



1. The Big Picture

LNA's South op. could widen cracks in Tripoli & West

After recently announcing a full-scale operation to combat smuggling and terrorism in the South, the Libyan National Army (LNA) rapidly advanced, seizing key positions in Sabha while facing little to no resistance after gaining the support of major tribes through negotiations. The LNA operation now enters its second phase, "Tawk Hamada", with the stated objective to secure the Algeria, Niger, and Chad border areas.

Beyond the potential military gains and territorial expansion, the LNA's operation is expected to increase its political and bargaining power in a context of rising uncertainty, which poses a direct challenge to the Government of National Accord (GNA). The closer the LNA is to securing the Sharara oil field and moving North, the more pronounced the gap will be among political factions in Tripoli. The GNA continues to lose political clout while the LNA scores real wins by positioning itself as a capable Libyan actor protecting Libyan interests. As the LNA proceeds and expands its presence, an ensuing vacuum is expected to emerge in Tripoli; possibly filled by anti-Islamist figures.

Politically, the LNA operation comes as the anti-Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and anti-Islamist currents are gaining momentum within Tripoli as highlighted by the head of the High Council of State (HCS) Khaled Al-Mishri's resignation from the group and an HoR petition looking to criminalize the group.

A strong anti-Islamist current will further erode the GNA's posture and widen the cracks between pro/anti Sarraj camps. It challenges Sarraj's strategy developed in the aftermath of the August/September 2018 Tripoli South clashes. To avert another attack Sarraj sought to gain the support of multiple Misrata factions, including the MB, while excluding and scapegoating Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) elements. It remains to be seen whether Sarraj will now begin to

isolate MB members while running the risk of losing support from the much-needed Misrata coalition.

In the medium term, collaboration with the LNA, or lack thereof, will exacerbate tensions between armed groups in Tripoli and tribes in the wider West.

Polarization between Islamists and secularists in Tripoli could help bolster the LNA's support among some Tripoli militias within the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) coalition, which recently showed eagerness to exploit divisions within the GNA by directly opposing interior minister Fathi Bashagha and by extension Sarraj. The most pragmatic militias in Tripoli understand that although they have survived, they have only managed to consolidate their foothold within the capital city while potentially losing allies from neighbouring cities.

Meanwhile, the Misrata-Zintan alliance could also begin to disintegrate due to conflicting attitudes towards the LNA. This is corroborated by a recent Zintani tribe statement calling on the LNA to intervene in Tripoli.

However, there are remaining challenges before the LNA could convert its military manoeuvres into political credit. First, from a security standpoint, the LNA could spread itself too thin by fighting on multiple fronts, which would create a perfect opportunity for militants to attack the Oil Crescent area. In addition, the longer and more entrenched the LNA's presence is in the South, the more challenging it will be to respond to local grievances, paving the way for some local resistance.

KEY POINTS

- LNA launches 2nd phase of operation
- Tripoli anti-Islamists growing stronger
- Tensions in West over LNA collab.



CONTENTS

- 1 THE BIG PICTURE**
LNA's South op. could widen cracks in Tripoli & West
- 2 NATIONWIDE SECURITY**
Events, Analysis and Data
- 3 SECURITY BY NUMBERS**
Charts, Statistics and Analysis
- 4 TRIPOLI REPORT**
News & Neighborhoods
- 5 BENGHAZI REPORT**
News & Neighborhoods
- 6 WHAT'S NEXT**
Forward Looking Expert Opinions

