



1. The Big Picture

Paris talks & GNA corruption allegations to escalate tensions

This week stands as the latest evidence of the potential for political developments to have ramifications on the security situation in Libya. The publication of the Audit Bureau 2017 report and corruption allegations it contains, threaten to escalate tensions among Tripoli-based militias and significantly undermine the Government of National Accord's (GNA) public image and its negotiating leverage ahead of the Paris talks scheduled for 29 May.

The Audit Bureau's 2017 Annual Report documents multiple corruption-related issues and significant irregularities in spending, despite appreciating oil revenues. The report will likely have immediate repercussions for GNA officials and the Central Bank of Libya (CBL).

From a security standpoint, the report has increased calls for transparency locally and could escalate tensions among militias nominally under the GNA and Presidential Council (PC). Although unconfirmed, there is mounting evidence to suggest the corruption allegations in the report were the likely motive behind the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB), led by Haithem Tajouri, the 301 militia, and Ghneiwa, seizing Presidential Guard (PG) positions, which resulted in their retreat, across Tripoli on 25 May.

Some militias and armed groups in the West could seek to exploit the corruption allegations given they will likely feel entitled to the misused funds and/or simply as part of opportunistic attempts to expand territory/influence. Tensions over the corruption allegations could potentially materialize into sporadic security incidents in the next few weeks.

Meanwhile, politically, the timing of the report coincides with an upcoming meeting on the Libyan crisis in the presence of high-level regional and international representatives, organized by French President Emmanuel Macron, following a draft 13-point non-binding political roadmap.

While the talks highlight France's growing role in Libya, there are limited prospects for achieving significant political breakthroughs without alienating local groups, including Tripoli-based militias. Issues such as the importance of a constitution prior to the elections and the unification of the central banks will likely remain areas of contention.

The Paris initiative could polarize local groups in Libya, especially the emerging Misrata-Zintan alliance. Thus far, Misrata has declined to attend the talks, while at least 13 prominent militias and military councils in the West rejected the initiative. It is likely that the brigades perceive the Paris talks as a mechanism to sideline them and potentially exclude them from the future political process. There is a possibility, however, some militias are attempting to gain negotiating leverage and ensure their voices are heard in any potential future outcome.

Regardless of the outcome(s), the talks could exacerbate tensions in a post-Audit Bureau report context, potentially modifying existing alliances, especially should local groups perceive the initiative as foreign interference and an attempt to militarize Libya.

KEY POINTS

- Report to escalate militia tensions
- GNA public image impacted
- Limited prospects for Paris solution



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2. National Security Map

IS SVBIED attack targets LNA checkpoint South of Ajdabiya; attack on CP North of Awjilah

