

November 12, 2019

1. The Big Picture

Currency shipment reverberates across western region

Fighting between Libyan National Army (LNA) and Government of National Accord (GNA) forces remained limited this week, though Tripoli forces came under sustained pressure from forces loyal to Khalifa Haftar. Military activity was dominated by the LNA's control of the Cement Factory in Tripoli's Sog Al-Khmies after a concerted northward push. For their part, GNA forces are yet to take an offensive stance and continue to rely on heavy artillery to compensate for the dwindling number of aerial sorties conducted over the past two weeks.

On the political front, however, the landscape continues to evolve and change. Generally speaking, political developments have overshadowed military activity over the past two months and narratives are now shifting towards negotiations. A solution to the Libyan crisis is now the focus of many stakeholders, despite the absence of a set date for the Berlin Conference on Libya.

The week was dominated by renewed allegations of Russian mercenary involvement in support of the LNA, which gained traction after a New York Times (NYT) article claimed at least 200 Russian fighters recently arrived in Libya. The report claims highly-trained snipers are now active on the frontlines as part of Moscow's strategy to assert influence over Africa. In response, multiple GNA officials, including Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, confirmed Russian involvement and compared it to the Syrian case, claiming it has altered the equation on the ground. However, these statements are politically-charged and timely as they help draw international attention to the Libyan conflict. While there is mounting evidence to corroborate some Russian mercenary presence across Tripoli's southern frontlines, the scale of Moscow's involvement is often overstated, and even if confirmed it is yet to result in a significant LNA push northward.

More importantly, controversy over the recent shipment of Russian-printed currency bound for the Eastern Central Bank of Libya (CBL) and seized by Maltese authorities has reverberated across the western region. In a letter, Prime Minister Fayez Al-Sarraj allegedly asked the Tripoli CBL governor, Sadik Al-Kabir, to take measures to counter what was described as counterfeit currency. The GNA has not commented on the letter and the CBL denied reports that it had prohibited the use of the currency. Of note, the Tripoli CBL has not yet claimed the currency from Malta or officially declared it as counterfeit. Reluctance to prohibit the circulation of the currency highlights the

quagmire the GNA is now running into. Restricting the currency would risk creating a liquidity crisis in the East; an outcome that Haftar and the eastern government will likely leverage to speed up international efforts to unify the central banks and limit the GNA's access to state coffers. Meanwhile, GNA PM Fayez Sarraj will find it hard to justify restricting the use of the currency as this would contradict a letter he sent allowing the circulation of Russian-printed Libyan dinars in 2016.

Locally, the development prompted a social media campaign urging residents and businesses across the West to refrain from accepting the banknotes while highlighting the minor differences from the standard currency printed by British company De La Rue.

Overall, the incident has highlighted the importance of the economic dimension in the current conflict. It shows that sooner or later, peacemaking efforts will need to address Libya's economy, beyond the Berlin Conference's focus on foreign arms transfer and alleged embargo violations. Until then, both the LNA and GNA will retain the capability to finance the war effort. If the GNA is capable of restricting this particular shipment, there is nothing preventing both the GNA or LNA from receiving additional cash shipments, further complicating any economic reform.

Separately, Haftar reassured that the fight to retake Tripoli is going according to plan, while reinforcing the LNA's counterterrorism narrative, singling out Turkey and Qatar, and categorizing fighters within GNA ranks, in a new interview with Independent Arabia. Although no new or groundbreaking statements were made, Haftar's comments come in a context of growing focus on "legitimacy". The situation in Libya is gradually being framed as a legitimacy crisis, as highlighted recently by the head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Ghassan Salame. The focus on legitimacy in the international community is seen as beneficial to the LNA as it undermines one of the core pillars that the GNA has relied on since 2016. By reiterating the LNA's narrative and overemphasizing the GNA's divisions, these interviews help cast doubts over the GNA's legitimacy as a political entity.

KEY POINTS

- Seized currency poses challenge for GNA
- Bashagha confirms Russian mercenaries fighting
- Haftar interview reinforces LNA narrative



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2. National Security Map

Alleged airstrip spotted Southwest of Tarhuna; Russian official denies Russian presence in Libya

