or quarter of a gorza. A 250-g block sells for LYD 3 000-4 000 (EUR 475-635, depending on the going black market exchange rate with the dollar). A quarter of a gorza sells for around LYD 1 000 (EUR 159).

MDMA: LYD 50 per pill (EUR 8).

The west coast's converging criminal markets

High-level drug trafficking has historically tended to be distinct from other forms of smuggling and trafficking in Libya. The profits involved, as well as the fact that it was closely monitored — and to an extent controlled — by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, rendered it a top-tier criminal economy that could be accessed only by the most connected and ruthless actors⁽¹¹⁾. The revolution altered this dynamic somewhat, first by opening up the local distribution market to new players and, eventually, by altering the governance of the large-scale transit of drugs.

⁽⁸⁾ Ali, M. (2017), 'Blockade in west Tripoli continues over arrest of local warlord', *Libya Herald*, 16 January 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/16/blockade-in-west-tripoli-continues-over-arrest-of-local-warlord/>

⁽⁹⁾ Telephone interview with a member of the Libyan anti-drug agency (ANGA) based in Tripoli, June and September, 2018.

⁽¹⁰⁾ The rate of exchange is an approximation of the black-market rate at the time of writing, which hovered above LYD 6.3 to EUR 1.

⁽¹¹⁾ Shaw, M. and Mangan, F. (2014), *Illicit trafficking and Libya's transition: profit and losses*, United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/02/illicit-trafficking-and-libyas-transition-profits-and-losses>

Increasingly, in the run up to and after the Fajr Libya war, hybrid criminal organisations were established by militia leaders and career criminals with overlapping interests in the smuggling of people, fuel, drugs and, for a time, weapons (although smuggling of the latter started to wane with the depletion of Gaddafi-era weapons stocks). Drug trafficking remained largely under the radar, even when other criminal activities came under local and international scrutiny because of their impact and visibility.

European countries that were receiving migrants and asylum seekers from Libya⁽¹²⁾ focused on coastal networks, while the smuggling of fuel became a cause for domestic frustration as towns and cities across the country were left facing severe fuel shortages — ironically forcing citizens to turn to the same black market and pay well above the official subsidised rate for fuel⁽¹³⁾. Pressure on both migration and fuel smuggling increased in 2015 and 2016, with a turning point coming in 2017. Since July 2017, the departure of migrants from Libya has dropped by around 80 %, while seaborne fuel smuggling has decreased considerably on account of commercial fuel tankers ceasing to operate in Libya between 2016 and 2017⁽¹⁴⁾.

This dramatic decline, particularly in migrant smuggling, is intimately linked to the establishment of the law enforcement model by the super militias of Tripoli. The international focus on migration created opportunities for militias (some of which were directly involved in migrant smuggling) to be co-opted into the state security apparatus by the GNA. Aside from tapping into state coffers, the legitimacy that co-option offered the leaders of these armed groups has been a lifeline as Libya's current political status quo fast approaches its endgame⁽¹⁵⁾.

The result was that several militias lowered their profile or retreated altogether from protecting the more exposed and politically toxic activities. The process was hastened by naming and shaming, and by the decision of the United Nations (UN) Security Council to impose sanctions on some of the biggest names or *rws* ('heads' as they are known in Libya) involved in fuel and migrant smuggling⁽¹⁶⁾.

Simultaneously, the Libyan Coast Guard's capacity was strengthened significantly through investments by the European Union (EU) (especially Italy), which expanded the force's assets and radar capability, with most of the support going to migratory flows⁽¹⁷⁾. In terms of fuel smuggling, targeted action by Italian law enforcement agencies through Operation Dirty Oil in October 2017 helped dismantle what was arguably the biggest fuel smuggling operation in the west of Libya⁽¹⁸⁾⁽¹⁹⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ Between 2014 and 2017, more than 680 000 migrants and refugees were smuggled out of Libya, (including arrivals and people believed to have died at sea), mostly from a 120-km stretch of coastline between the town of Zawiya and the Tunisian boarder.

⁽¹³⁾ During shortages, Libyans are forced to buy fuel on the black market, often sold from the same official petrol stations or informal distribution centres from where the price per litre of fuel can go up to LYD 2 or 3 (roughly EUR 1.26 to 1.89 at the official rate, or roughly EUR 0,30 to 0,50 at the black-market rate), in contrast to the official subsidised selling price LYD 0.15 per litre (EUR 0.09 at the official rate).

⁽¹⁴⁾ The smuggling of fuel at various land borders and even within Libya remains rampant but even this activity is under pressure from local law-enforcement initiatives. Moreover, there is no evidence of significant overlap between low- to medium-level fuel smuggling and international drug trafficking. The area of convergence is between networks organising large-scale fuel smuggling and international drug trafficking.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Micallef, M. and Reitano, T. (2017), *The anti-human smuggling business and Libya's political end game*, Institute for Security Studies, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/nar2.pdf>

⁽¹⁶⁾ Campos, R. (2018), 'U.N. sanctions six people on Libya human-trafficking', Reuters, 7 June 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-migrants-un/un-sanctions-six-people-on-libya-human-trafficking-idUSKCN1J32V1>

⁽¹⁷⁾ Nielsen, N. (2018), 'EU and Italy put aside €285m to boost Libyan coast guard', *EU Observer*, 29 November 2018, <https://euobserver.com/migration/140067>

⁽¹⁸⁾ An investigation by an anti-mafia unit in Palermo led to several arrests in connection with a major shipwreck that became known as the Lampedusa tragedy and began to expose human smuggling networks operating in Libya, forcing key players to dismantle their operation and/or flee. See Squires, N. (2005), 'Dirty business of people smuggling: Italian police release wiretaps from trafficking network', *The Telegraph*, 21 April 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/italy/11553193/Dirty-business-of-people-smuggling-Italian-police-release-wiretaps-from-trafficking-network.html>

Investigators estimate that the network, which connected criminals in Libya and Malta with the Sicilian Mafia, smuggled EUR 30 million worth of fuel in 1 year alone, between 2015 and 2016.

However, despite the intense focus on some of the players operating in the coastal system (some of whom even became targets of the press ⁽²⁰⁾), the systemic overlap between these different illicit activities and international drug trafficking remained largely under the radar of local law enforcement and international bodies in Libya:

'Many of these guys now being called kingpin ... this and that kingpin in the UN (Sanctions Committee Libya Panel of Experts) reports started their lives as drug traffickers, smugglers or even petty criminals and then they got a chance in the revolution and they started dreaming big. They are people who take opportunities and their new position brings them many opportunities in fuel, humans, drugs, alcohol, you name it.' ⁽²¹⁾

Before the arrests as part of Operation Dirty Oil took place, key members of these smuggling networks had been scaling back their fuel smuggling operations from October 2015, when they were first 'outed' in the press ⁽²²⁾ (and subsequently in a UN Security Council report the following March) ⁽²³⁾. For instance, Fahmi Slim Ben Khalifa, who is believed to have masterminded the criminal organisation targeted by Operation Dirty Oil, together with members of the Sicilian Mafia clan Santapaola-Ercolano, retreated to his native Zuwara (a historic smuggling hub 55 km east of the Tunisian border) from Malta, where he sold property that he owned ⁽²⁴⁾.

At around the same time, Italian law enforcement agencies were receiving reports of renewed shipments of hashish headed for Zuwara, believed to be for storage and eventual re-export ⁽²⁵⁾. It is instructive, in this respect, that when Slim Ben Khalifa was arrested in the coastal town on 23 August 2017, as part of a Libyan sting unrelated to the Italian investigation, he was arrested for possession of 1 kg of hashish and not on fuel smuggling charges ⁽²⁶⁾.

A similar shift is reported to have taken place in the operations of other criminal gangs in nearby Sabratha and Mutrud at this time, a period that coincides with the sudden collapse of migratory flows from these areas. Moreover, at least one of the alleged human smugglers placed on the UN sanctions

⁽¹⁹⁾ Scherer, S. (2017), 'Italy breaks up Libyan fuel smuggling ring involving mafia', Reuters, 18 October 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-italy-crime-libya/italy-breaks-up-libyan-fuel-smuggling-ring-involving-mafia-idUSKBN1CN2HI>

⁽²⁰⁾ Bühler, A., Koelbl, S., Mattioli, S., Mayr, W. (2016), 'On the trail of African migrant smugglers', <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/migrant-smuggling-business-means-big-money-in-libya-a-1113654-2.html>

⁽²¹⁾ Interview with a Libyan security source, Tunis, October 2018.

