



# 1. The Big Picture

## Combat Ops. enter 2<sup>nd</sup> phase as GNA counterattacks

This week, hostilities escalated with the use of indiscriminate shelling, the announcement of a Government of National Accord (GNA) counter-offensive, increased airstrikes, and reinforcements on both sides. Meanwhile, the GNA's political posture has been weakened following US President Donald Trump's statement in support of the Libyan National Army's (LNA) offensive, in a phone call with LNA head Khalifa Haftar.

There is mounting evidence that protraction is now likely, amid statements from both GNA and LNA officials that combat operations will transition to a "second" phase. On the ground, positions remain static with little to no change, though clashes expanded southward with a back and forth between rival LNA and GNA forces along the Swani – Aziziyah front. At the time of publication, reports indicate the LNA continued to control Aziziyah town, while GNA-aligned units maintained positions northward, in the Zahra Bridge and Al-Saadeya areas.

Combat operations continue to include indiscriminate shelling and airstrikes to support ground forces and degrade enemy capabilities. In his latest press briefing, LNA spokesman Ahmed Al-Mismary stated an additional MiG-23 aircraft has been tested and multiple other aircraft are in the process of being refurbished at the Braq airbase, South Libya. This would indicate the LNA Air Force (LAF) is attempting to increase its air cover in the West. Thus far, aircraft have been taking off mainly from Jufra and Wattya airbases. Separately, the LNA formed a security room led by Brigadier General AbdeNasser Salim in the four areas of Qasr Bin Ghashir, Sidi Al-Sayeh, Soug Al-Khmeis Emsihel and Espiaa on 20 Apr.

There is mounting evidence to ascertain the LNA's intent and strategy is to weaken GNA-aligned militias and some of the Misrata brigades currently engaged in combat. The LNA would then mount another larger offensive and

push further North across multiple axes. The LNA is expected to mount a broader offensive in the coming weeks; an assessment supported by multiple official and semi-official statements, including a recent comment by LNA Ajdabiya Ops Room commander, Faouzi Mansouri, expecting the LNA to enter Tripoli before Ramadan (May 6th).

Meanwhile, GNA-aligned forces could attempt a flanking manoeuvre by targeting the LNA's rear. Analysts suggest the 18 Apr attack targeting Tamanhint airbase in the South was an attempt to divert the LNA's assets, though there is yet to be direct attribution to GNA-aligned forces.

The likelihood that fighting will have an impact on Libya's oil and gas exports remains difficult to ascertain. However, the threat of disruption increases as military manoeuvres slow down and positions become clearer around defensible staging areas in Tripoli's South. In the short to medium term, direct attacks can disrupt Libya's O&G sector, though there is an additional risk of incidental exposure, including in Zawiyah where infrastructure is near urban areas. In addition, beyond security incidents, there is a risk of politically-motivated disruptions. Trump's remarks to Haftar would help reinforce the LNA's title as protector of O&G resources. However, the GNA could halt fuel supplies imported via Zawiyah terminal to the South and central areas to degrade the LNA's capabilities. This scenario would prompt the LNA to halt production in fields under its control.

### KEY POINTS

- US President praises LNA operation
- GNA forces counter-attack
- LNA to mount broader offensive



## CONTENTS

- 1 **THE BIG PICTURE**  
Combat Ops. enter 2<sup>nd</sup> phase as GNA counterattacks
- 2 **NATIONWIDE SECURITY**  
Events, Analysis and Data
- 3 **SECURITY BY NUMBERS**  
Charts, Statistics and Analysis
- 4 **TRIPOLI REPORT**  
News & Neighborhoods
- 5 **BENHAZI REPORT**  
News & Neighborhoods
- 6 **WHAT'S NEXT**  
Forward Looking Expert Opinions

## 2. National Security Map

LNA units repel armed attack on Tamanhint Airbase; allegations western faction involved

