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# Libyan commander Mahmoud al-Werfalli, wanted by International Criminal Court, killed in Benghazi

By Tracey Shelton, wires  
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Werfalli was killed by assailants who opened fire on his car in a busy street in Benghazi. (AFP: ICC-CPI)

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Libyan commander Mahmoud al-Werfalli, known for carrying out brutal street executions and wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged war crimes, has been shot dead in the eastern city of Benghazi, security sources say.

Werfalli, a senior Libyan National Army (LNA) figure and loyal to renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar, was killed by assailants who opened fire on his car in a busy street in Benghazi, the officials said.

They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to brief the media.

The officials said Werfalli was "shot dead with his cousin, Ayman, when unidentified gunmen opened fire".

The pair were seriously wounded, before being pronounced dead on arrival at Benghazi Medical Centre, located near the scene of the shooting, another security source said.

A video broadcast by local media showed a man slumped in the driver's seat of a car being transferred onto a stretcher.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack, which underscored the fragility of the conflict-stricken country.

Warfalli is believed to have been in command of around 5,000 men.



A formal ceasefire has halted fighting between the Tripoli-based GNA and a rival LNA administration in the east. (Reuters: Goran Tomasevic)

The ICC indicted Werfalli twice for having ordered or personally carried out eight separate rounds of executions of more than 40 captives.

ICC judges referred to video footage allegedly showing Werfalli personally shooting hooded and bound prisoners, or ordering a firing squad to open fire on them.

In a video widely circulated in 2018, a man identified as Werfalli was seen standing in front of a row of blindfolded men kneeling in blue jumpsuits in front of the gates of a Benghazi mosque.

The man walks along the line executing each of the men before firing another barrage of bullets into their bodies.

Other videos and images show fighters desecrating the bodies of supposed fighters who opposed the LNA.

This month, in a video widely circulated on social media, a man identified as Werfalli and his men raided a car showroom in Benghazi, smashing furniture and computers.

ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda told the UN Security Council in November 2019 that Werfalli was enjoying "his liberty in the Benghazi area", having been promoted earlier that year from major to lieutenant colonel in Haftar's force.

"For the sake of the women, men and children across Libyan territory who continue to be at risk of violent crimes, the era of impunity in Libya must come to an end," Ms Bensouda said, calling on authorities to immediately arrest and surrender Werfalli to the court.

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court told the ABC they were "aware of and currently verifying reports of the assassination".

The Office condemned "the continued violence in Libya" and said their investigations in the country would continue.

## Ceasefire brings uneasy peace

Born in 1978, Werfalli was a commander of the Al-Saiqa Brigade, an elite unit that defected from Libya's military during the 2011 uprising that toppled and killed dictator Moamar Gaddafi.

The LNA released a statement mourning Werfalli's death, describing him as a "hero".

Libyan political analyst Mohamed Eljarh said while Werfalli was viewed by many as a criminal for his public executions of prisoners — as well as a string of alleged attacks and assassinations — he also had an extensive and loyal following.

"Werfalli championed the cause of the LNA's injured fighters, their families, and the families of those that died during the war," Mr Eljarh told the ABC.

"The LNA will now have to deal with the potential fallout from Werfalli's assassination, including the risk of armed escalation from his loyal followers."

