



Whispering Bell

Libya Weekly Political & Security Update

August 18, 2020



Whispering Bell

1. The Big Picture

Turkish, Qatari & German ministers in Tripoli for talks with GNA

Recent weeks of diplomatic efforts led by external actors to reach a demilitarised solution on the Sirte-Jufra front amid was followed by emerging reports of a high-level ministerial visit to Tripoli on 17 August. Turkish and Qatari Defence Ministers, as well as Germany's Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, visited Tripoli amid wider efforts to secure a ceasefire in Libya's central region. Turkey's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, and Chief of Staff General Yasar Guler, visited Tripoli to "observe the operations under the military cooperation deal with Libya," according to the Turkish Defence Ministry. Meanwhile, in a separate meeting, reports indicate Maas was received by the GNA Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Siala at the PM Office.

While the outcomes of the aforementioned meetings remain limited thus far, the development would follow an evident international push to avoid military escalation in the Sirte region, which stands as the gateway to Libya's key Oil Crescent region. Prior to Maas' visit to Tripoli, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stressed that his country's "ultimate goal" in Libya should be to restore the state and its sovereignty, noting a mutual understanding between Moscow and Berlin in this regard according to Russian news agency Sputnik. Lavrov's remarks came during a joint press conference held with German counterpart in Moscow on 11 August. Lavrov reaffirmed the common agreement between the two countries on the need for a political solution in Libya, based on the principles of the Berlin Conference.

Meanwhile, in the context of Russia and Turkey representing the main two powerbrokers in the Libyan context, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova noted that a new round of Russian-Turkish consultations on Libya will be held in August or September. In addition, reports indicate the House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh will visit Moscow to discuss his latest political proposal. The latter comes as Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Vladimir Putin discussed the Libyan crisis during a telephone conversation on 17 August. The two sides emphasised a need to implement concrete steps towards a permanent ceasefire.

In addition, the US Embassy in Libya reported Ambassador Richard Norland held consultations with senior Turkish officials in Ankara on 12 August, discussing the urgent need to support Libyan voices seeking an end to the conflict and a return to United Nations (UN)-led political dialogue. In line with previous US-led talks, the consultations discussed steps to achieve a demilitarised solution for central Libya, including a full withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries, allowing the National Oil Corporation (NOC) to resume its work, and promoting economic transparency and reforms.

Domestically, members of the Zawiya-based Muslim Brotherhood submitted a collective resignation and subsequently dissolved its branch on 13 August. In a statement, the signatories noted that the decision came in response to calls of "many local people in the nation who seek freedom and the establishment of a civil state, regardless of their intellectual orientation or political affiliation." The statement added that Libya is currently witnessing a war in its homeland in pursuit of state militarisation under the narrative of fighting the MB and the war on terror. The members stated that the decision comes in effort to prioritise the interest of the country and its people. The development was received with skepticism over the motive behind the sudden resignation, with eastern-based HoR members accusing the group of "hypocrisy." Political motives behind the resignation stand as likely given the key timing and nature of the group at hand. Of note, the latter would come amid growing signs of discord among the GNA coalition, marked by tit-

for-tat statements between Al-Serraj and Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeq last week.

Turning to the combat theatre, the Sirte frontline witnessed reports of Libya National Army (LNA) airstrikes targeting GNA-aligned Turkey-backed mercenaries in Sirte's Wadi Bay area. In addition, this week was dominated by reports of increased LNA military reinforcements. The latter was corroborated by the GNA claiming LNA reinforced the road linking Sirte with Jufra and established trenches to prevent any advancement.

Beyond the Sirte-Jufra frontline, this week saw local grievances prompting protests denouncing poor living conditions in Tripoli, Mizda, and Houn. Similar protests are expected to continue across the country in the short-term. Meanwhile, local grievances related to a power crisis could fuel protests in the eastern region. The NOC warned of prolonged blackouts in eastern Libya amid an ongoing oil blockade orchestrated by LNA-aligned tribesmen. Reports indicate power cuts lasting up to 12 hours in the east. The Corporation reported natural gas supplies to power stations in Benghazi and Zueitina, which dropped to 160 million cubic feet per day from 250 mcf per day, were expected to be completely suspended by 15 August. The NOC noted that imports of diesel to operate power stations had resulted in "severe financial difficulties", while the closure of oil fields and ports led to a drop in fuel production at local refineries, in part due to a build-up of stored condensate that would cause environmental damage to dispose through burning. In realisation of the latter, Haftar chaired a meeting with a Board of Directors (BoD) member of the eastern-based NOC, Jadallah Al-Awkali, and the Arab Gulf Oil Company (AGOCO) chairman of the BoD, Mohammed Bin Shatwan, in Benghazi on 16 August. According to the LNA, the meeting was centred around the oil sector, including the latter's role and ability in providing citizens with fuel supplies in order to recover from the electricity crisis across the region.

Turning to the south, this week was marked by the reemergence of sporadic militant activity. Reports indicate the LNA's Tarik Ibn Ziyad Battalion raided an Islamic State (IS) hideout in Ghadduwah, south of Sabha, at night on 15 August. Reports indicate the raid prompted skirmishes between the Force and IS militants, resulting in three fatalities among IS ranks. Additional reports indicate some IS members detonated explosive vests. Meanwhile, three military vehicles were destroyed and two others were looted.

