

# 1. The Big Picture

## Tripoli clashes subside; setback for National Conference

Despite a shaky truce negotiated by tribal elders, this week's clashes in Tripoli's South have undermined confidence in Libya's 2019 path to stabilization. Politically, any potential delay in the planned January United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) National Conference would prompt militias in Tripoli to reconsider the military option as a viable alternative to preserve the status quo.

The clashes were the result of months of tensions building up between Tripoli's main militias, the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF), and the Government of National Accord (GNA) PM Fayez Sarraj and Interior Minister, Fathi Bashagha. By attacking Al-Kaniat militia, the TPF was in fact indirectly renegotiating Tripoli's security arrangements while opposing Bashagha's latest decision to assign Tarhunah's brigades to Tripoli International Airport (TIP). The TPF issued a statement noting that the force will no longer obey the orders of the Presidential Council (PC) and will only do so should decisions be adopted unanimously by all nine PC members.

The ceasefire remains fragile and neither the TPF nor Al-Kaniat have officially endorsed it. Clashes could resume with little to no warning in Tripoli's South and it remains unclear whether TPF/GNA tensions will result in attacks against some GNA officials and/or buildings. Looking ahead, TPF units will likely hold their positions in the South and could even attempt to attack Al-Kaniat further into Tarhunah. Meanwhile, Al-Kaniat could retaliate, though the group's bargaining position is weaker than in the Aug/Sep 2018 clashes.

However, there could be a silver lining as the latest round of violence could denote an unprecedented and more complex political position taken by militias. Unlike the Aug/Sep 2018 clashes, the latest "skirmishes" were not simply due to tensions between two militias, but the result of a power struggle between the GNA and Tripoli's militias who saw an attack against Al-Kaniat as a mere means to an end.

Perhaps, the biggest difference between the two crises is that in the latest situation, Tripoli's militias -also known as the "cartel" that helped the GNA consolidate its position since 2016- make it clear they are no longer the GNA's military muscle. The fact that TPF was forced to exploit an internal division within the GNA (and between PC members) to find a rationale for and justify its operation, acts as strong evidence of militias' dwindling power to operate unhindered across the capital city; a possible testament to Bashagha and the UNSMIL's recent efforts to transfer power from armed groups to state institutions, especially the Mol.

In the aftermath of the Zawiya ceasefire and by the end of 2018, there was a tacit realization among the TPF that they now have to play the "political game" to justify any military escalation; both international and local audiences were no longer receptive to opportunistic militia manoeuvres. In this latest round of violence, the frequency of statements issued by both sides underlines the new political nature of the struggle among militias. The crisis could be a prelude to the new reality on the ground where militias attempt to cement their position as capable political actors. While this does not rule out the possibility of skirmishes in the short and medium term across the capital city, militia tensions are unlikely to reach the scale of violence witnessed in the Aug/Sep 2018 clashes. What we could see instead are targeted attempts by the TPF to coerce Sarraj and/or Bashagha into reversing/enacting legislation.

Regardless, it remains to be seen if Sarraj and Bashagha will weather this storm. It will be a difficult task given the prevailing distrust of Sarraj and in light of the recently-surfaced rivalry within the PC. Tripoli militias will find it relatively uncomplicated to echo calls to reform the PC and oust Sarraj. Overall, the situation only raises expectations of the planned National Conference.

### KEY POINTS

- Shaky ceasefire & tensions could resume
- TPF plays political game; exploits PC rift
- High expectations of National Conference



