



# 1. The Big Picture

## LNA to shore up Tarhunah posture after commanders killed

After the Libyan National Army (LNA) repelled a large-scale offensive by Government of National Accord (GNA) forces across multiple fronts, clashes took an unprecedented turn this week with the death of senior LNA commanders from Tarhunah, a strategic town southwest of Tripoli that has served as the LNA's command & control centre for the past three months.

In a statement on 14 Sep, the LNA, led by eastern-based commander Khalifa Haftar, confirmed the identity of the three commanders killed as a result of a "Turkish Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) strike"; Brigadier Abdulwahab Al-Megri (9th brigade Tarhunah commander); Captain Mohsen Kani (LNA Auxiliary Force); and Abduladhim Kani (LNA Auxiliary Force). Of note, the Kani family from Tarhunah leads the main fighting battalion in the city; the 9th Brigade formerly known as "Kani militia".

Looking ahead, the development could have a significant impact on the LNA's posture South of Tripoli. After the loss of Gharyan, the LNA transferred its operational command to Tarhunah. The LNA relied on Tarhunah's tightly-knit tribal structure to compensate for the loss of Gharyan. However, as the conflict protracted, overreliance on Tarhunah provoked fears among locals that fighting will expand and expose their town. The death of top Kani commanders is expected to undermine the strength of the LNA's alliance with Tarhunah and could, by extension, raise concerns over its ability to maintain its posture across the West.

Alternatively, the development could prompt the LNA to increase its support for Tarhunah to shore up its alliances in the town. The LNA could retaliate by carrying out assassinations of top GNA commanders, which could propel the conflict into a more complex stage dominated by tit-for-tat surgical strikes and assassinations. The LNA has already begun efforts in the past three months to sow divisions among GNA militias. The latest development would prompt the LNA to increase such efforts, especially targeting militias with loose command structures such as the Ghneiwa militia.

So far, the LNA has sent reinforcements to Tarhunah in the immediate aftermath of the Kani commanders' death. In addition, the LNA and local Tarhunah tribesmen agreed on the formation of a new military force dubbed "Death Brigade" to be headed by Kani family's eldest brother, Mohammed Kani. Realising the importance of the town to its survival, the LNA will likely continue to send reinforcements in Tarhunah in the short to medium term. A scenario in which the LNA loses its influence and foothold in Tarhunah would most likely signal an LNA defeat in its broader Tripoli offensive as it would severely impact its supply lines.

But in reality, neither the LNA nor the GNA have proven capable thus far of exploiting such local successes to overpower their enemy, tilt the balance in their favour, and claim the upper hand on the battlefield. The Tarhunah episode may represent a significant turn of events, but it does not guarantee a complete break-away from the deadlock that has prevailed in recent months.

Even if the LNA is capable of inflicting high casualties with its superior air capabilities - as proven by the hundreds of deaths within GNA ranks in the past week - it would require more time to fully degrade the GNA's defensive posture. Yet the dilemma for the LNA is that it does not have time on its hands. While the GNA stands to benefit from conflict protraction to a certain degree, the LNA cannot sustain combat operations in the long term. The LNA will therefore attempt new tactics to secure rapid gains. The LNA could capitalize on the sizeable gains made on the Ain Zara front to push northward into Khallat Forjan. However, before doing so, the LNA will likely seek to draw forces away from Tripoli, especially Misrata battalions. The latest LNA airstrikes targeting GNA positions in Sirte are a case in point.

### KEY POINTS

- GNA kills top LNA commanders from Tarhunah
- Mitiga airport remains closed but targeted again
- LNA retaliates with airstrikes across West



