

1. The Big Picture

Cautious calm across Sirte amid negotiations to de-escalate

The week was relatively quiet in Libya. Developments gradually shifted to the negotiating table closely following Egypt's parliamentary approval to deploy troops on foreign combat missions on 20 July, and subsequent fears of a confrontation between foreign powers in Libya. Appetite for a negotiated settlement has increased likely due to the significant risk of miscalculation amid broader diplomatic efforts to avert a full-blown conflict in the central region. So far, the absence of military engagement in Sirte and Jufra is a telltale sign that negotiations are taking precedence. But a return to combat is possible in the medium term should negotiations fail. Overall, Sirte frontlines will likely remain in a state of flux while backchannel negotiations proceed on the diplomatic front.

On the ground, the frontlines remained relatively stable this week, despite sporadic security incidents. On 26 July, reports suggest a Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) operated by Government of National Accord (GNA) forces conducted a reconnaissance sortie over Sirte's Qasr Abu Hadi, prompting Russian Wagner Group private military contractors (PMCs) and affiliated Libyan National Army (LNA) forces to use anti-aircraft artillery in an attempt to down the UAV.

The incident marks the first documented UAV sortie by GNA forces over LNA-controlled areas in Sirte over the past few weeks. The development would come amid GNA and LNA reinforcements spotted heading towards Sirte frontlines throughout the week. In a press briefing on 22 July, LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mismary emphasised readiness to engage GNA and Turkish forces.

Moreover, the presence of Russian PMCs and expanding footprint continues to be documented across the central region. On 24 July, US Africa Command (AFRICOM) released satellite imagery showing Wagner Group forces and equipment on Sirte frontlines and at Khadim airbase. The AFRICOM director of operations, Bradford Gering, stated the supply of Russian military equipment demonstrates "intent toward a sustained offensive combat action capability, not humanitarian relief, and indicates the Russian Ministry of Defense is supporting these operations".

Additional open-source reports allege Wagner Group PMCs entered Ras Lanuf Refinery on 22 July. In a separate development, open-source video footage purported to document the PMCs onboard a helicopter over Benghazi, precisely southwest Benina, on 26 July. The PMCs reportedly took off from Benghazi's Benina International Airport (BEN).

On the political front, while there are tentative signs ceasefire negotiations are moving ahead, whether statements are followed by de-escalation measures on the ground remains to be seen. Turkey and Russia agreed to pursue ceasefire talks and establish a joint working group after a meeting in Istanbul on 22 July.

Shortly after formally approving the deployment of troops to Libya, Egypt hinted at its willingness to enter negotiations. Local reports suggest Cairo reiterated demands to pursue ceasefire negotiations, which include a complete withdrawal of Turkish military assets from Libya, a rejection of attempts to sideline LNA commander Khalifa Haftar and House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh from negotiations, and disarming militias across the country.

Meanwhile, on 25 July GNA Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj was received by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul, where the two sides discussed the latest developments in Libya as well as bilateral relations. According to local media, the two sides stressed the need to reach a political solution under the framework of UN resolutions and Berlin conference. The two sides also reviewed the bilateral security and maritime agreements signed in November 2019. Additional topics discussed included enhancing economic cooperation via the return of Turkish companies in Libya, as well as efforts to contain the coronavirus pandemic in Libya.

In a related development, a Central Bank of Libya (CBL) delegation headed by Governor Al-Sidiq Al-Kabir reportedly accompanied Al-Serraj on his visit, along with the head of the Audit Bureau, Khaled Shakshak, and other GNA finance officials. Al-Kabir reportedly met with Erdogan and discussed the final stages of an agreement to compensate Turkish companies contracted in Libya prior to the 2011 Revolution.

In the oil and gas sector, efforts to lift the blockade on exports are proceeding but are yet to bear fruit. The US Ambassador to Libya Richard Norland discussed with Aguila Saleh the need to support Libya's sovereignty, enable the National Oil Corporation (NOC) to resume operations nationwide, and achieve a peaceful solution to the Libyan conflict beginning with the stabilisation of the situation around Sirte and Jufra. Ambassador Norland reiterated his country's opposition to all foreign military interference in Libya and full support for UN-led dialogue.

