



1. The Big Picture

Loose commitment to truce unlikely to stop fighting on the ground

The COVID-19 crisis continues to dominate the local security environment in Libya, although no cases have been reported to date. This week, as preventive control measures continued to tighten, the Government of National Accord (GNA) and Libyan National Army (LNA) made a loose commitment to stop combat activity amidst the challenges posed by the coronavirus. But while the COVID-19 crisis is set to result in a slowdown in activity, low-level attacks and military operations are expected to continue in the medium term across frontlines.

The LNA has made it clear that it will continue to retaliate and respond to alleged GNA truce violations. In fact, there is reasonable evidence to suggest the LNA's acceptance only came as a result of pressure by the US Department of State, which urged in a statement the LNA, specifically its commander Khalifa Haftar, to suspend all military operations. Closely following the State Department's call, the LNA declared it welcomed the calls for a truce but warned that it will not accept being the only party compelled to it when "the terrorist militias and the mercenaries" continue to operate unhindered across Tripoli. The LNA added that it continues to commit to the Berlin Conference's outcomes, urging the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and Conference participants to force the GNA and Turkish government to abide by the ceasefire.

In brief, the truce remains fragile and does not constitute the permanent ceasefire discussed in Belin and at the so-called 5+5 military track negotiations. The LNA will likely maintain its positions while continuing to bleed GNA forces across key engagement axes. On the ground, LNA forces made a concerted push on the Ain Zara engagement axis, specifically the main road, between 15-18 March. The LNA's slow but steady advances in Ain Zara were facilitated by artillery attacks and shelling, which resulted in the killing of prominent Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC) commander Ziad Belaam alongside at least five other members in the area.

Meanwhile, politically, the coronavirus crisis is gradually being politicized and has fuelled competition between GNA and interim government authorities to extend sovereignty over their respective areas of influence. LNA and eastern authorities are jockeying to project capability across ports of entry/exit and cities. The LNA deployed units of the 106 Brigade Group, a relatively well-equipped and organized formation, to the Musaid border with Egypt. The coronavirus crisis is also tool to gain local support, as

highlighted by the LNA's intent to establish a field hospital in Zintan.

Both the LNA and GNA are exchanging accusations of lax control measures. If a case was to be confirmed in Libya, these accusations will likely intensify and gain momentum. For its part, the GNA has been accused of favouritism by allowing key officials to return via Misrata International Airport without undergoing screening.

Of note, the GNA introduced a "nationwide" curfew from 1800-0600hrs on 22 March and ordered the permanent closure of mosques, schools, cafes, restaurants, social halls, parks...etc. However, several localities, such as Tajoura and Zintan, have implemented conflicting measures. The GNA will find it difficult to enforce these measures given its limited reach across the country.

In a separate development, intra-GNA tensions continued to evolve this week. The Tripoli Protection Force (TPF) coalition published a video incriminating GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha in a number of cases, including embezzlement, corruption, and attempts to seize Tripoli and conspire with foreign actors to disarm armed groups. The video is a short documentary that claims to present facts behind Bashagha's rise to power. The video alleges Bashagha gained influence by taking control of letters of credit (LCs) at the Central Bank of Libya (CBL). The TPF then goes on to document Bashagha's attempts to seize Tripoli by force.

In the oil & gas sector, the East-West divide was highlighted by the National Oil Corporation's (NOC) condemnation of an illegal jet fuel shipment to the East. Gulf Petroleum 4, a Liberian-flagged vessel, reportedly discharged 10k metric tons from 13-16 March at Benghazi port. The NOC published data showing a 62.65% increase in jet fuel supplies to the East in 2019. The NOC claims this increase does not correlate with the reduction in civilian traffic during the conflict, concluding the jet fuel serves a military purpose. On 22 March, Gulf Petroleum 4 suffered an explosion off Misrata's coast at approximately 1630hrs. The explosion reportedly impacted the engine room and injured an unidentified number of crew. The GNA's Navy led by Brigadier Reda Issa claimed responsibility for seizing the tanker but failed to confirm the explosion or current status of the vessel.