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# 2. National Security Map

## LNA retaliatory airstrikes in Misrata & Sirte after GNA targets Jufra Airbase

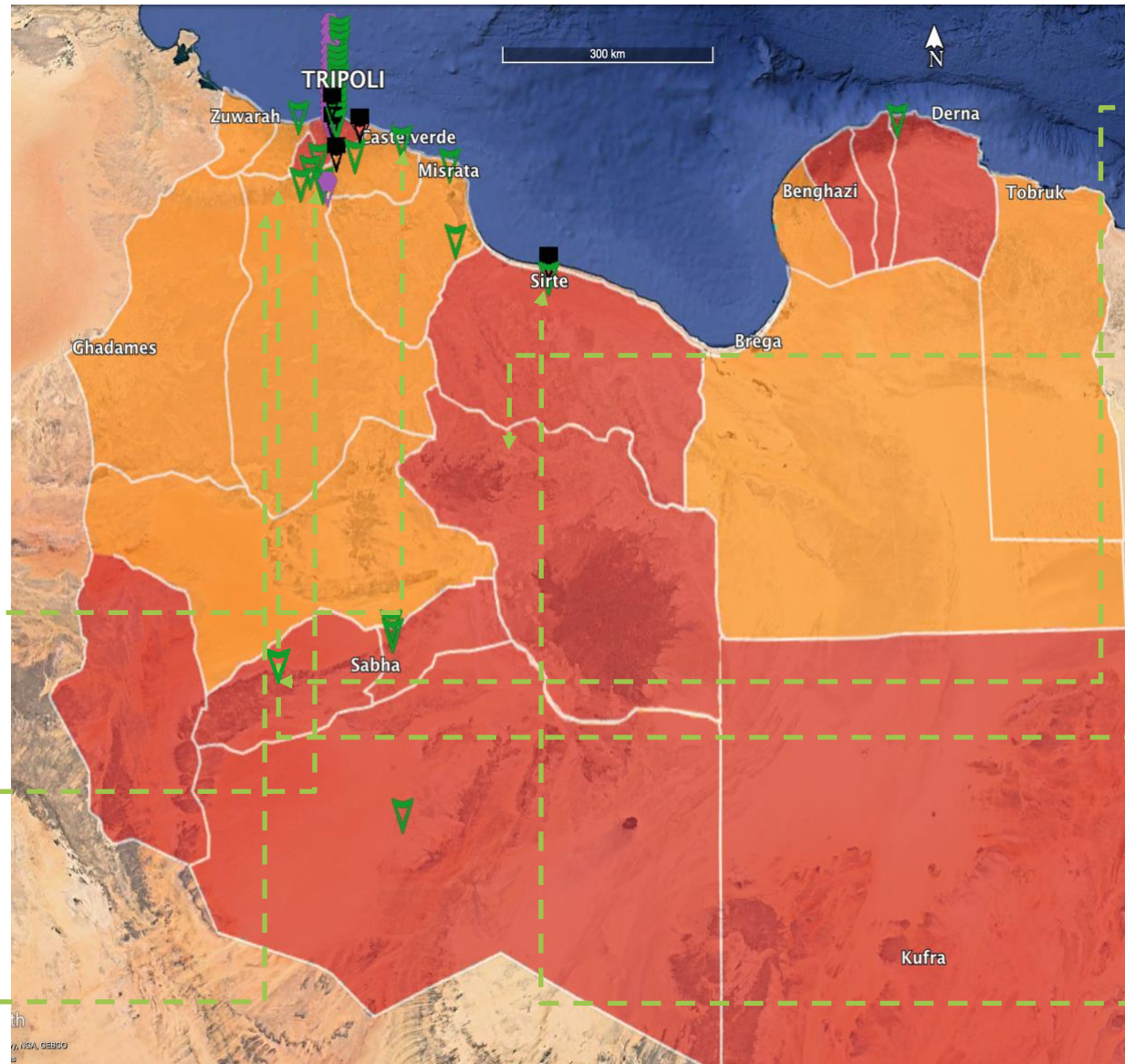
Key

**THREAT INDICATORS**

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

**EVENT INDICATOR**

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



Reports suggest Tebu militias kidnapped a Tuareg Sheikh from his house in Awbari in the morning on 10 Sep. Initial reports indicate he was released at night in a prisoner exchange, which included the release of two Tebu men.

The GNA Air Force claimed it targeted and destroyed the main LNA ops room at Jufra Airbase, reporting that six non-Libyan military officers were killed. The GNA statement added that an LNA air defence missile system was targeted at Jufra airbase at dawn on 13 Sep, while confirming that LNA retaliated with Unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) airstrikes targeting Misrata's air college and Sirte's Gardabiya Airbase. In response, the LNA Air Force declared it foiled a GNA attempt to target Jufra airbase, claiming it destroyed three Turkish UAVs that took off from Misrata.

WB sources reported an increased presence of forces affiliated with the LNA's Western Military Region commander, Idris Madi, on the main road of the Western mountains, from Bir Ayyad to Tiji, between 08-10 Sep. Meanwhile, sources reported GNA's Western Military Region forces, led by Osama Juwaili, established two checkpoints on the same road. No further info.

Reports of a military gathering of GNA-aligned Misrata militias inside Sirte in the early hours of 15 Sep. A similar gathering was reported at approximately 1730hrs 12 Sep, allegedly in preparation to attack the Jufra District.

Sources reported heavy explosions, likely by Rocket-Propelled Grenades (RPG), and AK-47 gunfire in Khoms' Sog Al-Khmies area in the early hours of 14 Sep. Initial reports indicate a local dispute erupted between youths in the area. No casualties reported.

