



1. The Big Picture

High expectations & uncertainty ahead of National Conference

This week was marked by a nationwide increase in sporadic security incidents; a prelude to growing political uncertainty in 2019 as Libya prepares to enter a new stabilization phase. Expectations are high ahead of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) National Conference, though premature elections in 2019 would spark renewed violence.

Political divisions are deepening ahead of the National Conference. On 12 Jan, PC deputy PMs Ahmed Maetig, Fathi Majberi, and Abdussalam Kajman, issued a strong statement warning Sarraj of a complete government collapse and accusing him of excluding them from decision-making. The statement goes on to accuse Sarraj of disregarding the terms of the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). While Fathi Majberi had shown signs of opposition to the Sarraj-led Government of National Accord (GNA) by resigning in Jul 2018, tensions between Maetig and Sarraj are previously undocumented and would add a new layer of complexity to Libya's existing rivalries between the House of Representatives (HoR) in the East and the Sarraj-led GNA.

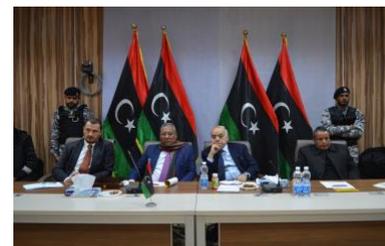
Analysts suggest Maetig is seeking to bridge the gap between the HoR and PC by opposing Sarraj and forming an alliance with the HoR in return for the latter's recognition of the GNA. It remains unclear how the latest rivalry will unfold in 2019. Maetig's opposition to Sarraj will likely grow calls to reform the PC while increasing the likelihood of a PC without Sarraj in the medium term. Political rhetoric is expected to grow in the short term between Tripoli-based political elements, especially in relation to budgets and corruption.

All bets are off as UN Envoy Ghassan Salame attempts to bridge the gap between Libyan factions. The course of action in the aftermath of the National Conference, especially a potential timeline for elections, remains unclear. Given Salame's recent statement, it looks as if presidential elections will yet again be delayed. Salame reiterated the importance of holding "parliamentary elections, then a referendum on the constitution and then presidential elections." However, this timeline will be contingent on the security environment, and Libyan factions' risk appetites and willingness to accept outcomes that may be unfavorable and/or detrimental to their interests.

Meanwhile, in the O&G sector, Reuters, citing unidentified trading sources, reported Swiss commodity trading company Glencore lost its exclusivity to market Libya's Sarir and Messla crude oil grades. According to the report, other trading firms and trading departments of major oil companies such as BP and Shell have already secured allocations of the Sarir and Messla grades. Reports from Jan 2017 suggested Glencore had extended its exclusivity rights for an unknown period with the National Oil Corporation (NOC). Meanwhile, China's Unipet is also reportedly set to begin lifting at least three cargoes from Marsa Al Hariga port in Libya's East, where the crude grades are exported.

KEY POINTS

- National Conference prospect unclear
- Growing Sarraj vs Maetig divisions
- Glencore loses rights over Sarir/Messla



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2. National Security Map

Misrata Port Customs seize Turkish shipment of firearms; Khoms police targeted in drive-by shooting

