

# 1. The Big Picture

## Nationwide anti-government protests & GNA power struggle

Civil unrest over the past few days across Libya culminated in a power struggle after Government of National Accord (GNA) PM Fayed Sarraj suspended Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha on 28 August. While protests in Tripoli came under the spotlight, it is important to note that unrest was recorded across both GNA and eastern interim government constituencies this week. Public anger prompted hundreds to take to the streets across Tripoli, Misrata, Sabha, Ghat, Jmail, Sirte, and Al-Qubah in the east.

The GNA temporarily suspended Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha and ordered a probe into the anti-corruption protests in Tripoli within 72 hours from the decree's release date on 28 August. The development marks a significant turn of events and came a day after Bashagha's televised address, where he tacitly attributed the use of force against protesters in Tripoli to the Nawasi Brigade. Of note, video footage purported to show Nawasi Brigade members celebrating Bashagha's suspension with fireworks at Martyrs' Square at approximately 2200hrs on 28 August. From the Nawasi Brigade's perspective, this is a continuation of its dispute with the Interior Minister after he had threatened to target militias and irregular forces.

Bashagha, who was in Ankara to meet Turkey's Defence Minister, responded with a politically-charged statement, accepting GNA decree 562 and his temporary suspension on the condition that the hearing is broadcast to the public. Upon his return, Misrata forces put up a show of force moving a convoy of approximately 300 vehicles (according to estimates) to receive the Minister at Mitiga International Airport (MJL) at 1800hrs on 29 August. Video footage documented the involvement of Misrata's 166 Battalion and Mahjoub Brigade. Bashagha, accompanied by 166 Battalion commander Mohammed Baaio "Al-Hasan" and other Misrata forces, stated he was ready to refute allegations and confessed to mass corruption across all state sectors across Libya.

In response to growing demands from protesters, the GNA premier issued five decrees, which include a cash disbursement to mothers and children by the Ministry of Social Affairs. The allowance will be deducted from government revenue generated by the foreign currency tax. Many observers were skeptical, arguing the reform is a "quick-fix" response and transfers the burden to the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) given the widening budget deficit. Meanwhile, Sarraj appointed Defence undersecretary Salah al-Deen Namroush, who hails from Zawiya, as the new Defence Minister. In a similar decree, Mohamed Haddad, the central region military commander from Misrata, was appointed Chief of Staff (CoS), in a move described as aiming to satisfy the Misrata support base.

While observers have long speculated there are tensions between Bashagha and Sarraj, the divide failed to come to the fore and remained limited to other senior GNA figures, including Deputy PM Ahmed Maiteeg. Given Bashagha's influence as the architect of security-sector reforms (SSR), observers agree that sidelining the Interior Minister will be difficult. The Minister continues to enjoy support and his latest move to call for a public hearing has likely strengthened his position. As a consequence, the political divide is unlikely to conclude in the short term and will likely expand further across the political spectrum as alliances shift. The vacuum will likely

provide an opening for the LNA to bank on divisions. The Gaddafi support base is also set to benefit, especially given recent pro-Gaddafi protests across Sirte, Sabha, and other cities.

Overall, three factors will likely impact the trajectory in the medium term; Turkish government course of action and whether the dispute begins to take on a pro-Turkey vs anti-Turkey dimension, Zintan and Zawiya's respective positions, and last but not least, resolve to oust the GNA PM and form a new government. A key battle opposing Sarraj to his opponents will be over the CBL led by Governor Sadik Al-Kabeer.

While alliances are not set in stone and will likely continue to shift, there is a possibility the Nawasi Brigade and pro-Sarraj bloc will manoeuvre on the political front to enact security-sector reforms so as to prevent Bashagha from doing so. The Tripoli Protection Force (TPF), which sided with Sarraj against Bashagha, and Greater Tripoli Union Council may press ahead with the formation of the National Guard, and other projections to reinforce the image of inclusive reforms.

The developments have added pressure to resume political track negotiations, but equally cast a shadow over the newly-agreed ceasefire and elections by March 2021. Of note, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Acting Head Stephanie Williams was received by Egyptian FM Sameh Shoukry to discuss the "rapid" political and security developments in Libya on 30 August. Some observers are of the view the popular movement and ensuing developments have undermined local confidence in GNA PM and Aguila Saleh to form an inclusive government and negotiate on behalf of Libyans.

At the time of writing, active mediation within the GNA cabinet could defuse tensions and reinstate Bashagha. However, multiple scenarios are possible given the complexity of the latest power struggle and involvement of stakeholders with competing interests. Even if the Interior Minister and premier are capable of overcoming differences, the struggle can continue to evolve locally as a dispute between Misrata vs Tripoli, Islamists vs non-Islamists, pro-Turkey vs anti-Turkey etc. As is often the case in Libya, local forces are capable of exploiting the latest dispute to advance narrow interests.

But the LNA power bloc is equally facing pressure. In its latest statement issued on 29 August, the Social Council of the Gaddafi tribe reiterated its previous demands to the LNA over the targeting of Sirte's residents. Of particular note, the Council rejected any form of cooperation with the LNA and warned that it would respond to any security breach accordingly. Amid heightened political tensions, local GNA and LNA forces have doubled down on bellicose rhetoric and exchanged ceasefire violation accusations. On the ground, reinforcements continue to be reported on both sides, while LNA forces reportedly continued to mobilize in Hun/Waddan, south Sirte.

