



# 1. The Big Picture

## LNA's South "blitzkrieg" sparks fears of possible Tripoli push

This week, territorial gains and growing support from tribes in the Western region, have continued to embolden the Libyan National Army (LNA), raising concerns over the southern campaign's next objective.

On 30 Jan, the LNA spokesperson, Ahmed Al-Mismary, declared the southern operation reached its third phase with the objective to establish full control over Sabha. Al-Mismary confirmed the LNA's control over the Central Military Zone from Sirte to Zillah, the Gulf Military Zone, Ajdabiya and Kufra, the Sabha Military Zone, and Murzuq, Ghat, and Umm-Aranib areas. The spokesperson noted SUVs require a special permit to operate in the Gulf, Kufra, Sabha, and Ghat military zones, or face military court including the confiscation of vehicles.

While the LNA is actively growing its local supporter base, the absence of a political roadmap and election timeline continues to threaten the Government of National Accord (GNA) and United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), while increasing the likelihood of confrontations between Tripoli militias and/or within other western cities/towns, including Misrata, Al-Zawiya, Zliten, and Gharyan.

The prevailing uncertainty over the LNA's objectives is highlighted by recent comments from the chairman of the National Oil Corporation (NOC), Mustafa Sanallah, who stated efforts to restart the field "have been complicated further by the launch of an international counter-terrorism mission which has expanded into an attempt to seize control of the territory, including potentially, national oil infrastructure". Sanalla did not directly accuse the LNA, though his remarks have been ascribed to the operation in the South and possible control of the Sharara oil field. Some observers suggest Sanalla's statement is unclear and could be the result of pressure

from the GNA; given Libya's oil & gas sector could benefit from a strengthening of Sharara's security posture should the LNA oust the local Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG). Regardless, it remains to be seen whether Sanallah will lift force majeure.

Although difficult to ascertain with a high degree of confidence, there is mounting evidence to suggest the LNA is hedging its bets and, in the short to medium term, will avoid any direct confrontation with militias in the West, and/or Misrata's Bunyan al-Marsous (BAM) force, its strongest opponent. By attacking Tripoli, Haftar would risk losing credibility and undermining his public image ahead of much-anticipated elections. Instead, a peaceful takeover of smaller towns such as Bani Walid and other areas with a weak local militia presence is a more realistic scenario.

By responding to and potentially solving a genuine security issue in the South, Haftar would reap the benefits and gain some form of international legitimacy. A scenario where the LNA successfully and peacefully secures the South, would be a "reality check" for the international community to reconsider the balance in Libya; between continuing to support a local government whose popularity is decreasing in the West and recognizing an eastern-based centre of power who enjoys widespread local support, including in the West. In the meantime, amid growing Tebu criticism and defections, the LNA's success is not guaranteed.

### KEY POINTS

- LNA grows supporter base & territory
- Some Western towns support LNA
- Uncertainty over next move



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## 2. National Security Map

LNA engages militants in Derna's Old City; prominent Ansar Al-Sharia militant arrested in Sirte

