



# 1. The Big Picture

## Tribes advance LNA's political interests amid uncertainty over conflict

This week, levels of military activity between Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA) forces led by Khalifa Haftar continued to rise, though positions remain unchanged and combat is limited to intermittent skirmishes and heavy artillery shelling. Neither the GNA nor Haftar's forces want to assume responsibility for an all-out escalation, despite mounting evidence that the 12 Jan truce is no longer holding.

The LNA's strategy is to wait for GNA forces to mount an offensive first before justifying any retaliatory action. This was highlighted by LNA spokesperson Ahmed Al-Mismary who confirmed forces remain in position and reserve the right to respond to GNA violations and conduct preemptive strikes. Al-Mismary claimed the LNA continues to monitor GNA preparations for an offensive across all combat zones.

In broad strokes, the narrative is gradually shifting towards escalation. The LNA's Head of Moral Guidance, Brigadier Khalid Al-Mahjoub stated the LNA will pursue attempts to control remaining kilometers left before reaching the heart of the capital. On the GNA's side, Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha told Reuters the GNA will definitely move from a defensive to an offensive course of action in the short term.

Meanwhile, intra-GNA divisions continue to widen in the aftermath of tensions between Bashagha and Tripoli-based militias, specifically the Nawasi Brigade. A drive-by shooting targeting Syrian fighters stood as the first act of retaliation by the anti-Bashagha camp across the capital. Of note, Tripoli-based militias attribute the deployment of Syrian fighters to Bashagha's policies. In addition, the body of a Misrata field commander identified as Mohammed Rfaida was found dumped near Salah Eddien Traffic Lights on 07 March. Rfaida was reportedly in charge of handling some Syrian fighters supporting GNA forces. The incident was attributed to the Nawasi Brigade. More targeted attacks and assassinations are likely in the medium term against individuals/assets perceived to be close to Bashagha, Misrata, and/or the interior ministry.

Bashagha will likely continue to face opposition from local militias as he attempts to reform the security sector across the West. Of note, a statement by the US Embassy in Libya helped boost the Interior Minister's credibility this week. The US Embassy emphasized it will work with Bashagha to implement US Executive Order 13726 related to blocking property and suspending entry into the US of persons contributing to destabilizing the situation in Libya.

The GNA's weakening posture was further compounded by economic woes. The GNA is feeling the "squeeze" from the closure of terminals and ports, which has cost the Libyan economy \$ 2.6 billion to date. The GNA approved a budget of 38.5 billion LYD for 2020, down from the 46.8 billion LYD figure in 2019. In addition, the GNA established a Crisis Committee to follow up on the financial needs of

Libyan citizens. The 2020 budget comes against the backdrop of spending cuts that will be implemented by the Ministry of Finance. The focus will be on fuel subsidies and public sector salaries, which put a major financial strain on state coffers.

By contrast, Haftar continues to gain political clout from his eastern stronghold of Ar-Rajmah, where he met a high-level delegation of diplomats and advisors from France, Italy, and Germany on 03 March. Haftar reiterated the LNA's commitment to eliminating militias, in a clear indication there will be no political course until militias are disbanded. Of note, at the time of writing, Haftar met with French President Emmanuel Macron in Paris. Haftar stated he was willing to sign a ceasefire if militias respect it, in yet another indicator of the little prospect of an end to the conflict in the medium term.

Haftar's resolute opposition to any form of negotiations comes in the aftermath of the failure of the political track. Commitment to uphold the Berlin Conference's outcomes has realistically faded away after the resignation of Ghassan Salame, the head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). Only a renewed diplomatic push by Moscow could bring parties back to the negotiating table.

Looking ahead, regardless of whether Moscow is able to broker a permanent ceasefire in Libya, Turkey will continue to face an uphill struggle in-country. Militarily, the LNA successfully bypassed Turkish air defence systems with the use of heavy artillery shelling across the capital. Ankara will find it more difficult to shore up its presence in Libya when EU countries officially deploy the recently-agreed naval mission off Libya's coast.

On the political front, Ankara continues to face hostile domestic audiences. Pro-LNA tribes and civil society members who recently orchestrated the oil blockade are now carving out an alternative political path in a bid to combat foreign invasion and oust the GNA from "within". One of the key arguments presented by the pro-LNA tribes to woo other tribesmen is "let us first counter foreign Turkish invasion and deal with our differences later". In a follow up to the Tarhunah tribal forum, the High Council of Libyan tribes concluded its first meeting in Harawah on 05 March and agreed to form a High Committee headed by the tribal head of Tarhunah, Saleh Al-Fendi. Tribes are now advancing the LNA's interests and building on gains already made on the political front by the interim government and House of Representatives (HoR). Ousting the GNA and forming a unity government remains a cornerstone of this political agenda.



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### KEY POINTS

- Haftar meets Macron in Paris
- GNA approves reduced 2020 budget
- Bashagha continues to face opposition from militias

# 2. National Security Map

Military build-up in Sabratah, Surman & Zawiya; large LNA reinforcements spotted towards Al-Weshka