### KEY POINTS

- GNA PM suspends Interior Minister
- Political tensions are high & alliances could shift
- Gaddafi supporters criticise LNA in statement



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# 2. National Security Map

## Sirte buildup continues; LNA reports suspected IS activity in south

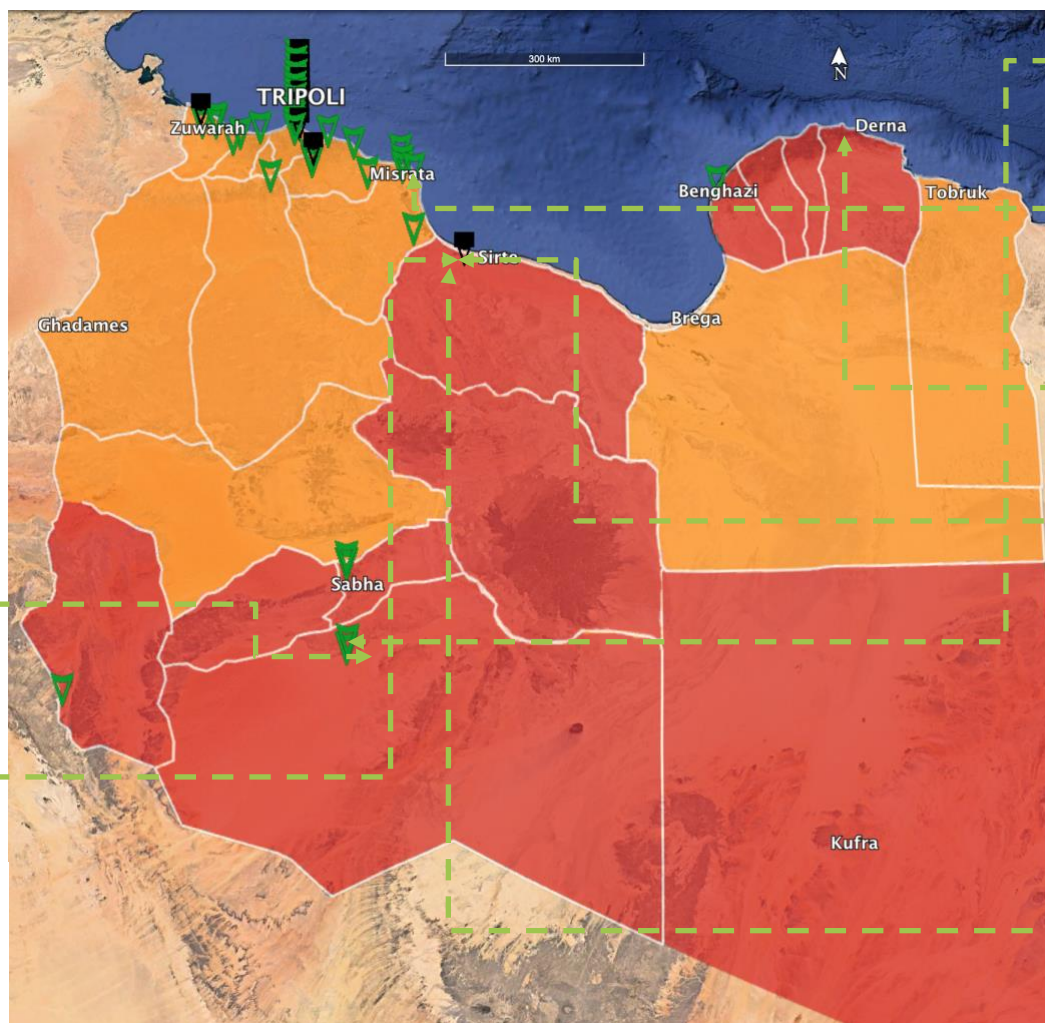
### Key

#### THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

#### EVENT INDICATORS

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



LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mismary reported activity of suspected Islamic State (IS) militants in Umm Al-Aranib on 25 August. Al-Mismary added the militants are supported by Chadian foreign fighters, in comments to Sputnik.

Pro-LNA accounts reported the LNA's 73 Brigade and 166 Battalion deployed patrols in Sirte in order to implement the curfew on 29 August. Of note, the LNA's growing deployment in Sirte comes against the backdrop of heightened tensions involving Gdadfa tribesmen across the country.

The Audit Bureau head Khaled Shakshak found evidence of negligence from officials amounting to a criminal offence in relation to the power crisis and intermittent outages. In a letter to the Public Prosecutor, the Audit Bureau recommended a travel ban against unidentified General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) officials until investigation findings are published.

Following reports of security forces dressed in military uniforms closing down polling stations in Taraghin ahead of scheduled municipal elections, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) attributed the incident to pro-LNA armed groups.

The Misrata-based Libyan Iron and Steel Company (LISCO) reported one of its employees in a marked vehicle was targeted by criminals in a carjacking incident in the vicinity of the LISCO complex on 26 August. The vehicle was later recovered by the Misrata Security Directorate.

Reports indicate locals protested against the Interim Government and living conditions in Al Qubbah, west Derna, in the afternoon on 25 August. The protesters burned tyres and closed off several roads within the town.

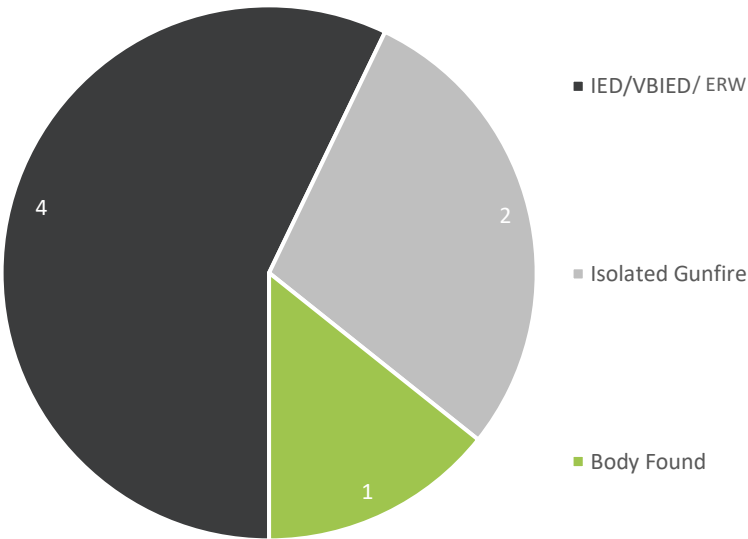
On 28 August, LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mismary categorically denied that the LNA targeted GNA forces or violated the ceasefire west Sirte. Al-Mismary emphasised the LNA's commitment to the truce announced on 08 June by LNA commander Khalifa Haftar. The statement refutes claims by GNA's Sirte-Jufra Security Operations Room that LNA-affiliated Wagner Group private military contractors (PMCs) attempted to target forces with over 12 Grad rockets across Sirte frontlines on 27 August.