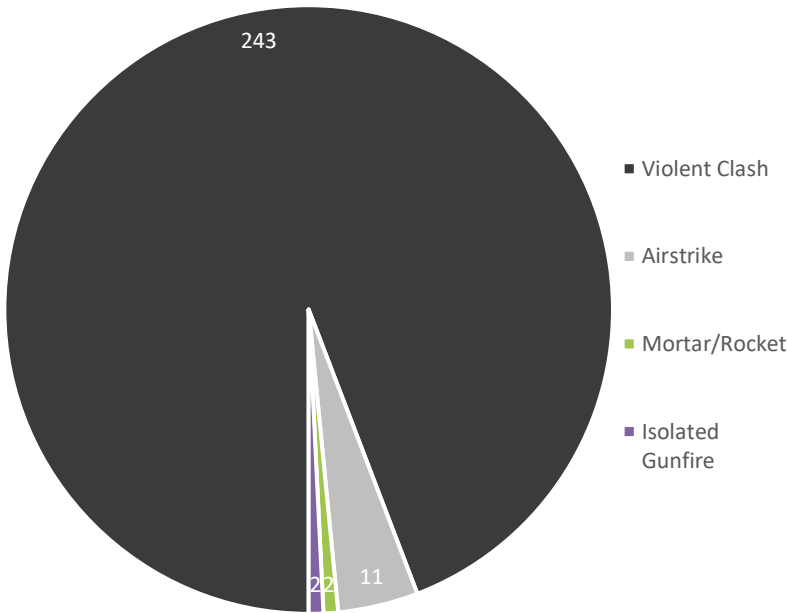
WB sources reported unidentified gunmen driving a gold Toyota with tinted windows carried out a drive-by shooting targeting a gas station in Gharyan's Sagaief area, which resulted in the death of a local at approximately 1100hrs on 12 Sep. The incident was corroborated by the LNA's Dignity Ops. Media Centre, reporting that heavy gunfire was heard during a militia dispute over fuel.

On 09 Sep, the first civilian aircraft landed at Zintan Airport after operations were suspended due to the 04 Apr offensive on Tripoli. The aircraft, operated by Afriqiyah Airways, came from Benghazi's Benina International Airport.

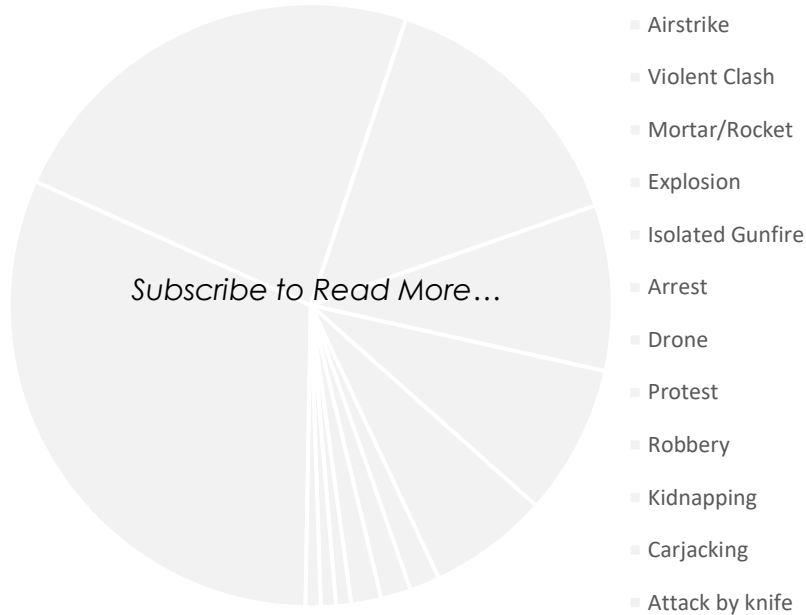
### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Sharp increase in nationwide fatalities following resumed military activity

Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



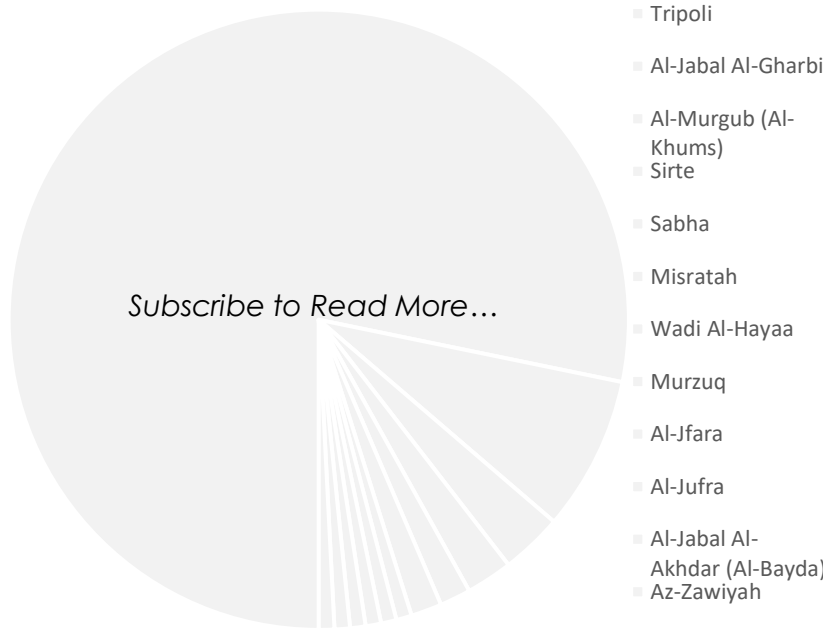
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



