



1. The Big Picture

Fighting intensifies as political talks fail & GNA divisions continue to widen

Fighting between the Libyan National Army (LNA) and Government of National Accord (GNA) reached new levels of intensity with an unprecedented LNA shelling campaign targeting multiple positions across the capital. Efforts to end the violence were also impacted; Geneva political negotiations were boycotted and failed to produce tangible outcomes. LNA and GNA intent to fight is high now that political negotiations have been put on hold. In brief, the odds continue to be stacked in favour of escalation and against a resolution of the conflict in the medium term.

Between 27-28 Feb, Tripoli saw the heaviest shelling recorded since the truce brokered by Turkey and Russia on 12 Jan. Reports bring the total number of LNA shells fired during this period to at least 60. The GNA retaliated with unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) strikes across frontlines South of Tripoli, though LNA forces led by Khalifa Haftar reported at least six Turkish UAVs were downed using air defence systems.

The development prompted Ghassan Salame, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) envoy, to condemn what he described as a "very serious violation of the truce". The limited prospect of a political resolution was further highlighted by Salame's resignation announced late on 02 March. The resignation comes at a critical juncture as Libya edges towards escalation.

There is mounting evidence to indicate the majority of LNA targets across Tripoli were indeed military targets, including a projectile launch site in Nasr forest and Turkish military assets at Mitiga International Airport (MJI), which suffered intermittent disruptions throughout the week. The Hospitality Palaces were also shelled by the LNA, likely to target the Turkish-made SERHAT counter-mortar radar installed on the building's roof. The targeting came a few days after LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mesmari presented a visual of the SERHAT system installed on the building.

The lack of condemnation from the international community, with the exception of MJI, corroborates the fact that LNA targets across Tripoli were indeed military ones. While the risk of collateral damage is high, the LNA sent a clear message that it is capable of targeting positions with precision in the Tripoli combat theatre in spite of the presence of a Turkish air defence system. Elsewhere, the LNA continues to maintain the upper hand by dominating Libya's skies.

For their part, GNA forces did retaliate but fell short of inflicting heavy losses on the LNA. While intent to fight is high among GNA forces, divisions will undermine

any attempt to mount an offensive against Haftar's forces.

Recent tensions between GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha and the Nawasi Brigade have continued to grow over the reporting period. More factions have sided with the LNA in the aftermath of Bashagha's corruption allegations against Tripoli militias and tensions over the Nawasi-sanctioned high-profile arrests of individuals affiliated with the GNA MoI. The Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) supported Nawasi and urged Bashagha to remember when Tripoli only relied on its men to take up arms and defend the capital in April 2019. The TRB added that it is thankful the current situation in Tripoli has blown the lid off disloyal elements, in reference to Bashagha. The TRB concluded by warning Bashagha that it will strike with an iron fist those who conspire to facilitate Tripoli's fall.

In a similar gesture of support, the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) coalition issued a politically-charged statement that opposed Bashagha. The TPF met alongside the commander of the GNA's Tripoli Military Region, Abdulbasit Marwan. Meanwhile, Abdulghani Al-Kikli, the commander of the Gheiwia militia, was also present. The TPF rejected Bashagha's recent statement welcoming the presence of a US military base in Libya.

Highlighting the severity of the prevailing tensions within the GNA camp, Bashagha was reportedly denied entry to the Ain Zara frontline by Nawasi, TRB, and Bab Tajoura Brigade on 25 Feb. With these factions gradually joining the anti-Bashagha camp, it remains to be seen whether the Interior Minister will be successful in his push to implement security reforms across the capital. Tensions are now evolving along two axes; first the divide between hardliners and pro-Bashagha reformists and the other split opposing Misrata to Tripoli-based factions. While hardliners have always expressed their frustration with the GNA's decision-making process since the conflict erupted, Bashagha's recent strategy exacerbated the long-standing Tripoli vs Misrata tensions. In the eyes of Tripoli-based field commanders, Bashagha is only seeking to protect armed groups from Misrata.

With this context in mind, the LNA continues to exploit the widening divisions. This week, the LNA even established a hotline enabling Tripoli residents to report the presence of Turkish military personnel and Syrian fighters.

KEY POINTS

- Unprecedented LNA shelling campaign in Tripoli
- More Tripoli factions side with Nawasi Brigade
- Ghassan Salame resigns as SRSG



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2. National Security Map

LNA advances in Al-Aziziya & Al-Hira areas seizing military camp; IS-affiliated doctor arrested in Sabha