GNA military spokesperson Mohammed Gnounou claimed intelligence services monitored an LNA-affiliated convoy consisting of 112 armed vehicles carrying "mercenaries" from the east arriving in Houn and positioning across three schools on 29 August. Gnounou reported the LNA gathered hundreds of Chadian and Janjaweed mercenaries in a training camp in Zellah, and established checkpoints from east Sirte to Jufra, as well as south of Sabha. In addition, Gnounou claimed GNA forces monitored the arrival of 70 armed vehicles and ammunition trucks carrying Janjaweed mercenaries in Sirte. Gnounou subsequently called on his forces to remain prepared to respond to any security breaches.

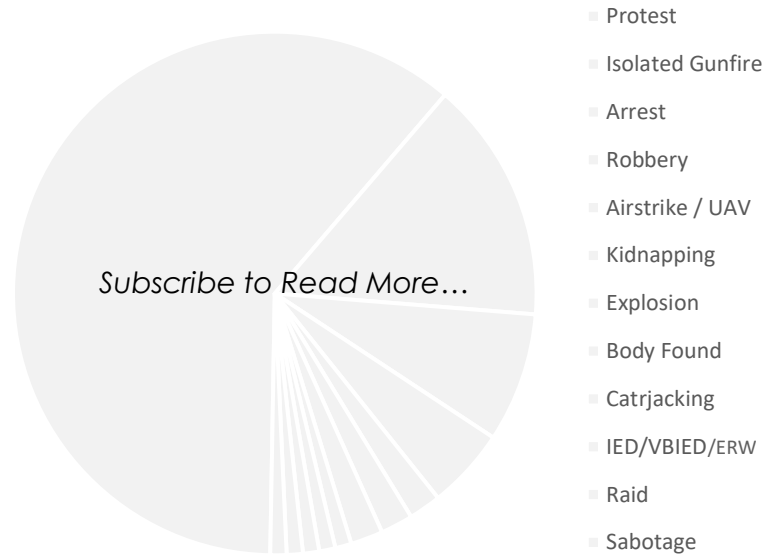
### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Nationwide protests dominate security environment; fatalities in Tripoli

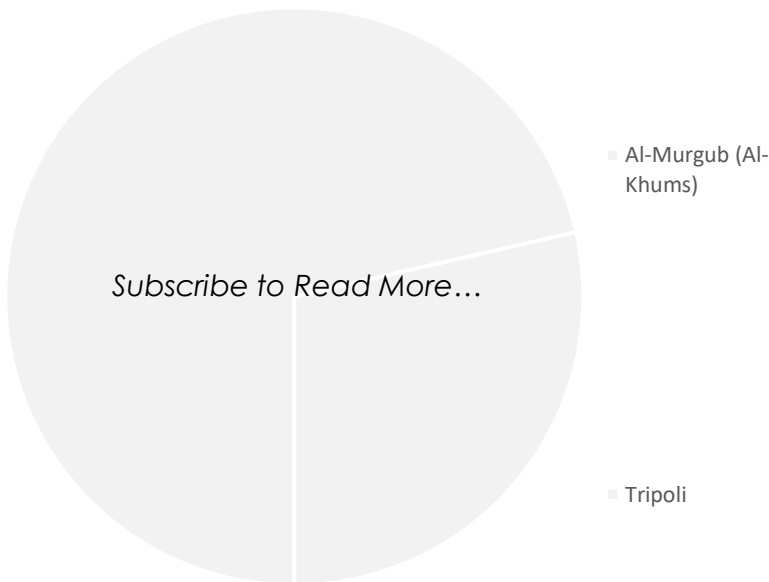
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



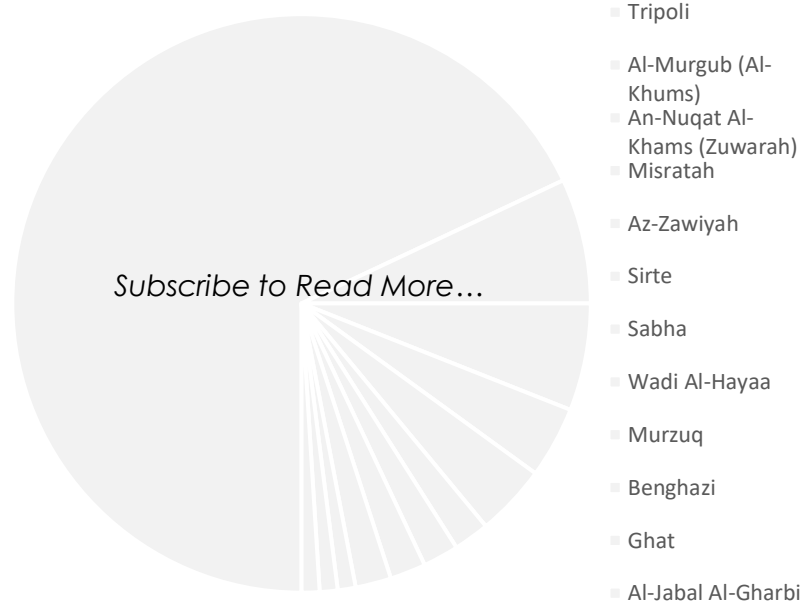
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



