

# 1. The Big Picture

## LNA could market oil via East as GNA posture weakens

This week on-the-ground advances and combat operations were overshadowed by developments on the political front as both Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA) rivals sought to reinforce their posture as measures of last resort to convert military gains, or lack thereof, into political credit. The clashes, which erupted on 04 Apr, now sit at a critical juncture amid a mutual LNA/GNA understanding of the uncertainty that lies ahead, the protracted nature of the conflict, and risk of a full-blown escalation.

On the ground, GNA's military posture was impacted by the capture of the foreign pilot of a downed Mirage F1-ED aircraft. The GNA denied any claims of attribution, though the incident reinforced the LNA's foreign mercenary allegations. Meanwhile, LNA airstrikes continue to grow in frequency and precision, targeting areas such as Zawiya and Tajoura. A new front in Sirte is now a more likely outcome after convoys of LNA vehicles and reinforcements headed towards the city on 11 May, reportedly following Haftar's orders to liberate the city.

Politically, GNA PM Fayez Sarraj embarked on a tour of European capitals to shore up alliances against the LNA's offensive. However, these meetings fell short of providing solid guarantees to the GNA, beyond statements calling for a cessation of hostilities and a return to the political process. France called for an "unconditional ceasefire" with international supervision to demarcate the lines. Prospects for a ceasefire remain bleak as the GNA continues to expect a full LNA retreat eastward, an unlikely scenario for Haftar who seeks recognition of his military gains and counter-terrorism might.

In further evidence that Sarraj failed to garner enough support during his European visits, and a day after meeting French President Emmanuel Macron, GNA Economy and Industry Minister, Ali Essawi, issued a decree suspending 40 foreign firms in Libya, including French energy company Total, citing failure to required renew licenses on 08 May. A day later, the GNA retracted the statement and granted the foreign firms a grace period of three months to renew commercial licenses or risk having their operations suspended. Whispering Bell learned the decree is specifically

targeting companies believed to have contracts with Total (possibly at the offshore field of Jurf). Should current conditions persist and given the GNA's posture, follow-through on the decision is unlikely even within the next three months. Regardless, the development indicates the conflict is now being fought on the political front.

In this context, the GNA's weakening posture continues to reinforce the LNA's bid to market oil independently via the East. In a recent Bloomberg op-ed, National Oil Corporation (NOC) Chairman Mustafa Sanallah noted that attempts to sell Libya's oil via the parallel NOC have been documented and are currently in the works, warning of the potential for parallel oil exports to prolong the conflict by generating new revenue streams for armed actors.

While Sanallah did not provide further information, reports indicate the parallel NOC in Benghazi signed a contract for the export of 2 million barrels of crude oil with a previously-undocumented entity called Sulaco Group on Apr 08. Some online publications have published details of the contract, which reportedly states that oil will be loaded at the port of Marsa El Hariga from 05 May - 20 Jun. The eastern-based NOC had multiple failed attempts to market oil independently of the Tripoli NOC in the past. There is no indication that this latest attempt will succeed, though the reports corroborate the likelihood of an expected disruption to Libya's O&G in the short to medium term.

Two questions will determine the course of action ahead: How far will the GNA go to ensure its survival and whether Haftar's prerequisite to end Tripoli operations would be a reorientation towards the East, including a shift towards the eastern NOC and Bayda-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL). Despite hostilities, there are some modest grounds for optimism. For the National Oil Corporation (NOC), it was business as usual this week. Sentiment was bullish after the opening of a new office in Houston as part of a 60 billion USD procurement drive to upgrade Libya's infrastructure and shore up production.

### KEY POINTS

- Bleak ceasefire prospects
- GNA threatens to suspend 40 foreign firms
- Reported LNA bid to market crude via East