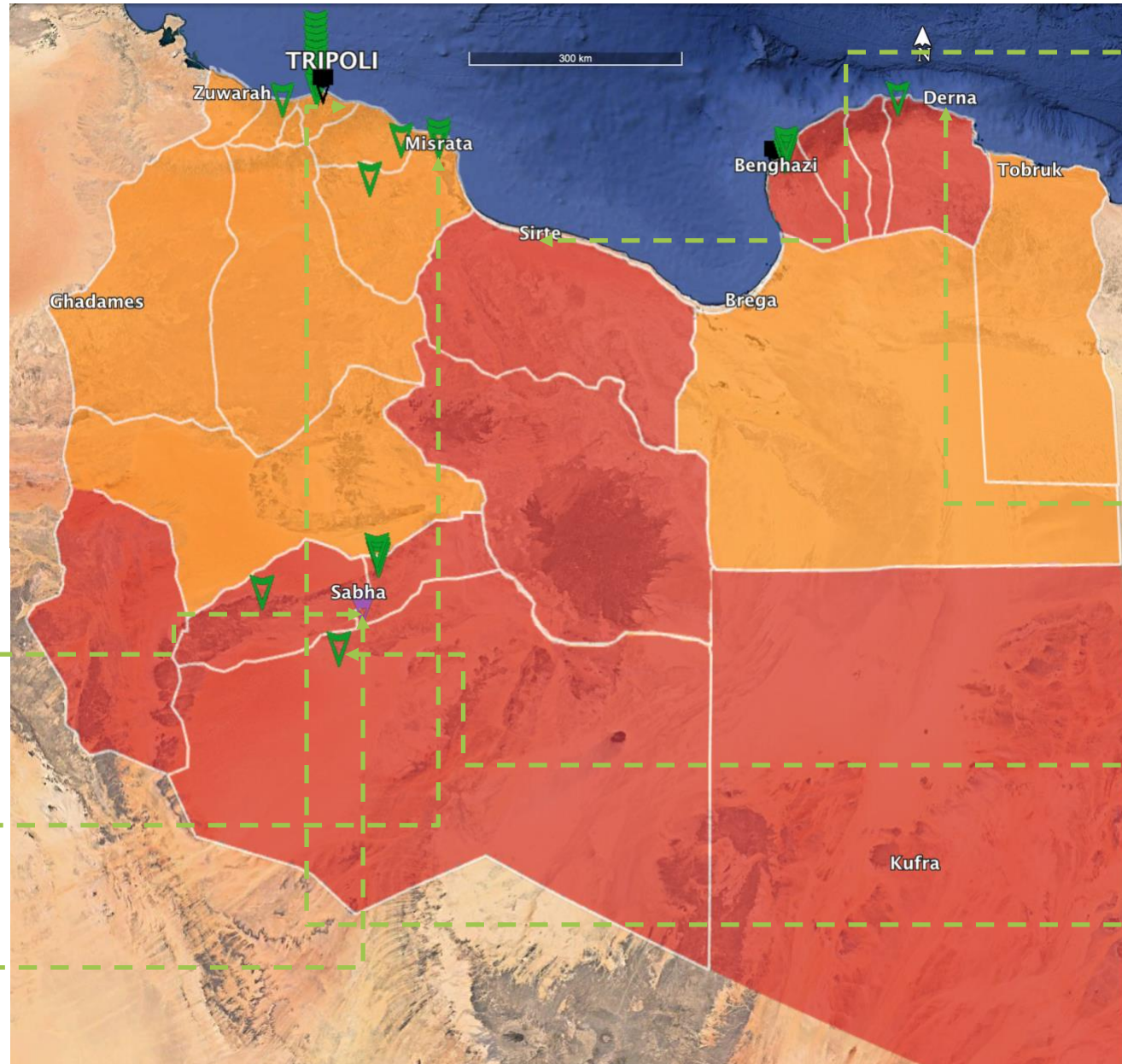
### Key

#### THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

#### EVENT INDICATORS

- ★ IED | VBIED
- ▼ Violent Clash
- Isolated Gunfire
- ▼ Other



According to the dean of the Municipality of Sirte, Mokhtar Al-Madani, the anti-terrorism force arrested a prominent Ansar Al-Sharia (ASL) leader and Islamic State (IS) loyalist, identified as Khalifa Barq, at night on 31 Jan. Al-Madani stated that the “surprise” operation and subsequent arrest occurred after receiving intelligence on Barq’s location in his residence in central Sirte. Meanwhile, in response to unconfirmed reports alleging the arrest was conducted with the help of foreign forces, local reports, citing an official from Sirte, denied any foreign involvement in the operation.

According to the Libyan National Army’s (LNA) 73rd Infantry Brigade Information office, violent clashes erupted between the LNA and the Derna Protection Force (DPF) in Derna’s old city in the afternoon on 02 Feb. The clashes erupted after LNA soldiers advanced on the last DPF strongholds in Derna’s old city. Reports suggest seven LNA soldiers were reportedly killed, whilst 16 others were injured.

Libyan National Army (LNA) Air Force fighter jets carried out strikes targeting Chadian rebel positions and their allies in Murzuq and Taraghin, South of Sabhā, at night on 03 Feb.

Reports suggest Al-Kaniat militiamen carried out a drive-by shooting resulting in the injury of a man in front of a mosque in the Garabouli area at approximately 0630hrs on 01 Feb. The motive behind the incident remains unknown.

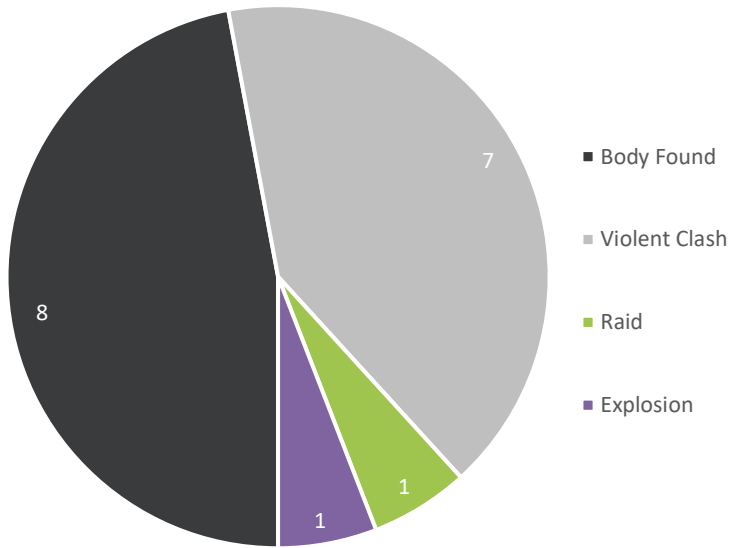
On 01 Feb, heavy clashes erupted after suspected Libyan and Chadian Tebu forces attacked the Libyan National Army’s (LNA) positions near Ghadduwah following the LNA’s departure from Sabha and arrival in Ghadduwah as part of their ongoing military campaign in the South. The latest reports suggest the attacking force retreated towards Muzruq and Umm Al-Aranib areas, whilst the LNA gained full control of the Ghadduwah area.