⁽²²⁾ Marlowe, A. (2015), 'Why does EU tolerate Libya's smuggler kingpin as migrants drown?', *Asia Times*, 16 October 2015, <http://www.atimes.com/article/eu-turns-blind-eye-to-fuel-for-arms-smuggling-as-migrants-drown/>

⁽²³⁾ Panel of Experts on Libya, letter dated 4 March 2016 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, 9 March 2016, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2016_209.pdf

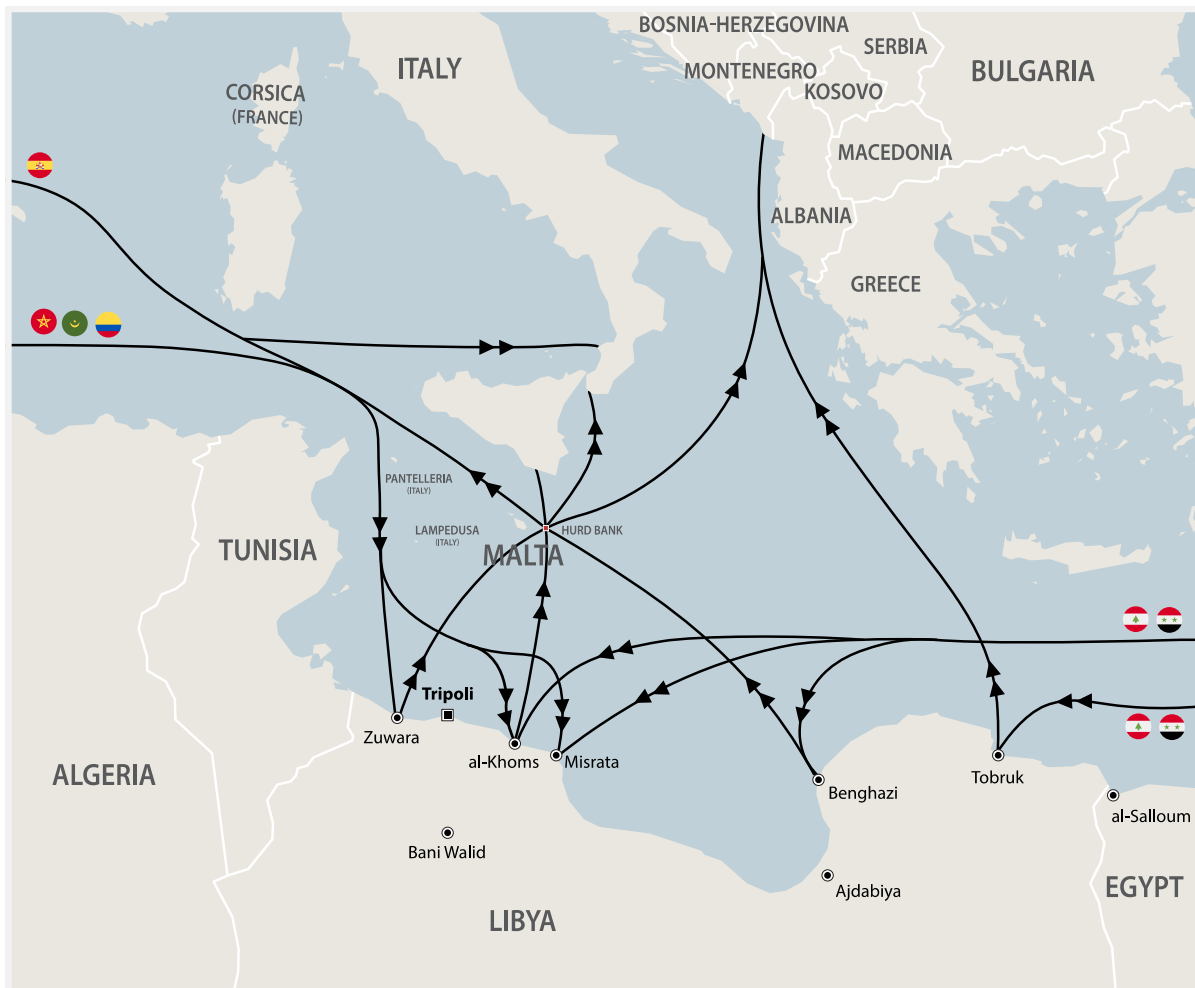
⁽²⁴⁾ Interview with a Maltese security source, Valletta, June 2017 and a telephone interview with a Zuwaran militiaman, June 2017.

⁽²⁵⁾ Telephone interview with an Italian security source specialising in Libya, October 2017.

⁽²⁶⁾ The smuggler, Ben Khalifa, had spent time in jail for drug trafficking before the revolution. Relatives of his launched a challenge before the district attorney in al-Jmail claiming that he had been framed. Multiple Zuwaran interlocutors contacted as part of research for this paper said that they could not believe Ben Khalifa would get his hands dirty over such small quantities of hashish clearly intended to be sold on the local market. However, even if the framing story is to be believed, it is telling that drugs were used to set him up in the context of the information circulating in restricted circles on the west coast of Libya that Ben Khalifa had turned to drug trafficking. Ben Khalifa remained in custody in a prison adjacent to the Mitiga airport in Tripoli. At the time of writing it has not been possible to obtain information on his legal case.

list is also believed to have become more heavily involved in drug trafficking after winding down migrant smuggling operations in Sabratha ⁽²⁷⁾.

Map 2: Indicative map of maritime trafficking routes for marijuana and cocaine involving Libya, based on data from investigations carried out by Libeccio International and information collected by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. The routes do not include trafficking through official container ports.



Drugs import and export

This is not to say that the decline of both sea-bound fuel and migrant smuggling created a coastal drug trafficking industry. The growing importance of these operations pre-dates these events, but the sudden collapse of these enterprises — which had become pillars of the Libyan west coast criminal economy — was a catalyst for the intensification of drugs shipping along the west coast.

The scale and complexity of both sea-bound fuel and migrant smuggling operations as they developed in the greater Tripolitania region after 2012/13 required a significant degree of collaboration between different criminal and militia players operating in an otherwise highly fragmented and divided region. More than mere networks, in many cases, the criminal actors at the top of these illicit markets formed consortia that were reinforced by competition from openly hostile

⁽²⁷⁾ Interview with a Libyan security source, Tunis, October 2018.

counterparts⁽²⁸⁾. By the end of 2012, members of such consortia working in these expanding illicit markets started developing a firm transnational connection on both logistical and financial fronts.

From a financial perspective, the criminal economy rapidly expanded its transitional connectivity through hawaladars (this is mostly the case for migrant smuggling), as well as money and gold traders operating from the old city in Tripoli and a more formal financial transaction system with bank accounts and companies. A complex system was developed, linking Libyan criminal actors and militia leaders involved in different forms of smuggling and trafficking with companies and businessmen with interests in legitimate trade in Libya, Malta, Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Albania, Montenegro, Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (Dubai), among other places:

‘You have a number of players who can be considered part of these criminal groups, who are really only the money people. Here in Libya, some have their stall in the Medina where they trade currency and buy and sell gold and where they can make a transfer of half a million euros between Istanbul and Libya, just like that.’⁽²⁹⁾

In terms of logistics, fuel smuggling, and for some time illegal arms export at sea as well⁽³⁰⁾, necessitated the development of a sophisticated maritime system that carefully exploited the jurisdictional limits of national law enforcement agencies in different countries. It is for this reason that Italian and Maltese players became pivotal in the overall operation of both fuel smuggling and drug trafficking⁽³¹⁾.

An important modus operandi in this context is the use of an undersea elevation off Malta, known as Hurd Bank (see Map 2). The bank provides a shallow area where ships can drop anchor for free and for this reason it is regularly used for bunkering by commercial vessels or even as a stopover during bad weather or downtime. Because the bank sits just outside Malta’s territorial waters, it is also used regularly for ship-to-ship transfers of illicit goods.

The strength of the system is that often the cargo has no identifiable owners, because they would be hidden behind bogus paperwork or letter-box companies in offshore jurisdictions. Similarly, shipping agents and/or ship owners claim ignorance about the vessels’ cargoes, which often means that the only people to be prosecuted are the captain and the crew, while a number of people who are more pivotal to the smuggling operation can carry on with the business.