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## 2. National Security Map

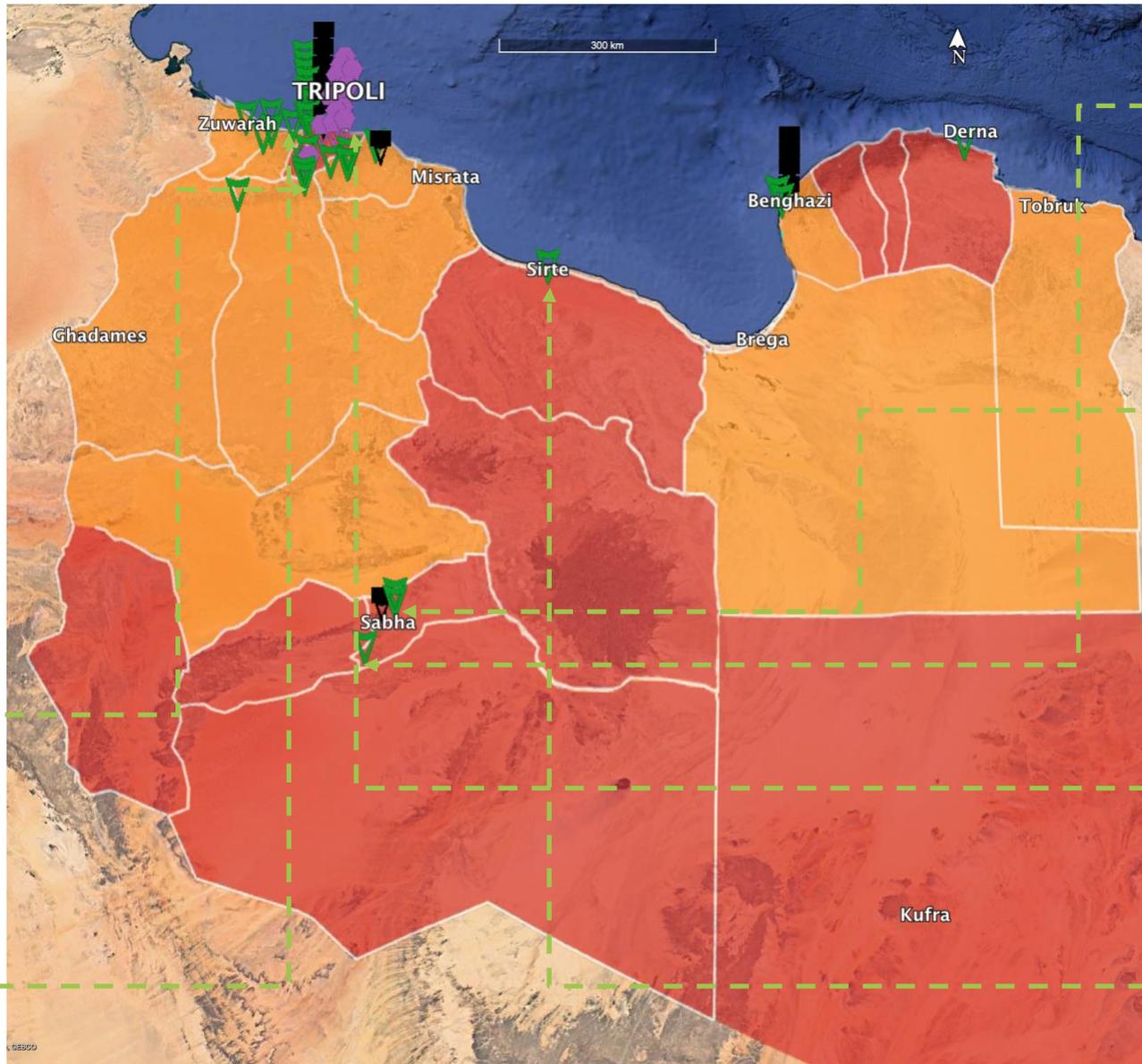
LNA downs GNA Mirage F1-ED aircraft near Gharyan; IS claims raid on Ghadduwah;

### Key

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Thr

### EVENT INDICATORS

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



The Islamic State (IS) group officially claimed the raid on Ghadduwah, 60 kms South of Sabha, via its Amaq publication on 09 May. The group claims a former Gaddafi-era official was killed during the raid, while 14 houses and government buildings were burned.

Local reports suggest three unidentified assailants attacked the Sabha Medical Centre in the early hours of 07 May. The guards reportedly repelled the attack and killed on of the three attackers, whilst the other two escaped. Initial reports indicated the attackers were Islamic State (IS) militants, though conflicting reports emerged suggesting the attack was carried out by individuals with no affiliation to a particular group.

Sources reported illegitimate checkpoints are being established intermittently in the Castelverde/Garabolli area, 60km east of Tripoli, by a group of gunmen with several vehicles, including two White Toyota Hilux, a White KIA Optima, a Grey Hyundai Avante and a Chevrolet. Initial reports indicate the gunmen stop bypassers and steal their belongings.

Sirte's Protection Force (SPF) conducted armed patrols from 10 May- 11 May, South of Sirte to the airport and East beyond Gate 40, after monitoring LNA movements in the area. The SPF raised its state of alert in light of a potential attack on the city.