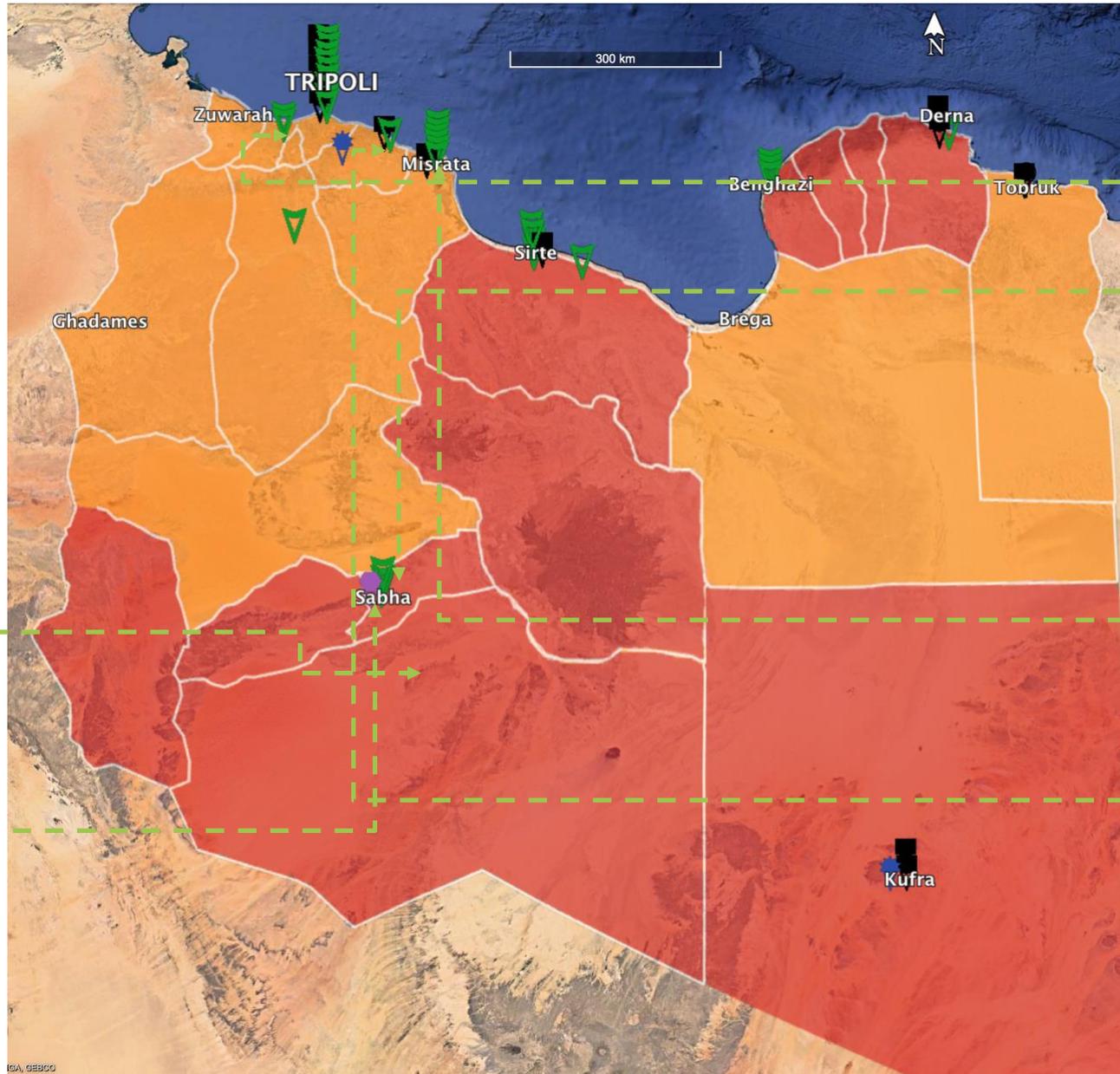
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



Local reports suggest a leader of Ansar Al-Sharia (ASL) in Benghazi, identified as Imad Al-Gheriani, was arrested in Al-Zawiya on 07 Dec. According to reports, Al-Gheriani was found hiding in a house and was transferred to an Special Deterrence Force (SDF) prison for interrogation.

On 12 Jan, reports suggest the General Command of the Libyan National Army (LNA) ordered the Tariq Ben Ziyad Battalion, 166th Infantry Brigade, and 155th Brigade to mobilize and move South of Libya, in a new mission to combat foreign militancy and criminal networks in the area.

Misrata Port's Customs seized a shipment of firearms concealed in a container, which reportedly includes 556 boxes each containing 36 "Ekol P29" handguns. Pictures circulated across social media appear to show the handguns found in boxes and concealed in the 20 foot container. There is no evidence to suggest the shipment was government-sanctioned.

Reports suggest unidentified gunmen fired at the Khoms police station in a drive-by shooting incident in the early hours of 11 Jan. There were no reports of casualties. While the precise motive behind the incident is unknown, multiple analysts have suggested it could be related to a recent foiled attempt to smuggle weapons into the city from Turkey. The weapons shipment sparked debates over Turkey's alleged destabilizing role in Libyan affairs and prompted an official investigation.

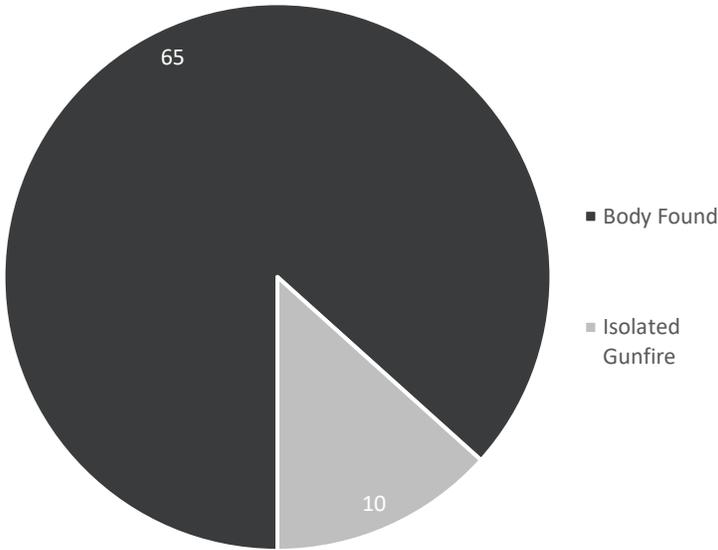
Reports of an alleged Islamic State (IS) attack on the gate of Majdul, a small town South of Sabha, resulting in two fatalities and the militants seizing control of the gate on 07 Jan. There is no further information available.