KEY POINTS

- Ceasefire talks but escalation risk remains
- GNA PM meets Turkish president in Istanbul
- US AFRICOM: Wagner expanding footprint



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2. National Security Map

French Academic's visit sparks controversy; NOC reports clashes in Brega

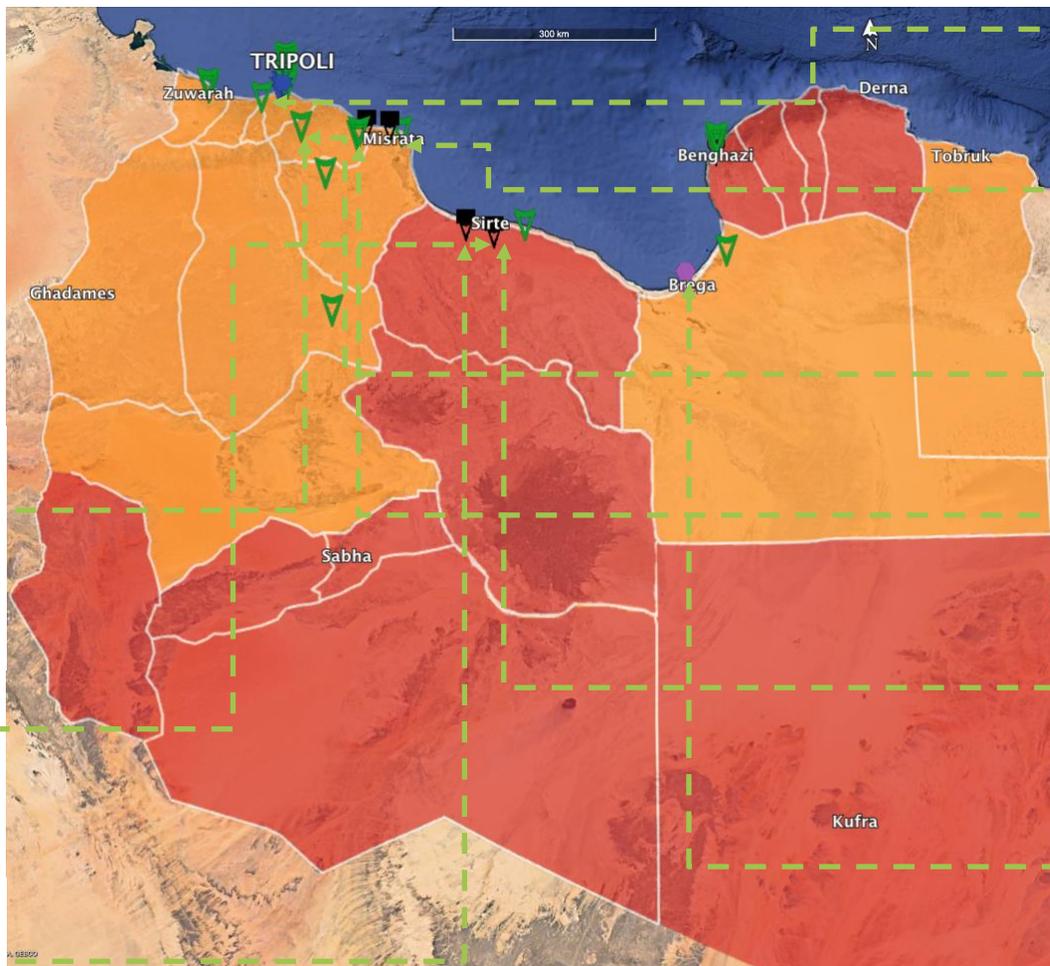
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



Tarhunah-based armed factions affiliated with the GNA's newly formed Joint Force prevented the convoy of French academic Bernard Henri Levy from leaving Tarhunah on 25 July. Levy's convoy was reportedly escorted by special operations units under the GNA Interior Ministry. The convoy was stopped precisely at the western entrance of Tarhunah, where warning shots were fired. The visit sparked controversy and was criticized by multiple GNA officials.

Open source video footage documents combat sorties by two MiG-29 aircraft over Sirte on 25 July. The fighter aircraft were spotted precisely near Abuajaila car market, on the road between Sirte and Qasr Abu Hadi. The MiG-29s were supplied by Russia via the Syrian regime and are operated by eastern European private military contractors (PMCs), according to a recent assessment by US Africa Command (AFRICOM).

The GNA Sirte-Jufra Operations Room reported Russian Wagner Group private military contractors (PMCs) fired indiscriminately at a local identified as Al-Sadiq Al-Forjani accompanied by his relative Faraj Abushufa, who were on their way to a camel pasture south of the Wadi Jarif area on 20 July

Reports indicate a GNA-aligned commander was assassinated on the military police road in the Wershiffanah area in the afternoon on 23 July. Details surrounding the incident remain limited.

