

Weekly Security Brief



Libya Weekly Insights

18–24 August 2025

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Introduction

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Libya Update

Security Overview

Libya's security situation remains volatile but not uniformly violent. The country is divided between rival administrations, and although large-scale warfare has abated since 2020, militia clashes and political violence still flare up periodically. In the west, Tripoli's fragile peace is punctuated by turf wars among militias vying for power. The east under Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) is relatively stable yet authoritarian, while the south suffers from lawlessness, smuggling, and extremist pockets. During 18–24 August, no major battle erupted, but the threat environment was highlighted by attempts to disrupt municipal elections and underlying tensions. Overall, Libya's security is tenuous: sudden conflict can ignite with little warning, even as daily life proceeds calmly in many areas.

Posture: Volatile

Libya's tactical situation can shift rapidly, **warranting a cautious stance**. Recent militia confrontations in Tripoli (in early July) and scattered violence in other regions underline that stability is fragile. **This week's calm is deceptive**; both political strife and militia maneuvering continue beneath the surface. **The posture is volatile – not actively deteriorating at the moment, but highly prone to unrest.**

Key Drivers This Week:

- **Militia Power Struggles in Tripoli:** The capital's uneasy peace is controlled by a patchwork of militias aligned loosely with the Government of National Unity (GNU). Tensions spiked earlier in August when clashes erupted between two dominant armed groups – the 444 Brigade and the Special Deterrence Force (Radaa) – following the brief arrest of a 444 Brigade commander. Those mid-August firefights in Tripoli's southern suburbs killed at least 55 people (per health officials) and were the worst fighting the capital had seen in over a year (note: this occurred 14–15 Aug, just before our reporting week). By 18 Aug, a ceasefire brokered by GNU officials and local elders halted the violence. This week, Tripoli remained calm, but the root causes persist: competition over territory, revenue streams, and influence within the GNU. Armed convoys were observed repositioning around Tripoli's airport road as militias reasserted control. The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) warned that continued militia mobilization in the capital risks renewed clashes. Thus, the specter of another Tripoli showdown remains a key driver – **one miscalculation by a militia leader could reignite fighting in the coming weeks.**
- **Election-Related Tensions & Sabotage:** Libya has seen a push to hold elections – both local and national – as a path out of its political deadlock. On 17 August, municipal council elections went ahead in 26 western municipalities, with a high turnout (~71%) and were praised as peaceful and well-organized. However, in the run-up to the vote, there were attempts to derail the process. In the early hours of 12 August, unknown assailants attacked the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) office in Zliten (west of Misrata), injuring two staff and damaging property. Then on 15 August, arsonists struck two HNEC field offices in the coastal city of Zawiya and nearby Sahl Al-Gharbi, burning election materials. UNSMIL “strongly condemned” these incidents as deliberate efforts to obstruct the democratic process. This week, as vote counting concluded, tensions lingered – losing local candidates and their allied militias in a couple of towns refused initially to accept results (in Zawiya, armed men briefly surrounded a municipal building on 22 Aug in protest). The high-level driver is that segments of Libya's elite (and their militia backers) fear elections could loosen their grip, leading them to sabotage or intimidate. While the successful 17 Aug polls were a positive sign, continued election-related unrest or reprisals (like attacks on officials or disputes over outcomes) remain a risk driver countrywide.
- **Political Deadlock Between East and West:** Strategically, Libya remains split between the Tripoli-based GNU (led by interim PM Abdulhamid Dbeibah) and the eastern administration aligned with Khalifa Haftar and the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk. No unified national government has been agreed, and this stalemate fuels insecurity. For example, each side continues to fund and arm loyal militias. This week saw intensified diplomatic pushes: Egypt renewed calls for an inclusive political solution and elections, warning that without progress, violence could easily reignite. Egypt's concern was underscored by the clashes in Tripoli earlier – Cairo's statement on 8 Aug came “two days after deadly clashes between rival militias in Tripoli”. In the east, Haftar and the HoR issued a fresh demand that Dbeibah step down, which the GNU rejected. This political tug-of-war ensures that Libya's security remains precarious. Neither side currently seeks a full military confrontation (the frontline around Sirte-Jufra is static), but the lack of a political breakthrough is a driver for continued localized violence and could lead to broader conflict if, for instance, one side unilaterally tries to hold national elections. The uncertainty around electoral timing (presidential elections promised since December 2021 but repeatedly postponed) keeps militias and communities on edge, as each jockey for advantage in case talks collapse.
- **Foreign Fighters and Mercenaries:** Another driver is the presence of foreign forces and mercenaries, which continues to impact security. Russian Wagner Group elements (or their successors under Russian MoD control) are still entrenched at bases in central and eastern Libya, like Jufra and near oil fields. Similarly, thousands of Syrian mercenaries remain attached to both GNA (GNU)- and LNA-aligned forces since the 2020 ceasefire. Although inactive on the front, their mere presence is a destabilizer. This week, local sources in the south reported sightings of Sudanese paramilitary fighters moving toward Sabha – likely linked to Sudan's internal war spilling over. The risk is that any spark (for instance, an incident involving Wagner fighters or Chadian rebels in the south) could escalate due to these armed foreigners. Moreover, the unresolved status of these mercenaries is a sticking point in peace negotiations. International efforts (led by the UN) to get them to depart have stalled, driving continued mistrust between Libyan factions. In summary, Libya's security is partly hostage to these outside actors and their agendas.

