



# 1. The Big Picture

## LNA Tripoli intervention threat remains unsubstantiated



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This week the Libyan National Army (LNA) continued to bolster its influence and expand its military sway in the West with additional local agreements and a purported “boots on the ground” presence in Gharyan and Asbi’a, some 120 kilometers South of Tripoli. LNA hints at an imminent Tripoli-bound intervention have raised concerns over the prospect of a power-sharing agreement to end Libya’s crisis, despite multiple statements at the 30<sup>th</sup> Arab League Summit in support of the United Nations (UN) political roadmap. Libya sits at the crossroads of escalation and a political agreement. However, a full-scale military operation to enter Tripoli appears unlikely today and would present far more risks from the LNA’s perspective. Instead, the LNA will seek to carve out political gains and escalation would be limited to clashes between/among armed factions in the North-West, including Tripoli militias in the short to medium term.

LNA posturing reached an all-time high this week with rumours of the formation of a “Tripoli Liberations Ops Room” (later confirmed as the Western Region Ops Group); LNA spox Ahmed Al-Mismary suggesting the army “will enter Tripoli but will do so in due time”; and news that Tarhunah’s Al-Kaniat militia and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade merged into the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade General Command, in a likely pro-LNA move. Seen from this angle, the optimism found in political statements, and accompanying the beginning of municipal council elections, does not seem to match the belligerent behavior and growing apprehension among armed groups in the West.

However, there is evidence that threats to enter Tripoli are part of political jockeying ahead of planned elections. On-the-ground realignment with the LNA across localities in the North-West does not corroborate the likelihood of an LNA move towards Tripoli. It remains difficult to ascertain the LNA’s influence in the North-West and there is no evidence of a heavy footprint as local allegiances have the potential to shift. Given the GNA’s waning popularity, some

groups are pledging allegiance to the LNA by default and a lack of alternative. Other groups that have not yet publicly declared their support for the LNA remain “neutral”.

The Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) statement announcing the formation of a Western Region Protection Force is a case in point. Many analysts have suggested the development proves that forces in the North-West are beginning to consolidate in response to LNA movements, describing this as an indicator of a looming confrontation. However, the statement’s mention of fiscal accountability and good governance with a specific focus on institutions such as the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), proves otherwise. The ambiguity in the TPF statement clearly reflects the reality that Tripoli armed groups can no longer side with the GNA and have to either maintain a neutral stance or shift towards the LNA; a trend that is expected to continue unfolding.

Politically, launching an offensive on Tripoli would not result in a desirable outcome for LNA head Khalifa Haftar, regardless of the LNA’s success. Haftar will instead exploit the formation of a new executive government - confirmed outcome of the Abu Dhabi meeting – to push for leadership change/restructuring at the Tripoli-based CBL, which would then enable him to control coveted oil revenues in the long term. In the meantime, the GNA does not appear capable of shoring up its decreasing popularity amid controversies over budget allocation, which have renewed salary grievances in the oil and gas sector.

**KEY POINTS**

- LNA intervention in Tripoli unlikely
- TPF forms Western Protection Force
- Haftar intent on carving political gains