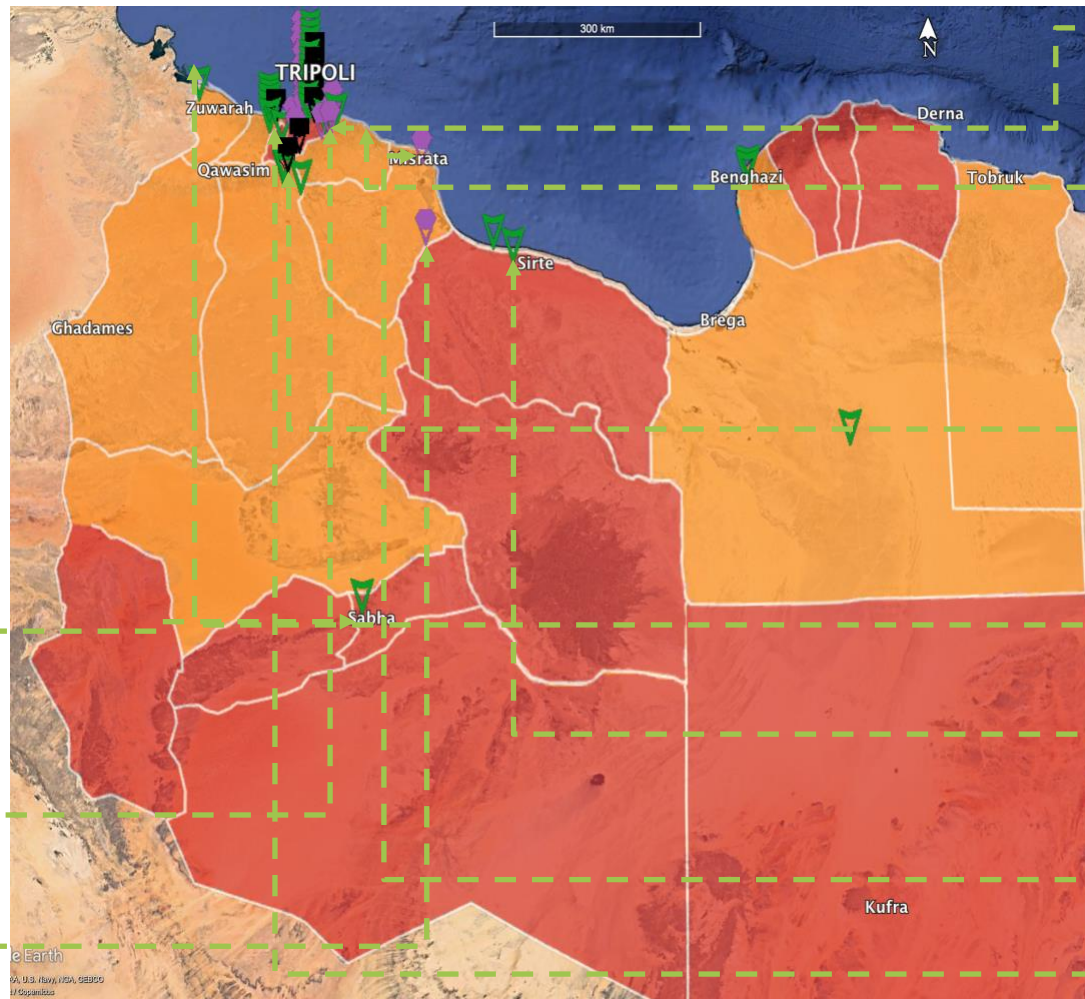
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



The Libyan Association of Judicial Authorities reported the abduction of Mohammed Benamer, a judge at Al-Khoms's Court of First Instance, in Garaboli on 26 Feb. According to the Association, Benamer was kidnapped under mysterious circumstances.

Pro-LNA accounts claimed four civilian men aboard a truck loaded with goods coming from the eastern region were stopped at a checkpoint in Khoms and arrested by Misrata armed factions on 20 Feb.

Following reports of clashes between LNA and GNA forces in Al-Hira, north-west of Gharyan in the morning on 29 Feb, the LNA announced full control over the road linking Tripoli and Gharyan later that afternoon. In addition, the LNA claimed advances in Al-Aziziya and Al-Hira areas, announcing control over Al-Akrami military camp in Al-Heera. The LNA claims were preceded by clashes resuming east of Al-Saadeya on the Al-Aziziya frontline. Meanwhile, in the evening, clashes erupted near Al-Ourban.

Reports continued to emerge renewing calls on travellers to exercise caution along the Coastal Road towards the Ras Ajdir Libya-Tunisia border crossing due to the threat of a possible LNA-sanctioned military deployment in the area.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) arrested three employees of the Social Security Fund in Sirte suspected of ties to IS.

The LNA spox reported a Turkish arms shipment via Misrata Port was recently monitored by the LNA.

Reports suggest the body of an unidentified male with sign of torture was delivered to Al-Zawiya Hospital in Zawiya on 27 Feb. No further information available. Separately, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) was reported over Zawiya's Saeyda Zaineb area on 28 Feb.

A spokesman for the LNA's Joint Security Room in Sabha, Ali Al-Tarshani, announced the arrest of a prominent Sudanese doctor affiliated with the Islamic State (IS) who allegedly planned a terrorist attack in the area on 29 Feb. The IS suspect was identified as Omar Al-Kamani "Abu Abdallah" and worked as a doctor for IS in Sabha. Al-Kamani was arrested after security forces in cooperation with Sabha's Security Room raided Al-Kamani's hideout. According to Al-Tarshani, the suspect is under investigation and noted that Al-Kani holds intelligence about IS cells in the south and Libya in general.

