Deadlines and Departures

National Transitional Council envoys continued their negotiations with tribal elders this week to persuade the remaining loyalist forces to surrender before the September 10 deadline. Rebel fighters surrounded the town of Bani Walid on September 5, though field commanders refrained from attacking the city to avoid alienating the resident Warfalla tribe. (WP) The negotiations have fluctuated between breakthroughs and impasses several times, and additional rebel reinforcements have massed outside the town in preparation for an assault if the talks fail. (Reuters) Opposition forces continued preparations for an attack on Qaddafi’s hometown of Sirte, as fighters seized the town Waddan 140 miles south of Sirte and the Red Valley area 40 miles to the east. (Bloomberg, AFP) NATO airstrikes have hit over 54 targets in Sirte since September 1. (NATO, NYT) Rebel forces are also gathering outside the Sabha area, located 400 miles south of Tripoli, as negotiations have stalled in the southern desert region. (VOA)

As opposition fighters assembled, reports emerged of a loyalist convoy fleeing Sabha and crossing into neighboring Niger on September 5. Initial accounts stated a military force of over 200 vehicles traveled from Sabha to the Nigerien border. (Reuters) The Nigerien military later clarified it had sent an armed convoy to escort the regime vehicles, and senior Nigerien officials stated that only four to ten loyalist cars entered Niger. (NYT) Niger’s foreign ministry reported that the sole senior regime figure in the convoy was Mansour Dao, a cousin of Qaddafi and commander of Libya’s Revolutionary Guard. (WP) Despite speculation that Qaddafi may also attempt to flee into Niger, Pentagon officials stated they had no information the former dictator had fled the country. (Reuters) In a recent audio tape, Qaddafi himself claimed to remain within Libya.

Transition in Tripoli

NTC Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril arrived in Tripoli on September 8, marking the first appearance of a senior NTC leader within the city. A number of NTC Executive Board members previously traveled to Tripoli following the retreat of loyalist forces, though the majority of the Council remains in Benghazi. An NTC spokesman indicated the rest of the Council will arrive by the end of next week, though Deputy Prime Minister Ali Tarhouni suggested the NTC may attempt to govern from both Tripoli and Benghazi. (NYT, WP) Meanwhile, many former regime bureaucrats have been returning to their jobs as Tripoli stabilizes. Rebel officials have welcomed the functionaries back to their posts, promising to only arrest and prosecute Qaddafi’s inner circle of government ministers. (NYT)

The head of Tripoli’s military council, Abdul Hakim Belhadj, has demanded an apology from the United States and Britain for facilitating his capture and torture in 2004. A former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), Belhadj was reportedly arrested by CIA and MI6 agents in Bangkok, flown to Tripoli and tortured by the Qaddafi regime. (BBC) Belhadj attempted to assuage fears of his past links to terrorist groups by stating “the West has nothing to fear” from the Libyan revolutionary, though he cautioned he may take legal action against the British government. (AFP) British special representative Dominic Asquith was unable to offer an apology, though Asquith noted a British inquiry has been established to investigate Belhadj’s claim. (Independent)
Weapons Proliferation Threat

The NTC is facing growing concerns over the security of the numerous weapons stockpiles of the Qaddafi regime. Many of the loyalist arms caches were left unguarded as the rebel forces advanced towards Tripoli, including the armory of the elite Khamis Brigade. Investigators recently discovered hundreds of surface-to-air missiles were missing from the base, such as SA-7 and SA-24 rockets. (LAT) The missiles can be fired either from vehicle mounts or shoulder launchers, raising fears that terrorist groups could target civilian airliners with the weapons. (NYT)

US officials indicated that a small number of SA-7s have already reached the black market in Mali, and an EU counterterrorism coordinator warned that Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) may also have acquired Libyan weapons. (Bloomberg, BBC) Stores of the highly-destructive plastic explosive Semtex have been lost as well, as have land mines, machine guns and other small arms. (Independent) US General Carter Ham declared international authorities are prepared to assist Libya in securing the weapons caches, though he acknowledged the NTC has the primary responsibility for preventing proliferation. (AFP) An NTC spokesman stated “we are doing our best, but we are extended to the limit.” (LAT)

Libya Conflict: Weekly Recap
By Michael Whittaker
September 16, 2011

Storming the Castles

Rebel forces launched large-scale assaults on the loyalist strongholds of Sirte and Bani Walid. Field commanders reported assembling a force of 900 armed pickup trucks for the attack on Sirte, simultaneously advancing on the encircled city from three directions on September 15. (Guardian) Rebel fighters encountered heavy resistance within Sirte; loyalists were able to hold the city center, though rebel commanders reportedly captured an old airstrip on the western border of the town and a larger airport south of Sirte. At least 11 rebel fighters have been killed and 34 wounded during the battle. (Globe & Mail, AJE)

