

# 1. The Big Picture

## LNA airstrikes in central Tripoli exacerbate militia tensions

Government of National Accord (GNA) PM Fayez Sarraj attempted to rally support in New York this week with a much-anticipated speech at the UN General Assembly (UNGA). At home, however, the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar continued to exploit divisions within armed factions across the Western region with surgical strikes targeting the Nawasi militia in central Tripoli and pro-GNA formations in Sirte and Misrata. The LNA's business as usual course sent a clear message that it will continue military operations and is yet to engage in negotiations.

The LNA targeted the Nawasi militia HQ at approximately 0800hrs on 27 Sep, killing at least two militiamen. WB sources indicate the LNA carried out an additional airstrike targeting an empty Nawasi camp in Tripoli's Souq Al-Jumaa area with no casualties recorded. The airstrikes targeting Nawasi militia were the furthest into central Tripoli since clashes erupted on 04 Apr, underlining LNA intent to gain as much leverage on the ground before potential negotiations. The GNA's response to this escalation has remained limited to political rhetoric; the Tripoli government emphasized the involvement of contracted Russian mercenaries allegedly fighting in the ranks of the LNA. GNA PM Fayez Sarraj reiterated these allegations in a televised interview with Fox News in an attempt to build a case against the LNA.

While the LNA's focus on Sirte remains consistent with its strategy to drive Misrata groups away from Tripoli and create tensions between Sirte and Misrata, the Nawasi development should be viewed within the context of emerging cracks between GNA decision-makers and field commanders. In response to the airstrike, the prominent Nawasi militia commander, Mohamed Abu Dra'a, commonly known as "Al-Sandog", threatened the GNA Minister of Finance, Faraj Abu Mtari. The Nawasi militia commander held the Minister responsible for the airstrike. The threat would closely follow another related incident. On 25 Sep, WB sources reported a high-ranking Nawasi militiaman and the Deputy Chief of Libyan Intelligence Services (LIS) raided the Ministry of Finance building in Tripoli's Al Dahra. Reports alleged the dispute was due to the Ministry of Finance halting salary payments to LIS employees.

The incident's significant was later highlighted by a GNA Interior Ministry arrest warrant issued against "Al-Sandog" and Al-Taher A'aroua for their involvement in the 25 Sep attack against the GNA Finance Minister. The arrest warrant, dated 26 Sep, confirms the fact that Nawasi commander "Al-Sandog" accused the GNA Ministry of Finance of cutting funding and stipends of LIS members. This appears to be the main motive behind the recent raid on the GNA Ministry of Finance HQ, prior to the LNA airstrike targeting Nawasi Camp. Of note, a large majority of LIS members are affiliated with the Nawasi militia. The development is a clear indicator of the widening rift between pro-GNA factions. In addition, the latest Bashagha-sanctioned arrest warrant could further exacerbate tensions as it would be equated with a Misrata attempt to curb Nawasi's influence.

Ultimately, the challenge for the GNA will be to meet the demands of hardliners within its camp, including pro-Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) elements, to ensure its survival and maintain its defensive posture. The dilemma is that by answering such demands, the GNA will inadvertently reinforce the LNA's narrative, namely that extremists are fighting within its ranks and continue to hold sway over Tripoli government's decisions. This explains why the GNA has to tread carefully to avoid marginalizing armed factions protecting Tripoli's outskirts and simultaneously ensuring it does not taint its public image.

Meanwhile, on the counterterrorism front, the week was marked by renewed engagement from US Africa Command (AFRICOM), with a least two additional airstrikes targeting militants over the course of the reporting period. The airstrikes are expected to cripple remaining terrorists and extremists, especially after the Tebu-led offensive on Murzuq and subsequent LNA retreat from the town.

### KEY POINTS

- LNA targeted Nawasi militia to exploit divisions
- GNA arrest warrants against Nawasi militiamen
- GNA compelled to respond to hardliners



## CONTENTS

- 1 **THE BIG PICTURE**  
LNA airstrikes in central Tripoli exacerbate militia tensions
- 2 **NATIONWIDE SECURITY**  
Events, Analysis and Data
- 3 **SECURITY BY NUMBERS**  
Charts, Statistics and Analysis
- 4 **TRIPOLI REPORT**  
News & Neighborhoods
- 5 **BENGAZI REPORT**  
News & Neighborhoods
- 6 **WHAT'S NEXT**  
Forward Looking Expert Opinions

## 2. National Security Map

Third AFRICOM airstrike kills militants in South; LNA air campaign intensifies in Sirte & Misrata

