

## 1. The Big Picture

### GNA formally requests military support from Ankara as LNA advances

Turkey's government has upped the ante with plans to submit a bill to Parliament in the first week of January 2020 to deploy troops to Libya and support the Government of National Accord (GNA), adding to existing tensions and raising the stakes in the Libyan conflict this week. The flare up in tensions over the past few weeks has led many observers to focus on the prospect for a major military escalation. But against all odds, the silver lining is that the current military environment is creating the conditions for de-escalation and negotiations. While the Berlin Conference in January 2020 may not result in significant breakthroughs, other negotiation avenues, such as Russian President Vladimir Putin's upcoming visit to Turkey may bear fruit.

Ankara's moves come against the backdrop of a concerted push northward by Libyan National Army (LNA) forces this week. Haftar's forces gained ground on the Salah Al-Dein and Airport Road engagement axes. LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mesmari stated LNA units stand 300 meters from the main neighbourhoods of central Tripoli. These advances compelled the Tripoli government to officially request military assistance from Ankara, despite internal opposition and a general understanding of the potential ramifications of such a move.

Turkey's support comes at the expense of the GNA's public image. Video footage of alleged Turkish-backed Syrian opposition elements in Tripoli began to surface on social media. Video footage was purported to show Turkish-backed Syrian rebels fighting alongside GNA forces in Tekbali Camp, in Tripoli's Salah Al-Dein, on 28 Dec. The GNA officially denied the arrival of Syrian fighters in its ranks, but there is ample evidence pointing to a deployment of some Syrian factions from Idlib and other parts. The development, if confirmed, would underline Ankara's intent to deploy proxies on a mercenary basis in Libya, which does not bode well within GNA circles given expectations of a deeper commitment from Turkey.

Reading between the lines, even if Turkey's Parliament approves the motion to deploy troops, Turkish soldiers are unlikely to enter combat and directly engage LNA forces. The role of Turkish military officers will be limited to coordination and training. Given the growing opposition to Ankara at a regional level, Erdogan will find it difficult to turn the tide in favour of the GNA. Instead, deploying troops will only help slow LNA advances and maintain the status quo. Ankara's objective is to uphold the GNA to secure its interests and maintain a foothold in the Mediterranean.

A full-scale "boots on the ground" presence will upset the regional military balance and may even prompt Cairo to commit additional resources and double down on its targeted aerial missions to deter Ankara. As a consequence, the forecast military escalation between Turkey, Moscow, Cairo, and others, remains unlikely in the short term. What is certain, however, is that the latest developments will prolong the conflict.

Turkey is well aware of the fact that its maritime demarcation deal is unlikely to gain the approval of the international community. Ankara's agreements with the GNA are valid insofar as the Tripoli government continues to exist. The GNA's legitimacy, however, is now suffering heavy setbacks and Ankara's support could backfire. All of these factors will limit Turkey's ability to deploy troops in the medium term.

Politically, Turkey continues to be at loggerheads with Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and other major power brokers. Beyond Libya, Turkey's maritime demarcation deal has raised the stakes at a regional level and provoked various responses. Cyprus has been leading efforts on the diplomatic front to counter Ankara's influence and vowed to maintain its energy exploration programme and drilling in the East Mediterranean. Meanwhile, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus, are all set to sign an agreement for the construction of the East Med pipeline in Jan 2020. The pipeline, if completed, would technically cross the Turkey-GNA exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Separately, Italy has publicly rejected Turkey's deals with the GNA. Italian PM, Giuseppe Conte, warned that Russia and Turkey were pursuing a military instead of a political roadmap in Libya. More importantly, Conte acknowledged Italy's dwindling influence in Libya and stated a no-fly zone (NFZ) over the country could be effective in achieving stability and undermining foreign influence.

Domestically, Ankara's projected troop deployment has helped the LNA gain additional support from the former Gaddafi regime supporter base and the average Libyan citizen. Foreign intervention has traditionally been a unifying factor in Libya capable of bridging gaps between tribes and the local population. Framing the Turkish intervention as a colonial scheme has helped rally public opinion, further undermining the GNA's legitimacy. The LNA may opt for an "inside-out" approach to deter Ankara by ousting the GNA, which would theoretically nullify any agreement with Turkey.

#### KEY POINTS

- Ankara mulls sending troops to Libya
- Emerging reports of Syrian fighters in Tripoli
- Italy PM proposes no-fly zone to solve crisis



#### CONTENTS

- 1 **THE BIG PICTURE**  
GNA formally requests military support from Ankara as LNA advances
- 2 **NATIONWIDE SECURITY**  
Events, Analysis and Data
- 3 **SECURITY BY NUMBERS**  
Charts, Statistics and Analysis
- 4 **TRIPOLI REPORT**  
News & Neighborhoods
- 5 **BENGHAZI REPORT**  
News & Neighborhoods
- 6 **WHAT'S NEXT**  
Forward Looking Expert Opinions