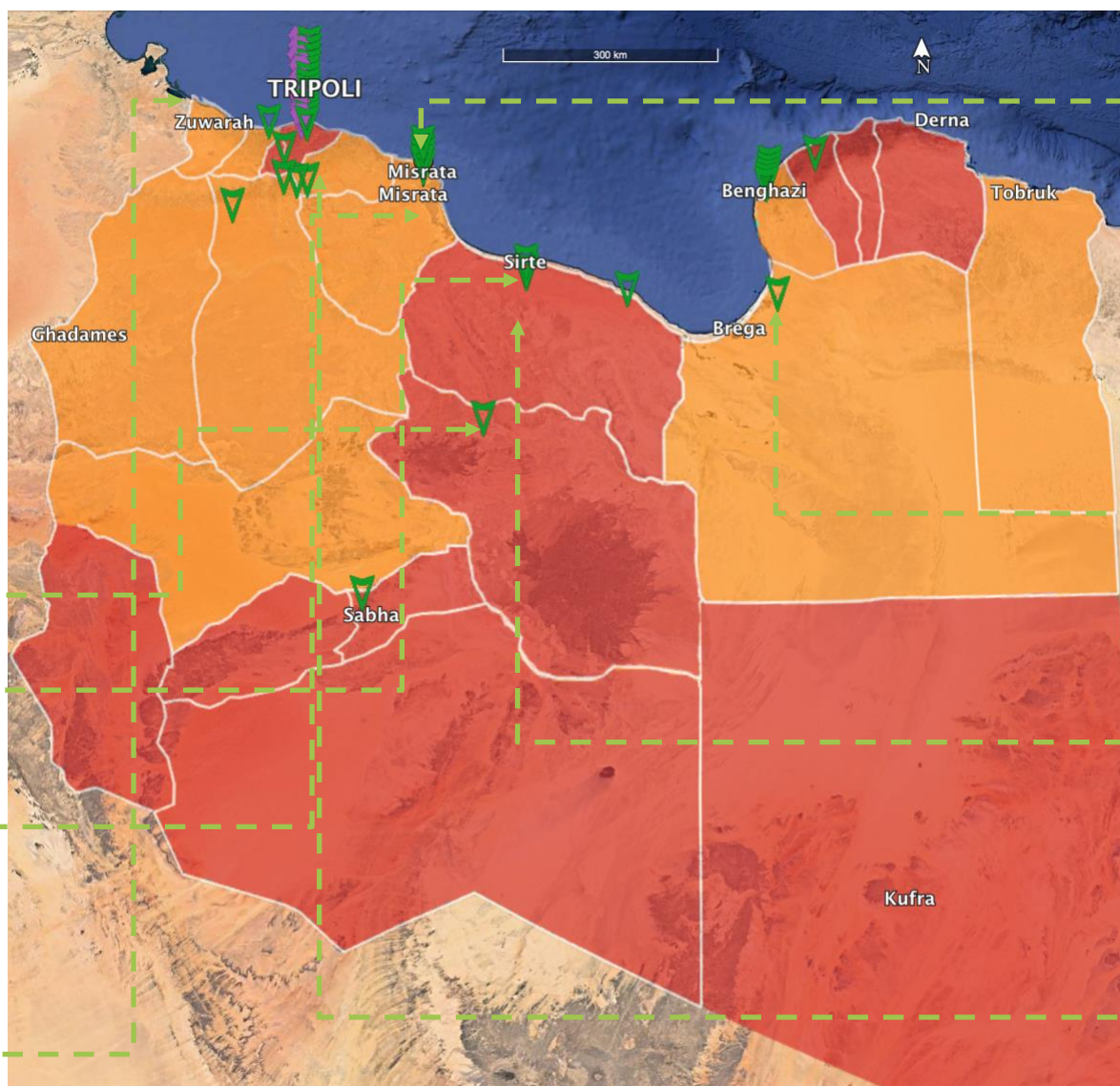
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



LAAF airstrikes targeted Misrata Aviation College temporarily halting air traffic at Misratah International Airport (MRA) on 03 Nov. An Afriqiyah Airways flights was diverted to Sfax-Thyna International Airport after departing Tunis-Carthage International Airport for MRA.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Sergei Ryabkov, refuted claims that 200 Russian mercenaries are mobilized in support of LNA units as part of the Kremlin's broader campaign to reassert its influence across the Middle East and North Africa. The claims were recently published in a New York Times (NYT) article.

Reports suggest the eastern-based Internal Security (IS) apparatus arrested an individual suspected of belonging to Ajdabiya Shura Council, the local Islamist extremist group, on 08 Nov.

Unidentified Misrata gunmen reportedly kidnapped Abdulfattah Malti, Al-Zaytouna University's President, and Registrar Ahmed Massoud on the Sirte-Jufra road in the evening on 07 Nov. The two were reported to be on a work trip and travelling eastward for a meeting with the eastern government's education ministry.

Satellite imagery published across social media purported to show a road converted into an airstrip in an unidentified area southwest of Tarhunah, the strategic town serving as one of the LNA's command centres. It remains unclear whether the airstrip, if confirmed, is used by the LNA for reconnaissance and supply missions.

Videos circulated across social media outlets were purported to show hundreds of Sudanese fighters present in Al-Jufra. The video's authenticity is unconfirmed.

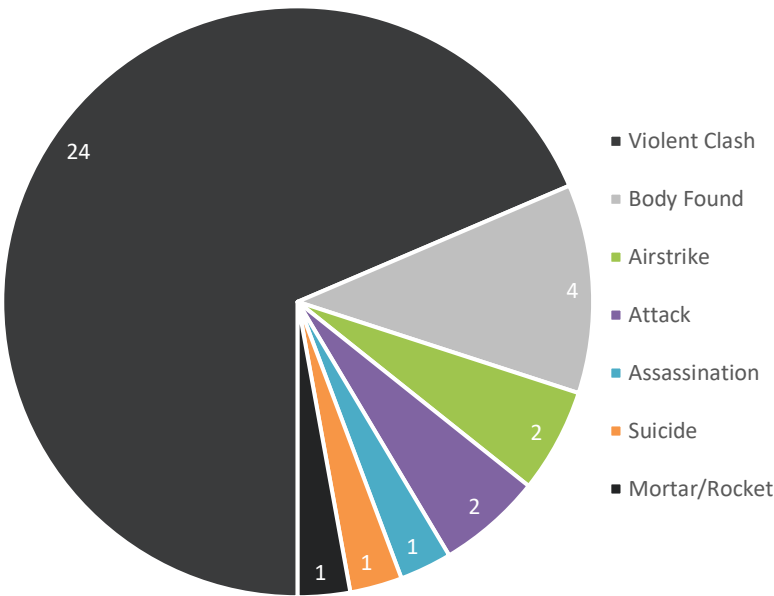
Sirte Protection Sirte (SPF), nominally operating under Misrata's Bunyan Al-Marsous (BAM), announced LNA airstrikes injured three of its members in an unidentified location on 05 Nov. Earlier, at approximately 1740hrs, LNA airstrikes were reported targeting GNA sites in the Sirte and Qardabiya Airbase vicinity. The LNA claimed the target was Saadi camp used for military purposes.