## 2. National Security Map

### Pro-LNA parade in Gharyan; LNA resolution to form Western Region Ops Group

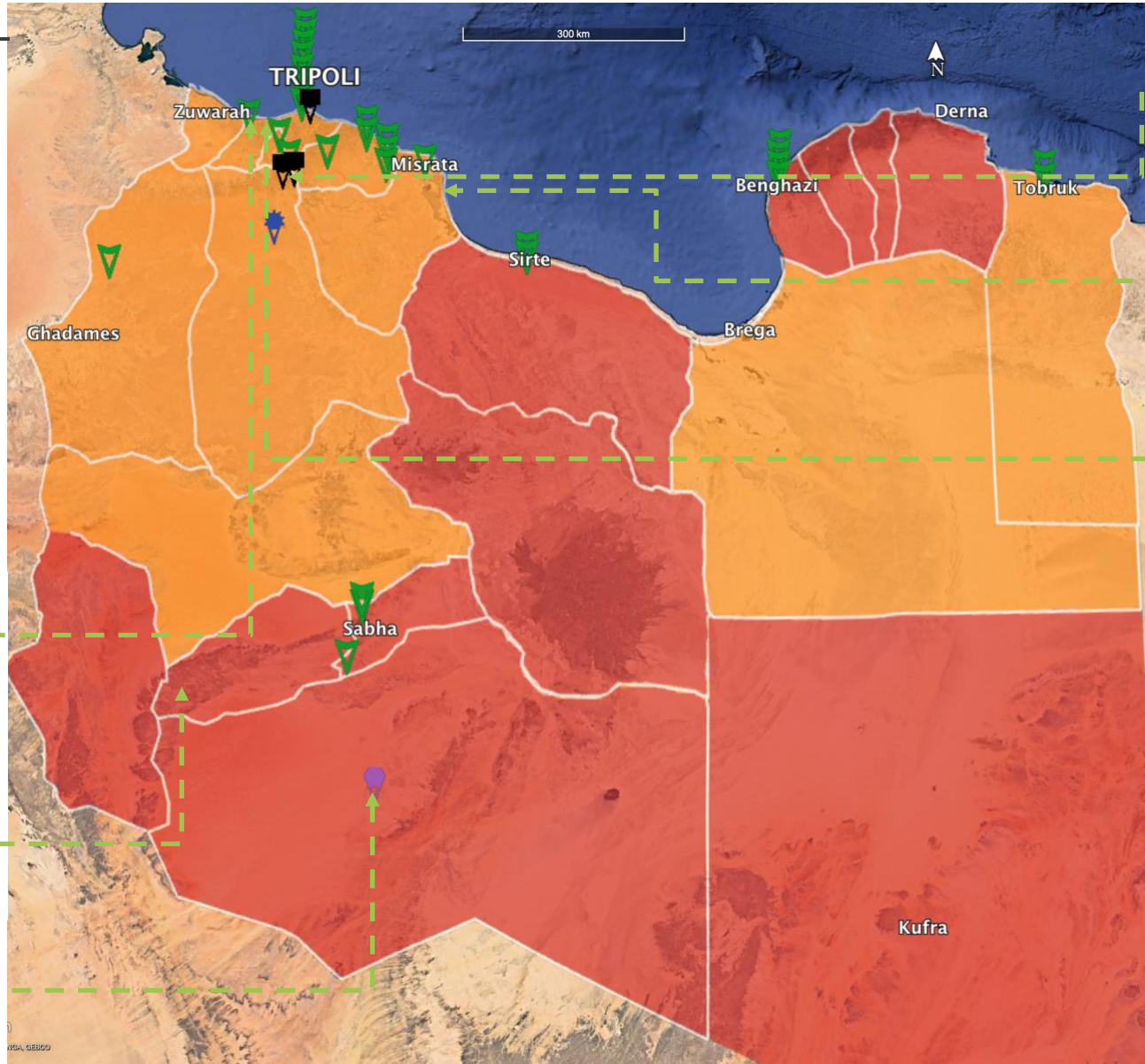
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

- ★ IED | VBIED
- ♦ Violent Clash
- Isolated Gunfire
- ▽ Other



Reports of a military parade by the 111th Battalion, a Gharyan-based military units, with a large convoy of technicals in an unidentified area of the city on 29 Mar. Videos of the parade were circulated by the LNA's War Media Office across social media outlets. The development would come after the 111th Battalion pledged allegiance to the LNA on 20 Feb. Separately, reports suggest the LNA sent supplies and reinforcements, including technicals, to the Gharyan Military Council on 29 Mar. Further, reports of a military parade by the 107th Battalion, a pro-LNA unit from Asbi'a, 120 km West of Tripoli.

Reports suggest a militiaman from the Awlad Saqr tribe was killed in a recent dispute that escalated between members of the tribe in Al-Zawiya on 27 Mar.

Resolution no.108 of 2019 issued by the Libyan National Army (LNA) head, Khalifa Haftar on 17 Mar, announcing the formation of the Western Region Operations Group led by LNA Ops Room Commander (Maj Gen) Abdussalam Al-Hassi. In the second article of the resolution, (Maj Gen) Al-Sadiq Al-Mazoughi, was assigned as Al-Hassi's assistant. The resolution called for the annexation of the personnel, weapons, and financial resources of the Tripoli Operations Room to the Western Region Operations Group.

On 27 Mar, the National Oil Corporation (NOC) announced that its February income from the sales of crude oil and derived products, in addition to taxes and royalties received from concession contracts, amounted to 1.26 billion USD, marking a month-on-month decrease of 330 million (-21%).

In a statement published on its official Facebook page, Sabratha's Security Directorate announced the arrest of a suspected Islamic State (IS) militant on 25 Mar. Security forces stated that legal action is being taken. No further information was provided.

A number of workers at the Sharara Oil Field and two other facilities, are demanding a salary increase by two-thirds, marking the first sign of objection following the lifting of force majeure and the resumption of operations at the field on 04 Mar 2018.