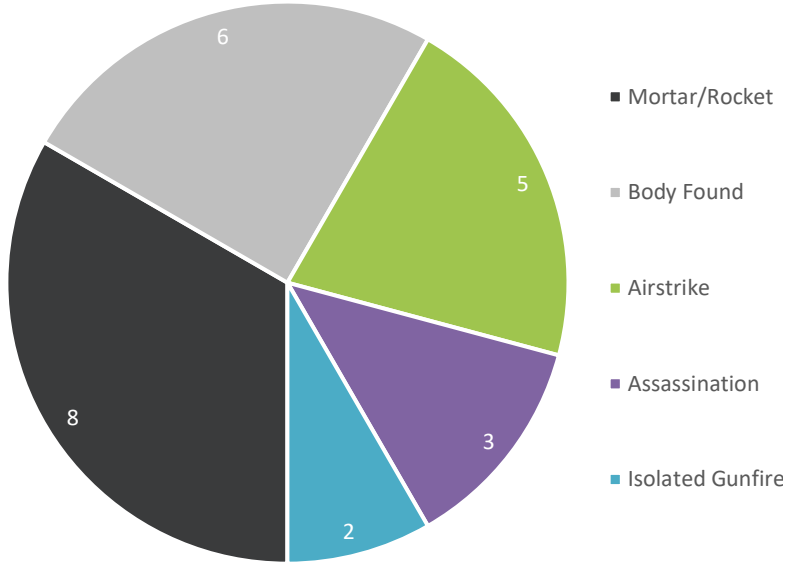
An LNA UAV was reported flying over Gwea, Al-Rawajeh, and Zayaanh at approximately 2130hrs on 28 Feb. Heavy gunfire was reported as GNA forces attempted to down the UAV. Of note, the LNA spox, Ahmed Al-Mismary, reported a Turkish UAV strike in Al-Rawajeh killed five members of a family.

The LNA's Saiqa SF commander, Wanis Boukhmada, ordered reinforcements to Al-Weshka - Abu Grein frontline on 25 Feb.

3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Highest no. of shelling incidents in Tripoli since launch of LNA offensive

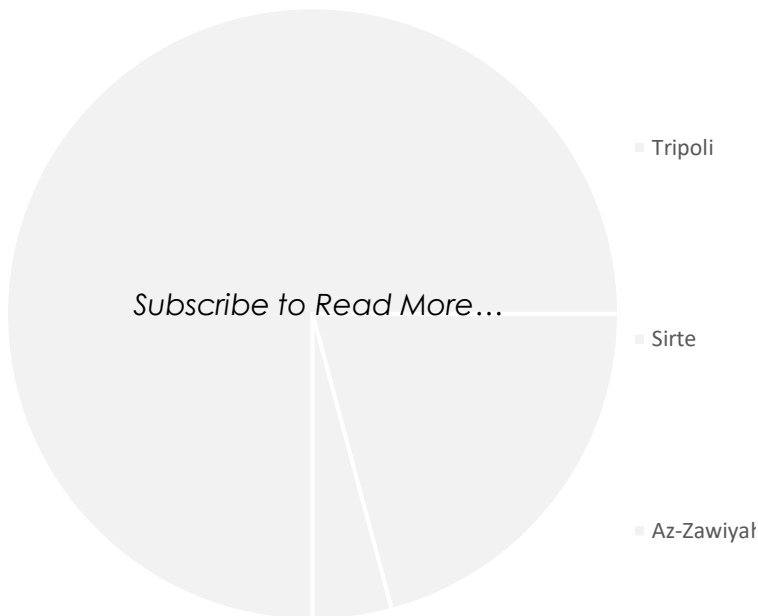
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



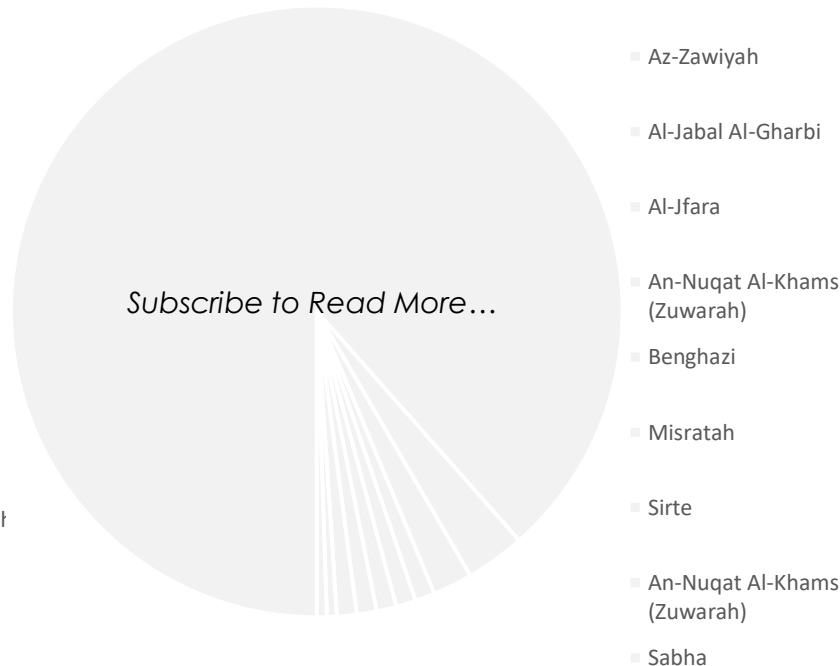
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