2. National Security Map

LNA secures key positions in South, announces second phase of operation

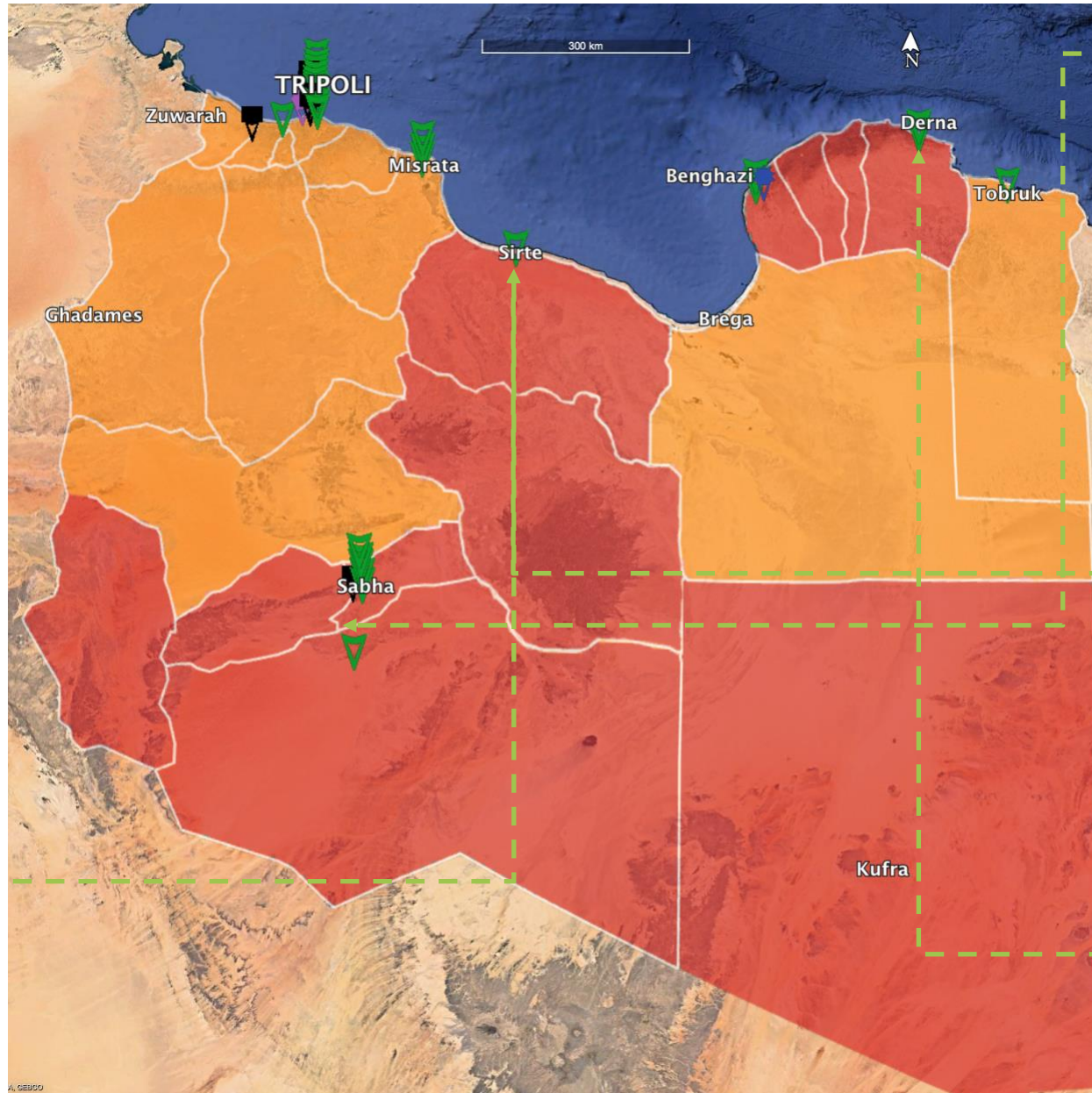
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



Reports indicate the Libyan National Army (LNA) made a significant advance as part of its ongoing operation in Libya's southern Fezzan region. LNA sources reported units seized at least nine critical positions, including Sabha Castle, Sabha International Airport, and the Faculty of Agriculture between 24 Jan and 25 Jan. WB sources reported the majority of locals welcomed the LNA's operation, which is highlighted by the limited resistance the LNA has encountered thus far. Sources suggest Tebu tribesmen surrendered most camps and positions South of Sabha.

Report suggest a Bunyan Al-Marsous (BAM) militiaman from Misrata, identified as Ahmed Hneish, was killed in Sirte on 21 Jan. Neither the identity of the assailant(s) nor the motive behind the incident are known. Unconfirmed reports across untested social media outlets suggest Tuareg gunmen were behind the incident, which stood as act of retaliation after the man previously killed their friend in Sirte.

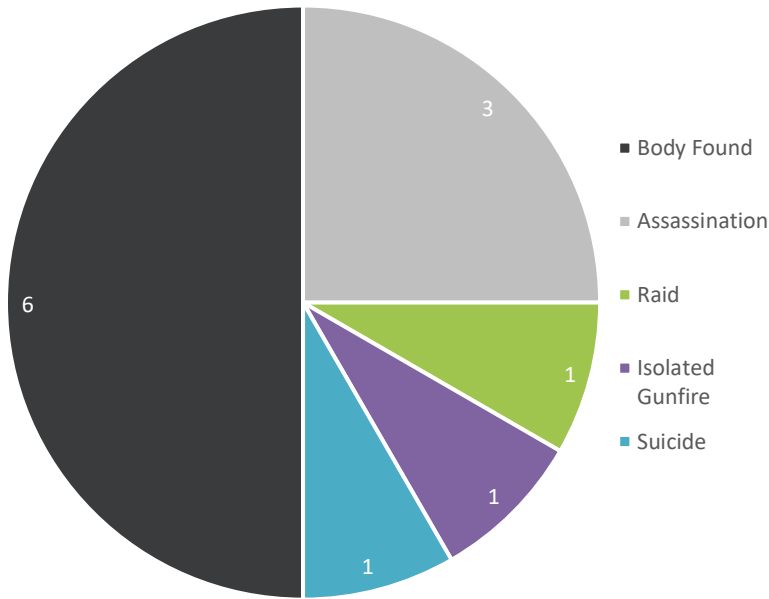
The Libyan National Army (LNA) announced the killing of two prominent militants, identified as Omar Al-Sha'arani and Mohammed Al-Tishani, during security operations in Derna's old city on 21 Jan. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest clashes between LNA forces and militants resulted in the death of an LNA 124 Battalion soldier, identified as Mohammed Al-Zintani, in Derna's old city on 21 Jan.