Reports suggest unidentified security forces captured a prominent Islamic State (IS) militant identified as Zakariyah Al-Sheikh in Misrata in the early hours of 31 Jan. Al-Sheikh is reportedly a fugitive from Derna. There is no further information available.

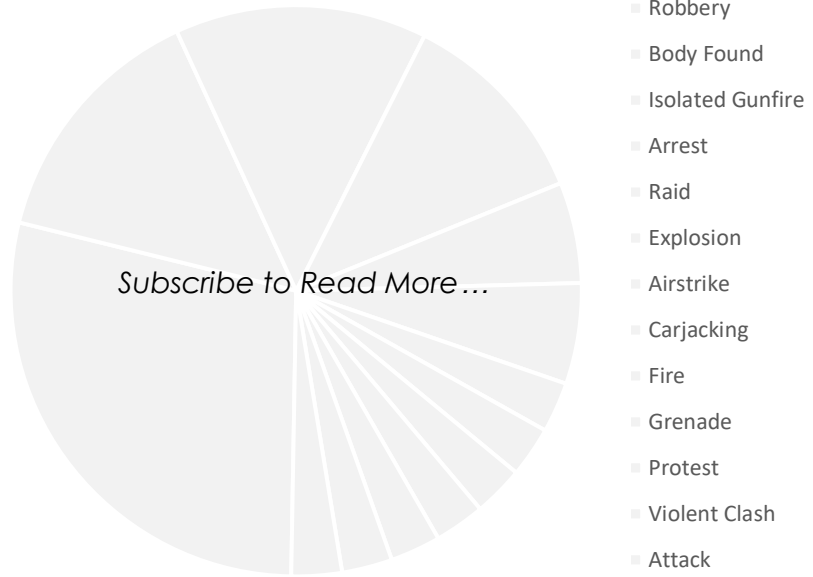
The commander of the Government of National Accord (GNA)-affiliated 6th Infantry Battalion in Sabha, Humaid Al-Attabi, announced the withdrawal of his forces from their headquarters after the Libyan National Army (LNA) seized the city.

### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis Slight increase in nationwide fatalities due to violent clashes in Libya's South

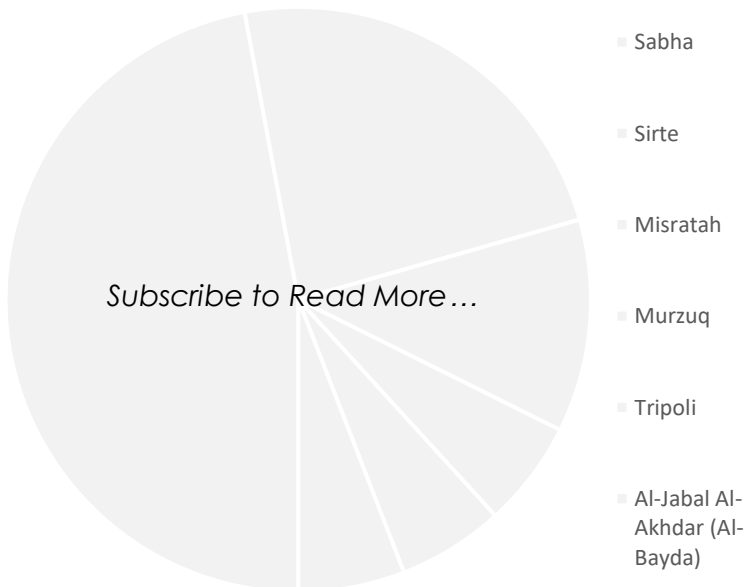
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