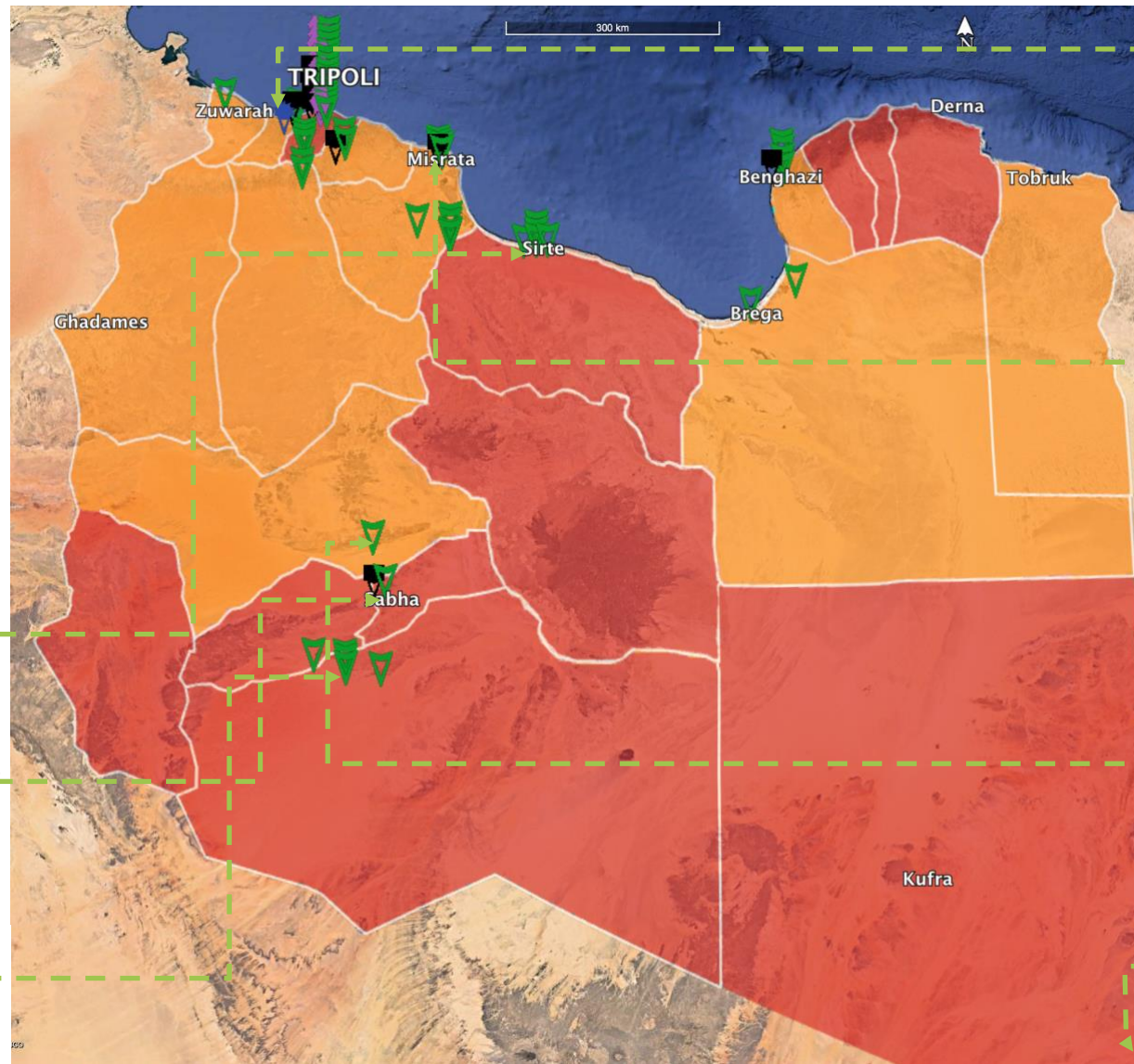
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

- ★ IED | VBIED
- ♦ Violent Clash
- Isolated Gunfire
- ▽ Other0



Reports of an explosion in Zawiyah's Al-Harsha area near Zawiyah refinery at approximately 1500hrs on 26 Sep. Initial reports indicate a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated in front of a scrapyard, resulting in limited physical damage and no casualties. Reports suggest the targeted property belongs to a pro-Gaddafi tribe accused by locals of sympathizing with the LNA and recently involved in tribal disputes in the area.

At approximately 0000hrs on 26 Sep, WB sources reported an LNA airstrike targeted Misrata's Aviation College resulting in a brief air traffic suspension at Misrata International Airport (MRA).

A prominent Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) commander has been recently reported operating in Libya's southern Brak Shatti district, according to an unidentified Libyan intelligence source quoted by Middle East publications. The unidentified source suggests Ahmed Abeljalil Hassanoui, an AQIM leader, was spotted in Tamzawa, a town in the Brak Shatti district, where his family is allegedly based. Hassnaoui is reportedly continuously moving across the southern region with other AQIM militants in an effort to protect hideouts. WB's local sources suggest Hassanoui's own family disowned him and he is wanted by local tribes for his involvement in summary executions.

On 26 Sep, the Sudanese Transitional Government ordered the immediate closure of its border with Libya and The Central African Republic, citing security and economic concerns.

On 28 Sep, LNA airstrikes were reported targeting checkpoints 20km East of Sirte. Additional LNA airstrikes were reported targeting multiple GNA positions in Sirte between 27 Sep-28 Sep. Targets included the Qardhabiya Airbase, a police station in Sirte's city center, Feed Factory, and a camp in Wadi Jaref.