Prior to the incident, the Russian news agency Sputnik cited a Libyan expert on terrorist groups in Libya, Mohammed Al-Sharif, noting suspicious movements of the Derna and Benghazi Mujahideen Shura Councils, as well as (IS) leaders in the southern region. Al-Sharif reported terrorist movements on the Al-Harouj-Murzuq route and claimed that members within the terror groups are operating independently of their leaders. The latter has made it difficult to monitor movements and track communications to determine potential operations, according to Al-Sharif.

Separately, in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US government allocated 13 million US dollars (USD) to international and national partners to bolster the COVID-19 response in-country. Libya has 7086 active cases of coronavirus, while 933 recoveries and 153 deaths have been recorded to date. Competent authorities warned of a particular surge in Tripoli, Misrata, and the south.



CONTENTS

1

THE BIG PICTURE

Turkish, Qatari & German ministers in Tripoli for talks with GNA

2

NATIONWIDE SECURITY

Events, Analysis and Data

3

SECURITY BY NUMBERS

Charts, Statistics and Analysis

4

TRIPOLI REPORT

News & Neighborhoods

5

BENGHAZI REPORT

News & Neighborhoods

6

WHAT'S NEXT

Forward Looking Expert Opinions

KEY POINTS

- Turkish, Qatari & German ministers visit Tripoli
- Muslim Brotherhood branch in Zawiya dissolved
- LNA forces raid IS hideout in Ghadduwah

2. National Security Map

LNA reinforcements head towards Sirte; GNA convoy targeted in Wadi Bay

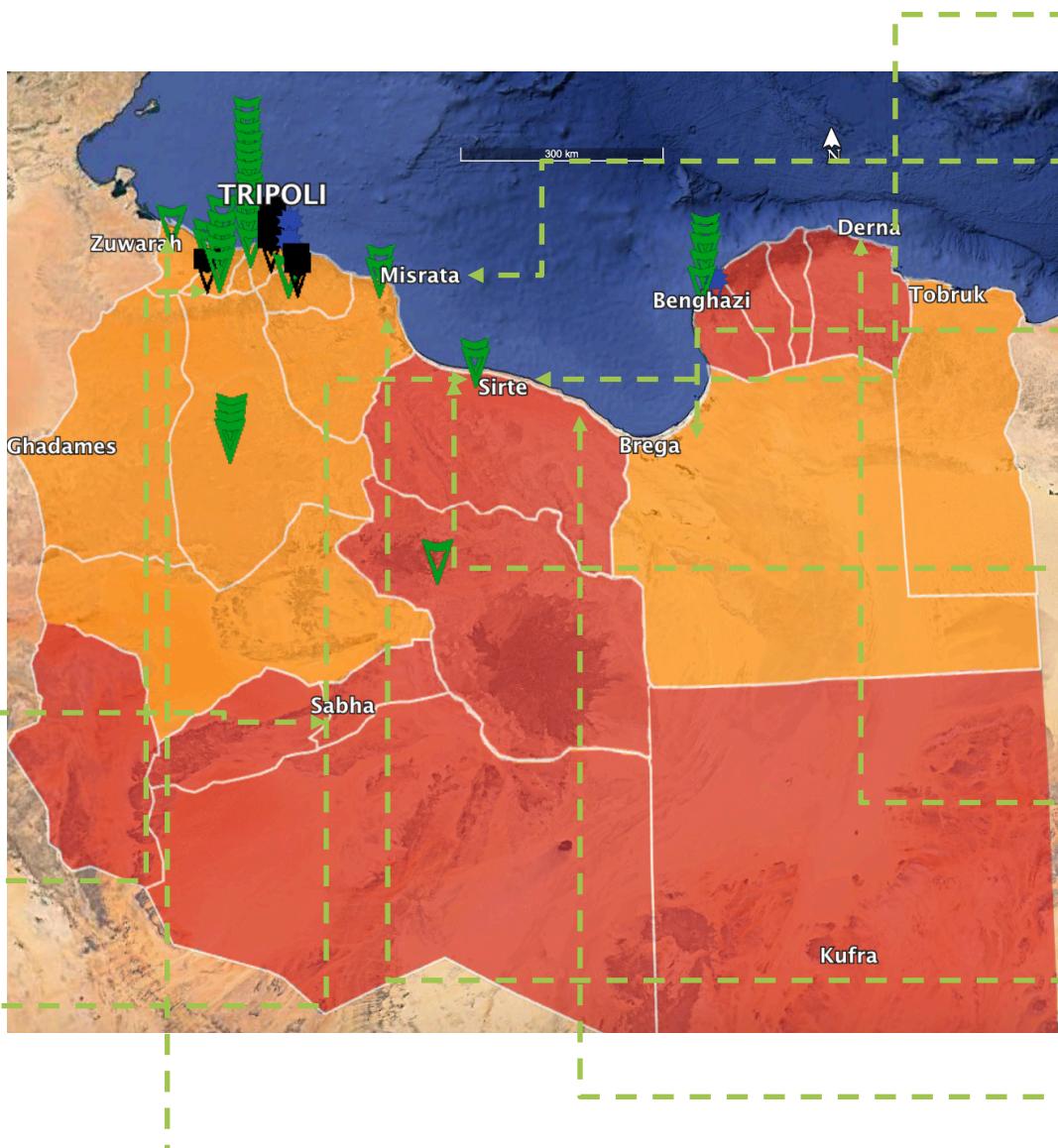
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

- ▲ IED | VBIED
- ▼ Violent Clash
- ▼ Isolated Gunfire
- ▼ Other



Reports indicate the LNA's Tarik Ibn Ziyad Battalion raided an Islamic State (IS) hideout in Ghaduwah at night on 15 August. Reports indicate the raid prompted skirmishes between the Force and IS militants, resulting in three fatalities among IS ranks. Additional reports indicate some IS members detonated explosive vests. Meanwhile, three military vehicles were destroyed and two others were looted.