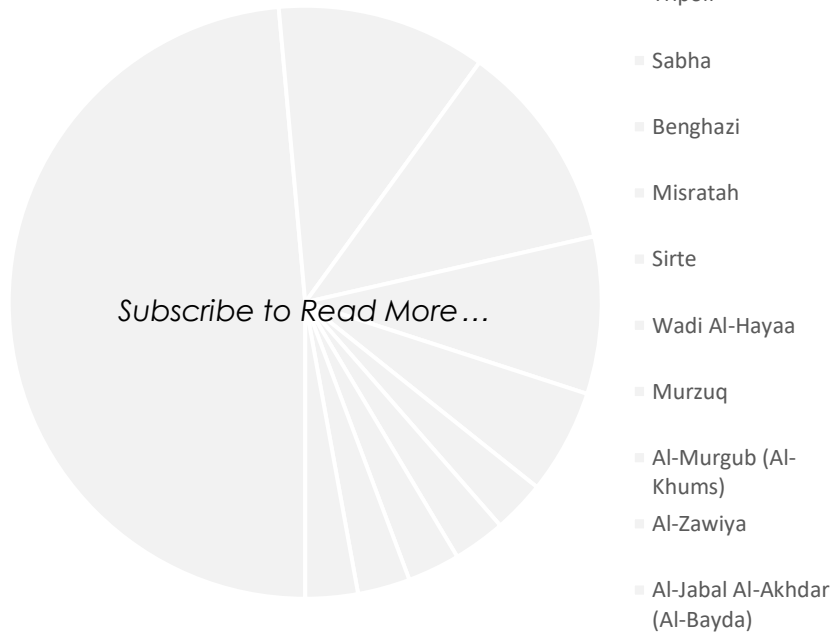
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)

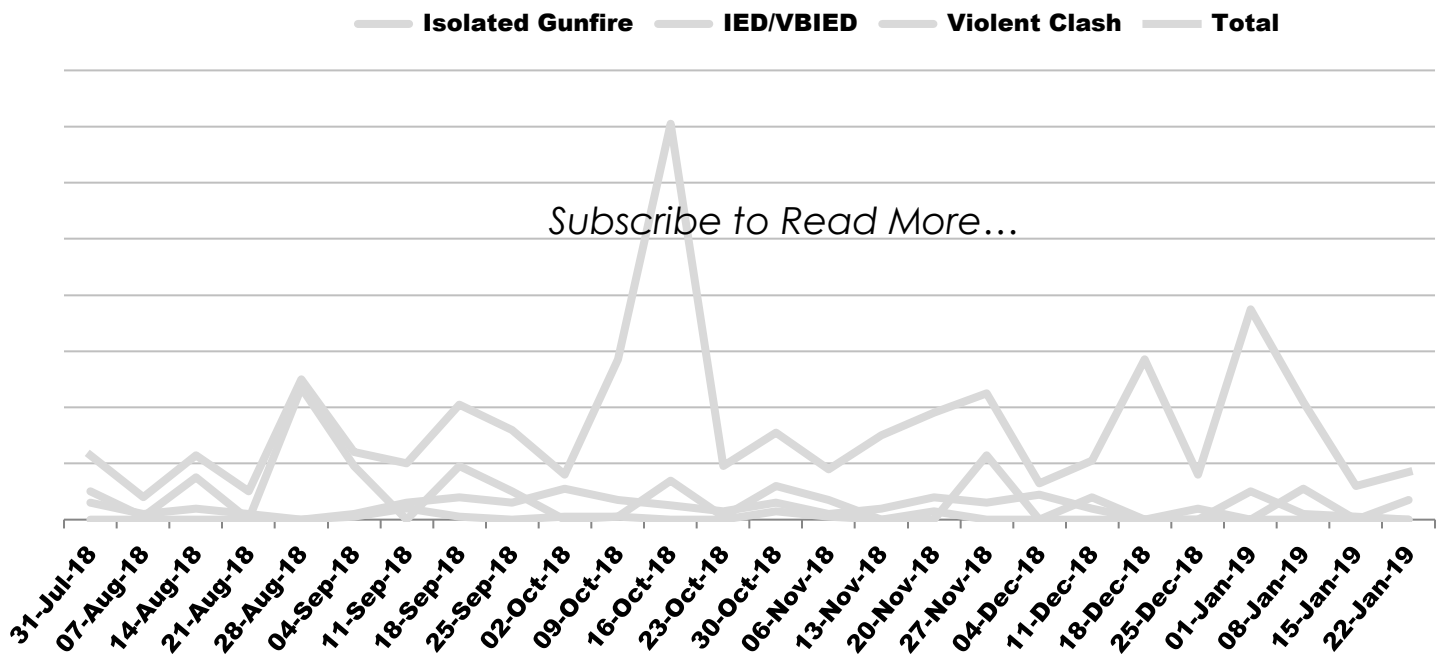


Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)





## Nationwide Fatalities by Type of Attack (Past 27 Weeks)



### Data Analysis

Whispering Bell recorded this week a total of 17 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 12 deaths reported last week and 42 the week before. This week violent clashes between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and rival armed groups resulted in at least seven fatalities near Ghadduwah. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country, including 10 robberies, 5 cases of isolated gunfire, 4 arrests, 2 raids, 1 airstrike, 1 violent clash and 1 carjacking.