Local reports young locals from Sabha killed three Chadian mercenaries and captured two others at midnight in Sabha on 08 Jan. Reports suggest five Chadian mercenaries, riding in two Toyota and Hyundai vehicles, entered Sabha's Secondary area, after which the locals killed at least three, and captured at least two others. The Chadian mercenaries reportedly operate under an opposition wing led by the Chadian rebel, Mohamed Hakimi, suggested to be one of the most dangerous Chadian elements operating on Libyan territory.

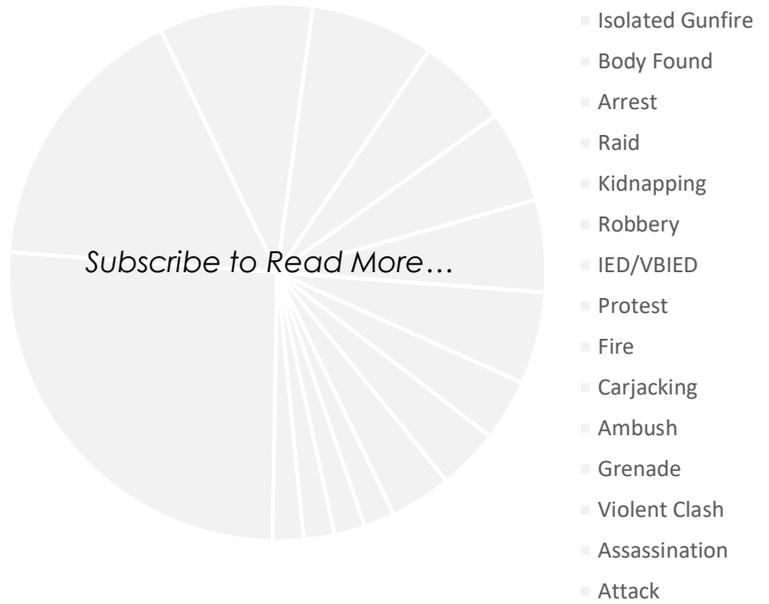
3. Nationwide Security Analysis

3/4 of fatalities due to Derna mass grave; increase in isolated gunfire incidents

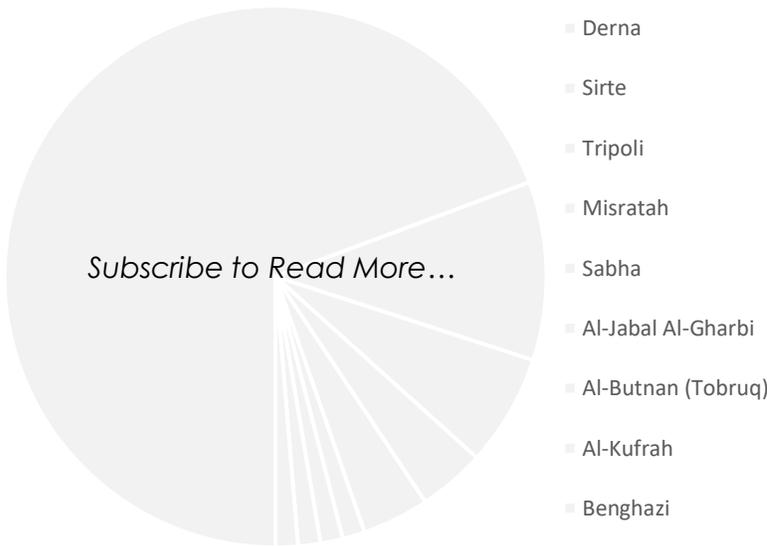
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



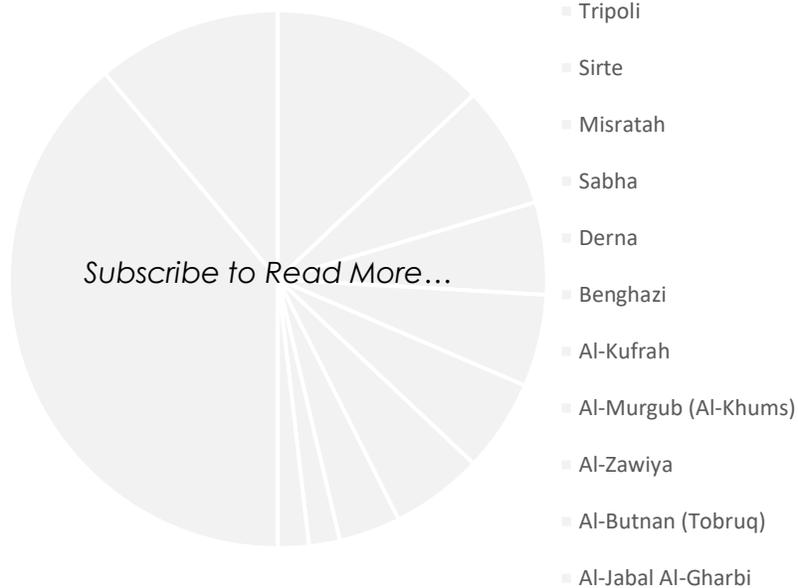
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