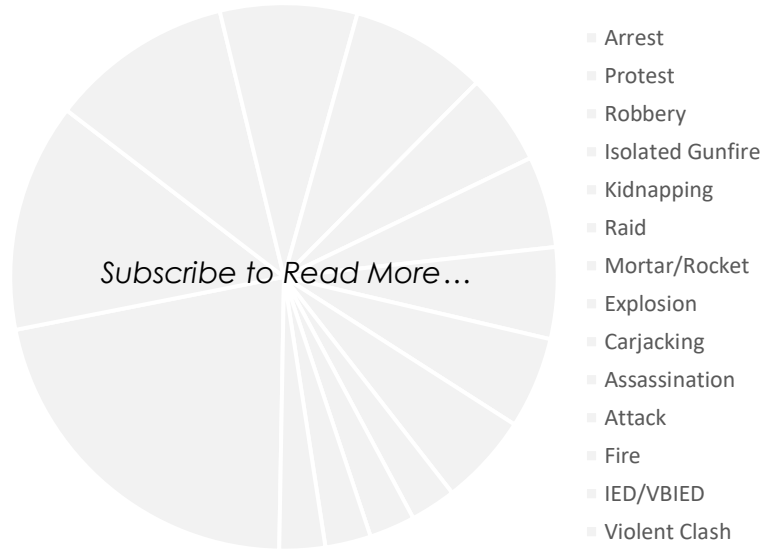
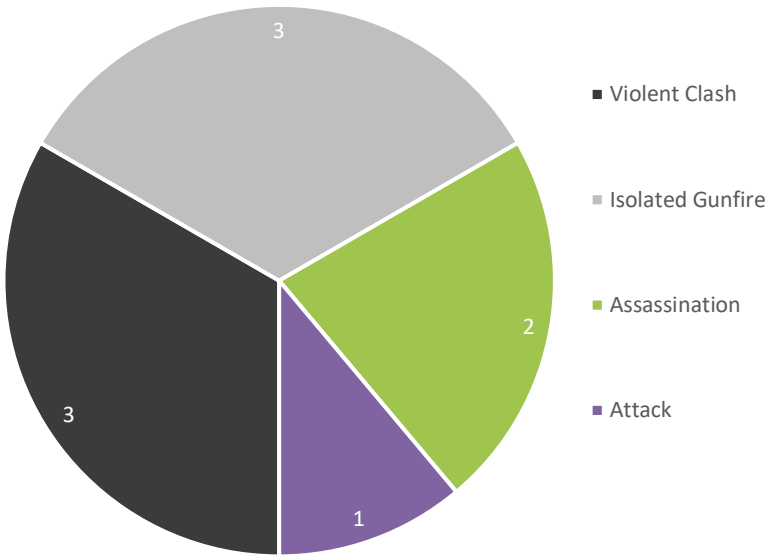
LNA units engaged an unidentified gang involved in kidnappings and robberies in Qatron, resulting in the death of 3 gang members, the arrest of three others, and the release of an unconfirmed number of abductees.

### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Sporadic incidents on the rise in the North-West amid tensions over LNA move

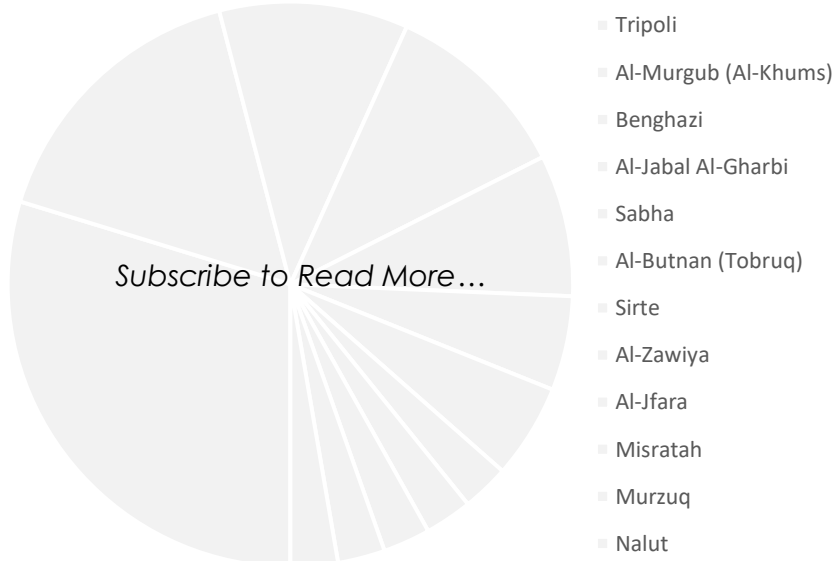
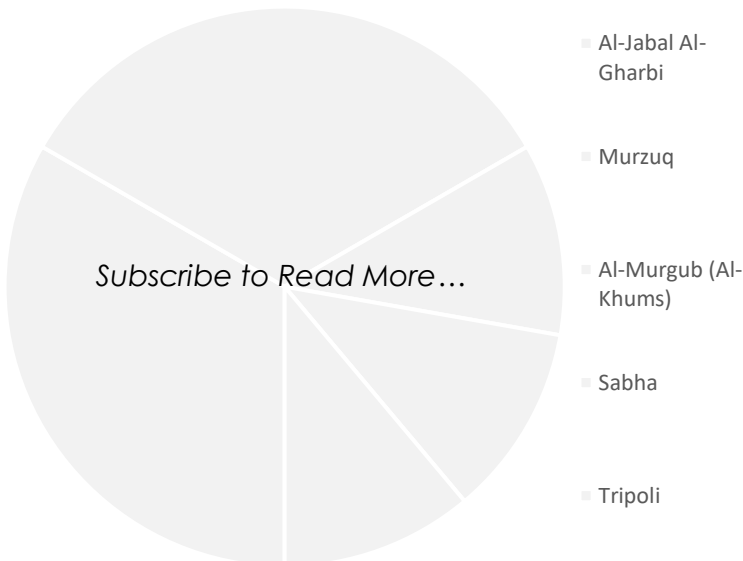
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)