In Western Libya, Whispering Bell recorded a total of 22 incidents, including 17 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli. In Tripoli, Whispering Bell sources reported gunmen riding two unidentified vehicles carried out a drive-by shooting and indiscriminately opened fire on buildings in Tripoli's Hai Al-Islami area at approximately 1430hrs on 29 Jan. Neither the identity of the assailants nor the motive behind the incident are known. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest a man was found dead with signs of a gunshot to his head inside his vehicle near the Mieh Heloa Mosque in Tripoli's Al-Gharrat area in the morning on 28 Jan. Beyond, in the wider Western region, reports suggest unidentified security forces captured a prominent Islamic State (IS) militant identified as Zakariyah Al-Sheikh in Misrata in the early hours of 31 Jan. Al-Sheikh is reportedly a fugitive from [Derna](#).

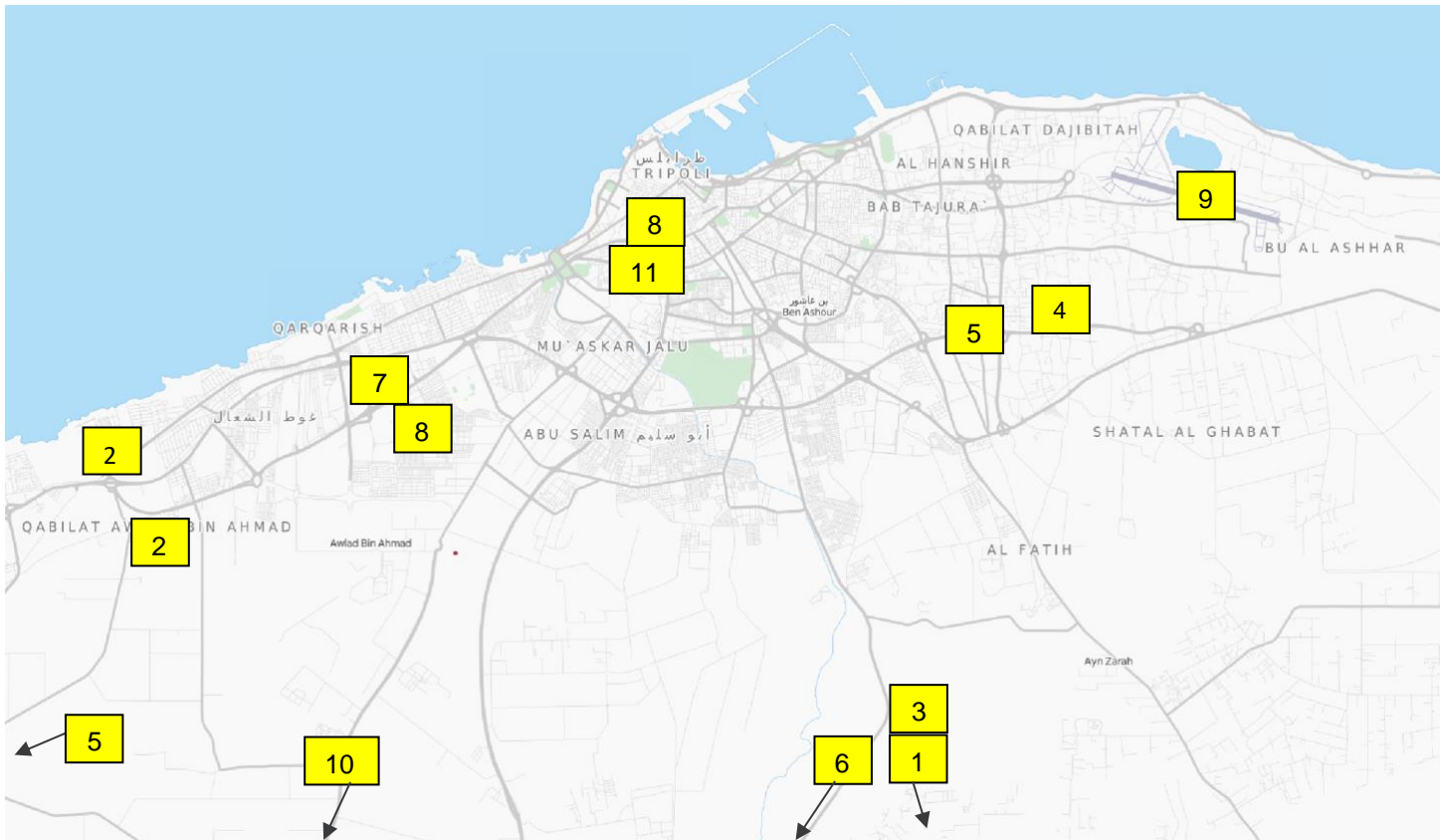
The week in Central Libya was marked by the arrest of a prominent extremist militant in Sirte. According to the dean of the Municipality of Sirte, Mokhtar Al-Madani, the anti-terrorism force arrested a prominent Ansar Al-Sharia (ASL) leader and Islamic State (IS) loyalist, identified as Khalifa Barq, at night on 31 Jan. Al-Madani stated that the "surprise" operation and subsequent arrest occurred after receiving intelligence on Barq's location in his residence in central Sirte. Meanwhile, in response to unconfirmed reports alleging the arrest was conducted with the help of foreign forces, local reports cited an official from Sirte denying the participation of foreign forces in the arrest operation.