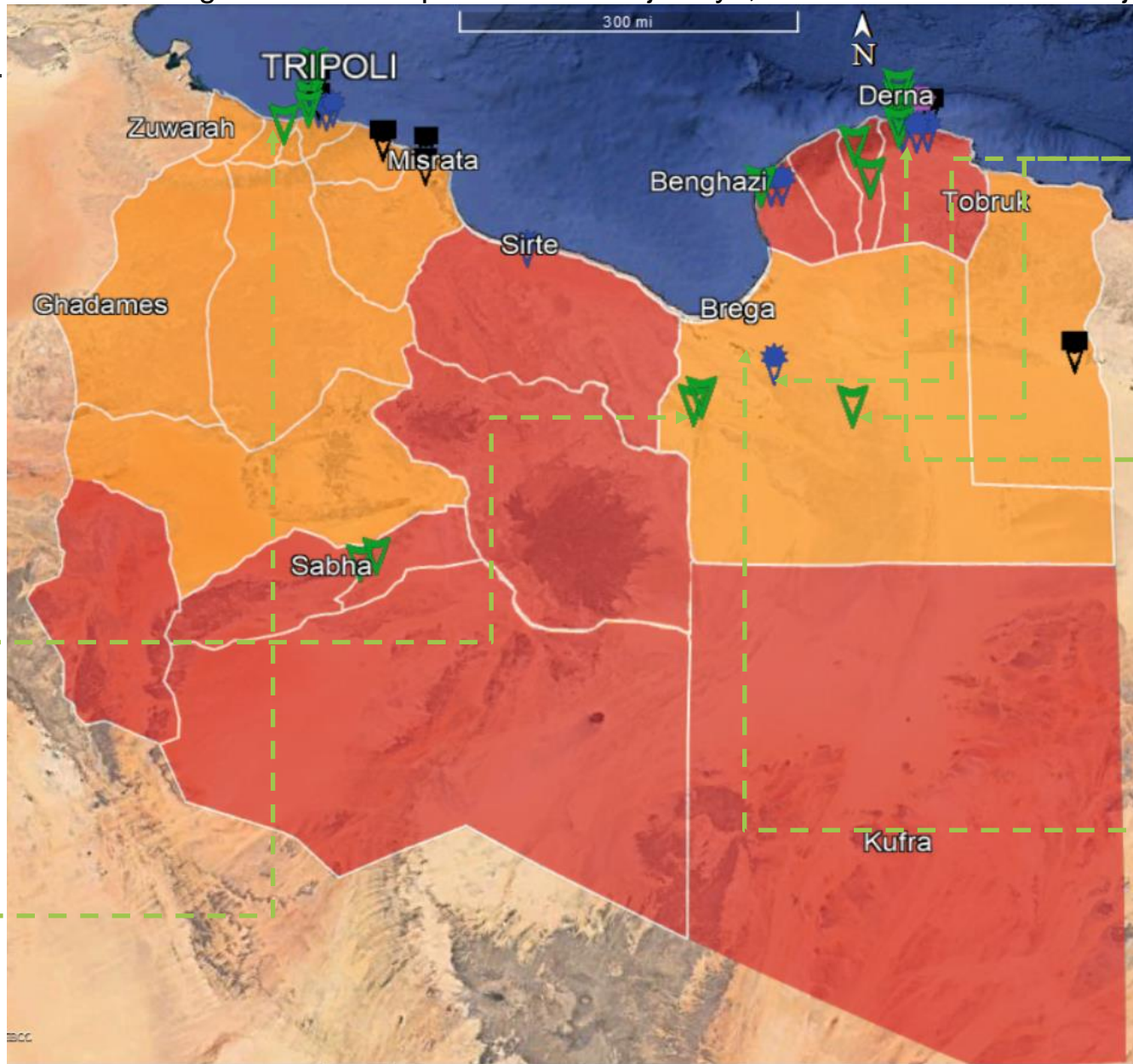
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



An Islamic State (IS) suicide vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (SVBIED) attack targeted a checkpoint manned by the Libyan National Army's (LNA) 152 Battallion, approximately 60 kms South of Ajdabiya, resulting in at least three fatalities among the LNA soldiers on 22 May. Meanwhile, minutes later, at least 10 IS militants, attacked, set fire to, and seized another LNA checkpoint North of Awjilah. Reports suggest the militants kidnapped at least two LNA soldiers.

Reports suggest the media coordinator of the Omar Al-Mukhtar Operations Room, Abdul Karim Sabra, confirmed that one of the leaders of the Islamic State (IS) in Libya, identified as Ibrahim Al-Helles, handed himself over to the Internal Security Service on 20 May.

A state of alert has been declared among military units near Ajdabiya to prepare for any potential terrorist attack targeting Libya's oil infrastructure and export terminals. The state of alert appears to be a preemptive measure. While there is no specific and confirmed intelligence over a potential attack in the Oil Crescent, it comes in response to other reports suggesting some terrorist elements have fled Ajdabiya.

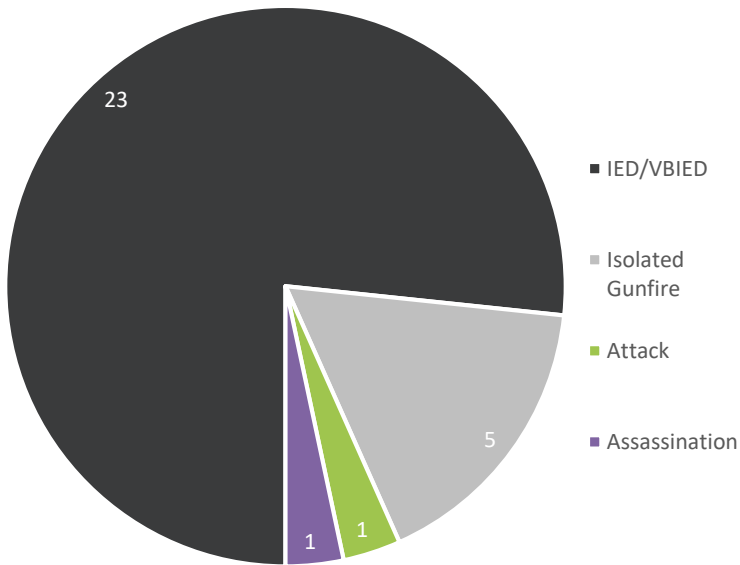
Young protesters from the town of Maradah, on 23 May, closed the Al-Raquba oil field, which is reportedly producing more than 5,000 barrels per day (bpd) of crude and feeding the Brega Port, though impact on production remains unclear.