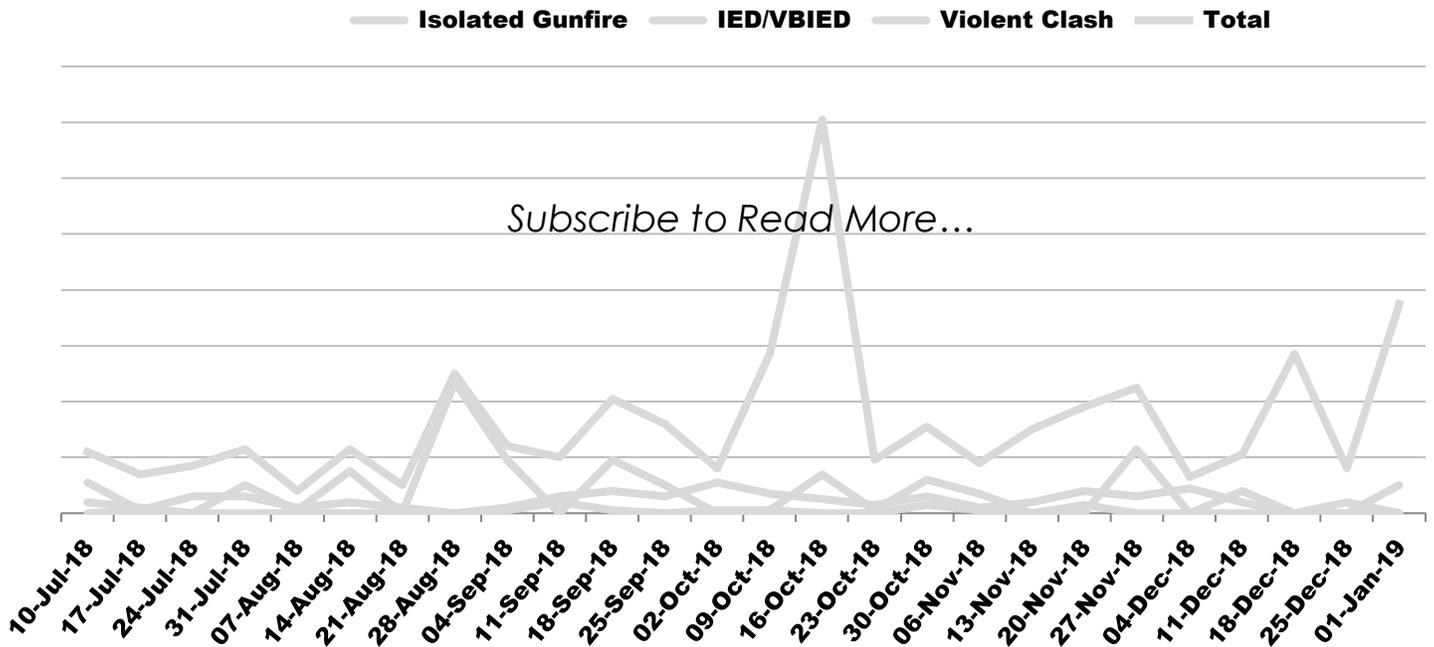
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)



Nationwide Fatalities by Type of Attack (Past 27 Weeks)



Data Analysis

Whispering Bell recorded this week a total of 75 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 16 deaths reported last week and 57 the week before. This week a mass grave located in Derna accounted for almost 3/4 of the nationwide fatalities across Libya. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country, including 14 cases of isolated gunfire, 9 bodies found, 4 raids, 3 kidnappings, 3 IED/VBIED incidents, 3 protests, 2 carjackings, and 1 grenade incident.