Reports indicate heavy explosions were audible in Al Ajaylat's southern suburbs at approximately 2030hrs on 11 August. Pro-LNA accounts alleged an unattributed airstrike targeted Al-Watiyah Airbase.

Open source satellite imagery confirms the presence of two aircraft at Sirte's Gardabiya airbase (SRX) on 12 August. The imagery would corroborate reports the airbase is now operational, reportedly by Russian Wagner Group private military contractors (PMCs).

Open source flight tracking platforms suggest two Turkish Air Force C-130 Hercules cargo aircraft landed at Misrata Air College and Al-Watiyah airbase in the morning on 14 August.

A convoy of more than 50 LNA vehicles was spotted in Ajdabiya heading west towards Sirte frontlines on 14 August. Separate reports suggest LNA reinforcements to Sirte frontlines included approximately 20 armoured vehicles (AVs) and 80 technicals.

Unidentified gunmen killed a police officer in Misrata at approximately 1300hrs on 14 August. Pro-LNA accounts allege the victim was identified as Khaled Al-Saber and worked at the investigations department of the passport office at Misrata Airport.

Reports indicate a group of gunmen aboard two vehicles with tinted windows, a grey Hyundai Sonata and a white Toyota Land Cruiser, kidnapped a man aboard his vehicle in Ajdabiya at night on 15 August. Reports indicate the gunmen are affiliated with a local pro-LNA militia in the city, where the man was kidnapped on charges of supporting Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi.

Reports suggest an LNA airstrike targeting GNA-aligned forces in the Wadi Bay area. There were reports of heavy explosions in Sirte's western suburbs at night on 11 August. The LNA claimed airstrikes targeted Turkish-backed mercenaries in the Wadi Bay area. Reports allege an LNA military aircraft, a MiG-29 likely operated by foreign private military contractors (PMCs), targeted a GNA military convoy in the area.

On 16 August, local reports indicate employees of the electricity sector in Derna demanded the immediate release of their colleague, Mohammed Faraj Idris, who was arrested after rejecting statements made by the General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) head, Fakhri Al-Mismari.

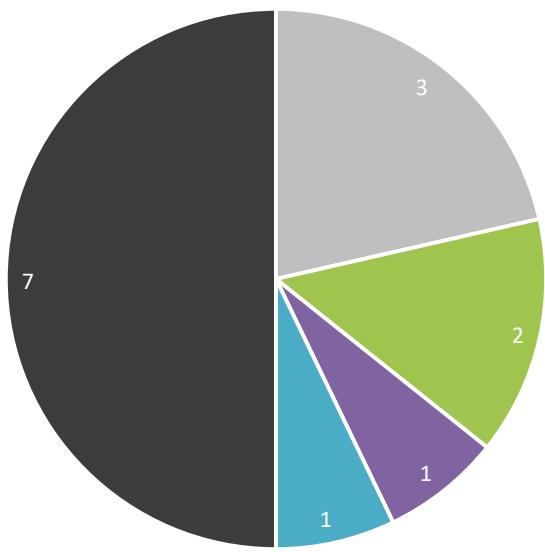
The LNA's Military Information Division (MID) claimed overnight airstrikes targeted GNA forces near As-Sadadah bridge on the road between Sirte and Misrata on 12 August.

LNA spokesman Ahmed Al-Mesmari reported the targeting of a boat carrying dozens of Syrian mercenaries after failing to comply with several warnings from the LNA's Navy Force upon entering the maritime zone and near Ras Lanuf on 10 August. Al-Mesmari reported the boat was targeted with a missile strike, while noting an ongoing search operation to locate survivors with no positive results thus far.

3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Surge in Tripoli robberies; all gunfire cases & assassinations recorded in west

Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



- Assassination
- Isolated Gunfire
- Body Found
- Attack by knife
- IED/VBIED

Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



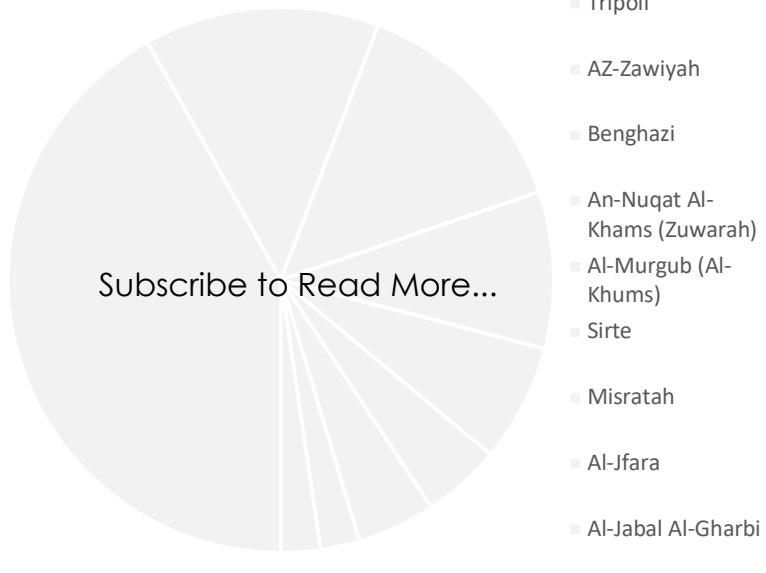
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Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