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 9 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 12 deaths reported last week and 04 the week before. This week, WB recorded a decrease in isolated gunfire incidents across the country. However, sporadic security incidents were on the rise in the North-West, especially in Gharyan and the Al-Murgub (Khoms) national district. Over ½ of the nationwide incidents were recorded in the Western region. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country including, 8 arrests, 5 protests, 4 robberies, 3 cases of isolated gunfire, 3 kidnappings, 2 raids, 2 carjackings, 2 assassinations and 1 violent clash.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 26 incidents, including 11 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli, marking the same number of incidents recorded in the West in the previous week. In Tripoli, reports suggest police officers closed off Tripoli's Al-Shat Road in response to reports of a suspicious bag possibly containing an improvised explosive device (IED) inside it, which was found under Al-Waddan Bridge at approximately 0100hrs on 27 Mar. The bag reportedly turned out to be empty. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest an armed group affiliated with the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) raided the Al-Musheer parallel currency trading market in downtown Tripoli and arrested a number of black-market traders due to their presence in illegal positions in front of the shops at the Clock Tower Square in the afternoon on 27 Mar. Beyond, in the wider West, reports suggest a member of the Khoms Internal Security identified as Muftah Al-Fitouri was kidnapped from his farmhouse on 22 Mar, with reports suggesting his vehicle was found on 26 Mar.