# 2. National Security Map

## Zawiya Refinery & Sharara Oilfield at risk of closure; tensions brewing in Zawiya

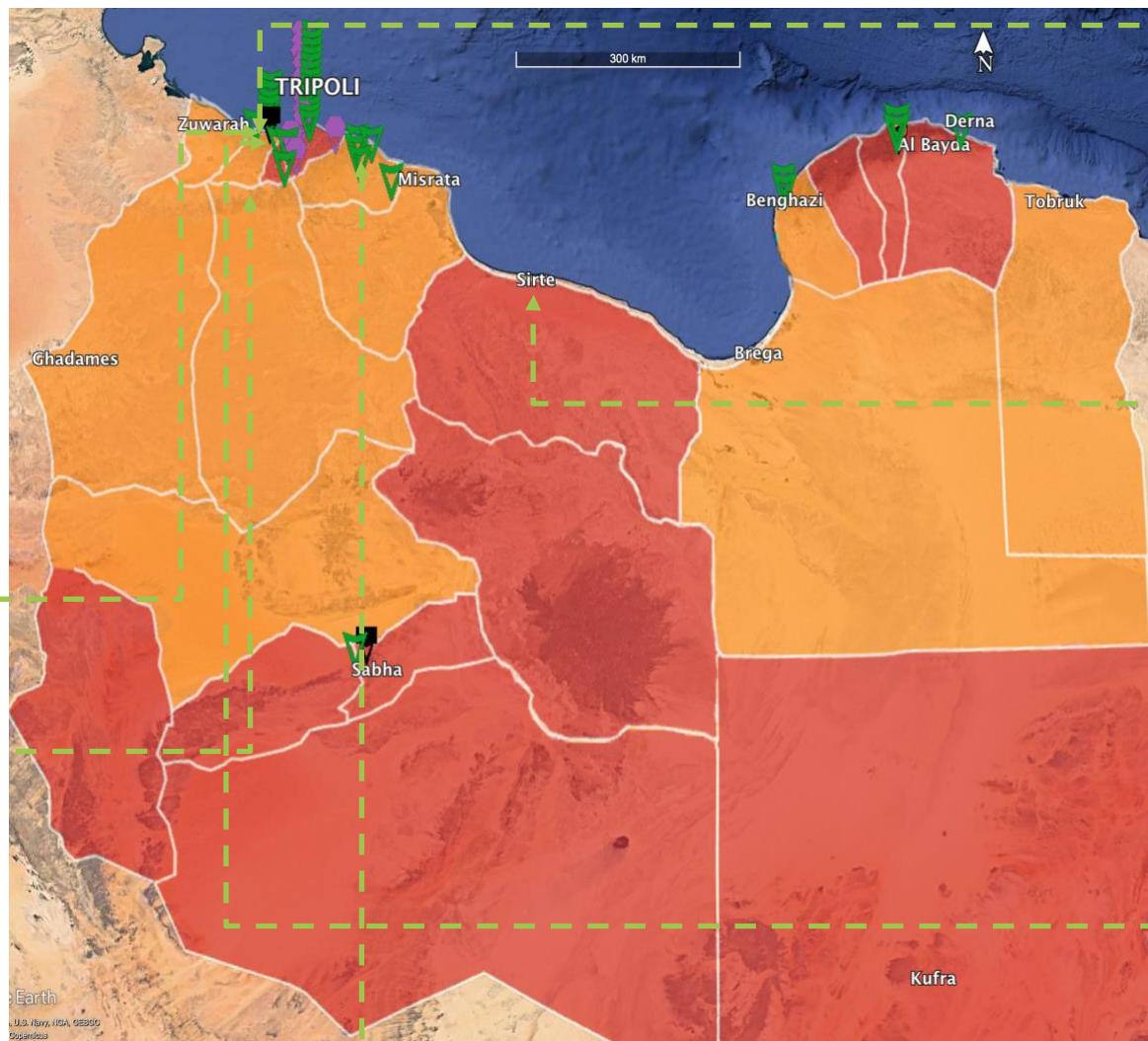
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



The National Oil Corporation (NOC) reported sites near the oil storage facility operated by the Zawiya Oil Refinery were hit by a missile preceded by an LAAF airstrike targeting the refinery at approximately 1400hrs on 27 Dec. The NOC stated that the airstrike targeted a storage warehouse West of the refinery gate.

Leading political and military figures of the Amazigh (Berber) town of Yefren declared a state of full mobilisation to repel the LNA's offensive on Tripoli and vowed to place all capabilities at the disposal of the GNA.

On 23 Dec, the LNA released the Grenada-flagged cargo vessel recently detained along with its Turkish crew members. According to the LNA, no weapons were found onboard. LNA pox. Ahmed Al-Mismary, stated the vessel was intercepted because it entered Libyan territorial waters. without permission.

An LAAF airstrike targeted pro-GNA forces in Msallatah's Al-Amamra area at approx. 1600hrs on 23 Dec.

The pro-LNA Western region Criminal Investigation Department (CID) reported the kidnapping of two of its members on 23 Dec. The CID held the Zawiya Security Directorate responsible, adding to existing tensions between rival factions in the area.

Military reinforcements were spotted arriving in Sirte in support of the GNA-aligned Sirte Protection Force (SPF), whilst the LNA's 128 Infantry Battalion reportedly arrived in Al-Arbaeen area, East of Sirte, on 25 Dec. LNA units reportedly reached the areas of Harawa, Al-Amrah, Umm Al-Qandil, Sultan and Al-Arabeen. Reports indicate some units were stationed in government and military sites and established checkpoints to inspect vehicles passing through the main road. Meanwhile, reports indicate several GNA battalions from the West reached the outskirts of Sirte following the expiry of the LNA's ultimatum demanding Misrata forces to withdraw from Sirte and Tripoli at 0000hrs on 25 Dec.

In a statement, Misrata's Municipality and its Emergency Ops Room rejected the LNA's ultimatum demanding a withdrawal of forces from Sirte and Tripoli by 25 Dec at 0000hrs. The statement also refuted claims that elements within the city were negotiating with Haftar's forces.