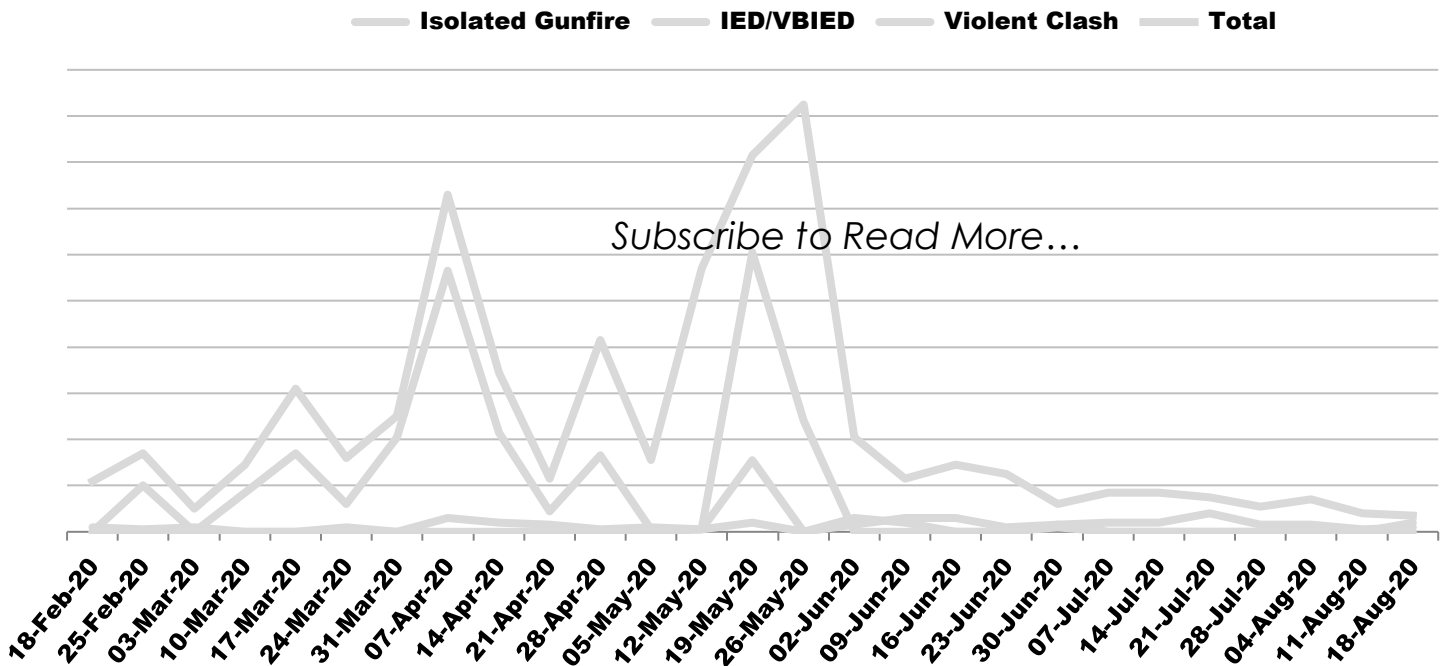
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)



## Nationwide Fatalities by Type of Attack (Past 27 Weeks)



### Data Analysis

WB recorded this week a total of 18 confirmed deaths in Libya compared with 08 deaths reported last week and 14 the week before. The fatalities recorded came as a result of two isolated gunfire cases in Tripoli, a landmine explosion killing four civilians on the road between Zliten and Tarhuna's Al-Dawoon area, in addition to a body found in Tarhuna. In the particular case of Tripoli, a civilian male protester was reportedly shot dead by security forces in Ghut Shaal, near Shifaa Hospital, at approximately 0015hrs on 28 August. Separately, an altercation between the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) and Ghneiwa militia resulted in a gunfire exchange in Tripoli, AOs Al-Nofliyeen area, killing at least one SDF member and injuring another while two Ghneiwa members sustained injuries at approximately 2200hrs on 27 August. The Ghneiwa members were reportedly escorting the GNA Deputy Health Minister, Mohamed Haithem, in a convoy of approximately eight unmarked and four military vehicles. The convoy was reportedly stopped at a checkpoint manned by the SDF near Abu Hajar Mosque, which led to a verbal altercation and the ensuing gunfire exchange. Reports allege tensions escalated because Haithem disapproved of the fact his convoy was stopped. Meanwhile, the remaining 5 fatalities were recorded in the Tarhuna district. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHRL) reported two landmines exploded between Zliten and Tarhuna's Al-Dawoon area resulting in the death of four civilians on 24 August. According to the NCHRL, the victims were on a hunting trip. Separately, Local reports indicate recovery teams located an unidentified tied body dumped in a water well in Tarhuna's Sidi Al-Saed area on 25 August.

In the wider western region, protests denouncing government corruption and deteriorating living conditions dominated the overall security environment. The majority of protests were recorded across the capital city. WB recorded a total of 43 protests in Tripoli. In addition, locals burned tyres and closed off several cities and towns in the western region, including Al Ajaylat, Aljmail, Al-Zawiya and Gharyan at night on 24 August. Reports indicate locals burned tyres and cordoned off Gharabolli's Coastal Road on the same day. On 27 August, reports indicate locals from Zliten protested against deteriorating living conditions in the city in the afternoon on 27 August. Additional protests were recorded in Misrata and other western cities and towns. Beyond protests, the Misrata-based Libyan Iron and Steel Company (LISCO) reported one of its employees in a marked vehicle was targeted by criminals in a carjacking incident in the vicinity of the LISCO complex on 26 August. The vehicle was later recovered by the Misrata Security Directorate. Meanwhile, pro-LNA accounts reported a Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) took off from Misrata's Aviation College in the afternoon on 26 August. In an additional report of UAV activity across the west this week, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) was spotted flying over Tajoura at approximately 2300hrs on 28 August.