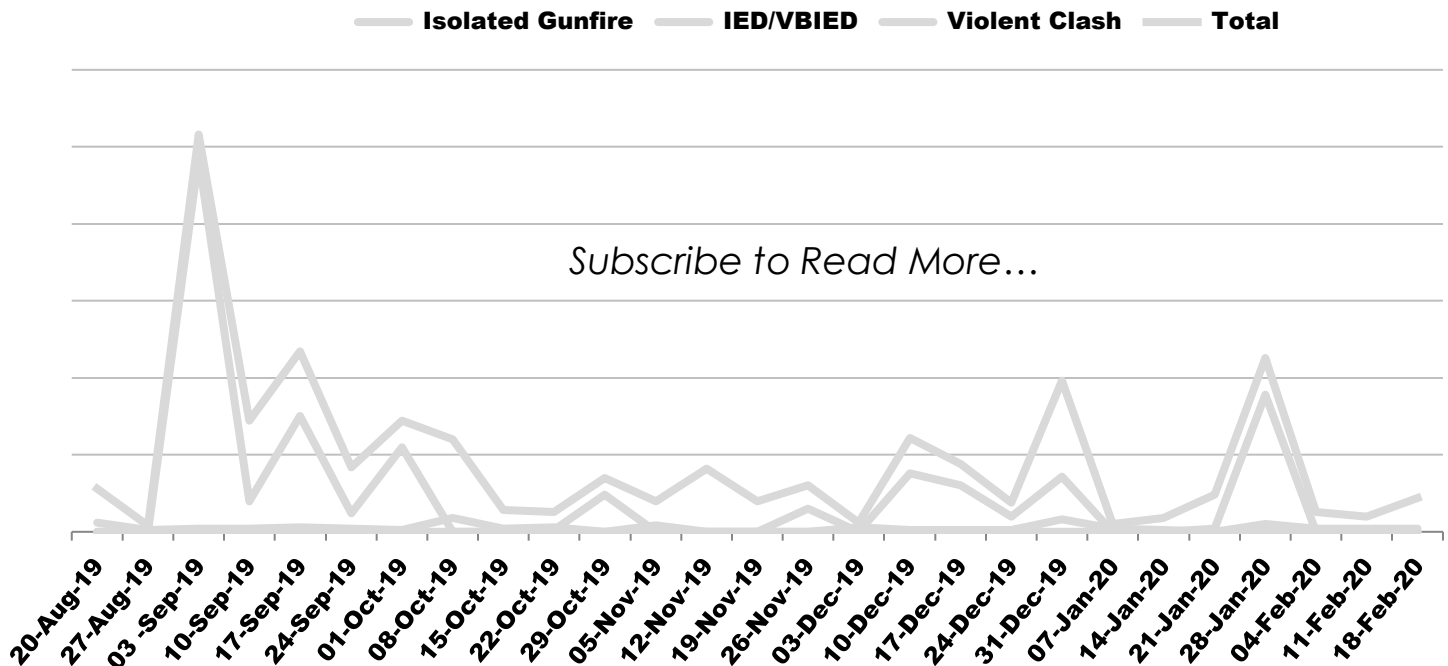
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



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 24 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 10 deaths reported last week and 13 the week before, marking an increase in the number of fatalities recorded in contrast to the previous week amid a resumption of military activity and subsequent casualties as a result. WB recorded 13 fatalities as a result of incidents related to the ongoing clashes. Eight fatalities were recorded as a result of mortar/rocket shelling incidents, with the Libyan National Army (LNA) claiming 7 Turkish military personnel were killed in the LNA's targeting of Turkish military assets at Mitiga International Airport's (MJI) military base. Meanwhile, an additional civilian fatality was recorded as a result of indiscriminate shells landing on civilian houses. Beyond shelling, this week saw five civilian fatalities as a result of Government of National Accord (GNA) unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) airstrike targeting Garaboll's Al-Rawajeh area. Meanwhile, besides military activity, WB recorded an additional 6 fatalities as a result of bodies found in Sirte and in Al-Zawiya, as well as 2 fatalities as a result of gunfire-related cases in Tripoli, and 3 fatalities among pro-GNA forces in the capital. In contrast to last week's data, this week saw an evident increase in mortar/rocket shelling incidents marked by the highest number of shelling reported since clashes broke out in Apr 2019. Meanwhile, WB recorded an uptick in reports of drones flying over western and central areas amid a resumption of UAV airstrikes conducted by both warring sides. In relation to criminal activity, WB recorded an uptick in isolated gunfire cases, kidnappings, and robberies. Beyond the western region, WB recorded two incidents in Sirte including an arrest and a body found, in addition to an arrest in the southern city of Sabha and an arrest and protest in the eastern city of Benghazi. Several incidents were recorded throughout the country including 73 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 28 violent clashes, 10 isolated gunfire cases, 5 robberies, 5 kidnappings, 3 airstrikes, 1 assassination & 1 carjacking.

In western Libya, WB recorded a total of 186 incidents, including 169 in Tripoli, marking a significant increase in security incidents recorded in Tripoli, largely due to an intensified shelling campaign. In Tripoli, three pro-GNA forces were found killed on Al-Nasheel Road in the Wadi Al Rabie area, with sounds of heavy gunfire audible in the area. Details behind the incident remain limited. Separately, sources reported an unidentified armed male killed two civilians and wounded two others in the vicinity of Al-Shok Road on 27 Feb. Reports indicate the armed male met with the victims to sell his vehicle, but refused to hand over the vehicle upon receiving an amount of cash. The armed individual then shot the victims before fleeing the scene. The reports allege the perpetrator has ties to the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) and claimed he acted in self-defence to resist a burglary attempt. Beyond this, WB sources reported gunmen driving a grey Hyundai Sonata carjacked a grey KIA Rio near Al-Swani Bridge on Al-Swani's main road at approximately 1100hrs on 26 Feb. Separately, a parked grey KIA Optima was stolen in front of a house in Tripoli's Al Serraj area in the morning on 26 Feb. Additional vehicle thefts were reported in front of a cafe on Omar Al-Moukhtar Street in Tripoli's downtown area on 22 Feb and from Tripoli University Hospital's parking lot on 24 Feb.