Ras Ajdir Libya-Tunisia border crossing reopened on 07 Nov. The crossing was closed to all travellers with the exception of ambulances and Libyan travellers crossing back into Libya.

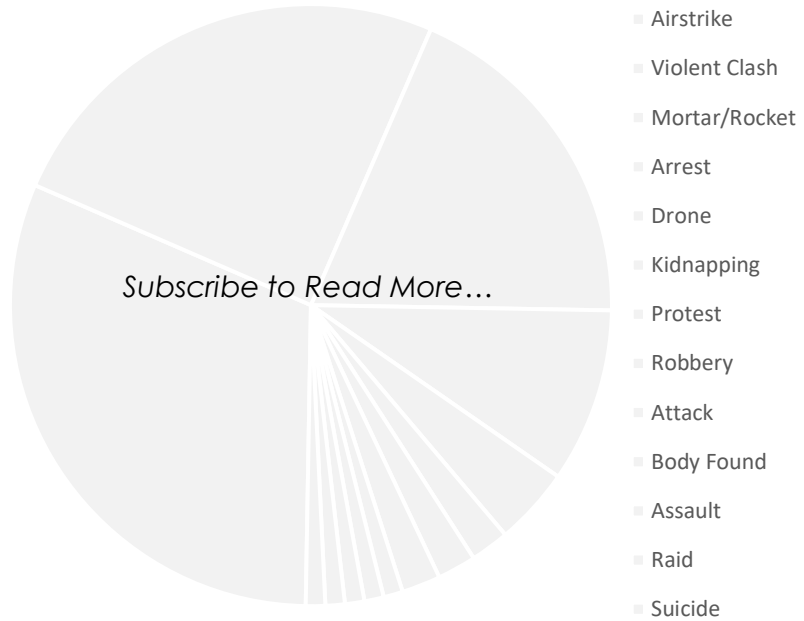
3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Majority of fatalities due to violent clashes; no isolated gunfire cases recorded

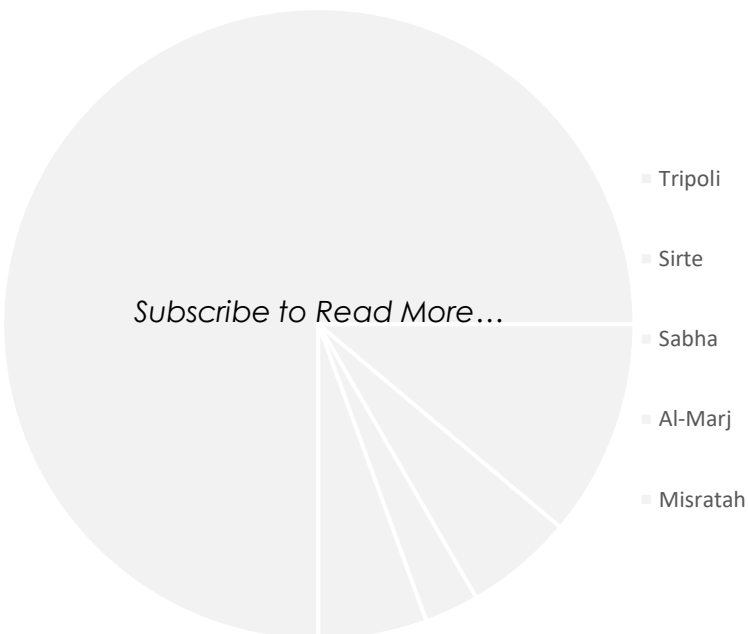
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



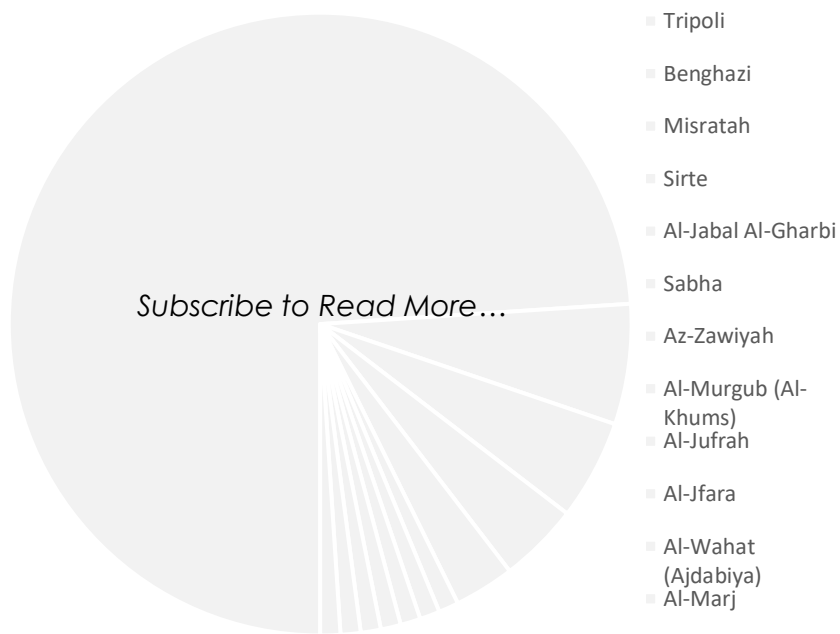
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



