

# 1. The Big Picture

## LNA responds to Gharyan loss by singling out Turkey

In a significant setback for the Libyan National Army (LNA), forces loyal to the Government of National Accord (GNA) seized Gharyan, a key forward base South of Tripoli, breaking the deadlock that had prevailed since the LNA's launch of the campaign to retake the capital on 04 Apr. Backed by air support, GNA forces launched a surprise offensive on Gharyan, forcing LNA units to retreat from their command & control (C&C) centre on 26 Jun. Yet the 13-week standoff is now far from being resolved amid mounting evidence the showdown is now spiraling into a proxy war. Turkey is gradually upping its involvement in the conflict, which could draw more foreign actors to double down on their support for the LNA.

WB sources indicate pro-GNA fighters entered Gharyan in the morning on 26 Jun dressed in civilian clothing and launched the attack from within. LNA units were caught by surprise as they controlled Al-Heera, north of Gharyan, and failed to protect their rearguard or anticipate that an attack would come from within.

While the Gharyan episode represents a significant loss for the LNA, calling into question its capability to seize Tripoli in the medium term, prospects of a decisive GNA military victory over the LNA remain limited. Despite its strategic importance, seizing Gharyan is unlikely to deter the LNA or force it to retreat from other parts of Tripoli. Instead, the Gharyan episode acts as a catalyst speeding up the LNA's efforts to achieve military objectives. Analysts are of the view the LNA will now look for alternatives in its "card deck", which may range from intensified airstrikes to political attempts to shut oil production. Haftar could be drawn closer to negotiations after the Gharyan episode, though he is unlikely to do so before exploring all other options.

In the immediate aftermath of the Gharyan battle, the LNA singled out Turkey and introduced a range of escalation measures. The LNA justified the move on the basis of what it described as continuous breaches of sovereignty by the Turkish government and military/logistical support provided by Ankara to the GNA. The LNA General Command instructed its Air Force (LAF) to target all Turkish commercial and military vessels within Libyan territorial waters, while calling on the interim government to expel all Turkish companies and end Turkish-affiliated projects in-country. The statement added that all commercial Libya/Turkey flights operated by Libyan airlines are to be stopped immediately. Meanwhile, LNA spox Ahmed Mismary, noted that "all Turkish strategic targets such as companies, headquarters and projects belonging to the Turkish government" will be considered legitimate targets. Mismary declared that "All flights from and to Turkey will be suspended and any Turkish nationals on Libyan soil will be arrested".

Tensions between Ankara and eastern-based interim government continue to grow after Turkey threatened to retaliate. On 30 Jun, the House of Representatives (HoR)

head, Aguila Saleh, declared a state of general mobilisation in the country. Earlier, a statement by Turkey's Foreign Ministry vowed to target Haftar's forces in retaliation for six Turkish nationals it said were held by the LNA. At the time of publication, reports indicate the six Turkish sailors were released. Separately, the Audit Bureau, under the HoR, banned all forms of transactions with Turkish companies/institutions, including imports of all kinds on 01 Jul. It remains unclear how the eastern-based bloc will effectively enforce these measures.

Beyond the political dimension, the LNA's response to Gharyan has so far come in the form of airstrikes. On 30 Jun, the LNA confirmed it targeted a Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) parked at Mitiga International Airport (MJI) while it prepared for takeoff. The strike resulted in a two-hour airspace closure between 2000hrs-2200hrs, with flights resuming later. In addition, Haftar's forces launched a new military operation dubbed "Akebat Al-Ghader" (end of the treachery) in the early hours of 01 Jun. The LNA's Air Force (LAF) Ops Room commander, Maj Gen Mohammed Manfour, declared the LNA will multiply its surgical airstrikes after "exhausting all traditional means" in the fight for Tripoli.

But while Turkish involvement in Libya could draw other foreign actors to step up in support of the LNA, the loss of Gharyan may have the opposite effect and prompt those actors to adjust policies, be less accommodating, and even reconsider their exposure. Reports suggesting US Department of State officials are investigating GNA claims that US-made military hardware was discovered in Gharyan are a case in point. There have been multiple similar allegations in the past with little to no impact on conflict dynamics in-country. However, in the current context, the development could prompt Washington to carefully reassess its exposure in Libya, and eventually pressure US President Donald Trump's administration to clarify its foreign policy stance, especially after Trump's call with Haftar was interpreted as overt support for the Tripoli campaign.

Analysts argue that foreign actors will now have to make their positions clearer and decide whether gestures of support for Libyan factions can be more overt. For its part, Ankara has blatantly declared its support for the GNA and, by extension, indirectly admitted it is in violation of the UN arms embargo when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan mentioned a common security & defence pact with the Tripoli government.