Citing debt and payment issues, the National Oil Corporation (NOC) suspended gas supplies to Norwegian fertilizer company Yara, which operates under the Libyan Norwegian Fertilizer Company (Lifeco), a joint venture with the NOC's subsidiary, Sirte Oil Company (SOC). According to a statement by the NOC, Lifeco owed it more than 80 million USD while SOC owed the joint venture approximately 187 million USD.

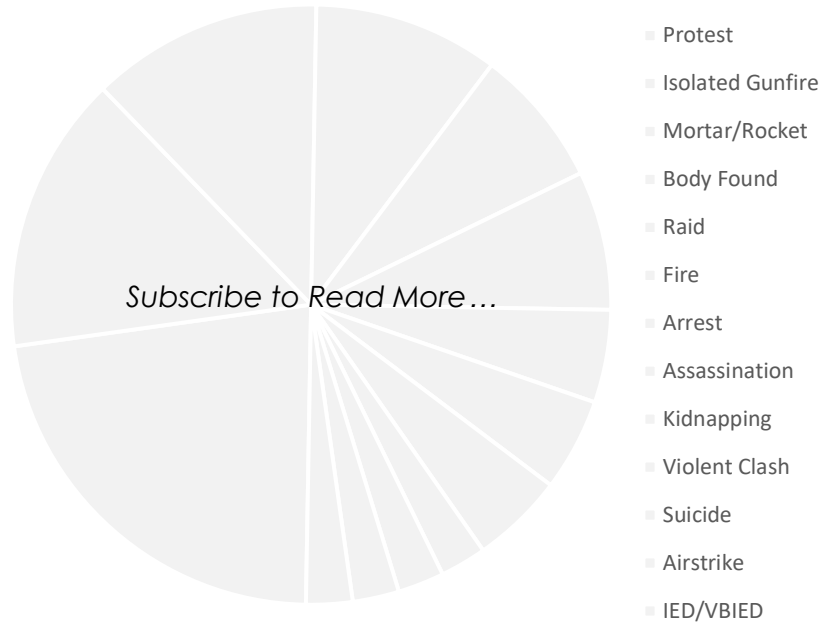
Local reports from 26 Jan suggest a helicopter landed in Sirte Airport after the airport underwent maintenance works. According to the airport's director, Salah Bojazia, electrical and telephone cables were repaired, and the main runway was reconstructed. Bojazia stated that work is underway to officially reopen the airport in the near future. Sirte's Airport was closed for four consecutive years due to the extensive material damage caused during the battle against the Islamic State (IS) in 2016.

3. Nationwide Security Analysis Over half of nationwide incidents in Tripoli; decrease in nationwide fatalities

Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



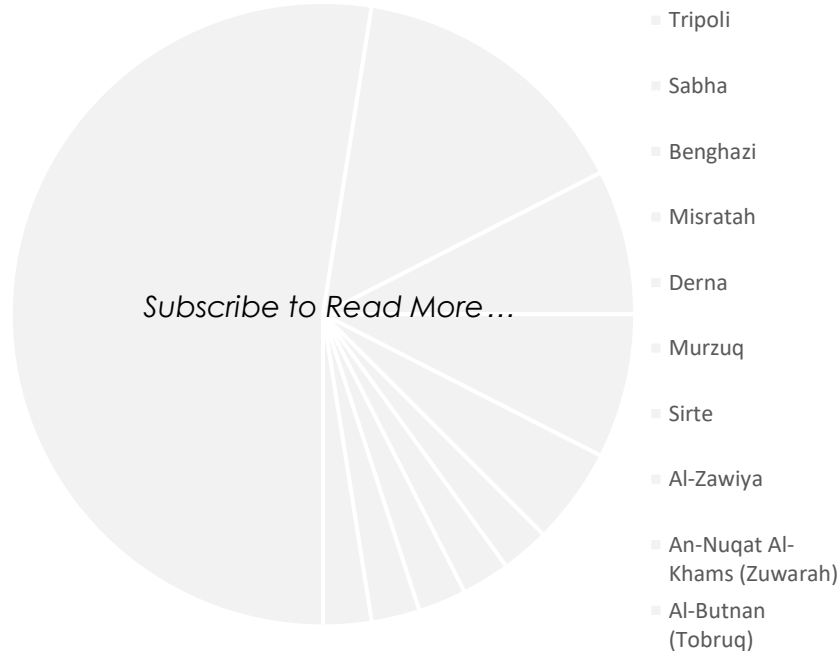
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



