

RWI-BRIEF-005 — Militia activity around Al-Watiya before the 14 December 2015 landing

All-sources pass: was there fighting, clashes, airstrikes, kidnappings or armed mobilisation around Al-Watiya air base in December 2015, especially 7–13 December, the week before a US special-operations team landed there? Sources: English and Arabic press, UNSMIL, UK government, New America's airstrike database, conflict-event datasets; NASA FIRMS (VIIRS) fire detections and NASA Black Marble night lights; Sentinel-1 radar and Sentinel-2 imagery of the base. Distances from the base are RWI estimates. Issued 28 Oct 2026. LLM-assisted analysis; check against the originals before publishing.

1. Bottom line

- 1.1 No sign of fighting at or near the base in the week before the landing.** No reported clash, airstrike, kidnapping, checkpoint incident or mobilisation within about 30 km of Al-Watiya between 7 and 13 December 2015, in English or Arabic. The satellite record agrees: no fire detection within 50 km all month, night lights at the base flat, and no change on the base in radar spanning the week (HC-003-P2).
- 1.2 The nearest violence that month was criminal, on the coast about 60 km away:** the kidnapping of three children in Surman on 2 December (UNSMIL). No airstrike hit western Libya at all between 18 October 2015 and 31 January 2016 (New America database).
- 1.3 The local fronts had been cooling.** The Warshefana–Zawiya ceasefire of 12 November was brokered with Zintan's help; the Libya Dawn advance toward Al-Watiya was in April 2015, with no renewed fighting on that front found for December. The month's big event was political: the Skhirat agreement, signed 17 December, three days after the landing.
- 1.4 Caveat.** "Nothing found" is not proof of calm. The outlets most likely to carry small local items — the Libya Herald December 2015 archive, the UN Secretary-General's February 2016 report (S/2016/182), the UN Panel of Experts report (S/2016/209), raw ACLED — could not be reached in this pass.