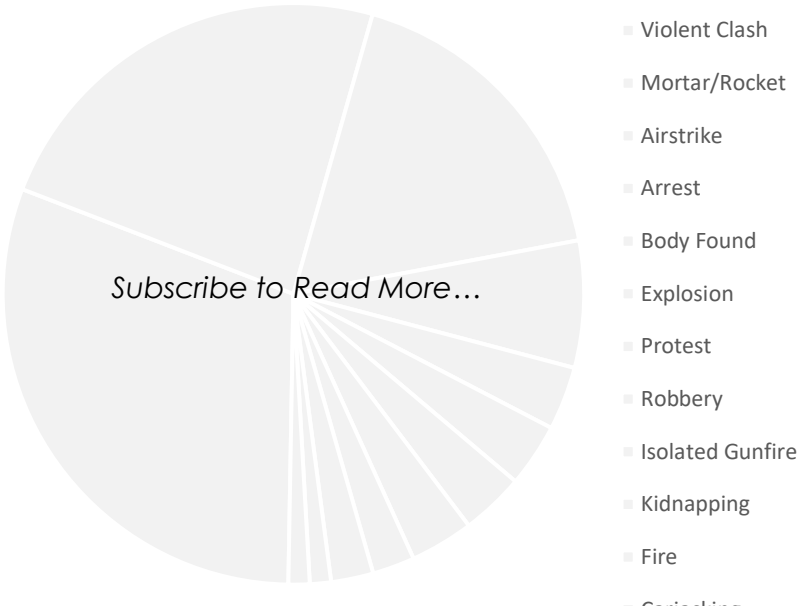
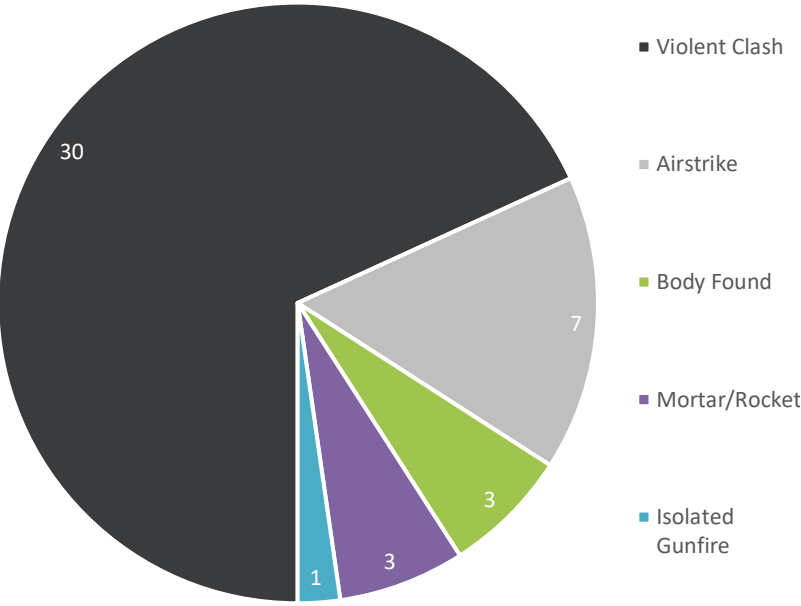
A heavy explosion was reported in Zawiya's Al-Harsha area at approximately 0300hrs on 29 Dec. Unconfirmed reports allege an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated. Separately, sources reported an LAAF airstrike targeted Zawiya's Abu Ghlasha area in the morning on 28 Dec. Reports indicate the airstrike targeted the Institute of Applied Engineering near the Zawiya Oil Refinery. No casualties/fatalities were reported.

### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

GNA claims 30 LNA units killed in Tripoli; series of LAAF airstrikes in Zawiyah

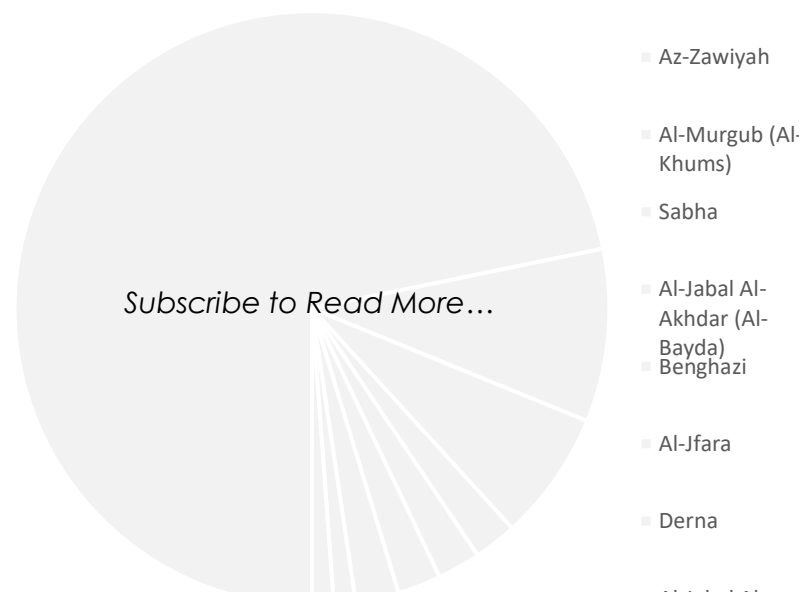
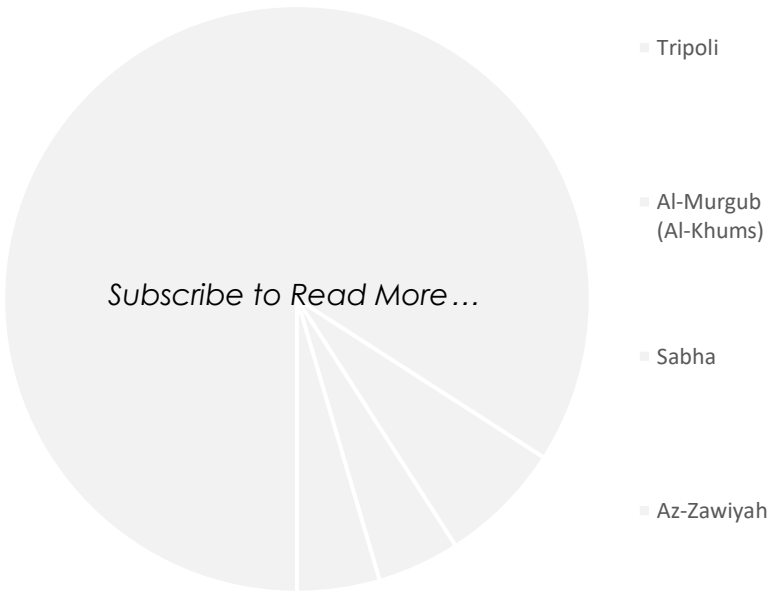
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)

Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)

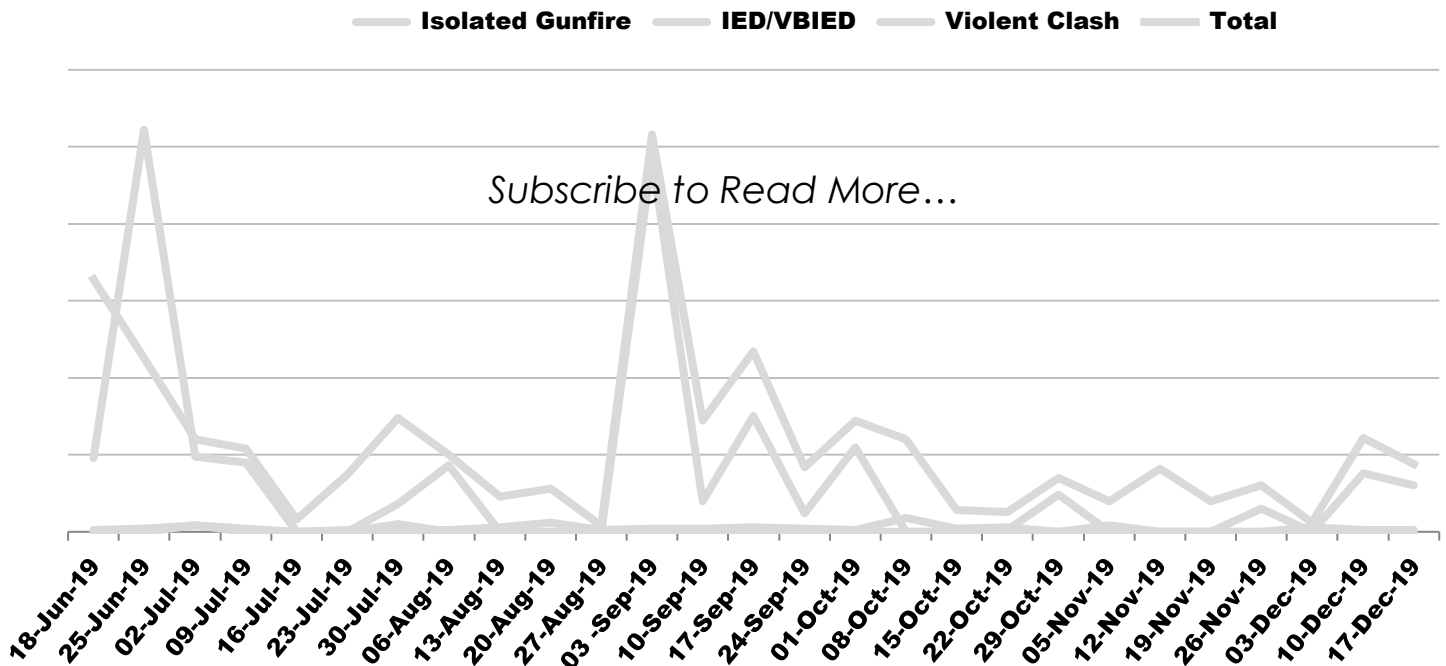


Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)

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 44 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 61 deaths reported last week and 6 the week before. While official figures remain unknown, this week was marked by pro-Government of National Accord (GNA) media outlets reporting at least 30 fatalities among Libyan National Army (LNA) units as a result of clashes in Southern Tripoli on 27 Dec. However, figures published by both LNA and GNA accounts across social media generally remain biased and are unlikely to reflect the real number of fatalities from combat. Meanwhile, this week saw 10 fatalities as a result of ongoing combat operations, with a total of 7 killed in an airstrike and 3 others killed in mortar/rocket shelling incidents. The remaining fatalities included three bodies found and an isolated gunfire incident. Similar to the trend witnessed since the outbreak of clashes on 04 Apr, Tripoli continues to account for the highest number of fatalities. This week, Tripoli was followed by Az-Zawiyah, where the LNA intensified its air campaign against the city; at least three LNA airstrikes were recorded throughout the reporting period. Whilst this week saw a decrease in the number of recorded airstrikes, mortar/rocket shelling incidents and violent clashes were on an upward trend as LNA units continued with the attempted push northward, seizing key positions on the Salah Eddien frontline. Several incidents were recorded throughout the country including 26 violent clashes, 20 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 15 airstrikes, 2 kidnappings, 2 isolated gunfire cases and 1 carjacking.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 78 incidents, including 61 in Tripoli, marking a sharp increase in security incidents recorded in the region in contrast to last week, largely due to intensified military activity across frontlines. In Tripoli, beyond military activity, two bodies of previously abducted men were found, whilst Libyan journalist and head of the Libyan Independent Media Organisation, Reda Fheil Al-Boom, was released after he was detained by the Libyan Intelligence Services (LIS) for 12 days upon his arrival at Mitiga International Airport (MJ) from Tunisia on 14 Dec. Reports indicate the Public Prosecution called for a two-week detention of Al-Boom in the Jdaida Prison without disclosing the charges against him. Separately, reports suggest unidentified assailants riding a Toyota vehicle carjacked a Kia Bongo truck in Tripoli's Janzour area on 22 Dec. No reports of casualties/fatalities.