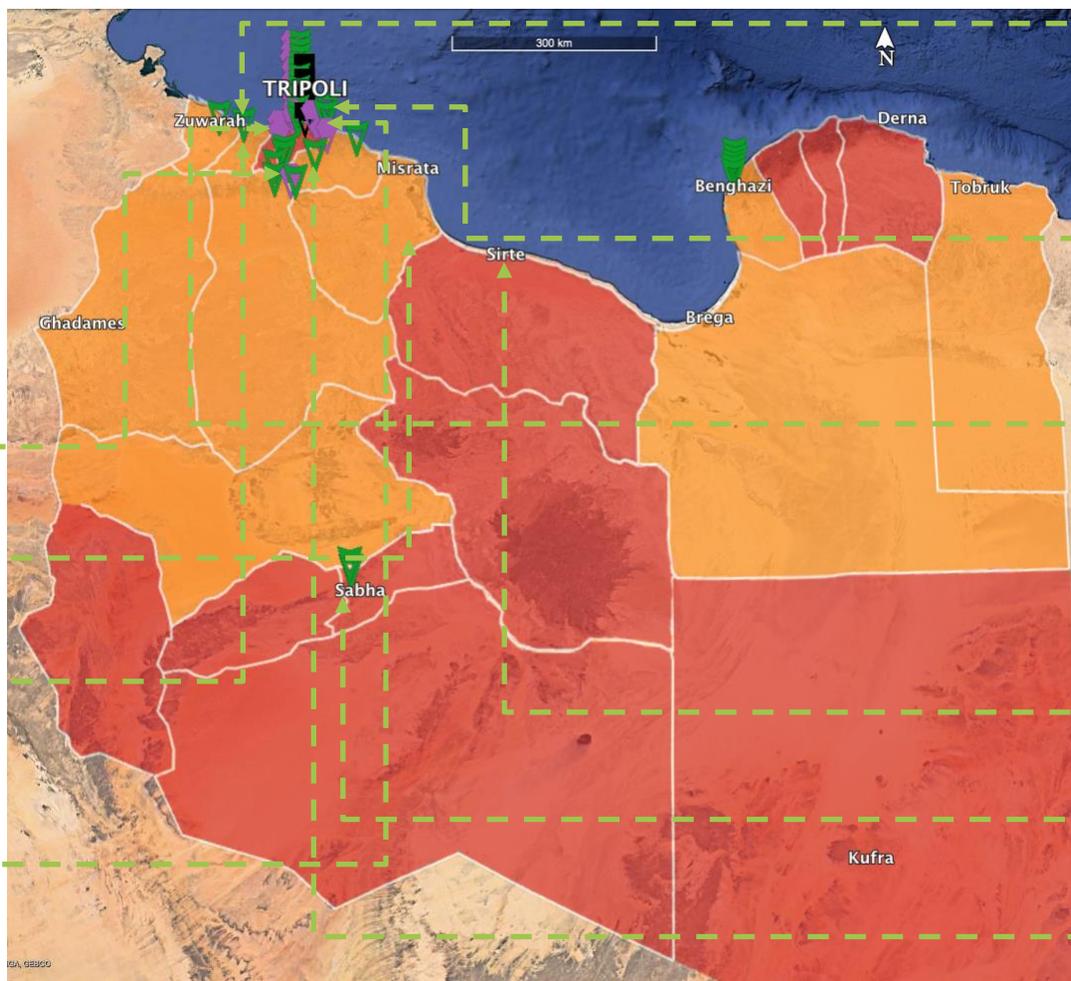
## Key

### THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

### EVENT INDICATORS

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



Large LNA reinforcements, including the 128 Infantry Battalion, have been reported flocking to Surman and Sabratah on 06 March. Pro-LNA accounts claim multiple GNA forces under the Joint Ops commander Osama Juwaili have been transferred from the Aziziyah frontline to Zawiya ahead of a GNA-sanctioned offensive on the pro-LNA towns of Surman and Sabratah.

Tensions continue to grow in the vicinity of Garaboli as LNA forces led by Tarhunah's 9th Brigade "Al-Kaniat" advanced in the Al-Rawajeh engagement axis on 04 March. Reports indicate a company affiliated with the 9th Brigade and led by Motaz Zakouzi carried out a tactical operation against GNA forces.

Skirmishes erupted between Zawiya armed factions and Al-Dawi militia (55th Battalion) led by Muammar Al-Dawi in the Syad area at approximately 1700hrs on 07 March. The skirmishes erupted at a petrol station after a group affiliated with the Zawiya armed factions assaulted a militiaman affiliated with Al-Dawi militia after the latter provoked them.

Large LNA convoys have been reported travelling via Sirte and towards Al-Weshka frontline. Reports suggest some 500 vehicles were spotted on 03 March. The LNA's 128 Infantry Battalion was the latest to mobilise and join the frontlines westward on 03 March.

Unidentified assailants carjacked a local doctor's white Toyota Corolla vehicle in Sabha's Al-Mahdiya area in the afternoon of 02 Mar. Locals in the area managed to chase and recover the vehicle in Sabha's Berdi area.

LNA forces reportedly detained four pro-GNA forces from Gharyan who were conducting reconnaissance in the vicinity of Tarhunah on 03 Mar.

Pro-LNA accounts hinted at a possible upcoming offensive to seize Gharyan, the town south of Tripoli captured by pro-GNA forces in June 2019.

An LNA airstrike targeted GNA-aligned positions in Abu Grein on 01 Mar.