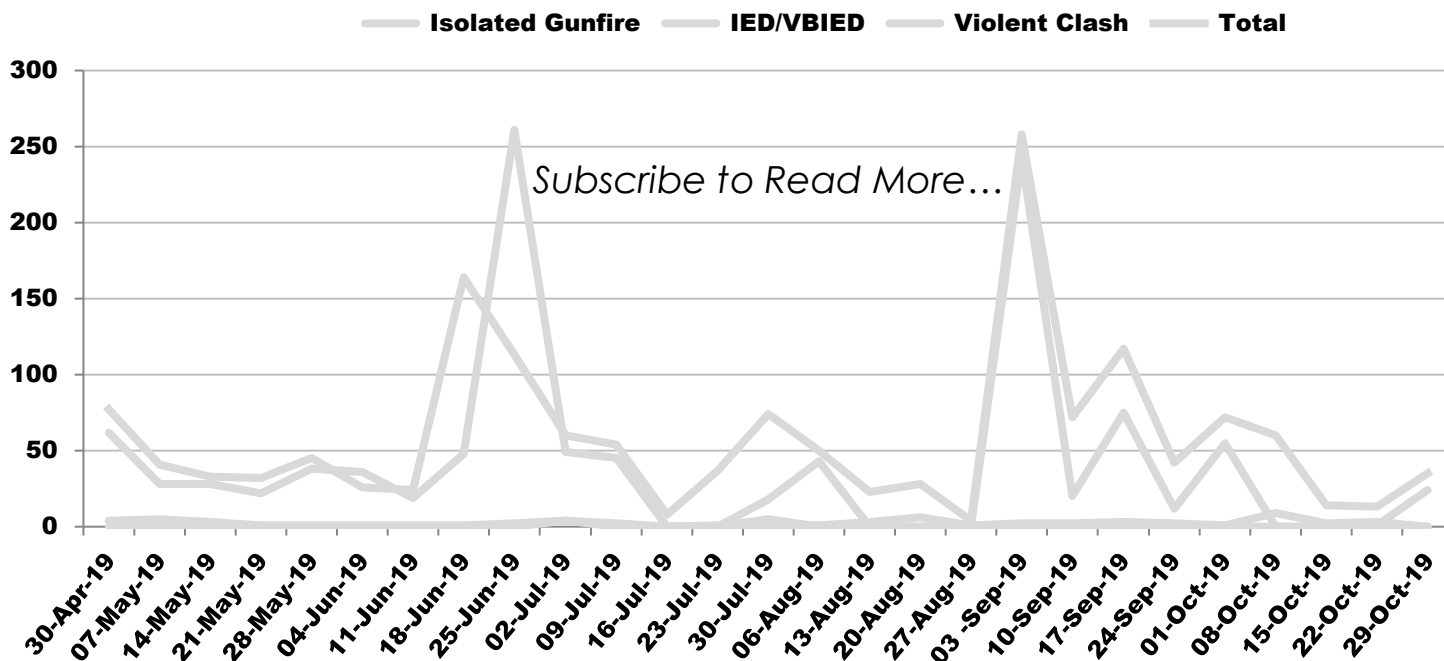
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



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 35 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 13 deaths reported last week and 14 the week before. The total number of nationwide fatalities would likely be significantly higher if a reliable casualty toll of the ongoing clashes in the Western region was available. This week, WB recorded 27 fatalities as a result of ongoing clashes between Libyan National Army (LNA) units and Government of National Accord (GNA) forces in Western Libya. Pro-LNA media outlets reported that 21 GNA forces were killed in clashes across several fronts in Tripoli on 03 Nov. Meanwhile, in contrast to last week, there was a documented increase in LNA Air Force (LAAF) airstrikes across frontlines, as well as a slight increase in mortar/rocket shelling incidents. However, contrary to the pattern witnessed over the past few weeks, no isolated-gunfire related incidents were recorded across Libya throughout the reporting period. Security incidents continue to be concentrated in the vicinity of Tripoli, followed by Benghazi and Misratah, where four LAAF airstrikes were recorded this week. Several security incidents were recorded throughout the country including 30 airstrikes, 24 violent clashes, 18 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 9 arrests, 4 drones spotted across Western cities, 2 kidnappings, 2 robberies, 2 protests, 1 robbery, 1 attack, 1 body found, 1 raid, 1 assault and a suicide.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 82 incidents, including 71 in Tripoli, marking a slight decrease in the overall number of security incidents recorded in the region. Amid ongoing military operations in the Tripoli district, an LAAF airstrike targeted the GNA's Rapid Intervention Force HQ in Ain Zara, killing at least two officers affiliated with the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and injuring four others at approximately 2130hrs on 06 Nov. Meanwhile, Tripoli's frontlines witnessed heavy shelling resulting in civilian casualties and the evacuation of some schools in Ain Zara after shells landed on Al-Nokhba Clinic resulting in the death of a child, as well as near a school in the area. In the context of increased civilian exposure as a result of military activity targeting civilian-populated areas, local reports indicate a protest was held by Almirad International School students in Zintan to mourn the death of the student, Mohammed Naghasa, who was killed in an LNA rocket attack targeting Tripoli's Salah Al-Din area on 28 Oct. Beyond military operations, reports indicate a man was found dead inside his vehicle near Al-Tok checkpoint located South of Misratah in the morning on 02 Nov. Initial reports suggest a suicide.