KEY POINTS

- Nationwide curfew from 1800-0600hrs
- LNA kills BRSC member Ziad Belaam in Ain Zara
- GNA seizes tanker delivering jet fuel to East



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2. National Security Map

Rumoured GNA attack on Abu Grein fails to materialise; GNA airstrikes target Al-Wattiyah Airbase

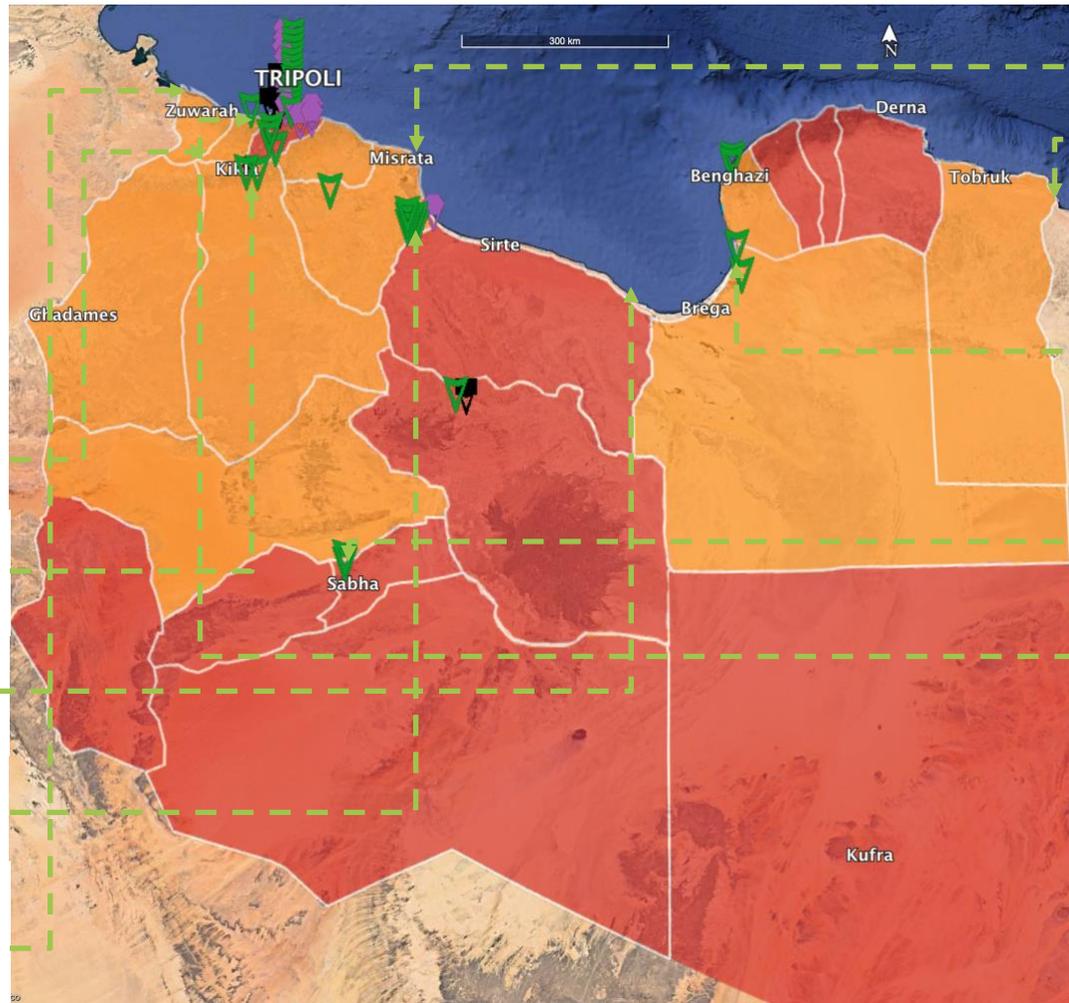
Key

THREAT INDICATORS

- Severe Threat
- High Threat
- Moderate Threat

EVENT INDICATORS

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



The Misrata Free Zone Port Administration confirmed shipping operations at the port remain uninterrupted following the GNA's decision to close all air, land, and sea ports as preventive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic.