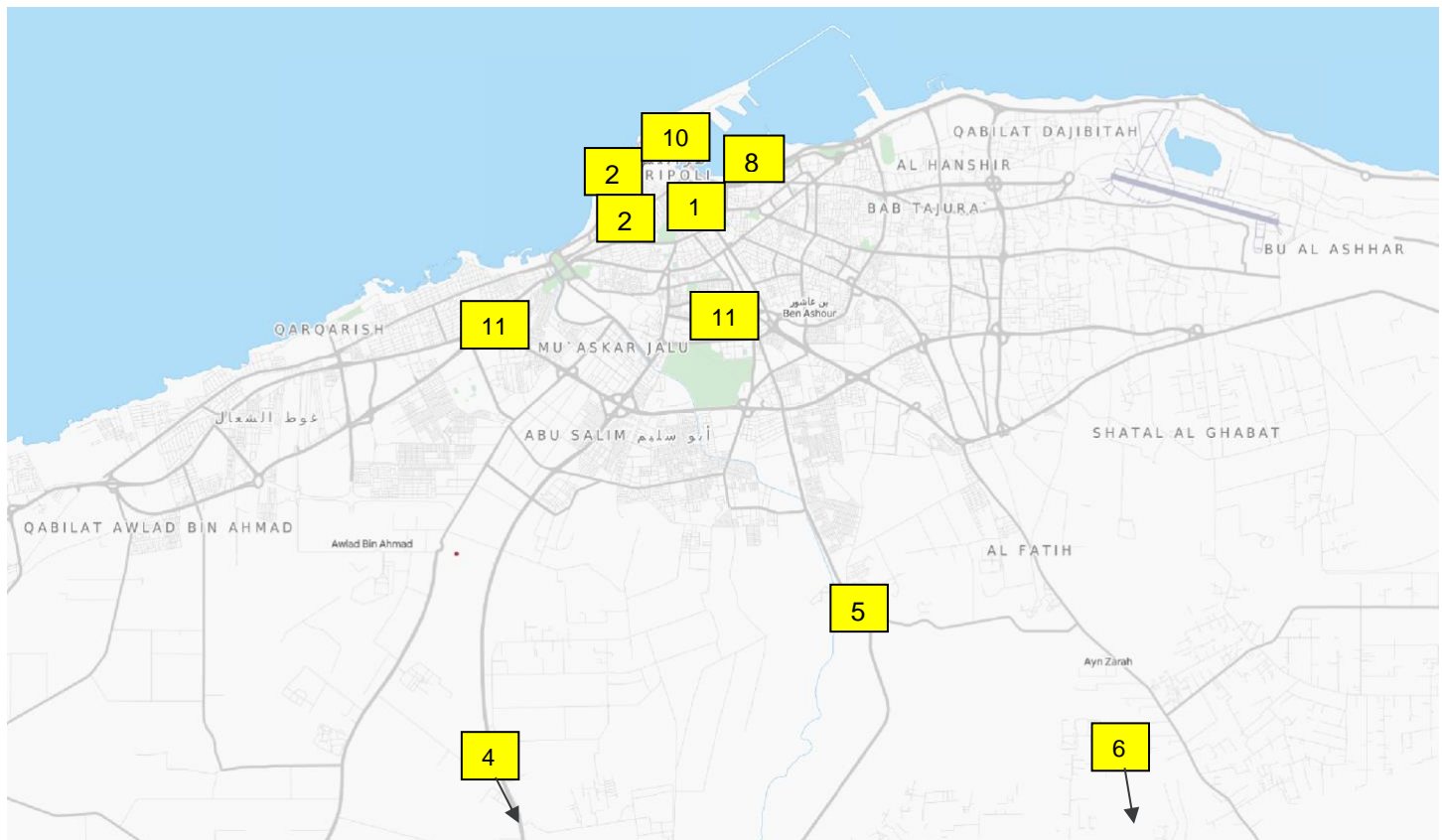
This week in Central Libya reports suggest an armed group kidnapped a local identified as Ali Furjani near Sirte's Gate 700 on 26 Mar. Neither the identity of the assailants nor the motive behind the incident are known.

Turning to Southern Libya, reports emerged of an unidentified group carrying out an armed attack on Ghadduwah, 60 kms South of Sabha, and the disconnection of telecommunications across the town at dawn on 25 Mar. The attack reportedly resulted in one fatality, the injuries of three others, and the kidnapping of two local residents. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports emerged over Libyan National Army (LNA) units clashing with an unidentified gang involved in kidnappings and robberies in Qatrun, resulting in the death of 3 gang members, the arrest of three others, and the release of an unconfirmed number of abductees on 26 Mar.

In Eastern Libya, WB recorded a surge in arrest campaigns across Benghazi and Tobruk. Security forces in Tobruk arrested a total of 103 illegal migrants in a crackdown on illegal migrants across the city. Meanwhile, in Benghazi, security forces continued to target criminal networks in an ongoing arrest campaign.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### Militia movements South of Tripoli; GNA Tripoli Military Region parade



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (23 Mar) Peaceful protest demanding release of Gaddafi ex-spy chief
2. (24 Mar) Nawasi militia presence in front of Corinthia & That Al-Imad
3. (25 Mar) UAV flying over Tripoli
4. (26 Mar) Explosion heard on Airport Road
5. (26 Mar) Increased militia movements South of Tripoli; military parade
6. (26 Mar) Ghneiwa militia allegedly assassinates Tarhuna resident
7. (26 Mar) 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion detains 100 Iron Factory laborers in Sidi Al-Sayeh
8. (27 Mar) Shat Rd. closed due to bag possibly containing IED; found empty
10. (27 Mar) TRB-affiliated group raids black market & arrests' traders
11. (27 Mar) Carjacking and vehicle theft
12. (28-29 Mar) Long queues at fuel stations after rumors of strike