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## KEY POINTS

- GNA seizes Gharyan after surprise attack
- Ankara's GNA support to draw foreign actors
- LNA targets Turkish UAV in Mitiga

# 2. National Security Map

Pilot of downed GNA Mirage identified as US citizen; Turkey flights restricted to/from East

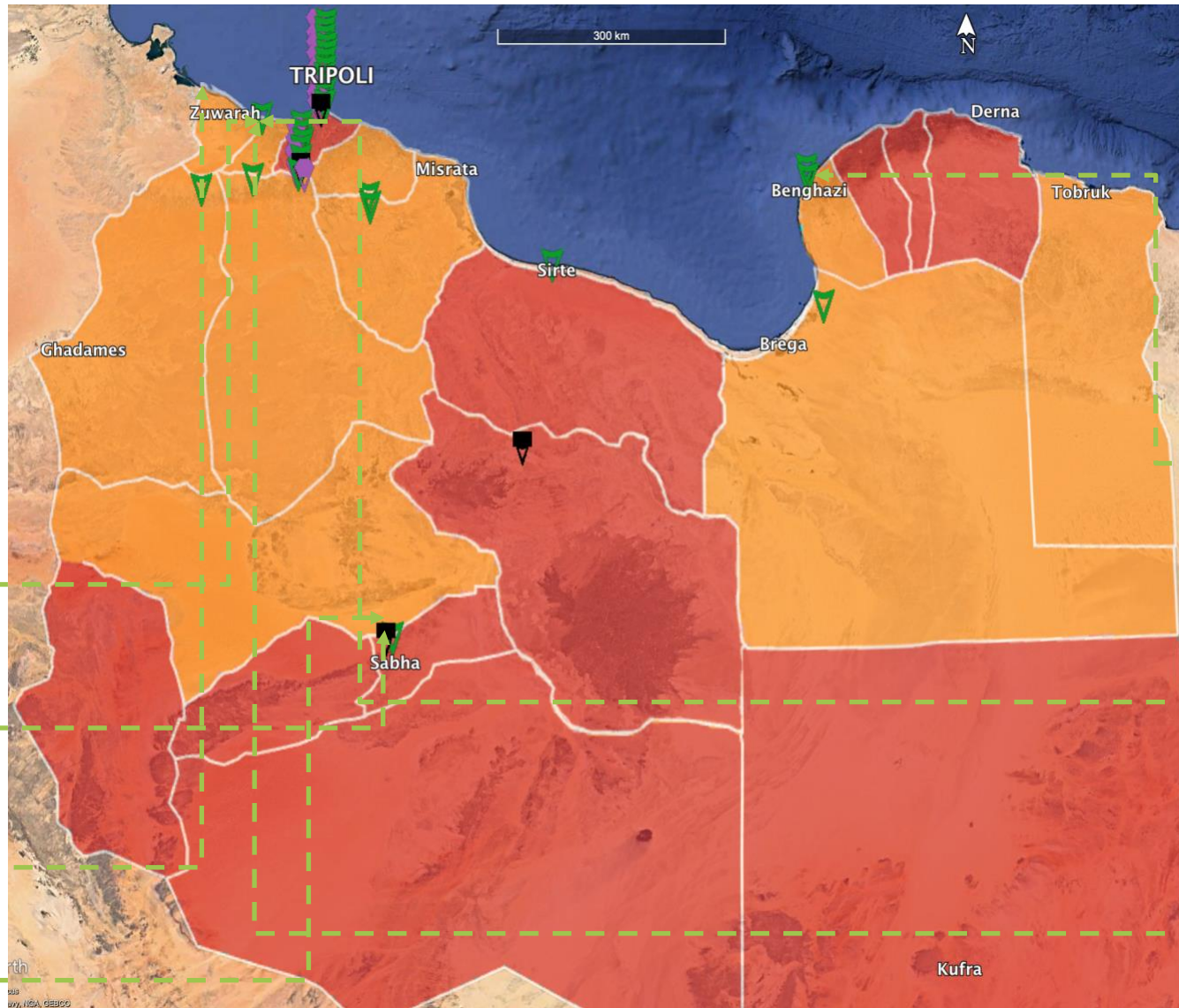
Key

**THREAT INDICATORS**

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

**EVENT INDICATORS**

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



The Washington Post (WaPo) identified the pilot of the GNA Mirage F1-ED aircraft downed by the LNA on 07 May as Jamie Sponaugle, a 31-year old American citizen and former US Air Force (USAF) enlisted airman working as an airspace technician. WaPo reported the pilot was released and flown to Saudi Arabia on 25 Jun after US and Saudi efforts to secure his release. It is worth noting the pilot was originally believed to be of Portuguese origin and that the GNA denied any involvement. LNA forces downed Mirage aircraft in Al-Heera near Gharyan on 07 May.

On 30 Jun, the eastern-based Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) announced the suspension of all flights to/from Istanbul. The eastern-based CAA noted that airlines will only operate flights with no pax to Istanbul to return Libyan nationals stranded in Turkey.

On 25 Jun, pro-GNA Facebook accounts published unconfirmed reports that a group under the Madkhali Salafist Al-Wadi Battalion in Sabratah defected from the LNA and joined the Osama Juwaili-led Western Military Region. It later appeared that only a sub-group entered negotiations to join the GNA camp, though without success.

The Sabratah Operations Room, affiliated with the LNA's Al-Zawiya Military Region, enforced a curfew in Sabratah from 0000hrs to 0400hrs, citing security reasons. The curfew, exempting hospitals and pharmacies, takes effect from its date of issuance on 29 Jun.