Key

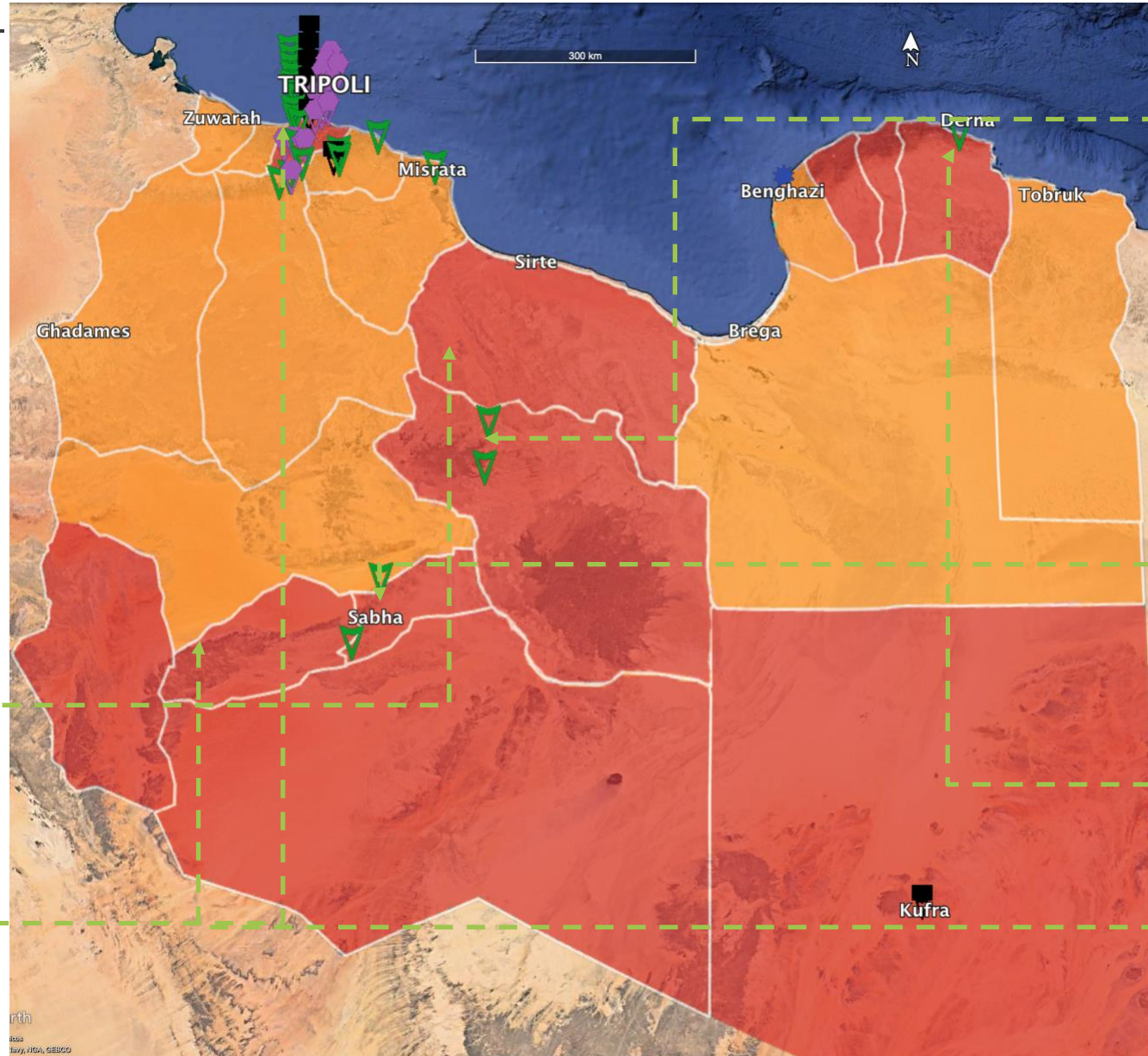
- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Thr

EVENT INDICATORS

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

The Sirte Protection Force (SPF), affiliated to Misrata's Bunyan Al-Marsous (BAM) and nominally under the GNA, carried out mobile security patrols and fixed-position guarding South of the Sirte national district. The SPF stated that all areas under its jurisdiction are secured; from Abu Grein in the West to areas East of Sirte. The patrols are in anticipation of potential LNA movements in the district.

On 17 Apr, the GNA Ministry of Education discredited reports of an improvised explosive device (IED) found at the Abu Issa school West of Zawiya. Unconfirmed reports had circulated, claiming authorities found five 122mm shells with remote detonation infrastructure at the school.



Reports suggest Government of National Accord (GNA) forces conducted an airstrike targeting the town of Houn, in the Jufra District, at approximately 0730hrs on 16 Apr. Initial reports indicate that the airstrike targeted LNA positions in Al Jufrah Airbase.

Reports of an armed attack targeting Tamanhint Airbase on 18 Apr. Initial reports indicate a convoy of at least 15 armed vehicles attacked the airport. The GNA-affiliated South Protection Force claimed control over the airport. Initial reports indicate Chadian and Tebu forces aligned to the GNA South Protection Force commander Ali-Kanna were behind the attack. The latest reports suggest the LNA regain control over the airbase. The LNA spok., Ahmed Mismary, attributed the attack to Jathran-aligned/Al-Qaeda militant called Hassan Musa, and Mohamed Hakimi, a Chadian rebel.