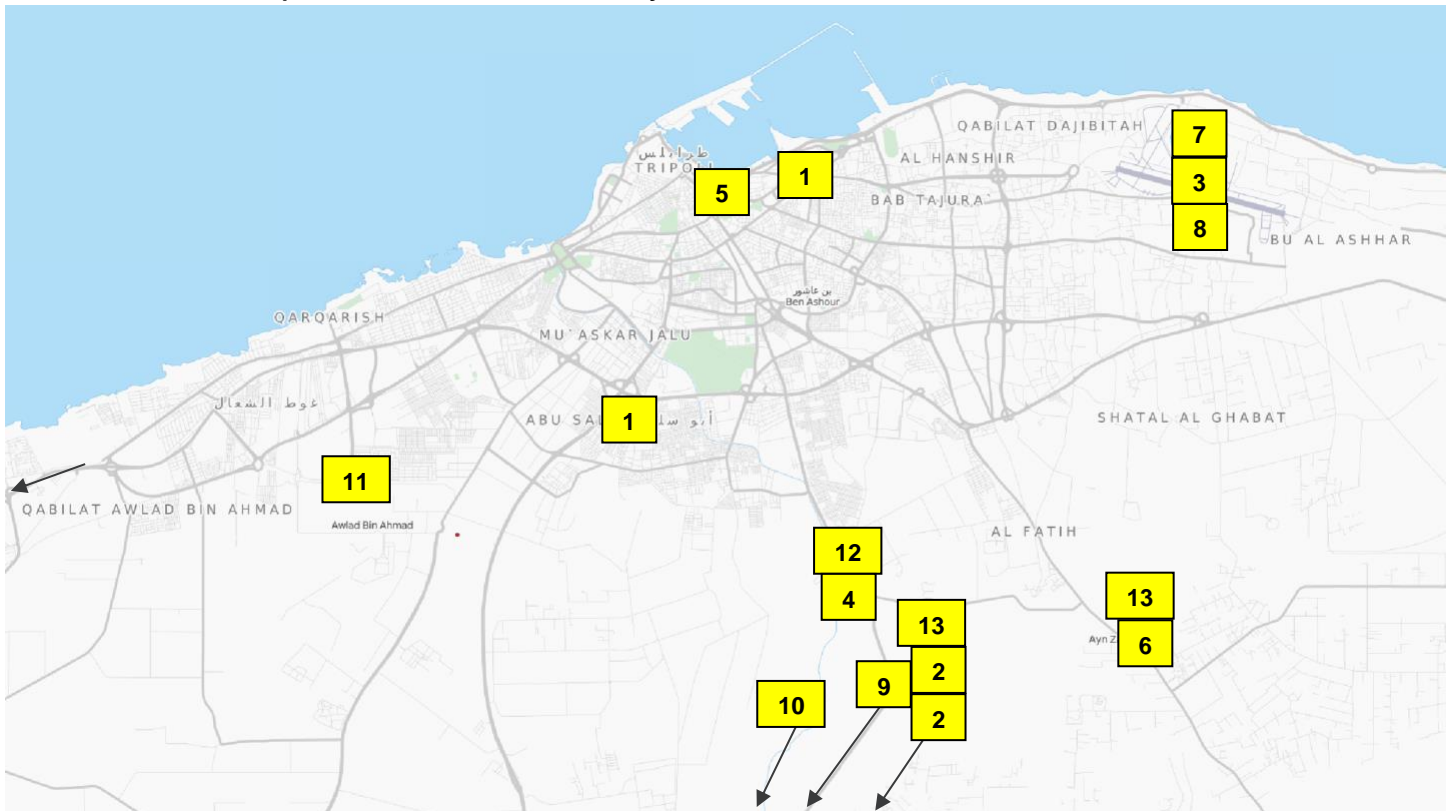
In the central region, beyond LAAF airstrikes targeting GNA-affiliated positions across the Sirte district, the Ras Lanuf Security Directorate located a grave containing four bodies near the coast of Bin Jawad's Al-Aweijah area after receiving reports by Bin Jawad's Police Station on the presence of a body found in the area on 30 Oct. The four bodies were found handcuffed and with signs of headshots. Local reports suggest the bodies are victims of assassinations carried out by the Islamic State (IS) during the battle of Sirte between 2015-16.

Turning to the South, this week WB recorded one security incident in the Sabha district. Sources reported two assailants attacked a security CP in front of Sabha Medical Centre resulting in a brief exchange of gunfire at approximately 2130hrs on 02 Nov. Sources reported the security forces repelled the attack resulting in the death of the two attackers, which included an Arab and Tebu.

In the East, the highest number of security incidents continues to be recorded in Benghazi, with 5 arrests and 1 protest reported this week. Beyond Benghazi, local reports from 06 Nov indicate two Chadian criminals were arrested after killing a Chadian shepherd in return for cash in Al-Marj. The victim was found wrapped in a blanket and dumped in a well.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Sporadic criminal activity; HCS head assaulted



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (02 Nov) Increased CPs including in Abu Slim & Zawiyat Al-Dahmani areas
2. (03 Nov) GNA claim repelled LNA attack in Al-Nahr & Khallat A-Furjan
3. (03 Nov) Five LAAF airstrikes target MJI
4. (03 Nov) Local from Gdadfa tribe kidnapped from residence
5. (03 Nov) Parked vehicle stolen from Al-Kabir Hotel parking lot
6. (05 Nov) LAAF airstrike targets GNA Rapid Intervention Force HQ; 2 Interior ministry officer killed & 4 others injured
7. (05 Nov) UN aircraft lands at MJ
8. (06 Nov) UN aircraft lands at MJI
9. (06 Nov) HCS head allegedly assaulted & evicted from frontline during visit
10. (06-07 Nov) GNA weakened on Khallatat Street front
11. (07 Nov) Gunmen carjack vehicle on World Islamic Society Road
12. (08-09 Nov) LNA gains ground in Northward push on Salah Al-Din front amid temporary GNA retreat
13. (09-10 Nov) Clashes continue on Khallat Al-Furjan & Ain Zara fronts

UN aircraft lands at MJI 48hrs after airstrikes

Following a series of Libyan National Army (LNA) airstrikes targeting Mitiga International Airport (MJI) on 03 Nov, sources confirmed that a United Nations (UN) aircraft landed at MJI between 1030hrs-1100hrs on 05 Nov. Separately, sources reported a convoy of approximately 15 vehicles was spotted travelling on Tripoli's Shat Road near MJI at approximately 1800hrs on 09 Nov. There is no further information available, though the convoy could have been affiliated with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) after plans to open a separate terminal at MJI. No further information related to the resumption of commercial flight operations.