Meanwhile, in the central region, this week was marked by tit-for-tat claims between the LNA and GNA. On 28 August, LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mismary categorically denied that the LNA targeted GNA forces or violated the ceasefire west Sirte. Al-Mismary emphasised the LNA's commitment to the truce announced on 08 June by LNA commander Khalifa Haftar. The statement refutes claims by GNA's Sirte-Jufra Security Operations Room that LNA-affiliated Wagner Group private military contractors (PMCs) attempted to target forces with over 12 Grad rockets across Sirte frontlines on 27 August. The GNA military spokesperson, Mohamed Gonounou, confirmed the development and stated forces are awaiting orders to retaliate. There has been no evidence to date to substantiate the claims. Meanwhile, pro-LNA accounts claimed artillery targeted GNA positions west of Sirte in the morning on 27 August. No official statements were issued to corroborate/deny the incident.

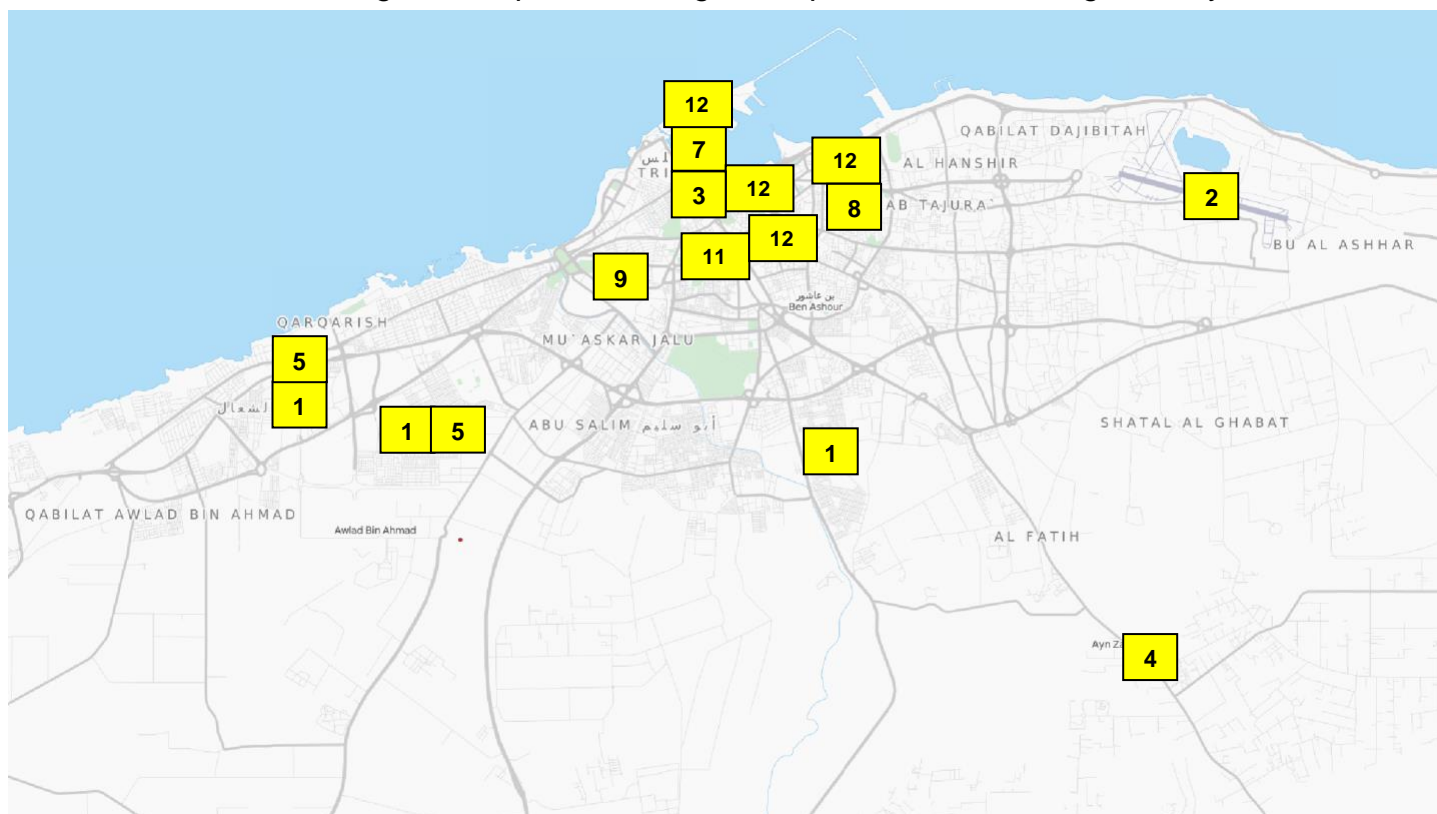
Separately, reports indicate a member of the COVID-19 Control Committee was kidnapped while driving an ambulance in Wadi Zamzam on 25 August. The abductee hails from Bani Walid. There are no further details available.

