

1. The Big Picture

Haftar orders final offensive; Turkish boots on the ground threat is unfounded

Shortly after Libyan National Army (LNA) leader Khalifa Haftar declared “zero hour” and a decisive stage in the offensive on Tripoli, LNA forces made a concerted push across frontlines between 12-14 Dec. The advances, however, remained limited after 14 Dec, leading Government of National Accord (GNA) forces to discredit Haftar’s claims. In response, LNA spox. Ahmed Al-Mismary clarified the LNA continues to “bleed” GNA forces and that the “zero hour” represents the beginning of the final stage in combat operations, rather than an all-out offensive northward. But escalation was more acute on the diplomatic front this week after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan renewed his commitment to provide military support to the GNA.

The threat Ankara will send troops to Libya grew after the publication of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) on security cooperation between the GNA and Turkish government. Turkish-GNA ties and security cooperation continue to take centre stage, especially given the recent controversy over the deal to delineate maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkish media published the entire text of the widely-condemned MoU signed between Ankara and the GNA valid for three years. Of note, the first Ankara-GNA MoU on maritime borders has already been ratified by Turkish parliament. This second MoU on security cooperation is currently being discussed by the Turkish parliament and is yet to be ratified. The scope of the security MoU includes the exchange of personnel, material, equipment, information, and subject-matter expertise. The MoU mentions the establishment of a “Quick Reaction Force” and a “Joint Office of Defence and Security Cooperation in Turkey and Libya” if requested by either the GNA or Ankara.

Yet despite the flurry of diplomatic manoeuvres and politically-charged rhetoric, a full-scale intervention by Ankara in Libya remains unlikely in the medium term. First, it is worth mentioning that the Quick Reaction Force describe in the MoU does not involve Turkish military officers.

Second, Turkey is unlikely to send troops as it would risk triggering a serious conflict of interest with Russia, an important ally with whom Ankara is currently discussing a second consignment of the S-400 missile defence system. In fact, Turkey’s foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, recently stated on the sidelines of a conference in Qatar that no formal request to send troops had been sent by the GNA. The third factor making a Turkish full-blown intervention in Libya unlikely is the fact that the MoU on security cooperation does not contain significant changes and is only re-establishing the same level of engagement from Ankara that existed in previous years. In addition, Turkey is well aware of the roadblocks and challenges it will face from the international community, especially given the recent focus on foreign meddling.

From Ankara’s perspective, the maritime demarcation deal has long been sought by Turkey’s Navy (at least since 2018) as part of geostrategic interests to increase leverage in regional negotiations over hydrocarbon resources and to curtail Greece’s influence in the Mediterranean. Seen from this angle, the maritime deal is more important for Ankara than the security cooperation MoU; it is fair to say that Turkey has already achieved its objective in Libya with the maritime demarcation agreement. Erdogan’s comments to send troops to Libya are therefore only part of a political bluff to increase Turkey’s leverage in future negotiations and perhaps reassure the GNA, which was likely compelled to accept the maritime agreement given its weakened posture. Turkey’s threat to intervene bears the hallmark of a strategy to “escalate to de-escalate”, with the ultimate goal of bringing parties to the negotiating table and making any conventional military response by LNA foreign supporters seem disproportionate. Even if Ankara ratifies the security MoU and decides to provide military support to the GNA, it will likely be in the form of military advisors and officers in a capacity-building function.

Regardless, the current situation does increase the prospect of an energy dispute in the eastern Mediterranean; Libya could be seen as a forward operating base by Ankara and a means to an end by an array of states seeking to secure their interests in the region. With this context in mind, Turkish boots on the ground in Libya, however unlikely, would threaten to expand the conflict and prompt more involvement from existing shareholders such as Egypt, while urging other countries, including Greece, to foster ties with the eastern-based government and LNA. An anti-Turkish coalition could develop between Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Italy. This coalition would further weaken the GNA’s position on the international scene and tilt the balance in favour of the LNA.

Domestically, the GNA’s closer ties to Ankara could further strain its alliance across the West and exacerbate divisions within the pro-GNA camp. The deals with Ankara are welcomed by pro-Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) elements that have long called for more Turkish intervention. However, more moderate pro-GNA factions will likely begin considering alternative options to hedge their bets, especially if they realise a rapprochement with Turkey means they are now fighting against a larger international coalition. This is especially true given recent tensions between armed factions in Tripoli and growing evidence of an escalation in the short term, including Haftar’s “zero hour” declaration and Misrata’s state of emergency.