#### Increased militia movements South of Tripoli

Conflicting reports emerged over increased militia movements South of Tripoli on 26 Mar. WB sources reported an armed convoy of approximately 21 vehicles travelling on Tripoli's Salah Eddien - Qasr Bin Ghashir Road at approximately 0900hrs on 26 Mar. Sources reported additional military convoys heading towards the Qasr Bin Ghasheir area, including a military convoy of approximately 200 armed vehicles affiliated with the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) and passing through the Souk Al-Sabt and heading South towards the Qasr Bin Ghashir area in the afternoon on 26 Mar. Qasr Bin Ghashir locals reported a military gathering of hundreds of armed vehicles in the afternoon. There were reports of heavy gunfire in the Sidi Al-Sayeh area. Initial reports indicate the TPF was testing its weapons. The military convoy reported travelling in the Qasr Bin Ghasheir area, was stationed in the Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel and Sidi Al-Sayeh areas at approximately 1730hrs on 26 Mar. Conflicting reports continued to emerge over the motive behind the military gatherings, with rumors suggesting the incident was in response to a Libyan National Army (LNA) mobilization in Tarhuna. Local reports suggest the movements came as part of a Government of National Accord (GNA) Tripoli Military Region military parade, headed by Colonel Abdelbasset Marwan, and in coordination with the Chief of Staff and the Presidential Council (PC). Overall,

the military gatherings would aim to portray a show of force in response to a potential LNA push towards the capital city.

#### Temporary emergency security room formed

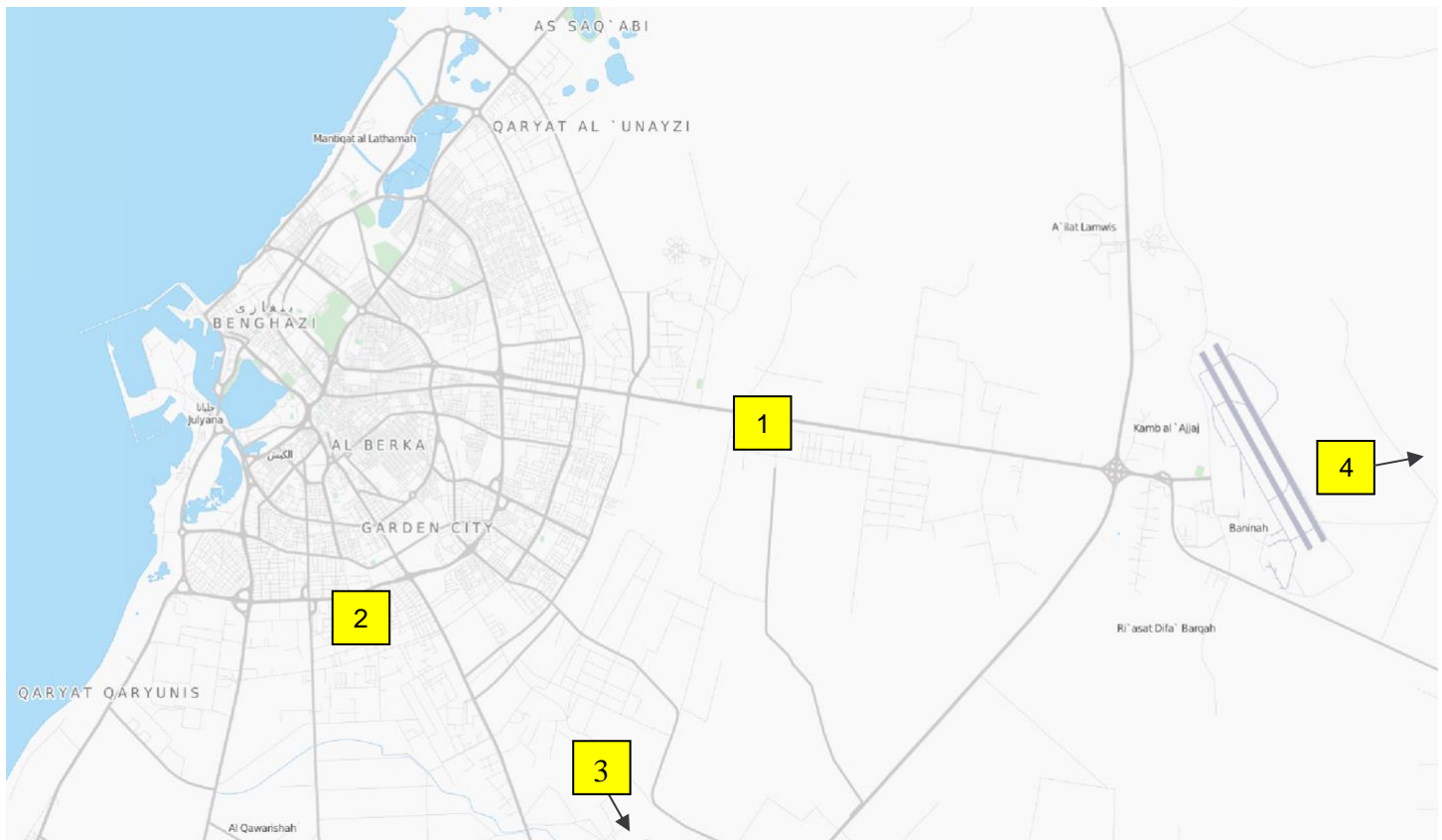
On 23 Mar, the GNA Interior Minister, Fathi Bashagha, announced the formation of a temporary emergency security room headed by the Tripoli Security Directorate head along with members across security and legal apparatuses. The Ministry of Interior (Moi) noted that the emergency security room is tasked with responding rapidly and effectively to thwart acts of sabotage, which comes as part of efforts to protect civilians and key public and private institutions. In a separate development, the Moi instructed security departments to temporarily suspend licensing demonstrations and/or sit-ins, citing the current security context and possible threats.