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# 2. National Security Map

Uncertainty surrounds LNA military operation in South; impact on O&G unclear

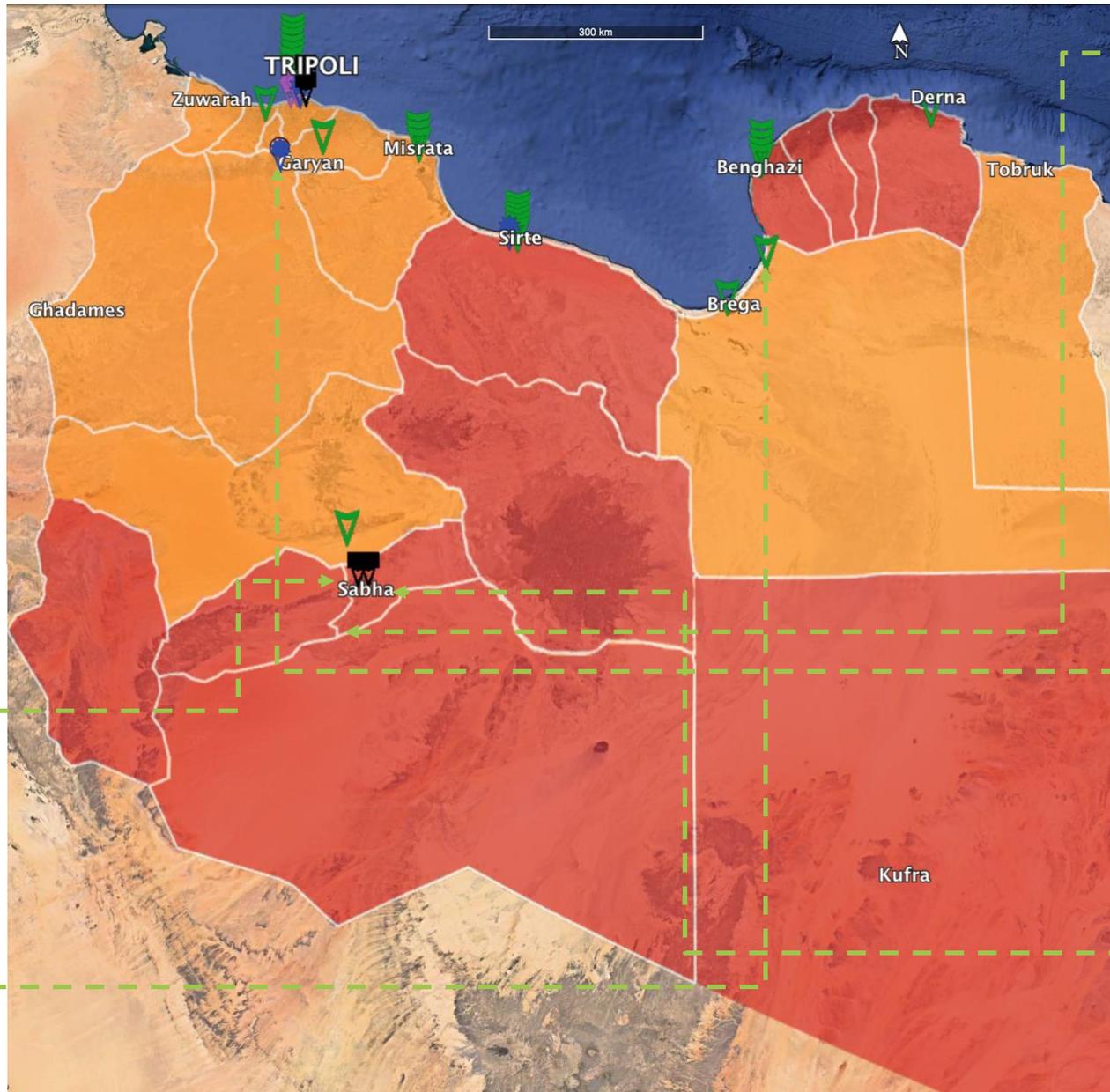
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



According to the Mayor of Murzuq Ibrahim Al-Shawish, three individuals from the Haj Hjeel area were abducted on the road between Ghadwa and Murzuq on 15 Jan. Al-Shawish stated the victims' vehicle was found with signs of gunshots, with reports suggesting they were on their way to Tripoli. Neither the identity of the assailant(s) nor the motive behind the incident are known, though the kidnapping was likely financially-motivated.

In a bulletin published on 14 Jan, the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) reported a significant decrease in the country's budget deficit from 10.6 billion LYD in 2017 to 4.6 billion LYD in 2018, attributed mainly to the rise in revenues from hydrocarbon resources. Meanwhile, the CBL highlighted the positive impact of the recently-introduced foreign currency fee, which helped gradually solve Libya's liquidity crisis and contributed approximately 13.2 billion LYD.

Local reports from 16 Jan suggest security forces located and subsequently detonated approximately 5 tons of explosive remnants of war (ERW) in Gharian's Abu Shiba, Al-Mathanin, Al-Araif and Al-Rabtah.

There were reports of brief clashes as LNA units seized additional bases and military installations across Sabha. Sources reported the LNA's Air Force conducted an airstrike targeting a camp belonging to Chadian mercenaries near Sabha Airport at approximately 1700hrs on 19 Jan. The LNA's territorial gains come amid report the Awlad Suleiman tribe handed over military sites to the LNA, whilst the High Council of the Tuareg released a statement declaring their support for the LNA's military campaign in the region on 19 Jan.