KEY POINTS

- Turkey unlikely to send troops to Libya
- Escalation likely after Haftar declaration
- Misrata responds with state of emergency



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2. National Security Map

Misrata declares state of emergency; LNA responds to Turkish-GNA maritime demarcation deal

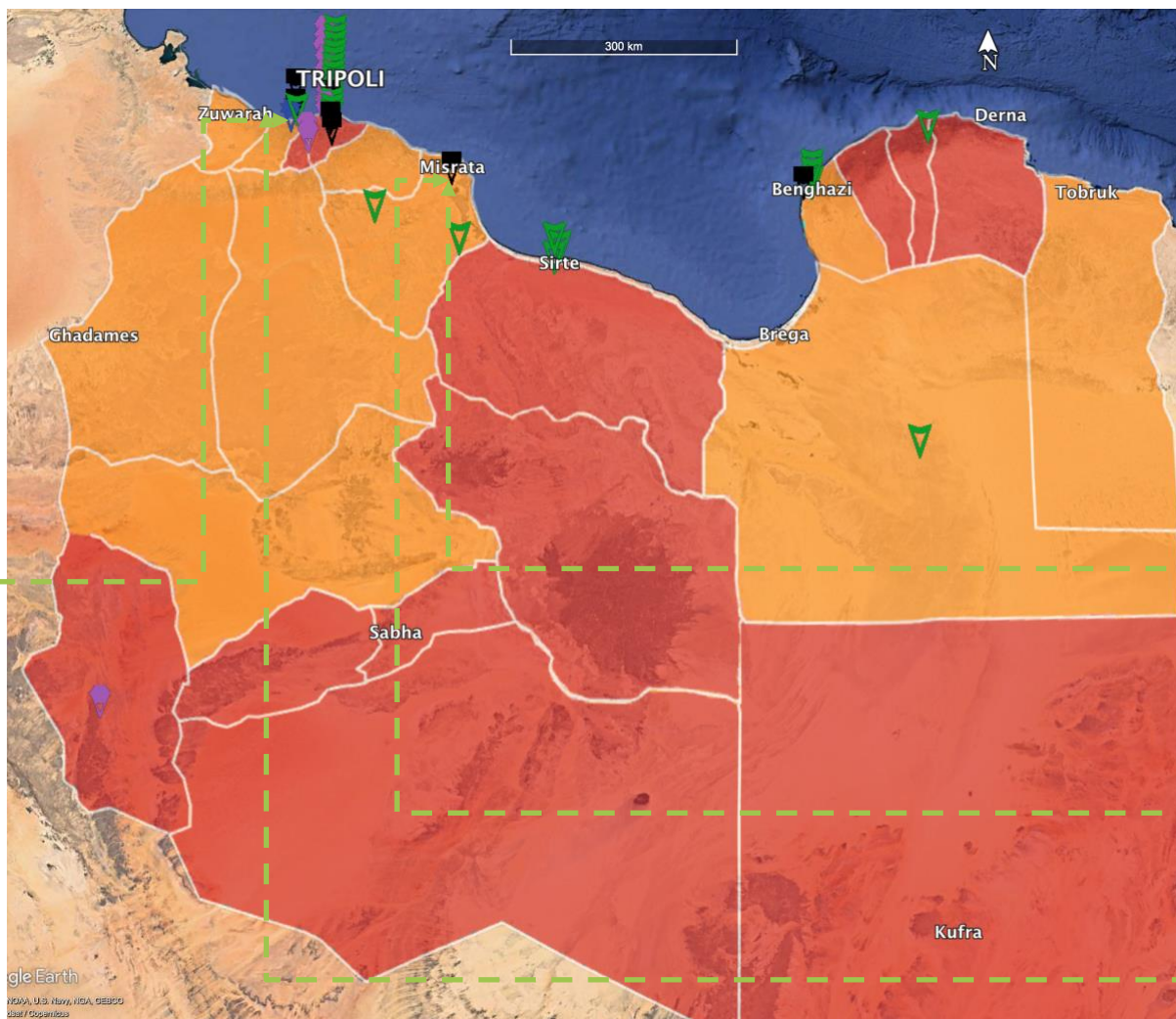
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



A vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) detonated resulting in material damage to nearby shops and buildings, without causing any casualties, in front of Al-Isnad Force HQ near the Olympic Club in Zawiya at approximately 2300hrs on 09 Dec. In the early hours of 10 Dec, an additional explosion was heard in Al-Zawiya. Initial unconfirmed reports indicate the residence of a GNA-affiliated militia leader, identified as Al-Qasab, was targeted. Al-Qasab controls and secures Al-Zawiya Oil Refining Company. Unconfirmed reports indicate Al-Qasab declared his support for the LNA in Mar, prior to the offensive on Tripoli. Pro-GNA accounts attributed the VBIED attack to LNA sympathisers in the city, in retaliation for Al-Isnad Force's mistreatment of the LNA MiG-23 pilot.

On 11 Dec, Mellitah Oil and Gas Company (MOG) resumed production at Al-Feel Oilfield following an illicit valve closure on the export line between Al-Feel and Mellitah on 05 Dec.