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 258 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 04 deaths reported last week and 28 the week before, marking a sharp increase in the number of fatalities. The latter is due to the LNA claiming to have inflicted 200 fatalities among GNA forces between 07-10 Sep. Conversely, the GNA's Ministry of Health reported 43 fatalities and 121 injuries within LNA ranks as a result of renewed clashes. An uptick in military activity across the main frontlines resulted in a surge in airstrikes, violent clashes, mortar/rocket shelling incidents and isolated gunfire cases recorded across the Western region. Meanwhile, sporadic security incidents continued amid reports of increased criminal activity beyond engagement areas, subsequently resulting in arrest campaigns across the country. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country including 39 airstrikes, 29 violent clashes, 18 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 11 explosions, 10 isolated gunfire cases, 8 arrests, 2 protests, 2 robberies, 1 carjacking, 1 kidnapping and 1 attack by knife.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 115 incidents, including 97 in Tripoli, marking a sharp increase in contrast to last week increase due to renewed clashes and an uptick in military activity from 07 Sep onwards. In Tripoli, WB sources reported a parked KIA Rio was stolen in front of Souq Al-hoot on Al-Rashid Street in the afternoon on 09 Sep. Later that evening, sources reported a parked grey KIA Sorento was stolen in front of a shop in Al-Kremiya area. Separately, WB sources reported heavy gunfire heard on s Al-Zawiya Street at approximately 2200hrs on 12 Sep. Initial reports indicate a dispute between young boys over a parking issue in front of a fast food restaurant near Al-Diafa Fast Food. The boys fired sporadic shots into the air. In the Wider Western region, WB sources reported unidentified gunmen driving a gold Toyota with tinted windows carried out a drive-by shooting targeting a gas station in Gharyan's Sagaief area, which resulted in the death of a local at approximately 1100hrs on 12 Sep. The incident was corroborated by the LNA's Dignity Ops. Media Centre, reporting that heavy gunfire was heard during a militia dispute over fuel.

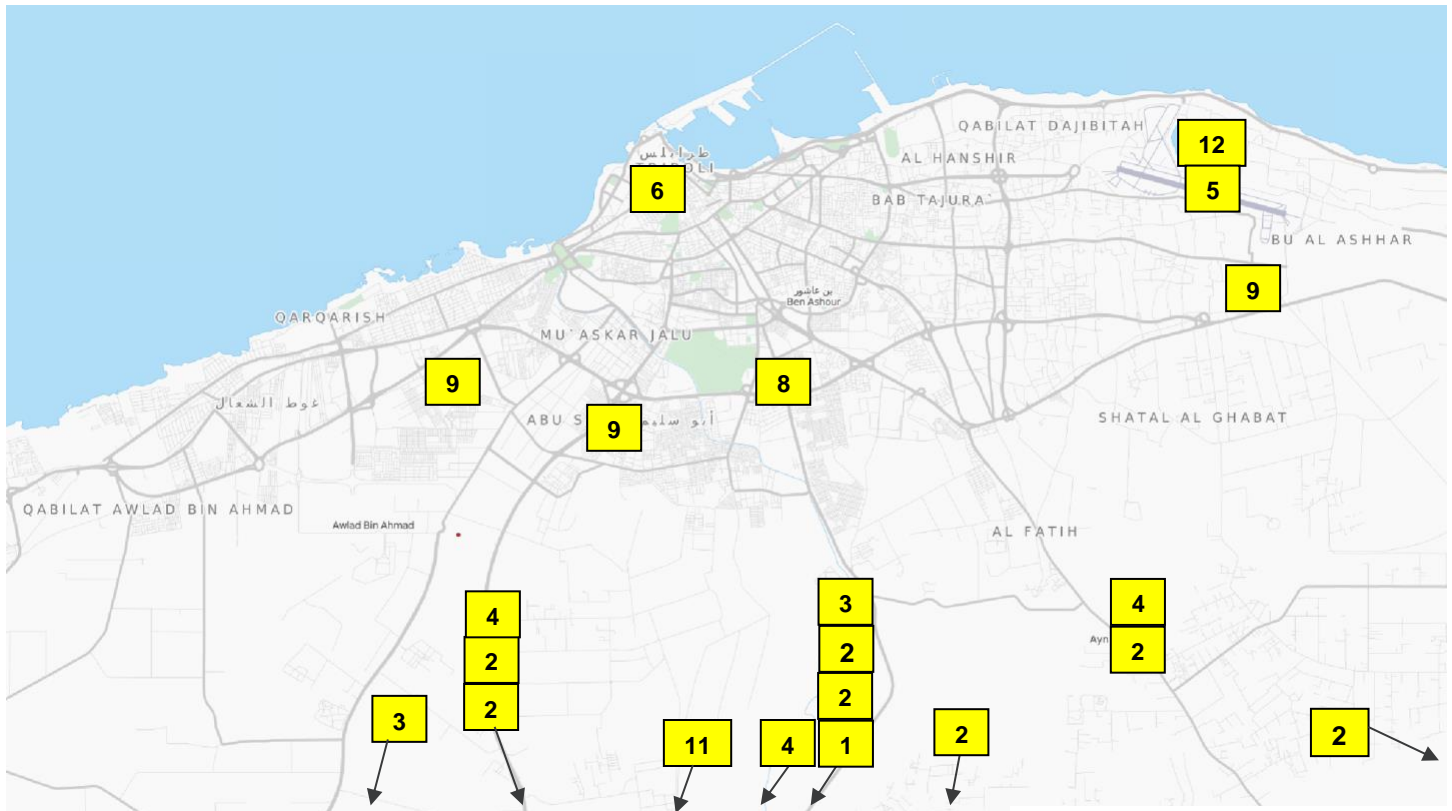
In the central region, this week was marked by the GNA reporting that an LNA air defence missile system was targeted at Jufra airbase at dawn on 13 Sep, while confirming that LNA retaliated with unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) airstrikes targeting Misrata's air college and Sirte's Gardabiya Airbase. An additional LNA airstrike targeted a CP South of Sirte at approximately 0230hrs on 13 Sep. Meanwhile, a military gathering of GNA-aligned Misrata militias was reported inside Sirte in the early hours of 15 Sep.