Kidnapping over tribal tensions

Reports indicate unidentified assailants kidnapped a local man belonging to the Gdadfa (Gaddafi) tribe from his residence in the Salah A-Din area on 03 Nov. Initial reports suggest the incident was fuelled by tribal tensions.

Vehicle theft & carjacking

Reports a parked gray 2012 KIA Optima was stolen from Al-Kabir Hotel parking lot in the morning on 03 Nov. Separately, sources reported gunmen carjacked a grey Hyundai Sonata in front of Philadelphia Wedding Hall on the World Islamic Call Society Road at approximately 2330hrs on 07 Nov. The theft of parked vehicles and carjackings remain widespread across the capital city.

Drug raid in Ghot Al-Shaal

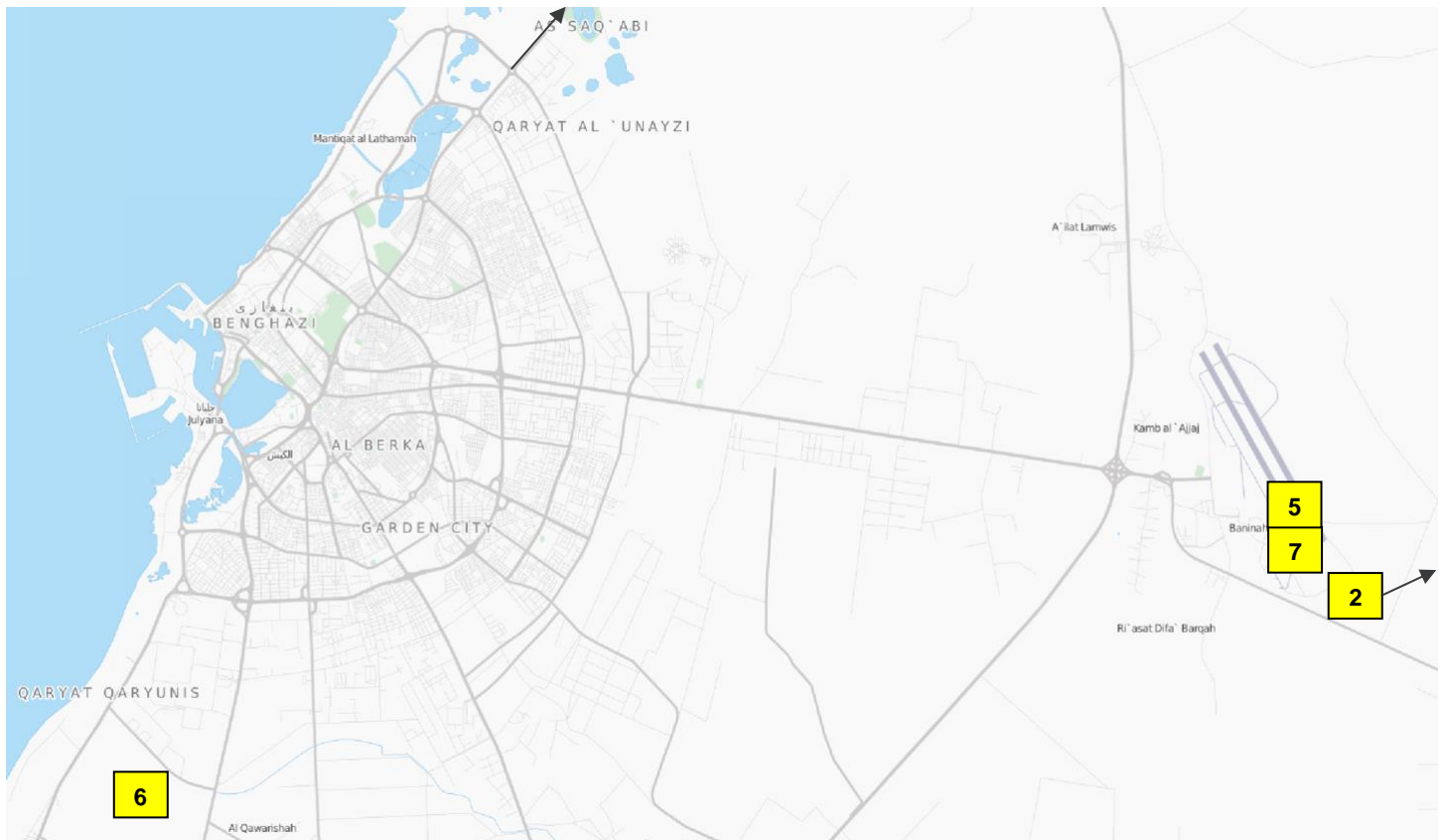
WB sources reported audible gunfire in the Ghot Al-Shaal area at approximately 2230hrs on 04 Nov. Reports indicate Zintan's General Security Directorate raided drug dealers resulting in an exchange of gunfire. Unconfirmed reports suggest one man was killed in the exchange.