Turning to southern Libya, on 01 Feb, heavy clashes erupted after suspected Libyan and Chadian Tebu forces attacked Libyan National Army (LNA) positions near Ghadduwah following the LNA's departure from Sabha and arrival in Ghadduwah as part of their ongoing military campaign in the South. The latest reports suggest the attacking force retreated towards Muzruq and Umm Al-Aranib areas, whilst the LNA gained full control of the Ghadduwah area. There are conflicting reports over local media outlets of the casualty toll, though at least 7 LNA soldiers were killed.

In Eastern Libya, locals protested against the UN envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, and called for his replacement in front of Benghazi's Municipality HQ on 30 Jan.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Mol arrests prominent Chadian rebel during raid on criminal hideout



### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (26 Jan) SDF military convoy stationed in Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel
2. (27 Jan) Two separate vehicle thefts in Al-Serraj & Salah Al-Din areas
3. (28 Jan) Unconfirmed: Juwaili convoy stationed in Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel
4. (28 Jan) Man found dead inside vehicle in Al-Gharrat area
5. (28 Jan) Two separate vehicle thefts in Al-Hashan & An-Najila areas
6. (29 Jan) SDF seizes control of Cement Factory
7. (29 Jan) Drive-by shooting targets buildings in Hai Al-Islami area
8. (29 Jan) Carjacking in Qaryat Salah; vehicle stolen in front of cemetery
9. (30 Jan) Technical glitch at MJI; foreigners prevented entry
10. (30 Jan) Mol arrests Chadian rebel in raid on criminal hideout
11. (31 Jan) Dispute with TRB militiaman at Ghneiwa-manned CP; gunfire

### Dispute at Ghneiwa-manned CP

There were reports of heavy gunfire after the Ghneiwa militia stopped a Toyota Land Cruiser vehicle belonging to a Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) militiaman at a checkpoint on Tripoli's Alqods Mosque Roundabout at approximately 2130hrs on 31 Jan. Initial reports suggest the Ghneiwa militia requested the TRB militiaman to remove the vehicle's tinted windows, after which the TRB militiaman got out of his vehicle carrying a PKT machine gun. Unconfirmed reports suggest two Ghneiwa militiamen and a young girl were wounded. Security incidents at militia-manned CPs remain common across the capital city.

### Unconfirmed militia movements; South

There were reports of an explosion heard in Tripoli's Edraiby area at approximately 0100hrs on 29 Jan. Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports emerged across untested social media outlets suggesting a military convoy affiliated with the commander of the Western Military Region, Osama Juwaili, stationed in the Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel area at night on 28 Jan.

### Mol raids criminal hideout; arrests

Local reports suggest the Mol arrested a foreign armed group after receiving intelligence from the CID under Jafara's

Security Directorate on the presence of an armed group engaging in criminal activity in Tripoli's Al-Swani and Kreymiya areas on 30 Jan. In a press briefing, the Mol stated that the arrest was carried out after receiving permission from the Attorney General Office to raid the criminal hideout and subsequently arrest the suspects. The Mol confirmed the arrest, whilst noting that a prominent Chadian high-ranked opposition rebel, identified as Mohammed Bukhari, was captured along with his son and bodyguard. Following his interrogation, reports suggest Bukhari admitted to his involvement in several war crimes.