- Tripoli
- Az-Zawiyah
- Al-Murgub (Al-Khums)
- Benghazi
- Al-Jabal Al-Gharbi

Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)



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Nationwide Fatalities by Type of Attack (Past 27 Weeks)



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Data Analysis

WB recorded this week a total of 14 confirmed deaths in Libya compared with 12 deaths reported last week and 15 the week before. The fatalities recorded came as a result of 7 assassinations, three isolated gunfire cases, two cases of bodies found, 1 IED/VBIED incident, and 1 attack by knife. In Tripoli, WB recorded a particular surge in the robberies of vehicles and General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) equipment/sites. In addition, WB recorded 7 robberies, 4 arrests, 3 isolated gunfire cases, 2 assassinations, and 2 IED/VBIED incidents.

Beyond Tripoli, gunfire-related incidents and assassinations dominated the overall security environment and subsequent fatality count across the western region this week. WB recorded sporadic security incidents across the Al-Murgub, Al-Jabal Al-Gharbi, Misratah, Az-Zawiya, and An-Nuqat Al-Khams districts. In regard to fatalities, WB recorded 7 assassinations in Misrata and Tripoli districts, while three isolated gunfire cases resulted in 3 fatalities in Tarhuna and Al-Zawiya. Meanwhile, this week was marked by reports of two airstrikes conducted in the west. Reports indicate GNA unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) airstrikes targeted fuel smuggling trucks in Zintan at approximately 1530hrs on 12 August. Heavy smoke was witnessed over the town as a result. Separately, the LNA's Military Information Division (MID) claimed overnight airstrikes targeted GNA forces near As-Sadada bridge on the road between Sirte and Misrata on 12 August.

Meanwhile, in the central region, a military build-up in Sirte and its surrounding areas continues to dominate the overall security environment as witnessed in recent weeks. This week was marked by reports of an LNA airstrike targeting GNA-aligned forces in the Wadi Bay area. There were reports of heavy explosions in Sirte's western suburbs at night on 11 August. The LNA claimed airstrikes targeted Turkish-backed mercenaries the Wadi Bay area. Reports allege an LNA military aircraft, a MiG-29 likely operated by foreign private military contractors (PMCs), targeted a GNA military convoy in the area. Earlier that evening, heavy sporadic gunfire was audible in Sirte's western suburbs with no further details on the motive, though pro-LNA accounts reported weapons testing.

Separately, local reports indicate civil society activists in Houn protested in front of the Steering Committee against three-month long water cuts across the majority of areas on 12 August. Water officials reported that the water cuts were due to the prolonged power outages from the main wells located in Soknah. Reports indicate Houn's residents purchase water tankers at a price between 100 and 120 Libyan dinars (LYD).

Turning to the south, parallel to last week's data, WB recorded no significant security incidents across the region throughout the reporting period. In relation to the region's security, the Security Directorate heads in the southeast of Libya held a meeting to discuss the security directorates of Al-Kufra, Tazirbu, Rabiana, Al-Wahat, Jalu, Awjillah, and Ajkharah as per the orders of the eastern Interior Minister Ibrahim Bushnaaf on 11 August. The Interior Ministry's Media Office reported the meeting discussed an extensive security plan that incorporates all directorates of the region in order to combat crime in the aforementioned areas, particularly smuggling and illegal migration. The security heads confirmed their support for LNA forces during the meeting.