An armed convoy heading from Al-Zawiya towards Sabratah, including the Al-Ammu militia, was prevented from entering Surman by a Western criminal investigation unit in the city on 19 May. The situation was tense between the two sides, with reports suggesting the Al-Zawiya force retreated to their camps on the same day. Previous unconfirmed reports suggested some Zawayah armed groups retreated from Surman and into the Zawiya Oil Refinery.

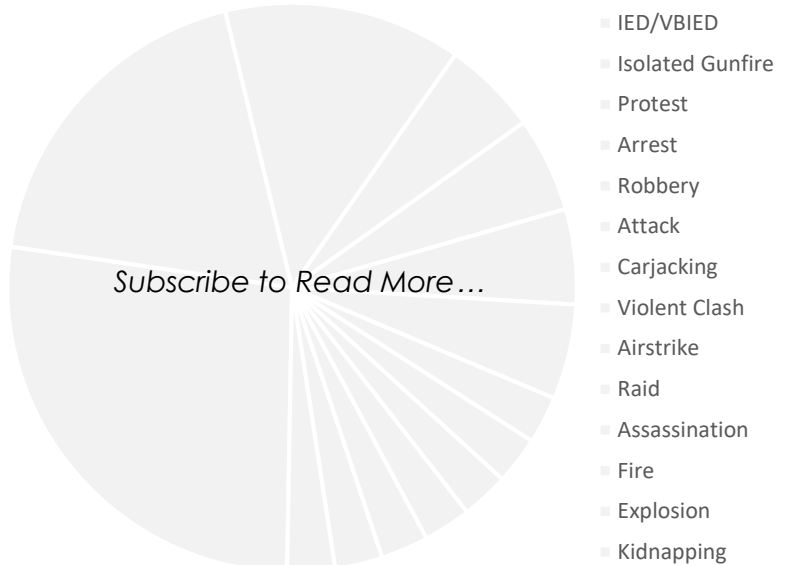
3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Increase in nationwide fatalities due to IED/VBIED incidents

Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



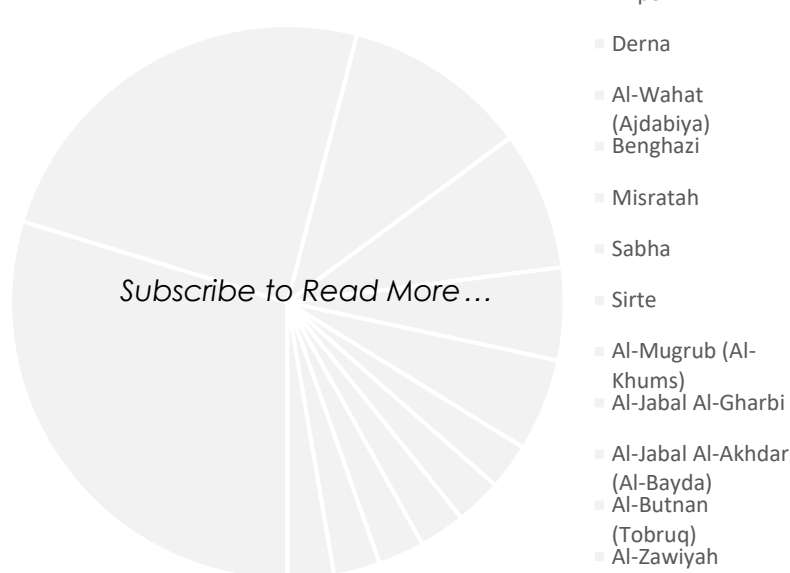
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