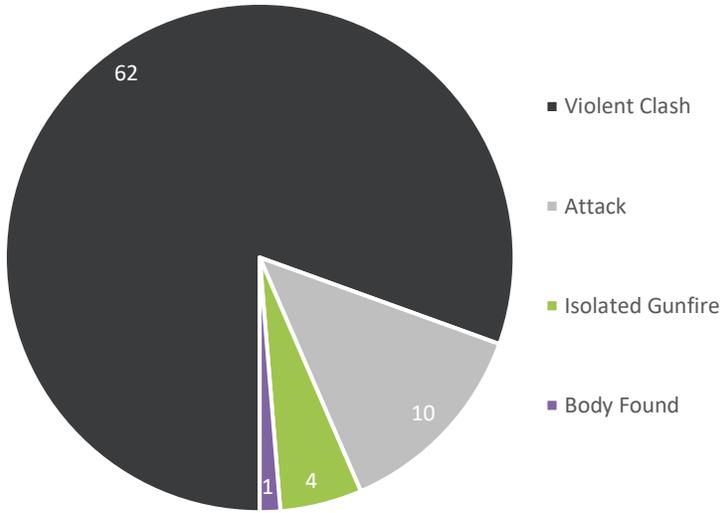
Libyan National Army (LNA) forces downed a GNA Mirage F1-ED aircraft in Al-Heera area near Gharyan at approximately 1225hrs on 07 May. Reports suggest the LNA managed to arrest the pilot, a Portuguese national believed to be originally from Serbia. The LNA War Information Division confirmed the incident and claimed the pilot flew other combat missions, including in Sidi Sayeh, Gharyan, Tarhunah, and Sog El Khmies. In the latest video footage, the pilot appears to state his name, "Jimmy Reese" and age (29), while affirming that he works under a civilian contract and was tasked to destroy bridges and roads.

Reports suggest an armed attack on a farm resulted in the death of six men in Al-Zawiya on 08 May. There is no further information available.

### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Majority of fatalities due to Tripoli clashes; increase in Benghazi incidents

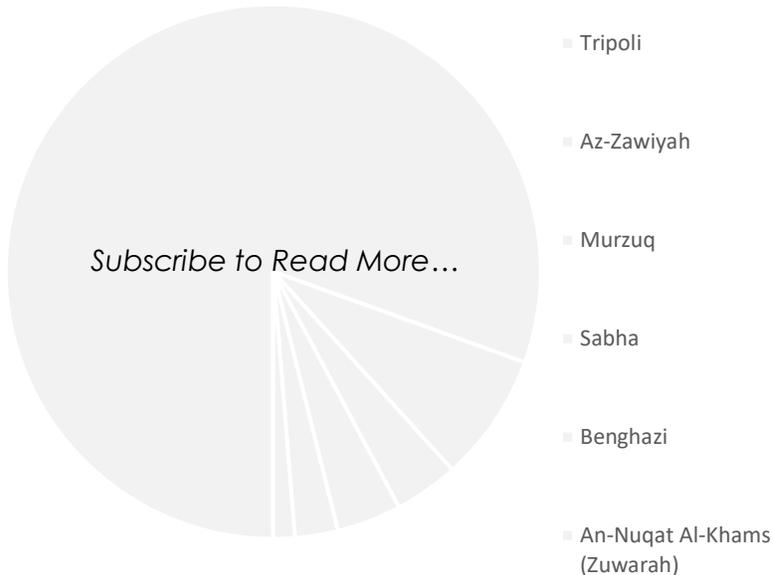
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



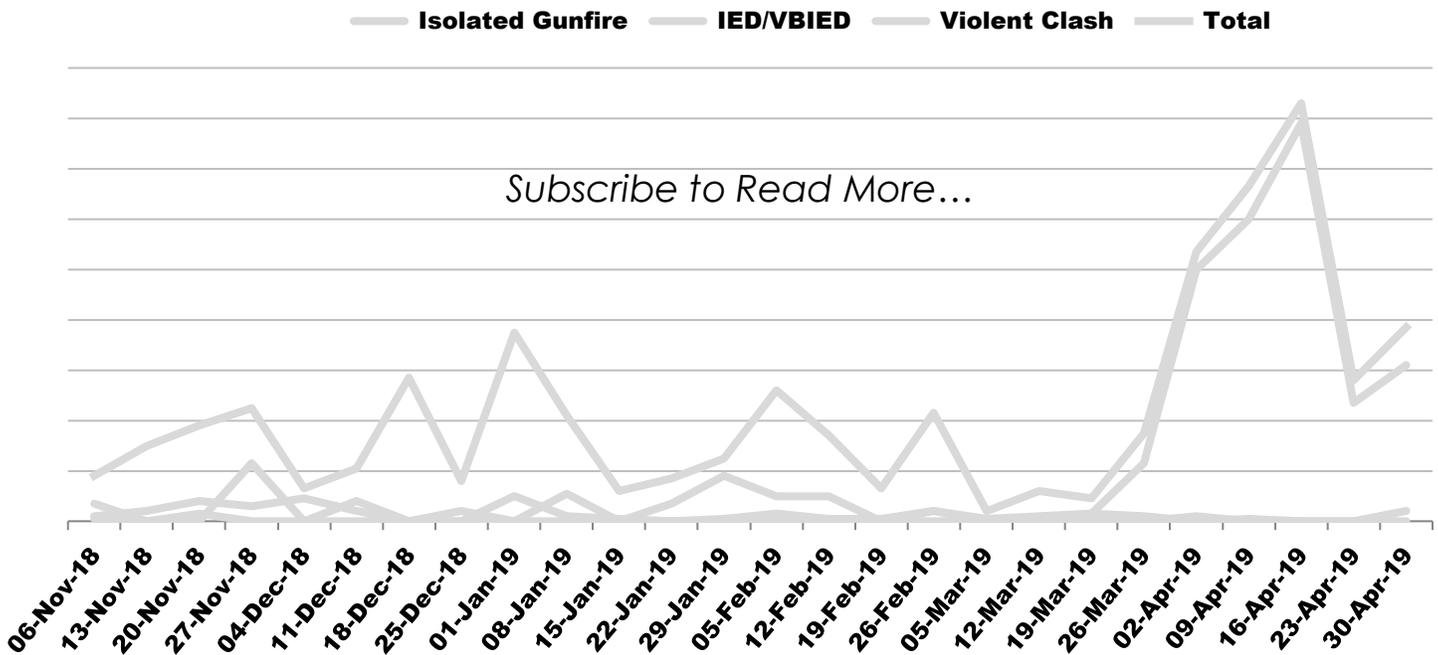
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



