

1. The Big Picture

Russia convinces GNA/LNA to move to negotiating table, but for how long?

The Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA) accepted Russia and Turkey's ceasefire agreement on 12 Jan, corroborating WB's assessment in last week's report that ceasefire negotiations are more likely than an all-out escalation. On 13 Jan, GNA officials and Haftar were at the negotiating table in Moscow, albeit separately, to discuss ceasefire implementation and stabilization measures. The latest reports suggest the GNA camp signed the ceasefire agreement, though Haftar and the House of Representatives (HoR) speaker, Aguila Saleh, left Moscow without signing, further reducing the prospect of a lasting ceasefire ahead of the Berlin Conference slated for 19 Jan.

But despite documented violations of the truce to date and the significant challenges that lie ahead, a fragile ceasefire would mark the first concrete peace effort nine months into the conflict and after tensions escalated at the prospect of a Turkish troop deployment. Analysts are of the view Turkey and Russia have officially filled the vacuum left behind by Washington, and EU countries, especially after the reported failure of Italy's last-ditch effort to organize a meeting between Haftar and Sarraj.

The ceasefire came as a result of alignment of visions between Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Turkish counterpart Recep Erdogan, after the two met in Istanbul. Turkey likely agreed to soften its stance on Haftar in exchange for a gradual retreat of alleged Russian mercenaries (recently corroborated by reports from GNA field commanders). Ankara's dovish tone towards Haftar was highlighted by an unprecedented statement on 11 Jan by Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who recognized Haftar's role and influence in Libya. Turkey also likely agreed to limit the scope of its deployment in Libya on the condition that negotiations for a ceasefire begin with no further territorial gains by Haftar's forces.

Whilst Russia has doubled down on its support for Haftar's military offensive, it did so to reach a point where negotiations can be held. Now that parties are willing to move to the negotiating table, Russia will seek the upper hand by taking a carefully-calibrated equidistant position from all parties to the conflict to reinforce Moscow's role as a mediator. Russia has enough leverage over all parties to shape negotiation outcomes. Moscow is reported to have provided significant military support over the past few years to the LNA, especially in terms of logistics, increasing Haftar's dependence. The Kremlin can even exploit the ties cultivated with the former Gaddafi regime supporter base to exert pressure on Haftar to negotiate.

From Putin's standpoint, brokering an agreement between Haftar and Sarraj will help increase Moscow's leverage over the European Union (EU). However, Putin

understands the significant challenges and likely roadblocks to stabilize Libya and will, as a result, limit the scope of Russia's involvement in negotiations to preserve the image of a credible mediator. Russia's initial objective will be to design a temporary ceasefire agreement, but the intricate details of Libya's political process will be delegated to the EU, United Nations (UN), and the Berlin Conference.

Putin will attempt to take credit for brokering a ceasefire but pass the baton to the EU and UN to fix the political impasse that prevailed before Haftar's offensive. Russia's position will then fluctuate between active support for Haftar and a more passive mediator role. When negotiations are unfolding, Russia will seek to secure its interests by exerting pressure on parties to the conflict. If there are major disagreements or the EU encounters roadblocks, all parties will be compelled to revert back to Moscow for mediation. This architecture will enable Moscow to preserve its image as a powerbroker and mediator to the conflict.

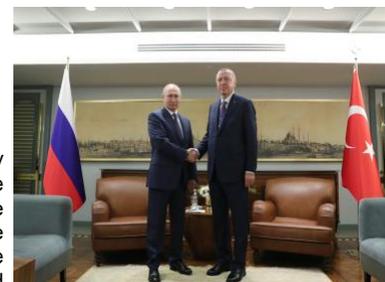
The peace process remains fragile and will encounter significant hurdles. The main issue will be determining demarcation lines; the LNA is unlikely to accept the GNA's demands to withdraw to pre-April 2019 positions. Turkey could pressure the GNA to accept the LNA's territorial gains, but regardless, any deal that recognizes Haftar's gains will be opposed by armed factions nominally aligned to the Tripoli government.

Meanwhile, it will be difficult for the Tripoli government to obtain the buy-in of pro-GNA armed groups, especially Islamist-leaning elements and hardliners such as pro-Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) members, making ceasefire violations likely in the short term. Hardliners fighting within GNA ranks continue to view a ceasefire as an opportunity for Haftar to replenish his ammunition. Of note, the timing of the ceasefire is delicate for Misrata after recent LNA gains in Sirte and further advances towards the west. A flashpoint in the Sirte or Misrata districts could lead to a resumption of hostilities in the short term, especially after LNA and GNA forces were recently spotted gathering in the area.