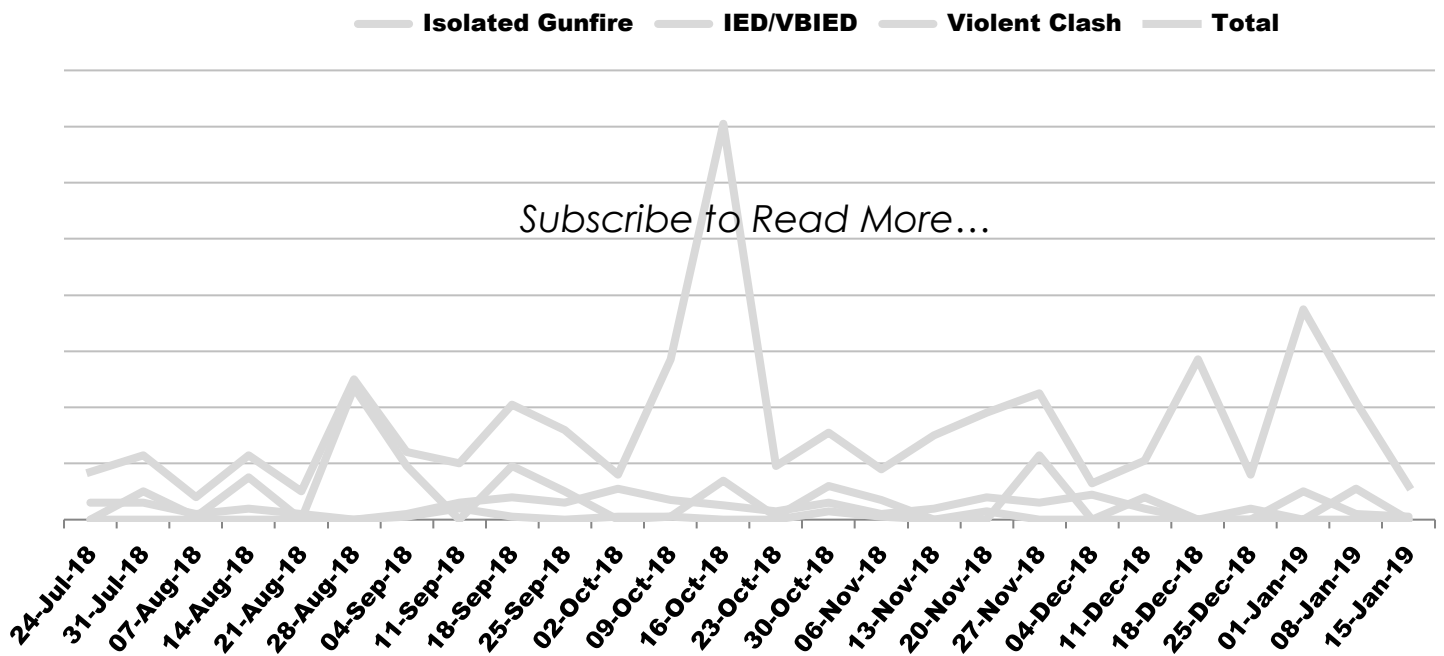
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



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 12 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 42 deaths reported last week and 75 the week before. This week Whispering Bell recorded a decrease in nationwide fatalities, with six bodies found accounting for half of the nationwide fatalities. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country, including 9 protests, 6 cases of isolated gunfire, 5 mortar/rockets, 4 bodies found, 3 raids, 2 assassinations, 2 kidnappings and 1 violent clash.

In Western Libya, Whispering Bell recorded a total of 26 incidents, including 21 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli. In Tripoli, dozens of journalists held a protest to condemn the recent killing of a photojournalist in Tripoli's militia clashes in front of Tripoli's Municipality headquarters at approximately 1330hrs on 20 Jan. Pictures circulated across social media outlets showing protestors raising banners denouncing recurrent attacks against journalists across Libya. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest several locals, in cooperation with a group of gunmen affiliated with Zintan, raided a Radio Station HQ in Tripoli's Al-Seyahiya area at approximately 1400hrs on 22 Jan. Additional reports suggest the militia expelled radio staff. According to reports, the locals claimed the radio station's HQ plot of land belonged to their family. Meanwhile, reports suggest unidentified assailant(s) kidnapped a man in front of his house in Tripoli's Ghut Shaal area at approximately 2300hrs on 22 Jan. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, unidentified assailant(s) kidnapped a man in Tripoli's Sidi Al-Sayeh area on 22 Jan. Neither the identity of the assailant(s) nor the motive behind the incidents are known.