Nationwide incidents by national district (Past week)



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



### Data Analysis

WB recorded this week a total of 77 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 56 deaths reported last week and 166 the week before. Whilst the ongoing clashes in Tripoli's South continue to account for the majority of nationwide fatalities since the Libyan National Army's (LNA) offensive on the capital city, this week WB recorded attacks in the Southern region resulting in six fatalities. Over the course of the reporting period, WB recorded a slight decrease in violent clashes, airstrikes and mortar/rocket incidents linked to indiscriminate shelling on Tripoli's Southern frontlines, which coincides with the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan on 06 May. In contrast, a nationwide increase in isolated gunfire incidents was recorded, with a notable surge in sporadic security incidents in Benghazi. Several security incidents were reported throughout the country including, 41 airstrikes, 20 violent clashes, 14 mortar rocket shelling incidents, 14 cases of isolated gunfire, 4 attacks, 4 arrests, 4 kidnappings, 4 robberies, 1 body found and 1 protest.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 100 incidents, including 88 incidents in the capital city, Tripoli, marking a decrease in Tripoli-related incidents in contrast to last week. Whilst clashes South of Tripoli continue to dominate the overall security environment in the Tripoli district, WB recorded sporadic incidents beyond the military escalation. WB sources reported dozens of women protested in front of the National Commercial Bank in downtown Tripoli at approximately 1500hrs on 05 May. The women held a sit-in in front of the bank for over 12 hours. Security guards informed the women that no cash was available as of the 05 May. No security incidents were reported. In a separate incident, WB sources reported three gunmen driving a white Mitsubishi lancer stopped two men driving a Hyundai Accent on Tripoli's Shat Road, near Al-Kabeer Hotel parking lot, at approximately 1800hrs on 04 May. Initial reports indicate that the gunmen stole over 25,000 Libyan Dinars (LYD) from the two men who work at Al-Musheer parallel currency trading market.

In the wider Western region, reports suggest a man was found killed in Ajaylat on 07 May. There is no further information available. Meanwhile, in a separate incident, reports suggest an armed attack on a farm resulted in the death of six men in Al-Zawiya on 08 May. Initial reports suggest the men were having a picnic.