#### Security alert raised to prevent security breach

The GNA's Minister of Interior (Moi) spokesman, Mohammed Abu Abdallah, noted that the Moi raised its security alert in Tripoli to prevent security breaches by "outlawed groups and Islamic State (IS) militants". Abu Abdallah stated that all facilities and diplomatic missions are fully secured, whilst confirming coordination between the General Directorate of Security Operations and the High National Elections Commission (HNEC) to secure the municipal elections that commenced on 30 Mar.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### EU Ambassadors meet Haftar & HoR delegation; series of arrests



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (25 Mar) Armed gang consisting of 6 members arrested
2. (25 Mar) Four individuals arrested for robbing cash
3. (25 Mar) Man accused of murder arrested
4. (26 Mar) EU Ambassadors meet Haftar and HoR delegation
5. (27 Mar) Human smugglers arrested for trafficking Egyptian migrants
6. (30 Mar) Egyptian man stabbed to death

#### EU Ambassadors meet Haftar

On Mar 26, following their visit to Benghazi, European Union (EU) Ambassadors issued a joint statement in which they called for an end to Libya's transitional stage through the holding of elections and expressed their support for the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) head, Ghassan Salame's efforts, including his upcoming Libyan National Conference due to be held in Ghadames between 14-16 Apr. The statement reaffirmed support for local municipal elections currently underway across the country and called for the participation of Libyan women in the political sphere. Further, the EU Ambassadors called for a unified military with civilian oversight and less foreign interference, whilst warning against human rights violations in conflicts across the country, noting the recent military campaigns in the East and South, as well as ongoing violations in the West. The joint statement came after the EU Ambassadors held a meeting with the Libyan National Army (LNA) head, Khalifa Haftar, and with a House of Representatives (HoR) delegation led by the Foreign Affairs Committee head, Yousef Al-Aghouri. According to the statement, the meeting's main objective was for EU Ambassadors and representatives to urge all parties to support efforts ensuring a successful National Conference, and support for holding elections

as soon as possible. Some observers suggest the EU statement directly accused Haftar's army of engaging in human rights' violations as part of his military campaign in Libya's East and South. Regardless, the EU's visit to Benghazi to meet with Haftar would highlight the centrality of the LNA commander in reaching any potential deal that would break the current stalemate.

#### Sporadic security incidents

The Directorate of the Security Information Office under Benghazi's Security Directorate, Ahmed Al-Mesmari, announced the arrest of an armed gang in Benghazi on 25 Mar. Al-Mesmari noted that the arrest came after receiving intelligence related to the armed group made up of six criminals, and its activity, including the theft of houses and farms, operating in Benghazi's Bouatni area. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, local reports suggest Criminal Investigation Department (CID) members arrested four individuals accused of robbing 400,000 Libyan dinars (LYD) from the "Smart Phone Company" shop in Benghazi's Beloun area on 25 Mar. Beyond this, an Egyptian national, identified was stabbed to death in Benghazi's Al-Fateh area on 30 Mar. The motive remains unknown.