Rebel fighters also encountered entrenched loyalist defenders during the attack on Bani Walid. A smaller rebel force assaulted Bani Walid on September 16 with dozens of armed pickup trucks. Loyalist troops responded with sniper, mortar and rocket fire, forcing the rebels to withdraw from the town after several hours of battle. (BBC) The attack on Friday marks the second unsuccessful attempt to take Bani Walid, as rebel fighters also retreated after a September 11 assault on the town. (WP) NTC officials suspect that Qaddafi’s son Saïf Qaddafi and spokesman Moussa Ibrahim may still be within the town. (NYT) Another Qaddafi son, Saadi Qaddafi, fled Libya and crossed into Niger on September 13. (BBC)

To the Shores of Tripoli

British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy traveled to Libya on September 15, making appearances before jubilant crowds in Tripoli and Benghazi. The two leaders praised the progress of the Libyan opposition and the National Transitional Council (NTC), though both cautioned that much work remained to be done within the country.
Cameron pledged further British aid for Libya, including deploying a military team to advise NTC commanders, unfreezing $948 million in assets, opening British hospitals for critically-ill Libyans, and providing funding for de-mining efforts. (Guardian) NTC leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil thanked the Western leaders, noting that the NTC intended to honor previous oil contracts and welcoming the further strengthening of Libyan, French and British relations. (BBC)

A number of other international officials visited Libya during the week. Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan landed in Tripoli on September 16, pledging military and political support for Jalil and the NTC. (Bloomberg) Iran’s ambassador to Libya, Ali Asghar Naseri, also returned to Tripoli on September 16. Iran has not yet recognized the NTC, though officials in Tehran stated their hope to “deepen bilateral cooperation” between the two countries. (Times of Oman) US Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Feltman arrived in Libya on September 14, marking the appearance of the highest-ranking American official since the fall of Tripoli. Feltman commended the NTC’s management of the various rebel militia groups while also reiterating that the risk of weapons proliferation remains a primary concern. (Reuters, AP) In New York, the United Nations General Assembly approved granting Libya’s UN seat to the NTC and encouraged the Council to appoint an ambassador within a week. (VOA)

Preliminary Political Posturing

As Libya’s new government gradually coalesces, divisions are emerging among the country’s secular politicians and Islamist leaders. Mustafa Abdel Jalil called for harmony among the Libyan population, stating that the next administration would draw from Islamic law while also being based on “moderate” Islam. (Guardian) Prominent Islamists have recently been critical of the NTC, with a particularly negative focus upon NTC Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril. Popular Islamist cleric Ali Sallabi declared the NTC was filled with “extreme secularists” and called for Jibril’s resignation, and a Tripoli Military Council spokesman stated Jibril “has lost the confidence of the people” across the country. (FT, AP)

The head of the Tripoli Military Council, Abdul Hakim Belhadj, is a leading Islamist and previously served as a leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group. Belhadj has thus far remained uninvolved in the dispute, though Libyan insiders are concerned Belhadj may try to unseat Jibril. (FP, NYT) Senior American officials have attempted to assuage fears by stating Islamists are not a threat to the future of Libyan unity, an assertion that has been questioned by Libyans worried about the continued stability of the country. (NYT, NYT)

Libya Conflict: Weekly Recap
By Michael Whittaker
September 23, 2011

Holding the Line

Loyalist forces continued to hold the strongholds of Sirte and Bani Walid, repelling several rebel assaults during the week. Rebels launched attacks against both locations on September 16. Determined loyalist resistance in Sirte has prevented rebel fighters from holding ground within the city, while a lack of coordination and mistrust among rebel units contributed to the defeats at Bani Walid. (AFP, Reuters) Opposition forces continue to encircle both cities and NATO aircraft have maintained operations against loyalist targets.
NATO members voted to extend the September 27 deadline for the air campaign by another 90 days, and NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated “We will be there for as long as necessary, but not a day longer.” (WP)

Rebel forces captured the southern Libyan town of Sebha on September 22 following several days of battle. Field commanders stated the town was “totally free,” though scattered loyalist snipers were still firing on rebel troops. Eighteen rebel fighters were killed during the battle. (BBC) The United Nations confirmed the discovery of a stockpile of yellow cake raw uranium at a storage site outside of Sebha. Rebels reported securing warehouses filled with thousands of blue barrels, with a number of them marked as “radioactive.” (AFP) The raw uranium has low radioactivity levels, as it must first be enriched before being used in nuclear power plants or weaponry.

**Timeline for Transition**

National Transitional Council officials announced additional details for the reformation of the NTC and eventual transition to a fully-democratic state. The NTC will soon appoint a new executive board of 22 ministers and a deputy prime minister, and the Council itself will gradually expand from 43 to 80 members to provide representation across Libya. (VOA, CNN) The NTC will facilitate the election of a 200-member National Congress within eight months, after which the NTC will cease to exist. The Congress will form a committee to draft a new constitution and a general referendum will be held to vote on the constitution.