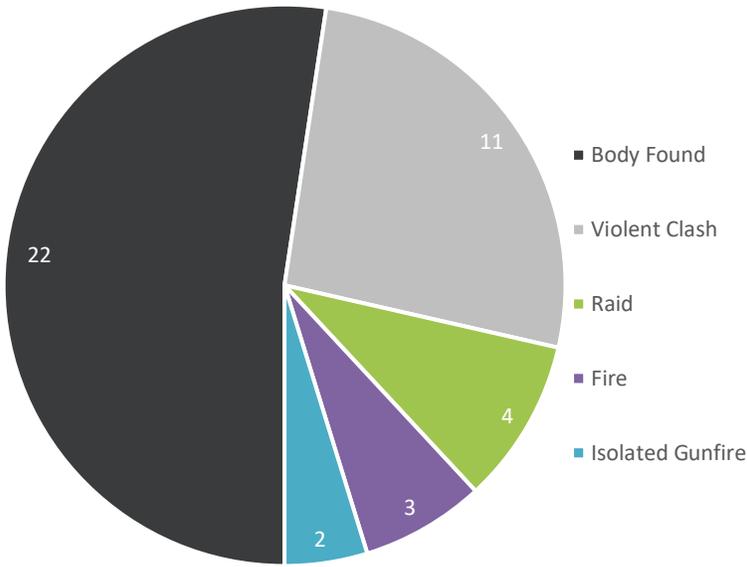
During a press conference pm 15 Jan, the Libyan National Army (LNA) spokesperson, Ahmed Al-Mismary, officially launched a full-scale military operation targeting foreign militancy and criminal networks and securing critical O&G facilities in the South-West. Al-Mismary laid out the operation's six objectives, which include protecting Libya's borders and sovereignty, combating terrorism and other criminal activity, providing basic services to locals, providing security to both local and foreign companies in the O&G sector and beyond. Uncertainty surrounds the LNA deployment to the South and its potential repercussions.

A house was set ablaze resulting in the death of three children in Ajdabiya's Zuwaitiya area in the morning on 14 Jan. Reports suggest five individuals from a single family were suffocated due to the outbreak of fire in their home, whilst three children ranging from ages 7-10 years old died. The cause of the fire remains unknown.

# 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

## Tripoli clashes & bodies found account for majority of nationwide fatalities

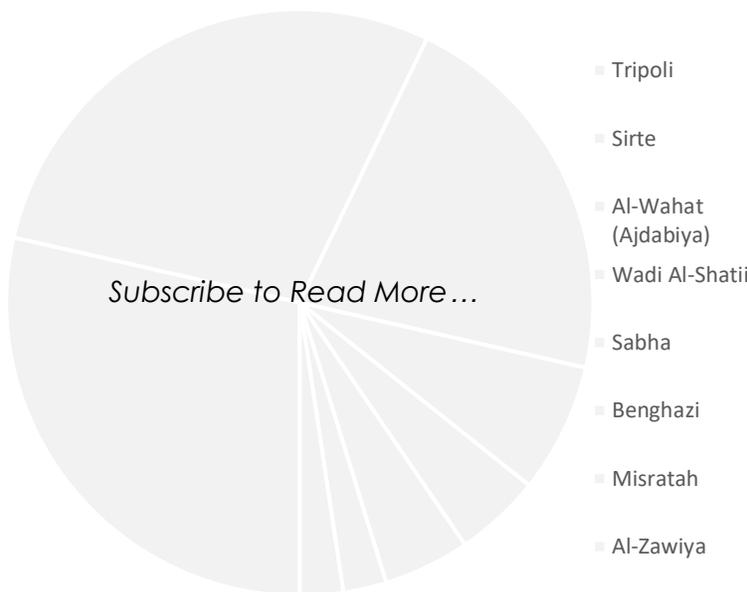
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



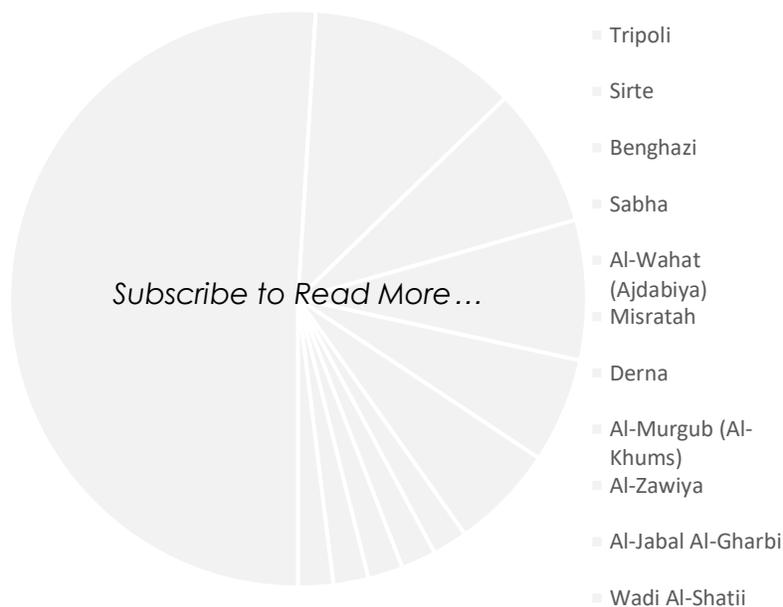
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