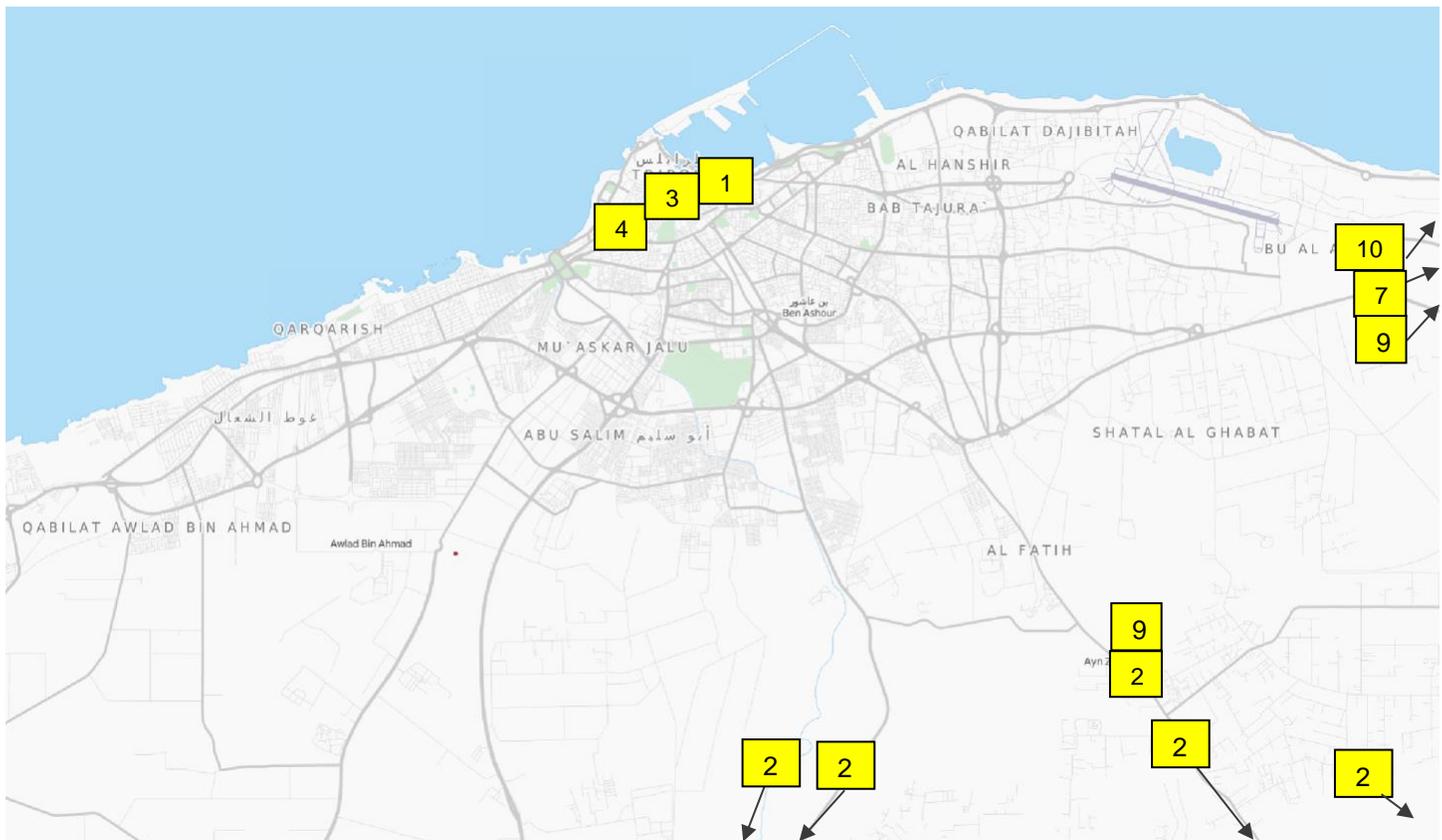
This week in Central Libya, tensions remain high due to reports of LNA movements in the Sirte district, subsequently prompting Sirte's Security Force (SPF) to raise the state of alert in light of a potential attack on the area.

Turning to Southern Libya, the Islamic State (IS) group officially claimed the raid on Ghadduwah, 60 kms South of Sabha, via its Amaq publication on 09 May. The group claims a former Gaddafi-era official was killed during the raid, while 14 houses and government buildings were burned. The incident is the latest in a wave of small-scale attacks carried out by IS in the South.

In Eastern Libya, WB did not record any sporadic security incidents in the region beyond the city of Benghazi. This week WB recorded a total of 6 security incidents in Benghazi, including 4 gunfire-related incidents, 1 kidnapping and 1 attack on the Benghazi Medical Centre.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

### LNA increases airstrikes & range of targeted areas; reinforcements arrive



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (04-05 May) Decrease in airstrikes and shelling; robbery near Al-Kabeer Hotel
2. (05-06 May) Clashes cont; Haftar calls for intensified battle in Ramadan
3. (05 May) Women protest in front of bank due to cash unavailability
4. (05 May) Libyan Airlines pilot kidnapped from Al-Safi Hotel
5. (06 May) Southern frontlines witness fragile calm as Ramadan begins
6. (07-08 May) Clashes cont as UNSMIL ceasefire calls disregarded
7. (08-09 May) Shrapnel from LNA airstrike lands on migrant detention centre; no casualties
8. (10 May) Reinforcements arrive; Halbous BDE & LNA 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry BDE
9. (10-11 May) Increase in LNA airstrikes; including in Ain Zara/Tajura
10. (11 May) LNA increase airstrikes & range of targeted areas inc. Tajura

#### LNA increases airstrikes; reinforcements arrive

Sources reported an increase in Libyan National Army (LNA) airstrikes and an expansion of its target areas including new areas such as Tajoura and Al-Zawiya. WB recorded a recent increase in LNA precision strikes targeting Government of National Accord (GNA) military camps and ammunition. Reports across social media outlets suggest the LNA conducted airstrikes South of Al-Zawiya at approximately 0100hrs on 12 May. Initial unconfirmed reports indicate that the airstrike targeted the leader of "Al-Ammo" militia, Ahmed Al-Debbashi, also known as "Al-Ammo", while he was driving a Toyota Land Cruiser with two other militiamen aboard. On the frontlines, clashes resumed in the Khallat Alfurjan area at approximately 0700hrs on 12 May. Sources reported heavy explosions in the Ain Zara area at approximately 0500hrs, whilst clashes resumed South of the area at approximately 2300hrs on 11 May. Earlier, heavy clashes continued South of the Airport Road in the Ramla area at approximately 1730hrs. Similarly, heavy clashes resumed South of Hadba Al-Mashro' area at approximately 1600hrs. At approximately 1300hrs, heavy clashes erupted in Al-Ramla area, South of the Airport Road and near Al-Saadeya. indiscriminate shelling was also reported.