Turning to the south, the region participated in mass nationwide protests denouncing deteriorating living conditions. WB recorded a total of 6 protests across the region. In the Murzuq district, reports indicate locals from Taraghin protested against the closure of the polling stations on 25 August and attributed the incident to an LNA-affiliated armed group. Meanwhile, Local reports indicate unidentified forces in military uniform closed Taraghin's polling stations scheduled to commence municipal elections at 0900hrs on 25 August. The forces also confiscated equipment across polling centres. Subsequently, the municipal electoral process was disrupted in the city. Of note, the Central Committee for Municipal Council Elections (CCMCE) previously postponed elections due to logistical issues. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) condemned the act and attributed it to a pro-LNA armed group. In Sabha, locals protested against deteriorated living conditions in the city on 23 and 28 August. In the Wadi Al-Hayaa district, reports indicate locals from Awbari joined the "Revolution of the Poor" denouncing deteriorated living conditions after the movement initially began in Sabha on 25 August. Further, on 22 August, local reports indicate women in Tsawwah marched on foot from the ancient mosque roundabout to the headquarters of the public square in the city to denounce the failure of successive governments in meeting the people's demands amid diminished services in the southern region.

In the eastern region, WB recorded one single incident in the city of Benghazi. Pro-GNA accounts reported angry locals temporarily blocked the road linking Benghazi's Benina International Airport (BEN) to Ar-Rajmah camp on 27 August. According to the unverified reports, the move came in response to the detention of a local in the area by LNA forces. The reports alleged LNA commander Khalifa Haftar sent a delegation to mediate and defuse local tensions.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Arrests/gunfire reported during mass protests dominating security environment



### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (30 Aug) Protesters close several roads; Ghut Shaal residents denouncing killing
2. (29 Aug) Large Misrata convoy receives Bashagha after landing at MJI from Istanbul
3. (29 Aug) Two protesters kidnapped/arrested in Martyrs' Square
4. (29 Aug) TRB convoy spotted in Ain Zara heading towards the downtown area
5. (27-29) Protesters burned tyres in several areas including Edraiby & Ghut Shaal
6. (27-28 Aug) TPF coalition issues strong statement in support of Fayez Al-Serraj
7. (28 Aug) Nawasi Brigade celebrates Al-serraj's temporary suspension of Interior Minister
8. (27 Aug) SDF member killed in gunfire exchange with Ghneiwa militia in Al-Nofliien
9. (26 Aug) Vehicle theft in Al-Mansoura
10. (26 Aug) PC imposes full curfew for 4 days effective 26 Aug followed by 2100-0600hrs curfew for ten days
11. (26 Aug) Ghneiwa militia open fire at protesters near Al-Quds Mosque
12. (25 Aug) Protesters flock to Martyrs' & Algeria squares, PM Office & in front of Fayez Al-Serraj residence in Al-Nofliien

### Large Misrata convoy receives Bashagha at MJI

A large GNA Interior Ministry convoy of approximately 200 vehicles consisting of Toyota FJ, Toyota Land Cruiser armoured vehicles (AVs), and Toyota pick-ups and "technicals" mounted with anti-aircraft weaponry were spotted exiting Mitiga International Airport (MJI) and heading towards the downtown area via Shat Road at approximately 1900hrs on 29 August. Reports indicate part of the convoy came from the recently-suspended Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha's hometown of Misrata to receive the Minister after he landed at MJI at approximately 1800hrs following his trip to Istanbul during which he met the Turkish Defence Minister on 28 August. Video footage documented the involvement of Misrata's 166 Battalion and Mahjoub Brigade, among other Misrata-based formations. Local media reported a total of 300 vehicles escorted Bashagha. The same convoy was reported roaming Tripoli's streets starting with the Shat Road towards Tuesday Mall Roundabout, Gorje, and headed towards Janzour on the highway via the Aldaran Roundabout. Sources reported the convoy was welcomed by locals, particularly in the Ghut Shaal area near the Ghut Shaal Roundabout with residents chanting pro-Bashagha and anti-Fayez Al-Serraj/Khalifa Haftar slogans. In the afternoon, the convoy was spotted travelling on the Coastal Road of Khoms heading towards Tripoli. Notably, Bashagha gave a speech upon his arrival at MJI with regards to his temporary suspension by Fayez Al-Serraj, noting his readiness to stand legally accountable and confessed to mass corruption across all state sectors, including his own Ministry. Bashagha stated that he stands with the entirety of the Libyan population, even at the expense of his own position as Interior Minister. Of note, Bashagha's speech comes ahead of a scheduled public hearing at Tripoli's Presidential Council (PC) headquarters on 30 August. Bashagha's

arrival and speech have contributed to his public image. The Minister's popularity has grown after the GNA's recent suspension decision.

### Protesters kidnapped/arrested

Reports indicate security forces kidnapped/arrested the founder of the "People's Voice Movement" along with his companion in Martyrs' Square in the evening on 29 August. Separately, Amnesty International attributed the abduction of six protesters and injury of others to the Nawasi Brigade citing their own sources, claiming the Brigade is detaining protesters in an area close to Al-Shat Road.