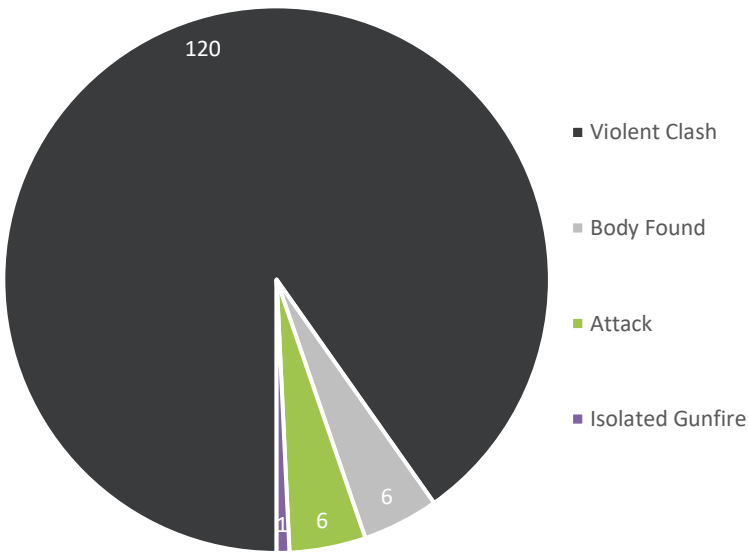
The Libyan Red Crescent (LRC) found four unidentified bodies in Derna's Al-Mughar area on 15 Apr. The LRC located the bodies after receiving reports from locals.

Reuters, citing an unidentified field engineer, reported Sharara Oil Field, currently under LNA territory, was producing approximately 285,000 barrels per day (PBD) on 19 Apr.

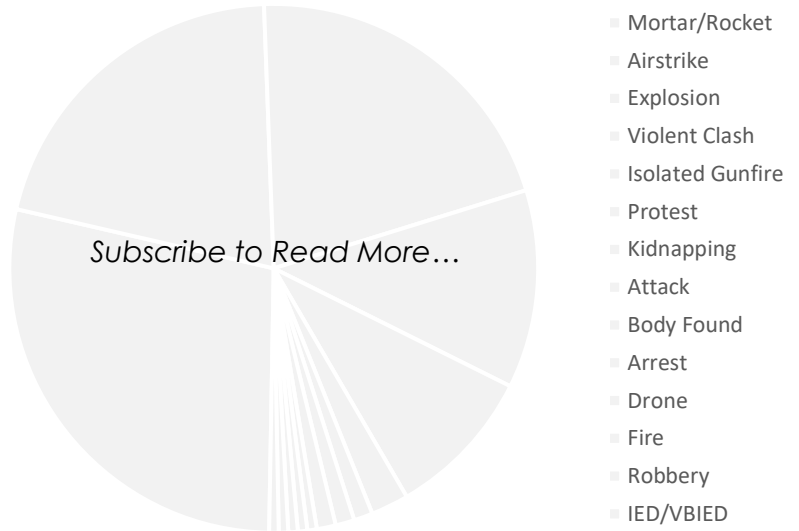
### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

#### Surge in airstrikes & indiscriminate shelling as clashes cont. in Tripoli's South

Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



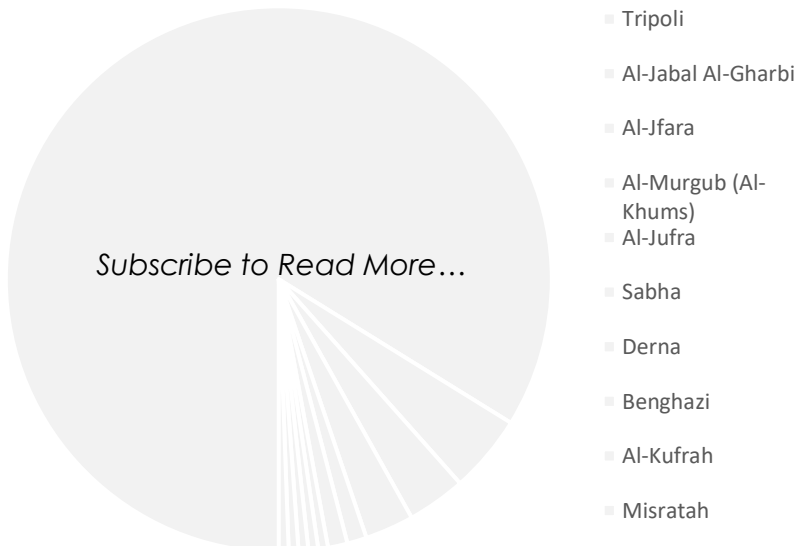
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