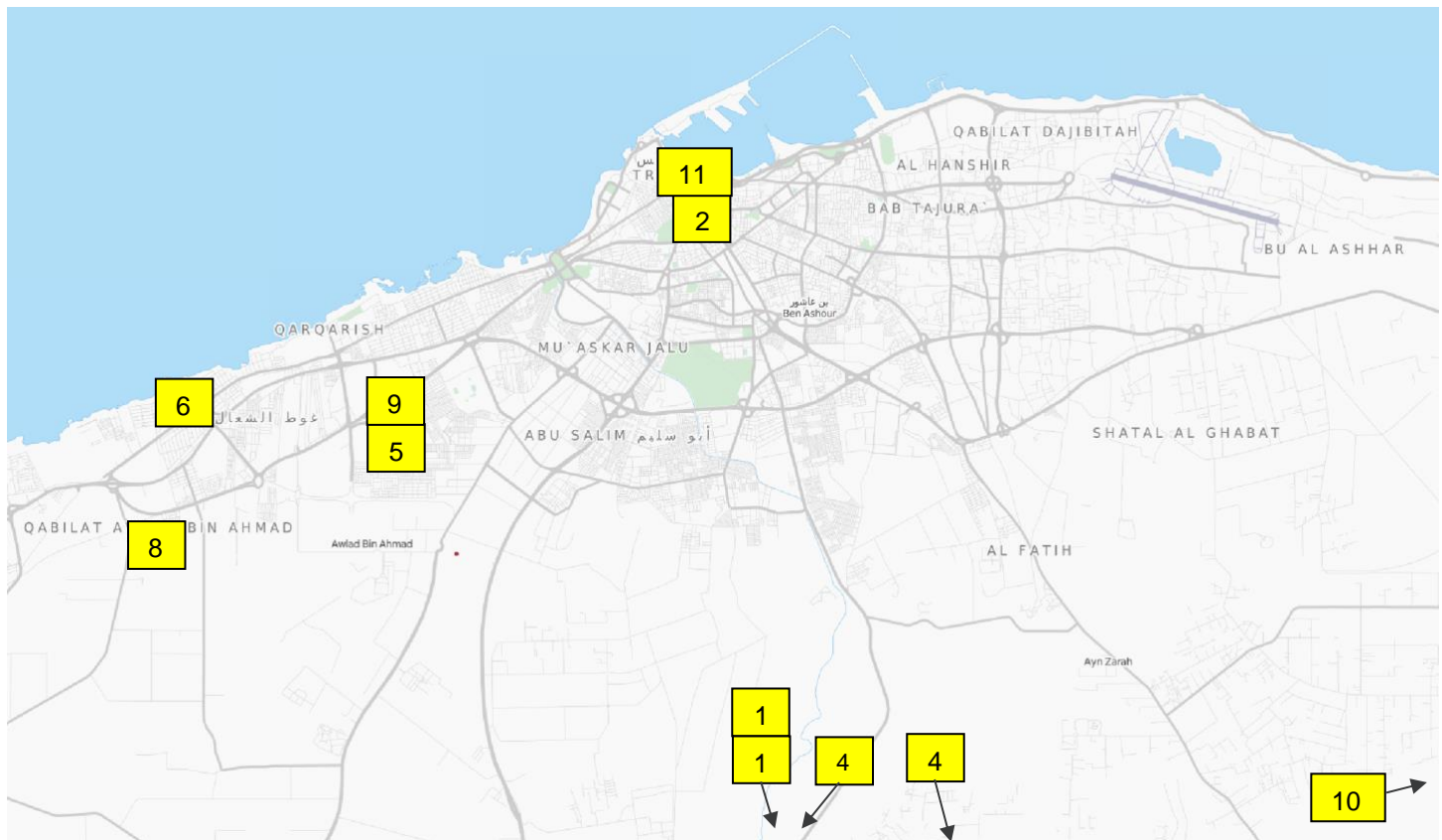
The week in Central Libya reports suggest a Bunyan Al-Marsous (BAM) militiaman from Misrata, identified as Ahmed Hneish, was killed in Sirte on 21 Jan. Unconfirmed reports across untested social media outlets suggest Tuareg gunmen were behind the incident, which stood as act of retaliation after the man previously killed their friend in Sirte.