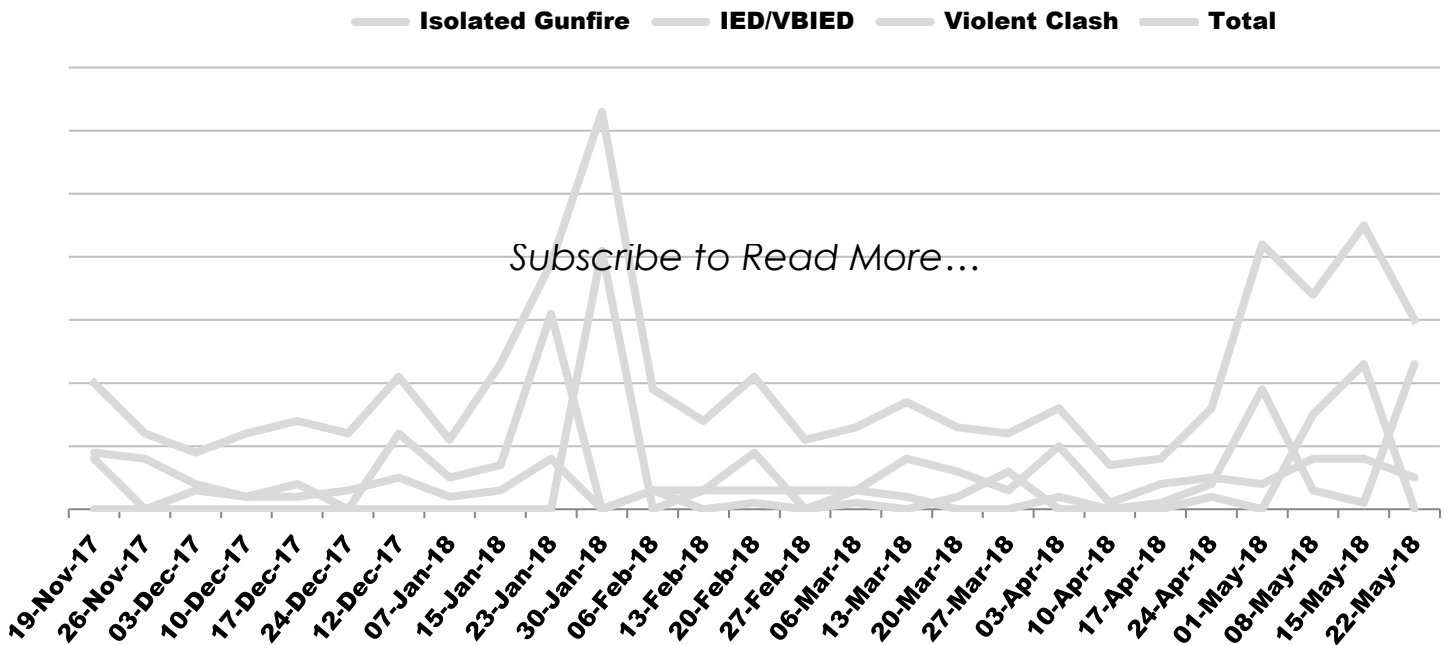
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)



Nationwide Fatalities by Type of Attack (Past 27 Weeks)



Data Analysis

Whispering Bell recorded this week a total of 30 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 45 deaths reported last week and 34 the week before. While there was a relative decrease in the nationwide fatalities numbers recorded this week, fatalities due to IED/VBIED incidents increased exponentially, accounting for approximately 75% of the total number of deaths. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country, including 7 cases of isolated gunfire, 10 IED/VBIED reports, 5 protests, 2 carjackings, 1 kidnapping, and 2 arrests.

In Western Libya, Whispering Bell recorded a total of 15 incidents, including 11 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli. Whispering Bell recorded in Tripoli increased militia tensions and movements. Reports suggest a local militia consisting of 10 armed men attacked the building of the National Authority for Combating Corruption located in Tripoli's Tajoura area in the morning on 21 May. Following the attack, the militia stole documents and files related to national corruption allegations. Moreover, reports suggest an employee's vehicle was stolen, in addition to mobile phones and computers. There were no further reports of security incidents. Meanwhile, there were protests on 20 May, by a few dozen Tripoli residents, including some Derna Protection Force (DPF) and Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) sympathizers, who gathered outside the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) camp in Tripoli's Janzour area, accusing the UN of negligence over Derna.