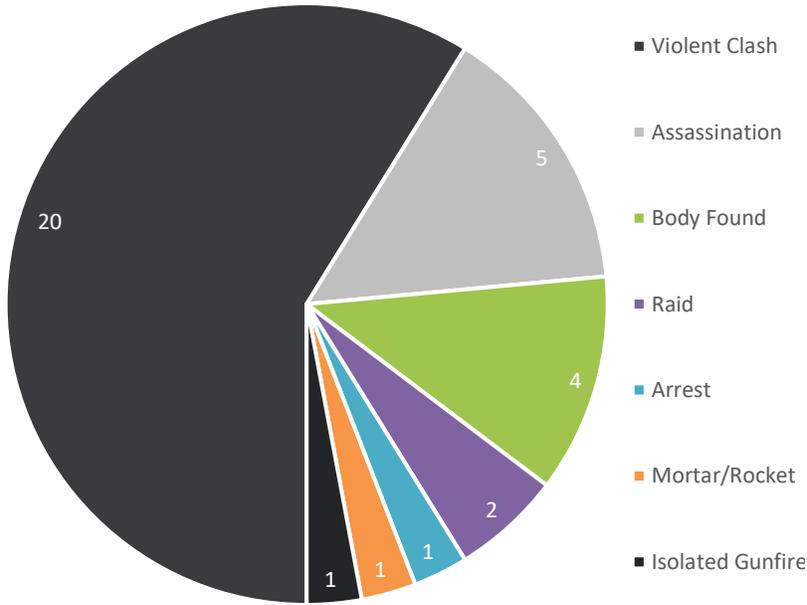
The LNA's Internal Security apparatus intercepted a vehicle en route to Tunis from Tripoli's Al-Dahra. The vehicle was allegedly stopped in Sabratah with members of the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB), Special Deterrence Force (SDF) and Nawasi Brigade onboard. The pro-LNA reports allege the militiamen were fleeing Tripoli.

The GNA's Qaser Al-Akhyar security room, under the Central Military Region, ordered a curfew in the vicinity of Garaboli from 2300hrs to 0600hrs until further notice. The curfew extends to areas along the coastal road from Al-Gwea CP to Al-Neqqaza CP.

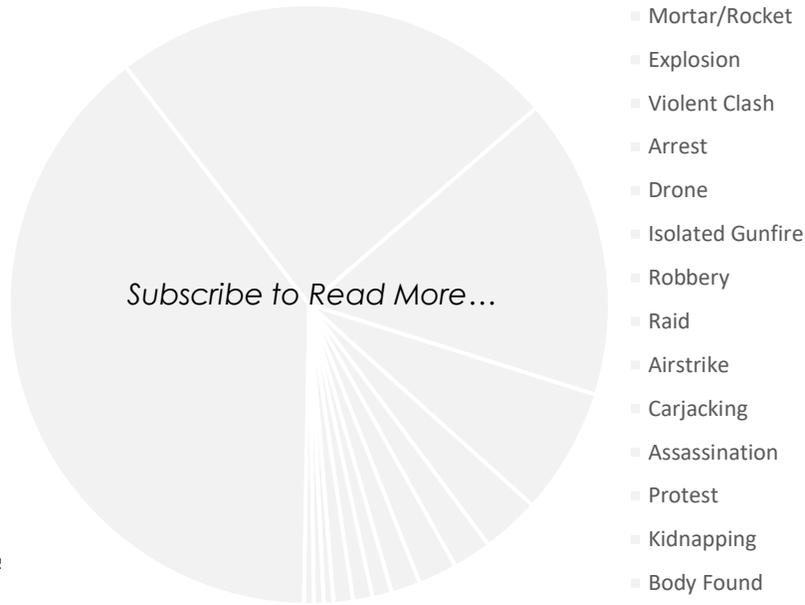
### 3. Nationwide Security Analysis

Tripoli clashes dominate fatality toll; politically-motivated assassinations on rise

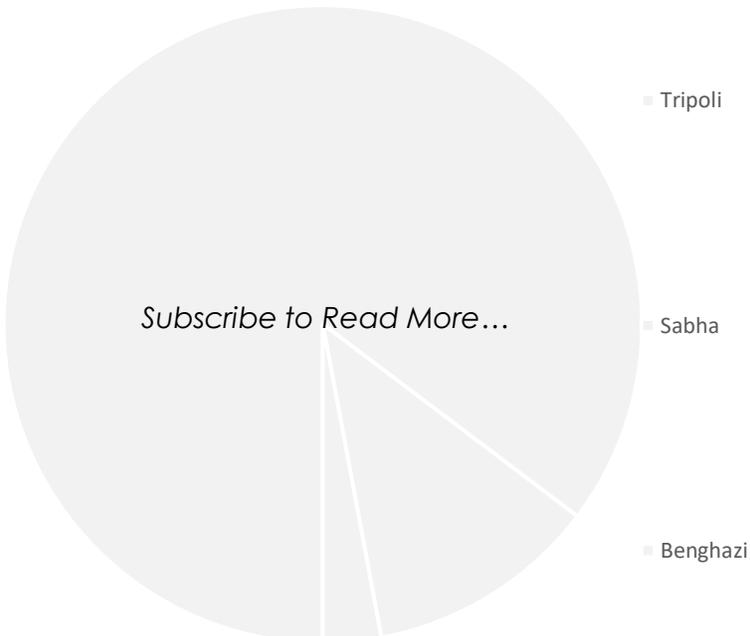
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