Social media reports suggest the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) head's convoy, Ghassan Salame, was stopped at a checkpoint along the Coastal Road in Sabratah and temporarily prevented from moving by forces manning the CP in the morning on 25 Jun.

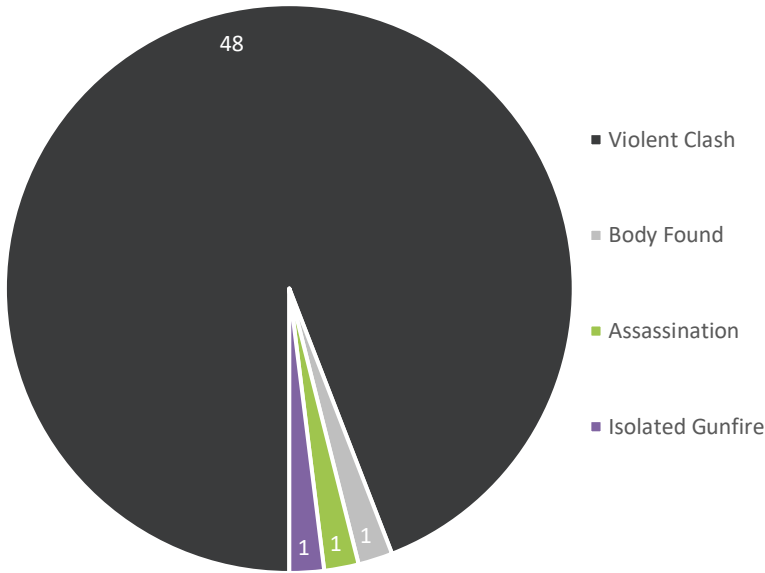
Local reports suggest the LNA's 160 Infantry Battalion conducted reconnaissance patrols across multiple security/military positions in Sabha on 24 Jun. The Battalion noted a stable security environment across the sites patrolled

WB sources reported traffic flow at the Libyan-Tunisian Ras Ajdir border crossing was stopped due to power outages on the Libyan side at approximately 0200hrs on 26 Jun.

Local reports suggest indiscriminate gunfire injured 25-year-old man, identified as Abdulrahman Ali Mahmoud, in front of Sabha's 20 Buildings on 25 Jun

### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis Almost all nationwide fatalities recorded in Tripoli district

Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



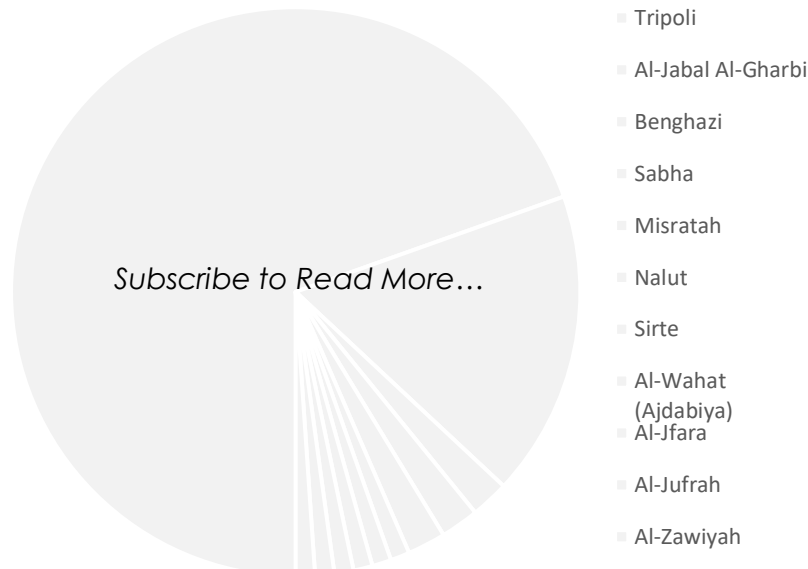
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)