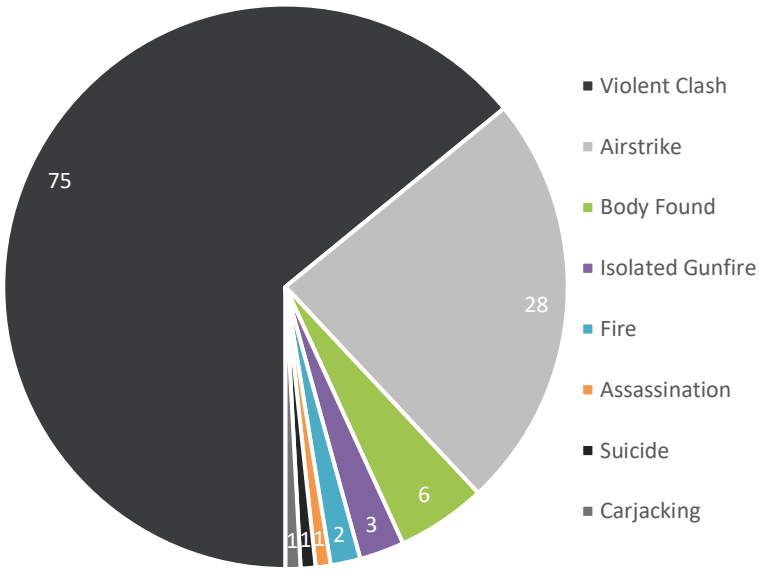
AFRICOM confirmed it targeted 17 Islamic State (IS) militants in an airstrike in southwest Libya on 26 Sep, in coordination with the GNA. Local WB sources confirmed the airstrike was audible in Sabha and targeted a residential unit in the vicinity of the "Indian Company" HQ. Additional reports indicate prominent IS leader in Libya, Mahmoud Al-Barasy, also known as "Abu Musab", was killed as

An AFRICOM airstrike, in coordination with the GNA, resulted in the death of 11 Islamic State (IS) militants near Murzuq on 24 Sep, marking the second AFRICOM airstrike targeting IS militants in the South this week.

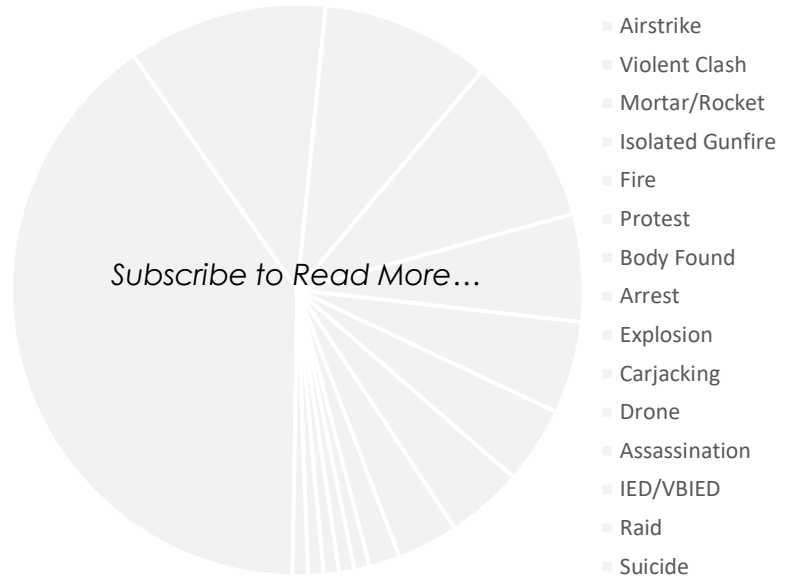
### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

#### Surge in airstrikes in Western, Central and Southern regions

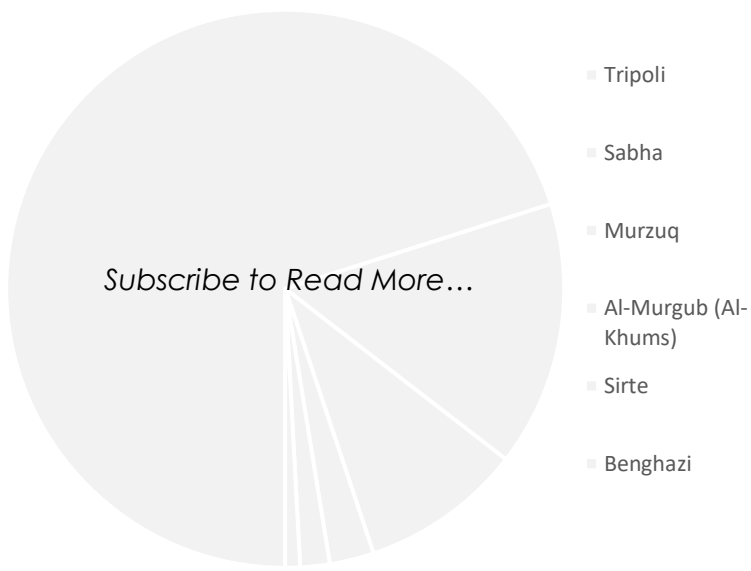
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



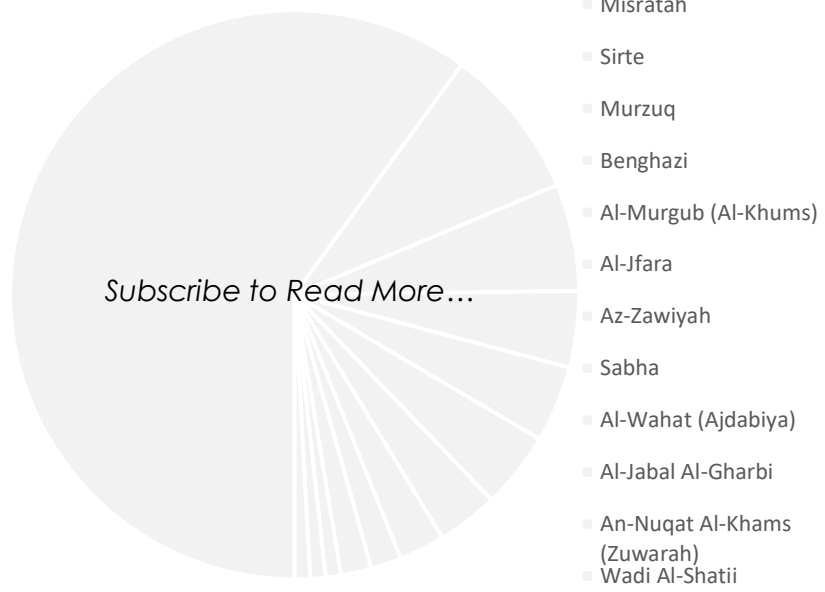
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