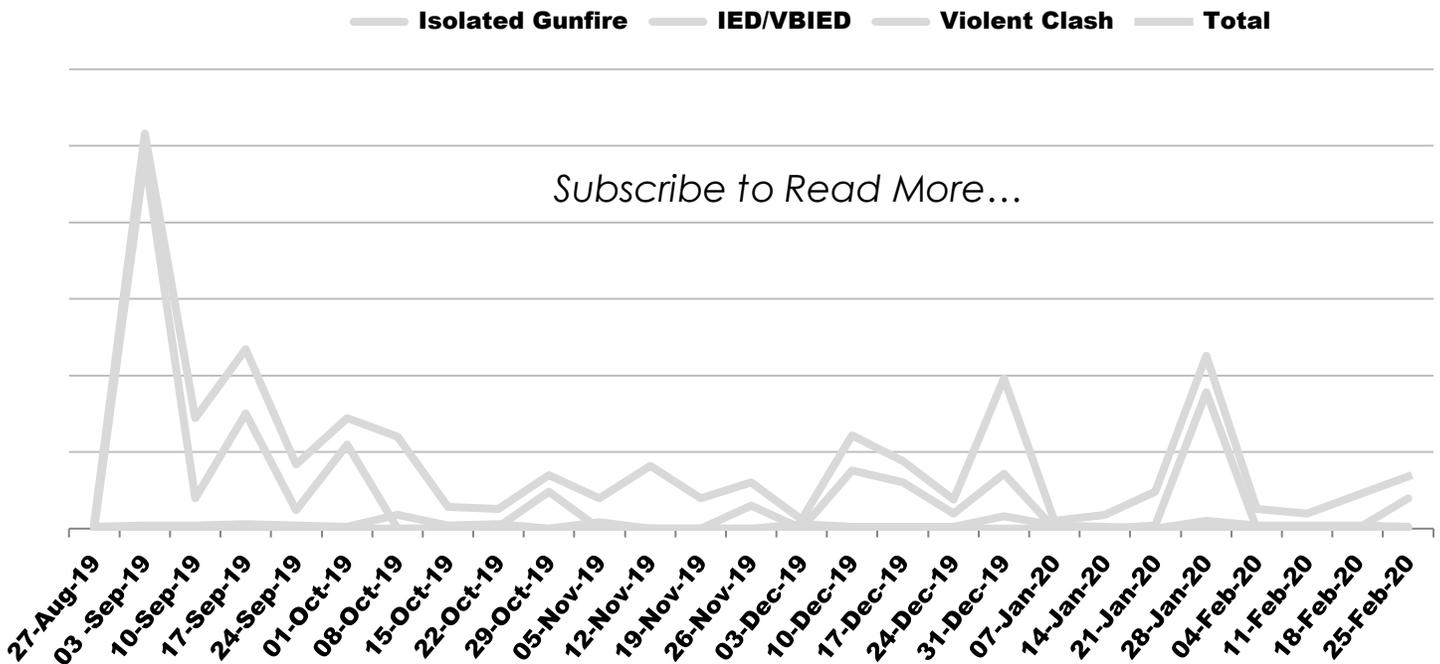
Nationwide fatalities by national district (Past week)



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 34 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 24 deaths reported last week and 10 the week before, marking a relative increase in the number of fatalities recorded in contrast to the previous week amid a resumption of military activity and subsequent casualties as a result. This week, the Libyan National Army (LNA) claimed 12 Government of National Accord (GNA) forces were killed in Tripoli's clashes. Similarly, the GNA claimed eight LNA units were killed in combat operations, bringing the total number as a result of violent clashes to 20. Meanwhile, one civilian fatality was reported as a result of an intensified shelling campaign across Tripoli. Beyond military activity, this week saw five assassinations, including three pro-GNA Syrian fighters and two pro-LNA locals from Tarhuna and Bani Walid. In addition, a man succumbed to his wounds after being tortured by the Ghneiwa militia on suspicion of LNA support. An additional fatality was recorded as a result of an isolated gunfire case in Benghazi resulting in the death of a Sudanese worker, and four other fatalities were recorded due to four bodies found in Sabha in the south. Beyond, two fatalities were recorded during raids conducted in Tripoli and Benghazi.

Meanwhile, similar to last week's statistics, this week saw 75 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, up from 73 in the previous week. Violent clashes also saw a slight increase with 31 recorded this week, up from 28 last week. Meanwhile, the number of airstrikes conducted remains relatively low, with two airstrikes conducted throughout the reporting period in Tripoli's Wadi Al-Rabei area and in the Abu Grein vicinity. Meanwhile, WB recorded an evident uptick in arrests reported across the country, including in Tripoli and Benghazi. Isolated gunfire cases saw a drop from 10 incidents recorded last week to four this week. Overall, sporadic criminal activity, including robberies, kidnappings, raids, carjackings and assassinations continue to be reported particularly across the western region. Several incidents were recorded throughout the country including 75 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 46 audible explosions as a result of intensified shelling, 31 violent clashes, 13 arrests, 4 isolated gunfire cases, 4 robberies, 3 raids, 2 airstrikes, 2 carjackings, 2 assassinations and 1 kidnapping.

In western Libya, WB recorded a total of 180 incidents, including 168 in Tripoli, highlighting similar numbers recorded in the region in the previous week. In Tripoli, WB recorded nine separate shelling attacks targeting Mitiga International Airport (MJI) resulting in its indefinite closure. Meanwhile, this week saw the LNA claim the downing of two GNA-affiliated Turkish unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) on the Khallat Al-Furjan frontline and in an unidentified location south of Tripoli. Among security incidents reported in the capital, skirmishes erupted on Al-Sampa Street, Tripoli's Al-Kremiya area, involving gunmen affiliated with the GNA Western Region commander Osama Juwaili at approximately 1430hrs on 01 Mar. Reports suggest a group of Chadian nationals affiliated with Juwaili were manning a CP in the area and stopped a traveller affiliated with Misrata's 301 Halbous Brigade. Tensions escalated into a gunfire exchange, allegedly resulting in some fatalities and prompting nearby shops to close. Separately, sources reported rising tensions at the Tripoli Health Services Administration under the GNA's Health Ministry. The Administration suspended work as of 02 March and its employees protested delayed salaries in front of the GNA's Ministry of Finance (Al-Sekka Road branch) near the Prime Minister's Office at approximately 1345hrs. Finance Minister Faraj Boumtari reportedly evacuated the premises. Special Deterrence Force (SDF) members then allegedly raided the Ministry and arrested some employees.