In the medium term, if the ceasefire holds and the GNA begins to implement the Berlin Process's military track by disarming/dissolving groups, there would be a serious risk of infighting amongst GNA factions. Even if the LNA commits to a cessation of hostilities and diligently follows the Berlin Process, the GNA will find it difficult to maintain the upper hand in negotiations and upend the reality on the ground, including the LNA's territorial control and recent gains on the political front. Whether actual progress has been made on the Libyan peace process remains to be seen

KEY POINTS

- Haftar and HoR are yet to sign ceasefire agreement
- Multiple factors could result in resumption of clashes
- Berlin Conference officially slated for 19 January



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2. National Security Map

LNA seizes Sirte and advances towards Misrata, declares military zone in Khoms & Misrata Ports

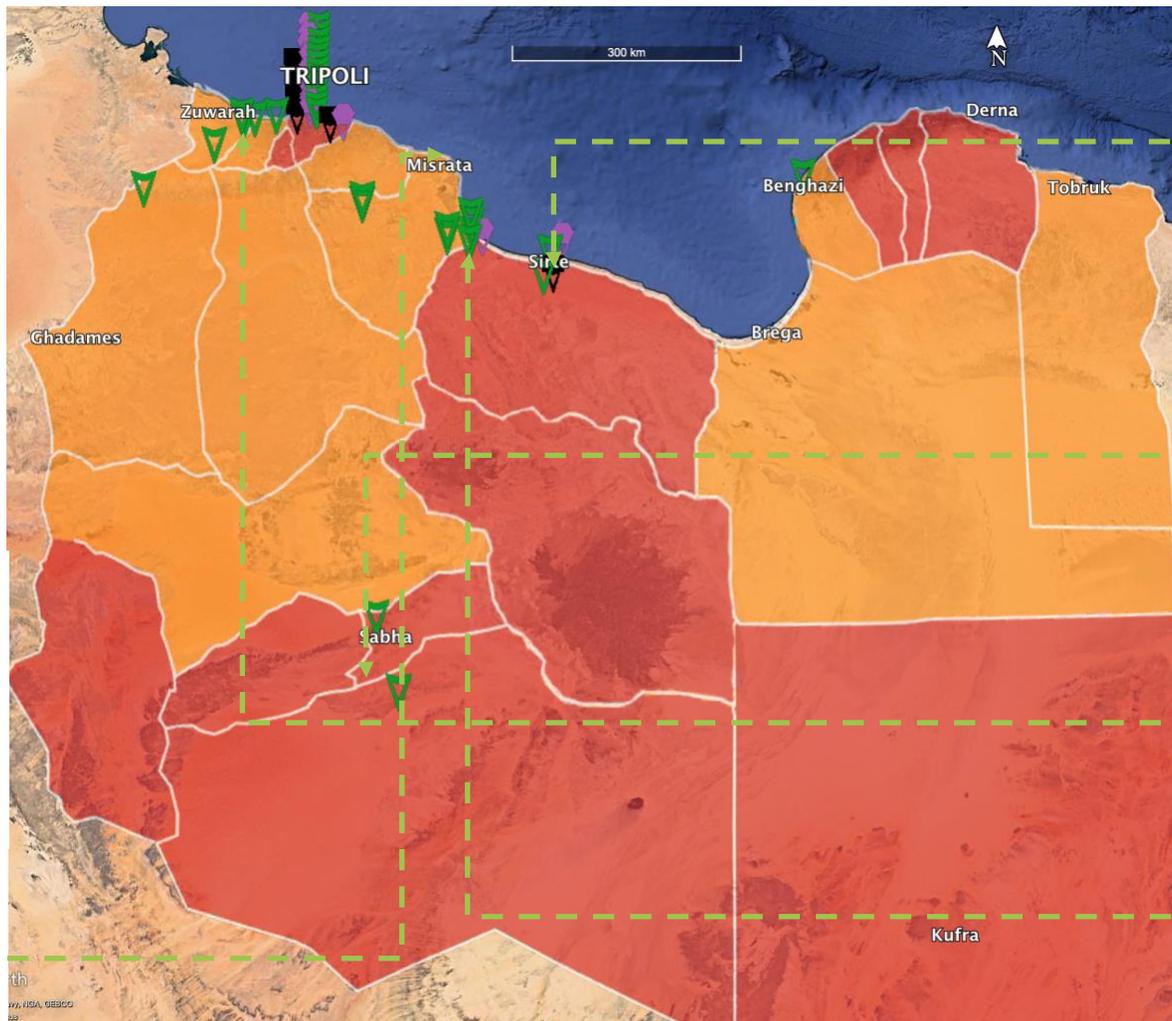
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



Sources reported initial engagement East of Sirte near the 20km CP between LNA forces and the pro-GNA Sirte Protection Force (SPF) at approximately 1400hrs on 06 Jan. LNA advances were then reported on the southern engagement axis in the Abu Hadi area at approximately 1530hrs, with intermittent clashes in the area resulting in at least a civilian casualty at approximately 1630hrs. The LNA's control of Sirte Port was confirmed at 1615hrs. Haftar's forces later seized Sirte's District No. 3 and at approximately 1715hrs, all urban areas were under LNA control. In response, military reinforcements from Misrata were spotted travelling towards Sirte at approximately 1600hrs and later at 2100hrs.

WB sources reported Islamic State (IS) activity between the southern towns of Ghadduwah and Timsa on 06 Jan. Sources stated locals reported suspicious individuals, likely sleeper cells, in these areas.

Reports suggest Al-Ajailat's Criminal Investigations Department (CID) raided Al-Sidra area at approximately 1400hrs on 08 Jan to capture local pro-GNA militants accused of obstructing the arrest of a prominent Islamic State (IS) militant on 07 Jan. Heavy gunfire exchange was reported in the area. Heavy gunfire was reported in the neighbouring pro-GNA town of Al-Jmail as locals reportedly prepared weapons to support the pro-GNA elements in Al-Sidra area.