Maltese law enforcement authorities have the right to search vessels on suspicion of illegal activity but law enforcement is rare, as there is no random patrolling carried out near the bank⁽³²⁾. This method was tried and tested with large-scale fuel smuggling from Libya to Europe⁽³³⁾, but Italian

⁽²⁸⁾ Micallef, M. (2017), *The human conveyor belt: trends in human trafficking and smuggling in post-revolution Libya*, The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, February 2017, <http://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/global-initiative-human-conveyor-belt-human-smuggling-in-libya-march-2017.pdf>

⁽²⁹⁾ Interview with a former fuel smuggler, October 2017, Tripoli, Libya.

⁽³⁰⁾ Illegal arms exports from Libya have been declining in recent years, largely because of depleting stocks in the country, while arms transfers to Libya continue; much of this activity appears to be systematic and likely to take place with the consent of foreign state actors supporting specific armed actors in Libya. See also Panel of Libya Experts, the Letter dated 5 September 2018 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, September 2018, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=%20S/2018/812

⁽³¹⁾ The Malta connection to Libyan drug exports is only now becoming visible. However, this is something that was pointed out to the author in face-to-face interviews with militiamen in Sabratha and Zawiya in August 2016 and October 2017, respectively. A recent investigation by the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) focusing on Malta-based elements of this maritime logistics network has started lifting the lid on this connection: see Anesi, C., Bagoli, L., Rubino, G. (2018), ‘Malta, a modern smugglers’ hideout’, OCCRP, 10 October 2018 <https://www.occrp.org/en/thedaphneproject/malta-a-modern-smugglers-hideout>

⁽³²⁾ *The Malta Independent*, Hurd’s Bank outside Maltese jurisdiction, 1 October 2010, <http://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2010-10-01/news/hurds-bank-outside-maltese-jurisdiction-280959/>

⁽³³⁾ Marlowe, A. (2016), ‘Whose Convenience?’, *Weekly Standard*, 2 December 2016, <https://www.weeklystandard.com/ann-marlowe/whose-convenience>

investigators working as part of an international anti-drug trafficking operation, Libeccio International, also concluded that Hurd Bank was used for the transfer of drugs from Libya to Europe.

The international operation, which now comprises several EU Member States, North African states and Europol, was instigated after the interception of a Comoros Islands-registered ship carrying almost 16 tonnes of hashish off the Italian island of Pantelleria in April 2013 ⁽³⁴⁾. That seizure and subsequent investigations had identified the first signs of a shift away from the established historic routes that saw hashish from Morocco make its way overland to Libya via southern Algeria, to be later re-exported to Egypt or Europe.

Hashish is now typically loaded off Casablanca, in the Atlantic, or between Nador in Morocco and Oran in Algeria in the Mediterranean, and is transported on board fishing vessels or commercial vessels to points off the Libyan coast (Figure 2). Similarly, the transfer in Libya is done either at sea or directly on land in container ports. To a lesser extent, the route is also used for cocaine from Mauritania or directly from South America ⁽³⁵⁾.

Figure 2: The 58-metre *Quest* being pursued by Italian law enforcement agencies while carrying 10 tonnes of hashish south-west of Sicily, in June 2018. The vessel had left from the Gulf of Oran in the direction of Libya. The crew included a Romanian, a Ukrainian, two Egyptians, a Croat and a Dutch national, along with a Maltese first officer. The shipping agent, Pawlu Attard, who has connections in Libya, was also indicted.



Photograph: Guardia di Finanza, Palermo.

⁽³⁴⁾ Ziniti, A. (2014), 'The new drug routes, North Africa in chaos and hashish invasion' (Le nuove rotte della droga 'Nordafrica nel caos, è invasione di hashish'), *Repubblica*, 8 July, 2014, https://palermo.repubblica.it/cronaca/2014/07/08/news/ecco_le_nuove_rotte_della_droga_nordafrika_nel_caos_invasione_di_hashish-90975113/

⁽³⁵⁾ Operational note furnished by the Guardia di Finanza of Palermo.

Part of such shipments is sold on the local market and part is then smuggled overland to Egypt and, to a lesser extent, to Tunisia. Libyan officials believe that a significant portion is re-exported on vessels to Europe or Turkey⁽³⁶⁾. Some ship-to-ship transfers take place at rendezvous points off the Libyan coast and involve several small to medium-sized fishing vessels loading cargoes of drugs on to ships destined for other places. The same method is also used to bring drugs into Libya.

Other transfers take place off Malta, at Hurd Bank, and are intended to camouflage the provenance of the illicit cargo, which typically lands in Sicily, Calabria or even Albania and Montenegro, specifically the Port of Bar⁽³⁷⁾. There is evidence that these routes are used by the same networks to move contraband cigarettes⁽³⁸⁾.

To date, drug seizures and intelligence gathered by Libeccio International has established shipments of drugs to and from eastern ports only (as discussed below). However, multiple law enforcement officials in Misrata, Tripoli and Zuwara insist that similar shipments also depart from western Libya⁽³⁹⁾.

Individuals linked by Libeccio International with the movement of hashish to Libya have also been connected to the illegal export of arms to and from western Libya⁽⁴⁰⁾. Moreover, just as with ports in eastern Libya, the ports of Misrata, Zuwara and particularly al-Khoms have also been receiving substantial volumes of drugs. The port of Tripoli does not appear to be an important drug trafficking site, as commercial movement has been undermined by the conditions of the port, where dredging and clearing works needed after the revolution were never carried out.

Some of this activity has been exposed. During August and September 2018 alone, port customs in al-Khoms seized around 31 tonnes of hashish, most of which came from Lebanon⁽⁴¹⁾. Similarly, in January that year, 11 million tramadol tablets were seized in the port of Misrata, while in September around 11 tonnes of cannabis (likely also to be of Lebanese origin) were seized in Malta from four containers destined for the same port in Libya⁽⁴²⁾.

⁽³⁶⁾ Interview with a Libyan security source, Tunis, October 2018.

⁽³⁷⁾ Italian and Maltese law-enforcement agencies have been monitoring vessels, one of which is owned by a Maltese shipping agent that sails exclusively between the Port of Bar and Hurd bank, face-to-face interview with an Italian security source, August 2018, Malta.

⁽³⁸⁾ See, for instance, a case from July 2017 in which more than three million packets of cigarettes were seized in waters off Cadiz, 50 nautical miles off Tunisia. Maltese security officials confirmed that the cargo had been transferred off Malta. The vessel carrying the cigarettes had no crew and was towed by a tug, whose captain and crew claimed ignorance of the cargo of the vessel they were towing, which, they said, they had been salvaging. See Spanish Office of the Prime Minister (2017), 'Spanish Tax Agency concludes largest ever operation against tobacco smuggling with seizure of three million packs in Cadiz waters', *La Moncloa*, 7 July 2017, http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/gobierno/news/Paginas/2017/20170707_tobacco-smugglin.aspx

⁽³⁹⁾ Telephone interviews with a coastguard captain from Misrata, July 2018, a Central Security Officer posted at the Ras Ajdir border crossing, September 2018, and a member of the Libyan anti-drug agency (ANGA) based in Tripoli, October 2018. Information on this point was also collected directly during interviews with militia leaders in Zawiya and Sabratha, November 2017.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ The Munzur, a ship that was carrying more than 13 tonnes of hashish when it was intercepted south of Pantellerija in December 2015, was at the time owned by Mohamed Kafaji, of Kafaji Shipping Co. SA. based in Tartus, Syria. Two separate vessels, the Letfallah II and the Alexandretta also belonged to Khafaji when they were found carrying arms in July 2012 and March 2013. In the first case, the weapons were loaded in Misrata and shipped to Tripoli, Lebanon. In the second, supplies of shotguns, pistols and ammunition were found in Greece where the ship stopped on its way from Derince, Turkey to Tripoli or Misrata, Libya. See Panel of Libya Experts, Letter dated 15 February 2014 from the Panel of Experts on Libya established pursuant to resolution 1973 (2011) addressed to the President of the Security Council, February 2014, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2014_106.pdf

⁽⁴¹⁾ <https://www.facebook.com/CUStoms.libya/posts/1862473807206911/> / https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=1840787922687016&id=938727209559763/ / <https://www.afriqatnews.net/article/تارادخملانم-وليك-4000-طبضي-سملانم-أ/> / https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2112031902372288&id=2071393619769450

⁽⁴²⁾ Grech, D. (2018), 'Largest drug haul had value of €28.5 million', *Times of Malta*, 18 September 2018, <https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180918/local/largest-drug-haul-had-value-of-285-million.689464>

Shipments to Zuwara tend to be of a smaller scale and are normally organised through transfers at sea using fishing vessels, rather than container ships. Zuwara gets weekly medium-sized container ships but these come mostly from a single port, that of Genoa, and the traffic is limited because of the modest size and limited depth of the port.