Turning to southern Libya, a group of masked gunmen, affiliated with the LNA raided several houses of a local tribe known as the "Awlad Imhimmed Tribe" in Sabhā in a failed attempt to arrest AbdulMajeed Othman Sahaki, a member of the Supreme Council of Libyan Tribes at night on 24 Jan. The LNA units reportedly arrested four individuals related to Othman. The latest reports suggest the raid occurred in Sabhā's Al-Hijarah area, with unconfirmed reports suggesting that the LNA managed to arrest Sahaki, whilst his mother allegedly died of a heart attack following the raid.

In Eastern Libya, the Libyan Red Crescent Society (LRC) branch in Derna received two unidentified bodies from security authorities on 21 Jan, whilst a group of Egyptian illegal migrants were arrested South of Tobruk on 22 Jan.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Ceasefire intact as militia clashes come to halt & South stabilises



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (20 Jan) Two separate missiles found in Qasr Bin Ghashir & Souq Al-Sabt
2. (20 Jan) Protest condemning killing of photojournalist in militia clashes
3. (21 Jan) TPF & Al-Kaniat begin implementing ceasefire
4. (21 Jan) Temporary breach to ceasefire; heavy gunfire & explosions
5. (21 Jan) Dispute between two gunmen and man; man killed
6. (22 Jan) Locals & Zintan militia raid radio station HQ; staff expelled
7. (22 Jan) Ghneiwa militiaman opens fire on man resulting in his injury
8. (22 Jan) Autistic missing boy found dead in sewer hole in Al-Serraj
9. (22 Jan) Locals close off road in protest against killing of Edraiby local
10. (23 Jan) TPF & Al-Kaniat exchange prisoners & bodies; Al-Kaniat retreat
11. (23 Jan) Protest against MB participation in state affairs

Situation stabilizes in the South

According to reports, the newly-announced ceasefire brokered by Bani Walid's tribal elders and sheikhs was temporarily broken for 30 minutes, with reports of heavy gunfire and explosions in the areas of Espiaa and Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel at approximately 1800hrs on 21 Jan. Conflicting reports emerged over the faction behind the renewed attack, though reports suggest Muammar Al-Dawi militias launched shells from the Espiaa area to reignite tensions. Additional reports suggest Al-Dawi militias broke the ceasefire after Al-Kaniat militia failed to retreat from Fam Molga area and towards Tarhunah. On 23 Jan, as per the ceasefire agreement, reports suggest the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) and Al-Kaniat militia exchanged prisoners and bodies. Reports suggest the TPF handed over 10 bodies to Al-Kaniat militia, whilst 17 bodies were handed over to the TPF. Additionally, blocked roads were reopened in the areas of Espiaa and Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel. Beyond, Al-Kaniat militia reportedly later retreated from Fam Molga into Tarhunah, whilst the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) expelled Muammar Al-Dawi militias from Espiaa area. The SDF was then stationed in the Bier Allagh area