In the aftermath of the LNA's control, the GNA conducted a series of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) airstrikes. The first GNA UAV strikes targeted LNA positions in Al-Weshka vicinity at approximately 2000hrs. Another GNA UAV strike targeted an LNA ammunition vehicle East of Abu Grein at approximately 2100hrs. A third wave of GNA UAV strikes was reported at approximately 2300hrs targeting LNA positions in Al-Weshka vicinity. Reports bring the total number of killed LNA soldiers as a result of the GNA's aerial campaign to 7.

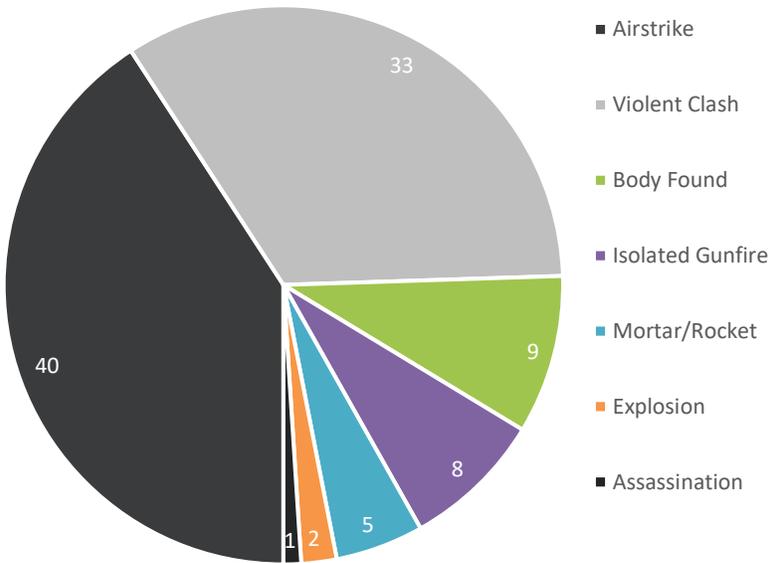
More details emerged in relation to the scope of Turkey's troop deployment to Libya, confirming previous assessments that it is relatively small. Turkish media quoted President Recep Tayyip Erdogan stating Ankara has deployed 35 soldiers that will only provide coordination and not partake in combat operations. The soldiers will be reportedly led by a Turkish lieutenant general operating from a command and control (C&C) centre.

On 10 Jan, the LNA's Navy declared Misrata and Khoms Ports as military zones and warned that any vessel entering the ports without prior authorization be treated as a legitimate target. In response, the GNA-affiliated Ports and Maritime Transport Authority stated that the ports of Khoms and Misrata are operating normally and are under the supervision of competent authorities.

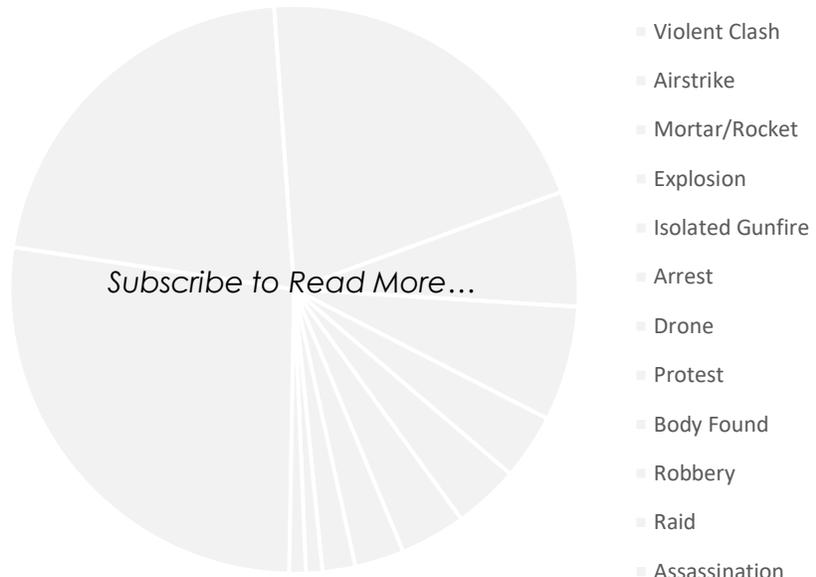
3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Violent clashes & airstrikes in West. region account for majority of fatalities