In the wider Western region, the majority of security incidents were recorded in the Al-Murgub (Al-Khums) and Az-Zawiyah districts and were dominated by the ongoing clashes between LNA and GNA forces. In the Az-Zawiyah district, WB recorded a violent clash in the Abu Issa vicinity between LNA-affiliated units from Sabratha and GNA-aligned Zawiyah forces. In addition, three airstrikes, 2 protests, 1 kidnapping and 1 isolated gunfire case were recorded in Az-Zawiyah district. Sources reported intermittent gunfire on Zawiyah's Daman street at approximately 2200hrs on 21 Dec. Reports indicate a local dispute escalated into an exchange of gunfire. No reports of fatalities or casualties and the motive behind the dispute is unknown. Meanwhile, in the Al-Murgub district, WB recorded three airstrikes, 2 mortar/rocket shelling incidents and 1 robbery.

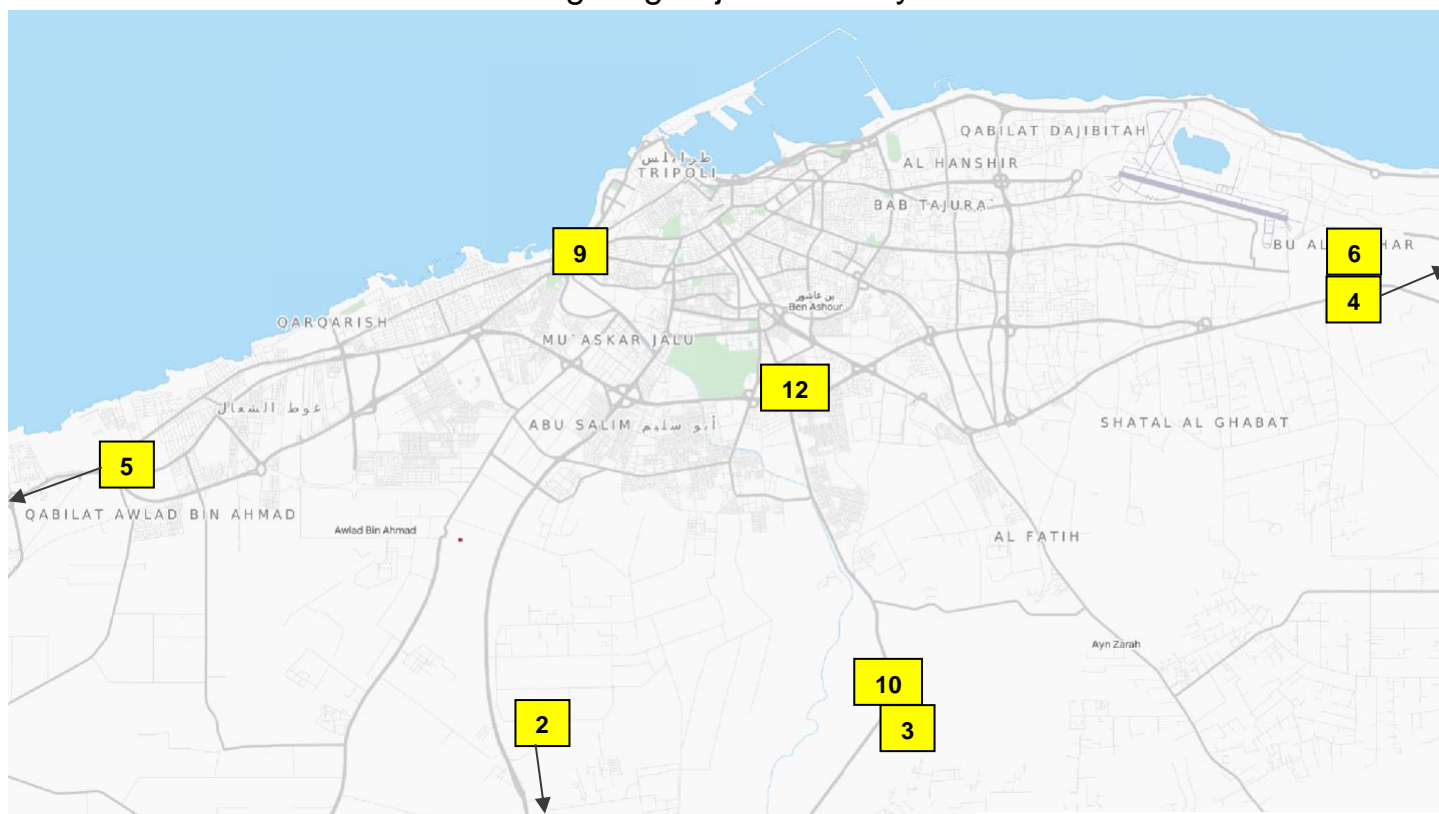
In the central region, WB recorded no security incidents in the Sirte district this week. However, reports indicate GNA military reinforcements arrived in support of the Sirte Protection Force (SPF), whilst LNA units arrived in Al-Arbaeen area, East of Sirte, and to nearby towns on 25 Dec. The military reinforcements came in the immediate aftermath of the expiry of the LNA's ultimatum for Misrata forces to withdraw from Sirte and Tripoli by 0000hrs on 25 Dec. The ultimatum was rejected by Misrata's Municipality and Emergency Operations Room.