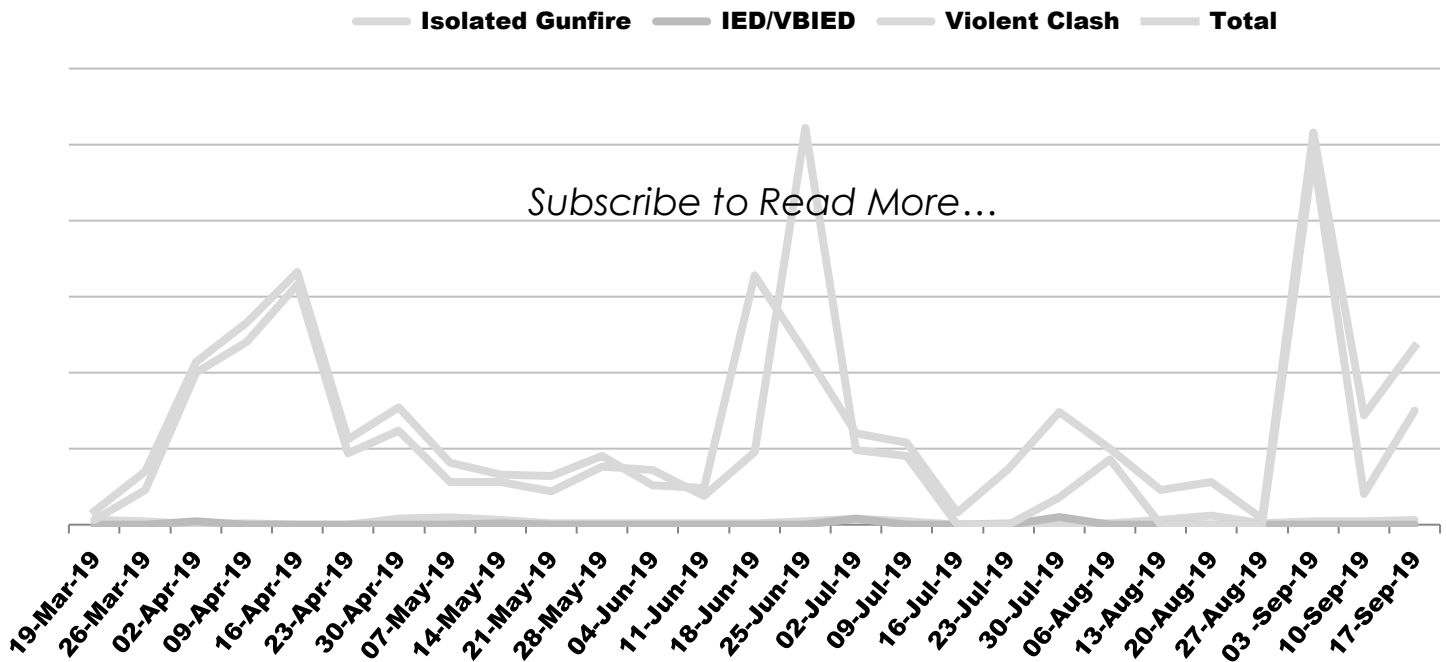
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



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 117 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 72 deaths reported last week and 258 the week before, marking a relative increase in the number of fatalities. This week, beyond casualties reported in the Western region as a result of ongoing military operations, 28 fatalities were recorded in the Southern region due to US Africa Command (AFRICOM) airstrikes targeting Islamic State (IS) militants in the area. Meanwhile, this week saw a slight increase in security incidents recorded in Tripoli and in the Southern region, with eight incidents recorded in the latter, including five in the Murzuq district. In the West, following Tripoli, the highest number of incidents recorded was in Misrata for the second consecutive week as a result of increased Libyan National Army (LNA) airstrikes targeting the city. In relation to military operations, this week saw a slight drop in violent clashes recorded, whilst the number of airstrikes increased. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country including 46 airstrikes, 13 violent clashes, 11 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 11 isolated gunfire cases, 6 protests, 5 bodies found, 2 carjackings, 1 IED/VBIED, 1 assassination, 1 raid and 1 suicide.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 93 incidents, including 69 in Tripoli, marking an increase in contrast to the previous week. In Tripoli, unlike the pattern witnessed in previous weeks, no vehicle thefts were recorded in central Tripoli. In the wider Tripoli district, reports emerged over two unidentified bodies found with signs of torture, South of Garabolli, in the afternoon on 22 Sep. The bodies were later identified as belonging to two middle aged men from Tripoli. Initial reports indicate the two men who were neighbours, were visiting each other in the Khallat Al-Furjan area in the afternoon on 20 Sep, after which they reported missing. Separately, reports indicate an additional unidentified body was found in the suburbs of Garabolli in the evening on 22 Sep. Beyond this, reports indicate a KIA truck was carjacked on the Coastal Road near Garabolli at approximately 0000hrs on 22 Sep. Residents of the area warned locals from passing through the Coastal Road during the night, particularly the area between Qaser Al-Akhyar and Garabolli. Meanwhile, there were reports of an explosion in Zawiya's Al-Harsha area, near Zawiya refinery, at approximately 1500hrs on 26 Sep. Initial reports indicate a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated in front of a scrap vehicle parking lot, resulting in limited physical damage and no casualties. Reports suggest the targeted property belongs to a pro-Gaddafi tribe accused by locals of sympathizing with the LNA and recently involved in tribal disputes in the area.