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

WB recorded this week a total of 133 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 107 deaths reported last week and 35 the week before. This week saw an increase in nationwide fatalities as a result of ongoing clashes between the rival forces of the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) in Tripoli's Southern areas. Over ¾ of the nationwide incidents occurred in the capital city Tripoli, with the majority of incidents recorded in the Western region. In Tripoli, WB recorded a surge in airstrikes, mortar/rocket shelling, isolated gunfire cases and explosions heard. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country including, 49 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 36 airstrikes, 36 explosions, 21 violent clashes, 16 cases of isolated gunfire, 4 protests, 2 kidnappings, 2 attacks, 1 body found, and 1 IED/VBIED.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 166 incidents, including 145 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli, marking a sharp increase in Tripoli incidents. In Tripoli, beyond the ongoing military escalation in Tripoli's Southern areas, sources reported two male individuals were found killed with signs of gunshots in Tripoli's Hai Alandalus near Coffee O2, at approx. 2330hrs on 19 Apr. No further information. Separately, the manager of Tripoli Medical Center, Dr. Nabil Alageli, was kidnapped by an unidentified group from the hospital on 18 Apr. Initial reports suggest Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) militiamen were involved in the kidnapping. Alageli was reportedly released on 19 Apr. In a separate kidnapping incident, reports suggest two Turkish nationals who worked in Qaser Bin Ghashir, an area of engagement in the current clashes, have been reported missing for at least a week. Initial unconfirmed reports the two nationals have been kidnapped with no further information available. In the wider West, on 17 Apr, the GNA Ministry of Education discredited reports of an improvised explosive device (IED) found at the Abu Issa school West of Zawiya. Unconfirmed reports had circulated, claiming authorities found five 122mm shells with remote detonation infrastructure at the school on 17 Apr.

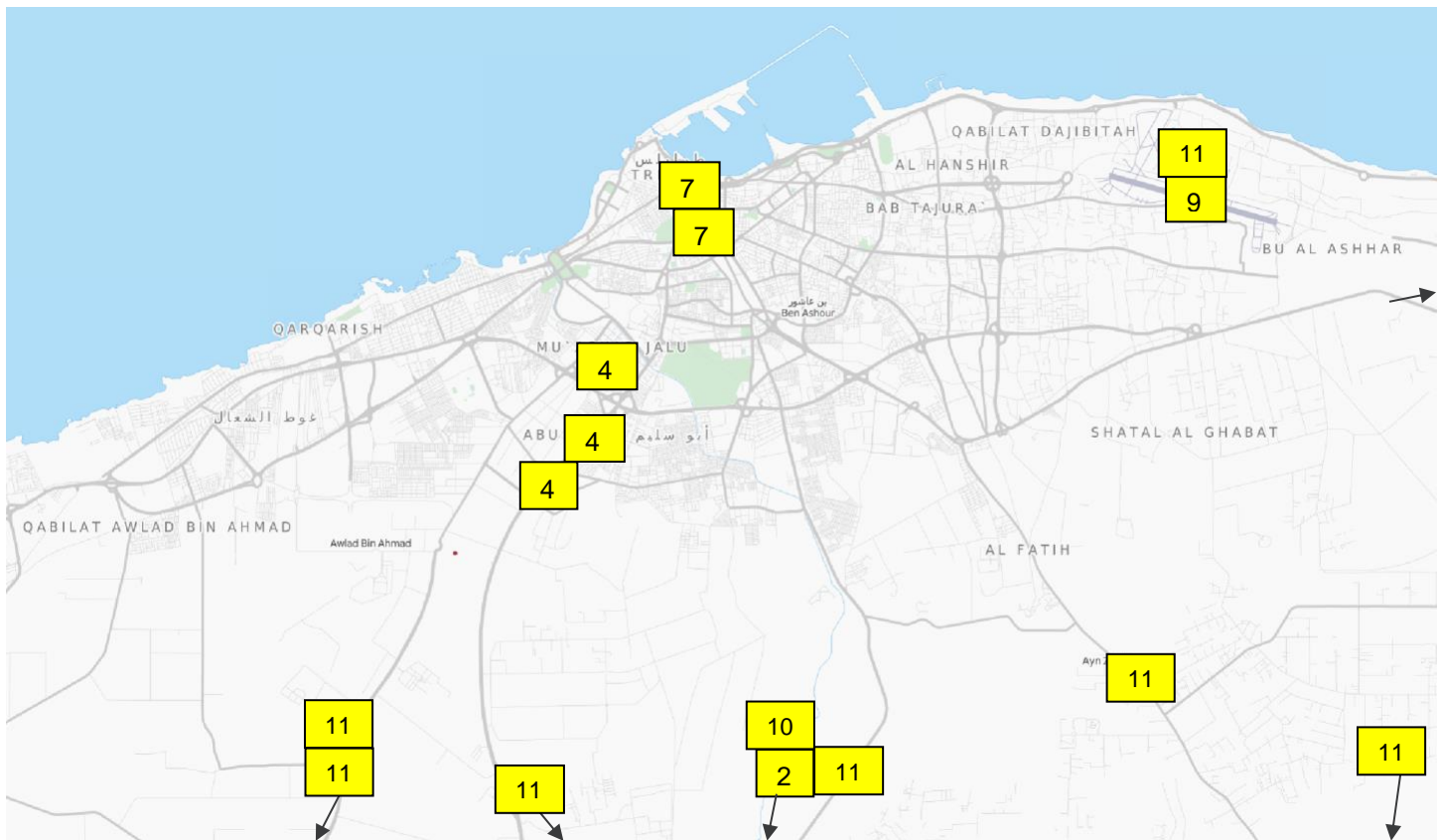
This week in Central Libya, local reports cited an unidentified military source stating that an airstrike targeted Houn in the Jufra district at dawn on 18 Apr. According to the source, it remains unclear which party carried out the airstrike. Separately, the Sirte Protection Force (SPF), affiliated to Misrata's Bunyan Al-Marsous (BAM) and nominally under the GNA, carried out mobile security patrols and fixed-position guarding South of the Sirte national district. The SPF stated that all areas under its jurisdiction are secured; from Abu Grein in the West to areas East of Sirte. The patrols are in anticipation of potential LNA movements in the district.