In the South, WB recorded two security incidents in Sabha. Reports indicate unidentified assailants shot dead a young man from the Gaddadfa tribe in Sabha's Al-Mehdiya area in the evening on 24 Dec. Unconfirmed reports suggest tribal motives. Separately, the dead body of a young man found with signs of torture near Sebha university on the evening of 21 Dec.

Turning to the East, three arrests were recorded in the region, including two in the city of Benghazi and one in Derna.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### LAAF airstrikes targeting Tajoura vicinity result in civilian casualties



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (21 Dec) Body of abducted senior lawyer found in unidentified area
2. (22 Dec) NOC & BPMC confirm warehouse on Airport Rd targeted
3. (22 Dec) LNA advance on Salah Eddien frontline; Police College seized
4. (22 Dec) Three mortar shells land on Al-Be'eish area; three men injured
5. (22 Dec) Unidentified assailants carjack Kia Bongo truck in Janzour
6. (24 Dec) LAAF airstrikes target Tajoura vicinity resulting in civilian casualties
7. (24 Dec) SDF arrests LNA sleeper cell in unidentified area
8. (25 Dec) Misarata municipality & emergency ops. room reject LNA ultimate to depart Sirte & Tripoli
9. (25 Dec) Body of abducted man found near Tuesday Mall roundabout
10. (25-26 Dec) LNA advance on Salah Eddien frontline; Passport Office seized
11. (27 Dec) LIS-detained Libyan journalist released after 2-week detention
12. (27 Dec) LNA spox. claims units 300m from Al-Hadba neighborhood

#### LAAF airstrikes result in civilian casualties

Clashes between Libyan National Army (LNA) units and Government of National Accord (GNA) forces were marked by an LNA Air Force (LAAF) airstrike targeting Tajoura's Beir Osta Milad area resulting in at least three civilian deaths, including two women, and 12 injuries, including a young boy and woman at approximately 1445hrs on 24 Dec. Reports indicate the airstrike hit a vegetable shop. In addition, at approximately 1400hrs, an LAAF airstrike targeted Tajoura's Khallat Fares area resulting in at least one civilian fatality and destroying a civilian house.

#### Bodies of abducted men found

WB sources reported a man's body was found with signs of torture near Tuesday Mall Roundabout in the morning on 25 Dec. Reports indicate unidentified assailants kidnapped the victim at a fake checkpoint on Sidra Road, South of Tripoli, in the morning on 23 Dec. Unconfirmed reports indicate the involvement of GNA-aligned Nawasi militia. Separately, the Tripoli Bar Association reported the discovery of senior lawyer Yasser Othman's body in an unidentified area of Tripoli on 21 Dec, after he was kidnapped by unidentified assailants in Oct 2019. Othman's body showed signs of torture, according to the Tripoli Bar Association. The identity of the perpetrators remains unknown.