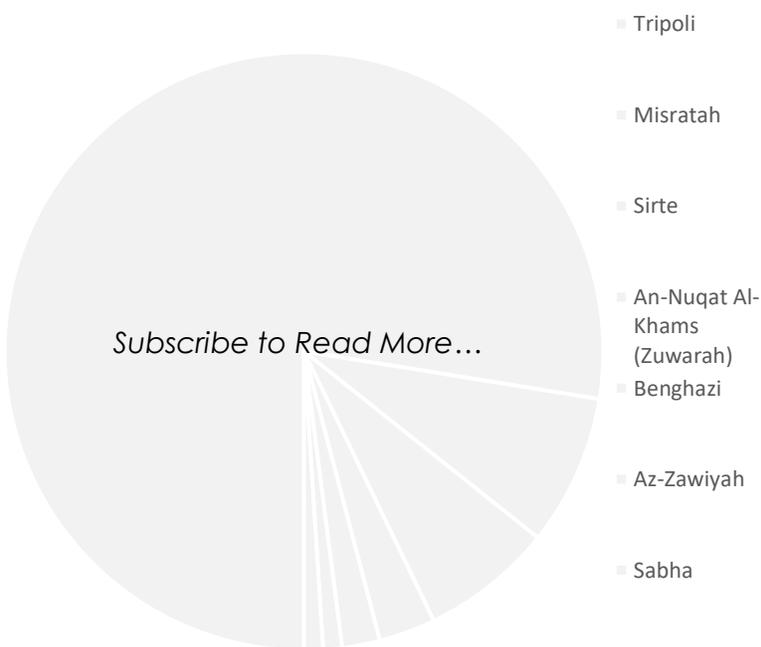
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



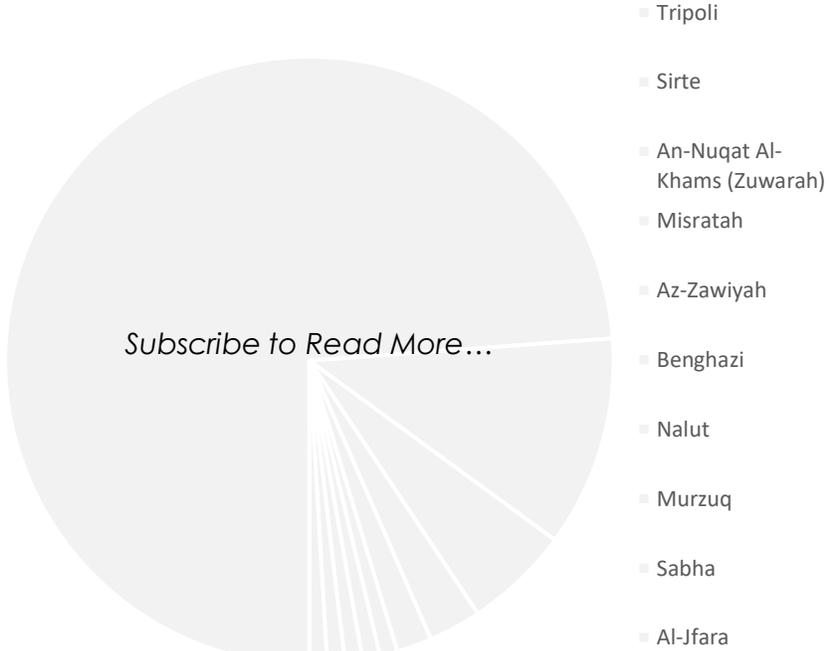
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



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

WB recorded this week a total of 98 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 19 deaths reported last week and 44 the week before, marking a sharp increase in fatalities recorded in contrast to last week's numbers. This week, 40 fatalities were recorded as a result of airstrikes, including the alleged LNA-operated foreign unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) airstrike targeting Hadba Military Academy, killing 30 military cadets on 04 Jan. Meanwhile, in line with assessments that GNA UAV activity resumed, WB recorded a series of GNA airstrikes targeting LNA units in the Misrata and Sirte districts following the LNA's control over Sirte on 06 Jan. The GNA claimed the airstrikes resulted in the death of seven LNA units. Beyond airstrikes, 33 fatalities were recorded as a result of violent clashes between LNA and GNA forces, with reports of 27 fatalities among LNA ranks South of Tripoli. Meanwhile, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights claimed six Turkish-backed Syrian rebels were killed fighting alongside GNA forces on 10 Jan. This week, WB recorded an uptick in security incidents recorded in the Sirte district as a result of the LNA's offensive. Four GNA airstrikes, and one LAAF airstrike, were recorded in the Sirte vicinity during the reporting period. Meanwhile, the Misratah district accounted for the highest number of fatalities, after Tripoli. In relation to military activity, airstrikes, mortar/rocket shelling incidents and violent clashes continued to dominate the overall security environment in the western and central regions. The remainder of security incidents were spread largely across the West, in addition to Sirte, Sabha and Murzuq in the south and Benghazi to the East. Several incidents were recorded throughout the country including 29 violent clashes, 23 airstrikes, 22 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 7 isolated gunfire cases, 2 robberies, 1 raid and 1 assassination.

In Western Libya, WB recorded a total of 92 incidents, including 79 in Tripoli, marking an evident surge in security incidents recorded in the region largely as a result of intensified military activity beyond Tripoli. In relation to the clashes, reports indicate five bodies, including two women, were found dead as a result of indiscriminate gunfire on Sidra Road, were found on 04 Jan. The following day, indiscriminate gunfire targeted travellers on the Sidra Road resulting in the death of at least three civilians as they attempted to evacuate the area. Separately, indiscriminate shelling resulted in the death of a young girl in Al-Hadba on 05 Jan.