## 6. What's next

### LNA posturing & threats to escalate tensions between Tripoli armed groups

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

Optimism on the political front was high this week, reflected in the United Nations Secretary General (UNSG), Antonio Guterres' statement that "this a moment of hope", referring to Libya's current political context. The UNSG stressed that the recent meeting between Fayez Al-Serraj and Khalifa Haftar in Abu Dhabi has resulted in a "window of opportunity". Yet, local sentiment has thus far indicated the 14-16 April National Conference is "doomed to fail". Reports suggest the HoR speaker, Aguila Saleh, is unlikely to accept any agreement and/or endorse the Conference's outcomes. Some HoR members are already promoting the idea that a LNA offensive into Tripoli is the only solution should the Conference fail. Locally, the controversial pro-Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) cleric and former Mufti, Sadiq Al Gharyani, stated he is not directly opposed to the National Conference so long as the UNSMIL confirms the list of attendees and pledges to abide by the Conference's outcomes. Gharyani's statement would denote a more nuanced stance by the LIFG and willingness to participate in the political process in an effort to prevent the marginalization of the pro-LIFG constituency. Internationally, Haftar's visit to Saudi Arabia, the first of its kind since King Idris, has further cemented his position as a prominent figure in the Libyan political scene. The visit will add further pressure on the UN to recognize his legitimacy after recent military gains.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Writing for *RAND*, Nathan Vest explores the threat of widespread violence in Libya in light of recent LNA movements in the North-West. Vest argues "it is highly unlikely that Haftar's core units will remain in the south for long, and reports are already circulating that LNA elements are redeploying to Jufra in central Libya, with their sites likely set on Bani Walid, 110 miles southeast of Tripoli. Bani Walid has long been a thorn in Haftar's side. Bani Walid has long been a thorn in Haftar's side. Opposing forces, namely the Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB) and the militia headed by Ibrahim Jadhraan, have used the town as a base to launch multiple operations against the LNA. Jadhraan is subject to U.S. sanctions for disrupting Libya's vital oil-exporting capabilities and costing the country billions of dollars, and Haftar considers BDB to be a terrorist group. Furthermore, after being expelled from its stronghold in Sirte in December 2016, ISIS has regrouped in the areas surrounding Bani Walid. Haftar could justify his thrust toward the town as a move to take out terrorists -- this is what he did in the south. However, Bani Walid would also serve as an ideal staging area for a push toward Tripoli." Vest then concludes "But if Haftar does begin a military attempt to subdue the forces in Libya's west and march on Tripoli, it could have dire consequences for the entire country, as well as for Libya's neighbors and Europe. An eruption of violence could upend the fragile stability that is currently stemming migrant flows from Libya across the Mediterranean."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

In Tripoli, evidence would indicate LNA movements and the threat of an intervention will exacerbate intra-militia tensions within the capital city, with the possibility of clashes with little to no warning. Tarhunah remains susceptible to flashpoints and skirmishes amid ambiguity over the recent formation of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade General Command, which includes both Al-Kaniat militia and the LNA-aligned 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade. Despite assurances provided by Tarhunah locals that the city will not be a conduit for the LNA, there is a possibility of skirmishes with Tripoli's militias. Gharyan's fluid security environment over the past month and recent pro-LNA rhetoric would likewise prompt further escalation in the city. Separately, the Islamic State (IS) group remains capable of carrying out a complex attack in Tripoli and/or against municipal council polling stations across the West. While the Sirte Protection Force (SPF) has not reported new suspicious movements in the district over the past week, the force remains on high alert. Beyond, the LNA could expand its military influence over Sabratah, Zawiyah, and Surman, amid rumours indicating a potential encirclement of Misrata and Tripoli as the LNA's strategic objective in the medium term. Libya's Southern region recently witnessed an evident uptick in criminal activity following the withdrawal of LNA units. Ghadduwah and nearby towns will continue to witness attacks and sporadic criminal activity in the short to medium term.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Ahmad Aleem, writing for *AlMonitor*, discusses Libya-Egypt relations from the perspective of Libyan reconstruction efforts. Aleem writes "Egyptian and Libyan security authorities have agreed to coordinate Egyptian laborers' entry to Libya by opening offices in the border cities of Sallum, Egypt, and Masaed, Libya. The agreement comes in anticipation of Libya's reconstruction in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, years of civil war and the resulting chaos that opened the door to the Islamic State (IS) in 2015." "Ayman Zuhri, head of the Egyptian Society for Migration Studies and a migration professor at the American University of Cairo, told Al-Monitor, "Egyptian labor is the best option for the Libyan market, given the countries geographic proximity. Besides, skilled and junior Egyptian labor is available at low wages, compared with labor from other countries." He added, "Egyptian workers are the primary candidates for the Libyan market currently. The number of Egyptian laborers is expected to return to pre-2011 figures, when there were around 1.7 million in Libya." He estimated the current number at 300,000 at most, while saying official figures are lacking and some workers cross illegally. Libyan Minister of Work and Rehabilitation Al-Mahdi al-Amen told the Egyptian *Al-Akhbar* newspaper in April that Egyptian laborers will have priority over those of other nationalities in the coming Libyan reconstruction because of their professional capacities and skills, which were evident in Libya before 2011."

# About Whispering Bell



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