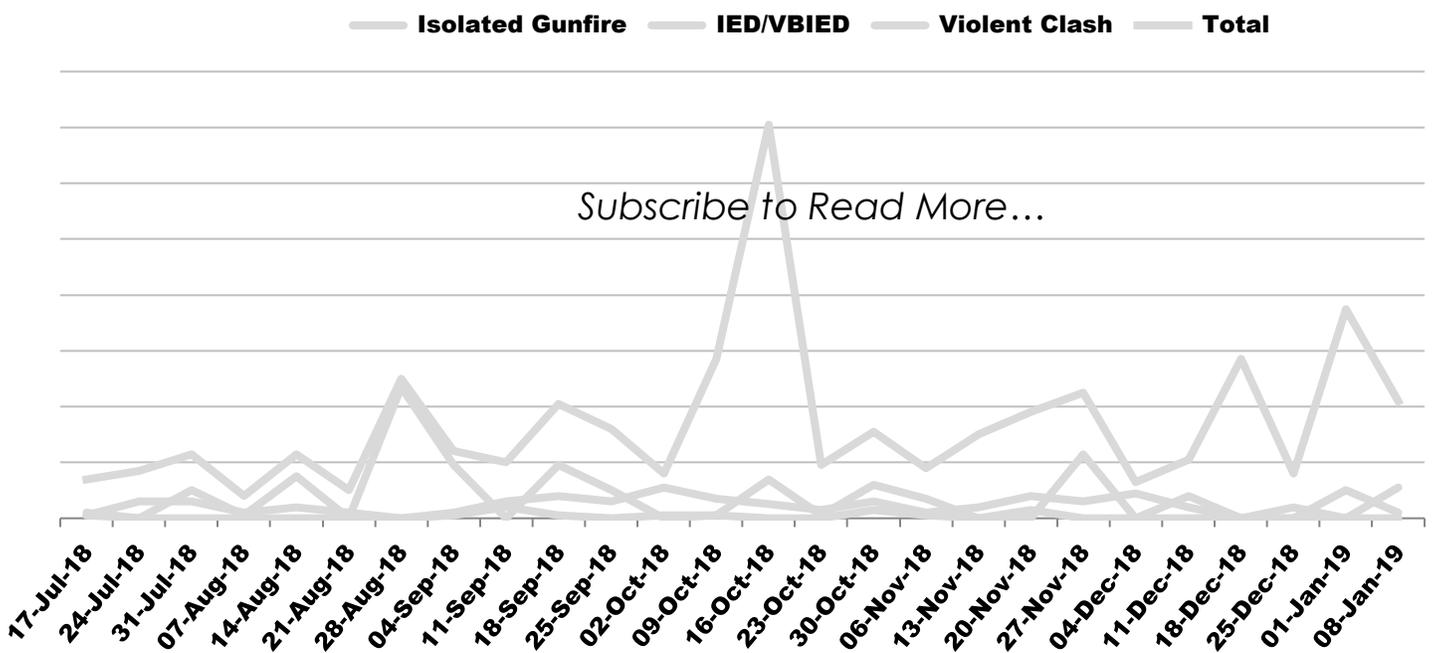
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



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 42 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 75 deaths reported last week and 16 the week before. This week a surge in bodies found and militia clashes in Tripoli's Southern areas accounted for almost 3/4 of the nationwide fatalities across Libya. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country, including 8 mortar/rocket incidents, 8 separate incidents of bodies found, 8 robberies, 4 cases of isolated gunfire, 3 IED/VBIED incidents, 3 raids, 2 violent clashes, 2 kidnappings and 1 carjacking.

In Western Libya, Whispering Bell recorded a total of 32 incidents, including 26 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli. In Tripoli, this week was marked by clashes between the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) and Al-Kaniat militia resulting in a confirmed 11 fatalities and 43 injuries in Tripoli's Southern area. Meanwhile, Whispering Bell recorded ongoing sporadic security incidents across the capital city. On 13 Jan, reports suggest locals targeted the Lebanese Embassy in Tripoli's Ben Ashour area with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) expressing their dissatisfaction after Lebanese locals trampled on and set ablaze the Libyan flag, in addition to Lebanese authorities preventing a Libyan delegation from participating in the Economic and Industrial exhibition held on the sidelines of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit (15-17 Jan). Meanwhile, in a separate incident, sources reported a militia gathering near the Nebras Restaurant in Tripoli's Bab Bin Ghashir area in the afternoon on 14 Jan. Initial reports suggest a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) was discovered and subsequently dismantled. Beyond, in Misrata, unidentified gunmen reportedly killed a woman inside her house in Misrata in the evening on 14 Jan.