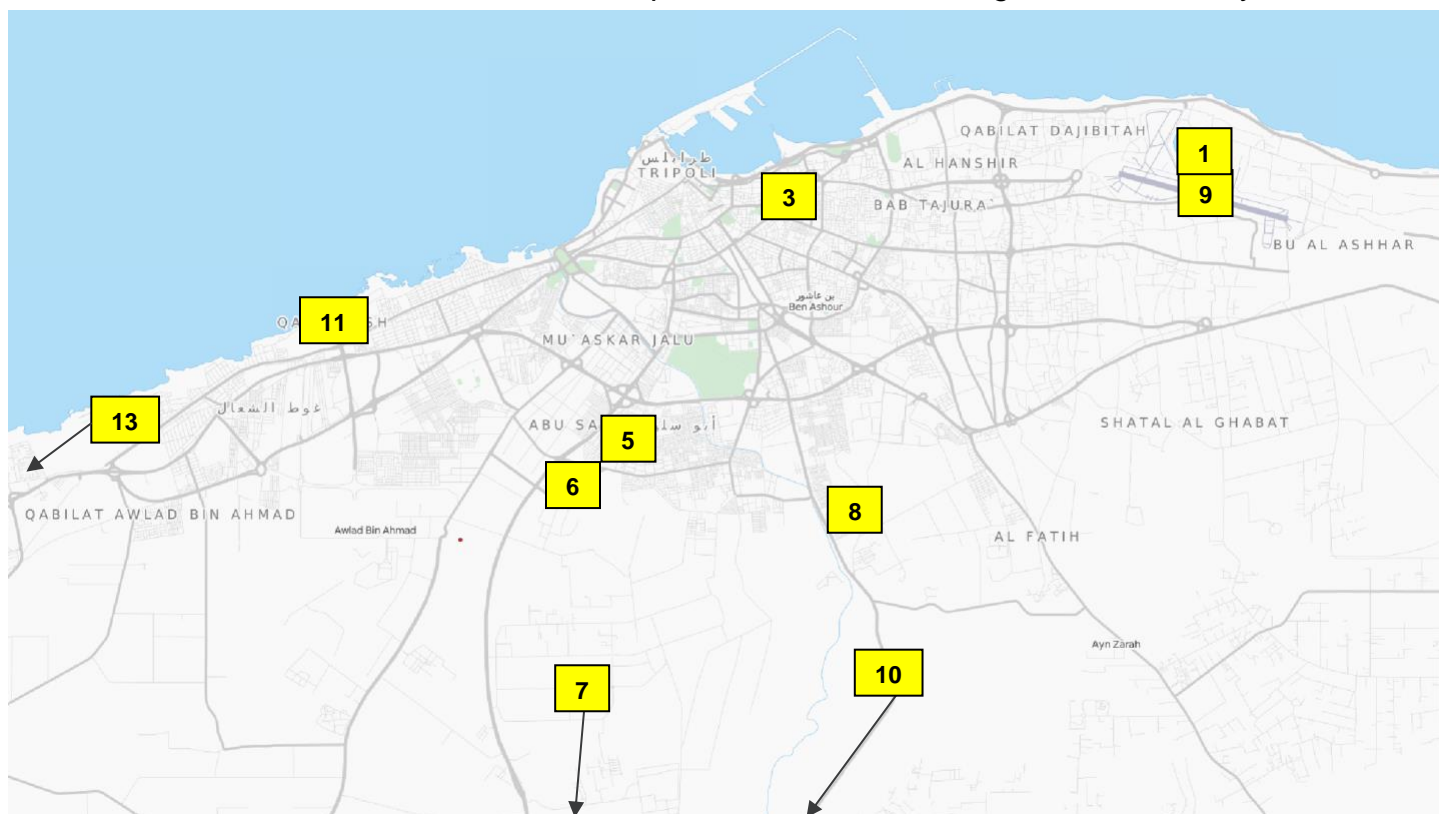
In the wider western region, reports indicate a group of masked gunmen kidnapped the dean of the Faculty of Engineering at University Marqab in Khoms at approximately 1100hrs on 19 Feb. The dean was released later that night, though he was found to be in a critical health condition after being tortured. Initial unconfirmed reports indicate the kidnapers were his students. Separately, sources reported an uptick in military activity across Garaboll's southern areas between 27-28 Feb. Clashes between GNA and LNA forces were intermittent in Al-Rawajeh and continued until approximately 1900hrs on 28 Feb. Meanwhile, indiscriminate shelling was reported in the area separately at approximately 1500hrs, 1530hrs, and 1600hrs on 27 Feb. Later, in the evening, shelling was reported in Gharaboll's Gwea area. Beyond this, there were reports of heavy gunfire and explosions in Gharyan in the evening on 23 Feb. Initial reports indicate a local dispute in the Qawasim area. No fatalities or casualties were recorded.

Turning to the central region, on 24 Feb, Sirte's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) uncovered a mass grave containing the bodies of five individuals killed by the Islamic State (IS) during the battle of Sirte in 2016. The mass grave was found on Sirte's coastline near Gate 30. Three of the bodies were dressed in military uniform, whilst the other two were found decapitated.