### SDF seizes Cement Factory

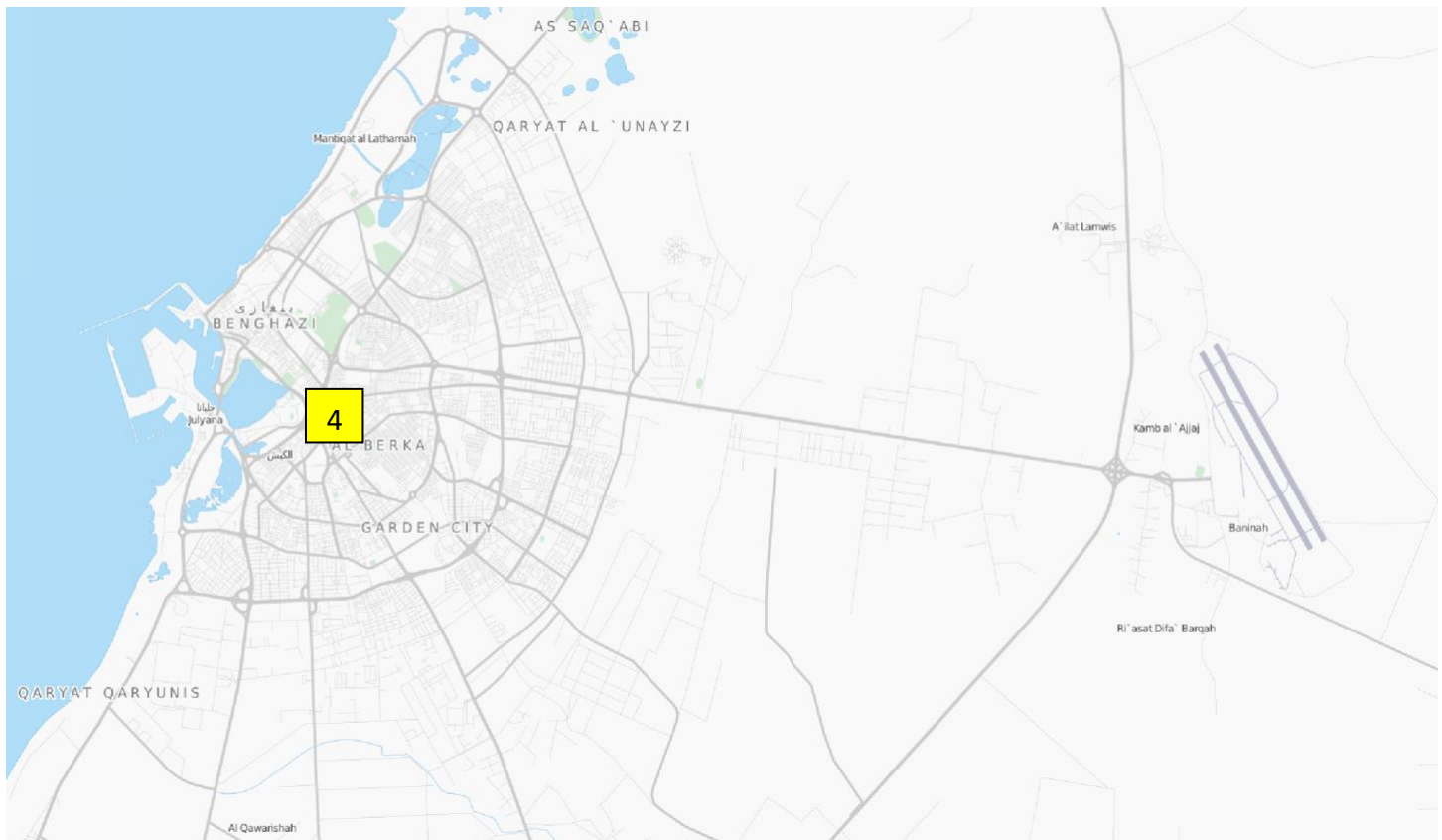
WB sources reported the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) seized control of the Cement Factory, South of the Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel area, on 29 Jan. Reports suggest the SDF found documents allegedly documenting corruption inside the factory, which was previously under the control of Al-Kaniat militia.

### MJI system glitch; foreigners prevented entry

WB sources reported a technical glitch in the foreigners' immigration processing system resulting in foreigners denied entry at Mitiga International Airport at approximately 1500hrs on 30 Jan. Sources reported the system glitch was due to a new registering procedure and was later fixed, allowing foreigners to enter the country.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Locals call for the replacement of UNSMIL head in front of municipality HQ



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (28 Jan) Security Directorate continues wide deployment
2. (28 Jan) Homemade fishing grenade detonated injuring one
3. (28 Jan) UNSMIL delegation discusses securing new office
4. (30 Jan) Locals call for UNSMIL head replacement
5. (30 Jan) Delegation of Chinese companies discuss return
6. (02 Feb) Blackout due to breakdown in power units
7. (03 Feb) Municipality Guard targets criminals across city

#### Protest against UNSMIL head

Several locals protested against the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) head, Ghassan Salame, and called for his replacement, in front of Benghazi's Municipality headquarters on 30 Jan. Pictures circulated across social media outlets of the protestors carrying banners against Salame, in addition to holding broomsticks as a degrading metaphor. The motive behind the protest was linked to Salame's recent remarks surrounding the Libyan National Army's (LNA) military campaign in the South. The protest comes amid UNSMIL preparations and meetings with Benghazi's security officials to reopen its office in Benghazi. A potential growing anti-Salame campaign in the East, and particularly Benghazi, could expose the UNSMIL's new office to security threats.

#### UNSMIL office opening preparations

The director of Benghazi's Security Directorate, general Adel Abdulaziz, received a United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) delegation to discuss securing the mission's new office in Benghazi on 28 Jan. Abdelaziz reassured the delegation that the directorate stands as fully prepared to

secure the mission's office in Benghazi, whilst noting that a security team, supported by patrols, equipment and advanced technical devices, will work cooperatively to secure the HQ in order for the mission to carry out its duties. Additionally, Abdelaziz stated that a general security plan was created to secure the mission during its presence in the city, in addition to undergoing comprehensive security measures for the UNSMIL members and heads of delegations. The reopening of the mission's office in Benghazi came as a result of a series of meetings between UNSMIL and Eastern officials and highlights a significant improvement in the city's overall security situation. The UNSMIL head, Ghassan Salame, previously stated that the mission sought to re-open offices in Benghazi and the South should the security situation permit.