Turning to the Southern region, this week WB recorded three separate security incidents in Murzuq, Sabha, and Wadi Al-Hayaa districts. Reports indicate two Nigerian migrant workers carried out a failed robbery attempt targeting a local man driving a Hyundai Sonata in Qatrun on 10 Sep. The victim was reportedly stabbed multiple times. The robbery attempt was thwarted by locals who called security services after witnessing the crime. The criminal was subsequently arrested.

In Eastern Libya, unlike recent weeks, this week saw no security incidents recorded in Benghazi. Beyond Benghazi, Shahat's Narcotics Control Bureau seized 50 kilograms of cannabis resin valued at an estimated 250,000 Libyan dinars (LYD) on 09 Sep. According to the bureau's head, Saad Saleh, investigations confirmed outlaws attempting to smuggle a shipment of narcotics through Shahat's municipal boundaries.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

No significant changes on frontlines; Sep 11 terror threat fails to materialise



### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (07 Sep) Indiscriminate gunfire results in woman's death in Sog Al-Khmeis
2. (07-08 Sep) GNA launches offensive on all fronts; claims 43 dead & 121 injured
3. (08-09 Sep) LNA advances in Al-Ramla & Sog Al-Khmeis Emsihel
4. (09-10 Sep) LNA claim death of 200 GNA forces over 72 hrs
5. (09 Sep) Shells target Mitiga Intl. Airport; allegedly fired from Sabaa area
6. (09 Sep) Two parked vehicles stolen
7. (10 Sep) Purported PFG letter to NOC circulates indicating terror threat
8. (10 Sep) Gunfire heard during dispute b/w Ghneiwa & Misrata militias
9. (10 Sep) Unconfirmed SDF house raid; Ghneiwa militia raids two houses
10. (10-12 Sep) Limited military activity; LNA claim arrest of 38 GNA forces
11. (13 Sep) GNA strike kills three LNA Tarhuna commanders; LNA retaliates
12. (14 Sep) MJJ targeted by grad shelling & airstrikes; LNA claims advances

### Terror threat fails to materialise on ground

A letter addressed to the National Oil Corporation (NOC) by the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG), dated 04 Sep 2019, circulated across social media outlets warning over a planned terror attack targeting Tripoli's downtown area, near Sekka Road, including the Zueitina Oil Company, former NOC office, PM's office, and Eni on 11 Sep. WB sources confirmed that employees of Tripoli's Dat Al-Emad complex received a warning over an expected attack, corroborating the letter. Increased security presence was witnessed across the capital following the terror threat, though the security situation remained unchanged.

### Ghneiwa-Misrata militia tensions

WB sources reported sporadic gunfire in Hay Demsheq and Al-Batata areas at approximately 1930hrs on 10 Sep. Initial reports indicate the gunfire was due to a dispute between Ghneiwa and Misrata militias, near Primo Cafe over a looting incident. The security situation stabilised at approximately 1945hrs. No casualties were recorded. Recent reports indicate heightened tensions between Ghneiwa and various Misrata militias, including the Mahjoub Brigade, across the capital city.

