

Benghazi airspace closed for several hours to enable US drone patrols

Media Gallery

By George Grant.



The Inkerman Group, an intelligence company, says US drones have likely been operating over Libya for several months.

*Tripoli, 14 September:*

The airspace over Benghazi was closed for several hours this morning, reportedly to enable unmanned aerial drones to patrol overhead.

The manager of Benghazi's Benina International Airport told reporters earlier today that the airspace was closed shortly after midnight for security reasons.

"Benghazi airspace has been closed since 00:30 GMT for routine security checks" Taba Mohammed said, without elaborating further. The airspace is said to have reopened around 12:15.

There have been reports that flights were grounded as part of an operation to prevent suspects involved in Tuesday's fatal attacks on the US consulate from using the airport as an escape route.

However, a UK-based risk and intelligence company has confirmed to the *Libya Herald* that it believes the primary purpose of the closure was to enable patrols by American drone aircraft.

“We believe our intelligence is accurate”, said Cassie Blombaum, an intelligence analyst at the Inkerman Group.

“We have multiple sources, including video footage of Libyans actually spotting the drones”.

Drones were reported to have been deployed over Libya following Tuesday’s attacks, which resulted in the death of the American ambassador together with three of his staff, but Blombaum says that the surveillance aircraft have likely been operating in the country over a much longer period

“We reported back in June that the US had drones operating out of Derna”, Blombaum said.

“This followed reports by CNN, citing a senior Libyan intelligence source, that the US was orchestrating drone attacks inside Libya”.

According to the CNN report, the US was using drones inside Libya to monitor suspicious activity around Derna, and that this was being done with the full knowledge of the Libyan government.

At the time, one militant commander operating in Derna, Abdulbasit Azuz, had complained that a drone strike had targeted his training camp in the east of Libya, although this was not independently verified.

The US government is notoriously secretive about its drone programme, which operates in many countries, and is rarely publicly acknowledged.

It is not known how many drones are operating over Libya, nor for how long the programme inside the country has been active.