The NTC assumed Libya’s official seat at OPEC and received international recognition from South Africa, Algeria and the African Union. (AJE, BBC) President Barack Obama met with NTC Chairman Mustafa Abdul Jalil on September 20, promising to aid Libya’s reconstruction efforts and support the new government. The Treasury Department unlocked assets for the Libyan National Oil Corporation, and the US continued to lift economic sanctions against Libya. (Reuters, WSJ) US Ambassador Gene Cretz returned to the American embassy in Tripoli on September 21 and officially re-opened the diplomatic mission the following day. (NYT)

**Road to Recovery**

The NTC is steadily continuing its efforts rehabilitate the country. Industry experts have estimated the return to full oil production will take 18 months, though Libyan refineries are expected to reach 50 percent capacity by next year. (Reuters) Libya’s central bank confirmed its ability to fund state spending for the next six months, and a bank official noted, “We’re in better shape than we anticipated initially.” (Reuters) Normalcy continues to return to the capital city of Tripoli. The city’s seaport has resumed normal operations and Tripoli’s airport is prepared to recommence air travel. (Reuters) The city’s police force is still facing a shortage of officers and equipment, though residents have indicated the streets remain peaceful despite the lack of a police presence. (AJE) Schools also restarted across Libya, with teachers utilizing modified lesson plans instead of the traditional Green Book curriculum of the Qaddafi regime. (AP)
The Stalwart Strongholds

Loyalist forces successfully defended the towns of Sirte and Bani Walid, resisting rebel attempts to take the final strongholds. Rebel fighters advanced towards Sirte from the south and east, reportedly seizing the city’s seaport on September 27 and recapturing the airport the following day. (Reuters, BBC) However, loyalist sniper fire and rocket attacks have prevented opposition forces from holding territory inside Sirte and rebel fighters remain over a mile from the city center. (BBC) One rebel commander claimed he was facilitating surrender talks with a Sirte tribal elder, though other rebel units have continued their assaults. (Reuters) Rebel forces have also been unable to dislodge the loyalists at Bani Walid, as the Qaddafi supporters continue to hold the mountainous high ground around the town. A loyalist rocket attack on September 28 killed rebel commander Daw Saleheen, the top rebel officer at Bani Walid, His death may further weaken the rebel chain of command outside the city. (AP, AP)

In western Libya, unidentified forces attacked rebel positions at the town of Ghadamis near the Algerian border. Six rebels were killed in the assault, and rebel commanders believe that Tuareg tribesmen may have carried out the strike. National Transitional Council officials now suspect Qaddafi may be under the protection of Tuareg fighters located near Ghadamis, as Qaddafi supported the Tuareg nomads since the 1970s. (Reuters, Reuters) NTC officials also believe Qaddafi’s son Saif al-Islam may be present in Bani Walid and Mutassim Qaddafi is hiding in Sirte. (NYT) Rebel commanders reportedly arrested Qaddafi spokesman Moussa Ibrahim outside Sirte on September 29; Ibrahim had continually provided pro-Qaddafi commentary to Western media outlets until his capture. (AFP)

Tension in Tripoli

The National Transitional Council failed to appoint a new Executive Board this week, despite previous promises to reform the Council’s governing cabinet. NTC officials stated the Board’s reformation would be postponed until Libya was entirely liberated, though the lack of rebel military progress has threatened to undermine the Council’s authority. (Xinhua) Rebel commanders from Misrata, Zintan, Tripoli and other cities have voiced their criticisms of the NTC, and numerous rebel militia groups remain within the capital. (NYT, Reuters) Leading Islamist Abdul Hakim Belhadj warned the NTC not to exclude Islamist factions from the new Libyan government. Belhadj, head of the Tripoli Military Council, cautioned that Islamist groups “would not allow” their contributions to the Libyan revolution to be ignored. (Guardian)

A US Senate delegation visited Tripoli on September 29. Senators John McCain, Mark Kirk, Lindsey Graham and Marco Rubio met with NTC leaders and toured Martyrs’ Square, expressing their support for the Council and emphasizing American interest in Libyan business opportunities. (AP) Interpol issued a red notice for Saadi Qaddafi, placing him on Interpol’s most-wanted list alongside his father and brother Saif al-Islam. (AP) UN officials indicated the “tremendous progress” of distributing food and medical supplies to Tripoli and other areas of Libya, though the UN warned of potential humanitarian crises in Sirte and Bani Walid if the sieges of those cities do not end soon. (Reuters)
The Missile Market

American security officials have expressed increasing concern over the fate of the Qaddafi regime’s weapon stockpiles, particularly the stores of surface-to-air missiles. Qaddafi military forces had an estimated 20,000 missiles prior to the conflict and the US State Department indicated it does not have a clear figure for how many have disappeared. (ABC) The State Department has already deployed a team to locate the missiles, and the White House is preparing to send additional personnel to aid in the task. (Forbes) Rebel groups have reportedly raided Qaddafi warehouses and sent weapons back to their home cities. Regarding the weaponry, a Misratan NTC member declared the munitions “spoils of war.” (NYT)