Libyan Wings announced it will operate outbound flights from Misrata International Airport (MRA) to Istanbul, Turkey, starting on 26 July. The announcement comes after Libya's Airport Authority (LAA) announced on 19 July that MRA will reopen for departure flights on 26 June.

The committee tasked by the GNA's Justice Ministry to locate mass graves in Tarhuna recovered eleven blindfolded unidentified bodies in a mass grave in the city on 22 July.

Reports indicate a man succumbed to his gunshot wounds on 22 July after gunmen aboard a black Samsung vehicle opened fire on the victim during a failed carjacking attempt in Zliten's Na'imah area on 15 July. According to reports, the man was a resident of Misrata and a currency dealer who worked between Zliten and Misrata.

At least three LNA convoys were spotted en route to Sirte from the east on 21 July. The convoys reportedly comprised at least 40 technicals. GNA convoys were also reported heading towards Abugrein on 21 July.

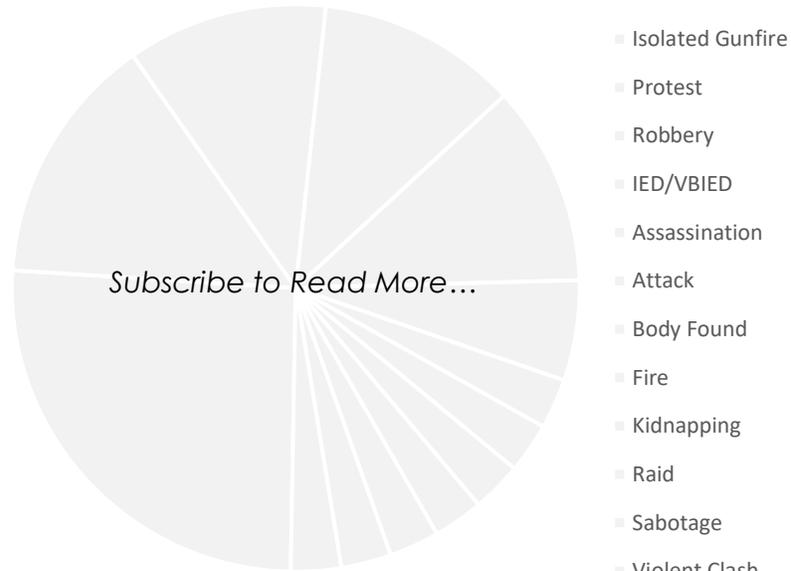
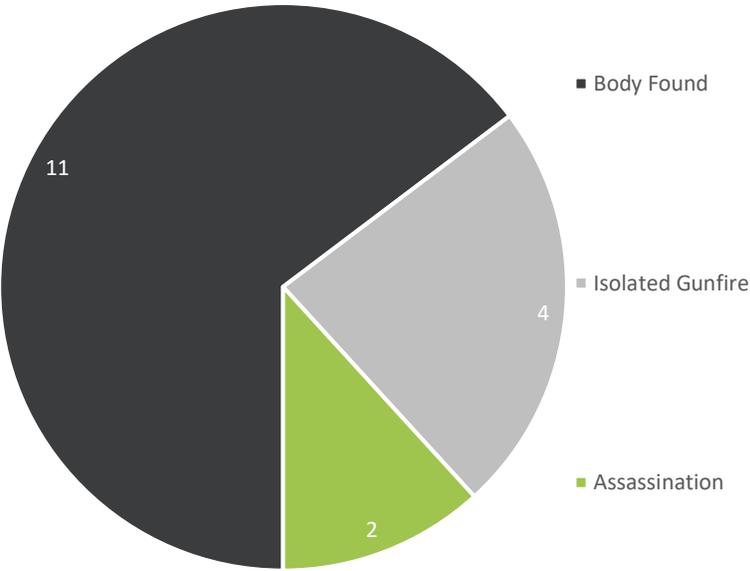
The National Oil Corporation (NOC) expressed its concern over the "serious deterioration" in the security environment across areas surrounding oil facilities in the Gulf of Sirte on 20 July. The NOC reported violent clashes between the LNA's Saiqa forces and the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) in the Brega area between 19-21 July. The PFG denied the NOC's claims.