The National Oil Corporation (NOC) approved Total's acquisition of Marathon Oil Libya Limited (MOLL)'s stake in the Waha concessions for 450 million US dollars (USD), which represents 16.33% of the concessions.

LNA Navy Chief of Staf Faraj Al-Mahdawi stated the LNA and Greece agreed to block the sea corridor between the Greek island of Crete and Libya's Eastern sea border to Turkish vessels loaded with weapons and suspected of transporting Islamic State (IS) militants. Al-Mahdawi stated the Greek side will intervene to detain any Turkish vessel off the Greek coast, while the LNA will intercept and sink vessels undertaking exploration and drilling activities or attempting to reach Libyan Western ports to deliver weapons, particularly Misrata Port.

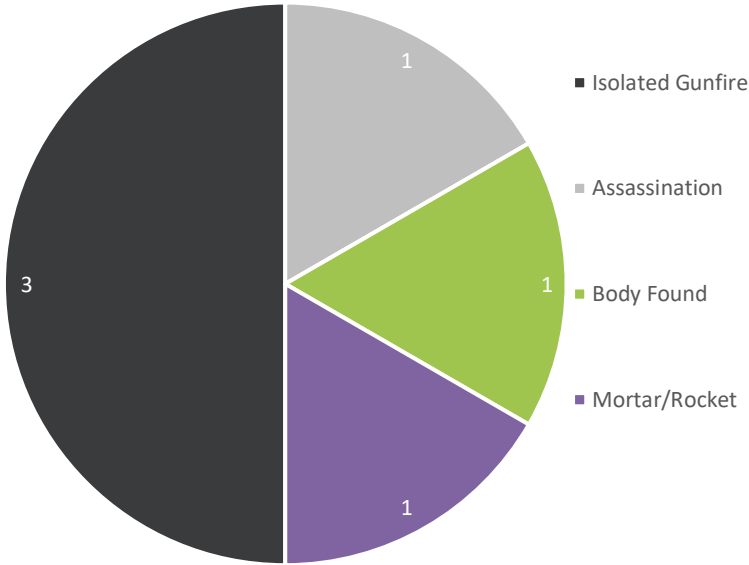
GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha attended a meeting with Misrata's municipal and military councils, and field commanders, where the general state of mobilization and alert was declared. Participants also agreed to mobilise all necessary means to achieve a decisive victory in the conflict against the LNA and end combat operations, calling on all Libyan cities to declare the state of emergency.

Unidentified armed men attacked the Judicial Police Station in Misrata's Tamina area in the evening on 11 Dec. Some defendants were reportedly smuggled out of the prison during their trial, which was likely the motive behind the attack.

Sabrata's Internal Security Apparatus arrested a senior Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) member travelling on the coastal road from Tunisia and heading to Tripoli in the evening on 12 Dec. The TRB member was later released following a prisoner exchange between LNA and GNA forces.

3. Nationwide Security Analysis Sharp decrease in fatalities as political rhetoric gradually overshadows fighting

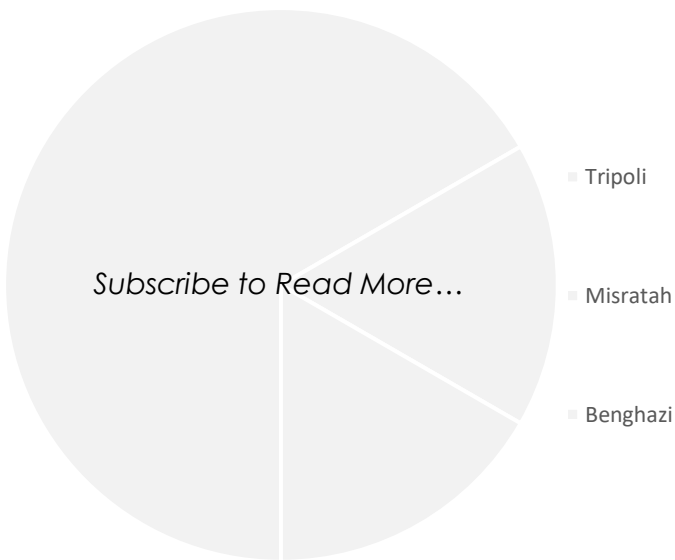
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