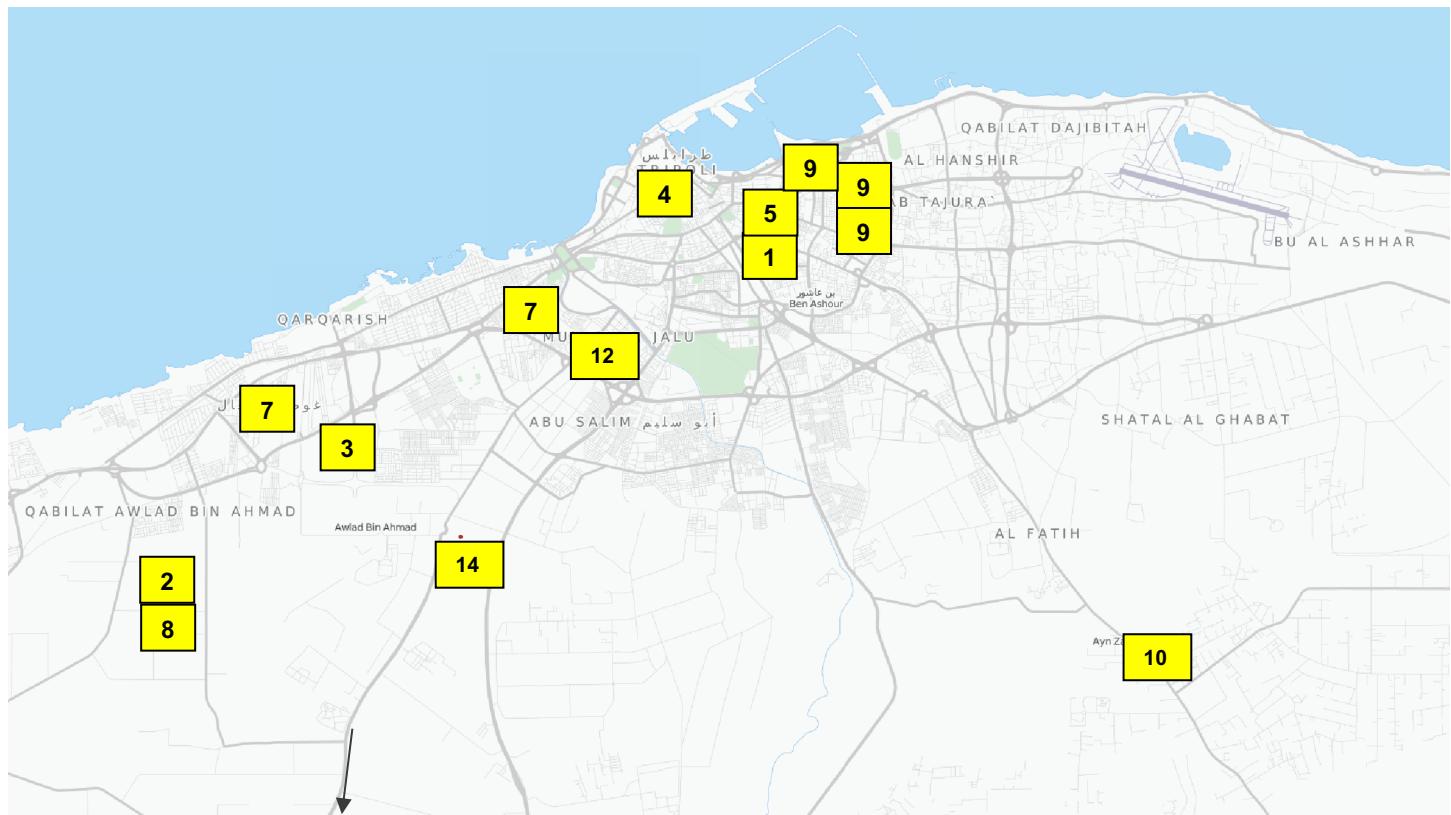
Separately, the Russian news agency Sputnik cited a Libyan expert on terrorist groups in Libya, Mohammed Al-Sharif, noting suspicious movements of the Derna and Benghazi Mujahideen Shura Councils, as well as (IS) leaders in the southern region. Al-Sharif reported terrorist movements on the Al-Harouj-Murzuq route and claimed that members within the terror groups are operating independently of their leaders. The latter has made it difficult to monitor movements and track communications to determine potential operations, according to Al-Sharif.

In the eastern region, this week saw a slight increase in criminal activity in Benghazi in contrast to the previous week, which was dominated by arrest campaigns targeting criminals across the city. WB recorded three arrests, one stabbing, one IED/VBIED incident involving the detonation of explosive remnants of war (ERW), and an explosion. Of particular significance, local reports indicate a retired brigadier general in the Air Defence Forces, Abdul-Munim Al-Dibani, was found killed with 32 stab wounds on the Qawarsha Road on 09 August. The victim's relatives noted that Al-Dibani worked at the Al-Kharouba Airbase, and lost contact with him on the night of 08 August. The motive behind the killing remains unknown. Separately, unconfirmed reports suggest an explosion in the Neroz Resort resulted in the injury of a man in the Qaryounis area in the evening of 11 August. The alleged explosion was reportedly due to dynamite fishing. In a possibly related incident, pro-LNA accounts reported military engineering teams detonated explosive remnants of war (ERW) in an unidentified location in Benghazi in the afternoon on 11 August. No further significant security incidents beyond the city of Benghazi.

4.

Tripoli Neighborhood Report

IS militant kills five family members in house following recent release from prison



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (17 Aug) Emerging reports of visit by Turkish & Qatari Defence Ministers & German FM
2. 16 Aug) Gunmen rob currency exchange office in Al-Serraj area
3. (16 Aug) Gunmen rob pharmacy in Edraiby
4. (16 Aug) Militiamen rob shop near Swehli Sq.
5. (16 Aug) Al-Serraj receives Zintan Municipality Mayor at PM Office
6. (16 Aug) Unconfirmed meeting between SDF & Zintan Trabelsi-led forces, latter distances itself from groups carrying out criminal activities under its banner
7. (15-16 Aug) Zintan's General Security Apparatus evacuates several HQs/camps
8. (15 Aug) Vehicle theft in front of house
9. (15 Aug) SDF deploys patrols & establishes checkpoints in Nofleen, Bab Tajoura & Zawiyat Al-Dahmani
10. (14 Aug) Convicted IS militant kills five family members in house
11. (11 Aug) Man wounded by stray bullet on Abu Slim highway
12. (11 Aug) Vehicles stolen from in front of houses on Airport Road & Gharhour
13. (10 Aug) Ghneiwa militia kills man in Edraiby

Three separate robberies across Tripoli

WB sources reported five gunmen aboard a black Hyundai Azera with tinted windows and no license plates robbed a currency exchange office in Tripoli's Al-Serraj area in the morning on 16 August. Reports indicate the gunmen stole an amount of one million Libyan dinars (LYD). Of note, WB has recorded an evident surge in robberies in the Al-Serraj vicinity.