### Alleged SDF house raid; Ghneiwa militia raids

Unconfirmed reports suggest the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) raided several houses in Al-Ghararat of the Souq Al Jum'aa area and arrested over 10 locals at night on 10 Sep. Conflicting reports emerged over the alleged arrest, with some reports indicating that they were arrested due to their affiliation with the LNA, whilst other reports indicate they were arrested on charges of shelling Mitiga International Airport.

Separately, sources reported the Ghneiwa militia raided several houses in the Abu Salim area and arrested an unknown number of locals at night on 10 Sep. Initial reports indicate the owners of the targeted houses are originally from Tarhunah. Beyond, sporadic gunfire was heard in Al-Hae Al-Senaea area at approximately 1830hrs on 10 Sep. Initial reports indicate the Ghneiwa militia raided a house in an arrest attempt in the Keshlaf area.

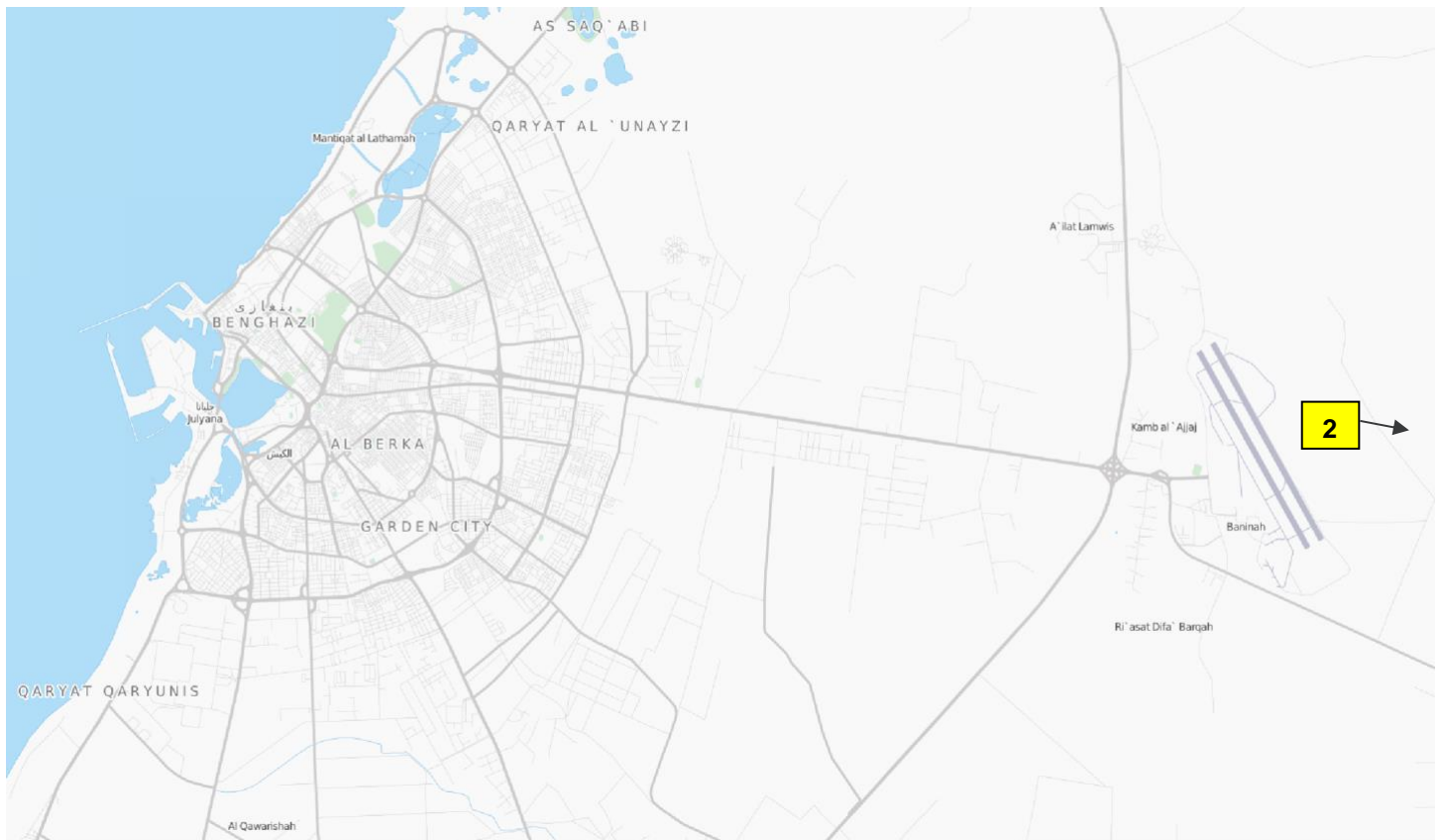
Separately, unconfirmed reports indicate a military gathering of approximately five anti-aircraft vehicles affiliated with the Ghneiwa militia stationed near Sidi Husain Cemetery in Al-Hadba Al-Mashro' area at approximately 1430hrs on 11 Sep. Initial reports indicate the anti-aircraft vehicles belonged to a dismissed Ghneiwa militiaman, identified as Aymen Al-Ahwel. Earlier this week, a Ghneiwa militia subgroup expelled Al-Ahwel's group from a farm in Hadba Al-Mashro' as per orders of Ghneiwa militia leader Abdulghani Al-Kikli. At approximately 1530hrs, the anti-aircraft vehicles fled from the scene.