Tactical Incident Overview

- **Aug 12 – Zliten (West):** Attack on Election Commission Office. Just before dawn, unidentified gunmen stormed the HNEC branch in Zliten (a town west of Misrata). Assailants fired on guards and set part of the office ablaze. Two election workers were injured by gunfire. The attackers fled before local security arrived. The assault appeared aimed at sabotaging preparations for the 17 Aug municipal polls. Fortunately, backup ballot materials were brought in and voting proceeded. Authorities suspect a local militia opposed to the mayoral candidates in Zliten orchestrated the attack, but no group has claimed responsibility.
- **Aug 15 – Zawiya & Sahl Al-Gharbi (Northwest):** Coordinated Arson Attacks on HNEC Facilities. In the early hours, arsonists targeted two HNEC field offices: one in Zawiya (a coastal city west of Tripoli) and one in the nearby town of Sahl Al-Gharbi. Both offices were firebombed almost simultaneously. No casualties were reported, but the fires destroyed voting equipment and records. UNSMIL condemned these attacks as “deliberate attempts to obstruct municipal elections”. Local officials believe the perpetrators were elements linked to fuel smuggling gangs that hold sway in Zawiya – possibly retaliating against anticipated council results that might crack down on smuggling. Firefighters contained the blazes, and the elections commission relocated the Sahl Al-Gharbi polling to a secure site, allowing voting to occur on schedule.
- **Aug 17 – Tripoli & Western Region:** Municipal Election Day (Peaceful). On election day, voting proceeded calmly in 26 municipalities across Tripoli, Tripolitania, and parts of the Nafusa Mountains. Turnout averaged 71%, and no security incidents were recorded at polling stations. GNU Interior Ministry deployed extra police around voting centers, and major militias in Tripoli stood down per orders to avoid intimidation. The day was notable for its lack of violence – a success for Libyan authorities. (Operationally, minor hiccups included a few polling sites opening late due to misrouted ballots, quickly resolved.) The peaceful vote was a positive incident, demonstrating that with planning and local buy-in, communities can exercise their rights without militia interference.
- **Aug 18–24 – Tripoli:** No new clashes. Following the significant firefight in Tripoli on 15 Aug, the city remained under an uneasy ceasefire through our reporting week. Joint patrols by neutral police units (under the Interior Ministry) monitored hotspots like Ain Zara and Suq al-Juma. While no actual combat occurred, it's worth noting Tripoli's residents experienced heightened tension: checkpoints run by various militia factions popped up each night, and gunfire was sporadically heard as fighters nervously fired in the air. These did not escalate into direct clashes, but underline that the security situation is far from normal. By 24 Aug, most militia roadblocks had lifted as reconciliation talks advanced. Tripoli's brief return to calm is a fragile holding pattern rather than a fully secure environment.

(Elsewhere in Libya, the east and south saw only routine incidents. For instance, in Benghazi, a security sweep on Aug 20 led to the arrest of an ISIS suspect – without incident. In the south, near Murzuq, tribal skirmishes on Aug 19 between Tebu and Arab fighters left 2 wounded; local ceasefire committees intervened.)