3. Nationwide Security Analysis

11 bodies found in Tarhuna mass grave; crime on rise in Zliten

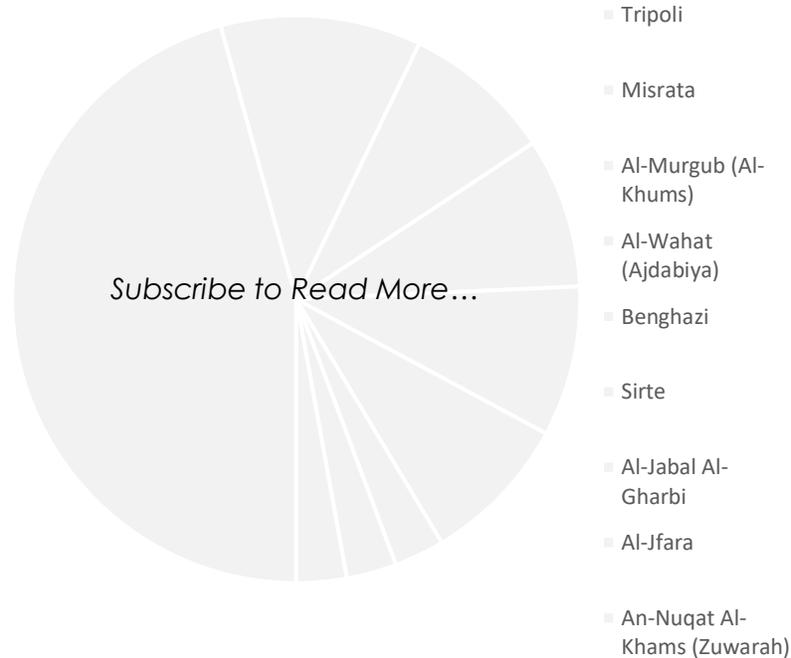
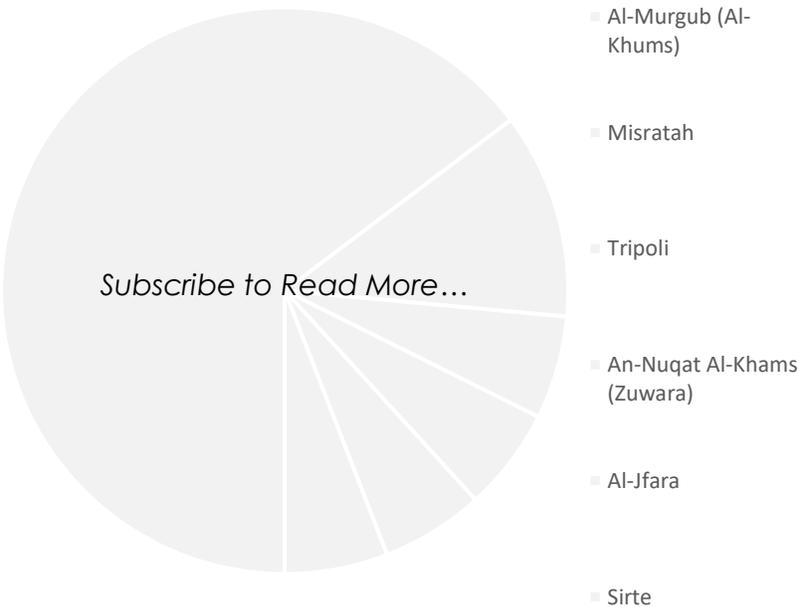
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)

Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)