In Western Libya, Whispering Bell recorded a total of 34 incidents, including 21 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli. Whispering Bell recorded an increase in security incidents across the capital city. Reports locals found a female body in Tripoli's Al-Gweia area at approximately 0900hrs on 11 Jan. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Gharabolli later reported the body showed signs of a bullet to the head and was handcuffed. In a separate incident, reports suggest gunmen, allegedly affiliated to the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) militia, kidnapped a senior official of the Government of National Accord's (GNA) Anti-Narcotics department while driving his vehicle (Toyota Hilux) in Tripoli's Ain Zara area at approximately 2100hrs on 10 Jan. In the wider Western region, reports suggest a man's body was found in Misrata in the morning on 09 Jan. Initial reports suggest the victim was a peace activist. Neither the identity of the assailant(s) nor the motive behind the incident are known.

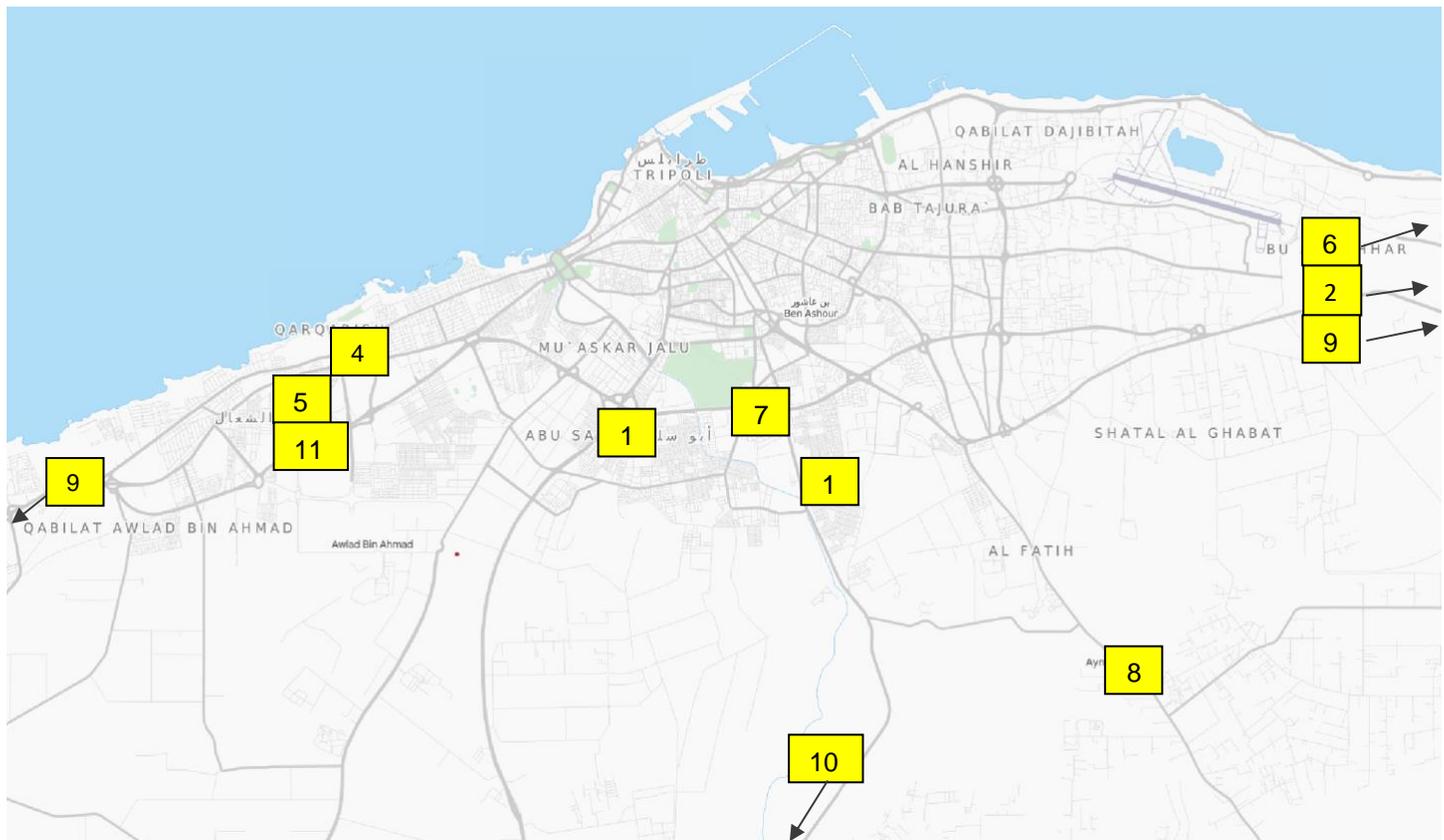
This week in central Libya, Whispering Bell recorded an increase in sporadic security incidents across Sirte. According to reports, a group of gunmen opened fire on the headquarters of Sirte's Security Directorate in a drive-by-shooting incident at approximately 0000hrs on 08 Jan. Reports suggest the drive-by-shooting was an act of retaliation after the gunmen were stopped at a checkpoint in the city. There were no security incidents reported.