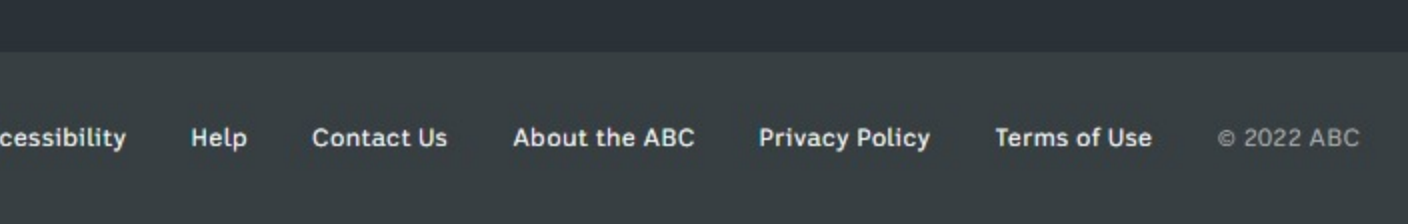
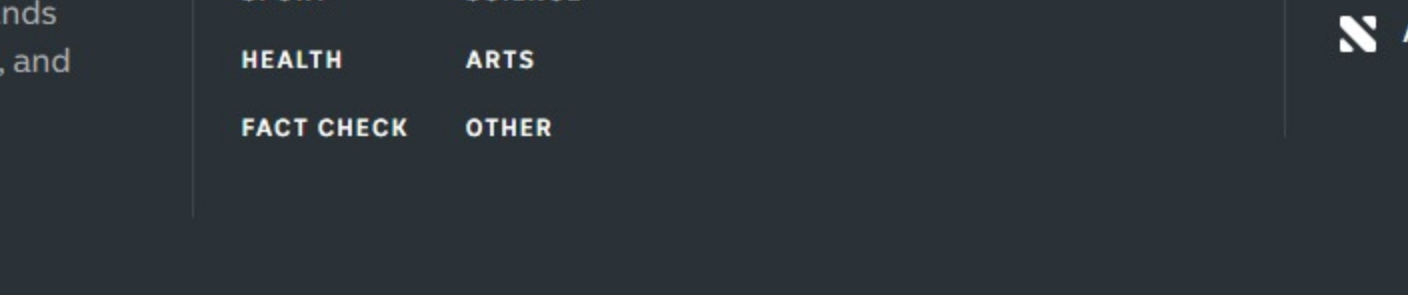
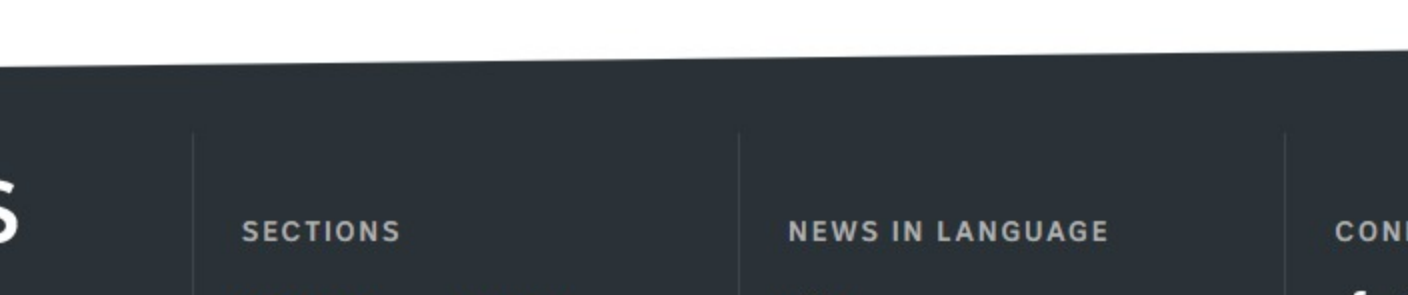
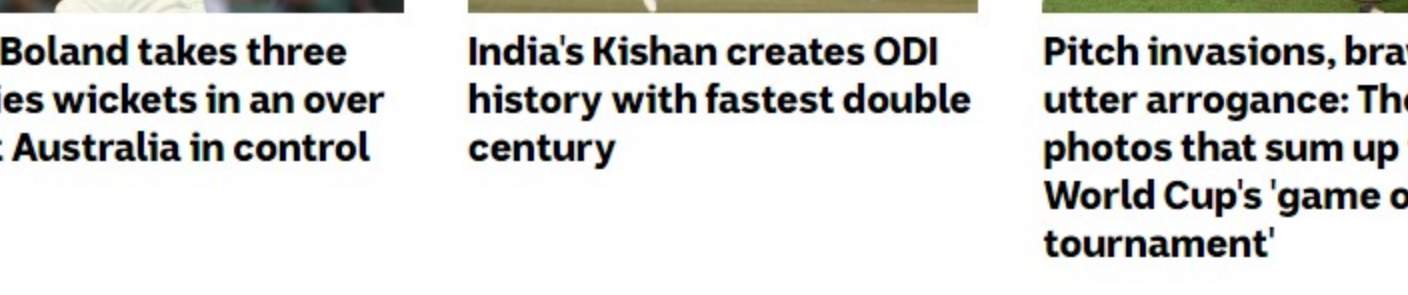
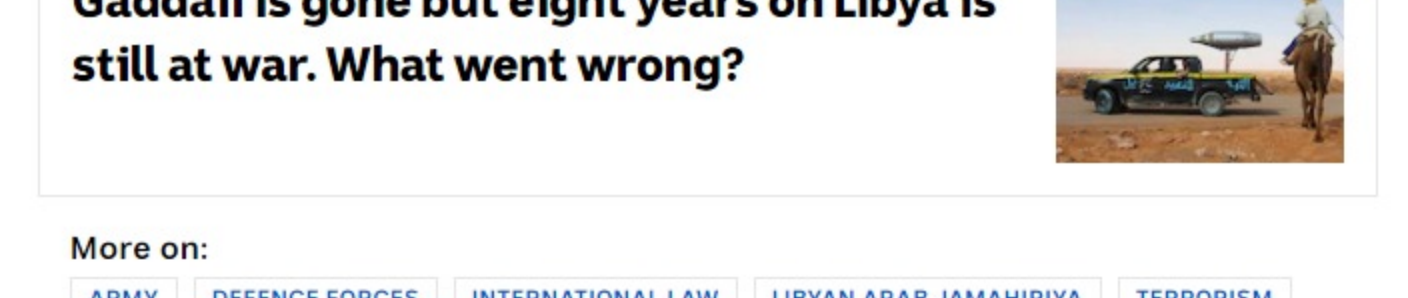
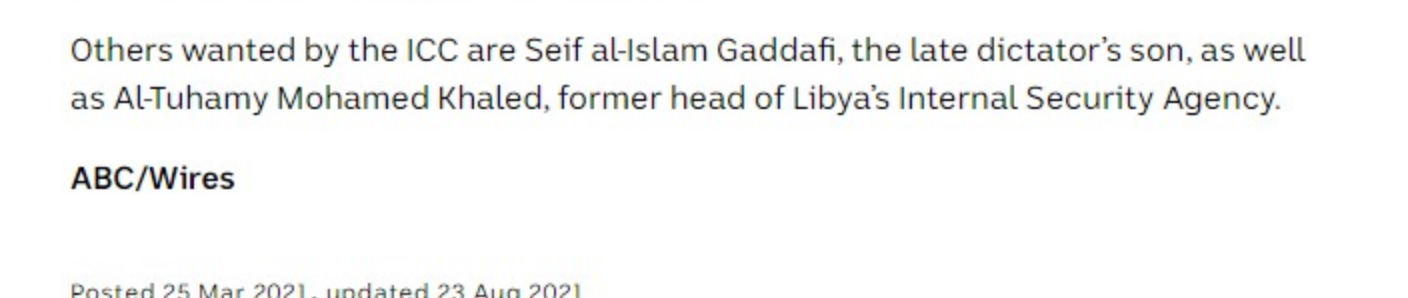
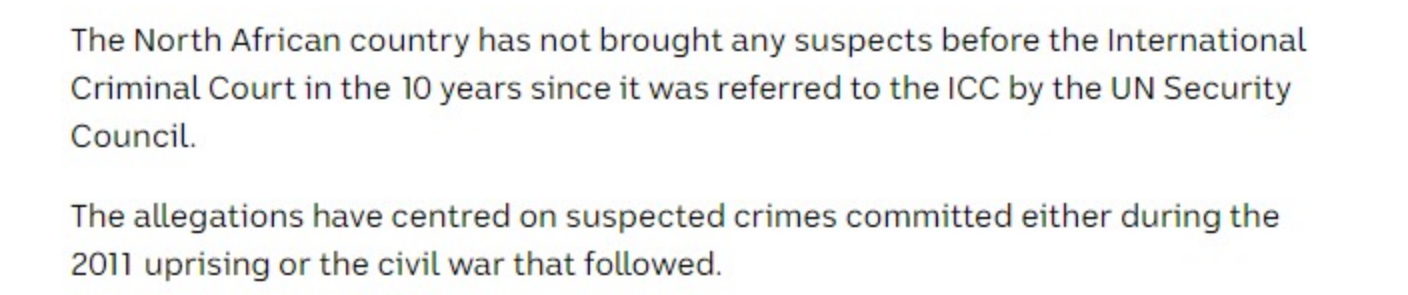
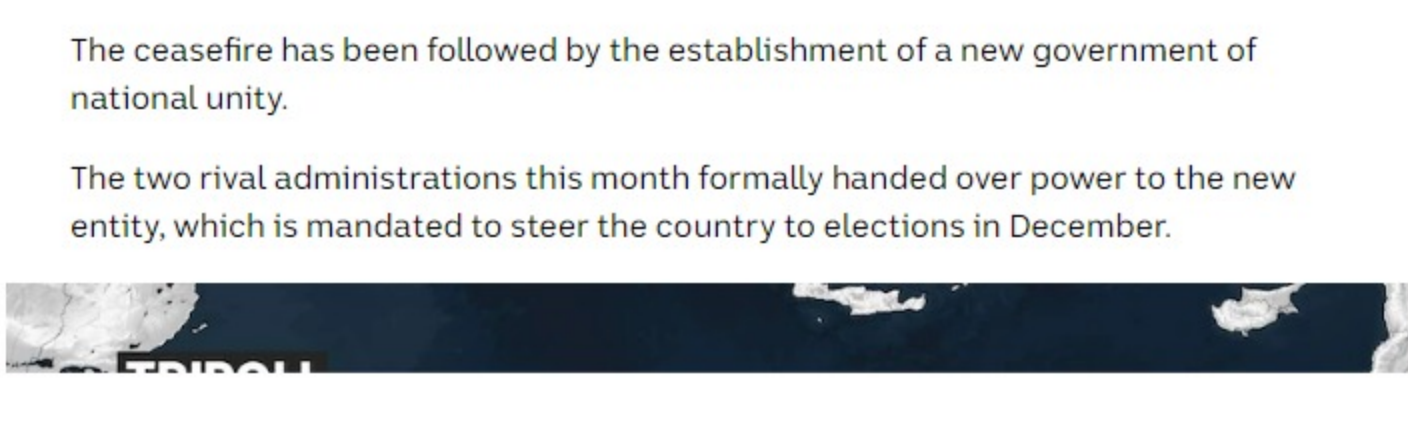
Following the attack, there was a heightened presence of security forces in Benghazi, with residents across the city saying they heard gun shots.

Since 2011, Libya has descended into chaos and has become a haven for Islamic militants and armed groups.

Fighting came to a halt in October when a formal ceasefire was declared between the Tripoli-based government of National Accord and Mr Haftar's rival LNA administration in the east.

The ceasefire has been followed by the establishment of a new government of national unity.

The two rival administrations this month formally handed over power to the new entity, which is mandated to steer the country to elections in December.



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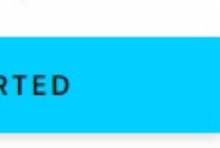
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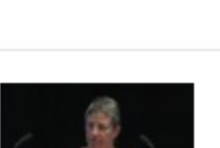
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