HCS head allegedly assaulted in field visit

Local reports suggest the GNA-affiliated Counter-terrorism Force (CTF) expelled the High Council of State (HCS) head, Khalid Al-Mishri, during his attempted field visit to the Wadi Al-Rabei frontline on 06 Nov, in protest against his latest political initiative. Meanwhile, the commander of the Martyrs' Nuri Freiwan Battalion, Mohammed Freiwan, affiliated with the GNA's Central Military Region and Misrata Military Council (MMC), claimed that a prominent Muslim Brotherhood (MB) member was insulted, assaulted and expelled by the CTF. To corroborate his claims, Freiwan stated that Al-Mishri's Media Office did not release any photos of his visit despite announcing it at an earlier time on 06 Nov. Meanwhile, reports suggest Al-Mishri was welcomed by other fighters across other frontlines. Of note, Al-Mishri called for the unification of security and military institutions to combat terrorism, as well as the need for armed factions to join regular police/security forces in his five-point political proposal.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Arrest campaigns continue; BEN staff protest director's resignation



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (02 Nov) Gang arrested for hacking bank accounts & stealing cash
2. (02 Nov) Haftar meets HoR head in LNA HQ in Ar-Rajmah
3. (04 Nov) Two individuals arrested on charges of theft
4. (04 Nov) Three suspects involved in robbery arrested
5. (04 Nov) BEN staff protest against resignation of airport manager
6. (06 Nov) Al-Hasi tribesmen call for release of abducted elderly woman
7. (09 Nov) Libyan drug trafficker arrested in Benina area

Series of arrests

Local reports indicate Benghazi's Morality Police arrested an officer working at Benghazi's Customs Administration, in addition to another local, on charges of stealing electrical cables and equipment on 04 Nov. The suspects hid the stolen supplies in the Teacher's Resort, West of Benghazi. Following a raid on the location, several locally-made explosives and a landmine used for military purposes were found. No further information.

Separately, Benghazi's Anti-Drug Agency arrested a Libyan drug trafficker operating in the Benina area after receiving intelligence on the suspect's location on 09 Nov. Benghazi authorities continue to crackdown on drug-related crime across the city.

Further, Benghazi's Security Directorate arrested three suspects for stealing 28,000 Libyan dinars (LYD) from a rented flat near Benghazi's Municipal Hotel on 04 Nov. The suspects were arrested after the tenant reported the robbery to the police. Investigations revealed that part of the stolen cash was used for purchasing drugs. WB continues to record frequent arrest campaigns combating drug-related crime across Benghazi.

BEN staff protest GM's resignation

On 04 Nov, the Airport Authority affiliated with the Eastern-based Interim Government rejected the resignation of Benina International Airport (BEN) general manager, Abdallah Al-Shafei, and requested that he continued his duties. According to the Airport Authority, Al-Shafei submitted his resignation based on deteriorating health and daily issues at the airport, particularly on the security front. In response, airport staff protested and called on officials to revoke the decision on 04 Nov. In a statement, airport staff noted that Al-Shafei resigned due to a general lack of resources needed to address issues within the airport, despite numerous proposals previously submitted by Al-Shafei. Of note, security issues impeding the work of airport officials at BEN have been frequently reported. Multiple pro-LNA groups continue to act in a law enforcement capacity across Benghazi, and sometimes interfere in airport internal affairs.

Tribesmen call for release of abducted woman

A video surfaced of Al-Hasi tribesmen condemning the abduction of an elderly woman, Magbola Al-Hasi, from her residence in broad daylight in Benghazi's Busnaib area on 16 Oct. Al-Hasi was reportedly kidnapped by an unidentified armed group. The tribesmen demanded her immediate release. Of note, the victim was identified as the mother of Al-Nasr football club player, Ahmed Al-Hassi, who confirmed the abduction of his 68-year-old mother by an armed gang at approximately 0345hrs. Al-Hasi published images from a surveillance camera showing the vehicles involved and one of the kidnappers. Her whereabouts remain unknown.