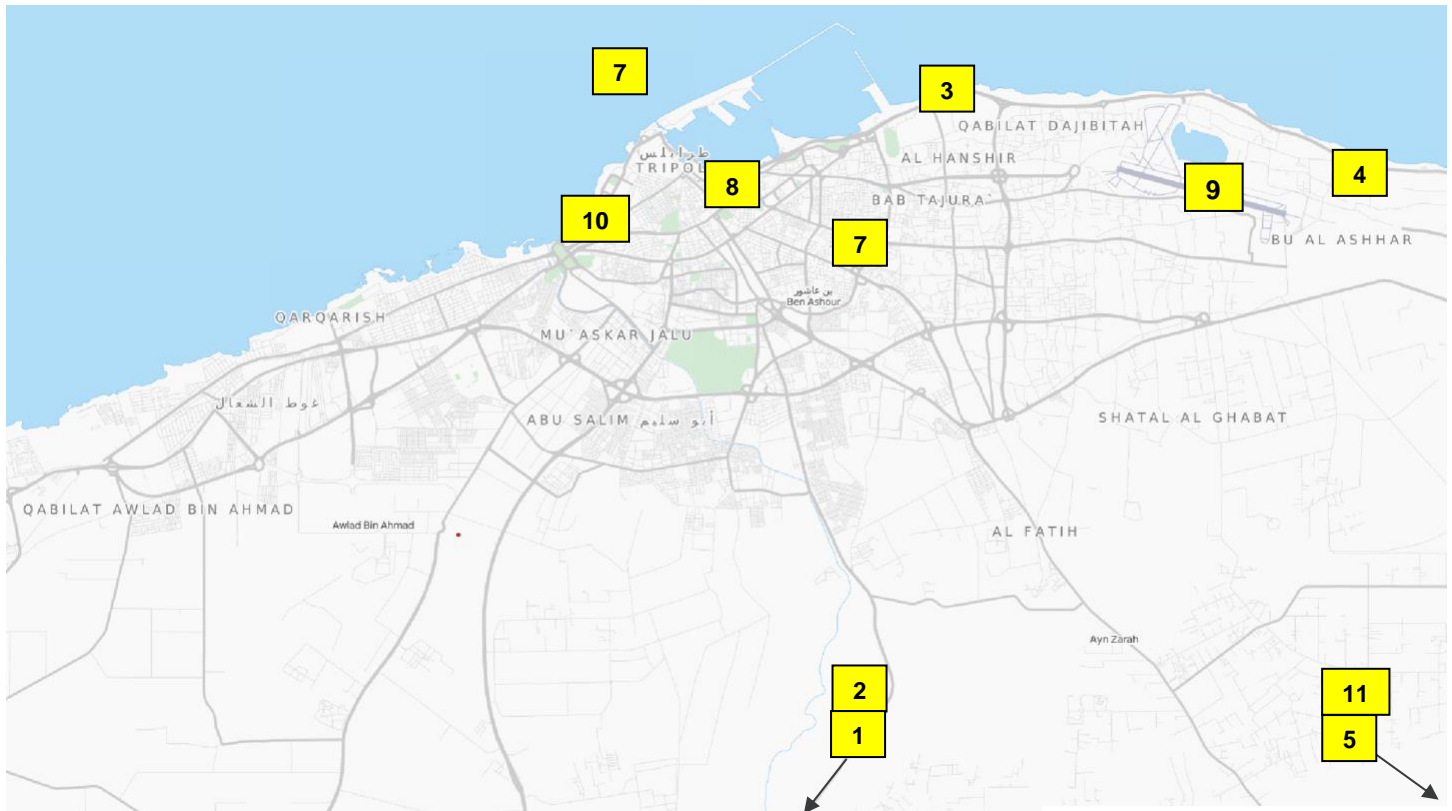
In the central region, the LNA increased its airstrikes targeting Sirte this week. On 28 Sep, LNA airstrikes were reported targeting a checkpoints 20km East of Sirte at approximately 0230hrs. Additional LNA airstrikes were reported targeting multiple GNA positions in Sirte between 27 Sep-28 Sep. Targets included the Qardhabiya Airbase, a police station in Sirte's city center, Feed Factory, and a camp in Wadi Jaref. Meanwhile, on 23 Sep, reports indicate LNA airstrikes targeted Sirte, with initial reports indicating that an airstrike targeted a military convoy affiliated with the former Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) head, Ibrahim Jathran, south-west the city.

Turning to the Southern region, WB recorded two US AFRICOM airstrikes, including one in Murzuq and one in the Sabha district. The airstrikes resulted in the total death of 28 IS militants. Separately, reports indicate unidentified gunmen driving a Hyundai Accent carried out a drive-by shooting resulting in the death of a man in Sabha's Al-Qurdha area in the evening on 23 Sep.