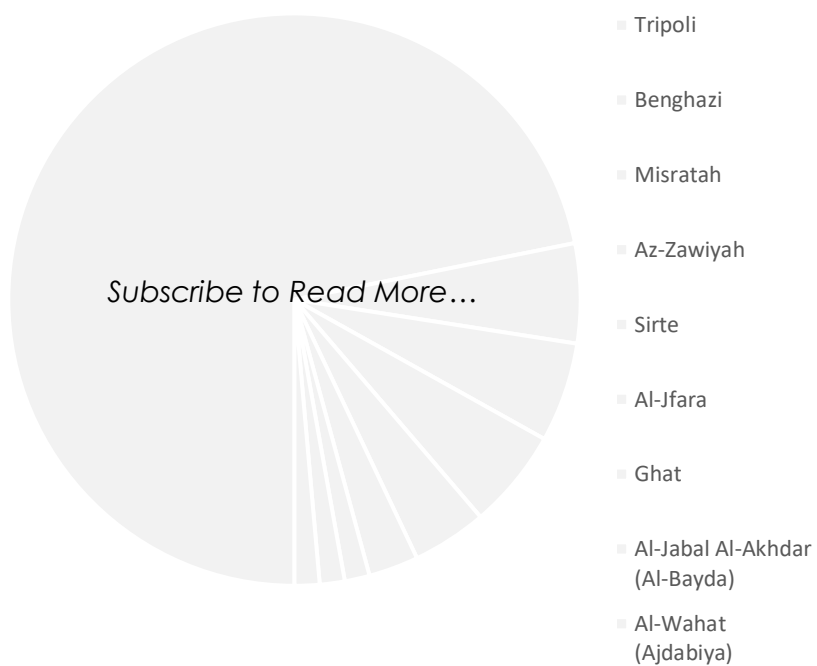
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



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 6 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 30 deaths reported last week and 20 the week before. The total number of nationwide fatalities would likely be significantly higher if a reliable death toll of the clashes in the Western region was available. It is likely that multiple fatalities from combat are underreported. Overall, despite Haftar's announcement of a final stage in combat operations and rapid advances by LNA forces in the immediate aftermath, arrests, politically-charged statements, tensions, and other security incidents took precedence over fighting this week; combat operations were dominated by the use of heavy artillery and indiscriminate shelling. This trend is indicative of the great uncertainty in the current context of the conflict and could help explain the relatively lower number of fatalities. Regardless, Tripoli continues to be the national district with the highest number of recorded incidents. Several incidents were recorded throughout the country including 18 reports of indiscriminate shelling with a least a civilian fatality as a result. WB recorded 12 bouts of violence with no documented fatalities from combat operations between LNA and GNA forces. Meanwhile, the week was marked by two separate reports of drones, an assassination, a body found, a kidnapping, and a robbery.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 61 incidents, including 51 in Tripoli, marking a sharp decrease in the total number of security incidents recorded across the region. In Tripoli, beyond engagement areas, multiple sporadic security incidents were reported this week. WB sources reported a group of gunmen driving a Hyundai Sonata conducted a drive-by shooting resulted in the death of two young men near Alnajma Factory in Al Bivio area at approximately 1900hrs on 10 Dec. Separately, reports indicate a parked black Hyundai Santa Fe was stolen in front of a house in the Abu Salim area in the morning on 10 Dec. Meanwhile, locals called on travellers to avoid passing through Al-Rawajeh area, South of Garabolli, due to the presence of suspicious vehicles in the area with the intent to carjack vehicles over. Beyond this, unconfirmed reports allege the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) raided several houses in Al-Ghararat area and established two checkpoints on 16 Road at night on 10 Dec. Initial reports suggest the incident came in response to the drive-by shooting in Al Bivio area.