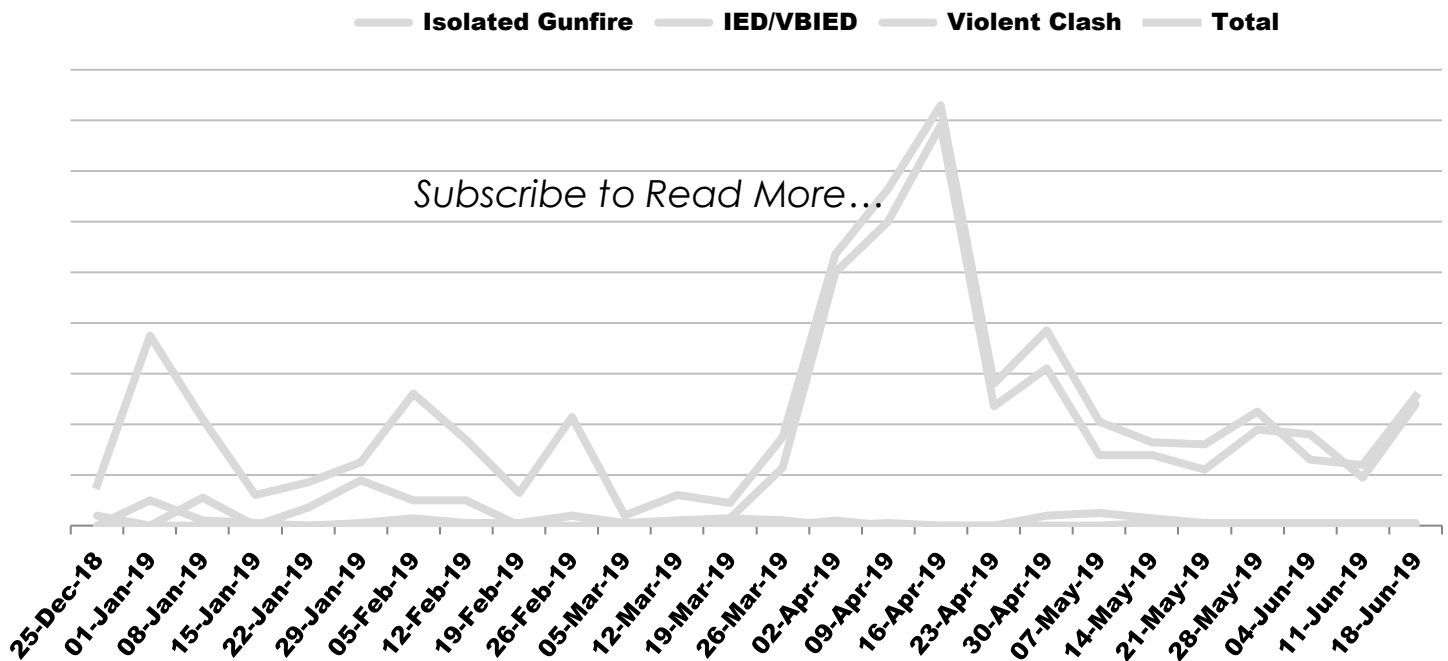


Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)





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



### Data Analysis

WB recorded this week a total of 51 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 24 deaths reported last week and 26 the week before. This week marks a sharp increase in nationwide fatalities due to an updated Tripoli casualty toll bringing an additional 48 deaths to the total. Similar to previous weeks, violent clashes in Tripoli resulted in the highest number of fatalities, followed by an assassination, a body found, and an isolated gunfire incident. All fatalities were recorded in Tripoli with the exception of a body found in Benghazi. Similar to previous weeks, and since the outbreak of clashes in the Tripoli district, violent clashes, airstrikes, explosions and mortar/shelling incidents continue to dominate the overall security environment. Meanwhile, the past two weeks have witnessed a surge in fires across Tripoli and the wider Western region, with at least 18 documented fires this week. Meanwhile, WB recorded sporadic incidents across Libya's Western, central, Southern and Eastern regions. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country including, 22 violent clashes, 19 airstrikes, 18 fires, 12 explosions, 5 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 4 isolated gunfire cases, 3 robberies, 3 arrests, 2 attacks, 1 arson, 1 kidnapping, 1 assassination and 1 body found.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 83 incidents, including 64 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli, marking a decrease in Tripoli incidents recorded. In Tripoli, sources reported a policeman was assassinated in Tripoli's Tajoura area in the morning on 26 Jun. Neither the identity of the assailant(s) nor the motive behind the incident are known. Separately, reports suggest a man was killed in the Ghut Shaal area at approximately 0100hrs on 24 Jun. Initial reports indicate the man who works for the Ghut Shaal Gas Station, was forcefully taken to the station by an unidentified militia, who had raided his house earlier, in an attempt to refuel their vehicles. The victim was killed by gunshots after he refused to open the gas station. In the wider West, reports indicate the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Western Branch kidnapped/arrested a Fursan Janzour Battalion member in Sabratah as he was visiting the city for medical treatment in the afternoon on 24 Jun. Sources reported the Fursan Janzour Battalion blocked the Coastal Road of the Janzour area for approximately 30 minutes (between 1500hrs-1530hrs) in response to the kidnapping/arrest of their affiliate. The latest reports indicate that the militiaman remains detained in Sorman.