On 10 May, reinforcements arrived in support of both sides, including Misrata's Halbous Brigade (GNA) in the Southern Tripoli fronts and the LNA's 106<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade.

#### Libyan Airlines pilot kidnapped

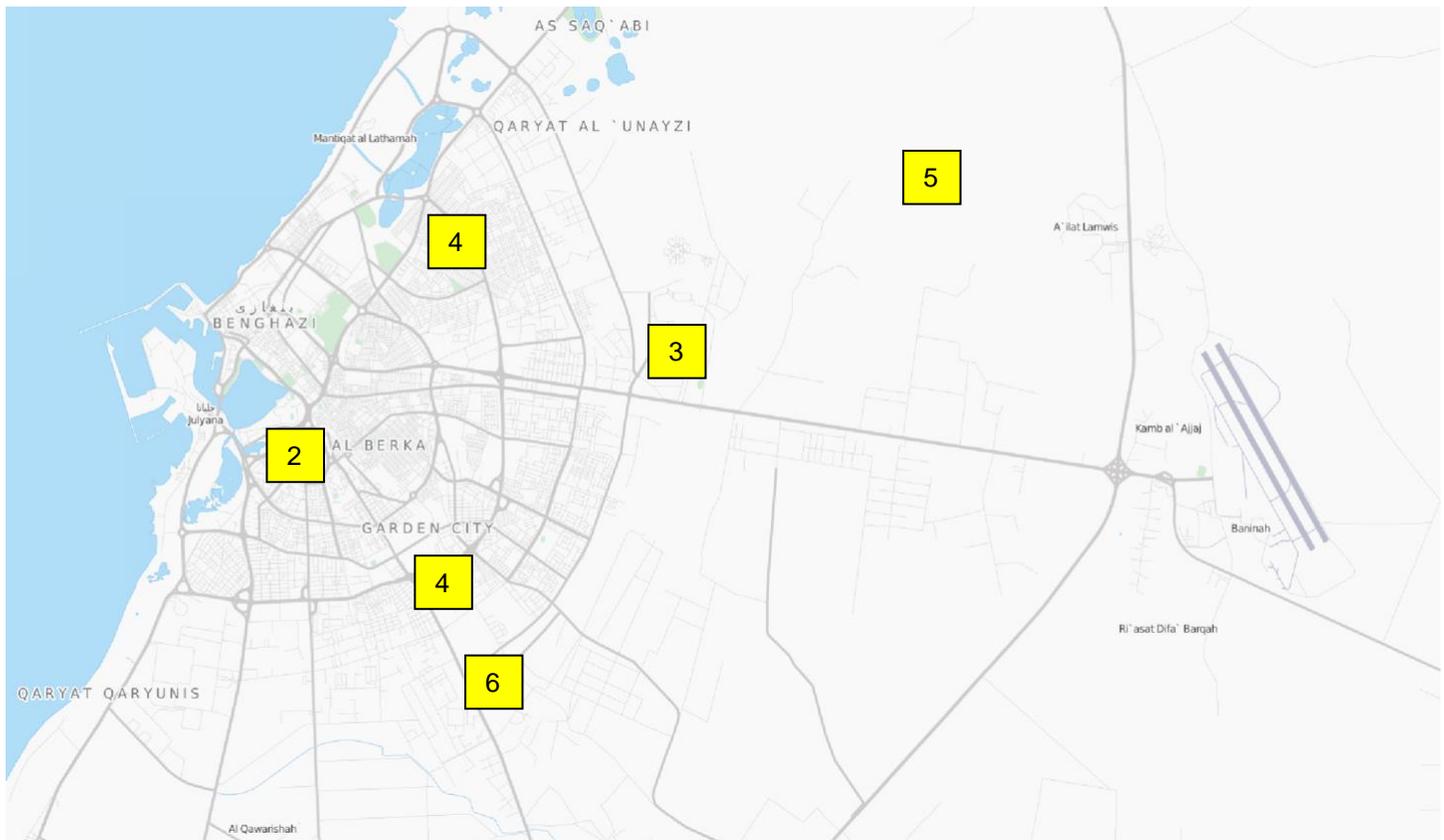
In a statement posted on its official Facebook page, Libyan Airlines confirmed that an unidentified armed group kidnapped its Captain Nawras Al-Atrash, originally from Benghazi, from his hotel room in Tripoli's Al-Safi Hotel on 05 May. His whereabouts remain unknown. WB sources indicate he was likely detained due to his pro-LNA views. Al-Atrash resides in Benghazi and was in Tripoli to operate a flight from Tripoli to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, according to local media outlets. The incident would follow a recent surge in kidnappings across the capital city, which could lead to tit-for-tat arbitrary kidnappings fueled by LNA/GNA sentiment both in Tripoli and Benghazi. Separately, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) expressed its deep concern over increased arbitrary arrests/detention, abductions, kidnappings, and disappearances targeting officials, activists, and journalists across the country on 06 May. The UNSMIL stated that at least seven officials and employees were detained and/or kidnapped in Libya's East and West.