In a similar incident, sources reported gunmen aboard an unidentified vehicle robbed one of the Whole Sale Pharmacies in Tripoli's Edraiby area in the morning on 16 August. Reports indicate the gunmen stole approximately 100,000 LYD.

Further, pro-LNA accounts reported unidentified militiamen dressed in military uniform robbed approximately 150,000 LYD from a shop located near Al-Swehli Square in Tripoli's downtown area on 16 August. It remains unclear if the three separate robberies were carried out by the same group

Emerging reports of high-profile ministerial visit

Unconfirmed reports suggest a high-profile meeting is scheduled to take place at Tripoli's Corinthia Hotel in the morning of 17 August. Sources reported the roads surrounding the hotel's vicinity remain open with no traffic congestion. Emerging reports at the time of writing suggest the Qatari Defence Minister, Khalid Bin Mohamed Al-Attiyah, and his Turkish counterpart, Hulusi Akar, as well as the German Foreign Minister, Heiko Maas, arrived in Tripoli in an announced visit.

IS militant kills five family members in Ain Zara

A convicted Islamic State (IS) militant identified as Ibrahim Al-Emari and recently released from the

Special Deterrence Force's (SDF) custody, is suspected of murdering five family members in his house in Tripoli's Ain Zara area on 14 August. Local reports indicate the Bab Tajoura Brigade intercepted the suspect after the incident. Of note, the suspect was reportedly arrested fighting in Sirte in 2016 and was recently released as part of the GNA and SDF's attempts to reform the prison system.

TRB force narrates detention by Syrian mercenaries

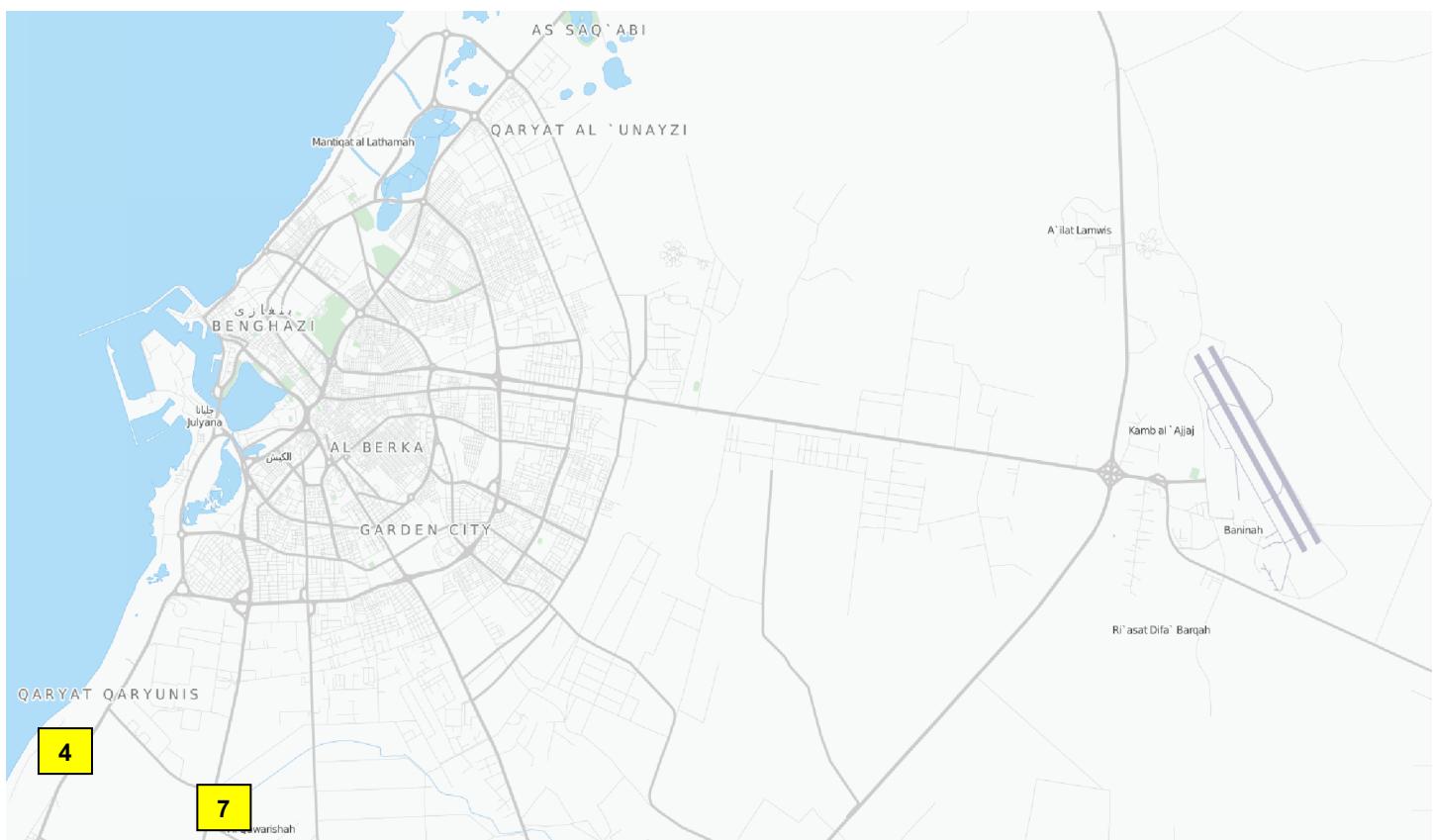
Pro-LNA accounts published videos purported to show a Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) member identified as Musab Batsha narrating his detention and alleged torture by Syrian elements in Tripoli. In the video, Batsha alleges he was detained on cocaine trafficking charges but managed to escape after handing cash to the Syrian fighters. Batsha, who hails from Abu Slim, threatens two individuals of retaliation, including one identified as "Lutfi". The video has not been independently verified and the incident bears the hallmark of a small dispute unlikely to have wider ramifications on Tripoli's security environment. Still, the alleged involvement of Syrian fighters against Tripoli-based militia members has the potential to escalate tensions. The incident would lend credence to the assessment Syrian elements are deployed to deter armed formations across the western region from acting with no GNA oversight. Of note, the TRB underwent leadership change after Haytham Tajouri.