### Fate of Hungarian cameraman unclear

Conflicting reports emerged over the fate of a Hungarian cameraman, identified as Szabó Gergely Hoang Viet, on 09 Sep. The GNA's Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that an LNA airstrike in Tripoli's Salah Al-Din area resulted in Viet's injury, after which he was evacuated for medical treatment. Meanwhile, pro-LNA media outlets reported that Viet was kidnapped from his hotel in Tripoli.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Tribal delegation from Rajban & Urban reiterate support for Haftar during visit



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (08 Sep) Continued deployment of security forces across city
2. (11 Sep) Haftar receives Western tribal delegation in LNA HQ
3. (12 Sep) Power outage causes temporary blackout
4. (15 Sep) CID seizes individual with forged vehicle documents

#### Individual seized with forged documents

Benghazi's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) reportedly seized an individual in possession of 5000 forged vehicle documents, including the printer used to forge the documents, on 15 Sep. The case was referred to the Public Prosecution.

#### Ongoing security deployment

Benghazi's Security Directorate Information Office, in collaboration with Libyan National Army (LNA) units, confirmed continued deployment of security forces across Benghazi. The deployment comes amid security operations carried out by Benghazi's Morality Police and recently tasked by the LNA head, Khalifa Haftar, to tighten security and combat "negative conduct" across the city.

#### Haftar receives Western tribal delegation

Haftar, received a tribal delegation of elders and sheiks from Rajban and Urban in the LNA Ar Rajmah HQ on 11 Sep. The tribal figures reiterated their support for the LNA and their "war on terrorism". The meeting is the latest in a series of tribal gatherings organized in Haftar's stronghold of Ar Rajmah. The meetings highlight clear attempts to shore up western tribal alliances, which would be critical to any LNA attempt to strengthen posture and expand its influence beyond the East.



## 6. What's next

### LNA retaliation post-Tarhunah; airstrikes set to expand across fronts

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

Military developments on the ground took precedence over political negotiations. Regardless, the week was marked by the announcement of yet another political effort to organize an international conference on Libya. German Ambassador to Libya, Oliver Owczka, announced that his country is planning to host another conference on Libya, in what was described as the first consolidated international push to end the conflict since the LNA launched its offensive on Tripoli in early Apr. According to Reuters, citing diplomatic sources, the planning for the conference is in its initial phase and is due to be held in Berlin in Oct/Nov 2019. The conference aims to push foreign actors to enforce the UN arms embargo, as well as secure a ceasefire that would allow Libyan factions to meet and facilitate dialogue. The announcement came after the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, told parliament that the situation in Libya risked destabilising the whole of Africa. Germany is perceived as a neutral player in the conflict relatively compared with Italy and France – both of whom held conferences that failed to bring about any significant breakthrough – and therefore qualifies to play a mediating role. However, the prospect for a negotiated settlement remains limited given the deep mistrust between armed factions. Focus on the arms embargo against Libya means that multiple foreign states could refuse to attend. Separately, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) unanimously agreed to extend the United Nations Support Mission in Libya's (UNSMIL) mandate by a year until 15 Sep 2020, while pledging to work towards a ceasefire in Libya. The UNSC stated that the Mission is tasked with supporting the GNA's consolidation, a possible ceasefire, and the subsequent phases of the transition process, including the constitutional process and organising elections.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