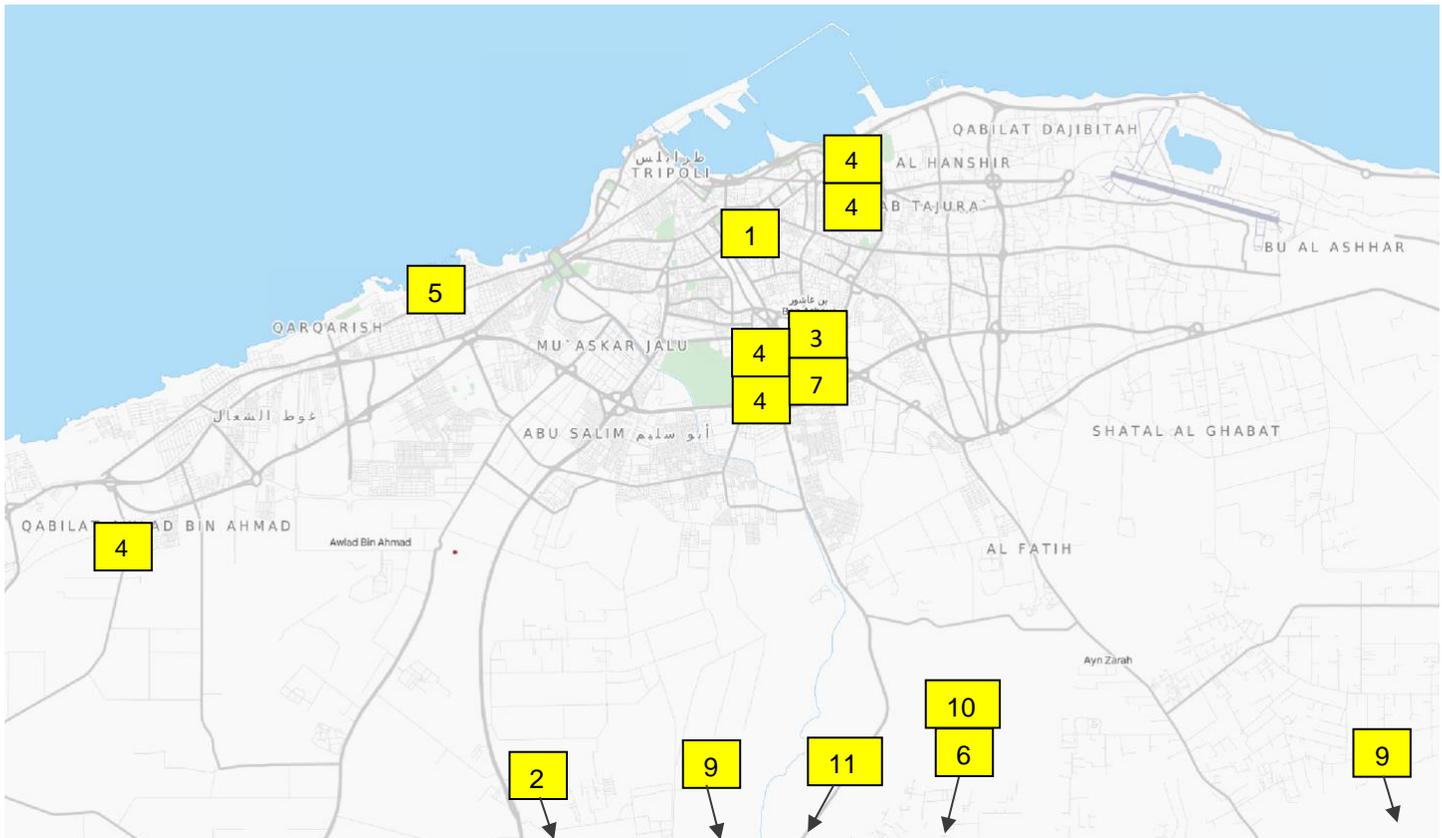
This week in Central Libya, according to a Sirte Protection Force spokesman, Salem Al-Amil, an explosion occurred in an ammunition warehouse behind Al-Tahady University on 15 Jan. There were no reports of casualties and/or physical damage. The cause of the explosion remains unclear. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, the Libyan Red Crescent reportedly found five bodies belonging to illegal migrants near Sirte's coastal areas on 15 Jan.

Turning to Southern Libya, Whispering Bell recorded ongoing kidnappings. According to the Mayor of Murzuq, Ibrahim Al-Shawish, three individuals from the Haj Hjeel area were abducted on the road between Ghadwa and Murzuq on 15 Jan. Al-Shawish stated the victims' vehicle was found with bullet marks, with reports suggesting they were on their way to Tripoli. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest indiscriminate gunfire resulted in the death of a young boy as he was walking home from school in Sabha on 15 Jan.