Overall, law enforcement officials widely believe that the seizures are the tip of the iceberg. Because of the lack of systematic checks and equipment, in practice only a small percentage of containers are checked. Moreover, the port of al-Khoms has been significantly infiltrated by militias. Libyan customs and the port security services are technically the bodies in charge of securing the facility and vetting cargo; however, multiple contacts approached during the reporting period said that many positions in these state bodies were filled with militiamen, particularly in 2012 and 2013.

The container port of Misrata is by far the largest and most commercially important (as it is attached to the Misrata Free Zone ⁽⁴³⁾) in western Libya. However, al-Khoms is reported to be more active in relation to drug trafficking. Significant commercial interest in the port of Misrata over the years has ensured that armed groups associated with the city do not maintain a formal presence around the port. Some families who live in the vicinity of the port of Misrata, particularly the area of Gasr Hamad, are known to exert some control. This provides ample opportunities to import illicit goods; however, different interlocutors approached for this research project concurred that this activity is regulated informally and is subservient to the interests of legitimate trade at the port:

‘Of course, a lot of smuggling takes place at the Misrata port, but it is much easier to go through al-Khoms. In practice, the port there can be said to be militia-run even though they are sanctioned (official) customs officers. Many of them have interests in many different things smuggled through the port, so it’s easier to work there.’ ⁽⁴⁴⁾

⁽⁴³⁾ Zaptia, S., Misrata Free Zone signs exclusive development agreement, 23 February 2018, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2018/02/23/misrata-free-zone-signs-exclusive-development-agreement/>

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Telephone interview with a Misrati port employee, October 2018.

Cyrenaica routes and smuggling dynamics

The principal flow of drugs from Cyrenaica to Europe relates to the shipment of hashish and, to a lesser extent, cocaine from the eastern ports of Benghazi and Tobruk. Tobruk in particular is a regionally important landing and storage site for drugs from Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, Europe (Greece and southern Italy) and even South America. Some of these drugs are consumed locally, but a significant volume gets re-exported via maritime routes to southern Italy and Balkan countries such as Albania and Montenegro.

Hashish, prescription drugs such as tramadol, and, to a lesser extent, cocaine and heroin are also smuggled overland to the Egyptian border from the official border crossing at el-Salloum as well as from desert areas further south, between Jaghub and Siwa. A smaller flow of cannabis and tramadol also moves west to Bani Walid via Ajdabiya, with the final destination often being Tripoli. Ajdabiya is also a transit point for drugs coming from the west, on their way to Egypt, mostly from south-west Libya after entering the country from Algeria and Niger. Illicit trade along this route appears to have lost some momentum in recent years. Smaller flows of cannabis and heroin also travel from southern Niger and cross northern Chad to the far south-east of Libya, near the town of Kufra, typically on their way to Egypt.

The town of Ajdabiya is important for the general understanding of illicit trade flows in the country because it is the main gateway to the Cyrenaica region. The town faces the Gulf of Sirte, which hosts the country's most important oil and gas infrastructure, and has a vast but sparsely populated desert area behind it. Its strategic location and geography has historically attracted smugglers and, more recently, jihadis.

Throughout 2016, conflict between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and the then nominally pro-GNA Petroleum Facilities Guards commander Ibrahim Jadhran — brother of the former mayor of Ajdabiya — negatively affected both legitimate trade and trafficking. Since then, the town has regained prominence as a transit hub despite ongoing sporadic terrorist attacks. A new military conflagration around the nearby oil infrastructure in June 2018 did not last long and does not appear to have had any significant impact on trafficking ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Monitoring carried out throughout the reporting period for this project indicates that, despite the overlap between trafficking and jihadi activities, there is little evidence of terrorist organisations being involved significantly in the region's drug economy. With the progressive loss of territorial control, jihadi groups in Benghazi, Ajdabiya and Derna, among other places, lost the ability to penetrate the drug trafficking market in any meaningful way.

Coastal hubs in Cyrenaica

Both Benghazi and Tobruk are known landing sites for drugs. However, the latter is by far the more closely associated with smuggling and, in particular, drug trafficking. Much like Zuwara on the western border with Tunisia, Tobruk (which lies 115 km from the Egyptian border) is perceived in the imagination of Libyans as a hub of illicit trade. One of the key actors interviewed for this study, for instance, mentioned a well-known joke, preceding the revolution, that if Tobruk were to burn, the whole world would be high for 20 minutes.

According to information collected during the reporting period (even though this is not really borne out by seizures), both ports have seen increased drug trafficking activity (Map 3). Reports from our field network suggest increases in the movement of Moroccan and Lebanese hashish and prescription drugs, particularly tramadol, from India and Syria.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ al-Warfalli, A. (2018), 'East Libyan forces reclaim key oil ports', Reuters, 21 June 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-oil-ports/east-libyan-forces-reclaim-key-oil-ports-idUSKBN1JH166>

Map 3: Indicative drug smuggling routes on Libya's east coast, based on data collected by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime. There is an overlap with similar routes used to smuggle different types of drugs and prescription medicines.



Crucially, there is also evidence that the east of Libya is becoming a more important target zone for cocaine shipments, sometimes linking the region directly with South American drugs trafficking. For instance, in July 2018, Colombian national police seized 43 kg of cocaine in the port of Buenaventura that were hidden in the structure of a container to be shipped to Benghazi⁽⁴⁶⁾. In October, anti-drugs police found 17 kg of high-purity cocaine destined for Benghazi from the Gioia Tauro container port in Calabria, southern Italy⁽⁴⁷⁾. Two years earlier, fishermen found 70 kg of cocaine on a beach 40 km west of Tobruk⁽⁴⁸⁾.

The seizures in recently cited incidents involve quantities considered small by the standards of international cocaine trafficking. Moreover, the port of Gioia Tauro is known to be infiltrated by a clan

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Policía Nacional de Colombia (2018), [We seized 43 kilos of cocaine that would be sent to Libya], (Incautamos 43 kilos de cocaína que serían enviados a Libia), 5 July 2018, <https://www.policia.gov.co/noticia/incautamos-43-kilos-cocaina-que-serian-enviados-libia>

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Il Metropolitan, [Gioia Tauro, 17kgs of high purity cocaine hidden among sunflower seeds] (Gioia Tauro: sequestrati 17 kg di cocaina purissima nascosta tra i semi di girasole), 10 October 2018, <https://www.ilmetropolitano.it/2018/10/10/gioia-tauro-sequestrati-17-kg-di-cocaina-purissima-nascosta-tra-i-semi-di-girasole/>

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Ben Ali, F. (2016), [A quantity of 'cocaine' was found on the coast of Qarubaiba west of Tobruk], (قربط برغ ةبضررقلا ئطاشب «نييالكوكلا» نم ةيمك ىلع روثعلا), September 2016, <http://alwasat.ly/news/libya/77718>

of the Calabrian 'Ndrangheta and is used as a European gateway for South American cocaine. However, information from both Benghazi and Tobruk is consistent on the point that cocaine trafficking is on the rise, even though the development does not appear to be clearly understood by local law enforcement ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

A significant portion of the drugs is destined for the Egyptian market, while some of the drugs are also sold in Libya, particular around Benghazi. However, since the revolution, the area has become an important logistical hub for the en-route storage of drugs before their transportation by sea to Europe and Turkey. This business overlaps with the trade of significant quantities of counterfeit cigarettes:

'We believe most drugs are stored in Tobruk itself while some of it may be also re-exported from Egypt. I cannot really speak for cocaine, I know this is happening with hashish. You have to understand that this ability to take (to be in a position to purchase) medium to large shipments of hashish whenever they want is what makes their (Libyan drug traffickers) business so good. They buy it at better rates when the Moroccans need to get rid of it because they have a lot, and then ship it out at a much higher price to Turkey or Italy.' ⁽⁵⁰⁾

Security officials in Cyrenaica appear to have little intelligence on where the drugs are exported to once they leave Libyan ports. However, movements identified by Italian investigators operating under the Libeccio International operation indicate Tobruk as both a destination and transit hub for cannabis and potentially for cocaine headed for Europe.