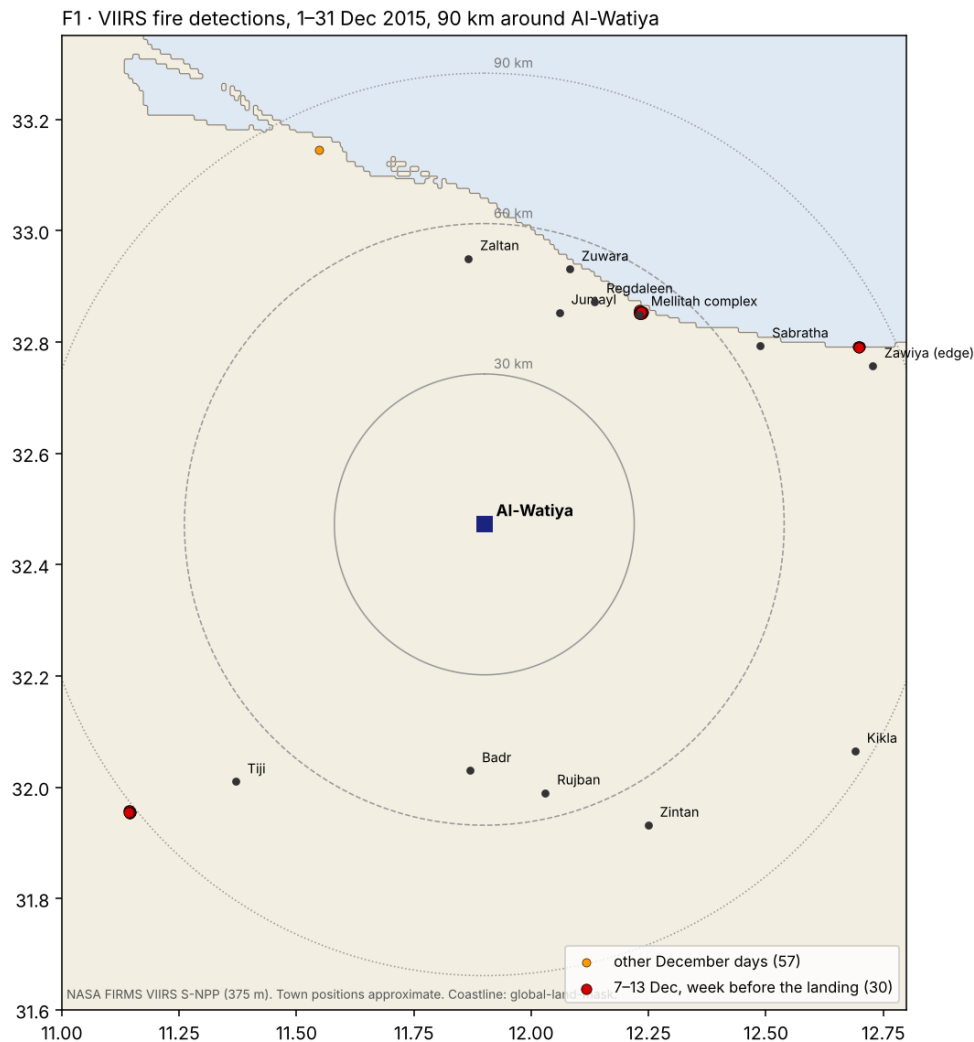
2. Incidents found, by date

Date	Place (from Al-Watiya)	What	Source · confidence
7–13 Dec	Al-Watiya and within ~30 km (Jumayl, Regdaleen, Zaltan, Al-Assah, Aqrabiya, Nalut road)	Nothing found	English and Arabic search; New America; UNSMIL; UK FCO
7–13 Dec	Benghazi, Ajdabiya (east, ~900 km)	14 LNA airstrikes, none in the west	New America · high
2 Dec	Surman (~60 km ENE)	Six masked gunmen abduct three Shershari children, wound the driver; ransom demands. Criminal.	UNSMIL · high
14 Dec	Al-Watiya	US team landed and told to leave (BRIEF-004).	multiple · high
week of 14 Dec	Sabratha (~50 km NE)	IS "briefly occupied" Sabratha — possibly confused with the Feb 2016 takeover.	II Post citing the Guardian · low
17 Dec	Skhirat, Morocco	Libyan Political Agreement signed.	UN · high
Oct–Nov	Sabratha (17 Oct)	One GNC airstrike, no casualties — the only western airstrike Oct–Jan.	New America · high
8 Nov	Sabratha (~50 km NE)	Two Serbian embassy staff abducted from a convoy; shots fired.	Al Jazeera · high
12 Nov	Bir al-Ghanam	Warshefana–Zawiya ceasefire, brokered with Zintan: 4 km pullback, prisoner exchange.	peaceagreements.org · high
8–10 Jan 2016	Surman, Sabratha	~30 abducted as bargaining chips, released 10 Jan; 9 Jan, three killed in Surman shootout.	UNSMIL · high
Apr 2015	Al-Watiya approaches	Libya Dawn advance toward Al-Watiya; Zintan-aligned forces pushed back south of Sabratha.	Al Jazeera Arabic · high