In Libya's East, a mass grave was found for the second consecutive week. Reports suggest a mass grave containing an uncited number of bodies was located in Al-Wahda school in Derna's on 18 Jan.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### Militia clashes in Tripoli's South; Bani Walid dignitaries negotiate ceasefire



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (13 Jan) Locals target Lebanese Embassy with RPGs; no casualties
2. (14 Jan) Security alert by TPF; rumors of TIP handover to Al-Kaniat
3. (14 Jan) Militia gathering near Nebras restaurant; VBIED dismantled
4. (14 Jan) Five separate vehicle thefts across Tripoli
5. (14 Jan) Ceremony marking beginning of first model police station
6. (14 Jan) Al-Kaniat militia raid farm & kill one man & injure two others
7. (15 Jan) Parked vehicle stolen in Al-Batata
8. (16 Jan) South Tripoli situation critical as initial reports of clashes emerge
9. (16 Jan) Clashes between TPF & Al-Kaniat militia; casualties
10. (18 Jan) Clashes continue; TPF state force will no longer obey PC orders
11. (19 Jan) TPF advances; Bani Walid dignitaries announce ceasefire

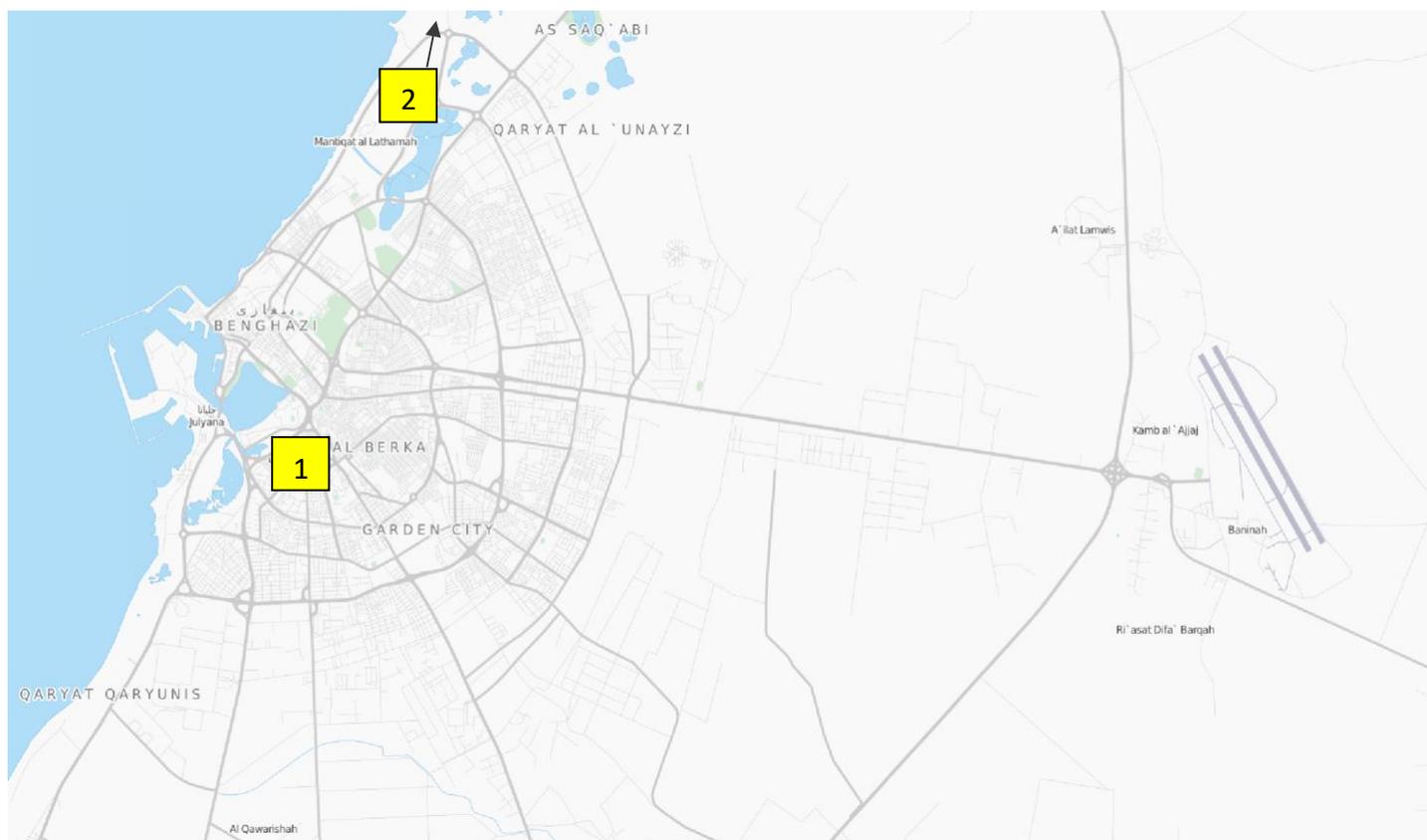
#### Militia clashes in South

Following four consecutive days of intermittent clashes, the latest reports suggest the Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) controlled the Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel area and advanced to the Fam Molga area, approximately 25 kms away from Tarhunah's city centre, on 19 Jan. According to the head of the Social Council of the Warfalla tribe, Aguila Al-Jamal, a ceasefire was reached between the rival forces following the intervention of Sheikhs and Elders of Bani Walid on 19 Jan. Meanwhile, following the TPF's advance, Al-Kaniat militia reportedly retreated from Gharabolli and stationed at the entrance of Tarhunah. Reports suggest a convoy affiliated with Misrata's Terrorism Control Apparatus stationed in the Gharabolli area and established a checkpoint along the Coastal Road on 19 Jan. Meanwhile, the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) reportedly evacuated several houses as a result of the indiscriminate shelling in Souq Al-Sabt, with reports of shells falling on houses in the area at approximately 1700hrs on 19 Jan. Additionally, an indiscriminate shell reportedly fell in the Khella Al-Furjan area at approximately 1500hrs on 19 Jan. Beyond this, GNA's Ministry of Health announced a revised number of the casualty toll, recording 11 fatalities and 43 injuries.

An indiscriminate shell resulted in the death of Mohammed Ben Khalifa, a freelance photographer who had worked with RT's video agency Ruptly and collaborated with Associated Press (AP), as he was covering the clashes in Southern Tripoli on 18 Jan. Ben Khalifa's death has been widely condemned by his associates and the general public across social media outlets. Meanwhile, reports suggest a sniper bullet resulted in the death of a nurse working for the Omar Ali Askar Hospital in the Sog Al-Khmies Emsihel area on 19 Jan. There are unconfirmed reports across untested social media outlets suggesting the nephew of the leader of Al-Kaniat militia, Mohsin Al-Kani, was allegedly killed as a result of the clashes. If confirmed, the incident could result in acts of retaliation. In a separate