Turning to Southern Libya, this week was marked by reports of an armed attack targeting the Tamanhint Airport on 18 Apr. Initial reports indicate a convoy of at least 15 armed vehicles attacked the airport. Meanwhile, the GNA-affiliated South Protection Force claimed control over the airport. Initial reports indicate Chadian /Sudanese and Tebu forces aligned to the GNA South Protection Force commander Ali-Kanna were behind the attack. The airport was reportedly later retaken by LNA units.

In Eastern Libya, a vehicle-improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated under Benghazi's Sidi Khalifa Bridge on 15 Apr, resulting in physical damage with no reports of casualties. Meanwhile, the Libyan Red Crescent (LRC) located four unidentified bodies in Derna's Al-Mughar area on 15 Apr.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### Clashes expected to protract & move further North; increased airstrikes



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (13-14 Apr) Airstrikes increase in number and frequency
2. (15 Apr) GNA downs LNA MiG23 aircraft; shelling intensifies
3. (16 Apr) UNSMIL head refers to Haftar's arrest warrant against Serraj as "coup"
4. (16-17 Apr) Clashes witness heaviest shelling thus far, civilian casualties
5. (16 Apr) UK-drafted UNSC resolution blocked by Russia & US
6. (16 Apr) Al-Serraj states lawsuit will be filed against Haftar for shelling civilians
7. (17 Apr) Locals protest to condemn shelling in Matryrs' & Algeria Squares
8. (17 Apr) LNA Ajdabiya Ops. Room commander: LNA to enter Tripoli's Centre before Ramadan (05 May)
9. (17 Apr) Closure of airspace between Benghazi & Tripoli Air Control
10. (17 Apr) Two Turkish nationals kidnapped in Qasr Bin Ghashir
11. (18-21 Apr) Combat Ops, enter phase 2 as airstrikes intensify; MJI temp. closure

#### Combat Ops. enter phase 2

The two-week offensive escalated overnight with increased airstrikes and allegations of foreign airpower support to the LNA. There are growing allegations that US President Donald Trump's apparent support to Haftar in a recent phone call has led to increased LNA foreign military backing. The clashes have thus far resulted in 227 fatalities and 1128 injuries, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Libya. Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport (MJI) is operational, though restrictions continue to apply (operations from 1700hrs-0800hrs). MJI was reopened after a 6-hour closure due to airstrikes targeting nearby areas of Souq Al-Jumaa. The airstrikes were initially thought to have targeted MJI, though this was later discredited and MJI's closure was only a precautionary security measure. Meanwhile, clashes intensified on the Swani, Kasarat, and Aziziyah fronts. The LNA attempted to regain control over Aziziyah in a counter-offensive to repel GNA-aligned militias, though conflicting reports on positions continue to emerge. The clashes on the Tripoli International Airport (TIP) and Aziziyah fronts opposed Osama Juwaili's Western Military Zone forces to the LNA's 166 Bn. and 106 Brigade group. Both sides continue to claim progress on multiple fronts. The GNA's "Volcano of Wrath" stated its operation entered a "new phase", claiming victory on multiple fronts. According to an official statement, the operation claimed advances on the Aziziyah-Swani, Ain Zara-Wadi Rabei, and Qasr Bin Ghashir fronts. In a similar