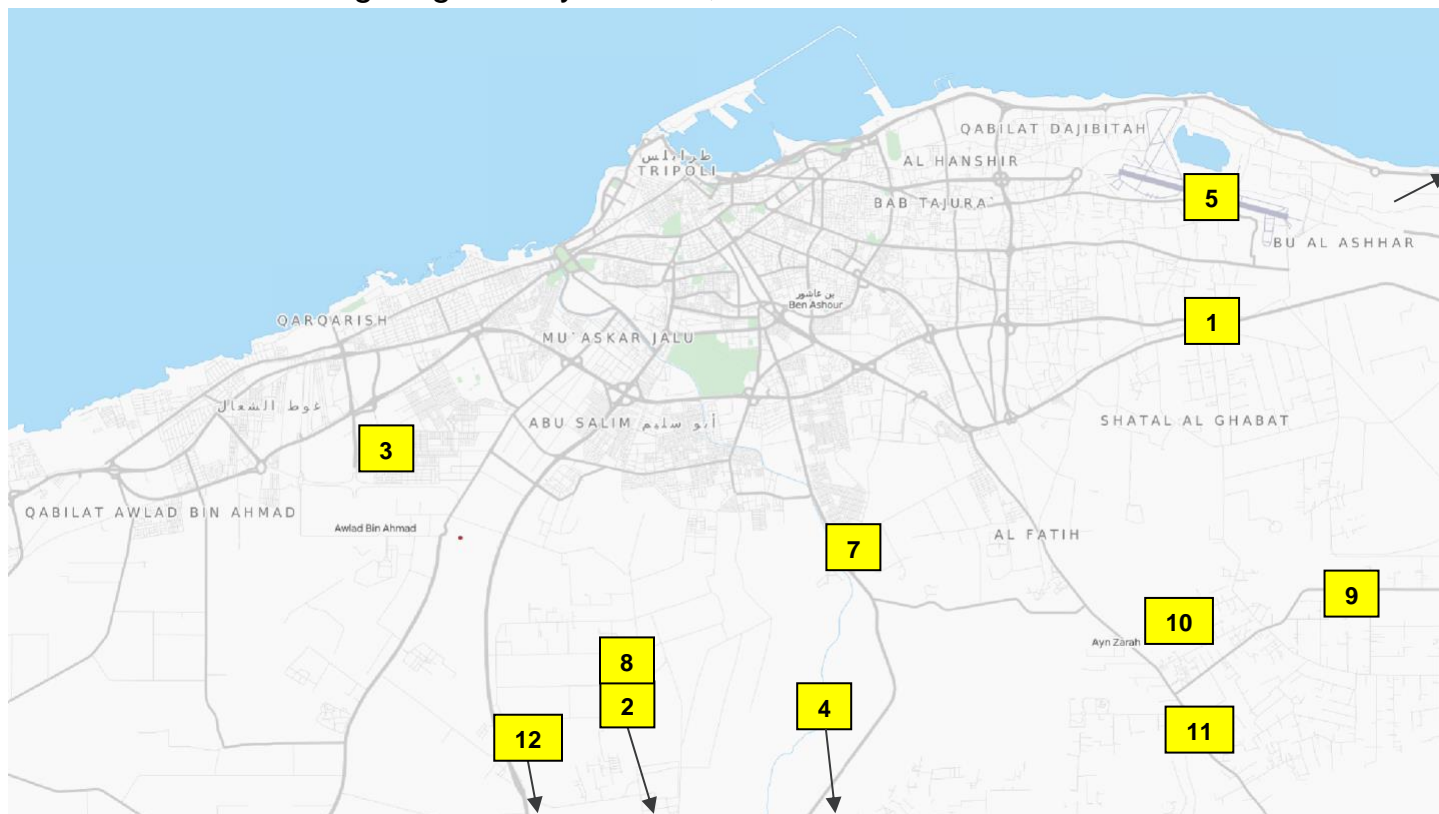
The central region continues to be marked by heightened tensions, highlighted by the declaration of a general state of emergency in Misrata and Sirte in the aftermath of a sustained LNA air campaign targeting multiple positions in Misrata. Other sporadic security incidents have also been reported. On 07 Dec, GNA-aligned Misrata militias arrested undocumented migrants disguised in women's clothing at a checkpoint in Abugrein on 07 Dec. Initial reports indicate the undocumented migrants were aboard a civilian vehicle heading towards Misrata. Separately,

Turning to the South, after recently expanding its foothold in the region and regaining Al Feel oil field, the LNA's Tariq Bin Ziad Battalion (128) entered the villages of Alawenat and Tahala, North of Ghat, southwest Libya, in the early hours of 10 Dec. Initial reports indicate skirmishes erupted between the LNA's 128 Battalion and a GNA-affiliated Amazigh (Berber) battalion in the area. Following the skirmishes, the LNA seized both villages and arrested the leader of the GNA battalion originally from Jadu, identified as Khalid Kaabar. WB sources confirmed that Kaabar was detained by LNA-affiliated forces, whilst noting that the majority of Kaabar's forces are made up of non-Libyan Tuaregs. Sources reported Kaabar positioned his forces in the Tahala area after frequently travelling back and forth from the Southern region.

The East continues to be relatively stable when compared with the current security environment across western regions. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Jalu's Security Directorate raided a farm used to store smuggled fuel and arrested a Libyan, along with several undocumented migrants on 08 Dec. The smugglers were seized in possession of 160,00 litres of fuel. According to the directorate, the owner of the farm charged a fee of 1,000 Libyan dinars (LYD) per vehicle to use his land as a warehouse for smuggled fuel.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

MJI flights gradually resume; tensions between SDF and TRB over detainees



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (10 Dec) Two men killed in drive-by shooting near Al-Najma factory
2. (10 Dec) Clashes resume in vicinity of Hamza Camp in Hadba Mashro' area
3. (11 Dec) Sporadic gunfire audible in Janzur. Motive unknown.
4. (11 Dec) Clashes resume in Khallat Al-Furjan at approx. 1000hrs
5. (12 Dec) MJI reopens; first Afriqiyah Airways flight to Istanbul scheduled
6. (12 Dec) Haftar announces "zero hour", orders final offensive
7. (13 Dec) shells lands in residential unit, kills a civilian
8. (13 Dec) Barq An-Nasr Battalion from Zintan joins LNA Tarik Ibn Ziyad on frontline
9. (13 Dec) LNA claims GNA-operated UAV downed over Ain Zara-Wadi Rabei
10. (13 Dec) Clashes resume on Ain Zara frontline at approx. 1730hrs
11. (13 Dec) LNA reaches Kahili Mosque on Ain Zara engagement axis
12. (14 Dec) LNA consolidates territorial gains over 48 hours