In the East, no incidents were reported beyond Benghazi, where 2 protests, 1 isolated gunfire case & 2 arrests were recorded over the reporting period.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### MJI targeted while closed; GNA advances on Al-Ztarna-Garabouli frontline



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (22 Sep) LNA advances on Espia-Aziziyah frontline; GNA retreat towards Aziziyah
2. (23 Sep) LNA cont advance on Espia-Aziziyah frontline; GNA remain positioned in Aziziyah
3. (23 Sep) LRC locate body dumped in Marine Club
4. (24 Sep) GNA's Illegal Immigration Police crackdown on migrants
5. (24-25 Sep) No developments; clashes resume on Al-Ztarna frontline
6. (25 Sep) Clashes cont on Aziziyah front; Haftar welcomes ministerial meeting on Libya
7. (25 Sep) Unidentified threat targeting MoE emerges; fails to materialise
8. (25 Sep) Body found dumped with signs of injury to head in Al-Dahra
9. (25-26 Sep) LNA airstrikes & shelling target MJI
10. (27 Sep) LNA airstrike targets Nawasi Militia Camp in central Tripoli
11. (28 Sep) GNA advances on Al-Ztarna-Garabouli frontline; LNA retreat towards administrative boundaries of

#### LNA airstrikes target MJI

WB sources reported an LNA airstrike targeted Mitiga International Airport (MJI) at approximately 0830hrs on 26 Sep. Between 2300hrs-0000hrs, additional LNA airstrikes targeted MJI. Initial reports indicate a Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), GNA depots, and GNA military positions were targeted. The incident was corroborated by the LNA's Military Information Division (MID). Beyond, at approximately 1630hrs, indiscriminate shelling targeted MJI. On 25 Sep, WB reported no signs of a potential resumption of operations at MJI in the short term.

#### Threat targeting MoE fails to materialise

WB sources reported an unidentified threat targeting Tripoli's Ministry of Education HQ in Al-Hany area, where a scheduled meeting was cancelled in the afternoon on 25 Sep. There is no further information available and no security incidents were recorded. The incident could be linked to reports of a dispute between the Minister of Education and his undersecretary. In addition, there are allegations of documented suspicious financial transactions involving some officials. Beyond this, the incident could be related to recent protests held by high school students in front of the ministry denouncing the GNA's lack of coverage of Tajoura's final examination results.

#### Bodies found

The Libyan Red Crescent (LRC) found a body dumped in Tripoli's Marine Club on 23 Sep. Initial unconfirmed reports suggest a local dispute erupted between the deceased and another man. Separately, a body was found dumped in the sea near Al-Waddan Bridge in Al Dahra area on 25 Sep. The body belonged to a man in

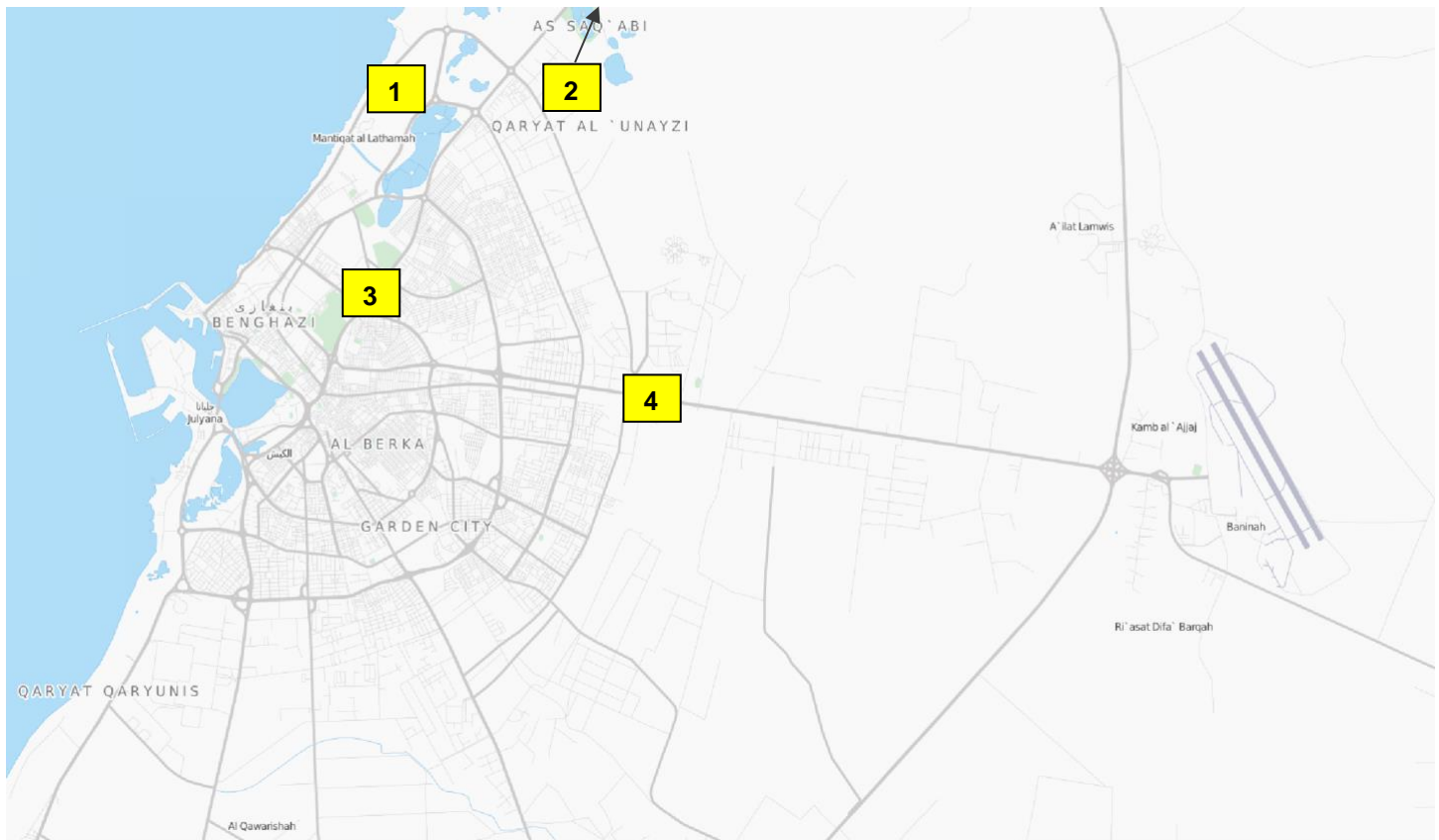
his forties suffering from mental health issues.