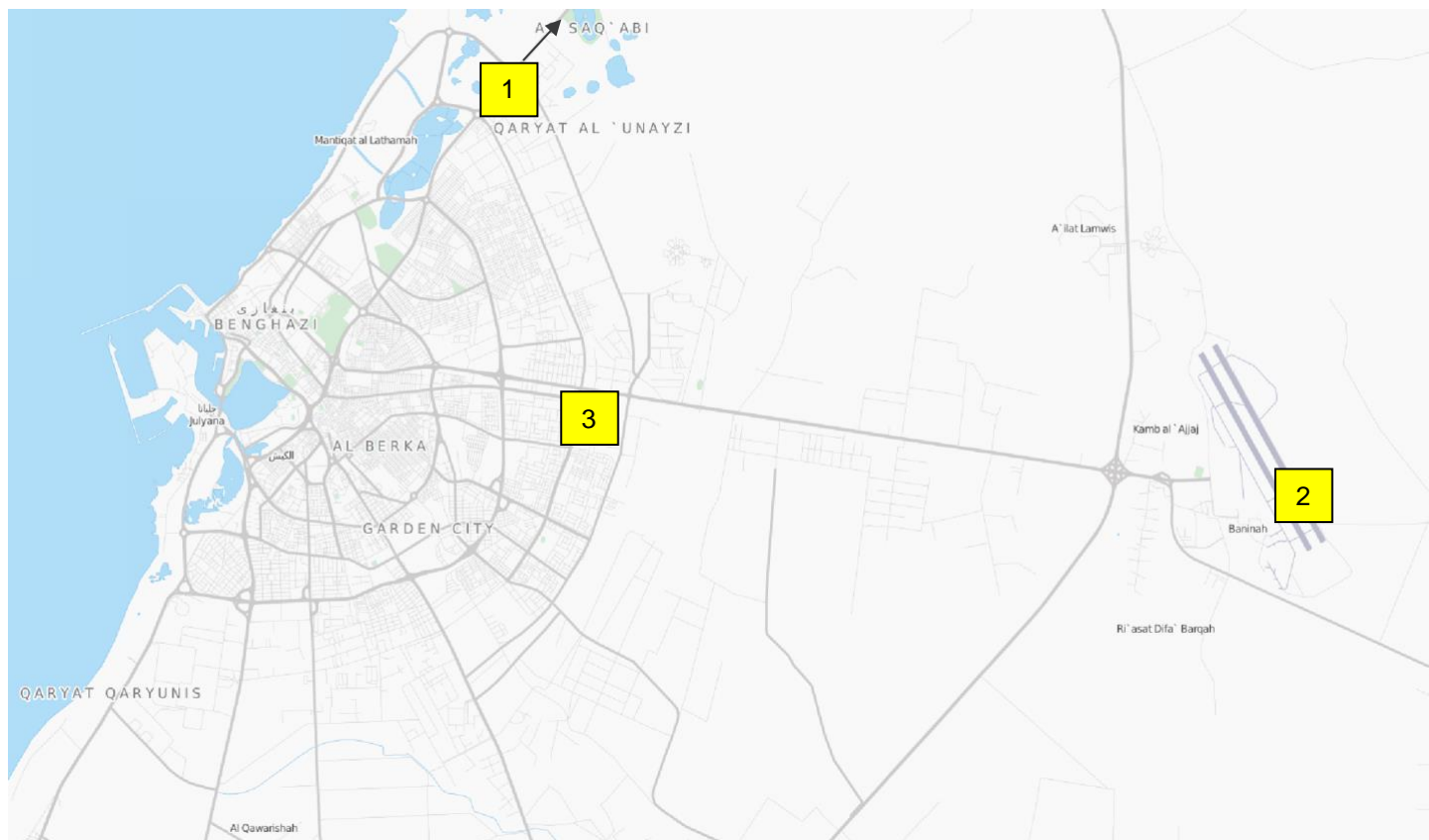
statement, the LNA spokesperson, Ahmed Mismary, announced the end of phase one and transition to the second phase of combat operations. More LNA reinforcements are expected amid unconfirmed reports that the Kufra-based Subul Salam Battalion and three additional battalions from Bani Walid are expected to join engagements. Based on developments and evidence thus far, the conflict is now more likely to protract. Additionally, the LNA Ajdabiya Operations Room commander, Fawzi Al-Mansouri, stated that the "liberation" of Tripoli will be achieved "days" before the start of the holy month of Ramadan (05 May). Al-Mansouri added that the LNA's entry into Tripoli's centre will not take longer than a week or 10 days.