Ghneiwa militia kills man in Edraiby

WB sources reported the Ghneiwa militia killed a man in the Edraiby area at approximately 2210hrs on 10 August. At approximately 2330hrs, locals burned tyres and cordoned off Edraiby Crossroads to denounce the killing. Unconfirmed reports suggest a dispute over the curfew.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Retired Air Force official found stabbed to death; NOC warns of prolonged power cuts



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (13 August) CID arrest former inmate impersonating police officer
2. (13 August) Bank employee arrested on charges of embezzlement
3. (13 August) NOC warns of prolonged power cuts in eastern region
4. (12 August) Haftar promotes 448 LNA officers
5. (11 August) Unconfirmed explosion in Neroz Resort injures man
6. (11 August) Military engineering teams detonate ERW in unidentified location
7. (09 August) Retired brigadier general in Air Defence Forces found killed

Two separate arrests

The Benghazi Security Directorate reported its Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested a former inmate for impersonating a police officer affiliated with Benina International Airport (BEN) on 13 August. The suspect was previously imprisoned in the Correction and Rehabilitation Institution on murder charges. The CID reported the suspect impersonated a police officer in order to engage in drug dealing.

In a separate arrest, the Anti-Counterfeiting and Forgery Department of the General Administration of Criminal Research arrested a bank employee on charges of embezzlement, involving an amount of three million Libyan dinars (LYD) on 13 August. The suspect confessed to the charges against him and stated that he had spent the stolen money on a villa and two new vehicles.

NOC warns of prolonged blackouts in east

The National Oil Corporation (NOC) warned of increasing blackouts in eastern Libya amid an ongoing oil blockade orchestrated by LNA-aligned tribesmen. Reports indicate power cuts lasting up to 12 hours in the eastern region. The Corporation reported natural gas supplies to power stations in Benghazi and Zueitina, which dropped to 160 million cubic feet per day from 250 mcf per day, were expected to be completely suspended by 15 August. The Corporation noted that imports of diesel to operate power stations had resulted in "severe financial difficulties", while the closure of oil fields and ports led to a drop in fuel production at local refineries, in part due to a build-up of stored

condensate that would cause environmental damage to dispose through burning.

Haftar promotes 448 LNA officers

The LNA commander Khalifa Haftar issued a decision to promote 448 officers on 12 August. The LNA reported the promotion came as a result of "exceptional performance" in achieving security and stability in Libya.

Alleged explosion in Neroz Resort

Unconfirmed reports of an explosion in the Neroz Resort resulting in the injury of a man in Benghazi's Qaryounis area in the evening of 11 August. The alleged explosion was reportedly due to dynamite fishing. Of note, there have been past reports of explosions and subsequent civilian casualties caused by dynamite fishing in the east.

In a possibly related incident, pro-LNA accounts reported military engineering teams detonated explosive remnants of war (ERW) in an unidentified location in Benghazi in the afternoon on 11 August.

Retired Air Defence official found killed

Local reports indicate a retired brigadier general in the Air Defence Forces, Abdul-Munim Al-Dibani, was found killed with 32 stab wounds on Benghazi's Qawarsha Road on 09 August. The victim's relatives noted that Al-Dibani worked at the Al-Kharouba Airbase, and lost contact with him on the night of 08 August. The motive behind the killing remains unknown.

6.