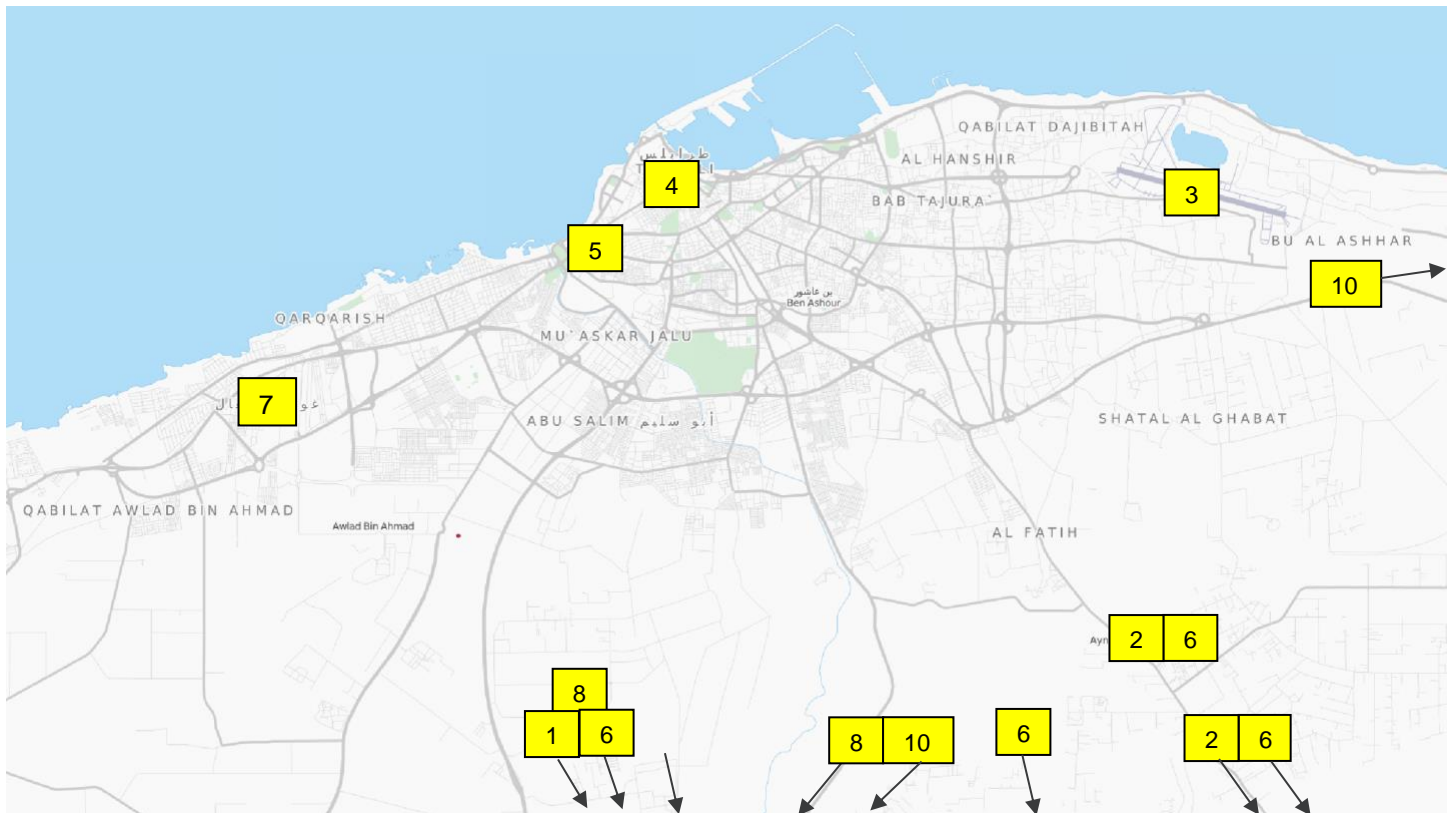
In the central region, local reports from 24 Jun suggest an unidentified man set fire to the house and vehicle of a local in the Al-Qaeda area, South of Sirte. The man reportedly escaped after causing material damage. Investigations into the crime are underway.

Turning to Southern Libya, local reports suggest indiscriminate gunfire injured 25-year-old man, identified as Abdulrahman Ali Mahmoud, in front of Sabha's 20 Buildings on 25 Jun. Separately, Local reports suggest the LNA's 160 Infantry Battalion conducted reconnaissance patrols across multiple security/military positions in Sabha on 24 Jun. The Battalion noted a stable security environment across the sites patrolled. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, the GNA's MoI reported the General Directorate of the Central Support Department conducted patrols across Sabha in an effort to maintain security and stability in accordance with the plan set by the administration on 23 Jun. Pictures circulated indicating the presence of one police vehicle along with two security forces.

In Eastern Libya, reports suggest a man's body was found with signs of torture in Benghazi's Sidi Faraj area on 24 Jun.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### LNA airstrike targets Turkish UAV at MJI; GNA gains ground in Espiaa



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (22 Jun) LNA repels renewed GNA attack on TIP; GNA forces captured
2. (23-24 Jun) Clashes on Ain Zara-Wadi Al-Rabei front; limited activity
3. (23 Jun) Mortar shells land near MJI runway; two-hour flight suspension
4. (23 Jun) RPG-7 shell removed from Soug Al-Mosheer (black market)
5. (23 Jun) Dispute b/w Misrata & Nawasi militiamen near Tuesday Mall
6. (24-25 Jun) Clashes on Ain Zara-Wadi Al-Rabei front; no changes
7. (24 Jun) Unidentified militia kills man for refusing to open gas station
8. (25 Jun) LNA gains full control over TIP as two additional SF BNs arrive
9. (26 Jun) LNA claims repelling large GNA offensive on Al-Yarmouk front
10. (26 Jun) Police officer assassinated in Tajoura
11. (28-29 Jun) GNA push in Espiaa; LNA intensifies airstrikes