#### TPF issue second statement

In a statement on 25 Sep, the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) referred to the policies of the Serraj-led Presidential Council (PC) as "confused" against the backdrop of the current situation in Tripoli as a result of an "international attack led by the war criminal". The statement noted that the TPF previously warned over such a development in its Feb statements. The TPF called on all "honorable" factions in Libya, including the defenders of Tripoli and those involved in the Libyan conflict, to take a unified position towards violations committed by foreign countries backing the attackers with weapons and equipment, noting the most recent addition of foreign soldiers on the ground. The TPF called on Al-Serraj and his delegation to hold these countries responsible at the United Nation (UN) General Assembly seventy-fourth session in New York, USA, and not to "bow" to pressure exerted on them by Haftar's backers. To conclude, the TPF stressed that it will not turn a blind eye to the offensive on Tripoli and Haftar's hindrance of the political process. The development would corroborate WB's analysis of the TPF's 19 Sep statement which stood as a clear attempt to express its willingness to reach a political solution in an attempt to distance itself from more radical pro-Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) elements opposed to any form of dialogue. The second statement further corroborates the assumption that cracks are beginning to emerge within the GNA camp.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Security environment dominated by criminal arrests



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (23 Sep) Exchange of gunfire b/w Morality Police & drug dealers
2. (25 Sep) BPMC staff protest NOC reduction of fuel supply to East
3. (25 Sep) CID set up ambush to arrest man threatening to kidnap children
4. (27 Sep) Local Benghazi Radio staff protest attempt to seize HQ

#### BPMC & local radio employees protest

On 25 Sep, local reports indicate Benghazi-based Brega Petroleum Marketing Company (BPMC) employees protested against the Tripoli-based National Oil Corporation's (NOC) recent reduction of jet fuel supply to the Eastern region. In a video published by the BPMC's Media Centre, employees at the Benina International Airport Oil Warehouse stated that the fuel restriction impacted civil aviation used for transferring people for medical treatment and shipping necessary medical and food supplies to the region. The Benghazi-based Brega Petroleum Marketing Company (BPMC) board of directors recently announced their secession from the Tripoli-based NOC due to documented reductions in jet fuel supply to the East.

Separately, local reports indicate employees of the Local Benghazi Radio, along with a number of media workers, protested against an attempt to seize the radio's HQ and in rejection of a decision to form a Higher Media Council without their consultation in the Bouatni area on 27 Sep. The protestors demanded the Interim Government PM, Abdallah Al-Thinni, the Benghazi Municipal Steering Council head, Saqr Bugwari, and the House of Representatives (HoR) head, Aguila Saleh, to intervene and halt any security breaches targeting the radio.

#### Arrest campaigns continue

Benghazi's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested a man threatening a family to kidnap their children or pay a ransom of seven million Libyan dinars (LYD) on 25 Sep. The suspect also set fire to the family's two vehicles. The threats were made via a fake Facebook account. After reporting the incident to security authorities, the latter requested the family to enter negotiations with the suspect over the ransom demanded in an effort to agree on a location to collect the cash and ambush the criminal. The suspect requested the family to place the cash, reduced to 1 million LYD, in a garbage bag and place it next to the Al-Jurra roundabout in the Salmani area. The suspect was arrested following the amush.

Separately, Benghazi's Morality Police reported a prominent criminal opened fire on its members in the Al-Lathama area on 23 Sep. On its Facebook page, the police stated that its members ambushed the area to demolish illicit kiosks used for trading narcotics in an attempt to arrest the suspect. Following the ambush, the suspect opened fire on the police members resulting in one injury and an exchange of gunfire between the two sides. The suspect's brother reportedly died in the incident. Benghazi recently announced a crackdown on outlawed groups across the city, including drug dealers.