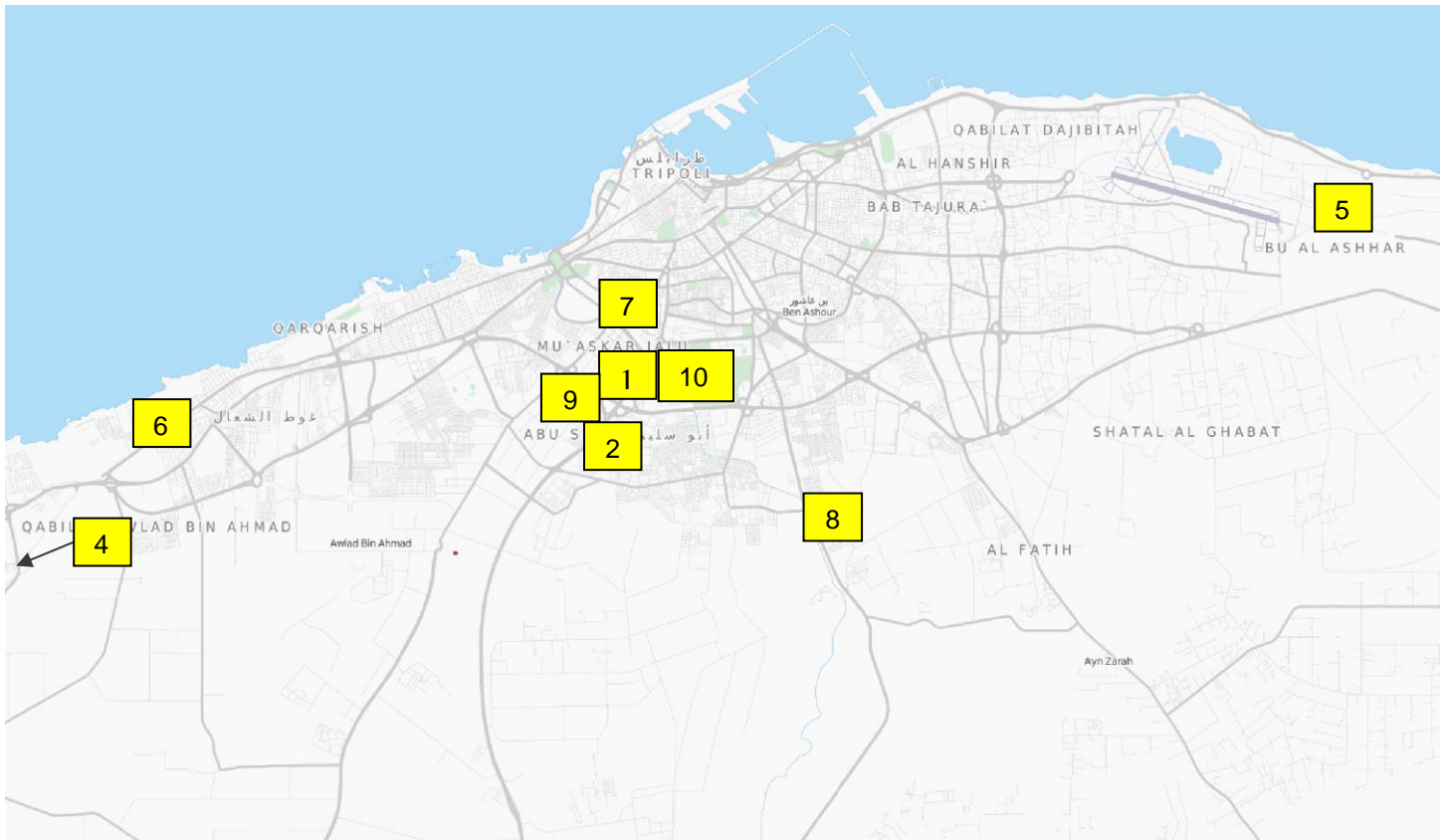
The week in Central Libya was marked by the discovery of improvised explosive devices (IED) on the western outskirts of the city following local reports in the morning on 23 May. The demining team reportedly visited the site and found a significantly large IED linked to other IEDs and ready for detonation. The team was unable to set a date for the removal of the IEDs due to a reported lack of resources available. The type of IEDs found remains unclear.

Turning to southern Libya, Whispering Bell recorded a relative stabilization of the security situation, which could be related to the recent announcement of the end of tribal clashes. However, tensions and criminal activity will likely prevail in the short term with the possibility of clashes resuming with little to no warning. Whispering Bell received reports that extremist groups, both local and Islamic State (IS), could exploit the lack of security and stability in the South to establish a stronger presence and logistical supply lines.