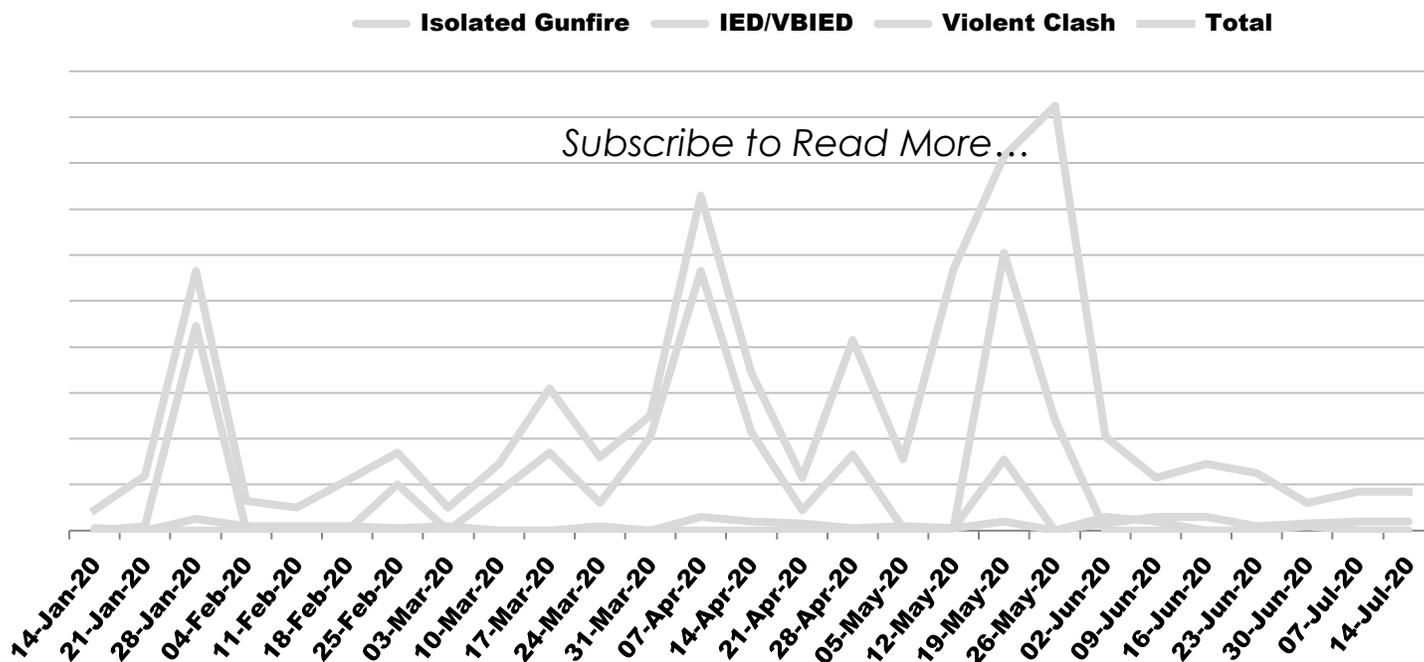


Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)

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 17 confirmed deaths in Libya parallel to the 17 deaths reported last week and 12 the week before. Eleven bodies recovered from a mass grave in Tarhuna accounted for the majority of fatalities. In addition, four fatalities were recorded as a result of gunfire-related incidents, as well as two assassinations. In Tripoli, WB recorded four IED/VBIED incidents, three arrests, three robberies, three protests, one assassination, one attack and one kidnapping.

In the wider western region, WB recorded sporadic security incidents across the districts of Misratah, Al-Jabal Al-Gharbi, Al-Murgub, An-Nuqat Al-Khasm and Al-Jfara. While sporadic security incidents were spread across the western region, the majority of incidents were recorded in the capital city. In the Jfara district, reports indicate a GNA-aligned commander was assassinated on the military police road in the Wershiffanah area in the afternoon on 23 July. Details surrounding the incident remain limited. Meanwhile, in Zliten, the GNA's Interior Ministry reported Zliten's Anti-Smuggling and Infiltration Unit thwarted a smuggling attempt involving 21 illegal migrants of different nationalities on 21 July. Separately, members of Zliten's Municipality, House of Representatives (HoR), High Council of State (HCS), and GECOL's Distribution Administration held an anti-GECOL protest denouncing lengthy power cuts across the city on 18 July. In Zuwara, reports indicate skirmishes erupted between two armed groups resulting in the death of an individual, likely by indiscriminate gunfire, in a beach resort on 24 July. Further, in Misrata, reports indicate skirmishes erupted between relatives over inheritance resulting in two brothers killing their cousin in the Sakt area on 21 July. The Misrata Security Directorate arrested the perpetrators on 22 July.

Meanwhile, in the central region, a military build-up in the Sirte vicinity and its surrounding areas continues to dominate the overall security environment as witnessed in recent weeks. Reports of military reinforcements from both sides, reconnaissance missions and artillery testing continue to circulate. However, despite ongoing GNA threats of an imminent attack on the Sirte-Jufra frontline, the latter has yet to materialise on the ground. Nevertheless, the security environment remains tense in the area in anticipation of possible confrontation.

This week, WB recorded two isolated gunfire cases and one robbery in Sirte. There were reports of sporadic gunfire in Sirte's Qasr Abu Hadi area at approximately 0130hrs on 25 July. No further details, though LNA forces were likely testing weapons in the area. Meanwhile, there were reports of heavy explosions in the vicinity of Sirte in the early hours of 23 July. Reports suggest the explosions were due to LNA forces testing weapons in Sirte's Qasr Abu Hadi area. Pro-LNA reports allege a Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) was downed, though there is no evidence to ascertain the claims.

