

Secret US-French drone base in Libya?

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The website [Algeria ISP](#) reports (citing unnamed “Arab” sources) Dec. 11 that the US and [France](#) have jointly established a secret drone base in the Libyan desert, near the area of Katroune. Craft from the secret base are allegedly flying missions to Niger, Mali and Mauritania, with the ostensible objective of seeking out Saharan arms trafficking networks of al-Qeada in the Islamic Maghreb ([AQIM](#)). Algeria has reportedly refused to allow the drones to fly through its territory.

The NATO military mission in Libya, dubbed Operation Unified Protector, officially ended Oct. 31, after nearly 10,000 bombing runs. But on Dec. 3, the UN Security Council unanimously voted up a resolution drafted by the US and UK that extends the mandate of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya ([UNSMIL](#)) until March 16, 2012. UNSMIL was established by the Security Council on Sept. 17 with an initial period of three months and a mandate to help restore public security and initiate political and economic recovery in Libya. UNSMIL may have a military component. The Security Council said the mandate of UNSMIL “shall in addition include, in coordination and consultation with the transitional government of Libya, assisting and supporting Libyan national efforts to address the threats of proliferation of all arms and related material of all types, in particular man-portable surface to air missiles.” ([RIA-Novosti](#), [Xinhua](#), Dec. 3; [CNN](#), Oct. 31; NATO [Unified Protector](#) page)

The question of what exactly constitutes the “transitional government of Libya”—and especially its security forces—remains somewhat ambiguous. [The Guardian](#) reported Dec. 7 Tripoli’s residents awoke on that morning “to a city in lockdown as security forces were deployed across the capital to clamp down on rogue militias.” We assume that “security forces” means those militias loyal to the faction in the NTC that has the upper hand, and “rogue militias” means those factions currently on the outs with the NTC leadership. [AP](#) reported on Dec. 11 that “revolutionary fighters clashed with national army troops” near Tripoli’s airport, leaving one dead. Both the phrases “revolutionary fighters” and “national army troops” are undefined. The “revolutionary fighters” appear to be militiamen from the western mountain town of Zintan, who control Tripoli’s airport, and opened fire on the convoy of Gen. Khalifa Hifter, the commander of the “fledgling national army.”

So the “fledgling national army” doesn’t even control the capital city’s airport. The airport seems to be a particular flashpoint. [Digital Journal](#) reported Nov. 28 that protesters blocked a runway, preventing a Tunisian plane from taking off, to demand that the NTC bring to justice those responsible in the deaths of several Souq al-Juma militiamen who were apparently ambushed and killed by members of a rival faction as they attempted to arrest three pro-Qaddafi loyalists in Bani Walid.

Meanwhile, if it remains uncertain who exactly is in charge, Libya’s oil industry is recovering

“faster than many people had hoped,” the [BBC News](#) reported Dec. 8. Before the conflict, Libya was producing 1.6 million barrels a day. During the fighting, production virtually ground to a halt. Now, according to the National Oil Company, Libya is pumping just over half of its pre-war level—840,000 barrels a day. The NOC has said it expects to be back at its pre-conflict output by the end of 2012.

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