Investigations have identified an area of ship-to-ship transfer around 50 km off Tobruk where hashish is offloaded from motherships on to fishing vessels. Since the start of the operation, almost 40 vessels have been targeted, leading to more than 250 individual arrests, including in Morocco ⁽⁵¹⁾ and Egypt where law enforcement agencies have cooperated with their European counterparts. In all, around 500 tonnes of hashish and 6.7 tonnes of cocaine have been seized, with an estimated street value of EUR 6 billion ⁽⁵²⁾ (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Customs officials at the port of Tobruk during an operation carried out on 5 September 2018, in which 700 kg of hashish were seized from a shipping container with double walls.



Photographs: Port Customs.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Telephone interview with a security source from Benghazi, June 2017.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Interview with a member of the Libyan anti-drug agency (ANGA) in Benghazi, September 2018.

⁽⁵¹⁾ The most high-profile arrests were made in Morocco when Ben Ziae Berhilli, considered one of the most significant Moroccan producers of hashish, and his son Mustafa, were apprehended in 2016. See Tondo, L. (2016), 'One of the world's most wanted hashish smugglers arrested in Morocco', *The New York Times*, 1 December 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/01/world/africa/hashish-smuggler-benziane-berhilli-arrested-in-morocco.html>

⁽⁵²⁾ Operational note furnished by the Guardia di Finanza of Palermo.

The control of sites that are strategic to the smuggling economy in this far eastern corner of Libya is organised tribally. The recent war in Benghazi, between 2014 and 2017, reorganised power dynamics and left the LNA, led by the strongman Khalifa Haftar, with much greater control of the port, the city and the wider environs. However, the situation is different in Tobruk, where the port area remains largely controlled by the Obeidat tribe, specifically the Haroun family from the Maryam clan. The Obeidat is the east's largest tribe and historically has counted many military officers within its ranks (⁵³).

The Mnifa tribe exerts control at the airport, to the south-east of Tobruk, while members of the Qutaan, which is a subtribe of the Awlad Ali, an important tribe that straddles the border, stretching all the way to the Egyptian coastal town of el-Hamam (420 km east of the border) and more than 200 km south of the coast to the Siwa Oasis, control the border (⁵⁴). Members of the smaller Habbun tribe have also historically been involved in trade and smuggling activities at the border.

The vast majority of cross-border business consists of legitimate trade, labour migration and the export of subsidised or tax-free goods. A significant part of this business is focused on the Egyptian town of Marsa al-Matrouh — the seat of the Awlad Ali tribe — in Suq Libya (the Libyan market). However, drug trafficking takes place within this context and thrives very much as a result of the tribal system of governance that is set in place. Over the years, this has not only allowed illicit trade to thrive largely unhindered on both the Libyan side and the increasingly militarised Egyptian side, but has also often led to the co-option of important tribes people as pivotal regional players:

'When the terrorists were in control (⁵⁵), the smugglers worked with them. They are very good at negotiating with whoever the governing authority is. But when it became clear that the tide would turn, drug lords started supporting the LNA with cash, weapons, food etc. to make sure they are on the right side. These people sometimes spend millions to guarantee their own interests in the long term.' (⁵⁶)

The Libyan National Army intervenes to wrest control of port and border

This understanding between the LNA leadership and the tribes that govern Tobruk was tested in 2017 with a tussle between local authorities loyal to the community and the LNA as it tried to assert control over the port and other strategic sites.

As the war that the LNA had been waging against Islamist militias in Benghazi since 2014 was coming to an end (⁵⁷), its commander, Khalifa Haftar, sought to widen his effective control on the region. Shortly after the appointment of General Mohamed al-Madani Al-Fakhri as head of the newly minted Military Investment and Public Works Authority (⁵⁸), the LNA made its move on Tobruk. The

(⁵³) Ben Lamma, M. (2017), 'The tribal structure in Libya: Factor for fragmentation or cohesion?', Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, September 2017, <https://www.frstrategie.org/web/documents/programmes/observatoire-du-monde-arabo-musulman-et-du-sahel/publications/en/14.pdf>

(⁵⁴) Hüsken, T. (2017) 'The practice and culture of smuggling in the borderland of Egypt and Libya', *International Affairs* 93, pp. 897—915.

(⁵⁵) A range of Islamist militias, including groups operating under the banners of the Islamic State and variants of al-Qaeda, held significant territory in Cyrenaica, particularly the city of Benghazi, before they were engaged by the LNA under Operation Dignity in a war that lasted from October 2014 to the end of 2017. See Toaldo, M. (2017), *A quick guide to Libya's main players*, European Council on Foreign Relations, December 2017, https://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping_libya_conflict

(⁵⁶) Telephone interview with a Tobruk-based businessman, October 2018.

(⁵⁷) Field Marshal Haftar declared Benghazi 'liberated' in July 2017. The statement was premature. The LNA controlled all but small pockets of the city; however, fighting continued until the end of the year. See BBC News (2017), 'Libya eastern commander Haftar declares Benghazi 'liberated' ', 6 July 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-40515325>.

(⁵⁸) Fornaji, H. (2017), 'Haftar appoints former Beida interior minister as head of military investment authority', *Libya Herald*, 8 June 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/06/08/haftar-appoints-former-beida-interior-minister-as-head-of-military-investment-authority/>

army's argument hinged on the lack of security and rampant corruption, identifying the port in particular as a key smuggling hub. However, members of the community retorted (not without merit) that this was simply another manoeuvre in the LNA's strategy to secure funding streams for itself and protect its own interest in the black economy (⁵⁹).

The tug of war came to a head in October 2017 when the port's management agreed to close it to international shipping and admitted lax security (⁶⁰). The closure triggered instant protests and threats that the Egypt-Libya border would be closed in retaliation and in solidarity with port workers (⁶¹). The port was eventually reopened on 22 December 2017, following the appointment of three commanders to head security at the port, the airport and the Musaid crossing at the land border with Egypt. Colonel Abdalsalam Younis, who nominally replaced the former civilian port manager Hassan Haroun, said that his first decision was to unite all the security bodies in one operations room inside the port with the goal of tightening control and forming a committee of all the agencies to ensure that the contents of all containers (including abandoned ones) were inventoried (⁶²).

Interviewees contacted in Benghazi and Tobruk consistently reported, however, that, since then, the new regime focused mostly on so-called empty containers, which are connected with a now widely diffused scam through which the owners of companies with an export license obtain letters of credit to enable them to make payments in foreign currency from the Central Bank (in Tripoli) only to then import less than the value the credit letter entitles them to so that they make money on the difference between the official rate of exchange and the black market rate of exchange for the Libyan Dinar.

Key informants tapped during the reporting period for this project consistently indicated that the arrangement reached essentially gave the LNA a measure of control over the port, the airport and the border, all of which are significant revenue generators, but that this presence would not impinge on the business of connected actors:

'Haftar has a lot of backing from external allies but he knows that the only way to establish control over the territory is by increasing revenue and with the current political stalemate his options are limited (⁶³). Control over these sites will make them a lot of money but it cannot be outright control or he will have a difficult problem on his hands. It has to be a balance' (⁶⁴).