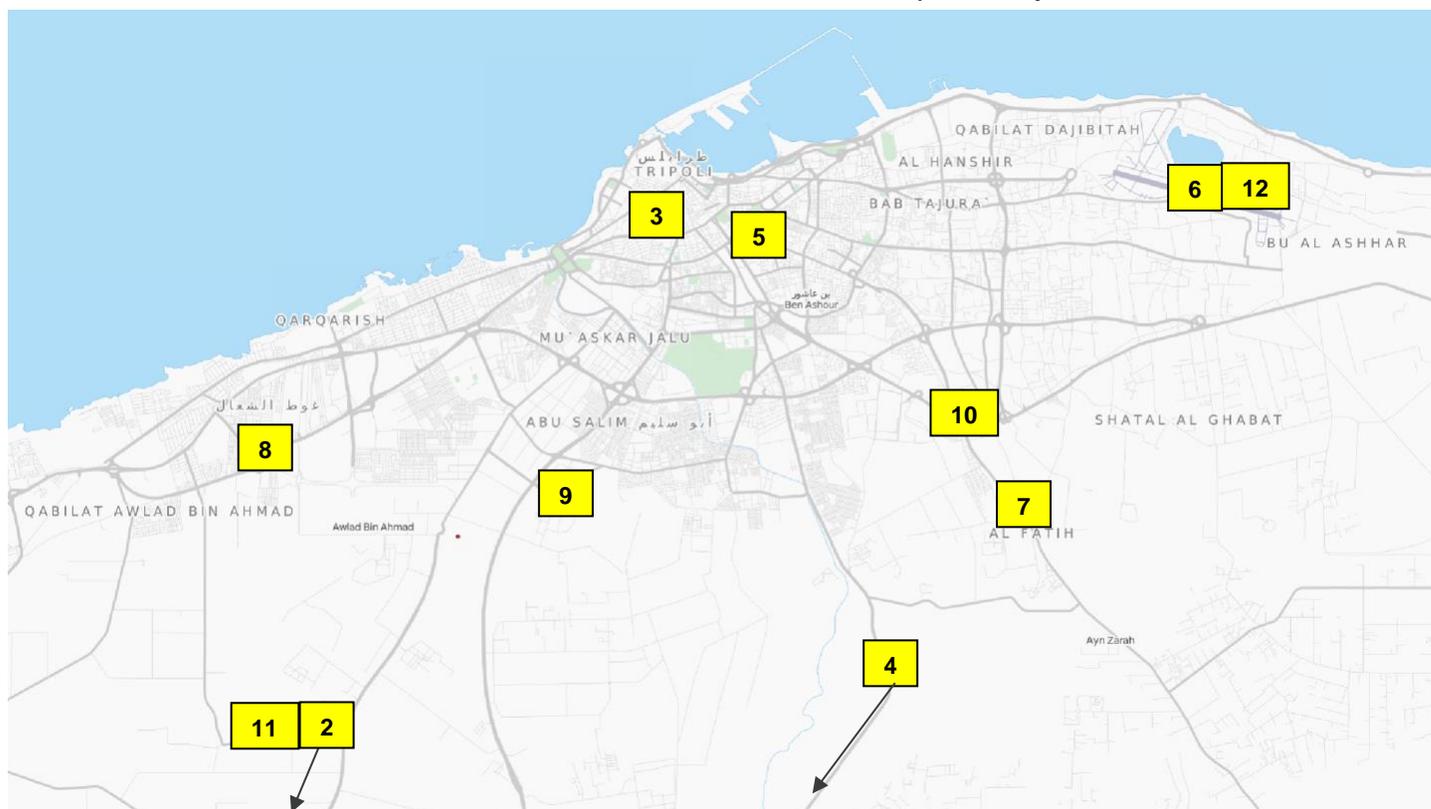
In the wider western region, WB continued to report tensions in the Garaboli vicinity amid advances by the LNA-affiliated Ninth Brigade (Al-Kaniat militia) in the Al-Rawajeh area. Meanwhile, a military build-up was reported in Sabratah, Surman and Al-Zawiya. In addition, reports continue to surface over a possible upcoming LNA offensive on Gharyan to recapture the city after it fell to GNA forces in June 2019. Beyond, reports of large LNA military reinforcements being sent from Sirte towards Al-Weshka frontline continue to circulate.

Turning to the central region, WB recorded no incidents in the city of Sirte, though tensions remain high due to proximate military activity in the Misrata district.

In the southern region, WB recorded a carjacking incident in Sabha, as well as four bodies found in the city. Reports indicate the bodies of two men and two women were found dumped on a road toward Sabha's Al-Jadid area on 01 Mar. Initial unconfirmed reports suggest the bodies belonged to individuals practicing sorcery. Furthermore, in the eastern region, WB recorded three arrests and one raid in the city of Benghazi. No other incidents were recorded across the region.