In Eastern Libya, Benghazi and Derna continue to witness episodes of violence. The VBIED attack in Benghazi was the latest evidence of the city's unstable security situation and prevailing tensions. In Derna, heavy clashes continued on the outskirts of the city, especially in the South-West. The LNA announced the death of the 36th Al-Saiqa Brigade commander, Brigadier General Abdul Hamid Buakilh Al-Warfali, due to an attack by the Derna Protection Force (DPF).

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Authorities locate and dismantle series of IEDs across Tripoli



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (18 May) Unidentified assailants carjack vehicle in Gharghour
2. (19 May) Authorities defuse 2 IEDs in Abu Sleim
3. (20 May) At least 5 former regime figures arrested South of Tripoli
4. (20 May) Protest against Derna offensive in Janzour
5. (21 May) Militia attacks anti-corruption building in Tajoura
6. (21 May) Dispute between TRB and IDPs in Al-Seyahiya
7. (21 May) Unidentified assailants kidnap/arrest two men
8. (21 May) Authorities dismantle 2 RCIEDs in Salah al-Dein
9. (22 May) Authorities dismantle 2 IEDs in Al-Fellah
10. (24 May) Dispute between 2 men and members of Bab Tajoura

Total of 6 IEDs dismantled

Authorities defused two Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) near the highway in Tripoli's Abu Salim area, in the morning on 19 May. Pictures circulated on social media show two small remote devices, which suggests the IEDs were radio-controlled (RCIED), manufactured with artillery shells as the main explosive charge. Meanwhile, in a similar incident, authorities found and dismantled two RCIEDs in Tripoli's Salah al-Dein area in the evening on 21 May. Pictures of the RCIEDs indicated a similar design and use of components to the devices found on 19 May. Beyond this, authorities found and dismantled two IEDs in Tripoli's Al-Fellah area, near the Government of National Accord's (GNA) Ministry of Justice building, at approximately 1930hrs on 22 May. This was the third such incident since 19 May, representing a total of 6 IEDs found across the capital city. While the possibility that a group could be behind the IEDs with the intent to destabilize the security situation in the capital city cannot be ruled out, a deliberate