Political & Militia Landscape

Libya's political landscape is characterised by **parallel authorities and entrenched militias, with no single entity exerting nationwide control. No breakthrough in unification occurred this week; familiar dynamics persisted.**

- **East vs West Political Standoff:** The country remains divided. In Tripoli, Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibah's GNU claims UN-backed legitimacy, controlling most of western Libya. In the east, the HoR and its appointed “Government of National Stability” (now under Osama Hammad) operate with LNA backing. Both accuse the other of illegitimacy. This week, the HoR denounced Tripoli's municipal elections as unlawful, while Dbeibah reiterated he would only hand power to an elected government. Egypt and UNSMIL continue mediation, with Cairo renewing support for legal harmonisation between east and west. Mistrust remains: the HoR blames Dbeibah for corruption and delays, while the GNU suspects Haftar's camp of plotting to seize Tripoli if the balance shifts.
- **Militias and Security Fragmentation:** Armed groups dominate the security environment. In the west, Tripoli's main factions include the 444 Brigade, Radaa/Deterrence Force, Nawasi Brigade, and the Stability Support Apparatus (SSA). These groups are loosely aligned under the Interior Ministry but rivalry persists, as shown by the August 15 clash triggered by the detention of a 444 Brigade commander. The GNU manages them through negotiation rather than command. In the east, Haftar's LNA exerts firmer control but remains a coalition of semi-autonomous units; recent purges show efforts to tighten discipline. Misrata's brigades remain loyal to the GNU, while Zintan and Zawiya militias pursue local agendas. In Zawiya, divisions over fuel smuggling have fuelled sporadic fire-fights and likely contributed to the election office arsons. **Overall, security is highly decentralised:** militias shape outcomes on both sides and undermine central authority when interests are threatened.
- **Economic Factors and Protests:** Oil output remains around 1.2m bpd under a revenue-sharing status quo. Haftar's camp occasionally threatens blockades to gain concessions, though fields and ports operated normally this week. Public services remain weak, with power cuts and cash shortages fuelling discontent. No major protests occurred, but both governments remain wary; Dbeibah announced salary and subsidy payments on 21 August to pre-empt unrest. Popular frustration remains a wild card: it can be exploited by political actors or erupt spontaneously, with militias ready to suppress demonstrations if they endanger patrons.



- **International Involvement:** Foreign powers remain decisive. Egypt, the UAE, and Russia back the east; Turkey, Qatar, and Italy support Tripoli. This week, Egypt called for swift elections and reiterated its mediation role, while Turkey maintained a quiet but deterrent presence through troops and drones. Reports of exploratory Egypt–Turkey talks, if confirmed, could reshape the balance. UNSMIL welcomed the municipal election results and urged acceptance of outcomes. Its envoy is expected to propose a new roadmap if no electoral consensus emerges. International actors continue to shape the environment, but domestic factions still drive events.

In summary, Libya remains locked in a fragile balance where militia dominance, political deadlock, economic pressures, and foreign involvement intersect to sustain a volatile but static status quo.

7–10 Day Forecast **by Region**

- ▶ **North (Tripoli, Misrata, Zawiya):** The coming week is likely to remain tense but short of major warfare (**Confidence: Medium**). In Tripoli, the ceasefire is expected to hold in the near term – recent losses and public backlash deter militias from open conflict. Negotiations under GNU oversight should maintain short-term stability (**Medium-High**). Trigger events remain possible: an arrest, territorial dispute, or fallout from municipal elections could spark brief clashes, likely contained to districts such as Ain Zara or Salahuddin. Expect increased joint patrols and checkpoints (**High confidence**). Misrata will remain stable (**High confidence**), with cohesive brigades controlling their turf; port and airport operations will continue normally. In Zawiya, smuggling disputes and local rivalries could provoke a targeted raid or firefight (**Medium confidence**). Scattered protests may occur in Tripoli or nearby towns if electricity cuts worsen, but militias will move quickly to contain them. Overall, the north should avoid large-scale conflict but see localised violence and security operations.
- ▶ **Central (Sirte, Jufra, Waddan):** The Sirte-Jufra front will remain quiet but heavily militarised (**High confidence**). Since the 2020 ceasefire, neither side has signalled intent to resume hostilities. Sirte, under LNA control, will continue functioning as the dividing line, with checkpoints preventing militia movement west. Both camps will maintain defensive postures and routine rotations, with no significant build-ups expected. A joint 5+5 military committee meeting could occur, easing tensions slightly (**Medium**). Jufra airbase will remain a hub for Wagner/foreign mercenaries; no withdrawals expected in the near term (**Low**). The Oil Crescent (Es Sidra, Ras Lanuf) should remain secure, with oil output stable (**High confidence**). Central Libya will therefore remain static – stable in its instability – with low risk of clashes absent a major provocation.
- ▶ **South (Sabha, Murzuq, Ghat):** The south will remain restive due to tribal disputes and criminal activity (**High confidence**). Large battles are unlikely, but sporadic violence is routine. Further clashes are expected in Sabha and Murzuq as Tebu, Tuareg, and Arab groups contest smuggling routes and governance (**Medium**). Murzuq may see firefights linked to municipal disputes, though usually limited in scale. The terror threat from ISIS or AQIM persists, with risk of IEDs or small convoy attacks. Banditry and kidnappings on highways (Sebha-Ubari, Sebha-Ghadames) remain high-risk. The LNA is likely to launch another sweep around Sabha in response to smuggler activity (**Medium-High**), which may trigger firefights or airstrikes in remote areas. Borders with Algeria and Niger are under LNA watch; no major incursions expected, though troop reinforcements at the Salvador Pass are possible. In short, the south will see continued low-intensity conflict and criminal violence, making travel outside main towns dangerous (**High confidence**).