#### Homemade fishing grenade detonates

Local reports suggest a homemade fishing grenade detonated resulting in the injury of a 42-year-old man on the Western shores of Benghazi on 28 Jan. According to reports, the incident stands as the first of its kind in 2019. Homemade grenades are commonly used in the fishing process in Libya.



## 6. What's next

### LNA campaign to shift alliances and polarize factions in the West

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

The January 2019 deadline for the National Conference has not been met, indicating a potential failure to gather enough support from Libyan political factions. A delay in the planned presidential/municipal elections is therefore to be expected, especially after the targeted campaign from eastern-based figures against the UNSMIL's Ghassan Salame, who is expected to meet Haftar and the House of Representatives' (HoR) Aguila Saleh in a reported attempt to garner support for his initiative. Meanwhile, in a sign of growing support for the LNA's military campaign in the South, the 54th Brigade, the Reconnaissance Battalion and the Police and Prisons Investigation Office in Surman, affirmed their support for the army in its latest operation. However, the LNA will likely continue to face growing challenges in maintaining healthy relations with local tribes, especially after allegations made by Tebu tribesmen, accusing the LNA of "ethnic" targeting. Beyond this, the Governor of the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL), Sadiq Al-Kabir, met with the High Council of State (HCS) head, Khalid Al-Mishri, to discuss the latest financial arrangements for 2019 on 29 Jan, according to the CBL's Information Office. The Italian Ambassador to Libya, Guiseppe Peronne, officially announced the end of his term on 31 Jan.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Libyan academic Emadeddin Badi, writing for *Middle East Institute (MEI)*, discusses the National Conference's prospect, noting that "as it stands, the National Conference is Salamé's way of jump-starting a political process that has come undone. Reducing its role to only laying the groundwork for elections is unlikely to meet the real needs of the Libyan people. However, Salamé's inability to coerce the Libyan parties to move beyond their zero-sum approach to politics and proceed with his UN Action Plan over the past two years signals that the goals of the conference may be at risk." Badi concludes "The odds are stacked against Salamé in his gamble that the international community will adopt a unified position, especially since even neighboring European countries have shown little ability to devise a coherent, common Libya policy. Libya has become one of many theaters in the ideological conflict between the Gulf states and Qatar and Turkey, also complicating matters. Without a major power advocating for a policy in Libya that transcends "containment" and limits the involvement of external actors, the prospects for the success of the National Conference or subsequent elections remain grim. Nevertheless, Salamé could use the influence of the U.S and its previously tried-and-tested ability to keep both Libyan actors and international players in line as he works to advance the political process."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

In Tripoli, travellers are advised to exercise caution due to planned celebrations of the 17 February Revolution. Meanwhile, tensions and skirmishes are possible between Tarhunah's Al-Kaniat and the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF), particularly the Ghneiwa militia, following reports of arbitrary killings. Growing support for the LNA across tribes in the wider West would help increase the perception of isolation and encirclement among Tripoli militias, which raises the likelihood of sporadic militia activity across the capital city. A pro-Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) alliance, including Misrata, could begin to form in response to the LNA's advances further North. There is a possibility of skirmishes and/or a build-up of tensions between pro-LIFG elements and the GNA or LNA. In addition, there is a possibility of intra-Islamist divisions, particularly between Madkhali Salafis who would nominally support Haftar and LIFG elements. In the South, LNA forces could seize the Sharara oil field given the speed with which the southern campaign has thus far proceeded. 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. In Derna, clashes will likely continue between the LNA and militants in their remaining stronghold within the Old City.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Writing for *Al Monitor*, Libyan author Mustafa Fetouri, analyses the potential outcome of the LNA's operation in the South and whether a move towards Tripoli is plausible. "If the LNA manages to keep its positions in the middle and southern regions, it means all militias along the coast, including in Misrata and Tripoli, are surrounded, even if from a distance. As the LNA consolidates its presence, it may consider moving toward Tripoli. As of Jan. 29, LNA forces were spreading in the area after taking most of Sabha, including its famous castle." "Such a scenario will certainly involve confrontations with the strongest militia, al-Bunyan al-Marsos, which controls the area from Harawah in the east, all the way to Misrata in the west, along the coastal road from Sirte to Tripoli. Most fighters in the militia are from Misrata, and al-Bunyan al-Marsos is the same militia that expelled IS from Sirte in December 2016 with help from the US Africa Command and Italy." Fetouri adds "If Hifter is still following his objective of controlling Libya, then at some point he will have to take action against other militias entrenched in Tripoli and other cities along the coast. However, in the current political atmosphere, it's unlikely the LNA will take any action against any other militia. Hifter is bound by his commitment to the international community, to UN envoy Ghassan Salame, to free elections and to avoiding violence under all circumstances."

# About Whispering Bell



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