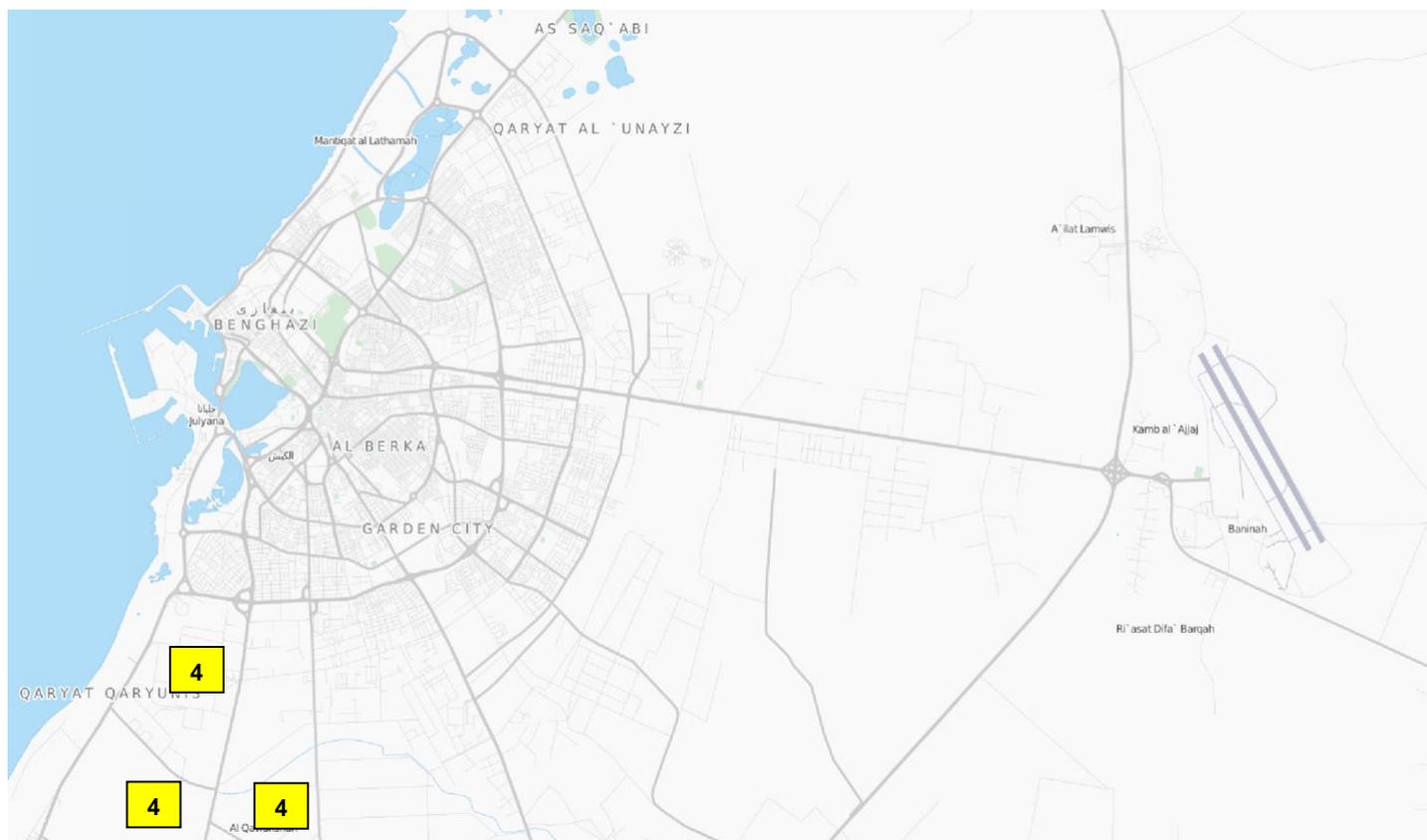
Separately, the GNA's Sirte-Jufra Operations Room reported Russian Wagner Group private military contractors (PMCs) fired indiscriminately at a local identified as Al-Sadiq Al-Forjani accompanied by his relative Faraj Abushufa, who were on their way to a camel pasture south of the Wadi Jarif area on 20 July. According to the Sirte-Jufra Ops room, the Libyan nationals were also targeted by a landmine explosion. Al-Ferjani suffered minor injuries, while Abushufa succumbed to his wounds.