#### SDF arrest LNA sleeper cell

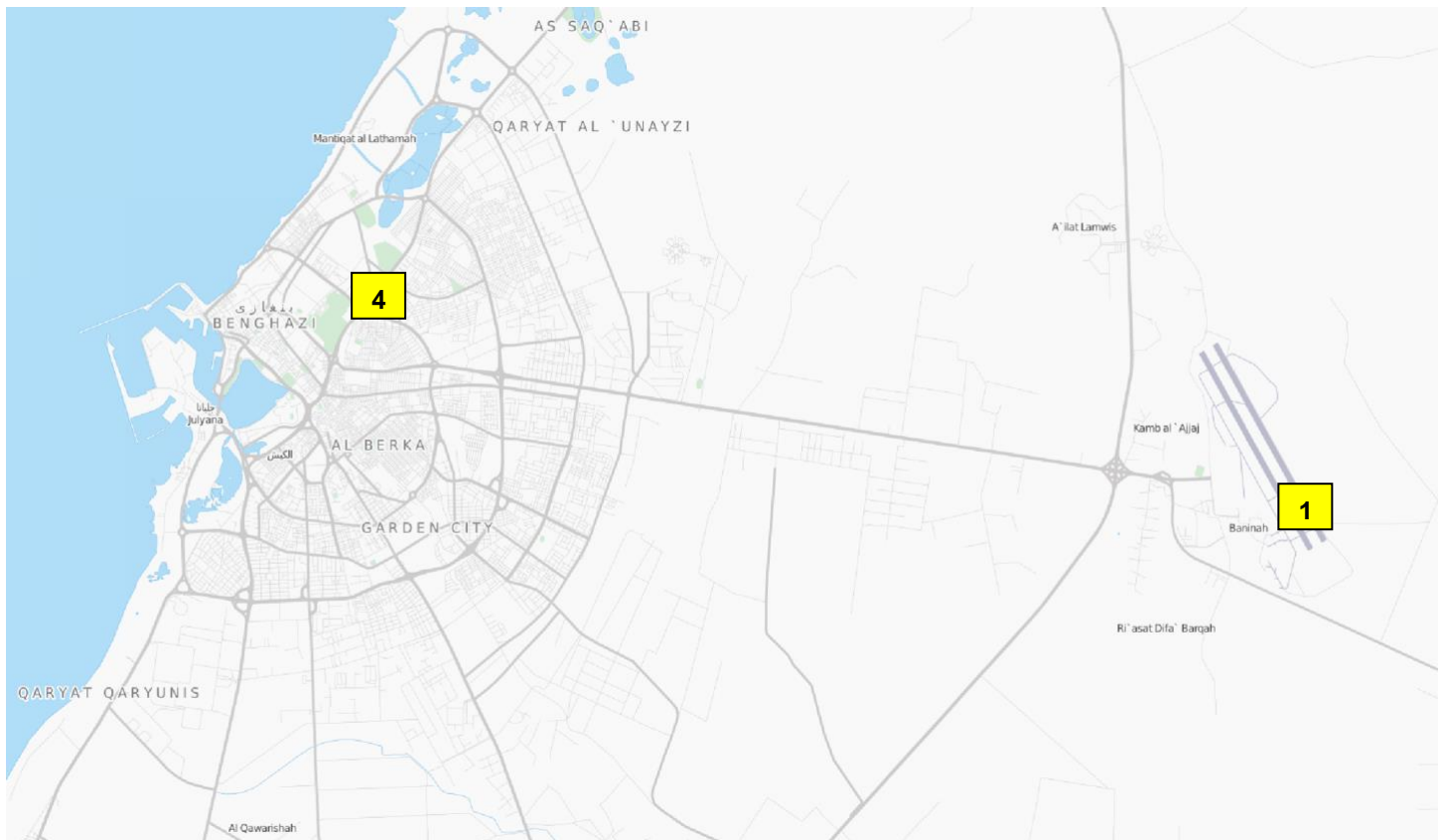
Reports the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) arrested an LNA sleeper cell in an unidentified area of the capital on 24 Dec. The pro-LNA cell was reportedly found in possession of weapons and had plans to carry out operations within Tripoli. Since the beginning of combat operations, pro-LNA accounts have claimed the presence of sleeper cells across the capital on multiple occasions.

#### Calls for large pro-GNA demonstration

There are calls across social media for a large pro-GNA demonstration in Tripoli to coincide with an upcoming visit by the European Union (EU) Foreign Affairs chief, Josep Borell, scheduled for 07 Jan 2020. The demonstration calls, which are yet to gain momentum, will reportedly include a march from Mitiga International Airport (MJI) to Martyrs' Square, via the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The precise motive behind the demonstration is unclear, though it is likely centred around the LNA's offensive and to express support for the GNA. On 18 Dec, the EU spokesperson, Peter Stano, stated Borell expressed his willingness to visit Libya and meet with the Presidential Council (PC) head and other officials to help solve the Libyan crisis. According to the GNA's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Borell, accompanied by the foreign ministers of Germany, France, Italy and Britain, are all due to visit Libya in the short term. The scheduled visit would come a day before the Turkish parliament is due to vote on a motion to deploy troops at the request of the GNA. According to local media, the EU delegation will seek to exert pressure on the GNA PM, Fayez Al-Serraj, to withdraw his request for military support from Turkey.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Series of arrests; Benina-Zintan/Kufra/Sabha flights to resume



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (23 Dec) Flights from Benina to Kufra/Sabha/Zintan resume
2. (23 Dec) CID arrest criminal gang involved in raid & vehicle theft
3. (24 Dec) Three Egyptians wanted in several criminal cases arrested
4. (28 Dec) Three individuals arrested in raid on illegal alcohol factory
5. (28 Dec) Last suspect in Egyptian fugitive case arrested

#### Series of arrests

Benghazi's Morality Police raided an illegal alcohol factory and arrested three individuals in Al-Faakat area, West of Benghazi, on 28 Dec. The police received local reports corroborating the presence of three individuals using a farm to manufacture and trade alcohol.

Separately, Benghazi's Morality Police arrested the last suspect in the "fugitives from Egypt" case in the Zuweitina area on 28 Dec. The suspect was found hiding inside a farm. Of note, on 24 Dec, Benghazi's Morality Police announced the arrest of three Egyptian nationals wanted in several criminal cases including possession/trade of arms and armed robbery. Beyond, Benghazi's Criminal Investigations Department (CID) arrested a criminal gang suspected of stealing a vehicle and raiding a mobile phone shop on 23 Dec. The individuals confessed to the charges.

#### BEN-Zintan/Kufra/Sabha flights to resume

The eastern-based Libyan Airports Authority (LAA) announced the resumption of flights from Benghazi's Benina International Airport (HLLB) to Zintan (HLZN), Kufra (HLKF), and Sabha (HLLS) on 23 Dec. The flights will be operated by Afriqiyah Airways.