## 6. What's next

### Further GNA divisions; LNA to focus on Al-Ztarna/Garaboulli frontline

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

A negotiated settlement remains unlikely in the short term. While a recent statement from the LNA General Command was interpreted as openness to dialogue ahead of a ministerial meeting on Libya, it clearly highlighted that political dialogue will only be possible once military operations are complete. The LNA statement made it clear that there is no room for holding elections until militias are disbanded. The weeks ahead could see more involvement from the African Union (AU) on the Libyan dossier. A concluding statement was issued following a high-level ministerial meeting on Libya, bringing together representatives and ministers of China, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Turkey, the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US), the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in addition to the African Union (AU) commission chairperson, and the European Union's (EU) high representative. The statement provided pre-conditions to resume the UN-led political process. On the economic front, efforts to unify the parallel central banks appear to be in full swing. US Ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland, and US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East and Africa, Eric Meyer, met with the Eastern-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL) governor, Ali Al-Hibri, on 26 Sep. A day earlier, Norland and Meyer met with the Tripoli-based CBL governor, Al-Sadiq Al-Kabir. On the lobbying front, Politico reported US lobby firm Gotham Government Relations & Communications has been contracted on behalf of the GNA for a one-year contract worth 1.5 million USD and an additional fee of 150k USD. According to disclosure filings viewed by Politico, the lobbyists will reach out to the US executive branch to highlight "human rights violation and crimes against Libyan civilians" allegedly carried out by LNA leader Khalifa Haftar.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In a Bloomberg article, *Samer Al-Atrush* and *Stepan Kravchenko* explore the alleged involvement of Russian mercenaries on the ground in Libya. The authors write that more than 100 mercenaries from the Wagner group have arrived at an unidentified base in Libya to fight in support of the LNA's Khalifa Haftar, according to "people familiar with the matter" and other unidentified sources quoted in the article. However, despite the alarmist reporting triggered by reports of Russian mercenaries involved on the ground, if confirmed, it would remain unclear if they were contracted by a local armed faction or sent by Moscow. An official within the LNA has denied the presence of Russian nationals within its ranks. The authors write "More than 100 mercenaries from the Wagner group headed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, also known as "Putin's chef" for his Kremlin catering contracts, arrived at a forward base in Libya in the first week of September to support eastern strongman Khalifa Haftar's assault on the capital Tripoli, said the people, who included Libyan and Western officials. All asked not to be named because they weren't authorized to speak with the press. A Russian mercenary commander also confirmed that Wagner contractors were fighting in Libya, and said that some had been killed in action there. Their arrival this month coincided with an escalation in airstrikes in support of Haftar, who's pushing for decisive gains on the battlefield to strengthen his hand before an international peace conference expected next month. His forces have been bogged down at Tripoli's outskirts since early April. Russia is distancing itself from the struggling UN-backed administration in Tripoli and expects Haftar now to gain the upper hand after his initial failure to push into the capital, said a person close to the government in Moscow. Russian officials believe there will be a role for ex-dictator Moammar Qaddafi's fugitive son in any future power structure in Libya, though not as leader of the country, the person said."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

The Al-Ztarna/Garaboulli frontline will continue to take centre stage in combat operations as both LNA and GNA forces understand the strategic importance of the area. Prospects of a GNA victory would be significantly reduced should the LNA secure access to the Coastal Road and cut Misrata's access to central Tripoli. Such a scenario would provide the LNA with additional leverage to compel militia factions in Tripoli to switch sides and facilitate its entry into the capital city. Separately, the uptick in criminal activity along Garaboulli's coastal road has prompted local law enforcement to implement a curfew. Meanwhile, there is a possibility of tensions escalating between Bani Walid and Tarhunah, after a series of kidnappings targeting Bani Walid locals on the road between the two towns. Unconfirmed pro-GNA reports indicate Mohamed Al-Kani, the Kani militia leader, has struck an agreement to defuse tensions between Tarhunah and Bani Walid. The agreement was reportedly mediated by a delegation sent by Khalifa Haftar from the East. At the tactical level, the LNA's Ajdabiya Ops Room claimed pro-GNA armed groups are laying improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and landmines across frontlines in Tripoli's South. The claim, if confirmed, would highlight how localized fighting has become, while underlining the potential for collateral damage to civilians. In Zawiya and across Tripoli's "western flank", allegations of support for rival factions are expected to continue resulting in tit-for-tat attacks. In the central region, LNA airstrikes increased in Misrata and Sirte, subsequently increasing the prospects of ground confrontation between LNA units and Misrata forces around the Sirte and Jufra areas in the short term. In the South, AFRICOM's renewed engagement could lead to additional airstrikes, especially after recent pro-LNA reports that GNA-sanctioned militants are hiding in Sabha.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Rebecca Murray, writing for *Middle East Eye*, explores the long-term implications of war on Libyans living in the capital city. The author documents the everyday lives of residents: "For Libyans in their twenties, going to university, mulling careers, and socialising with friends can be a welcome reprieve before shouldering the conservative society's expectations of nailing down a job, getting married and raising children. But many in this generation, who as children experienced the bloody overthrow of the Gaddafi regime and the insecure chaos of militia rule that followed, share a deep-rooted anxiety about everyday life and the future. Chronic gun violence, the corrupt enrichment of a few amidst growing societal impoverishment, inept government, broken services and displacement feed a widespread psychological need to block out reality." The author adds that even in a scenario where the current war ends, there could be additional internal conflicts between the various armed factions. "At a city café, a 25-year old former fighter in Tripoli said he gave up fighting five years ago, but is still in close contact with friends on the frontline. "This young generation is mentally destroyed," he says, describing how the militias have access to pharmacies, and fighters are addicted to a "mind erasing" cocktail of Tramadol for pain and Ecstasy for adrenaline. Cocaine is around, but expensive. Smoking hashish and drinking home-brewed alcohol has always been most common, he says. He continues: "They don't understand what family or street rules mean. They don't care about respect. They take examples from the combat video games like PUBG – similar to Fortnite – where teams kill each other off, and then apply it to the real battlefield."

# About Whispering Bell



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