incident, the TPF released a "last call" demanding the withdrawal and subsequent surrender of rival forces, after which they would not be further pursued. The statement also called on citizens to cooperate with the TPF to allow the force to secure the "liberated" areas until the respective security forces assumed their duties. Overall, the latest reports suggest the clashes could come to a fragile halt following the latest ceasefire announced by Bani Walid's Elders and Sheikhs, corroborating WB's assessment that clashes are unlikely to reach the scale of violence witnessed in Aug/Sep 2018. However, the security situation remains fragile in Tripoli's southern areas.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Two separate murder cases in Al-Keish & Sidi Khalifa; motives unclear



### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (12 Jan) Man found dead with signs of slit throat
2. (12 Jan) Man found murdered in Sidi Khalifa
3. (12 Jan) Benghazi-Tripoli joint vehicle supervision
4. (18 Jan) Salame: UNSMIL office to open end of Jan

### Bodies found

According to reports, police officers found the body of a male individual with signs of a slit throat in his apartment after his vehicle and belongings were stolen in Benghazi's Al-Keish area on 12 Jan. Abdeljalil, a 22-year-old Tobruk resident, reportedly moved to Benghazi to study medicine at the Arab Medical University in 2018. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest a 42-year-old man, identified as Othman Najim, was found murdered in Benghazi's Sidi Khalifa area. On 07 Jan, Benghazi's Security Directorate head, General Adel Abdelaziz, stated that a new security plan for the city was in preparation, in addition to the formation of a joint Operations Room in coordination with multiple directorates and the Central Support System. The draft of a new security plan and the formation of a joint Ops Room stands as an effort to enhance security following a recent surge in criminal activity across the city.

### Largest alcohol factory raided

Benghazi's General Directorate of Criminal Investigations raided the largest alcohol manufacturing factory in Benghazi's Faakat area on 16 Jan. Authorities reportedly

seized 30,000 litres of homemade alcohol prepared for sale and arrested the suspects. Raids targeting the illicit manufacturing and trade of alcohol remain frequent across Benghazi.

### Coordination efforts between Benghazi-Tripoli

According to a member of the unification of security efforts between Tripoli and Benghazi security services, Fouad Al-Basha, efforts to unify the security apparatus between Tripoli and Benghazi continue, noting the agreement to link the supervision of vehicles of the General Directorate of Traffic to combat the theft of vehicles and prosecute those involved. Al-Basha added that the Ministries of Interior under the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Interim Government are working uniformly to issue instructions and security circulars related to the work of security centres across different regions of the country. On 28 Dec, the director of Tripoli's Security Directorate, Brigadier Salem Sayeh, and the director of Benghazi's Security Directorate, brigadier Adel Abdulaziz, held a meeting to discuss the "unification of national security efforts" in Benghazi's Tibesti Hotel.