Turning to the south, WB recorded no significant security incidents across the region. However, a surge in coronavirus cases in the south has added yet another layer of complexity to a region that is already suffering from diminished services.

In the eastern region, WB recorded three arrests in the city of Benghazi, in addition to two arrests and one violent clash in the Al-Wahat district. In Ajdabiya, local reports indicate the Investigation and Arrest Unit in cooperation with the Rapid Intervention Force raided an illicit alcohol factory in Ajdabiya's Hay Al-Wifaq area in the early hours of 22 July. The factory owner was subsequently arrested. Meanwhile, NOC reported clashes between the LNA's Special Forces (SF) and the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) near oil tanks in the Brega vicinity.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Benghazi dominated by arrests; greater powers delegated to CoS Al-Nadhouri



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (25 July) Haftar delegates more powers to CoS Al-Nadhouri in latest decision
2. (24 July) CID arrests criminal involved in house robberies in several areas
3. (23 July) Rescue Police Dept. arrested criminal gang involved in robberies
4. (22 July) CID arrests criminal gang involved in robberies in several areas
5. (19 July) Municipality Guard closes restaurants & fast food joints

Series of arrests targeting criminals

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) affiliated with the Benghazi Security Directorate arrested a criminal operating as part of gang carrying out house robberies across several areas of the city on 24 July. The arrest came after a local filed a police complaint. The suspect confessed to the charges against him.

On 23 July, Benghazi's Rescue Police Department arrested a criminal gang involved in several robberies across different parts of the city, including the River Road, Al-Kawadik land, Airport Road, and Al-Rahba. The acts of theft targeted houses, public and private sites, pharmacies, and vehicles. The suspects confessed to the charges against them.

Meanwhile, Benghazi's (CID) arrested a criminal gang on robbery charges across Al-Qawarshah, Al-Fakat, Qaryounis, and Bousnib areas on 22 July. The suspects admitted to several charges, including the robbery of a workshop and revealed that they sold the stolen goods in a local market.

Municipality Guard close restaurants

The Municipality Guard (Benghazi branch) closed all restaurants and fast food joints effective 19 July. The decision came in response to a surge in coronavirus cases in the city, where two infected patients died due to coronavirus complications on 19 July.

Haftar delegates more powers to CoS

On 25 July, the LNA commander Khalifa Haftar ordered the restructuring of forces directly affiliated to the LNA Chief of Staff (CoS) Abdelrazak Al-Nadhouri. According to decision no. 301 of 2020, the Dignity Operations Room, military regions, training department, operations department, military survey department, reconnaissance department, electronic warfare administration, and all security rooms are to be assigned to the CoS. The decision also includes full coordination between other independent bodies, departments, and units. The decision was described by local observers as a sign Haftar is gradually delegating his duties to other elements within the LNA.

6. What's next

Preliminary ceasefire agreement; negotiations continue over Sirte

POLITICAL FORECAST

The political impasse and threat of partition is adding pressure on stakeholders to formulate solutions to the conflict and reach a compromise. There are tentative signs that the contours of a ceasefire agreement are gradually being set, despite uncertainty over Sirte. Regionally, Morocco reportedly proposed an amended version of the Skhirat Agreement, or Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), as a way forward during Aguila Saleh's visit to the country accompanied by the eastern Foreign Minister Abdelhadi Al-Hweij on 26 July. The Libyan HoR stated that the talks will discuss all possible ways to end the Libyan conflict and achieve national and regional stability. Saleh's visit coincided with reports of a GNA delegation led by the High Council of State (HCS) head Khalid Al-Mishri arriving in Morocco to meet with government officials. Of note, Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita recently stated that the LPA should not be abandoned, particularly amid an absence of viable alternatives. On the tribal front, while local actors arguably have limited reach in light of foreign involvement in Libya, participants of the consultative tribal meeting held in Bani Walid attended by tribal delegates from the western region proposed six recommendations to solve Libya's conflict on 20 July. In a statement, the tribesmen reiterated Libya is a unified state where all Libyans enjoy equal rights; the need for an immediate cessation of hostilities with no preconditions; the formation of a delegation to work with Libyan parties and the international community; asserting that there is no alternative to Libyan dialogue to lay the foundation for state building and restore stability; rejecting external interference in domestic affairs under any justification; the need for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to hold external players interfering in Libyan affairs accountable. To conclude, the tribesmen reaffirmed that the country's sovereign resources belong to all Libyans and no party has the right to use the country's resources to exert pressure and deprive Libyans of their wealth.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In a Stratfor Worldview piece published by *The National Interest*, prospects for an Egyptian intervention in Libya and direct confrontation with Turkey are discussed. The article argues that Egypt will likely seek to limit the potential for a confrontation with Turkey, but the risk cannot be ruled out. The piece reads "If the LNA loses control of Sirte and Jufra, Egypt will thus likely launch a limited military intervention focused on maintaining stability along Libya's eastern half and ensuring the GNA cannot advance further eastward. Egypt's intervention would aim to bolster the LNA's defense of oil fields in central Libya and increase the defense of key cities along the eastern route to Benghazi, such as Ajdabiya. It would also likely include shoring up Hifter's air defense capabilities in Benghazi and the surrounding areas. Assets that Cairo could draw upon include special operation forces and conventional ground forces, as well as air power and air defense batteries. Egypt will use real and exaggerated tribal and historical ties to eastern Libya to justify such an intervention, and will also work with local aligned tribes to preserve its economic links in the region. Some tribes in Egypt's western desert have closer social and economic ties with nearby eastern Libyan tribes than they do with other Egyptian tribes. Although the Egyptian government otherwise typically views these tribes as politically marginal communities, Cairo will play up their relations with eastern Libya in order to justify the need to meddle in Libya's civil war to both the Egyptian and Libyan publics."