#### GNA/LNA advances on Southern frontlines

Developments on Tripoli's frontlines between 24-25 Jun were marked by the Libyan National Army (LNA) expelling Government of National Accord (GNA) forces from the strategic Tripoli International Airport (TIP). Sources reported that TIP was under full LNA control as of the morning of 26 Jun. Meanwhile, the LNA's Dignity Operations Room Media Centre reported units repelled a large-scale GNA offensive on Al-Yarmouk Camp front in Wadi Al-Rabei. The centre reported heavy losses on the GNA side, including equipment and forces. Later, it became clear that the 26 Jun combat operations were used as a GNA tactic to draw the LNA's attention away from Gharyan's offensive. On 29 Jun, sources reported significant advances by GNA forces on the Espiaa front, South of Qaser Bin Ghashir, seizing the College of Civil Aviation Technology and Meteorology. Meanwhile, sources reported the LNA retreated further further south in Abu Argoub.

#### Senior TRB militiaman dies in foreign hospital

WB sources confirmed that senior Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) militiaman Mohamed Al-Meshay, nicknamed "Al-Shaar", died on 28 Jun in a foreign hospital after succumbing to wounds from clashes in Apr. It is worth mentioning that Al-Shaar was considered the right-hand of TRB leader Haithem Al-Tajoury. "Al-Shaar" was in charge of areas such as Hai Alandalus, Qerqarish, Al-Seyaheyya, Ghut Shaal and Gorje areas, before Zintan militias established control over these areas.

#### SDF release head of Hneish militia

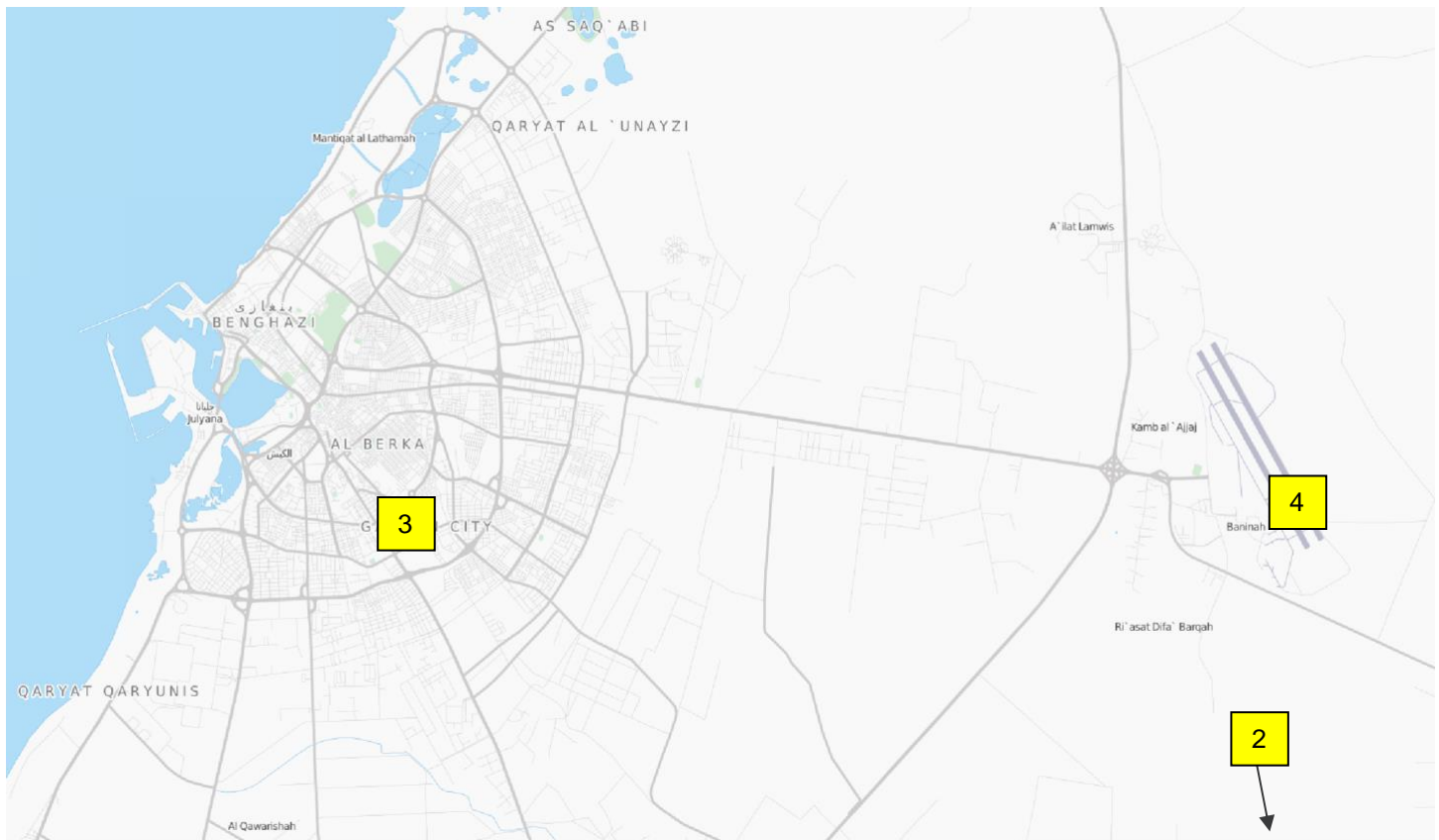
Local reports suggest the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) released Mabrouk Hneish, the head of the Hneish militia, on 27 Jun after two years of detention. The reports are yet to be verified by WB. The SDF arrested Mabrouk in Oct 2017 in Warshaffanah on suspicions he attempted to provide support to the Amu militia during clashes against the Operations room and the Islamic State (IS) in Sabratha. Since then, Mabrouk's brother, Khalifa Hneish, has been responsible for multiple security incidents in retaliation for his brother's arrest. In May, Khalifa claimed responsibility for disrupting water flow to Tripoli from the Great Man-Made River (GMMR) site in Ash Shwayrif.