In the wider western region, WB recorded eight bodies were found in the Bani Walid area. Bani Walid General Hospital reported seven bodies of illegal migrants were found and subsequently buried on 06 Jan. Bodies of illegal migrants are frequently found in the Bani Walid area. In addition, Bani Walid's branch of the Libyan Red Crescent (LRC) Society found an unidentified body in a valley after a local reported its presence in the area on 05 Jan. Meanwhile, Misrata Security Directorate established a curfew in the city between 0000hrs-0600hrs from 08 Jan and until further notice. The curfew came in response to fears of an LNA advance on the city after Sirte fell under Haftar's forces.

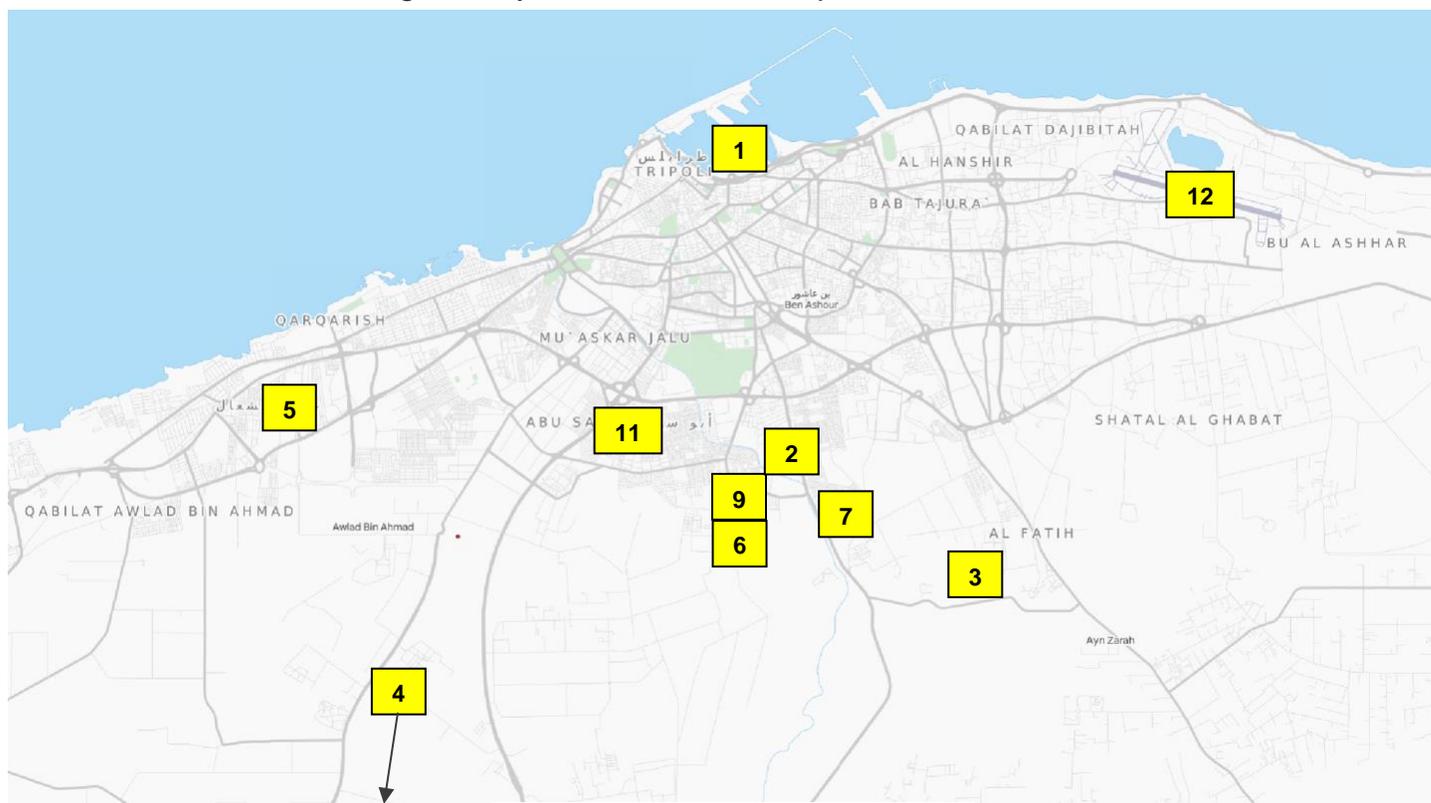
In the central region, this week was dominated by the LNA seizing Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte from GNA-aligned forces on 06 Jan. The development prompted a series of GNA UAV airstrikes targeting LNA positions in the city and intermittent clashes.

In the southern region, reports indicate the body of an unidentified man was found dumped on a street in Sabha's Al-Mahdiya area in the morning on 05 Jan. Neither the identity of the assailant(s) nor the motive behind the incident are known. Separately, WB sources reported an airstrike carried out by an unidentified party targeted Islamic State (IS) remnants near the southern town of Umm Al-Aranib on 09 Jan. It remains unclear whether the airstrike resulted in any fatalities or injuries.