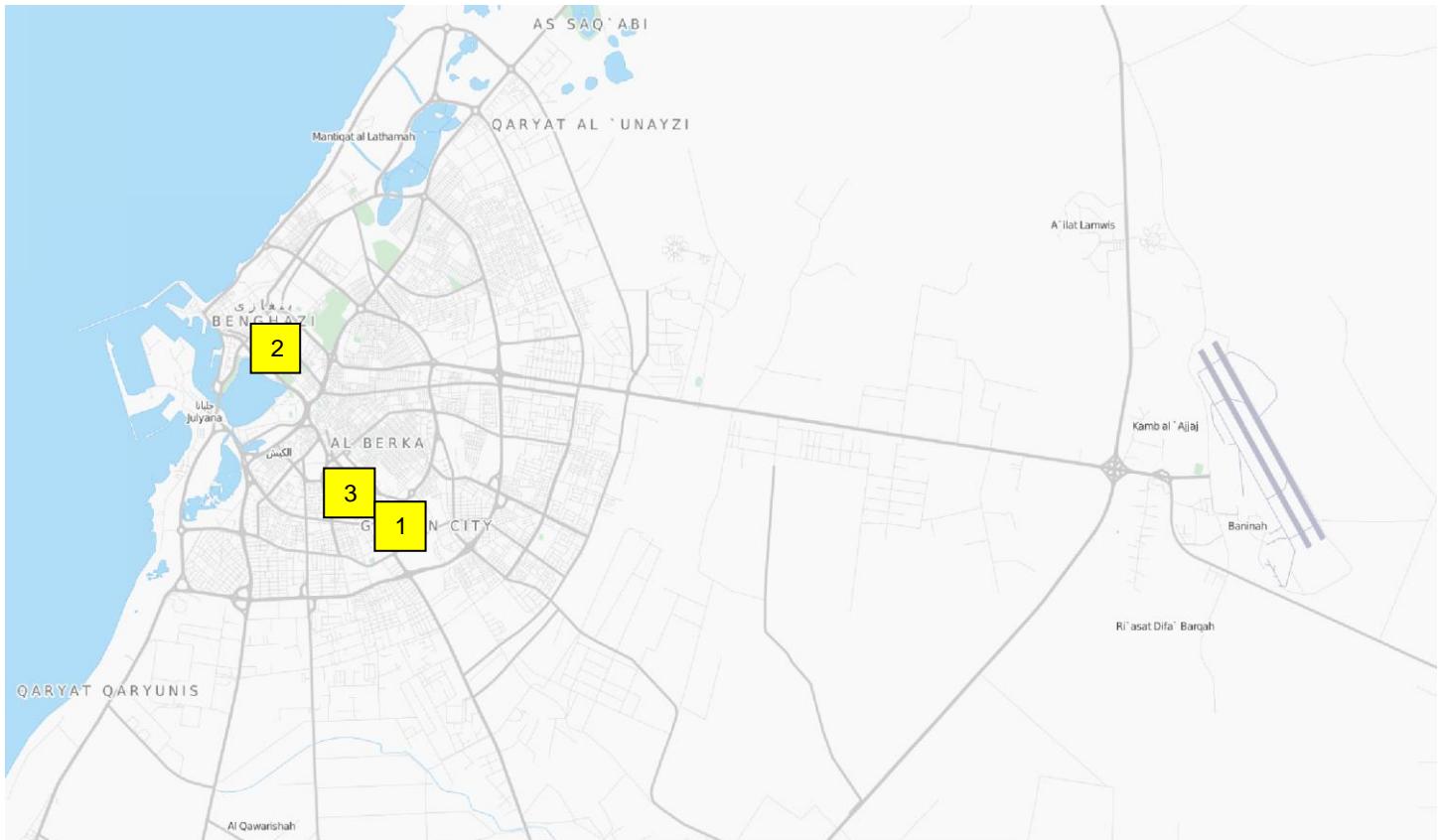
campaign to assert legitimacy and/or secure funding remains plausible. There could be a deliberate attempt by some elements within security forces to project such a threat to assert capabilities in combating terrorism, especially following the controversial decision to grant the Deterrence Apparatus (former Special Deterrence Force) a wider counter-terrorism mandate.

Dispute sparks local tensions

Tensions escalated into local protests following a dispute between two young men and members of the Bab Tajoura Brigade, affiliated to the Presidential Council (PC), in Tripoli's Ras Hssen and Ben Ashour area on 25 May. The dispute resulted in the killing of the two local men by the Bab Tajoura members on 24 May. Protests erupted on 25 May demanding the perpetrators be handed over to authorities, which prompted the Bab Tajoura Brigade to withdraw from its position in Ben Ashour. The Deterrence Apparatus, subsequently reinforced its presence in the area.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

VBIED detonates near Tibesty hotel; 8 fatalities and 11 casualties



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (20 May) Man killed inside apartment in Al-Zaitouna
2. (24 May) Deadly VBIED detonates near Tibesty hotel
3. (25 May) LNA commander survives assassination

Deadly VBIED explosion

A vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated in central Benghazi, on Jamal Abdel Nasser Street, near the Tibesty Hotel, killing 8 people and wounding at least 11 others at night on 24 May. While information related to the identity of the perpetrators and motive(s) behind the attack remains unclear, the incident stands as the latest evidence of Benghazi's unstable security situation. The explosion represents the fourth documented significant attack in Benghazi in 2018, following a failed assassination attempt in the Sidi Khalifa area, the IED bombings in Saad Bin Obada Mosque, and the twin VBIED explosion in Benghazi's Salmani district. Meanwhile, there remain conflicting reports over the potential motive behind the attack, which was condemned by multiple foreign governments. Pro-Libyan National Army (LNA) officials have directly linked the attack to the ongoing offensive in Derna, accusing Islamists of carrying out the attack. Other unconfirmed reports have claimed, without any evidence, that the Islamic State (IS) was responsible.

Overall, regardless of the motive and identity of the perpetrators, the attack will likely have a direct impact on Haftar's image. The development will likely further undermine his attempts to establish a stronger foothold following his absence and return from hospitalization. In response, Haftar will likely engage in further reshuffling of the security apparatus and seek to eliminate perceived internal threats in the short to medium terms.