Turning to southern Libya, Whispering Bell recorded an increase in sporadic security incidents across Sabha. Clashes erupted between gunmen belonging to the tribes of Hasawneh and Gaddafi resulting in an uncited number of casualties in Sabha on 09 Jan. Sources confirmed sporadic clashes and sounds of heavy weapons used over the night in Sabha. According to reports, the outbreak of clashes followed the killing of a Hasawneh tribesman. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest four unidentified bodies were found in Sabha's Thanawiya area at night on 09 Dec. It remains unclear if the bodies belonged to the tribal forces. Beyond this, reports suggest unidentified gunmen carried out an armed attack on the headquarters of Sabha's Directorate on 09 Jan.

In Eastern Libya, the Derna branch of the Libyan Red Crescent reportedly discovered a mass grave of 52 bodies in Derna's Fatayah area on 09 Jan. The mass grave contained bodies belonging to Islamic State (IS) militants.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Dat Al-Imad Towers evacuated following VBIED terror threat



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (05 Jan) Parked vehicle stolen in Abu Slim; Carjacking on Al-Hadba Toul Rd
2. (06 Jan) Indiscriminate gunfire results in death of man in Tajoura
3. (07 Jan) ACA request to lift immunity of HCS head, Khalid Mishri
4. (08 Jan) Locals protest killing of young man by militiamen in Qerqarish
5. (09 Jan) Ghneiwa & Zintan militias' clash over control of Pepsi factory
6. (09 Jan) Unidentified militia breaks into National Heart Centre in Tajoura
7. (10 Jan) Ghneiwa militia raid multiple houses in Al-Hadba Al-Khadra
8. (10 Jan) Gunmen kidnap senior GNA anti-narcotics department official
9. (11 Jan) Female body found in Al-Goweia; man killed in Janzour
10. (11 Jan) Two sons of Buraq Airlines Director kidnapped from residence
11. (11 Jan) IED ready-for-detonation dismantled in farm in Ghut Al-Shaal

VBIED terror threat

There were unconfirmed reports of a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attack intended to target Tripoli's Dat Al Imad towers in the morning on 10 Jan. Sources received reports of at least two companies evacuating their personnel in the morning on 10 Jan. Corinthia Hotel's security confirmed the threat to Whispering Bell sources. Meanwhile, the Government of National Accord (GNA) discredited the VBIED terror threat and reassured the security situation in Tripoli was under control. Special Operations Forces were deployed near the buildings in the aftermath of the terror threat. Unconfirmed reports suggest authorities arrested two "dark-skinned" Sub-Saharan African migrants with forged Libyan passports and explosive belts (person-borne improvised explosive devices - PBIEDs) in Tripoli's Four Seasons Hotel on Omar Al-mukhtar Street on 10 Jan. It remains unclear whether the arrest, if confirmed, is related to the terror threat on 10 Jan.