SDF/TRB tensions over former regime detainees

Reports corroborated the Special Deterrence Force's (SDF) raid of a prison controlled by the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) in Zawayat Al Dahmani area and transfer of at least four former regime figures to the Mitiga complex between 0000hrs-0200hrs on 15 Dec. The SDF's attack and ensuing gunfire exchange was reportedly to thwart a TRB-sanctioned handover of some of the detainees to Misrata in exchange for a sum of money. Reports allege Ziad Kafu, the TRB's "financial controller", received cash to exchange one of the detainees. Of note, Kafu threatened to retaliate and gave the SDF a deadline to handover the detainees, which include former head of Libya's intelligence apparatus Abdullah Senussi, Al-Saadi Gaddafi (Gaddafi's son), and former PM Al-Baghdadi Al-Mahmoudy. The incident is the latest to highlight the widening rift between armed groups nominally aligned to the GNA. Tensions over former regime detainees come amid signs of an established alliance between the LNA and elements within Gaddafi's supporter base. Both the TRB and SDF understand the added leverage that comes with detaining former regime officials who can be used in potential future negotiations.

MJI flights gradually resume

WB sources reported Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport (MJI) gradually resumed flight operations in the morning on 12 Dec, following a three-month closure due to a mortar attack and the subsequent diversion of all flights to Misrata International Airport (MRA) on 01 Sep.

LNA downs GNA UAV over Ain Zara-Wadi Rabei

The LNA claimed it downed a GNA-operated Turkish

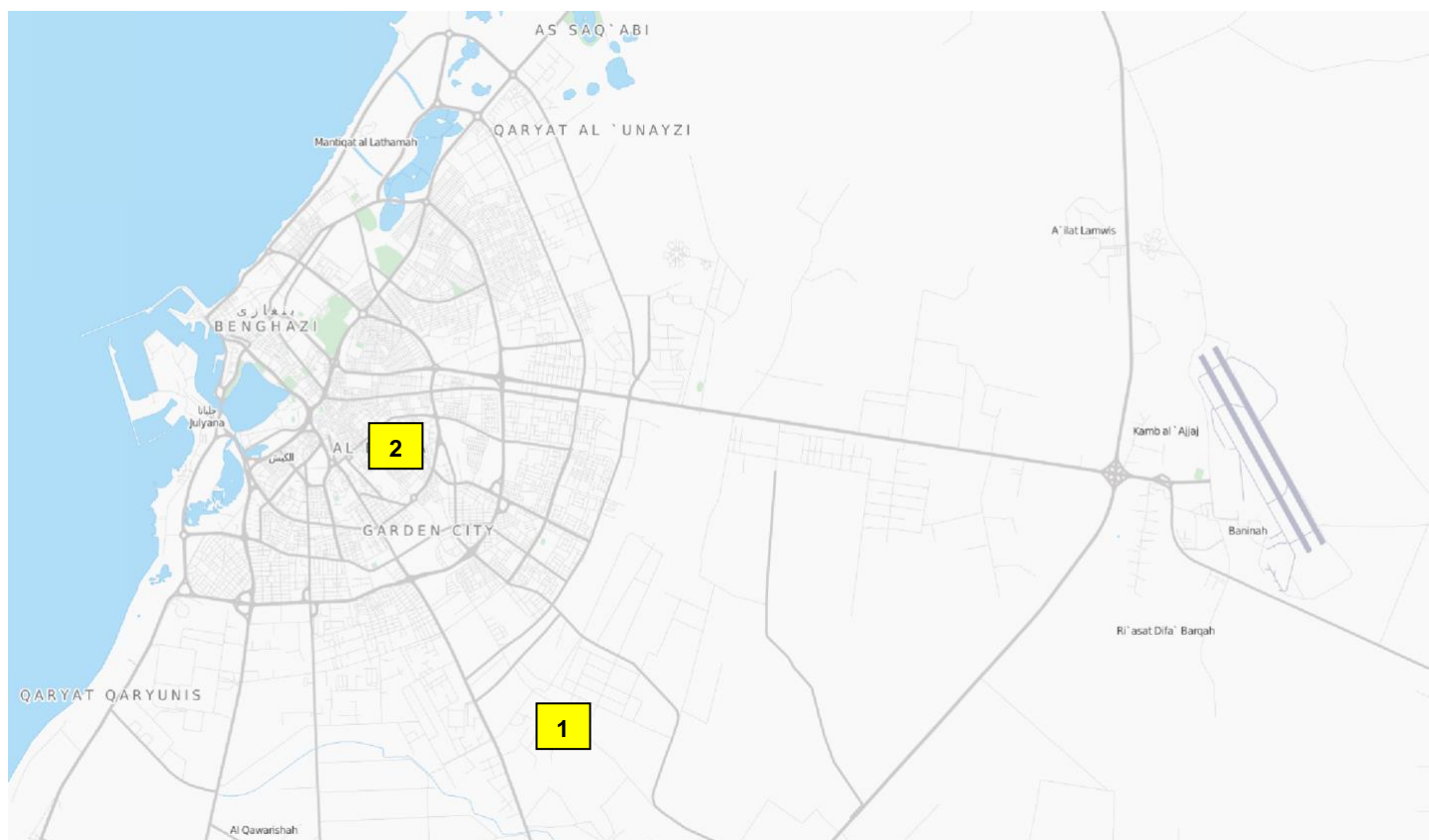
unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) on the Ain Zara - Wadi Al-Rabei axis after it entered the LNA's no-fly zone (NFZ) on 13 Dec. According to LNA's Western Region Ops Room commander, Mabrouk Al-Ghazwi, the downed Turkish UAV departed MJI hours after the airport resumed operations, highlighting the possibility of LNA airstrikes targeting the airport in the short term.