In the southern region, LNA units arrested an Islamic State (IS) affiliated doctor allegedly planning to carry out terrorist operations in Sabha. Meanwhile, in the east, a protest was held by Brega Petroleum Marketing Company (BMPC) employees in front of their Benghazi office due to their rejection against company decisions. In addition, an arrest was conducted against a group of six involved in a house robbery in Benghazi.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

MJI resumes air traffic despite consecutive shelling; criminal activity in central areas



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (23 Feb) GNA Mol refutes claims of meeting with "unofficial groups" in MJJ
2. (24 Feb) TRB sides with Nawasi Brigade against GNA Interior Minister in statement
3. (24 Feb) GNA's Ministry of Communications & Transport HQ targeted with gunfire
4. (24 Feb) Pro-LNA accounts claim Nawasi Brigade kidnaps Syrian mercenary
5. (25 Feb) Indiscriminate shelling in Abu Slim kills three & injures two
6. (25 Feb) Gunmen spotted scouring Hai Al-Akwakh area
7. (25 Feb) LNA claim downing of GNA Turkish UAV in the Wildlife Garden
8. (25 Feb) GNA claims LNA shelling on Al-Hadba Al-Badry killed 1 & injured 2
9. (25-01 Mar) MJJ targeted with shells
10. (26 Feb) LNA downs GNA Turkish UAV in Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel area
11. (26 Feb) Man kidnapped under Qerqarish Bridge; body allegedly found at scene
12. (27-28 Feb) LNA intensifies shelling
13. (28 Feb) Gunmen raid Janzour Tourist Village & threaten reported IDPs to evacuate

MJJ targeted with barrage of shells

More than a dozen shells fired by LNA forces targeted Mitiga International Airport (MJJ) on 28 Feb, in the heaviest reported shelling of the airport since the clashes erupted in Apr 2019. Reports suggest the initial wave of shells prompted passengers to evacuate the airport amid check-in procedures. LNA accounts claim the sustained shelling campaign targeted Turkish military assets, alleging 7-10 Turkish personnel were killed. The claims are unverified. Conflicting reports from the LNA's Head of Moral Guidance, Brigadier Khalid Al-Mahjoub, bring the total number of Turkish personnel killed in MJJ to 15.

Shelling targeted the airport in separate waves. The first wave was reported between 0800-0830hrs and diverted flights to Misrata International Airport. Between 1000-1130hrs, the LNA intensified the shelling, with explosions audible across several parts of Tripoli's downtown area, including Fashloum. At approximately 1230hrs, shelling targeted the airport and Shurfat Al Malāha, damaging a residential unit and resulting in thick black smoke. Later, between 1500-1630hrs, another wave of shelling prompted the Mitiga Hospital staff to evacuate the premises. Air traffic resumed at approximately 2000hrs, although shelling continued at approximately 2030hrs. On 29 Feb, shelling targeted the airport again at approximately 1000hrs, halting air traffic. MJJ continued to be targeted with shells between 29-01 Mar, though the airport remains operational as of 02 Mar.

LNA downs two GNA-affiliated Turkish UAVs
Military activity between 25-26 Feb was marked

by the LNA's Western Region Operations Room claiming the downing of a GNA-affiliated Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) south of Tripoli on 25 Feb. Pictures and videos circulated across social media outlets reportedly showing a TB2 Bayraktar UAV downed south of Tripoli. The LNA spokesperson, Ahmed Al-Mesmari, claimed the targeted UAV took off from MJJ. Sources reported the Turkish UAV was downed in the Airport Road's Wildlife Garden at approximately 1800hrs. Less than 24hrs later, the LNA's Media Office claimed it targeted a second UAV in the Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel area at approximately 1600hrs on 26 Feb. Of note, the LNA claimed at least six Turkish-made UAVs operated by the GNA were downed using air defence systems.