## 6. What's next

### Pressure mounts on UNSMIL to provide more clarity on National Conference

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

Ahead of the planned National Conference, UNSMIL head Ghassan Salame's position is delicate as pressure mounts from the Cyrenaica House of Representatives (HoR) bloc and Tripoli militias. Meanwhile, the HoR head, Aguila Saleh, stated that Libya should proceed with national elections regardless of voter turnout in the planned draft constitution referendum vote. Aguila's remarks could stand as a response to foreign and domestic accusations that he is attempting to undermine elections to consolidate his political interests. By stating that Libya must hold elections regardless of the consensus reached on the draft constitution, Saleh aligns himself with the widespread international and domestic opinion. Meanwhile, as expected by WB, the GNA and Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL) failed to agree on the budget for 2019 due to a dispute over spending priorities. The dispute would reportedly continue until March 2019, stemming from a disagreement over how to spend revenues generated by the newly imposed fee on hard currency transactions. The GNA reportedly seeks to spend the fees for development purposes, whilst the CBL seeks to pay back debt. Overall, the dispute stands as a setback for international actors and the United Nations (UN), which pushed for widespread reforms to tackle Libya's economic crisis.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

In his 18 Jan briefing to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), the UNSMIL head, Ghassan Salame, states: "All Libyans struggle with deteriorating public services. Prison detainees, migrants, journalists, members of the judiciary, to name just a few, are subject to abuse and violence at the hands of armed groups. Many thousands live with humanitarian concerns. Civilians continue to live in fear of casualties of violent conflict. Tripoli, after months of calm derived from the September ceasefire agreement, was two days ago once more rocked by renewed clashes. We have worked closely with all parties to stop breaches of the ceasefire from going any further. For now, the violations have been contained. Fighting in Derna is not over. Civilians have been killed in the conflict, families displaced and homes looted. Unconditional, unimpeded and sustained humanitarian access to the affected civilians in the old city is essential but denied. Civilians, including women and children have been arrested and held in the detention facilities, without charge. Meanwhile, the LNA started movement into the South, beyond the positions they held before. Wherever there is fighting, parties must take all measures to protect civilians and civilian facilities, and adhere to International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. Where they do not, we will ensure in time they face the consequences."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

In Tripoli, clashes could resume with little to no warning as TPF units are likely determined to pursue Al-Kaniat further into its Tarhunah stronghold. Meanwhile, there is also the possibility of TPF movements against GNA positions in Tripoli, although this remains less likely. In the South, while the LNA has secured some important wins on the counterterrorism front with its reported killing of the notorious AQIM leader "Abu Talha Al-Libi", the success of its operation will largely depend on the support of multiple tribes and factions. In the short term, retaliation against LNA units by local militants is likely. It remains unclear whether the LNA will move to secure the Sharara oil field, which remains shut due to protests, and other O&G infrastructure. If confirmed, the LNA's presence in western O&G sites will have ramifications on the political / military balance between East and West power hubs in Libya. Meanwhile, there are growing concerns that in the aftermath of the operation in the South, the LNA could exploit its territorial gains to move further North towards Tripoli and/or use its presence as an additional political bargaining chip. Amid growing political uncertainty, tensions in Tripoli, and a full LNA mobilization in the South, terrorists and/or extremist elements affiliated with the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) could exploit this opportunity to carry out attacks, including against O&G infrastructure in the Oil Crescent.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Middle East publication Asharq Al-Awsat, citing unidentified sources, reported Moscow's alleged role in attempting to secure the release of Muammar Gaddafi's son, Hannibal, from Lebanon. "Hannibal was detained more than three years ago on charges of concealing information about the disappearance of the founder of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council, Imam Moussa Sadr during a visit to Libya in August 1978. Political sources had earlier told Asharq Al-Awsat that Moscow decided to join the Syrian regime in working on this file at the request of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, brother of Hannibal, who currently resides in a mountainous area of Libya, under the protection of loyal tribal groups. Saif al-Islam, who "maintains a good relationship, even by correspondence, with Moscow," sent his representatives to the Russian capital, asking officials to intervene to release his brother who was arrested in Lebanon on charges of concealing information that is punishable by a maximum of three years of imprisonment, according to the sources. The Director-General of the General Security, Major General Abbas Ibrahim, conveyed a message in this regard to Speaker Nabih Berri, and that Ibrahim met with Gaddafi at his detention cell in the Information Division prison. According to the senior official, the Russian government has sent a letter to the Lebanese State, expressing its willingness to secure the transfer of Gaddafi's son to the Russian capital in preparation for granting him the Russian citizenship."

# About Whispering Bell



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