

## The West Moves Discreetly in Libya

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### Analysis

Satellite imagery confirms the arrival of French special operations forces to Benina air base near Benghazi, Libya. The base, which is under the control of Gen. Khalifa Hifter's forces, was rumored to host as many as 180 French soldiers in February, but this has been neither confirmed nor denied.

In the imagery Stratfor obtained, experts at AllSource Analysis identified enhanced security measures around certain compounds in the air base, including raised barriers at security perimeters and foliage removal to improve observation and provide fields of fire to forces securing the facilities. While the imagery does not clearly confirm the forces' nationality, security measures such as these are typical precautions that Western forces take when deploying to conflict areas. The absence of any noticeable air assets or military vehicles indicates that this is a limited presence, one that is not intended to take part in significant combat operations, but rather support training, advisory or intelligence operations. Nevertheless, this preliminary foothold could facilitate a rapid buildup at the base in the future.

### Heightened security measures point to special forces activity in Benghazi

In the wake of claims by Libyan commanders that French special operations forces are at Libya's Benina air base, imagery taken March 1 shows a clear effort to establish security perimeters around several of the base's compounds.





**Area  
detailed  
above**

Sources: AllSource; Airbus

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And as foreign militaries increase their presence in Libya, they must identify local partners to train, support and advise. But because [Libya lacks a unity government](#), Western countries are forced to work with a variety of local militias and political groups, many of which are in conflict with one another and clash violently throughout the country. Until a clearer prospective political solution emerges, U.S., British, French and Italian military forces have decided to work incrementally in both western and eastern Libya to fight the Islamic State. In western Libya, U.S. and British forces are reportedly working with militias from Misrata, while in the east, French forces reportedly work near Benghazi with Gen. Hifter's Operation Dignity. December reports projected that the foreign military intervention forces in Libya, currently numbering in the hundreds, will eventually total 6,000 soldiers.

For several reasons, Western militaries must be discreet as they expand into Libya. First, many Libyans vehemently oppose their presence, forcing Western countries to operate under the radar to avoid political repercussions. Second, Western militaries must work delicately with Libya's many different groups without getting pulled into competing rivalries. Finally, since many Libyans despise Gen. Hifter, French support of his forces is especially controversial. Still, his allies' gains against militants in Benghazi make working with the general useful for French and other Western militaries.