What's next

Diplomatic efforts on demilitarisation of Sirte/Jufra & resuming production

POLITICAL FORECAST

SECURITY FORECAST

Russian-Turkish consultations on Libya are reportedly scheduled to be held in Moscow in August or September, according to Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova. The scheduled talks come amid an evident diplomatic push by the international community to avoid military escalation in Libya's central region, as well resume oil production. The House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh is reportedly scheduled to visit Moscow to discuss his political proposal., Saleh told Al-Hadath news channel that he proposed Sirte as the headquarters of a new government to be protected by a joint force comprising members from all regions of Libya. The Speaker noted that he had made the proposal during consultations with US Ambassador to Egypt Jonathan Cohen in Cairo. Meanwhile, the US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland welcomed the support received for the Cairo Declaration proposed on 06 June and highlighted US support for all Libyan parties seeking a peaceful solution to the conflict during his visit to Cairo. Norland met with Saleh to review the HoR's efforts to promote a demilitarised solution in the Sirte-Jufra region, allowing the National Oil Corporation (NOC) to resume its vital work nationwide, to ensure revenues are managed in a transparent manner, as well as efforts leading to peaceful elections. Domestically, the Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections (CCMCE) announced that the Misrata Municipal Council elections are scheduled for 03 September. The committee added that the deadline for voter registration is on 18 August and thus called on citizens to register via sending an SMS to 11711 with their national number and electoral center number. In addition, the Committee noted campaigning begins on 16 August, where they set the financial ceiling for electrical campaigns at 200,000 Libyan dinars (LYD) for lists, and 95,000 LYD for individuals with special needs, revolutionaries, and women. In addition, the CCMCE reported that Qatrunk's municipal elections will be held on 31 August, where electoral campaigns will end on 29 August.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In an article for The Jamestown Foundation, author Jacob Lees Weiss discusses the future of Government of National Accord (GNA) militias in the aftermath of the LNA's failed offensive on Tripoli, with Weiss arguing that divisions among GNA militias indicate the "significant international difficulties the GNA will likely face, regardless of further military success." Weiss stated that the involvement of Turkey-backed Syrian mercenaries in order to bolster GNA forces has further exacerbated tensions among GNA militias, stating "the inter-militia differences within the GNA have been exacerbated by the increasing presence of foreign militias—notably the Syrian militants flown in by Turkey to strengthen military support in the conflict against the LNA. The authors added, "the changing demographic caused by the influx of Syrian militants has provoked fears of a major divide in the GNA camp. Hundreds of Syrian militants were filmed holding up the Turkish flag and pictures of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Janzur on August 5. While no clashes have occurred between foreign and domestic militias, a Tripoli security source stated that tensions between the two groups have increased due to differences in ideology and allegiance." In regard to the military build-up around Sirte, Weiss argues that an increased dependency by the GNA on foreign militias will further destabilise security in GNA territory." Domestic militias are likely to become increasingly resentful as they are crowded out and replaced by their foreign counterparts. The more these militia groups fear they will not benefit from a country controlled by the GNA, the more they will be open to defection to the LNA or other actors. Meanwhile, on GNA security reforms, Weiss stated that "control over Sirte would give the GNA access to significant oil revenue which could lead to a flurry of militia attempts to divert a percentage of the profits. Likewise, the increased delay in undertaking reform would allow militias further time to entrench control and extend power."

Following last week's reports of increased internal discord among the GNA coalition marked by tit-for-tat statements between Fayez Al-Serraj and Deputy Prime Minister Ahmed Maiteeg, this week was marked by pro-LNA accounts alleging a meeting was held in Tripoli to discuss overthrowing Al-Serraj's cabinet. While the latter remains unverified, such reports come amid a series of protests held across the western, centra, and southern regions, denouncing deteriorating living conditions, where protesters chanted anti-GNA slogans. WB assesses similar protests to spread across the country, particularly amid an exacerbated power crisis across the country. However, in a more positive development in the context of ongoing efforts to evacuate military camps/HQs, this week saw Zintan's General Security Apparatus evacuate several HQs in Gorie and Ghut Shaal areas. Meanwhile, the Joint Force will likely remain active in its security operations as it targeted unauthorised cooking distribution centres in Tripoli. In the wider west, GNA continues its operations aimed at combating smuggling activities in Zintan, Zuwara, and the Ras Ajdir crossing. Meanwhile, criminal activities remain relatively high in areas between Garabulli and Zliten, with a continuation of sporadic crime in Misrata. Turning to the central region, this week saw reports of an LNA airstrike in Sirte's Wadi Bay area targeting GNA-aligned forces, though no significant changes took place on the ground amid increased international talks surrounding demilitarization. Nevertheless, reports of LNA reinforcements, in particular, continue to circulate. In Libya's South, this week was marked by LNA forces raiding an Islamic State (IS) hideout in Ghadduwah, resulting in losses among IS ranks. LNA forces are expected to bolster their presence in the region following the incident. Meanwhile, the south could witness a surge in protests and other forms of civil unrest amid lack of services. Further, while the eastern region remains relatively stable in contrast to the rest of the country, local grievances are expected to increase amid lengthy power cuts.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an interview with Reuters, the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) chairman Ali Mohamed stated that the Authority is planning to request permission from the United Nations (UN) to allow it to invest billions of dollars inactive in its accounts after losing out on an approximate 4.1 billion US dollars (USD) in potential equity returns amid a near decade of sanctions. Mohamed noted that the LIA also wanted to avoid negative interest rate charges, costing an approximate 23 million USD since 2011. The LIA aims to request the UN Sanctions Committee to make adjustments to enable it to invest via a custodian, an estimated 12.7 billion USD frozen cash held by its investment managers, including some proceeds from 769 bond holdings at a value of 4.8 billion USD that have developed since 2011. Mohamed noted that any current attempts at investments were obstructed by a prolonged process that required approval from the Sanctions Committee, as well as within Libya. The LIA's stock holdings have been cut by an approximate 5% during the coronavirus pandemic, prompting a potential debt restructuring across its subsidiaries. Libyan authorities previously requested the UN Security Council to approve a sanctions exemption for the LIA in 2016, though the Council rejected and set the establishment of a stable government as a precondition. The LIA was blacklisted in March 2011 while it under the control of the Gaddafi family, where its assets were valued at 67 billion USD in 2012. The LIA noted plans to update the aforementioned statistics in October after a review by its financial adviser Deloitte.

About Whispering Bell



Contact Whispering Bell at: +971-4-448-6690 or at ras@whisperingbell.com

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