As with the west of Libya, increasing local consumption in the east is starting to have an effect on the tolerance of the local population for drug trafficking activities. Policing targeting local consumption is on the rise. Raids in cities are frequent and typically involve significant seizures of hashish, alcohol and, less frequently, MDMA and heroin (⁶⁵). Drug raids are few and far between relative to the flow of

(⁵⁹) The LNA has been seeking to expand its revenue base by taking control of formal economic sectors and regularising its own involvement in informal activities such as the international export of scrap metal, which is considered a lucrative illicit trade in Libya. See Assad, A. (2018), 'Haftar-loyal military investment authority sells Libyan scrap to Turkish firms' *Libya Observer*, 3 April 2018, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/haftar-loyal-military-investment-authority-sells-libyan-scrap-turkish-firms>

(⁶⁰) Ben Ali, F. (2017), [Tobruk port closed to international shipping to stop corruption and smuggling, al-Wasat], (بيريده تلالو داس فل افقول ةيلودل ةحالم الاما قربط ءانيم قالغ), October 2017, <http://alwasat.ly/news/libya/146443>

(⁶¹) Libyan Express (2017), 'Egypt-Libya border threatened with closure over Tobruk port shutdown', 22 October 2017, <https://www.libyanexpress.com/egypt-libyan-border-threatened-with-closure-over-tobruk-port-shutdown/>

(⁶²) Al-Marsad, Director of Security Port Tobruk Maritime: These are the names of companies that received empty containers, (ءءرف تايواح تءرو ىتلا تاكشلال ءامس ءهء: ىرربلا قربط ءانيم نم اريءم), December 2019, <https://almarsad.co/2017/12/29/ءءرف-ءانيم-نم-ا-قربط-ءانيم-نم-ا-ريءم>

(⁶³) Libya has been institutionally split since 2014. Currently, there are two de facto governments, the one based in Tripoli, which is recognised by the international community, and the other based in the eastern city of Beida, which is not recognised. The parliament, which sits in Tobruk, is recognised by the UN-sponsored political roadmap, the Libya Political Agreement of 2015.

(⁶⁴) Telephone interview with a security source, September 2019.

(⁶⁵) See, for instance, a haul of 5 kg of hashish said to have a street value of LYD 80 000 (around EUR 12 000) and 180 litres of locally brewed wine from a dealer in Benghazi (9 September); the interception of 20 kg of cannabis worth LYD 320 000 (EUR 50 000) was smuggled into Benghazi along

drugs believed to be passing through the east. However, when they do happen, they are widely advertised:

'There is increasing concern about drug abuse and people are starting to speak up, even on the radios, saying we know that these vans leaving the port are full of tramadol, why is this allowed to go on. So the security guys need something to face the population with. The drug seizures you see are reacting to these concerns, and are attempting to achieve a balance. I burn a few trucks of tramadol and the business goes on.'⁽⁶⁶⁾

Fezzan routes and smuggling dynamics

The Fezzan region is a major hub for drugs flowing in from the southern borders with Algeria, Niger and Chad. Most border-crossing activity is controlled by smugglers from the dominant tribes in the deep south: Tuareg smugglers control flows coming in from Algeria, from border points between Djanet and Ghat, and from Niger, around the Salvador Pass (although Tebu smugglers are also involved in smuggling at this particular crossing).

The crossing around Ghat is mostly used for the smuggling of hashish and prescription drugs, principally tramadol, while cocaine and heroin, as well as hashish, tend to travel through the Salvador Pass. Drugs flowing through these routes converge on Sebha, from where they proceed north through Shwayrif via Brak al-Shaati, normally handled by Magarha and Awlad Suleiman smugglers.

Tebu and Guraan traffickers handle the crossings from Niger through points close to the Toummo crossing or via the Tibesti region in Chad, normally cutting through desert routes around Wour and the Kouri Bougoudi mines before reaching Murzuq and Um al-Aranib. Eventually, drugs flowing through these areas converge on Sebha where they move north through Tammanhint headed towards Hun, Waddan and Bani Walid before moving towards the coastal areas, involving different Arab smugglers, particularly the Qaddadfa.

Small-scale hashish runs and prescription drugs often follow the same lines as smuggled goods, closer to or through the official Toummo crossing. Sebha remains a key clearing and storage location. Internal consumption across the region is reported to be rife, particularly for tramadol and hashish.

Insecurity reduces the flow of cocaine and heroin in Fezzan

Over the past decade, Fezzan has played an increasingly important role in the transit of hashish, cocaine and heroin from the Sahel to the coastal areas of Libya and Egypt, with some of these drugs ending up in Europe (Map 4).

The disruption of the control order over these routes after the revolution fuelled conflicts between different southern communities, such as the Tuareg and Tebu (2014), the Awlad Suleiman and the Tebu (2013, 2015), and the Zway and the Tebu in the south-east (2012).

However, chronic insecurity in Mali and growing banditry in Niger and Libya have had a disruptive effect on high-profit drug runs transiting these areas. In Fezzan itself, the repeated intergroup conflicts — most recently in Sebha between the Tebu and the Awlad Suleiman in the first half of 2018⁽⁶⁷⁾ — coupled with the absence of the state, have led to an influx of heavily armed groups from

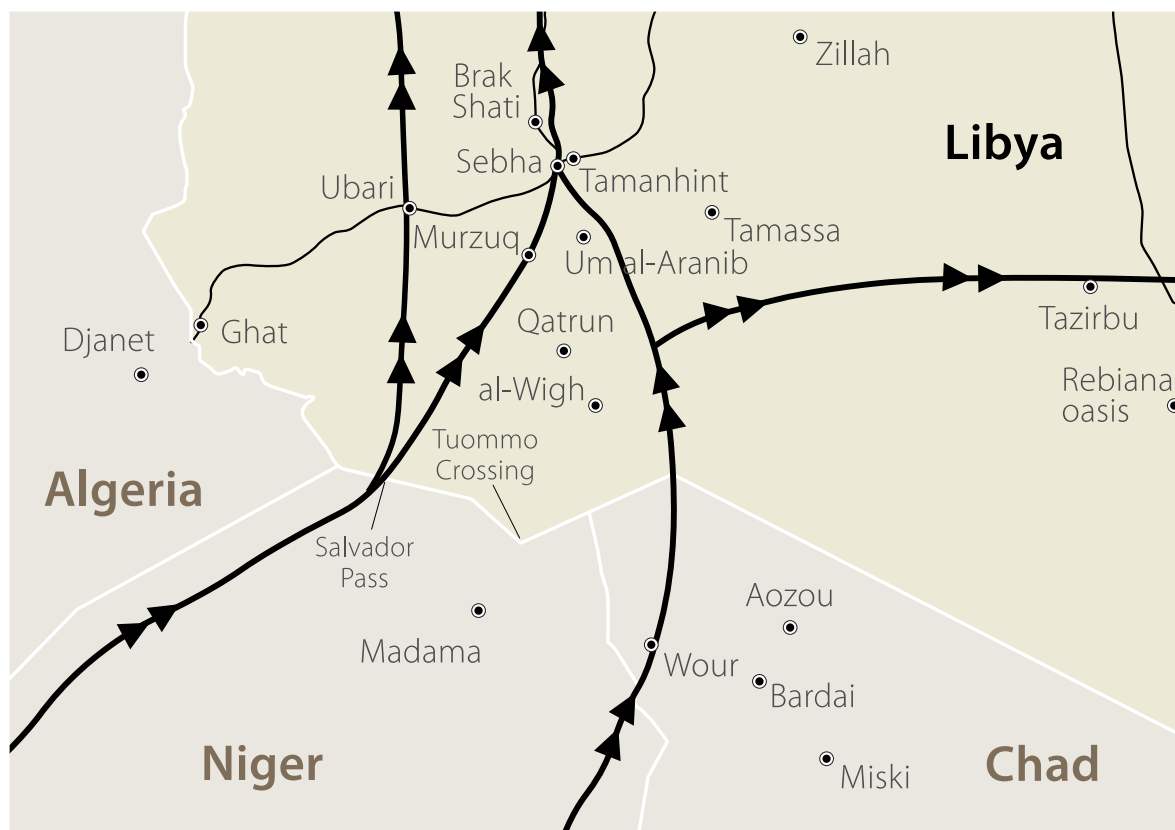
the Coast Road west of the city (11 August), https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=2107601652891396&id=1525413971110170

⁽⁶⁶⁾ Telephone interview with a businessman in Tobruk, October 2019.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Cousins, M. (2018), 'Mounting strife in southern Libya adds to the country's instability', *The Arab Weekly*, 4 March 2018, <https://thearabweekly.com/mounting-strife-southern-libya-adds-countrys-instability>

neighbouring countries, particularly Tebu and Guraan opposition groups from northern Chad⁽⁶⁸⁾. This has destabilised control over lucrative routes at the southern border, rendering it unreliable.

Map 4: Indicative drug smuggling routes in Libya's south-west, based on data collected by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.