Ghneiwa & Zintan militia tensions

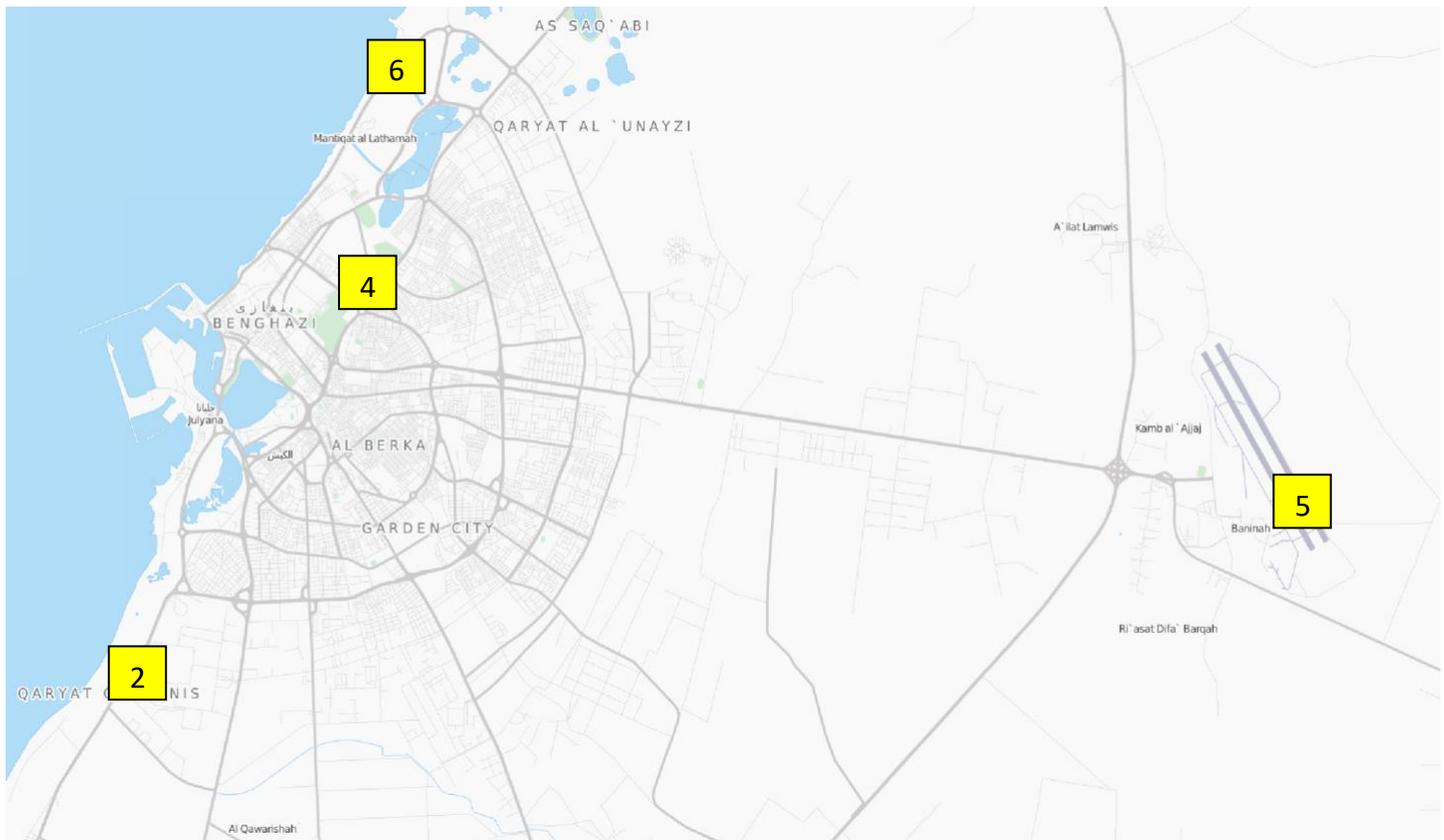
There were reports of heavy gunfire due to a dispute between Ghneiwa and Zintan militias' over the control of the Pepsi Factory in Tripoli's Edraiby area at approximately 2300hrs on 09 Jan. There were no security incidents reported. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest Ghneiwa militiamen raided multiple houses in Tripoli's Alhadba Alkhadra area in the evening on 10 Jan. There is no further information available though local reports suggest the raids targeted individuals from Al-Zintan and Tarhunah. If confirmed, this would closely follow reports of growing tensions between Ghneiwa and Zintan militias.

IED ready for detonation dismantled

Authorities dismantled an improvised explosive device (IED) ready for detonation in a farm in Tripoli's Ghot Al Shaal area on 11 Jan. Based on pictures circulated by the explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) unit affiliated to the Government of National Accord's (GNA) Ministry of Interior (MoI), the IED was manufactured with a 155mm shell and a dual detonator.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Benghazi's Security Directorate drafts new security plan & joint Ops Room



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (07 Jan) New security plan & formation of joint Ops Room
2. (08 Jan) Hideout used for trade of narcotics & alcohol raided
3. (08 Jan) Individual behind circulation of Werfalli's former executions' video released
4. (09 Jan) Wanted criminal arrested at surprise CP
5. (09 Jan) Agreement signed to resume Cairo-Benghazi flights
6. (12 Jan) Body of illegal migrant found on seashore

New Security plan & Ops Room

On 07 Jan, the head of Benghazi's Security Directorate, General Adel Abdelaziz, issued an order to all concerned security departments and officials to follow up on efforts to arrest individuals carrying unlicensed weapons. Additionally, the Directorate stated that a new security plan was prepared, and a joint operations room was formed with multiple directorates and the Central Support System, in an effort to enhance security across the city. On 20 Dec, the Interior Minister of the Interim Government, Ibrahim Bushnaf, raised the state of alert to critical in the city of Benghazi for three consecutive months, noting the encirclement of the city's main entrances along with increased security presence at night. Raising the state of alert to critical in Benghazi coincides with a recent surge in criminal activity, particularly armed robberies, across the city.

Body found

Security services reportedly found the body of an approximately 30-year-old man on the seashore in Benghazi's Al-Lathama area on 12 Jan. According to reports, the body belongs to an illegal migrant who drowned.

Criminal arrested; hideout raided

Local reports suggest members of Benghazi's Najda Department arrested a wanted narcotics dealer and criminal at a surprise checkpoint near Al-Salmani post on 09 Jan. The criminal was reportedly intoxicated and caught with a firearm during the arrest. Additionally, the criminal's vehicle was found with narcotics, homemade alcohol, and cash. In a separate incident, Benghazi's Rescue Department reportedly raided a hideout used for the trade of narcotics and alcohol in the village area on 08 Jan.