Assassination attempt

The commander of the Libyan National Army's (LNA) 21 Al Saiqa Brigade, also known as Al-Zawiya Martyrs Brigade, Jamal Zahaoui, stated he survived an assassination attempt in Benghazi on 25 May. Zahaoui did not elaborate further on the circumstances related to the assassination attempt. Neither the identity of the perpetrators nor the targeting methods used are currently known. The incident stands as a clear indicator of the prevailing internal tensions and discord within LNA leadership, specifically in Benghazi.

6. What's next

France to put forward proposal in talks with Libya's political figures

POLITICAL FORECAST

Libya has recently witnessed a series of vital political developments that will likely have wider ramifications on the political and security environment, in particular with relation to the upcoming elections. France is set to hold talks regarding a proposal to end the turmoil and subsequently determine the unification of institutions and the holding of elections. The talks are to be held in the presence of Khalifa Haftar, Fayez Al-Serraj, Khalid Al-Meshri, and Aguila Salah, in an attempt to reach consensus and end the political fragmentation. Moreover, according to the proposal put forward by France, a vital step in the political process is the unification of the rival East and West central banks. Furthermore, the recent annual report of 2017 published by the Audit Bureau highlights widespread government corruption and the misuse of funds. The report seems to have sparked local dissatisfaction and may result in tensions across Libyan cities. Amid the House of Representatives end term in August, an absence of solid rapprochement between the HoR and high Council of State (HCS), along with East-West divisions, unification prospects remain limited.

SECURITY FORECAST

In Tripoli, a series of IEDs were located and dismantled across the city, whilst Tripoli's main militias seized multiple Presidential Guard (PG) positions. Such militia tensions are likely to remain and could be exacerbated by political developments amid unconfirmed reports over potential separate moves by Gaddafi loyalists, Misrata, and Zintan elements into the capital city. In Al-Zawiya, militia and/or local tensions may affect the security situation the city. Moreover, in the wider Western region, security incidents related to ongoing smuggling activities will likely persist. In Libya's South, while tribal clashes have tentatively come to a halt, extremist elements, both local and Islamic State (IS), could exploit the lack of security and stability in the South to establish a stronger presence and logistical supply lines. In the East, the Libyan National Army's (LNA) offensive in Derna is likely to spark further local dissatisfaction amid reports of shortages and security incidents and as fighting moves towards the city. In Benghazi, a VBIED attack brought an end to the city's relative calm, and will likely prompt increased LNA security presence and/or arrests, in addition to potential reshuffles within the LNA.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In an article for "*The Washington Institute*", the author, Ben Fishman, argues that Libya should focus on municipal elections, development projects, and a dialogue between militias in place of focusing on national-level polls. "In his April 13 address to Arab foreign ministers, UN special envoy for Libya Ghassan Salame described a constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections as equally important. Further, he burdened the HOR and HSC with producing an agreement on how to proceed, effectively enabling either or both bodies to block an agreed electoral or referendum law. Still undecided, though, is whether Libyans would go forward with elections before or after a constitutional referendum. A referendum will require its own law and a public awareness campaign covering the contents of the proposed constitution. Moreover, holding parliamentary or presidential elections before the constitutional referendum risks electing a body before knowing what constitutional authorities it will possess. As for the time crunch noted earlier, the post-Ramadan 2018 calendar simply does not have enough days to accommodate both a referendum and an election, while allowing for sufficient campaign periods, let alone the logistical requirements for preparing, printing, and distributing ballots." said Fishman.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an article for *Reuters*, the author, Aidan Lewis, highlighted the former prime minister's statement regarding the risk of partition should Libya go ahead with elections. "Libya is too divided to hold elections and risks partition if it goes ahead with a vote without security guarantees and a national consensus on building a state, a former rebel prime minister said on Tuesday. Mahmoud Jibril, who led the National Transitional Council during the uprising that toppled Muammar Gaddafi after more than four decades in power, said a U.N.-endorsed target of holding national polls by the end of the year was unrealistic. "The country is still not ready. More unity is needed, more consensus is needed." "To go for elections when the country is so divided – we are exposing the country to real partition." Jibril said that before any new elections, written commitments to accept election results must be obtained and Libyan and international authorities need to show they can ensure the outcome is respected — something currently impossible due to the lack of national security forces or an effective judiciary. "If those conditions are not met I don't think we can participate, because that means we are exposing ourselves to a third round of disappointment, a third round of unfulfilled dreams," said Jibril.

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