SDF releases BRSC members from Mitiga prison

Reports indicate the SDF led by Abdelraouf Kara recently released up to 29 Benghazi Revolutionary Shura Council (BRSC) members from Mitiga prison, which remains under its control. The date of the incident is unknown, though controversial mufti Sadiq Al-Gharyani recently called on Kara to release all BRSC and Derna Mujahideen Shura Council (DMSC) members to enable them to support GNA forces in combat operations against the LNA. Similar calls have been voiced in the past to exert pressure on the SDF to release prisoners from its Mitiga Prison to help compensate for the documented lack of manpower within GNA ranks. The development, if confirmed, will likely increase MJI's exposure to LNA targeting, and further reinforces the LNA's narrative.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

CID arrest terror financing suspects with links to IS fugitive in Egypt



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (10 Dec) CID arrest criminal gang (location unknown)
2. (11 Dec) Armed men kidnap relatives in the evening
3. (13 Dec) CID arrest terror financing suspects (location unknown)
4. (13 Dec) Protesters denounce Turkish President's comments

CID arrest criminal gang

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Benghazi's Security Directorate arrested a criminal gang involved in vehicle theft and armed robberies on 10 Dec. The gang consists of four individuals, including an Egyptian national who is reportedly specialized in painting stolen vehicles.

Kidnapping in Al-Hawary

Reports indicate unidentified gunmen kidnapped two relatives in Benghazi's Al-Hawary area in the evening on 11 Dec. At the time of publication, the motive behind the kidnapping was unclear.

CID arrest terror financing suspects

The CID arrested a father and son suspected of smuggling large amounts of cash outside Libya reportedly for a fugitive Islamic State (IS) militant through a third suspect, an Egyptian national. The CID seized weapons and ammunition inside the suspects' residence. Following interrogations, a fourth IS fugitive was identified in connection to the Egyptian national. Both suspects confessed to the charges and transferring the funds received from Libya. The suspects were referred to public prosecution.

Anti-Turkey protests

Pro-LNA media outlets reported a local demonstration, mostly by students, was held to

denounce recent remarks made by the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on the prospect of sending troops to Libya if requested by the GNA, in Benghazi's centre on 13 Dec. The protestors chanted slogans in rejection of Turkish interference in Libyan affairs and raised banners denouncing Erdogan's statements. The protest would follow the Eastern-based Interim Government instructing the Ministry of Interior (MoI) and competent security services to secure the scheduled protests on 13 Dec across various pro-LNA cities, including Ajdabiya, Sabratha, Tarhuna and Tobruk.

6. What's next

LNA continues to focus on securing new alliances across the West

POLITICAL FORECAST

The political landscape continues to be dominated by growing Turkish-GNA ties. In response to Turkish involvement in Libya, Egyptian President Abdelattah Sissi stated the GNA continues to be held hostage by "armed and terrorist militias". Sissi added that the Tripoli government is therefore unable to make decisions of its own. Domestically, the GNA's legitimacy continues to weaken amid a sustained eastern-led effort to oust Sarraj and his cabinet. The speaker of the eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) Aguila Saleh delivered a speech urging Tripoli residents to support the LNA and calling on the international community to back the HoR as the legitimate legislative body in Libya. In addition, Saleh laid out the political roadmap after the end of LNA combat operations in Tripoli. He announced the HoR will first help form a unity government representative of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan. The HoR will then prioritize the unification of Libya's institutions such as the Central Bank of Libya (CBL). Third, the HoR will focus on reconciliation and drafting of the Constitution. The last step will be organizing presidential elections, according to Saleh. Saleh's speech comes as part of a recent eastern-led political effort to further undermine the GNA's legitimacy by urging the international community and regional organisations such as the Arab League to no longer recognize the Tripoli government. Meanwhile, the diplomatic war is being fought on all fronts. Citing security reasons, the Libyan Embassy in Cairo (Egypt) announced its indefinite closure from 15 Dec. The move closely follows a statement by the Embassy on 14 Dec declaring that all diplomatic personnel and the Libyan Mission in Egypt no longer operate under GNA PM Fayez Sarraj. The Embassy declared it now serves to represent the LNA and eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR). However, the GNA's Foreign Ministry denied allegations that Embassy staff had defected, claiming an unknown group stormed the Embassy in Cairo.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