#### Local dispute at gas station

Sources reported sporadic explosions and gunfire heard on Al-Nasr Street due to a local dispute at the Al-Nasr Street gas station at approximately 2230hrs on 10 May. Initial reports indicate the dispute erupted over fuel, where long queues were reported across several gas stations.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Child injured in gunfire incident; Benghazi Medical Centre later targeted



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (05 May) Two abducted tribal council members released
2. (07 May) Indiscriminate gunfire injures man in Al-Kish area
3. (08 May) Child injured after tampering with father's firearm
4. (08 May) Local skirmishes results in injury of child & retaliation attack on Medical Centre
5. (10 May) Kuwayfiah Police seize alcohol factory in Budzira
6. (11 May) Man behind murder in 2014 ambushed & arrested near CBL

#### Medical Centre attacked in retaliation

Reports suggest skirmishes between two locals resulted in an exchange of gunfire and the subsequent injury of a five-year-old girl in Benghazi's Al-Wheishi area in the afternoon on 08 May. Initial reports indicate that a man opened fire on another man driving his vehicle with his children aboard in a targeted assassination attempt against the driver. The incident resulted in the death of a child. In response, the child's father stepped out of his vehicle and shot the man targeting his vehicle, resulting in his injury. Later, the children's family raided the Benghazi Medical Centre and shot dead the man behind the child's killing. On its official Facebook account, Benghazi's Medical Centre announced an armed dispute resulting in the damage of a care and shelter room in the centre. The centre stated that security forces intervened to resolve the dispute.

#### Indiscriminate gunfire

Local reports suggest indiscriminate gunfire resulted in the injury of a 22-year-old man identified as Firas Al-Mesmari in front of a cafe in Benghazi's Al-Kish area on 07 May. Al-Mesmari suffered injuries to the

back. Separately, reports suggest a seven-year-old child suffered injuries to the head as he accidentally shot himself after tampering with his father's firearm placed in his vehicle in Benghazi's Masakin area on 08 May. Casualties caused by children tampering with unattended firearms' remains common across Libyan cities.

#### Two abducted Tribal Council members released

Reports suggest two previously kidnapped/arrested members of the Supreme Council of Tribes were released from a prison in Benghazi on 05 May. Initial unconfirmed reports suggest the individuals were arrested on charges of affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). On 18 Mar, reports suggest a group of gunmen affiliated with the Internal Security under the Eastern-based Interim Government, kidnapped/arrested two members of the Supreme Council of Tribes in Benghazi.

#### Alcohol factory seized

In a statement, Benghazi's Security Directorate announced that the Kuwayfiah Police seized an illicit alcohol factory in Benghazi's Budzira area on 10 May. The Directorate reported the seizure of large amounts of alcohol and empty containers user for manufacturing and packaging.