Turning to the eastern region, this week a house explosion killed two in Benghazi. No additional security incidents were reported across the region.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Air traffic gradually resumes at MJI; reports of ceasefire violations



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (04 Jan) LAAF airstrike targets MJI & GNA-aligned Nawasi Camp on Beach Road
2. (04 Jan) Death toll of alleged LNA-operated foreign UAV airstrike targeting Hadba Military Academy rises to 30
3. (05 Jan) Indiscriminate gunfire kills 3 civilians attempting to evacuate by road
4. (07 Jan) Seven GNA forces killed in heavy clashes on Al-Ramla frontline
5. (07 Jan) Armed faction establishes CP to scrutinize mobile phones for signs of LNA affiliation/support
6. (08 Jan) LNA advance on Hadba Al-Mashro' axis, reach Sidi Husain Cemetery
7. (08 Jan) Indiscriminate shell lands inside civilian house injuring at least one female
8. (10 Jan) GNA claim series of airstrikes resulting in death of 20 LNA units in south
9. (10 Jan) Indiscriminate shells land on civilian house killing three family members
10. (11 Jan) LNA/GNA accept Turkish-Russian ceasefire; claims of violations
11. (10-12 Jan) Ghneiwa militia arrest pro-LNA sleeper cell in Abu Slim
12. (12 Jan) MJI may resume flight operations

Air traffic gradually resumes at MJI

WB sources confirmed air traffic resumed at Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport (MJI) and a Libyan Wings-operated flight landed at night on 12 Jan. Meanwhile, Afriqiyah Airways announced it will resume flight operations from MJI on 14 Jan, whilst Libyan Wings announced some flights will operate from MJI and others from Misrata International Airport (MRA). Of note, MJI halted operations due to two mortar attacks between 02-03 Jan. The airport continued to be targeted during its closure. It is unclear if the LNA's no-fly zone (NFZ) will continue to apply if a ceasefire agreement is signed between the GNA and LNA in Moscow.

Fighting intensifies between 08-09 January

LNA forces strengthened their posture on the Hadba Al-Mashro' engagement axis, reaching Sidi Husain Cemetery in the morning on 08 Jan, and Hadba Al-Gasi in the early hours on 09 Jan. Overall, combat operations between LNA and GNA forces were marked by a relative increase in activity between 08-09 Jan. Heavy clashes continued in the morning on 08 Jan across Salah Al-Dein, Al-Sidra Road, Ain Zara, Wadi Al-Rabei and Hadba Al-Mashro' areas. There were reports of locals evacuating Ain Zara's Al-Shok area following intensified clashes. Indiscriminate shelling resulted in physical damage to several residential units in Ain Zara's Al-Shok, Al-Sidra roads, and Salah Al-Dein, at approximately 1800hrs on 08 Jan. At least one civilian female was injured when an indiscriminate shell landed inside her house near Ouya Clinic. At approximately 2330hrs, shelling was reported in Al-Sab'a and Hadba Al-Mashro' areas, with reports of smoke over the Banana Project in Al-Sab'a area.

Ghneiwa arrest pro-LNA sleeper cell

Reports indicate the GNA-aligned Ghneiwa militia arrested a pro-LNA sleeper cell in Tripoli's Abu Slim area during the past 48hrs. A similar incident was reported on 24 Dec when the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) arrested a pro-LNA sleeper cell in an unidentified area in Tripoli.