The recent UN Panel of Experts (PoE) report placed greater emphasis on the necessity to enforce the UN arms embargo. The Report was submitted to the UN Security Council (UNSC) and confirmed that both the GNA and LNA received weapons, military equipment, technical support, and non-Libyan fighters in violation of the UN arms embargo on Libya. Reports indicate some UNSC members hope that Report's publication will exert pressure on the mentioned states to cease support for the warring sides. Of note, however, given its reporting period restriction, the Report fails to mention recent developments such as the alleged mobilization of Russian fighters in support of the LNA. Regardless, by precisely documenting the methods used to ship military supplies and naming recruiters and middlemen involved in transferring fighter to both the GNA and LNA, the Report sets the agenda for the upcoming Berlin Conference, which is expected to specifically focus on the international dimension of the conflict. In response to the Report, several recommendations were put forward to help enforce the arms embargo, including the establishment of an effective inspection system to intercept arms transfers across the sea and within Libyan ports, as well deterring the transport of weapons by air via independent inspection of aircraft landing at Libyan airports. Meanwhile, in relation to the illicit export of crude oil and petroleum products, the panel recommended extending the scope of the measures contained in Resolution 2146 of 2014 to authorise Member States to search the high seas off the Libyan coast, including searching suspicious ships believed to be carrying smuggled petroleum products coming in and out of Libya.

SECURITY FORECAST

Evidence points to a likely escalation in the short term. Misrata's declaration of a state of emergency, adopted by other pro-GNA towns across the West, comes in response to Haftar's "zero hour" declaration. Uncertainty continues to grow, increasing the likelihood of assassinations, defections, conflicting reports and allegations of support for the LNA/GNA, and other similar incidents across the capital and beyond. Separately, whilst the gradual resumption of operations at MJI stands as a positive development, attacks targeting the airport, including shelling and LNA airstrikes, remain probable in the short to medium term. The LNA spokesman, Ahmed Al-Mesmari, claimed receiving intelligence on an expected delivery of Turkish armoured vehicles at MJI, paving the way for further targeting. Meanwhile, the LNA will continue to devote its resources and efforts to secure new alliances and sow divisions across Western towns, especially in Zawiya where recent tensions present it with an opportunity to expand its influence. Of note, some Zawiya-based armed factions recently retreated back to the town in anticipation of an attack by pro-LNA forces in nearby Surman and Sabratha. Tensions are likely and could escalate into armed confrontation between pro-LNA and pro-GNA forces across the Western region, and/or within pro-GNA armed factions in Tripoli. The state of emergency announced by Misrata and other towns across the West could result in offensive operations by GNA forces. The LNA Air Force Chief of Staff, Saqr Geroushi, confirmed the transfer of all aircraft and ammunition to Al-Wattiyah airbase in line with Haftar's decisive offensive announcement and in preparation for an intensified air campaign. As a result, there is a possibility GNA forces will launch an offensive on Wattiyah airbase or other LNA-controlled positions. By doing so, GNA forces risk creating a vacuum across Tripoli frontlines, paving the way for the LNA to advance northward.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Writing for Middle East publication *Arab News*, Menekse Tokyay explores the ramifications of the second Turkish-GNA memorandum of understanding (MoU) on security and military cooperation. Quoting Aydin Sezer, an Ankara-based analyst, the article explores the likelihood of a Turkish boots on the ground intervention in Libya. The article assesses that a scenario in which Ankara sends troops to Libya is unlikely in the short term. According to Sezer, the MoU was rushed to parliament after recent discussions between Sarraj and Turkish officials on the sidelines of the Doha Forum. Sezer adds that by bringing the deal for ratification in Parliament, the Turkish government is attempting to share the burden of involvement in the Libyan case and reinforce the rationale behind a military cooperation. The article reads: "One of the striking points of the deal is that it legalizes the deployment of "guest personnel" and "guest students," especially considering that Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said last week that Turkey could deploy troops to Libya if the Tripoli-based Al-Serraj government requested it. According to Sezer, the wording of "guest" implies for the host country all active military personnel and students who are not Libyan nationals. "The legal text lacks a serious justification for the military cooperation. It refers to the sovereignty of the parties and mutual respect of equality. However, there is no proper sovereignty in Libya nowadays," he said. For Sezer, bringing the text of the deal to ratification is an attempt by the government to share its responsibility with the Parliament in being involving in such a civil conflict. "It is somehow for creating a shield of incontestability in any future move," he said."

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