## 4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

MJI shelled amid closure; militia-sanctioned politically-motivated crime on rise



### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (29-02 Mar) GNA forces close last road linking Wadi Al-Rabei with Garaboli
2. (01 Mar) Gunfire exchange during skirmishes b/w GNA Commander Juwaili's forces
3. (01 Mar) Self-declared CEO of Afriqiyah Airways kidnapped in front of his house
4. (02 Mar) LNA downs Turkish UAV over Khallat Al-Forjan after taking off from MJI
5. (02 Mar) GNA Finance Minister evacuates office during protest held by healthcare staff
6. (02-08 Mar) Barrage of shells target MJI; air traffic suspended & flights diverted to Misrata
7. (03 Mar) Ghneiwa militia arrests suspected pro-LNA male at CP, later dies of torture
8. (03 Mar) Tensions at Ghut Shaal roundabout over kidnapping of unofficial Afriqiyah CEO
9. (04 Mar) Shells land on Akakus Oil Operations HQ; NOC confirms firefighters attacked by gunfire
10. (04 Mar) Gunmen affiliated with Nawasi Brigade assassinate three Syrian fighters
11. (05 Mar) Civilian killed by stray bullet
12. (07-08 Mar) LNA shells Turkish Ops. Room in MJI & downs Turkish UAV south of Tripoli

### MJI targeted with shells amid closure

WB sources reported nine separate shelling attacks targeting Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport (MJI) between 02-07 Mar. The Libyan National Army (LNA) claimed responsibility for the majority of the attacks that targeted Turkish military assets inside the airport's military base. Whilst no casualties were recorded as a result of the consecutive attacks, sources confirmed an Afriqiyah Airways aircraft was hit with shrapnel after it landed from Tunis on 02 Mar. In response to the heavy shelling, MJI suspended flight operations and diverted all operations to Misrata International Airport (MRA).

### Nawasi Brigade assassinates 3 Syrian fighters

Sources reported the Nawasi Brigade assassinated three Syrian fighters in a drive-by shooting Tripoli's Al-Furnaj, near Victoria cafe, at approximately 1530hrs on 04 March. The Syrian fighters were reportedly driving a white Toyota Hilux vehicle and stopped by an electronics shop in the area to buy mobile devices. Three gunmen wearing masks affiliated with the Nawasi Brigade fired from a vehicle instantly killing two Syrian fighters, while the third later succumbed to his wounds as he was being interrogated en route to the hospital. The incident is a clear indicator of the hostility towards Syrian fighters. The incident is likely tied to recent tensions with GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha. In response to Bashagha's comment in relation to militias, multiple Tripoli-based armed groups claimed the hiring of Syrians by Bashagha was one of the main reasons behind the Minister's bold stance and call for reform. The Tripoli-based armed groups claimed Bashagha was only confident because he hired Syrians to protect him. The development is significant as it highlights one of the first actions taken by the anti-Bashagha camp in

in Tripoli in the aftermath of recent tensions between armed groups in the capital. The anti-Bashagha camp will likely continue to carry out similar acts of retaliation across Tripoli.

### Ghneiwa militia offshoot releases multiple detainees

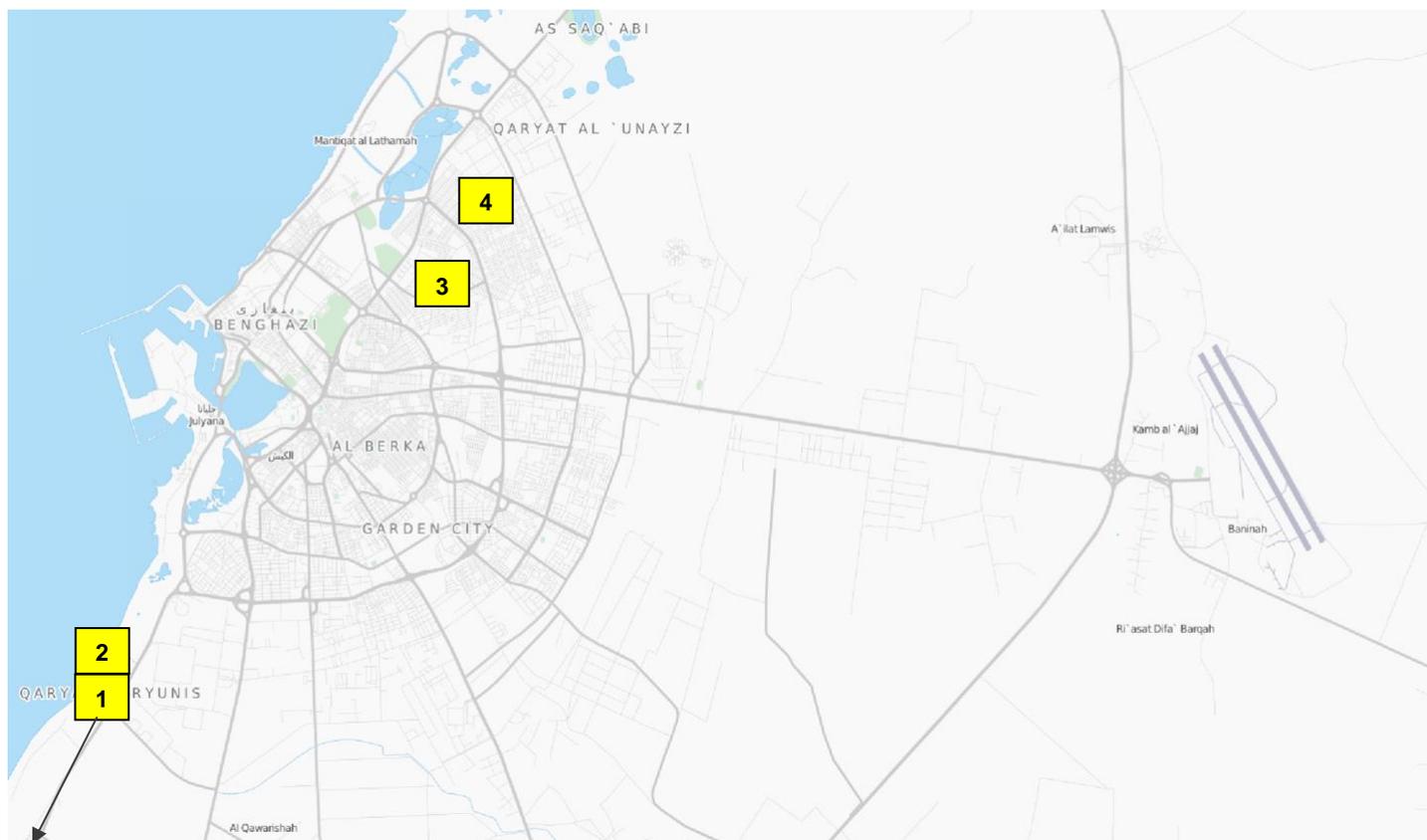
Sources reported the release of multiple individuals held in the recent wave of kidnappings and arbitrary detentions carried out by the Ghneiwa militia offshoot led by Abd Al-Hameid Al-Aneizi, locally known as "Al-Madghota". While it was initially thought the arrests were based on suspicions of sympathizing with the LNA, the latest reports indicate Al-Madghota carried out the arrests in response to a media campaign recently launched against him. Tensions continue to be high between Tripoli-based militias in the aftermath of the rift with GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha. Deep mistrust prevails between armed groups who suspect Bashagha is attempting to disband militias across the capital to facilitate the entry of Haftar's forces.