Travellers stopped & phones searched at CP

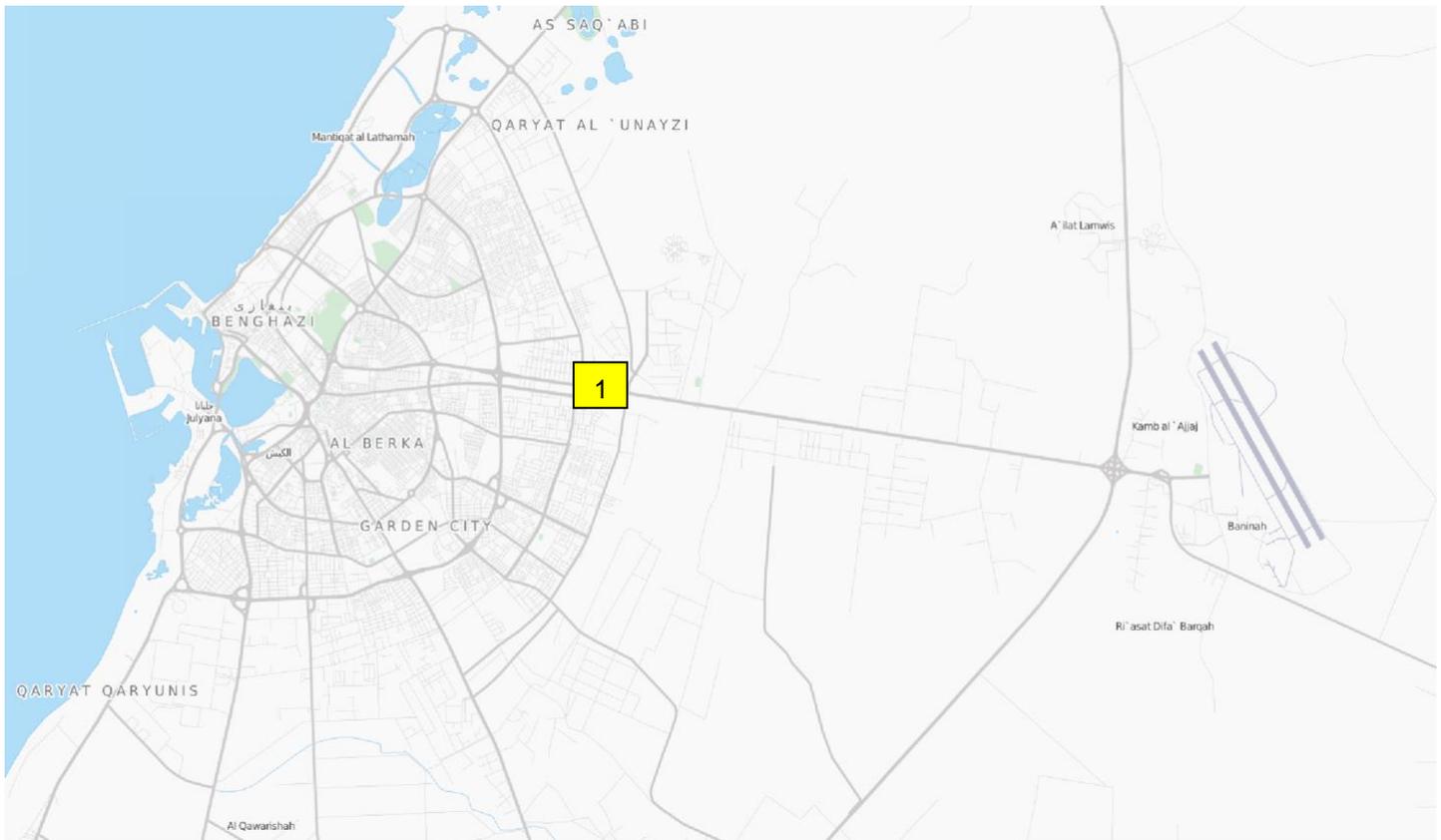
Local sources reported an unidentified armed faction established a checkpoint (CP) in Tripoli's Ghot Al-Shaal at approximately 2230hrs, arbitrarily stopping travellers and scrutinizing mobile phones for signs of affiliation/support to the LNA.

Documented ceasefire violations

LNA and GNA forces exchanged accusations of ceasefire violations. WB sources reported sporadic bouts of violence. On 13 Jan, an indiscriminate shell landed near Abu Shaala Mosque in Abu Salimat approximately 0200hrs. At approximately 0100hrs, heavy explosions were heard in Abu Salimand Alhadba Alkhadra areas. At approximately 2230hrs, heavy gunfire was heard in the areas of Al-Kremiya, Al-Swaniand on the Airport Road. Between 1700hrs-2000hrs, heavy explosions were heard in Ain Zara. At approximately 1430hrs, clashes resumed on the Salah Eddien frontline 1130hrs. Simultaneously, heavy sporadic gunfire was reported in Ain Zara.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

House explosion kills two & injures seven others in Bouatni



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (10 Jan) House explosion kills two and injures seven in the Bouatni area

House explosion kills two

Local reports from 10 Jan indicate a house explosion resulted in two fatalities and seven injuries, including two children, in Benghazi's Bouatni area. The cause of the explosion is unknown.

LNA detains Italian-flagged vessel

On 12 Jan, LNA units detained an Italian-flagged commercial vessel sailing towards Misrata Port, forcing it to dock at Benghazi Port. The move closely follows the LNA's announcement of military zones at Misrata and Khoms ports, warning any vessel in violation will be considered a target. An LNA Navy official stated the vessel's crew were under investigation and the vessel was being searched. The official noted that the vessel and its crew would be released provided nothing suspicious or illegal is found onboard after unloading its cargo in Benghazi. Overall, the incident would highlight LNA intent to assert its sovereignty over Libyan waters.

6. What's next

Skirmishes in the West & opposition to negotiations as Berlin Conference proceeds