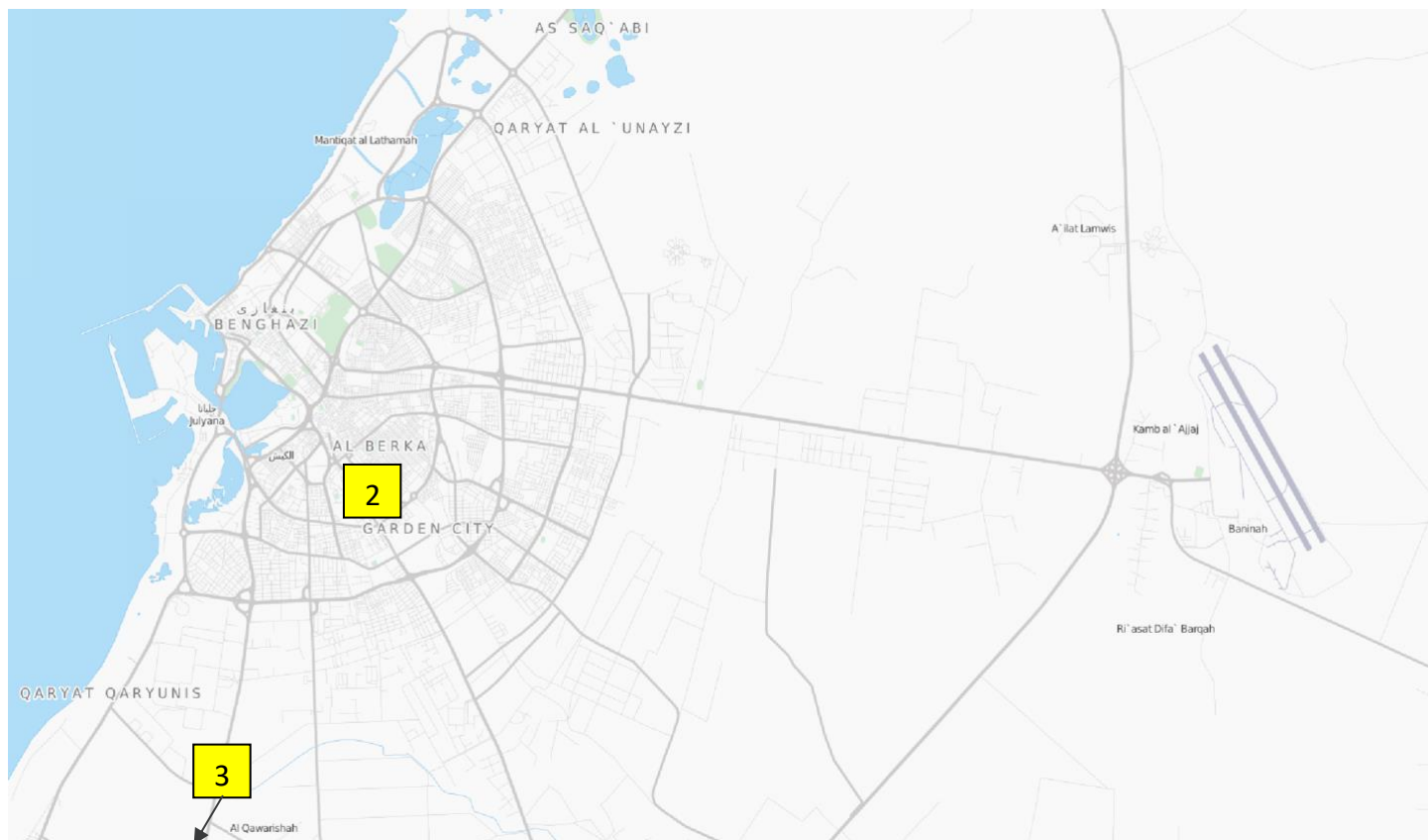
in the evening on 23 Jan. Elders of the Espiaa area voiced their anger and concerns to the SDF over Al-Dawi militias' intimidation of locals. Al-Dawi militias had reportedly raided and blocked off areas in Espiaa during the militia clashes in the southern areas, which restricted local movement.

Heightened security at Corinthia Hotel

Whispering Bell sources reported a heightened security presence around the Corinthia Hotel due to a high-level Presidential council (PC) meeting taking place inside the hotel in the morning on 23 Jan. Sources reported the presence of two armored vehicles (AVs) affiliated with Tripoli's Security Directorate in front of the hotel's two main gates. Additionally, sources reported the Corinthia Traffic Light was closed, with reports of two hotel personnel checking visitors' IDs at the entrance of the main gate. Beyond, sources reported the closure of Tripoli's Maari Street by a Toyota Hilux vehicle, South of Corinthia Hotel, whilst a sniper was stationed on the top of the old city's wall opposite the hotel. There were no further security incidents/developments reported.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Indiscriminate gunfire results in 4 fatalities and 64 injuries in 2018



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (23 Jan) Three tons of ERW removed across city
2. (23 Jan) CID of Security Directorate HQ opens
3. (24 Jan) Two unidentified bodies found in Al-Silik

Two bodies found near Suluq

Security forces reportedly found two unidentified bodies in Al-Silik, approximately 40 kms Southeast of the Municipality of Suluq, and South of Benghazi. According to reports, the bodies likely belonged to illegal migrants that were attempted to be smuggled by human traffickers.

Three tons of ERW removed

Local reports suggest Benghazi's Demining Team, in cooperation with the Emergency Department of Benghazi's military engineering class, removed approximately three tons of explosive remnants of war (ERW) from previous battlefields across the city. The Libyan National Army (LNA) launched a three-year military campaign targeting extremist elements across Benghazi, subsequently resulting in the widespread presence of ERW planted across the city.

CID of Security Directorate HQ opens

The headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department of the Benghazi Security Directorate opened after receiving the necessary allocations, including the gathering of public forces and equipment,

on Benghazi's Jamal Abdelnasser Street on 23 Jan. According to the directorate's media office, the opening of the Criminal Investigation Department on Jamal Abdelnasser Street highlights the department's success and the improvement of administrative and field work.

2018 statistics; indiscriminate gunfire

Al-Jalaa Hospital released its annual indiscriminate gunfire casualty statistics across Benghazi during 2018. According to an official from the hospital's Information Office, Fadia Bargouthi, four fatalities and 64 injuries were recorded in and out of Benghazi due to indiscriminate gunfire. Bargouthi noted that the incidents occurred in Benghazi's Western Salmani, Buhdima Al-Masakin, Al-Wheishi, Al-Leithi, Sidi Yoynis, Boudzrira, Ard Graish, Bouatni, Al-Rahba, Al-Sabri, Deryana, Omm Mabrouka, Benina, and Ganfouda areas. Additionally, the hospital received casualties due to indiscriminate gunfire from Derna, Tobruq, Al-Jufra, Sabha and Al-Kufra.