### SDF-held unofficial Afriqiyah Airways CEO released

WB sources reported the Special Deterrence Force's (SDF) recent detention of Ali Daw may have been linked to his attempt to establish a parallel Afriqiyah Airways Tripoli office after declaring himself as the airline's CEO. The official CEO of Afriqiyah Airways remains Lutfi Abdullah. The latest information would counter claims Daw's arrest was related to GNA pressure on airlines to maintain operations at MJI. Although such pressure has been documented on several occasions, Daw's detention is more likely tied to competition over Afriqiyah Airways's leadership. Of note, reports indicate Daw was released between 04-05 March after he was kidnapped in front of his house on Tripoli's Omar Al-Mokhtar Street on 01 Mar.

## 5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

### Al-Werfalli attempts to defuse tribal tensions between Darsi, Awaqir, Werfalla



#### KEY INCIDENTS

1. (03 Mar) Drive-by shooting targets Gardina Police Station; officer injured
2. (04 Mar) CID arrest prison escapee convicted of murder
3. (05 Mar) Three burglars raid health clinic; Sudanese worker killed
4. (05 Mar) Drug traffickers in Al-Wheishi open fire on CID members during arrest

#### Sudanese worker killed in raid on clinic

On 05 March in the evening, three burglars raided Shuhada Al-Salawi Clinic in Benghazi's As Sulmani area, stabbing and killing a Sudanese cleaner who resisted the attack. Reports allege security forces later captured the three perpetrators on 06 March. Attacks against hospitals and medical facilities are common, especially in the East. Hospital supplies are a soft target for criminals.

#### CID arrests prison escapee

On 04 March, Benghazi's Criminal Investigations Department (CID), under the Security Directorate, arrested a prison escapee convicted of murder and sentenced to capital punishment. The individual reportedly escaped from a Tripoli prison in 2011 and was found in Benghazi's Qaryounis area.

#### Health authorities deny COVID-19 cases

Benghazi health authorities have denied rumours of cases of the COVID-19 virus ("coronavirus"). The National Centre for Disease Control denied that any cases had been discovered in Benghazi. Reports alleged an infected individual from Battah died from the virus in Al Marj Hospital on 06 March. Social media reports allege the man's death was reported as resulting from acute pneumonia in an attempt to cover up the incident.

#### Suspects arrested for targeting police station

The Security Directorate of Salouq-Qaminis reported the arrested of two wanted suspects

behind the attack on Gardina Police Station, South of Benghazi, on 03 Mar. According to the Directorate, the suspects conducted a drive-by shooting resulting in the injury of a police member. The first suspect was arrested despite his resistance, which prompted security forces to shoot him in the leg. Meanwhile, the second suspect surrendered after hearing of the injury of the first suspect.

#### New force to protect public & private property

The spokesperson of the LNA's "Saiqa" Special Forces, Miloud Zway, declared a new force will be established to protect public and private property. Zway claimed the new force will help all civilian property owners with title deeds whose property has been misappropriated. While little is known about the force, Zway's statement is directly related to Benghazi and eastern cities under LNA control. Property misappropriation cases have gone underreported although they have multiplied over the past few years, especially in Benghazi. Reports implicate the LNA's Military Investment Authority in some cases.

#### Al-Werfalli attempts to defuse tribal tensions

Mahmoud Al-Werfalli, the LNA commander wanted by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged war crimes, was spotted delivering a speech at a tribal gathering, emphasizing fraternal ties in an effort to defuse tensions between the Darsi, Awaqir, and Werfalla tribes. Al-Werfalli's speech would closely follow a mobilization by the Awaqir tribes at Benghazi's Al-Kish square, where the tribesmen accused Al-Werfalli of seizing their lands by force across Benghazi. Tensions between pro-LNA tribes are often underreported. Al-Werfalli has been recently very active on the tribal front. Reports allege he has been tasked with setting up a pro-LNA force in Bani Walid and bridging the gap with pro-Gaddafi elements.