*"The Daily Beast"*, reporting on the presence of 300 mercenary fighters under the Russian "Wagner Group" funded by Yevgeny Prigozhin, reveals a series of internal communications from within Prigozhin's Libya operation referred to as "the Company". "They show that, quite apart from running guns for hire and arranging Facebook propaganda campaigns, Prigozhin's operatives lately got into the business of "government-in-a-box" political consultancy. The Russians appear willing not only to arm but also do PR work for a variety of dubious—and rival—factions in Libya, yet they harbor no illusions as to the popularity or leadership qualities of any of these proxies. They openly advocate rigging elections, for instance, to help Haftar in the likely event he runs for the Libyan presidency. But the Company certainly takes a dim view of what he's achieved thus far and of his honesty as a Russian client. It accuses the warlord of using his publicized relationship with Russia as a bargaining chip with other actors to raise his stature—all the while failing to cooperate with or even hindering Company personnel. One memo, written on April 10 this year, claims that Haftar even spread disinformation about the presence of 300 mercenaries from the Wagner Group, going as far as having Libyan National Army troops stick paper copies of Russian license plates to their vehicles in order to give the impression of Russian support. (Company employees were dispatched to peel off these fakes.) Nor has the Company been the model of transparency and loyalty in its dealings with Haftar. Remarkably, it entered into an agreement with the leader of Sudan's notorious Janjaweed militia and Rapid Security Forces, which were responsible for atrocities during the Darfur genocide and the massacre of protesters in Khartoum this June, to attack forces allied to Haftar during his assault in Tripoli. The goal here apparently was to strike a cynical balance of power in Libya—"equilibrium," in the Company's phrase—to the benefit of Moscow. Another set of documents outline a strategic alternative to boosting the unimpressive field marshal's political fortunes—a campaign to help his opponent Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of the late dictator Muammar Gaddafi".

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#### SECURITY FORECAST

The killing of three key LNA Tarhunah commanders dominated the overall security environment this week. The incident was followed by the arrival of an LNA delegation, military convoys, and an agreement to form Tahruna's largest military force. Whilst the incident could prove significantly detrimental to Haftar's posture in the city, the LNA will likely continue to deploy units and tighten cooperation with local tribes in an effort to avoid a Gharyan scenario. Developments in Tarhunah will have a direct impact on the situation in Tripoli. Meanwhile, criminal activity remains on an upward spiral as GNA-aligned militias inside Tripoli continue to conduct criminal activity beyond engagement areas. Tripoli's only functioning airport - Mitiga International Airport - remained a target this week as it was subject to shelling/airstrikes casting doubt on aspirations that it will open anytime soon. In the central region, tensions increased in the Sirte and Jufra areas as a result of retaliatory airstrikes by both sides. Pro-GNA Misrata militias are expected to continue deploying forces towards Sirte in both a defensive and possible offensive position. There remains the possibility of an opportunistic attack by Misrata militias on LNA positions in the Oil Crescent and Jufra in an event where the LNA's posture is significantly weakened on Tripoli's frontlines. In addition, GNA forces could eye LNA-controlled cities such as Sabratah and Surman, by using its forces in Al-Zawiya and Zintan, to potentially secure Al-Watiyah Airbase and its airstrip and cut off LNA supply lines. In the South, security continues to deteriorate with reports of carjackings and kidnappings this week. Further, reports of a potential Islamic State (IS) attack in Tripoli on 11 Sep failed to materialise on the ground, though it would nevertheless highlight the group's intent to carry out sporadic attacks amid a widened security vacuum caused by the ongoing clashes.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an article for *"Gulf News"*, the author, Sami Moubayed, argues that Haftar's victory in Tripoli would subsequently shatter Turkey's aspirations in Libya, and the Arab world at large. "If Haftar succeeds in taking Tripoli, Erdogan's ambitions in the Arab World would be coming to an end, as government troops regain control of most of Syria, and Brotherhood-affiliates are rounded up in Yemen. Frantic that he might soon lose Al Sarraj as well, the Turkish President has been sending help to various Brotherhood militias in Tripoli, in clear violation of a UN arms embargo on Libya. A Haftar victory would end Erdogan's ideological schemes for Libya and terminate the steady arms flow that his proxies have been sending to Sinai. For years, these weapons have made their way into Egypt and reached the hands of the Daesh-affiliated Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, where they were used to launch attacks against the Egyptian police and armed forces. Squeezed out of Libya and Egypt, he would also have little future in Sudan, after the toppling of Omar Al Bashir earlier this year, effectively ending his tutelage in North Africa. In Tripoli itself, Turkey will likely be excluded from all future business contracts with a Haftar-led government and its \$23 billion debt to Libya will probably get scrapped. So would the \$18 billion worth of contracts, mostly in construction, currently signed with Fayez Al Sarraj. The Turkish leader believes that General Haftar, like Colonel Muammar Gaddafi before him, supports Kurdish national aspirations in Turkey. It all depends on how Turkey plays its cards in the upcoming months. If Erdogan accepts the fact that Haftar is a reality that needs to be accepted, respected, and dealt with professionally, he can still use his considerable influence to bring stability to Libya. That can come in many forms, like ending support for the Brotherhood militias, for example, or helping with a Libya peace conference. Judging from his track record, however, the Turkish President will do none of the above, but rather, insist on pushing through with his ideological agenda, regardless of the consequences. That's what he did with Egypt, after all, until his country's influence was completely terminated in 2013, and that is what he did with Syria since 2011, leaving no room for climb down or retreat".

# About Whispering Bell



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