Man kidnapped under Qerqarish bridge

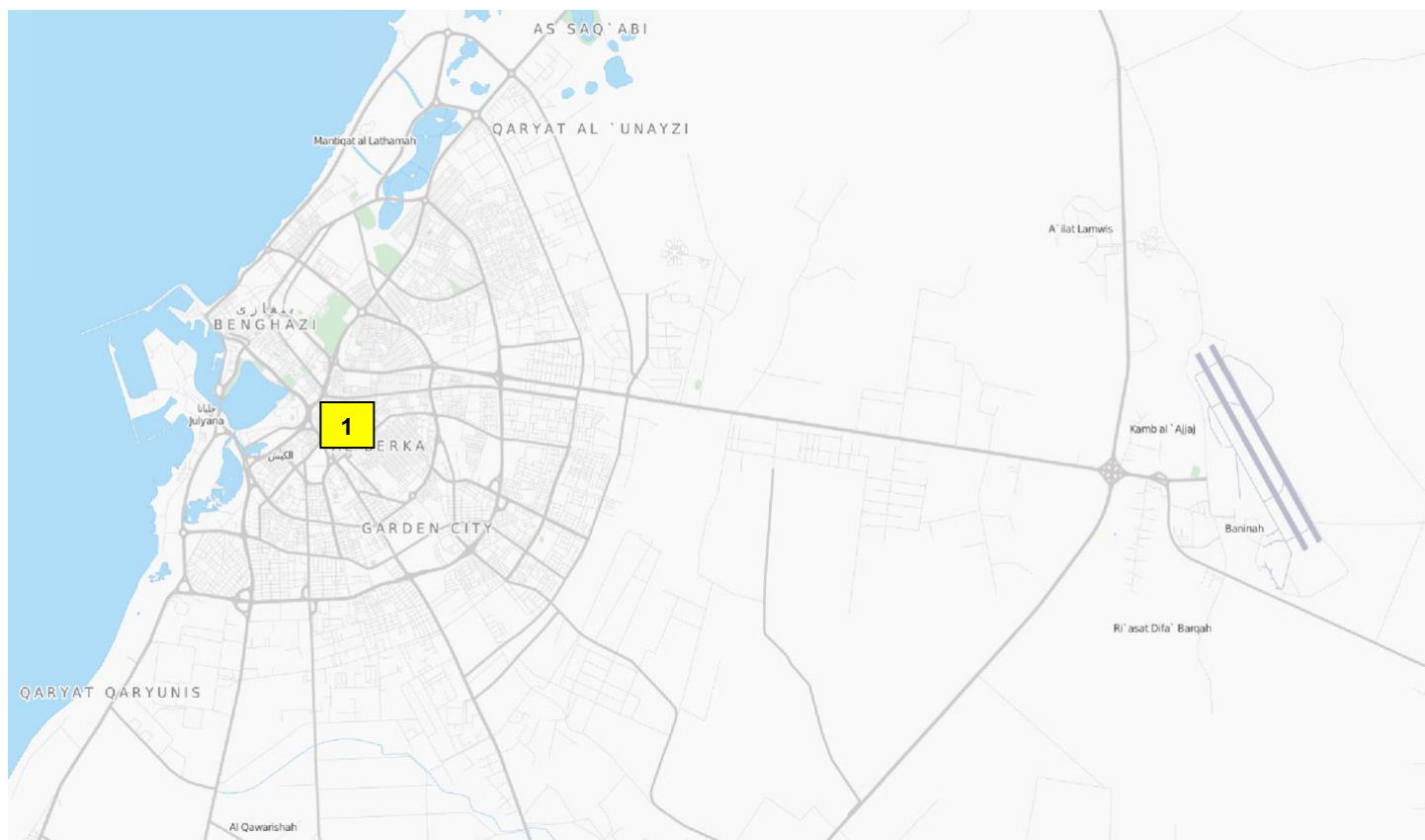
Unidentified assailant(s) driving a black Mercedes kidnapped a man under the Qerqarish bridge in Tripoli's Qerqarish area at approximately 2200hrs on 26 Feb. Video footage circulated across social media outlets showing the victim calling for help as he attempted to resist the kidnapping. Unconfirmed reports suggest a body was found under the Qerqarish bridge, though it remains unclear if the body belongs to the man. At the time of the incident, reports suggest a patrol affiliated with the Central Security Directorate was stationed above Qerqarish Bridge, in addition to two unidentified vehicles parked nearby.

Failed kidnapping attempt in Hai Al-Andalus

Reports indicate two men driving a white Mitsubishi carjacked a white Toyota in front of a house in Tripoli's Hai Alandalus area. Initial reports indicate the driver of the targeted vehicle escaped on foot following a failed kidnapping attempt.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Al-Thinni issues decree establishing Benghazi as new govt. HQ replacing Al-Bayda



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (27 Feb) BMC employees protest against company decisions
2. (29 Feb) Group of six arrested for stealing artifacts in house robbery
3. (29 Feb) New airline opens its Benghazi HQ
4. (01 Mar) Al-Thinni issues decree establishing Benghazi as new govt. HQ replacing Al-Bayda

BPMC employees protest company decisions

Reports indicate Brega Petroleum Marketing Company (BPMC) employees protested in front of its Benghazi branch in Al-Berka area in the afternoon on 27 Feb. The protest was against various decisions made by the company. The protesters requested the Benghazi-based National Oil Corporation (NOC) to intervene. The nature of the company's decisions opposed by its employees remains unknown.

Group arrested on attempted robbery charges

On 29 Feb, Benghazi's Security Directorate arrested a group of six individuals on attempted robbery charges. The suspects attempted to steal antiquities and gold buried underground an abandoned house in the city. Following interrogations, the suspects confessed that they began the excavation process five months ago after receiving reports on the presence of ancient Roman artefacts under the house. The suspects admitted to stealing multiple artefacts in the past, including a Roman statue.

New Benghazi-based airline launched

On 29 Feb, a newly-established private airline, Berniq Airways, opened its Benghazi headquarters in the attendance of prominent figures in the city, including the eastern-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL) governor, Ali Hibri. According to local reports, the airline has a capital of 200 million Libyan dinars (LYD), with the Benghazi-based Bank of Commerce and Development owning a 40% share. Berniq Airways is scheduled to use

Benina International Airport (BEN) as its hub and will commence its domestic and international flights with a fleet of three Airbus A320 aircraft. According to the airline's founder and chairman of the board of directors of the Bank of Commerce and Development, Jamal Abdul Malik, the airline's first aircraft will enter service in the beginning of Apr. The remaining two aircraft are expected to enter service in May.

Benghazi established as new Interim Govt. HQ

On the political front, the Interim government PM, Abdullah Thinni, issued a decree establishing Benghazi as the new HQ for the government and replacing Al-Bayda. The move would corroborate the assessment that the Interim government's intent is tied to the LNA's push to place Benghazi at the centre of investment and reconstruction efforts. The LNA's military manoeuvres continue to be motivated by the long-term objective of transferring the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), National Oil Corporation (NOC) and other key institutions to Benghazi.