#### LNA airstrike results in 2-hour closure at MJI

An LNA Arstrike targeted a Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) parked at Mitiga International Airport (MJI), resulting in a two-hour closure between 2000hrs-2200hrs. Initial reports indicate MJI's runway was hit. The LNA claims it targeted the UAV as it was preparing for takeoff to conduct combat missions against Haftar's forces. MJI reopened following the temporary closure and a flight departed at approximately 0000hrs on 01 Jul.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Turkish restaurants/cafes closed down following LNA-Turkey tensions



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (23 Jun) Female seized with narcotics from Tobruk arrested
2. (24 Jun) Man's body found with signs of torture in Sidi Faraj
3. (25 Jun) Extended security meeting held at directorate's HQ
4. (29 Jun) Flights suspended to/from BEN-Istanbul; Turkish restaurants/cafes closed down

#### Flights to/from BEN-Istanbul halted

In a statement issued on 29 Jun, Benina International Airport (BEN) Administration announced the suspension of all flights to/from Istanbul, with the exception of return flights (Istanbul-Benghazi) for Libyan citizens stranded in Turkey. The airport's management called on passengers with one-way ticket reservations to liaise with airlines and booking offices. The suspension of flight operations to/from Turkey would come hours after the LNA spokesperson, Ahmed Al-Mesmari, announced escalation measures against Turkish interests, including the suspension of flight operations and the classification of any aircraft coming from Turkey as a hostile target. Separately, Benghazi's Municipal Guard reported the removal of all Turkish names across restaurants, cafes, and sweet shops, on 29 Jun. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the Municipal Guard arrested some of the Turkish laborers. Meanwhile, sources reported the LNA-affiliated Security Apparatus under the Interim Government closed several Turkish restaurants and fast food joints across various Eastern cities, including Benghazi and Al Bayda. Sources reported most of the targeted restaurants/cafes are locally owned, resulting in local dissatisfaction.

#### Body found

Reports suggest a man's body was found with signs of torture in the Sidi Faraj area in the morning on 24 Jun. Initial reports indicate the man was missing for over five days. Unconfirmed reports indicate that unidentified gunmen kidnapped the man from his residence.

#### Female drug trafficker arrested

The General Investigation Department under Benghazi's Security Directorate captured a woman carrying 15 pieces of cannabis resin in a taxi vehicle coming from Tobruk to Benghazi on 23 Jun. The woman's son was reportedly aboard the vehicle. In a statement posted via its official Facebook page, the directorate stated that the woman admitted that herself, son and spouse all deal with narcotics. The suspect also confessed that her spouse incited her to purchase the narcotics, after which the directorate ambushed and subsequently arrested him. The woman was reportedly wanted by security services in Tobruk, Ajdabiya and Benghazi for several narcotics trafficking cases.

#### Meeting establishes joint security plan

Benghazi's Security Director, Adel Abdulaziz, held an extended security meeting at the Directorate's HQ to discuss the city's security environment on 25 Jun. The meeting discussed the development of a joint security plan, as well as the formation of a committee tasked with conducting arrest campaigns targeting criminals in an effort to reduce crime and fully secure the city.