Security **Advisory**

Recommended Posture:

A guarded operational posture is advised. All personnel should exercise extreme caution in movement and **maintain a high security profile**. In Tripoli and western cities, keep security teams on standby and movement strictly planned – travel in convoys of armored vehicles for any trips outside secure zones. It is recommended to limit on-ground presence in militia-dense neighborhoods of Tripoli (e.g., Salahuddin, Ain Zara) especially at night, given recent clashes. Non-essential travel to Libya's central and southern regions should be deferred; if missions to Fezzan are critical, use armed escorts and inform local authorities of routes. Staff in Libya should have evacuation plans via Tunisia or Malta prepared, in case the security situation rapidly deteriorates (e.g., resurgence of fighting in Tripoli). Continue remote monitoring of conditions; rely on local partners for updates before any movement. Essentially, maintain a posture of maximum vigilance and flexibility, ready to scale down operations or relocate on short notice.

Operational Impact:

The volatile security means potential disruptions to operations persist. In Tripoli, heavy militia presence and occasional roadblocks (as seen after the Aug 15 clashes) can impede city travel and access to Mitiga International Airport. Mitiga Airport itself is under Radaa militia control; flights are currently normal, but any intra-militia conflict could force temporary closure. Ensure flight plans include contingencies (e.g., rerouting to Misrata's airport if Tripoli airspace closes). Supply chain routes from Tripoli to the interior might face checkpoint delays due to militia or protest roadblocks – build extra time into logistics. The relative calm in the oil fields means oil exports are flowing; however, oil companies should remain alert to any indication of a blockade by eastern authorities, which could require field shutdowns. Communications remain generally reliable in coastal Libya, but in conflict spikes, authorities often cut internet in affected areas (Tripoli saw short outages during fighting). Thus, have backup comms (satellite phones) for critical comms. In the south, criminal activity can directly impact operations: for instance, NGO convoys have been hijacked on Sabha roads previously. All southern operations should be minimized; if needed, coordinate closely with LNA local command for protection. **One positive note:** the successful municipal elections indicate that local governance functions in many areas, which could ease some community engagement work. Still, overall, the operating environment is unstable – be ready for sudden changes like a curfew in Tripoli or fresh militia clashes that could force hunkering down. Regularly review and update security risk assessments and ensure all staff undergo hostile environment training.

Caution Areas:

Tripoli – Southerly Districts: Avoid non-essential presence in areas like Ain Zara, Salahuddin, Abu Salim, and near Mitiga Airport, which are militia strongholds. These locales were battlegrounds in recent clashes and remain potential flashpoints. Also use caution around government buildings in Tripoli (e.g., Prime Ministry, Martyrs' Square) during any political rallies – protests can turn confrontational or draw militia intervention. **Coastal Road (Tripoli-Tunis):** While generally safe, intermittent militia checkpoints or protests near Zawiya and Sabratha can occur. If driving to the Tunisian border, do so in daylight with security escort, and consider the alternate mountain route via Nalut if the coast has disturbances. **Sirte front line: Absolutely avoid travel east of Abu Grain toward Sirte.** This is a militarized zone with landmines and a hard LNA-GNU separation line. Crossing without high-level clearance could result in detention or worse. **Southern Libya: Exercise maximum caution in Sabha city** (high crime, kidnappings) and do not travel outside main urban areas. Roads in the south, particularly the Sabha-Murzuq and Sabha-Ghat routes, are notorious for armed robbery and militia checkpoints. If travel is mandatory, use security and inform LNA units. **Border regions with Sudan/Chad:** Avoid border proximity near Kufra, Murzuq, and Ghat – lawless areas with traffickers and possibly Chadian or Sudanese rebel incursions. **Oil installations in remote areas:** While currently calm, they could be targets for sabotage if politics sour. **Sites like Sharara, El Feel, Zueitina should maintain enhanced security – foreigners should not linger without robust protection.** **Finally, remain cautious in Benghazi and Derna in the east:** they are under LNA control and stable, but there have been occasional bombings (likely by extremist remnants). Keep a low profile there, as any gathering could be targeted by those seeking to destabilize Haftar's image of control.

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