6. What's next

LNA offensive & northward push; GNA political peace overtures

POLITICAL FORECAST

Political developments are now taking centre stage, even domestically where local factions are now embracing political rhetoric to compensate for the limited movement on the military front. Tensions are high and the rift widened between the GNA's decision-makers and field commanders fighting the war. This was evident in the reported assault of the head of the High Council of State (HCS), Khalid Al-Mishri, as he visited frontlines and following his five-point peace proposal, which was perceived by some GNA fighters as a peace overture to Haftar's forces. The incident highlights the fact that politics and negotiations are out of the question for some GNA fighting battalions, increasing the prospect that any negotiated settlement will create intra-GNA tensions. The HCS attempted to balance Al-Mishri's dovish statements by calling on the GNA to support forces fighting Haftar and hold accountable those who have failed to undergo their "national duties". Of note, Al-Meshri, sought to obtain the buy-in for his peace proposal by distancing himself from Muslim Brotherhood (MB) elements and reassuring the international community, particularly Cairo. In an interview, Al-Meshri, stated that the MB in Tripoli would not seek power and its influence would be curbed if Egypt stopped its support for Haftar's forces. Separately, the eastern government's foreign minister, Abdulhadi Al-Hweijj, continues to carve out a post-war political vision. Highlighting the prevailing legitimacy crisis, he spoke at an event at the Milton Institute in Rome, Italy. Al-Hweijj reassured that work is underway to regain control over the country and centralise decision-making in order to open up new investment opportunities, development and cooperation. Although it is unclear if Al-Hweijj met with senior Italian government officials beyond the Parliament's Chamber of Deputies, the visit is symbolic given Italy's traditional ties to the Tripoli government. Internationally, observers are of the view that US political efforts to reach a solution in Libya are set to increase in the medium term. Meanwhile, efforts led by the African Union (AU) have so far failed to bear fruit, according to analysts.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Former US Special Envoy for Libya Jonathan M. Winer explores the recent seizure of a shipment of Russian-printed currency by Maltese authorities and what this means for the Libyan economy. In an article published in *The Middle East Institute (MEI)*, Winer discusses the importance of the seizure as indicative of the role played by the economy in the current Libyan crisis and how a comprehensive solution to the current conflict may not be limited to the proliferation of arms given both sides retain the ability to finance the war effort. The author then looks at options available to the GNA to secure the country's economic sovereignty without necessarily inducing a liquidity crisis in the East. Winer writes "While it may not be possible to convince Russia to cease providing Hifter and the east the counterfeit, but not yet prohibited, currency, Libyan authorities do have tools to reassert their authority and to counter Hifter's now-stalled assault on the capital. Specifically, Sarraj and Kaber could declare the Russian-printed dinars to be non-negotiable after a certain date — such as Jan. 1, 2020 — stating that after that date Libya's Central Bank would not honor them for any purpose. At the same time, to prevent liquidity issues in the east and throughout the country, the Central Bank could order billions in new dinars from De La Rue, and agree to exchange them in full with anyone turning in the Russian ones until the non-negotiable date, and for a limited time afterwards. This would allow the GNA and the Central Bank of Libya to again secure control of the country's currency and economic sovereignty, while protecting the ability of Libyans, regardless of where they live, to have access to the currency they need to carry out their day-to-day lives. In the process, such a move would deny Hifter a critical source of extra-budgetary funding he has been using to fund the continuing siege of Tripoli. It might also help bring all the parties back to the diplomatic negotiations, enable the Berlin conference to take place, and potentially, some progress to be made in securing a cease fire as a prelude to more sustained talks.

SECURITY FORECAST

The nature of urban combat in Tripoli is gradually shifting towards to the street-by-street level engagement. Although difficult to ascertain, the lack of counter-offensive operations and decreasing number of aerial sorties would indicate a weakening posture and combat fatigue on the GNA side. LNA offensive operations are expected in the short term after multiple reports of reinforcements in support of Haftar's troops mobilized across Tripoli's southern frontlines. For their part, GNA forces appear to be mobilizing in Arrabita, likely in anticipation of an offensive on LNA forces in the vicinity of Gharyan, and more precisely Alasabaa. Such an offensive would help GNA forces redirect LNA forces southward to release pressure from southern Tripoli frontlines. However, a GNA-sanctioned offensive against LNA forces in Tarhunah, Al-Wattiyah airbase, and Al-Jufra airbase is yet to materialize. Given recent reports indicating GNA forces have been weakened, a large-scale offensive would be unlikely. Instead, GNA forces could prioritize the Ain Zara and Wadi Rabei frontlines to weaken LNA forces. This was highlighted by Ahmed Abushama, commander of the GNA's Volcano of Rage field room, who emphasized these frontlines as critical in cutting the LNA's supply lines to/from Tarhunah. West of Tripoli, local reports suggest tensions are brewing in Zawiya and could escalate in the short term between armed groups. Meanwhile, in Sabratah, the Eastern-based Interim Government's decision to establish a branch of the Cabinet of Ministers, could escalate tensions in the region between supporters/opponents of the LNA. Separately, the reopening of Ras Ajdair border crossing has expanded options of travellers. The crossing was reopened following an agreement between Libyan and Tunisian authorities, with confirmed on-the-ground reports from WB sources that traffic has relatively eased and waiting times have been reduced.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In a *Washington Post* article, Sudarsan Raghavan gives local accounts of Russian mercenary involvement across Tripoli's frontlines. The author writes: "Some pro-government fighters said they knew the mercenaries were Russian by the chatter on their hand-held radios. Both sides can access each other's frequencies at times, and the pro-government fighters recall hearing Russian spoken. In the battle for the empty school, fighters said, they heard the enemy fighters screaming commands and names in Russian. A *Washington Post* reporter also reviewed Russian identity cards, documents and other material belonging to the Russians found at the site of clashes, as well as photos and videos of the mercenaries taken by Libyan militia fighters." Further, Raghavan narrates details of a confrontation between GNA forces and alleged Russian mercenaries: "When the Russians entered the multi-story Awlad Telese school in Al Aziziyah, a dozen -pro-government fighters were on the floors above. A firefight broke out as the better-equipped Russians lobbed grenades and the militiamen fired with their AK-47 rifles at any mercenary who tried to come up the stairs, recalled two fighters who were there. Some of the mercenaries, the militiamen said, were blond. They wore helmets, black bulletproof vests and olive green and black attire. They carried black backpacks with small antennas and clutched black modern-looking guns, which fired rapidly. Soon, the bulk of the mercenaries were shooting out of the school's windows at the -pro-government fighters outside trying to push forward. "We were lucky," said Mohammed Abdul Gader, 30, one of the Libyan militiamen on the floor above. "If they were all fighting us, we would not have survived." The battle lasted nearly 24 hours. In the early morning, the pro-government fighters advanced in Turkish armored vehicles into the school, said Mohammed Hamadi, a 33-year-old commander who was there. The mercenaries blew a hole in the wall of a classroom and escaped."

About Whispering Bell



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