6. What's next

Fighting picks up across frontlines amid skirmishes between pro-GNA factions

POLITICAL FORECAST

After Ghassan Salame's resignation and increasingly hostile audiences to any resolution, political talks are expected to be sidelined in the medium term. Russia could take the lead on the military track to mediate a deal, but this is unlikely in the short term. Salame's resignation would come after a pro-GNA campaign calling for his resignation. Meanwhile this week, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States (US) all welcomed the "considerable progress" in the Geneva-hosted military talks toward a permanent ceasefire in Libya on 25 Feb. It is therefore clear that international powerbrokers will look to build on this relatively limited progress on the military track. The military track is expected to continue to be the focus of the African Union (AU) High Level Committee, scheduled to meet on 12 March. On the international front, the temporary tensions between Ankara and Moscow over combat in Syria's Idlib province were felt in Libya in the form of heated war of words. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov accused Turkey of bringing in foreign fighters into Libya on 26 Feb. Similar counter claims were presented by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in relation to Russian private military contractors (PMCs). The precise role played by Syria in the geopolitical tussle over Libya remains unclear. However, Turkey's involvement in the Libyan conflict is clearly prompting the interim government, now based out of Benghazi, to develop closer ties to Damascus. Interim government FM Abdulhadi Al-Hweij signed a memorandum of understanding to reopen diplomatic missions between the Syrian government and Libya. The Libyan Embassy in Damascus is expected to reopen on 03 March according to the latest reports.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Senior editor at Carnegie Middle East Center, Michael Young, quotes insights from experts assessing how the Libyan conflict will unfold in the coming months. For his part, Libya expert Emadeddin Badi argues that intent among warring sides to militarily confront one another remains at its peak pointing to an "unprecedented escalation in Libya". Badi highlights the fact that a military build-up occurred in the immediate aftermath of the Berlin Conference, highlighting that "the commitment made by certain states to the flowery pledges made at the meeting were, at best, insincere". Separately, Silvia Colombo assessed the conflict in Libya will likely remain a low-intensity one, albeit with "highly destabilizing effects in the coming months". Colombo argued that regional and international efforts to solve the crisis will fail to achieve tangible results, where "lawlessness and the proliferation of contested orders will prevail". Referring to the human aspect of the conflict, Colombo stated that "Libyans are seeing their moral restraints in the conflict collapsing, are questioning the people who should be protecting them, and are losing hope in the future". Further, Jalel Harchaoui argued that Haftar's offensive has allowed for meddling foreign countries to expand their presence in western Libya "dramatically and more indelibly". Harchaoui referenced the ongoing oil blockade orchestrated by the pro-Haftar camp and claimed that it is only one "facet of a wider campaign meant to squeeze the Central Bank in Tripoli". In addition, Harchaoui highlighted a "very possible" scenario in which the GNA, with the help of Turkey, succeeds in expelling Haftar's units from Tripoli. In such a scenario, Harchaoui predicts that Haftar and his foreign backers may use massive force to engage in a larger push into central Tripoli, thus increasing the likelihood of further destruction and human loss. Lastly, Tim Eaton, stated that the EU's naval mission will concern the GNA as it receives its support from Turkey via sea, therefore, for the embargo to prove effective, Eaton argues that there must also be a means of stifling support to the LNA by land and air. Eaton noted that Haftar's ceasefire conditions highlight his commitment to a military course, whilst the GNA's insistence on the LNA withdrawing to its original positions is unattainable under the current circumstances. Eaton also warns of the conflict's spillover effect on the economic sphere amid the blockade, noting the difficulty for national institutions to operate as governance divisions widen.

SECURITY FORECAST

The week was marked by a renewed LNA focus on southwestern fronts of Al-Aziziyah, Al-Kremiya, and Al-Heera. The LNA continued to push on other central fronts such as Ain Zara. The latest developments in the Tripoli theatre have corroborated the LNA's growing reliance on heavy artillery shelling over UAVs as a result of the documented presence of defence systems, including the Hawk MIM-23, manned by Turkish forces in central Tripoli. Regardless, LNA forces have proven capable of reaching any area within Tripoli with the latest shelling. On the ground, hardliners within the GNA camp continue to hint at offensive operations against Tarhunah, Bani Walid, and other LNA-held areas. It remains to be seen whether the latest rift in Tripoli with Fathi Bashagha will prompt these hardliners to follow through with offensive operations. GNA hardliners do not have air cover outside Tripoli and could run the risk of being exposed to LNA airstrikes. Meanwhile, tensions over funding and lack of ammunition rounds will complicate any possible offensive by GNA forces. Meanwhile, tensions on the Gharabolli Coastal Road will likely continue to escalate in the medium term. Of note, sources reported an uptick in military activity across Garabolli's southern areas between 27-28 Feb. The LNA's 9th Brigade Tarhunah will continue to carry out tactical incursions to bleed GNA forces in the area. Further west, local fears continue to grow over a possible LNA-sanctioned military deployment along the coastal road towards Tunisia. Local reports warned travellers on two separate occasions to exercise caution when travelling along the coastal road. UAV recon activity West of Tripoli indicates possible LNA offensive operations in the short term, with Zawiyah being the most likely target if Haftar's forces launch an offensive.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In a special briefing published on 28 Feb, a senior US State Department official comments on Washington's engagement in Libya. The official reiterated key US policy concerns related to the conflict in Libya. In a more noteworthy statement, the official expressed concern that the oil blockade may have been manipulated "with the intention of using oil as a political tool", in a clear reference to the LNA. Meanwhile, Haftar's role was also acknowledged during the briefing. The State Department official noted "It's clear that in asking the LNA to suspend its offensive we're not – that there is a role for Haftar in shaping Libya's political future. Nobody is saying there isn't; nobody is asking him to surrender. But we think that the way he is going to advance the goals he's talking about are best – is best done at the negotiating table. And of course, this is just the first step in de-escalating the overall conflict. But it's got to begin with suspending the current offensive." Among other references, the official touched upon the terrorist threat in the South, stating "we're already getting indications this is an environment that's ripe for terrorist groups to reform themselves".

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