### Ghut Shaal locals denounce killing of resident

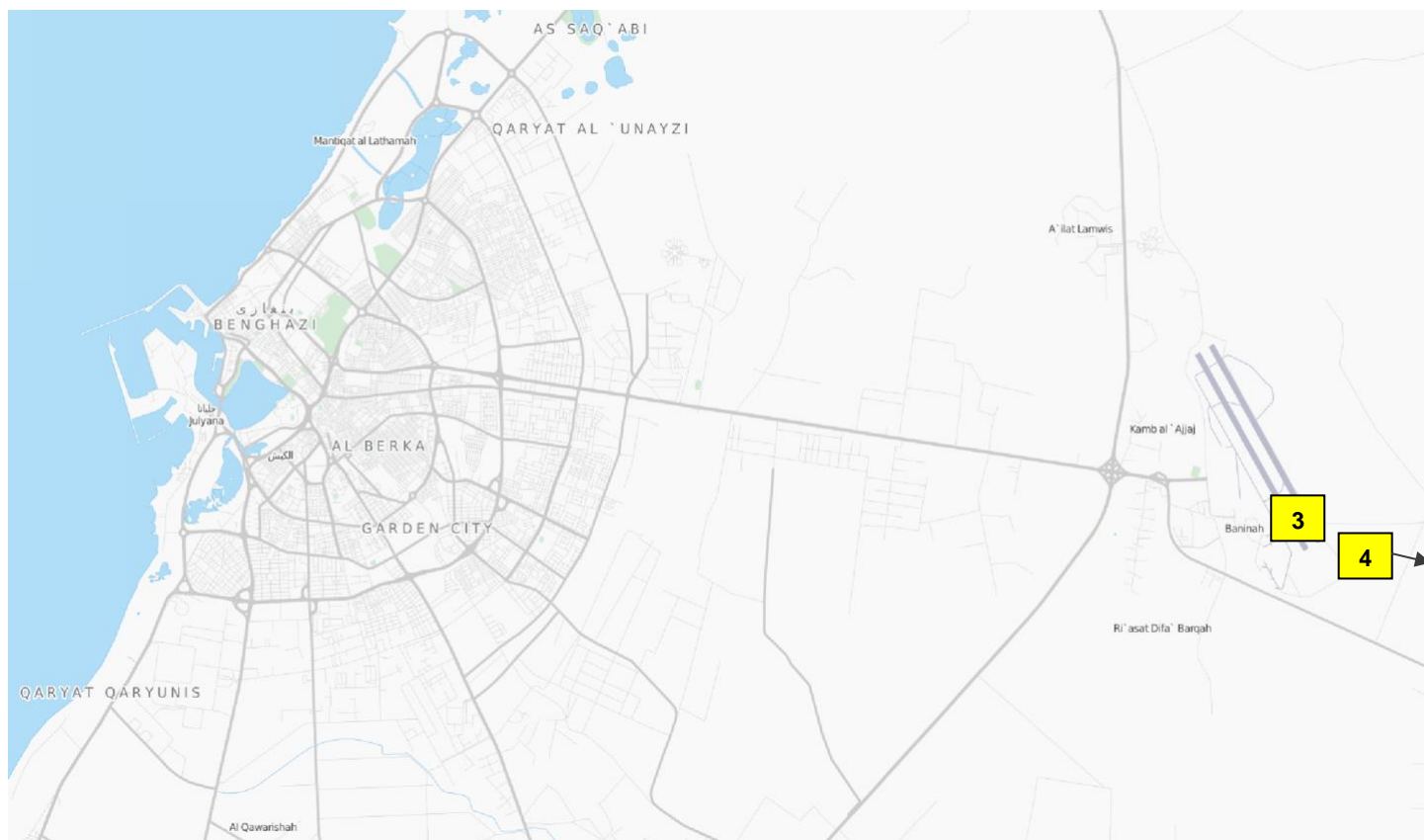
Locals burned tyres and closed off several roads across Al-Hadba Al-Sharqiya, Ghut Shaal and Edraiby to protest living conditions in the evening of 29 August and in the early hours of 30 August. The road closures were particularly concentrated in the Ghut Shaal vicinity in response to the killing of a young civilian male protester by security forces in the area on 29 August.

### Altercation between SDF & Ghneiwa militia

An altercation between the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) and Ghneiwa militia resulted in a gunfire exchange in Al-Nofliyeen area, killing at least one SDF member and injuring another while two Ghneiwa members sustained injuries at approximately 2200hrs on 27 August. The Ghneiwa members were reportedly escorting the GNA Deputy Health Minister, Mohamed Haithem, in a convoy of approximately eight unmarked and four military vehicles. The convoy was reportedly stopped at a checkpoint manned by the SDF near Abu Hajar Mosque, which led to a verbal altercation and the ensuing gunfire exchange. Reports allege tensions escalated because Haithem disapproved of the fact his convoy was stopped.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Al-Awaqeer tribe calls on eastern camp to probe into raids on private property



### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (29 Aug) Al-Awaqeer tribe denounce raids on property; calls on officials
2. (28 Aug) Woman shot dead by spouse
3. (27 Aug) Angry locals block road b/w BEN & Ar-Rajmah in response to local's detention
4. (25 Aug) Haftar receives officials to discuss daily needs of citizens

#### Awaqeer tribe denounce raids on properties

On 29 August, the Al-Awaqeer tribe issued a statement in Benghazi denouncing raids on their private properties carried out by the LNA's Tarik Ibn Ziyad Brigade and subsequently called on the LNA commander Khalifa Haftar, Prime minister Abdallah Al-Thinni, Interior Minister Ibrahim Bushnaaf, the Justice Minister, and other officials to probe into the security breaches. Of note, video footage circulated across social media outlets showing various military vehicles overrunning some lands in an unidentified location in Benghazi, causing a state of anger among the Awaqir tribesmen after they attempted to expel the brigade members. Unconfirmed reports suggest the raids was ordered by Haftar's son, Samddam, and occurred in Benghazi's Sidi Fraj area. The development would not stand as the first time LNA-affiliated forces have been accused of seizing private lands by force across Benghazi.

#### Woman shot dead by spouse

Reports indicate a woman was shot dead by her spouse in an unidentified location in Benghazi in the morning on 28 August. Unconfirmed reports suggest the victim's spouse accidentally killed her and subsequently handed himself over to the police.

#### Alleged road closure due to local's detention

Pro-GNA accounts reported angry locals temporarily blocked the road linking Benghazi's Benina International Airport (BEN) to Ar-Rajmah camp on 27 August. According to the unverified reports, the move came in response to the detention of a local in the area by LNA forces. The reports

alleged LNA commander Khalifa Haftar sent a delegation to mediate and defuse local tensions. The development has not been independently verified by sources.