#### UNSMIL head denies assassination attempt

Rumours circulated of a possible assassination attempt targeting Ghassan Salame, the head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), near Tripoli's Cortinthia Hotel. The reports claim Salame's vehicle was under fire near the hotel, with no further information. The reports were later denied and discredited, with no evidence to corroborate an assassination attempt or any other security incident. Salame himself took to social media to deny the rumours.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### VBIED detonates under Sidi Khalifa bridge resulting in physical damage



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (15 Apr) VBIED detonates under Sidi Khalifa Bridge
2. (19 Apr) Airspace between Benghazi & Tripoli reopens
3. (19 Apr) Criminal arrested for robbing 58,000 LYD

#### VBIED detonates under Sidi Khalifa Bridge

Reports emerged over a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonating under Benghazi's Sidi Khalifa Bridge at approximately 1040hrs on 15 Apr. Unconfirmed reports alleged that the VBIED intended to target the Anti-Terrorism Apparatus head. However, the Information Office head of Benghazi's Security Directorate, Ahmed Al-Mesmari, denied the circulated reports across social media outlets suggesting the VBIED resulted in the injury of the Anti-Terrorism Apparatus head. According to Al-Mesmari, the VBIED resulted in physical damage to nearby vehicles and the Sidi Khalifa Bridge, whilst denying that the explosion resulted in casualties.

#### CID arrests criminal involved in robberies

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) reportedly arrested a criminal for robbing the Sony electronics shop on Benghazi's Venice Street on 19 Apr. According to the CID, the criminal admitted to stealing 58,000 Libyan dinars (LYD) worth of goods, in addition to carrying out four separate acts of robberies in the Shabneh area.

#### Airspace reopens between Benghazi & Tripoli

WB sources indicate airspace between Benghazi and Tripoli reopened on 19 Apr. Flights between MJI/MRA and Benghazi (MJI-BEN & MRA-BEN) were previously cancelled due to airspace closure between Tripoli and Benghazi air traffic control.



## 6. What's next

### Prospect of Tripoli ceasefire undermined; LNA to mount broader offensive

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

This week was marked by the White House Press Office confirming that US President Donald Trump “recognized Field Marshal Haftar’s significant role in fighting terrorism and securing Libya’s oil resources” in a phone call with Khalifa Haftar on 15 Apr, where the “two discussed a shared vision for Libya’s transition to a stable, democratic political system”. Trump’s remarks would clearly indicate support for the LNA’s recent Tripoli offensive, marking a sharp departure from previous opposition to the military offensive voiced by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who urged “the immediate halt to these military operations.” Multiple analysts have suggested this move legitimizes the LNA’s offensive while increasing the likelihood of a full-blown military escalation with foreign intervention in support of the LNA, while undermining the GNA’s likelihood of survival. Other analysts indicate this latest change in position was prompted by Trump’s concerns over the impact of military escalation on global oil and US gasoline prices. The development would undermine prospects of a UN ceasefire in the short term. This is especially true given recent objections by the US and Russia to a British ceasefire resolution at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). While Russian objection is consistent with its recent position, the US veto would corroborate a potential shift in US policy as highlighted by Trump’s remarks. Beyond, military escalation has also impacted diplomatic relations. The GNA’s interior ministry suspended “all relations between the ministry and the French side”, accusing Paris of tacit support for Haftar. Domestically, the UN Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, praised the municipal elections held across seven municipalities on 20 Apr. The seven municipalities included Brak Al-Shati, Edri Al-Shati, Al-Rhaibat, Awbari, and Ash-Shwayrif.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In an article for *The National*, the author, Jonathan Brown, discusses how Russia attempts to distance itself from being perceived as a sole supporter of General Khalifa Haftar, and is instead, taking on a more neutral stance by calling for a political solution to end the ongoing clashes in Tripoli. “The most theatrical display of Moscow’s support for Gen Haftar came in 2017. As Russia’s flagship piece of military hardware, the Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier, was departing Syria, officials gave a tour to Gen Haftar before he spoke to Russia’s Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu via video link about fighting international terrorism. But the Kremlin has also offered hands-on assistance. To the dismay of western diplomats and officials in the Tripoli government, Russia has printed banknotes for the Tobruk government. And although the Kremlin has stopped short of intervening militarily on behalf of Gen Haftar, his regular visits with defence and foreign ministry officials in Moscow have raised eyebrows. In November, he was seen at a meeting in the Russian capital alongside Yevgeny Prigozhin, the Kremlin-connected businessman alleged to run a private military company whose fighters are reported to be deployed in eastern Libya. But Russia analysts are keen to point out that Russia hasn’t put all its eggs in one basket in Libya. Fayez Al Serraj, the prime minister of the GNA is also a regular in Moscow, and in 2016 Russia’s state-run oil giant Rosneft signed a deal to buy oil from Libya’s National Oil Corporation in Tripoli. Whether the Kremlin’s investment in Gen Haftar pays off remains to be seen but Moscow is positioned to seek out the next best actor if the commander’s star wanes, says Leonid Bershidsky, a Russian political columnist. “If Haftar fails to win control of Tripoli,” he wrote in Bloomberg recently, “and his hold on much of Libya’s natural wealth weakens as a consequence, the Kremlin will be actively seeking others to empower so it can get back into the country’s oil and gas sector and seek opportunities for a naval presence.”