## 6. What's next

### Escalation likely as tensions begin to draw foreign actors into conflict

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

By calling out Turkey, the LNA's escalation measures threaten to deepen foreign involvement in the Libyan conflict on both sides, prolonging the conflict and undermining prospects of a negotiated settlement. In this context, it remains unclear whether peace initiatives will gather momentum. The Mahmoud Jibril-led Libyan National Forces Alliance (NFA) launched an initiative aimed at establishing a ceasefire, and a buffer zone to enable humanitarian passage for families under siege (minimum 15-day period extendable to 40 days), and a joint GNA/LNA to combat terrorism. Meanwhile, Haftar received the Regional Director of the German Foreign Ministry, Christian Buck, accompanied by Germany's Ambassador to Libya, Oliver Owczka, at the LNA's HQ in Ar-Rajmah. Buck reiterated his country's support for the UN Envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, whilst the two parties called for a return to the UN-led political process addressing all legitimate security and economic concerns. For his part, Salame, upon his return from the East, briefed GNA PM Sarraj on his meeting with Haftar. Details of the meetings remain limited. Separately, the anticipated audit of the central banks has come back under the spotlight, when the UNSRSG for Political Affairs, Stephanie Williams, met with the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL) governor, Sadiq Al-Kabir, on 25 Jun. On the international front, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, called for an immediate ceasefire in Tripoli whilst stressing no military solution to the crisis. Yi's ceasefire calls came during a meeting with the GNA's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Sayala.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Analyst Kirill Semenov reviews Russia's foreign policy stance in Libya in an article for *Al-Monitor*. He argues that Moscow's policy has an interest in promoting the GNA's peace plan to effectively cement its role as a mediator in the Libyan conflict. Semenov further contends that Russia is gradually pulling its support away from Haftar given the stalemate in the Tripoli campaign; "Generally, the Russian side is becoming more positive about the initiatives proposed by the head of the Government of National Accord. A certain shift in Russia's approach may be further observed judging from the statements by the head of the Russian contact group on Libya, Lev Dengov. He said Moscow did not agree with Hifter's account that Tripoli was being controlled by "terrorists" and also did not support Hifter's idea of Tripoli's "liberation" by the Libyan National Army. On the contrary, the Russian diplomat stressed the need to cooperate with the administration in Tripoli in order to eliminate terrorism." The author then explores prospects for Russia to be a mediator in Libya "By promoting a peaceful resolution, Russia could receive new opportunities to become a referee. When Sarraj confirmed his willingness to restart dialogue, Moscow, Paris and Rome signaled to Hifter the need to embrace this initiative while also moving to convince Sarraj to accept Hifter as a participant in the process. In any case, Hifter is most likely to insist on maintaining his positions around Tripoli, whereas Sarraj will stress the need for the Libyan National Army troops to be withdrawn. But it is this status quo that may help effectively return the parties to the negotiation table. At the same time, Moscow's supportive gestures toward Tripoli are still quite weak. Although it is possible that while the campaign drags on, Moscow will be more accommodating to Tripoli's interests, Russia may equally move to expand its support for Hifter — including clandestine military aid. The prospects heavily depend on the further events of the campaign and Russia's position is now primarily defined by its reaction to the achievements and failures of the sides confronting each other in their battle for Tripoli."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

The risk of collateral damage in Tripoli is now more acute after the LNA's escalation measures against Turkish assets/interests. The LNA could carry out airstrikes against any position in Tripoli, including MJJ's airbase and other government/civilian buildings, on suspicions of Turkish military presence. Meanwhile, given Gharyan's hilly terrain, LNA retaliation is likely to come in the form of airstrikes and escalation on other fronts with a possible push northward from its positions South of Tripoli. However, some pro-LNA reports indicate forces will attempt to encircle GNA forces in Gharyan, by controlling Aziziya first. Pro-LNA reports have attempted to downplay the impact of Gharyan's loss, indicating the LNA maintains supply routes from Jufra to Qaryat, Bani Walid and Tarhounah. The LNA is unlikely to target a commercial aircraft within Libyan airspace given the potential negative impact on its public image. West of Tripoli, tensions will continue to grow after rumours of negotiations between Sabratah's Madkhali Salafist Al-Wadi Battalion and the GNA, alleging the battalion had defected from the LNA and joined the Osama Juwaili-led Western Military Region on 25 Jun. In response, the Sabratah Operations Room, affiliated with the LNA's Al-Zawiya Military Region, enforced a curfew in Sabratah from 0000hrs to 0400hrs, citing security reasons. The curfew, exempting hospitals and pharmacies, takes effect from its date of issuance on 29 Jun. The Ops. Room issued an additional statement denying any negotiations with the GNA and reaffirmed its support for the LNA. Separately, the LNA is expected to draw in more forces and reinforcements from the East, which could create a vacuum in the Oil Crescent and southern areas.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an article for *Al-Monitor*, Jack Detsch explores the resurgence of the Islamic State (IS) in Libya in the current context of combat operations between LNA and GNA forces. Detsch quotes US Pentagon's Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Paul Selva confirming that a resurgence of the group has been recorded in Libya's central regions. "Both the LNA and the GNA "are keeping a lid on IS for their own individual interests for a fair period of time," Selva, who leaves his post at the end of October, told a gathering of reporters in Washington earlier this month. "Because they're now going after one another in the capital, it's actually taking their attention off of IS and we've seen a small resurgence of those [IS] camps in the central region." It was not immediately clear how significant the resurgence of the Islamic State has been since the April offensive began. Selva said that the Pentagon picked up that IS camps in Libya's central region and Tuaregs were "helping out the IS militants and moving people back and forth across the border to the south." "US troops helping to fight IS in Libya left the country in April as security conditions deteriorated. Selva said he worried about IS becoming a "third party in the fight in Libya." But Selva's comments come after a series of visits from top GNA officials to Washington to put pressure on the Trump administration to clarify its position in the conflict, after the president reportedly appeared to greenlight Hifter's offensive in an April call with the strongman. The US administration had previously insisted there was "no military solution" to the conflict."

# About Whispering Bell



Contact Whispering Bell at: +971-4-448-6690 or at [ras@whisperingbell.com](mailto:ras@whisperingbell.com)

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[Website](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



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