## 6. What's next

### GNA divisions widen; possible offensive combat operations

#### POLITICAL FORECAST

Amid dim prospects for a resolution of the conflict via UN-led political negotiations, Libya's path to stabilization remains uncertain, especially after the resignation of UN envoy Ghassan Salame. Nevertheless, there is a possibility Moscow - seen as the only player capable of compelling the LNA to accept an agreement - will renew efforts to establish a permanent ceasefire now that European Union (EU) attempts have essentially failed. The outcome of a Russia-led political effort will be determined by concessions made during talks between Erdogan and Putin over Syria's Idlib enclave. Analysts are of the view while the latest Syria deal presented by Putin is unfavourable to Erdogan, Turkey may have obtained assurances over the Libya file, namely that Russia may scale down its support for Haftar. This was made clear in Erdogan's remarks on 6<sup>th</sup> March, when he declared that Putin promised to take positive steps in regard to the Russian Wagner private military contractors (PMCs). Meanwhile, the scale of diplomatic relations between Damascus and Benghazi was highlighted by a visit of the interim government high-level delegation to Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad on 02 March. The visit came ahead of the reopening of the Libyan diplomatic representation in Damascus on 03 March. The Syrian government is officially the first to recognize the Benghazi-based government. The growing ties between Damascus and Benghazi are the result of Turkey's expanding involvement in Libya. Regionally, interim government FM Abdulhadi Al-Hweij continues to be active on the diplomatic front with a Maghreb-wide tour. Al-Hweij visited both Morocco and Algeria in his capacity as envoy of the HoR Speaker Aguila Saleh.

#### WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

Fehim Tastekin for *Al-Monitor* explores the feasibility of Turkey's involvement in Libya and whether Ankara has enough clout to maintain a foothold in the East Mediterranean in the long term. Tastekin argues that factors surrounding the Libyan conflict have made it harder for Ankara to deepen its involvement in Libya. The author quotes experts assessing that while Ankara's involvement has rebalanced the military equation on the ground, the LNA and its backers stepped up their involvement too in response. According to the article, the situation means that Ankara would have to deepen its involvement further to produce significant outcomes on the ground. Tastekin concludes "By sending troops to Libya, Erdogan hoped to achieve some form of partnership with Russia, similar to the one in Syria that has alternated between collaboration and conflict. Libya has thus become the second most important topic in Turkey's bargaining with Russia, which has backed Hifter through the private Russian security company Wagner. Yet Erdogan's expectation that Russia's involvement in Libya will play into his hands has not held true, both because of Russian reluctance and the much greater role that Egypt and the UAE play in backing Hifter. The GNA, which has lost \$2.6 billion in revenues since Hifter's forces blockaded major oil ports and a key pipeline in January, is now calling on the United States to set up a military base in Libya to counter Russia. Washington may be wary of growing Russian influence in the region, but there are no tangible signs yet that it is willing to reopen the Libya file, shelved since the 2012 slaying of the US ambassador. And what Turkey could do in Libya is limited, given its growing involvement in Syria."

#### SECURITY FORECAST

While positions remain unchanged across Tripoli's frontlines, it is clear GNA forces are now retaliating and mobilizing greater resources to repel the LNA, highlighted by the relative increase in the number of UAV sorties and projectiles fired on LNA forces. This marks a departure from the GNA's passive defensive posture recorded in earlier months. For its part, the LNA will continue to engage in retaliatory and preemptive military operations justified on the basis of alleged GNA truce violations. Mitiga International Airport (MJI) will likely continue to be targeted in the medium term, though Misrata positions may also be exposed after LNA reports that Turkish assets have been transferred from MJI to Misrata. Meanwhile, GNA divisions are expected to widen, increasing the likelihood of targeted attacks, assassinations, and politically-charged statements. LNA forces will continue to sow divisions among pro-GNA groups, especially the Nawasi Brigade. Pro-LNA accounts allege some Nawasi members are fostering closer ties to the LNA after tensions with GNA Interior Minister Bashagha. Regardless of the veracity of these claims, rumours could exacerbate divisions. West of Tripoli, tensions could escalate into skirmishes between pro-GNA and pro-LNA armed factions West of Tripoli in Zawiya and the pro-LNA towns of Sabratah and Surman in the short term. The week was marked by multiple reports of a military build-up of LNA forces in Sabratah and Surman town, and a similar build-up by pro-GNA forces in Zawiya. East of Tripoli, the LNA will likely continue to bleed GNA forces in the Garabolli area in an effort to weaken defensive lines in Tripoli. The LNA has proven capable of advancing towards Gharabolli with little to no warning, an outcome that would effectively isolate Misrata from Tripoli and cordon off the capital.

#### LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

In an article published on *The Arab Weekly*, Libya expert Michel Cousins takes a closer look at the political context of negotiations in the aftermath of Ghassan Salame's resignation. Cousins argues that a smooth transition into a new UN envoy is unlikely to turn into reality. The author underlines issues with finding a replacement for Salame, although Deputy Special Envoy Stephanie Williams will maintain some form of continuity with Salame's three track process. Cousins argues that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres may seek an African candidate in line with the African Union's (AU) growing involvement in the Libyan conflict. Cousins concludes "For the moment, it is Williams who is left in charge in what may be a lengthy interregnum. Guterres's other problem is the view among Libyan players, and probably others, that Salame's resignation presses the restart button, that existing UNSMIL plans are dead in the water. Certainly, they are on hold until a new envoy is found, Williams persuades a reluctant White House to take a more proactive policy on Libya. That would not be an easy task although surprises cannot be ruled out in Libya. However, if it is to effect real progress in Libya, the United Nations needs to rethink what it can offer. Focused on elections and a new government as the answer to Libya's problems, it is on the wrong track. The focus must be on bringing Libyans together again. Only then is there any chance that elections and a new government could succeed."

# About Whispering Bell



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