6. What's next

Election & National Conference delay to weaken Sarraj; strengthen HoR

POLITICAL FORECAST

Domestically, the campaign against Ghassan Salame, the UN Special Envoy, and the National Conference continued throughout the week, championed by eastern-based figures such as the House of Representatives (HoR) speaker Aguila Saleh, who referred to the National Conference as a “coup against legitimacy”. Looking ahead, realignments and changes in alliances will continue to shape up the upcoming months, especially within the GNA camp. With no set deadline for a National Conference or election roadmap, proponents of the “constitution before elections” will find it increasingly difficult to justify any delay in holding elections, which will consolidate the HoR and eastern camp’s position and undermine the Sarraj-led GNA camp. The LNA looks set to secure some wins with its operation in the South, though it remains unclear whether its military manoeuvres will enable it to gain levels of international legitimacy comparable to those currently enjoyed by the GNA. While divisions and gaps widen in Tripoli, the LNA will seek to project a strong posture. On the international front, the France/Italy rivalry was brought back to the scene after comments made by Italian PM Giuseppe Conte, accusing France of hampering stabilization efforts to protect oil interests. Meanwhile, in further evidence that elections could yet again be delayed, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that deadlines for elections can be “counterproductive”.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In an article for Arab News, Hafed Al-Ghwel discusses Libya’s political stagnation and its ramifications. Al-Ghwel argues that “each change of leadership has failed to bring Libya any closer to completing the transition to holding elections and establishing a stable, unified government backed by strong public institutions. In fact, early last year, a report produced at the end of a National Conference Process blamed the lack of political progress on “conflicts among the country’s elites,” who have neglected their duties, robbed the national coffers and only worsened the nearly eight-year-long crisis. Yet, it is toward these same “elites” that Salame’s efforts are directed, signaling the potential repeat of a cycle of flurries of activity, high-level meetings, press conferences, reports and then stagnation — followed by the appointment of a new UN special representative.” The author then concludes by stating “Ultimately, it appears as though Libya might spend another year in transition, given that the UNSMIL’s mandate expires in September, which will necessitate an extension into late 2020. It remains unclear whether any significant progress will be made and all eyes will be on the outcome of the National Conference, at a yet-to-be announced date and venue.”

SECURITY FORECAST

In Tripoli, political uncertainty is high despite an uneasy calm after sporadic skirmishes South of the capital city came to an end. Armed groups under the TPF could resort to small-scale disruptions to question Sarraj and Bashagha’s authority. Meanwhile, tensions between Islamists and secularists could escalate in the wider West, especially within areas where allegiances are mixed between LNA and GNA, such as Zintan, Surman, Ajaylat, and Riqdalin. There could be an increase in the number of assassinations and/or kidnappings of individuals perceived to be LNA sympathizers. LIFG members throughout the West could exploit the growing isolation of MB members to form new coalitions and/or pursue their agenda and interests by growing their supporter base. Meanwhile, in the South, the LNA is expected to directly engage foreign elements, including Chadian rebels, as it launches the second phase of its operation to secure the South. Beyond the threat posed by direct militant attacks targeting LNA units, the military operation in the South could result in a security vacuum in the East, including the Oil Crescent, which would provide a fertile ground for opportunistic militant attacks. No major incidents are expected to occur in Benghazi.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an interview with Middle East publication Asharq Al-Awsat, HoR speaker Aguila Saleh argued “replacing the country’s rulers will pave the way to resolving its crisis.” Saleh added “it was “definitely” time for Sarraj to leave power, adding that “accord” does not describe the GNA. The parliament, he stressed, “is the only authority that has been elected by the people and it has taken all necessary decisions to build state institutions.” Among those decisions was the draft law to hold a referendum on the constitution, he explained. The vote is expected in late February. Should the people agree on the constitution, then it will be used to elect a new president and parliament, Saleh continued. The UN, however, appears to be reneging on its commitment to hold the vote, he said. Asked if the security and military conditions in the country are suitable for holding the vote, he replied: “Yes, if the UN supports us. Anyone who objects to the elections by force will be slapped with local and international sanctions.” “I believe that the Libyans are keen on ensuring the success of the process,” Saleh stated.”

About Whispering Bell



Contact Whispering Bell at: +971-4-448-6690 or at ras@whisperingbell.com

[Twitter](#)



[Website](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



Copyright © 2016 Whispering Bell, All rights reserved.