POLITICAL FORECAST

All eyes are now set on the Berlin Conference slated for 19 Jan. The Berlin Process has been laid out by the UNSMIL's Ghassan Salame and will include military, economic, and political tracks. Salame aimed to activate all tracks in January, and stated the economic track began on 05 Jan with an inclusive meeting held in Tunis. Salame added that the second military track is due to be launched soon and will address a ceasefire, arms embargo, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process and Counter-Terrorism (CT). This will be followed by the third track due to be launched before the end of Jan, which includes political dialogue likely to take place in Geneva, Switzerland. Meanwhile, Putin and Erdogan's call for ceasefire came amid a flurry of diplomatic activity as Italy and the European Union rushed to achieve breakthroughs on the Libyan file this week. GNA PM Faye Serraj visited Brussels while LNA commander Haftar met with Italian PM Giuseppe Conte for a couple of hours in Rome. Serraj was scheduled to meet Conte on the way back from Brussels but cancelled his trip reportedly upon learning that Haftar was present in the city. Reports allege Italy attempted to secure a meeting between Haftar and Serraj. Rumours of a meeting between the two prompted the GNA to refute in an official capacity claims that Serraj flew to Rome to meet with Haftar. Separately, whilst Putin and Erdogan met in Turkey, foreign ministers of Italy, Greece, Cyprus, France, and Egypt, gathered in Cairo to discuss Libya. In a joint press conference, the FMs of Greece, Cyprus, France, and Egypt, rejected Turkey's maritime and security agreements with the GNA and declared them void. Notably, Italian FM Luigi Di Maio attended the meeting as an observer but did not take part in the joint press conference or sign statements.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Writing for *Malta Today*, Raphael Vassallo interviews James Sater, lecturer at the University of Malta's International Relations department, for his views on the Libyan political and security situation. Sater first explores Turkey's recent involvement in Libya and how it has raised the stakes in the conflict. More importantly, Sater analyses the LNA's recent capture of Sirte and its ramifications on the peace process. Sater argues that the fact that battle lines are fluid has undermined the feasibility of a ceasefire. He states: "But the rise in international concern about Libya is not due only to the actions of other countries – in this case, Turkey – in the region. Recently, General Haftar has launched a series of military campaigns in a push to capture Tripoli: Sirte is part of that project, as the town is a stepping stone to the capital – strategically located halfway between Tripoli and Benghazi. The trouble is that, with Haftar in control of Sirte, it becomes difficult for the UN-led peace initiative to continue as planned. The first part of the UN envoy Ghassan Saleh's three-point initiative, a ceasefire, is impossible to achieve as long as the military lines keep shifting. So, the fact that in this conflict, military forces are still moving – and that foreign support or involvement, including now Turkey's, can go on to make a decisive tactical difference to the outcome – jeopardises the reconciliation process. It makes it difficult to reach compromises; even dirty ones, such as having warlords in government."

SECURITY FORECAST

Whilst the gradual resumption of operations at Tripoli's Mitiga airport stands as a positive development, MJL will remain exposed to further targeting in the short to medium term. Intent to target the airport is likely high among local armed groups, including Al-Bugra militia and other pro-LIFG elements, especially if the GNA's political negotiations prompt a shift in sentiment. Meanwhile, any changes to the fragile ceasefire and/or resumption of hostilities would reinstate the threat of targeting by the LNA. On the frontlines, the reported gradual withdrawal of Russian mercenaries fighting in support of Haftar, if confirmed, would have significant repercussions on the LNA's posture in Tripoli. Separately, with the Berlin Conference slated for 19 Jan and current diplomatic/political activity, there is a possibility local opposition to negotiations will turn violent across major cities, especially in GNA-controlled territory. Meanwhile, LIFG opposition to the GNA's negotiations could resume combat operations against the LNA and may even result in targeted attacks against GNA government officials. Moving to the central region, the strategic loss of Sirte to LNA forces on 06 Jan continues to reverberate through GNA ranks. In the Misrata and Sirte districts, the security environment will remain fluid and the timing of the ceasefire negotiations would prove delicate given the LNA's recent gains. As of 13 Jan, Haftar's forces continue to maintain positions in Al-Washka, West of Sirte. Misrata factions, especially Islamist-leaning groups, are likely skeptical of any agreement that would help Haftar's forces consolidate recent gains in the area. A reported gathering of forces in the area may result in skirmishes, especially after LNA hints at a move towards Tawergha further West. Meanwhile, the LNA may seek to gain new positions in Zliten and other cities in the West.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Gamal Essam El-Din reports Aguila Saleh's visit and speech at the Egyptian parliament for *Al-Ahram online (English)*. Of note, the speech was made on 12 Jan, and Saleh alluded to the possibility of requesting Egypt to deploy troops to Libya if Turkey was to deploy forces on the ground. Saleh's Egyptian counterpart, Ali Abdul Aal, warned that if its national security is at stake, Egypt could prioritise a military solution over a political one in Libya. The author quotes in his piece Saleh stating: "History will never forget Egypt's firm support for Libya in its current crisis." "Dear Egyptian MPs, please know that Libya is facing Turkish aggression and terrorist operations led by some countries which claim themselves to be Muslim ones," Saleh said, adding that "Turkey is trying its best to spread chaos on the Libyan land in terms of a proxy war that seeks to achieve the interests of some terrorist groups." According to Saleh, Turkey has a bloody history, not only in Libya, but in many Arab countries. "There is a fascist dictator who is using terrorist groups for targeting the national Arab states in Syria and Libya in the name of religion and for resurrecting what is called 'the Ottoman Caliphate.'" "In this respect, Turkey moved to exploit what is called the presidential council in Tripoli to achieve its malicious objectives in Libya, and for this reason El-Serraj, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood, was pushed to sign the agreements with Turkey," Saleh said, adding that "These agreements opened the door wide for Turkey's interference in Libya's internal affairs in the same style they did in Syria." "Erdogan claims that Libya is an Ottoman state and that he wants the Ottoman colonialism to be back to Libya to restore the shameful past of Ottomans there." According to Saleh, the illegitimate Government of National Accord in Tripoli also opened the door wide for terrorist militias to control Libya and to play havoc with the lives of the Libyan people. "The memorandums reached with Turkey did not get the approval of the Libyan parliament and so they should be considered null and void, not to mention that they represent a kind of treason that well condemn," said Saleh."

About Whispering Bell



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