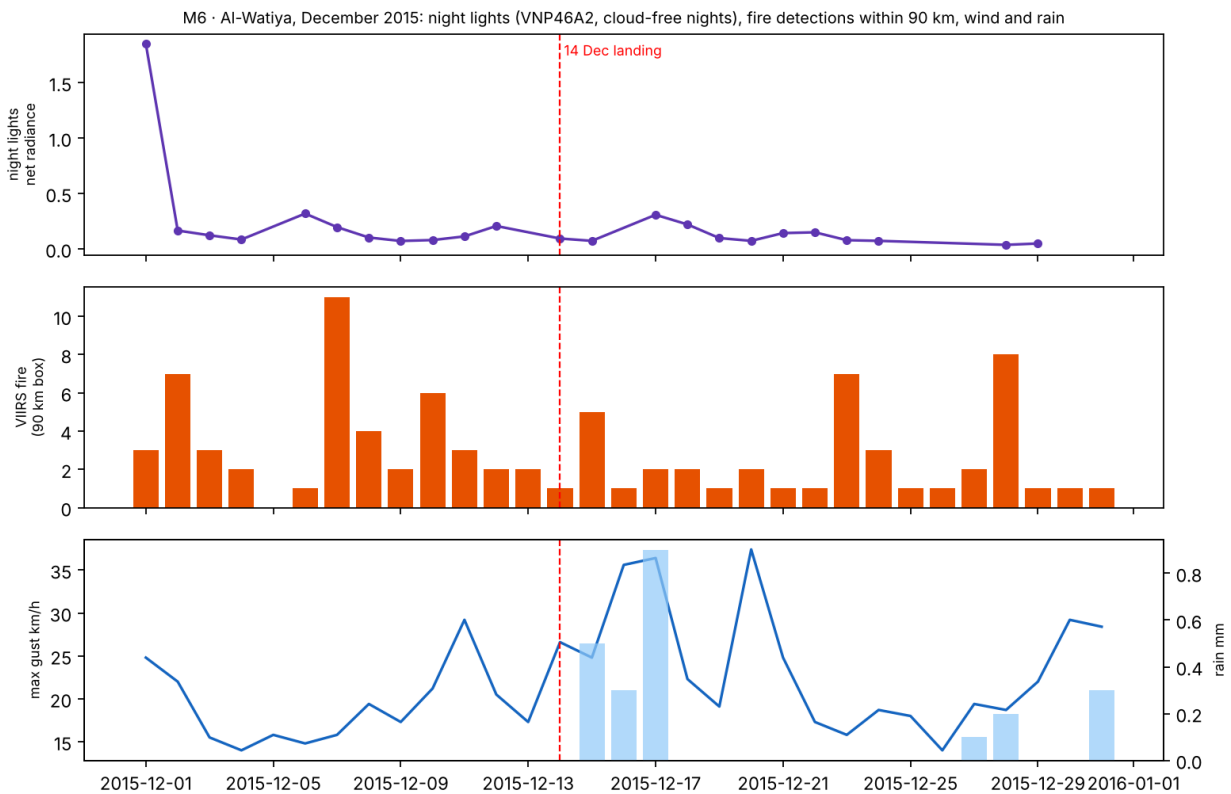
3. What the satellites show

3.1 **Fire.** 87 VIIRS detections within 90 km in December; 86 at night and all on industrial sources: the Mellitah gas complex (52 km NE, 21 days), the Zawiya area flare (83 km ENE), and an unidentified night source 90 km south-west (24 days). None within 50 km of the base. In 7–13 December, 30 detections, all on the same sources. Burning vehicles, buildings or fields from fighting would show as new, short-lived points; there are none (F1).

3.2 **Night lights and radar.** From HC-003-P2: the base was dark and flat at night all month; Sentinel-1 radar across 30 Nov → 12 Dec and 12 → 24 Dec shows no change on the base beyond the noise level.



F1 · Every VIIRS fire detection within 90 km, December 2015. Red: 7–13 Dec. All sit on persistent industrial flares; nothing near the base or the towns around it.



M6 (from HC-003-P2) · Night lights at the base, fires per day in the 90 km box, wind and rain, December 2015. Red line: 14 Dec.

4. Reading

4.1 The record does not support a landing into an active fight. It does support a political problem: a base held by Zintan-aligned units that answered to the Tobruk-side army, three days before the unity agreement, receiving a US team cleared by "Libyan officials" whom the local battalion did not recognise. The Libyan Air Force post itself frames the episode as a question of "who deals with foreign parties under cover of the army".

4.2 To close the gap: the UN Secretary-General's report S/2016/182 and the Panel of Experts report S/2016/209; the Libya Herald and Al-Wasat archives for 1–14 December 2015; raw ACLED events for Nuqat al-Khams and Al-Jabal al-Gharbi districts.

Sources

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- UN News, 17 Dec 2015: news.un.org/en/story/2015/12/518412-un-welcomes-historic-signing-libyan-political-agreement
- CCAPS conflict events: strauss.tacc.utexas.edu/ccaps/armedConflictLocation/show/5965235 and [/5966653](https://strauss.tacc.utexas.edu/ccaps/armedConflictLocation/show/5966653)
- NASA FIRMS VIIRS S-NPP (RWI data/firms-area/al-watiya-2015-12-90km.csv); NASA Black Marble VNP46A2; Copernicus Sentinel-1/2 (RWI-HC-003-P2).