The LNA recently stepped up its activity in the region with the explicit intent of targeting Chadian armed groups but also ostensibly to tackle smuggling and trafficking activities. On 6 September 2018, the LNA 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. The group's influence south of Sebha remains limited. However, the battle against foreign mercenary groups is a widespread concern, including among the Tebu, who have often been accused of harbouring Chadian armed groups and relying on their numbers in conflicts with Awlad Suleiman.

Insecurity affecting drug routes has been further intensified by two external factors in recent years. The first springs from the discovery of gold across the Sahel in 2012, and especially in northern Niger, northern Chad and across the southern Libyan border after 2014. Artisanal mines mushroomed across this poorly administered desert region, attracting tens of thousands of labourers but also armed gangs, all the way from Sudan to southern Mali and Burkina Faso. The gold rush rapidly heightened insecurity and fuelled banditry in the north of Niger and Chad and southern Libya⁽⁶⁹⁾.

After 2016, the situation worsened when the government in Niamey began implementing a law that had been passed in the summer of 2015 criminalising migrant smuggling. The result was that many

⁽⁶⁸⁾ Tubiana, J. and Gramizzi, C. (2017), 'Tubu trouble: state and statelessness in the Chad-Sudan-Libya triangle', Small Arms Survey, <http://www.smallarmssurveysudan.org/fileadmin/docs/working-papers/SAS-CAR-WP43-Chad-Sudan-Libya.pdf>

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Pellerin, M. (2017), 'Beyond the 'wild west'- the gold rush in Northern Niger', Small Arms Survey, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/T-Briefing-Papers/SAS-SANA-BP-Niger-Gold.pdf>

drivers who formerly worked in migrant smuggling switched to banditry when their migration business was undermined ⁽⁷⁰⁾. Attacks on drug traffickers are normally carried out by well-armed and well-resourced bandits who can expect to extract ransoms of hundreds of thousands of dollars in a single hit.

This is not to say that banditry has halted the trafficking of cocaine and heroin (coming from various through points in West Africa and then through Mali and Niger). These drugs, as well as hashish, are still prevalent on routes through Niger and Chad, and even Algeria in the case of hashish. However, interlocutors interviewed during the reporting period in Fezzan, northern Niger and northern Chad suggest that the flow of drugs has diminished compared with the volumes seen in the immediate post-revolution period.

The business remains tightly controlled by the better-armed and -connected networks, more so as a result of the increasing threats to the cargoes facing traffickers ⁽⁷¹⁾. The Salvador Pass, at the intersection between the borders of Algeria, Libya and Niger, remains one of the most important passages for drugs, although the area is reported to be under increasing surveillance by French troops stationed in Madama (225 km south-east of the pass).

Reports of a reduction in drugs flowing through Fezzan come in parallel with reports of an increased use of maritime routes moving hashish (and smaller volumes of cocaine) to Libyan ports. Similarly, there has been a growth in activity along the Algerian coast. At the end of May 2018, more than 700 kg of cocaine was seized from a boat off the port of Oran — the cocaine had been shipped from Brazil via Valencia in Spain. A well-known Algerian businessman, Kamel Chikhi, was arrested, with the resulting scandal engulfing senior politicians, security officials and civil servants in Algiers ⁽⁷²⁾. The size of the seizure and the apparent involvement of high-level state actors strongly suggest that this was a well-established route, with traffickers confident that they would not lose the shipment.

Simultaneously, the trafficking of tramadol and other prescription drugs has been increasing. This should be understood in the broader context of an economic crisis in northern Niger and southern Libya, driven by the criminalisation of migration in Niger and the closure of artisanal gold mines, such as the Jado gold field in 2017. The collapse of these informal economic pillars has thrown a number of young men with experience in transporting migrants across desert tracts into economic distress, creating a pool of recruits for low-level drug trafficking. According to local contacts, tramadol is an attractive option for trafficking with a low barrier to entry — it is cheap, relatively easy to access and carries less social stigma than drugs such as alcohol or hashish. Some smugglers purchase their own tramadol in local markets, while others are hired as drivers. A representative trip from Agadez in northern Niger to Qatron in southern Libya can earn a driver approximately EUR 600.

Tramadol is smuggled in both directions across the Sahara. According to local contacts, the drivers on the northbound routes in Niger — who are mostly Tebu — transport the drugs to the border, where they sell them to Arab traffickers, with payment being made on the spot. Some smugglers further increase their profit by including cannabis and/or migrants, who are still moving north across Niger but in vastly reduced numbers.

The crisis of prescription drug misuse

In recent years, Libya has become a major location for the transit and consumption of synthetic opioids, stimulants and other prescription medication, a problem that is consistently flagged as the

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Tubiana, J., Warin, C., Saeneen, G. M. (2018), 'Multilateral Damage - The impact of EU migration policies on central Saharan routes', *Clingendael*, September 2018, <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2018/multilateral-damage/>

⁽⁷¹⁾ Telephone and face-to-face interviews carried out with interlocutors in Ubari and Murzuq (Libya, June and September 2018) and Agadez (Niger, December 2017).

⁽⁷²⁾ Alilat, F., 'Algeria: Kamel Chikhi, Kouba's Escobar' (Algérie : Kamel Chikhi, l'Escobar de Kouba), *Jeune Afrique*, 16 August 2018, <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/614011/politique/algerie-kamel-chikhi-lescobar-de-kouba/>

most pressing drug use issue facing the country at present ⁽⁷³⁾. The most commonly found prescription drugs are opioid-based painkillers sold mostly as tramadol. Another popular substance is clonazepam, which is produced by Roche and normally sold under the Rivotril brand name; it is commonly referred to on the streets by this name. Clonazepam is a tranquilizer, normally used to prevent and treat seizures and panic disorders, among other things. Similarly, pregabalin, normally sold under the Lyrica brand name, is prescribed to treat epilepsy and anxiety disorders. Anti-drugs police also report small seizures of counterfeit captagon, which is typically a blend of amphetamines and caffeine, but the drug does not appear to be sold widely in Libya ⁽⁷⁴⁾. MDMA, or ecstasy, and hallucinogens have also been found on the market and are believed to be imported from Europe in relatively small quantities.

The extent of Libya's tramadol problem is illustrated by some spectacular seizures made over the past few years. One of the biggest tramadol seizures reported in the country occurred in February 2016 in the port of Tobruk, where three abandoned shipping containers from India were found to contain 45 million tramadol tablets, probably destined for the local market ⁽⁷⁵⁾. More recent seizures made in Italy corroborate reports of growing internal consumption collected during the reporting period from different Libyan cities in the west, east and south of the country. In May 2017, 37 million tramadol tablets (with an approximate street value of some EUR 60 million, at EUR 2 per tablet), were seized in three containers at the port of Genoa in Italy. The containers — labelled as containing blankets and shampoo — had come from India and were on their way to Misrata and Tobruk in Libya ⁽⁷⁶⁾. A few months later, in November 2017, Italian authorities seized 24 million tablets worth EUR 40 million in the Calabrian port of Gioia Tauro. The shipment was also heading to Libya from India ⁽⁷⁷⁾. In September 2018, port authorities in Colombo, Sri Lanka, stopped a cargo of 15 million tramadol tablets en route to Libya from southern India ⁽⁷⁸⁾.

The use of prescription drugs for recreational purposes appears to be a phenomenon that flourished after the revolution. As discussed, collapsed border security, both at the coast and at land borders, flooded the markets with different kinds of drugs. In this context, prescription drugs offered a relatively inexpensive alternative that is reportedly used both as a means to get high and for self-medication in the face of the several stressors faced by the population in Libya. A typical regular user, who is considered moderate, will consume one to two tablets a day, spending between LYD 100 and LYD 150 a week (EUR 16-24).

Nonetheless, drug use in general, and the use of prescription medication in particular, appears to have increased exponentially after the 2014 Fajr Libya war. Several interlocutors underscored the pivotal effect of the Fajr Libya war on the growth of drug trafficking in the region, often pointing to the use of tramadol for its analgesic and stress-relieving properties on the front. As with captagon in the Middle East, tramadol in Libya has assumed the reputation as a 'grit-booster', therefore making it

⁽⁷³⁾ This assessment is based on data collected from several interlocutors in Tripoli, Misrata, Sebha, Ubari, Murzuq, Bani Walid, Benghazi and Tobruk between June and October 2018, complemented by telephone interviews with members of the Libyan anti-drug agency (ANGA) based in Tripoli and Benghazi.