#### SECURITY FORECAST

Whilst clashes in Tripoli’s Southern areas have entered their eighteenth consecutive day, reports suggest the fighting on 21 Apr was less fierce in contrast to the wave of airstrikes and indiscriminate shelling witnessed over the past few days. However, it remains likely that the conflict will protract with neither side accepting a ceasefire. Fighting could move further North towards Tripoli’s centre as the LNA pushes to claim victory prior to the holy month of Ramadan (05 May). The latter was confirmed by the LNA’s Ajdabiya Ops. Room commander stating that the army would “liberate” Tripoli days before the start of Ramadan and would enter Tripoli’s centre within a week/10 days. The LNA could see significant advances on the ground amid reports of additional reinforcements from across the country. Meanwhile, in the wider West, unrest continues to dominate the Jfara area with ongoing clashes in Al-Aziziya. On the Gharyan front, the Government of National Accord (GNA) continues to target LNA positions with airstrikes though the latest reports suggest the army remains in full control over the city. In Libya’s central region, Sirte’s security forces remain on high alert with mobile security patrols and fixed-position guarding against the backdrop of possible LNA movements. Meanwhile, whilst output remains unaffected by clashes in the West, the Oil Crescent remains exposed to a possible coordinated attack by anti-LNA factions. In the South, an armed attack on the Tamanhint Airbase indicates the likelihood of similar security incidents in the region amid an LNA focus on the Tripoli campaign, subsequently exposing areas under its control across the country. Similarly, Haftar’s Eastern stronghold of Benghazi could see an increase in criminal activity.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an article for *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the author, Ahmed Eleiba, discusses the details surrounding General Khalifa Haftar’s latest meeting with Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah el-Sisi, in Cairo, Egypt. “It is clear Cairo considered the motive of Haftar’s operation exactly as he stated it in his first statement released following the launch of the operation. Haftar said Operation Flood of Dignity aimed at “fighting terrorism and cleansing Tripoli of the militias controlling it”. The operation’s motive won it Cairo’s support, as clarified in Monday’s presidential statement. An anti-terrorist operation in Libya would definitely win Egypt’s support for strategic reasons, obliging Cairo to be updated on security developments in its neighbouring country, and more so now because Egypt has suffered from the deterioration of security conditions in Libya. Terrorist networks functioning in eastern Libya are in close proximity to Egypt’s western border through which terrorist elements entered Egypt. The majority of terrorist organisations based in the east of Libya were eliminated thanks to successful LNA operations and Egypt’s logistical support. In the same context, Cairo stressed it supported the anti-terrorist operation in western Libya, especially after LNA figureheads revealed terrorist leaders from Al-Qaeda and other militias on Egypt’s list of terrorists were camping in west Libya. Cairo also declared its intention to intensify its efforts towards uniting the Libyan army and security apparatuses to minimise the chances of division within their ranks, exacerbated after the spread of militias and legitimising their presence on the security and political fronts. Haftar’s visit in Cairo was also aimed at winning the support of allies for the operation. This required listening to Egypt’s vision regarding the operation and exchanging views, especially since the operation’s field developments have revealed it was different than military operations the LNA conducted in the east and south”.

# About Whispering Bell



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