## 6. What's next

### Intra-GNA divisions widen as LNA's Haftar consolidates political posture

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

The GNA's series of meetings with EU leaders to strengthen its posture and mobilize support have not borne fruit; at least not from GNA PM Fayeze Sarraj's perspective who continues to expect a full LNA retreat eastward. The leaders fell short of providing guarantees to the GNA, beyond statements calling for a cessation of hostilities and a return to the political process. Haftar on the other hand continues to consolidate his position and managed to secure the overt approval for his offensive from Egyptian President Sissi during a Cairo visit, where he is reported to have met US Defense and State Department officials. Haftar is expected to further cement his position in an upcoming meeting with French President Emmanuel Macron. Meanwhile, the GNA continues to seek more clarity on Washington's Libya policy. Middle East publication Al-Monitor reported the GNA hired Prime Policy Group, a Washington lobby group, last week to enable GNA Deputy PM to brief Congress and US President Donald Trump's administration on the escalation "and his government's interest in peace and unity government, which is US policy." According to Al-Monitor, there are no written contracts and the GNA hired Prime Policy Group on a pro bono basis. This would represent the GNA's second lobbying effort in less than a month. On the domestic front, the House of Representatives (HoR) Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Committee called on the UNSC to assess lifting the arms embargo imposed on the LNA in order for the army to strengthen its campaign targeting "terrorist groups" posing a regional threat. The HoR has invited all of its members to attend a session on 13 May in Tobruk, with no further information on the session's agenda. The meeting is important given the latest parallel sessions held by pro-GNA HoR members in Tripoli.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Writing for *Politico*, Rym Momtaz, explores the crumbling European backing of the GNA PM Fayeze Sarraj, as highlighted in his recent visit to European capitals. Momtaz writes "Fayeze al-Sarraj came to Europe to shore up support for his Libyan government. He'll have left disappointed." The author then analyses the French position: "The strongest line came from French President Emmanuel Macron, who "encouraged an unconditional ceasefire" based on a line delineated "under international supervision," according to an Elysée readout of his meeting with Al-Sarraj. Implicit in that position is an acceptance of the military advances Haftar has achieved since launching his attack in defiance of the struggling U.N.-mediated peace process, a notable development in favor of the strongman from eastern Libya. The other European capitals simply called for a ceasefire. The ongoing clashes have killed more than 440 people and displaced nearly 60,000 since they began on April 4, according to the WHO." Further, Momtaz argues "So far the French position on Libya has been ambiguous at best, both supporting the GNA and also refraining from openly condemning Haftar. The GNA has accused France of supporting Haftar, with the interior minister going as far as calling for cutting ties with Paris as a retaliatory measure. Protesters in Tripoli have carried anti-Macron signs, lumping him together with leaders of Egypt and the UAE, who are said to be providing Haftar with military backing. French authorities reject the accusation, pointing to French support for the Tripoli-based government in the form of "capacity-building, training of the presidential guard, the army and the coast guard," according to the high-level diplomat. But France also considers Haftar a counterterrorism partner, one who has both fought extremist groups and migrant smugglers, a major issue for Europe in Libya. The French diplomat admitted that France "partly shares Haftar's assessment [that] there are terrorist militias [in the GNA territory] that need to be eliminated" to bring back stability. Yet many see this as a pretext for Haftar to seize power."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

A new sense of normality has settled with the clashes in Tripoli's South. As discussed in last week's report, Zintani support for the GNA is dwindling and appears to be limited to Osama Juwaili. The Zintan Social Council issued a statement lending its full support to the LNA. On the CT front, the Islamic State (IS) group will continue to consolidate its targeting capabilities. The group released pictures of a recent attack against an LNA camp in Sabha, revealing interesting information on the group's tactics. The militants split into three separate groups; some militants conducted the attacks, others remained on standby and provided overwatch, while a third group acted as a reserve. Separately, UK tabloid the "Daily Express" reported that the British Royal Air Force (RAF) joined coalition forces in an international mission over Libya's skies at night on 12 May to locate the self-proclaimed IS leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, after intelligence the latter had fled to Libya. Domestically, if confirmed, the presence of Al-Baghdadi in Libya will likely be exploited to reinforce the LNA's counter-terrorism narrative in ongoing combat operations in Tripoli. In the South, reports of suspicious Chadian rebel movements are beginning to emerge. On 11 May, the Sabha Joint Ops Room reported suspicious movements of Chadian rebel groups in the Libya-Chad border areas. The groups had entered Libyan territory after receiving financial support from the Southern Protection Force (SPF), nominally under the Government of National Accord (GNA). According to the reports, the militants are led by Hassan Mussa, a notorious smuggler who had been previously detained in Tripoli. The militants are reportedly planning to establish a presence in small towns in the South in order to consolidate and attack larger towns such as Murzuq and Sabha.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an op-ed for *Bloomberg*, National Oil Corporation (NOC) chairman Mustafa Sanallah makes a case for a ceasefire as the only way to prevent current hostilities in Tripoli from impacting Libya's oil exports. Sanallah wrote "As Chairman of the Libyan National Oil Corp., I cannot foresee any scenario, other than an immediate ceasefire, in which Libya's oil exports are not severely impacted by the conflict. The fighting is already impacting the oil sector, threatening our ability to maintain production – and more importantly, to ensure the safety of our employees. On April 10, a bomb struck one of our facilities in the outskirts of Tripoli, causing a fire to break out. We are experiencing supply shortages at fields in the south and the west of the country, which need fuel and catering in order to sustain operations. The war has forced Libya's oil aviation service, Petro Air, to halt many of its flights, affecting crew changes at a number of fields. It also creates a deep sense of unease amongst our workers, who see no route to safety in the case of security or medical emergencies. Two weeks ago a colleague was abducted near Sirte, and others have received threats to their lives by telephone. In Tripoli, key personnel cannot cross the city from their homes into our headquarters due to the fighting. Larger projects have been disrupted by the evacuation from Libya of international oil company staff. It is also proving increasingly difficult to preserve our neutrality in the conflict. For example, our airport at Sidra was seized by the LNA and warships have been berthed at one of our terminals. On another occasion, LNA fighters attempted to commandeer our vessels for military purposes, posing a significant threat to our loading capabilities. We expect more pressure from belligerent parties to utilize our property and fields. While we are as determined as ever to oppose attempts to depict NOC as partisan in this conflict, we are in no position to resist this sort of military pressure."

# About Whispering Bell



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