#### Haftar discussed needs of citizens

The LNA's commander Khalifa Haftar received the Interim Government Prime Minister Abdallah Al-Thinni, as well as other ministers and officials, at the LNA's headquarters in Ar-Rajmah on 25 August. The meeting discussed the daily needs of citizens, including electricity, cash, fuel, and infrastructure projects. Haftar instructed competent authorities to solve the power crisis in the eastern legion in less than 10 days, as well as alleviating the liquidity crisis via activating the Visa Card system.

## 6. What's next

### Alliances gradually shift as Bashagha-Sarraj tensions defused

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

#### SECURITY FORECAST

Diplomatic efforts are set to focus on a full resumption of political track negotiations against the backdrop of civil unrest across the country and Tripoli in particular. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) Acting Head Stephanie Williams was received by the Egyptian FM Sameh Shoukry to discuss the "rapid" political and security developments in Libya on 30 August. Williams expressed her gratitude for the Egyptian President Abdelfattah al-Sisi welcoming the ceasefire calls by the GNA Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj and the House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh. Separately, Williams met with the Secretary General of the Arab League, Ahmed Aboul Gheit, to discuss the current situation in Libya and ways to resume the political process. Both sides agreed on the need to stop escalation and reach a lasting ceasefire, calling for an immediate halt to foreign interference. It remains to be seen how the latest rivalry between Bashagha and Sarraj will impact the position of foreign stakeholders, particularly Turkey and the United States, vis-à-vis the GNA. The US Embassy in Libya reiterated its support for the rule of law, adding it "appreciates close partnerships with PM Sarraj and MOI Bashaga". The Embassy statement called for cooperation to provide good governance to the Libyan people. In all cases, the latest wave of protests has highlighted the power of the "silent majority". In almost all of their respective statements, the GNA, TPF, and MoI, mention they are acting in the interest of this majority and the "Libyan citizen", from which legitimacy is derived. The statements, regardless of their impact on the ground, highlight the state of affairs in Tripoli in the aftermath of the LNA's offensive. Manoeuvres on the ground will no longer be justified by the security threat posed by LNA forces, but by the presence of this silent majority. Meanwhile, EU sanctions against Turkey are possible in the short term after consensus among EU foreign ministers on 28 August. Foreign policy chief Josep Borrell spoke of "rapid adoption" and reported individuals may be added to existing sanctions regime for drilling in the eastern Mediterranean.

Overall, the protests are set to lose momentum in the medium term, at least in Tripoli, after the Nawasi Brigade's intervention and other armed factions nominally under the GNA, including Zawiyah-based elements opposed to Bashagha. However, if the GNA fails to contain civil unrest, the protests risk further undermining its posture and international legitimacy as foreign stakeholders will find it difficult not to side with the civilian movement and advocate a government reshuffle. Sporadic road closures, skirmishes between armed formations nominally under the GNA, assassinations, and politically-motivated kidnappings are possible in the medium term in Tripoli. High-profile buildings and all kinds of public gatherings should be avoided at all times. Tensions will likely remain high and there is a possibility of politically-motivated security incidents targeting figures perceived to be opposed to Sarraj and/or sympathizing with Misrata and Bashagha. Tensions could escalate between Tripoli armed factions and Misrata formations with a presence in some areas of Tripoli, such as Misrata's 166 Battalion, which was assigned security of Tripoli International Airport (TIP) on 29 June. However, there is a possibility these tensions will remain limited to areas of central Tripoli where Nawasi Brigade exerts influence. Despite its sizeable influence over the Libyan Intelligence Services (LIS), the Nawasi Brigade is unlikely to venture further south in former engagement zones where Syrian brigades maintain a presence. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether the Joint Force and Osama Juwaili will side with Sarraj against Bashagha. In this scenario, skirmishes would be possible further south between Misrata formations and the Joint Force, although this remains a remote scenario as of 29 August. Meanwhile, if political tensions prompt Tripoli-based armed formations and the pro-Sarraj alliance to take an anti-Turkey stance, targeted attacks against Syrian assets could ensue, similar to the Nawasi Brigade's assassination of three Syrian fighters in March 2020 in Tripoli's Al-Furnaj, near Victoria cafe.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Observers argue the Turkish government will likely tread carefully so as to maintain a cohesive GNA bloc and uphold the status quo. Turkey-led attempts to mediate between Misrata and Tripoli could ensue. Other observers argue Sarraj's move to temporarily suspend Bashagha was likely vetted by Turkey. Beyond local dynamics, analysts argue Russia could have pressured Turkey to oust Bashagha at the negotiating table given the latter's anti-Moscow and reformist stance. Even if the Turkish government has an interest in supporting Sarraj given he is formally recognized as the GNA decision-maker, it is unlikely to overtly support one side over the other in the latest dispute. The risks would be high if Ankara is seen as siding with Bashagha or Sarraj, as what initially began as a power struggle would transform into opposition to Turkey. Instead, the Turkish government could choose to remain neutral and avoid getting involved in local dynamics, especially given there is a risk to Ankara's posture amid efforts by the LNA's foreign allies to utilise the latest protests to make the case for a new government.

Samer Al-Atrush for *Bloomberg* – takes a closer look at the recent wave of pro-Gaddafi protests and how the current political context is viewed by some Libyans yearning for stability as an opportunity to support the return of Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi. According to aides cited by the Bloomberg piece, Saif Al-Islam is planning a comeback and "Priorities include pushing for the release of his jailed siblings and Qaddafi-era officials". Gaddafi can count on his support base across Sirte and other towns, but observers argue the pro-Gaddafi segment will have to overcome opposition from the GNA and LNA power blocs. The recent crackdown on pro-Gaddafi protests in Sirte is a case in point. An anonymous Western diplomat cited by Bloomberg is of the view former regime officials should be included in talks for these to be considered as inclusive. "One said it was a mistake to exclude them in the past from international attempts to bring all sides together. They are the silent majority, said another."

# About Whispering Bell



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