SECURITY FORECAST

The build-up continues in Sirte and skirmishes remain possible in the short term. The reported UAV recon sortie by GNA/Turkey over Sirte could be the prelude to broader offensive operations. If ceasefire negotiations fail, an offensive could materialize. In Tripoli, WB recorded a slight uptick in petty and violent crime across Zawiyat Al-Dahmani, Gorje, Al-Serraj & Al-Shouk Road areas. Meanwhile, the resumption of outbound flights from Misrata, albeit limited, is expected to boost confidence in the business environment. Tripoli's Mitiga Airport is expected to fully resume operations in the first two weeks of August after maintenance work is completed, though it remains to be seen if COVID-19 measures will be eased to allow inbound flights. Turning to the power crisis across the west, several General Electricity Company of Libya (GECOL) employees rejected the newly-appointed board headed by Abdelsalam Al-Ansari. Rejection of the new board will likely spark further anti-GECOL protests in Tripoli and the west. Reports suggest Misrata factions affiliated with the former GECOL administration are engaging in coercion attempts against the newly-appointed board in an attempt to receive funds. Local reports allege the former GECOL administration colluded with the armed factions and received protection in return. Of note, GECOL reported blackouts across the western and southern regions in the afternoon of 25 July after locals raided the power stations in Tripoli's Souq Al Jum'aa and Khoms' Wadi Kaam areas, in addition to the closure of the gas valve feeding Al-Zawiya Power Plant. In Zuwarah, skirmishes were reported between armed groups over a beach resort on 24 July. Similar incidents are possible across beach resorts in the western region given these represent a source of income as demand peaks during summer. Meanwhile, the security environment around Libya's oil and gas infrastructure remains unstable. If reports that Russian Wagner Group PMCs seized Ras Lanuf refinery are confirmed, the development would mean the PMCs are effectively in control of most of Libya's O&G assets after Sharara and Es Sider terminal.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Former Egyptian assistant foreign minister, Hussein Haridy, argues in an opinion piece published by *Al-Ahram Online* that Egypt's recent declaration Sirte and Jufra are red lines is a ceasefire call addressed to both the LNA and GNA. According to Haridy, Egypt's position has been made clear and Cairo's ceasefire line between Sirte and Jufra is also a call on the LNA to refrain from launching a counteroffensive towards the western region. "Thus, Cairo discourages Haftar from crossing this line to the west, if he plans, by any chance, to counter attack. Earlier, the Tripoli government was afraid that Haftar might think of launching a counterattack to recapture the towns and positions he lost earlier this year in the western part of Libya. On the other hand, President Al-Sisi said that Egypt is not an enemy to the western region of Libya — probably a reference to the GNA. These two messages should be reassuring for the Tripoli rulers. In the meantime, it aligns Egypt, to an extent, with the positions of Algeria and Tunisia regarding the Libyan conflict. This alignment is necessary as well as important if the three countries would weigh on future negotiations by the Libyans to carry out UN Security Council Resolution 2510, adopted on 12 February 2020, that supported the Berlin Process."

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