## 6. What's next

### LNA to continue northward push; diplomatic focus on ceasefire

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

The Berlin Process continues to be overshadowed by military manoeuvres on the ground. This was highlighted by the Turkish Presidential Office, which emphasized there is no value in holding the Berlin conference on Libya as long as Haftar's Tripoli offensive continues. The GNA's political posture was dealt a blow after the Tunisian presidency clarified it would not be part of any coalition in Libya, shortly after GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha claimed a coalition involving Algeria, Turkey, and Tunisia was formed. The development highlights the negative repercussions associated with supporting the GNA in its current form at the international level. Meanwhile, the eastern-based interim government and House of Representatives (HoR) are set to continue working with international allies such as Cyprus and Greece to withdraw international recognition from the GNA. Internationally, the solution to an already-complex Libyan dossier is now dependent on the outcome of negotiations between Ankara and Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Turkey on 08 January 2020 is expected to coincide with Turkish Parliament's vote on the motion to send troops to Libya. Turkish President Erdogan and Putin will oversee the opening of the TurkStream natural gas pipeline, but Libya is expected to dominate discussions. Erdogan will make the case for an Ankara-Moscow partnership to stabilize Libya. Whether Erdogan will convince Putin to cooperate on the Libyan file remains to be seen. The prospects for Turkish-Russian cooperation are difficult to ascertain given the complexity of dynamics on the ground. Unlike Syria, Russia has to balance competing interests, including those of Egypt and other LNA foreign supporters. The potential for a conflict of interest between Ankara and Moscow in Libya remains and it will be difficult for Ankara to convince Moscow to realign its interests in favour of an ailing Tripoli government. However, if a deal is struck, its potential ramifications on the ground will be significant. The LNA could lose its leverage if Moscow strikes an agreement with Ankara.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In an article published on 28 Dec, Middle East publication *Arab News* sheds light on the potential deployment of Syrian elements to Libya. The article reads "The parliamentary vote is a continuation of Ankara's recent commitments to support the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) through a security and military cooperation deal, and an agreement to delimit maritime borders. Sultan Murad Division, Suqour Al-Sham Brigades and Faylaq Al-Sham are reported to be among the armed groups destined for Libya, but the Syrian Interim Government has denied any possibility of sending troops who have fought government forces during the civil war. But deploying fighters from such groups can be done immediately, without the need for a parliamentary green light. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said Turkey-backed Syrian rebels had opened recruitment centers in Aleppo for dispatching young men to western Libya with a monthly salary of up to \$2,000, while Russian media said Turkey had already sent 7,000 fighters to the north African nation." Further, the article draws on the potential ramifications of increased Turkish involvement, warning of the potential for the LNA's foreign backers such as Egypt to double down on their support. "It is unclear how the process of moving Turkey's Syria assets to Libya will develop in the coming days ahead of a Jan. 8 meeting between Erdogan and Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia is against any interference in Libya's internal affairs by an outsider, the Russian president's press secretary told reporters earlier this week, although it welcomed attempts to resolve the crisis there."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

In Tripoli, LNA forces are now closer to Salah Eddien Traffic Lights, a strategic position the LNA has long coveted because it facilitates a northward move. LNA forces are now reportedly 2.5 km away from Salah Eddien Traffic Lights, where they are expected to advance in the short term. The arrival of alleged Turkish-backed Syrian fighting factions will likely take centre stage in upcoming weeks but is unlikely to halt the LNA's northward offensive. The LNA is expected to continue with its aerial campaign targeting critical positions across Tripoli and may even conduct preemptive airstrikes to deny GNA forces the capability to receive support from Ankara. Meanwhile, infighting and splintering are expected within GNA ranks, especially given disagreements over Ankara's support and the controversial deployment of alleged Syrian opposition groups. Separately, the likelihood of an LNA offensive in the Sirte national district remains strong, despite no further escalation after the LNA ultimatum's expiry on 25 Dec. LNA forces will likely seek to secure as many gains as possible before an official deployment of troops from Ankara in the first week of Jan 2020. In fact, Haftar met senior operations room commanders at the LNA's HQ in Rajmah on 25 Dec. Haftar studied the situation across all engagement axes and gave his orders to the commanders, urging them to protect civilians and uphold military discipline. Meanwhile, as discussed in the previous report, tensions escalated into armed clashes on 27 Dec in Zawiya. Despite a shaky ceasefire holding as of 30 Dec, sources reported heightened tensions in the area. Clashes and skirmishes could erupt with little to no warning in the short term, increasing travellers' incidental exposure to operational disruptions along the Coastal Road.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

*Mada Masr* explores the circumstances that helped the LNA gain the upper hand over the past few months and recover from the strategic loss of Gharyan. The article argues that Haftar's forces continue to dominate Libyan airspace, which has enabled the tide to turn in the LNA's favour eight months into the conflict. The article goes on to contend, however, that cracks are beginning to emerge in both GNA and LNA ranks. *Mada Masr's* editorial team argues that internal divisions are plaguing Haftar's camp, which prompted foreign supporters such as Cairo to double down on their support for the LNA, especially after Turkey's pivot in support of the GNA. The article reads: "On Friday, the GNA formally requested deployment of Turkish troops, activating the memorandum on security cooperation, and a Turkish official told Bloomberg that the Turkish navy and ethnic Turkmen rebel groups that have fought alongside Turkey in northern Syria would be deployed to the Libyan capital. Ankara seeks to use its alliance with the GNA to push Russia to realign its interests toward Tripoli's government, withdraw Wagner's mercenaries, and convince the Kremlin to cooperate on the Libyan file weeks after the two countries had worked together in Syria. A source from Tripoli's Foreign Ministry told *Mada Masr* "We do not have a problem with Russia, our main problem is with Wagner Group mercenaries joining Haftar's forces, and we are working jointly with Turkey through diplomatic channels to convince the Russians to withdraw their mercenaries from combat." Turkey and Russia are holding talks on the Libyan file, and there is a risk to the LNA that the critical mercenary support that has won them gains in Tripoli could disappear in the event that a deal is struck."

# About Whispering Bell



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

[Twitter](#)



[Website](#)



[LinkedIn](#)



*Copyright © 2016 Whispering Bell, All rights reserved.*