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Unlike in other parts of the Middle East and North Africa, captagon does not appear to be imported in significant quantities in Libya. Tablets sold as captagon in recent years have been typically found to be amphetamine tablets wrongly labelled as captagon, which is meant to be made of fenethylamine. There is a risk that some captagon tablets are mislabelled in reports of seizures. However, multiple Libyan interlocutors concur that there is no evidence that captagon is imported in Libya in large quantities. Telephone interviews conducted between July and October 2018, including with ANGA officers based in Tripoli and Benghazi.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Assad, A. (2016), '45 million tramadol pills seized in Tobruk port', *Libya Observer*, 13 February 2016, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/inbrief/45-million-tramadol-pills-seized-tobruk-port>

⁽⁷⁶⁾ Squires, N. (2017), 'Italy seizes huge drugs haul intended for Isil fighters in Libya', *The Telegraph*, 9 May 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/09/italy-seizes-huge-drugs-haul-intended-isil-fighters-libya/>

⁽⁷⁷⁾ BBC News (2017), 'Italy seizes 50m-euro drug shipment to Libya', 3 November 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-41863168/italy-seizes-50m-euro-drug-shipment-to-libya>

⁽⁷⁸⁾ Rajakaruna, C. (2018), 'PNB intercepts over 15 million Tramadol pills en route to Libya', 6 September 2018, <http://www.adaderana.lk/news/49842/pnb-intercepts-over-15-million-tramadol-pills-en-route-to-libya>

popular among fighters. However, the pivotal effect of the 2014 conflict appears to be related more to the exposure opportunity it created:

'We started seeing tramadol in Libya around 2012. We had not really seen these sorts of drugs being used in this way before. But what was strange was that we started getting more and more reports [of drug taking] from small towns and the mountain areas [the Nafusa Mountains], for instance. Reports of drug taking in these areas were rare in the past. Suddenly small smugglers, really young people, started dealing in these drugs. After Fajr Libya, it seemed like everyone was on this drug and these small smugglers suddenly became heads.' ⁽⁷⁹⁾

In recent years, gold mining activity in the Sahel and southern Libya has also driven demand. Tramadol use is reported to be widespread across various mines in northern Niger and northern Chad. Moreover, as discussed, the transportation of tramadol, which is considered low risk, has attracted many drivers who were previously employed in the migration industry in Niger. Smugglers mention the ease with which tramadol is hidden, as well as the high returns, when justifying their participation in this illicit economy. Indeed, the drug's growing popularity is seen as very promising for smugglers in the region, especially when drug scarcity in some regions causes opioid prices to skyrocket ⁽⁸⁰⁾. As with any other commodity, tramadol prices fluctuate depending on supply and demand. In southern Libya for example, which is further away from the main entry points of Tobruk and Misrata in the north, the availability varies, creating opportunities for greater profits.

This gap is readily exploited by smugglers who routinely take the Agadez-Sebha route. Tebu smugglers interviewed in Niamey in June and August 2018 told us that tramadol was purchased for very low prices in Northern Nigeria (widely available) and sold in southern Libya for up to 15 times the initial price ⁽⁸¹⁾. We have also received reports of Nigerian migrants being paid to carry small quantities of tramadol while travelling to Libya.

Most of the tramadol going north to Libya through Niger is imported through the Gulf of Guinea by well-established criminal networks. This is confirmed by numerous important seizures made in the ports of Cotonou (Benin), Lomé (Togo), Lagos (Nigeria), Accra (Ghana) and Abidjan (Ivory Coast) ⁽⁸²⁾.

As with stories connecting captagon with jihadi groups, particularly ISIS, in the Middle East ⁽⁸³⁾, a similar association has been developed between tramadol and terrorist actors in Libya ⁽⁸⁴⁾. Law enforcement officials are concerned that jihadi cells may profit from taxing the movement of drugs around the country. Monitoring carried out during the reporting period indicates two areas of concern for this type of activity: the areas up to 100 km south of Sirte, which are also used for the transportation of drugs and where ISIS fighters are known to have set up checkpoints ⁽⁸⁵⁾, and the desert areas between Ubari, Brak al-Shaati and further north to the town of Shwayrif.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ Telephone interview with a Security Directorate officer in Zawiya who served in an anti-drugs unit in Tripoli between 2009 and 2015, August 2018

⁽⁸⁰⁾ Tinti, P. (2018), 'New trends in tramadol trafficking in Niger', Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, <http://globalinitiative.net/tramadol-trafficking-in-niger/>

⁽⁸¹⁾ Tinti, P. (2018), 'New trends in tramadol trafficking in Niger', Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, <http://globalinitiative.net/tramadol-trafficking-in-niger/>

⁽⁸²⁾ Conference paper submitted by the Arab Republic of Egypt on strengthening international cooperation in addressing the non-medical use and abuse, the illicit manufacture and the illicit domestic and international distribution of tramadol Commission on Narcotic Drugs, Sixtieth session, Vienna, 13-17 March 2017, https://www.unodc.org/documents/commissions/CND/CND_Sessions/CND_60/CRPs/ECN72017_CRP4_V1701497.pdf

⁽⁸³⁾ Laniel, L. (2017), *Captagon: Deconstructing the Myth*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, July 2017, <https://en.ofdt.fr/BDD/publications/docs/efdallx7.pdf>

⁽⁸⁴⁾ Nadeau, B. L. (2018), 'The Italian Mob is peddling pills to ISIS', *The Daily Beast*, 2 March 2018, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-italian-mob-is-peddling-pills-to-isis>

⁽⁸⁵⁾ Eye on ISIS in Libya (2018), 'Isis in Action', 2 October 2018, <http://eyeonisisinlibya.com/isis-in-action/26-september-2-october-isis-fighters-observed-south-of-sirte/>

This notwithstanding, to date there is scant evidence that jihadi groups are in a position to engage in the transportation or sale of drugs on a large scale. Since its significant territorial losses in Sirte in 2016 ⁽⁸⁶⁾, ISIS in particular has curtailed its ability to muscle its way into a competitive drug trafficking market.

⁽⁸⁶⁾ The New Arab (2018), 'Libya declares Sirte officially liberated from IS', 18 December 2018, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/12/18/libya-declares-sirte-officially-liberated-from-is>

Conclusion

In spite of the EU's growing engagement with Libya, specifically on border control measures, drug trafficking has received scant attention, even if it has been well established that migrant smuggling, which is the primary target of European involvement in Libya, forms part of a broader black economy that involves various types of criminal activities ⁽⁸⁷⁾.

In the coastal system of the Tripolitania, some of the same criminal actors and/or networks involved in the smuggling of people or fuel have also been able to use the criminal infrastructure they built to become involved in drug trafficking. Moreover, even when there is no direct convergence of actors or networks, there is a symbiotic relationship between different smuggling trades. The withdrawal of militias from human and fuel smuggling activities in coastal areas has been linked to the involvement of a growing number of actors in the import and export of drugs.

Similarly, following the criminalisation of migrant smuggling on the routes from Niger to Libya, some actors have shifted from the transport of migrants to that of drugs. This shift has helped expand the supply of tramadol to southern regions.

More evidence-based research is required to improve knowledge on this poorly understood area. However, in this context, a more comprehensive strategy is needed to address organised criminal activity and its overlap with Libya's war economy, as this poses challenges to the peace process and state building efforts. For instance, the mooted expansion of EU border forces ⁽⁸⁸⁾ cannot and should not maintain a blinkered focus on migrant smuggling at the expense of other maritime smuggling activities.

The success of the Libeccio International initiative stems from the fact that different national law enforcement officials sought to network with counterparts across the Mediterranean in a bid to mirror the criminal organisations that they were fighting. In the same way, the policy of different agencies dealing with smuggling networks in Libya must also adapt to the nature and shape of the country's post-revolution criminal economy.

⁽⁸⁷⁾ Shaw, M. and Mangan, F. (2014), *Illicit trafficking and Libya's transition: profit and losses*, United States Institute of Peace, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2014/02/illicit-trafficking-and-libyas-transition-profits-and-losses>

⁽⁸⁸⁾ Stone, J. (2018), 'EU plans to triple spending on border control in response to refugee crisis', *Independent*, 13 June 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/eu-border-control-spending-refugee-crisis-austria-coast-guard-mediterranean-a8397176.html>