6. What's next

Mounting opposition to Sarraj; budget to sow divisions ahead of National Conference

POLITICAL FORECAST

Political uncertainty and divisions are growing ahead of the planned National Conference. The UNSMIL is yet to announce a date / publish a list of attendees, though the Mission clarified that the date/venue of the Conference will first be announced via its official communication channels. Opposition to the Conference and/or its outcomes could begin to form as multiple factions have already described the Conference as foreign meddling. In the aftermath of the Conference, regardless of its success, tensions will likely escalate between those that favor early elections and another group for whom elections would be premature. On the international front, the new phase in the Syrian conflict, marked by a forthcoming US troops' withdrawal, will have political ramifications on Libya, especially in relation to foreign players' policies. Analysts suggest Turkey is expected to pursue a more aggressive policy in Libya, while evidence suggests Russia is already on a balancing act by reportedly supporting remaining pro-Gaddafi figures, including Gaddafi's close relatives. Russia likely realizes that a large segment of the Libyan population continues to support Gaddafi and that its Western counterparts have not prioritized this segment of the population; an opportunity for Moscow to cement its role as a powerbroker.

SECURITY FORECAST

Tripoli authorities will likely remain on high alert as the general context of political uncertainty ahead of the National Conference could result in attacks and other disruptions. The newly-formed Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) could come into direct confrontation with Tarhuna's Al-Kaniat militia and/or Zintani units within the capital city. Alternatively, the Islamic State (IS) could exploit this context of uncertainty to carry out attacks. Meanwhile, in the wider West, WB recorded an increase in fuel smuggling activity. Attempts to smuggle fuel into Tunisia are expected to increase after the GNA officially dissolved the Fuel and Gas Crisis Committee led by the controversial Milad Hajrasi. Meanwhile, the Sharara oil field will likely be shut in the short to medium term as reports of security breaches continue to emerge. In the South, heavy clashes will likely continue in the short term, especially following LNA units' mobilization and the planned "Anger of Desert" operation. Tensions will escalate on the Chadian border after Chadian opposition group CCMSR engaged Sudanese Darfuri SLA units near Kouri Bougoudi gold mines. In the East, Benghazi will continue to see sporadic security incidents and a general surge in criminal activity.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In a policy brief published by the *Atlantic Council* and *ISPI*, the authors, Karim Mezran and Wolfgang Puzstai, discuss the prospect of a new stabilization plan in Libya, absent a strong constitutional basis to hold elections. "A new stabilization effort must start with a series of regional ceasefires between the most important military actors. This must include, among others, the LNA and Misrata, the greater Tripoli area, and the Fezzan in the south. The authors discuss three ways to ensure a centralized government's security: "The first one is to establish an independent, capable, and trusted Libyan force. Regrettably, it is not realistic that—for at least another 12-15 months—there could be such a Libyan-made force and only if things are properly in place. The second option would be to employ an international protection force to establish a secure environment. [...] The third option is a temporary relocation of the decision makers and their closest staff to a safe zone. Such a zone must be on the northern coast, at or in the vicinity of an airport, and preferably also close to a harbor. It must be further away from the "main combat zones" to make it easier to protect." The authors conclude that "There is a good possibility of a breakup of the country into several parts and a major civil war. But it seems to be that the strong man in the East, Marshall Haftar also has an interest to deliver a real Libya-Libya solution. There is a good chance, that the National Conference could become a turning point in Libya's history."

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Writing for *The Arab Weekly*, Michel Cousins argues "The discovery of two attempts, less than a month apart, to smuggle Turkish-made guns into Libya triggered hostile reactions over suspicions of Ankara's support to extremists. [...] Even without the two incidents, hostility to Turkey is growing. The acting mayor of Derna, which for four years was run by the Islamic State and then by local Islamists sympathetic to al-Qaeda and is still not fully cleared of the latter, claimed that investigations following the arrest of four militants showed they had been provided with arms and equipment by Turkey and Qatar. The fact that Turkey has, with Qatar, become a sanctuary for numerous Libyan Islamist or quasi-Islamist political figures also fuelled hostility. Prominent among them is Abdulhakim Belhaj, the head of Libya's al-Watan Party and owner of its pro-Islamist TV station Al Nabaa, which operates out of Turkey." Cousins adds that "Nor is distrust of Turkey likely to subside. Its perceived alliance with transnational Islamist movements, allegations of links to Libyan militants, the fact that so many use Turkey as a base and now the accusations of gun smuggling, coming on top of the generally negative perception of Libya's history as a neo-Ottoman province, appear to be building public suspicion and antagonism towards Turkey."

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