The anti-crime unit under the east-based Interior Ministry closed the Emsaed Libya-Egypt border crossing in the afternoon on 20 March. The closure was prompted by reports that travellers had crossed into Libyan territory without undergoing thermal screening.

A patrol of the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) (Oil Crescent branch) found 25 kg of cannabis resin (hash) near Zueitina Port in the morning on 16 March. In a separate incident, the Oil Crescent Security Directorate arrested six intoxicated individuals found in possession of alcohol, white arms, and ammunition at night on 15 March.

Reports indicate unidentified assailant(s) killed a man in Sabhā's Al-Jadid area in the evening on 16 March. Initial unconfirmed reports indicate an assassination due to a tribal dispute.

Reports suggest two LNA officers have been kidnapped south of Zawiyā's coastal road. The perpetrators are reportedly affiliated with the militia led by "Al-Far".

The LNA's general command reported the Murzuq and Awbari Military Regions closed Libyan borders with Niger and Algeria until further notice on 18 March. The closure comes a day after similar measures by the Kufra Military to close borders with Sudan and Chad. On 17 March, the LNA's Subul Al-Salam Battalion, primarily operating in Al-Kufra, reported that armed patrols will mobilise towards Libya's borders with Chad and Sudan to carry out arrests of those attempting to enter the country in violation of the new govt. measures.

GNA airstrikes reportedly targeted the LNA-controlled Al-Wattiyah Airbase in the early hours of 19 March.

Unidentified gunmen killed a civilian man while attempting to carjack his vehicle in Kikla on 15 March. The victim was travelling from Brak in the Wadi Al-Shatii district and headed towards Misrata.

An Italy-flagged vessel was prohibited from docking at Ras Lanuf port on 21 March due to recent preventive measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus.

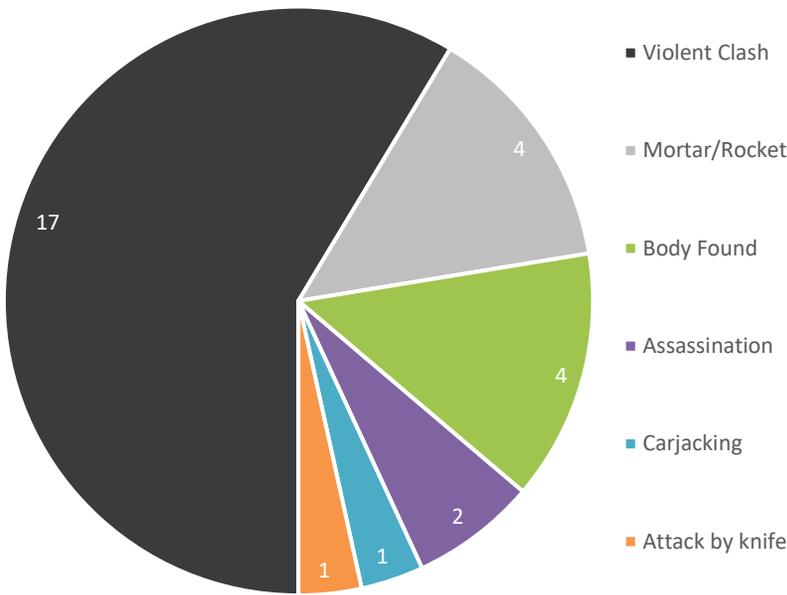
Pro-GNA accounts warned forces over LNA preparations to launch an attack on Abu Grein on 19 March. The attack has failed to materialise on the ground as of 23 March.

On 18 March, the second Libya-Tunisia border crossing of Dehiba-Wazen closed after it was previously open for returning Libyan travellers. Meanwhile, the main Libyan-Tunisian border crossing of Ras Ajdir was initially open for returning Libyans in the morning of 19 March, but later fully closed, leaving Libyan nationals stranded on the other side of the border.

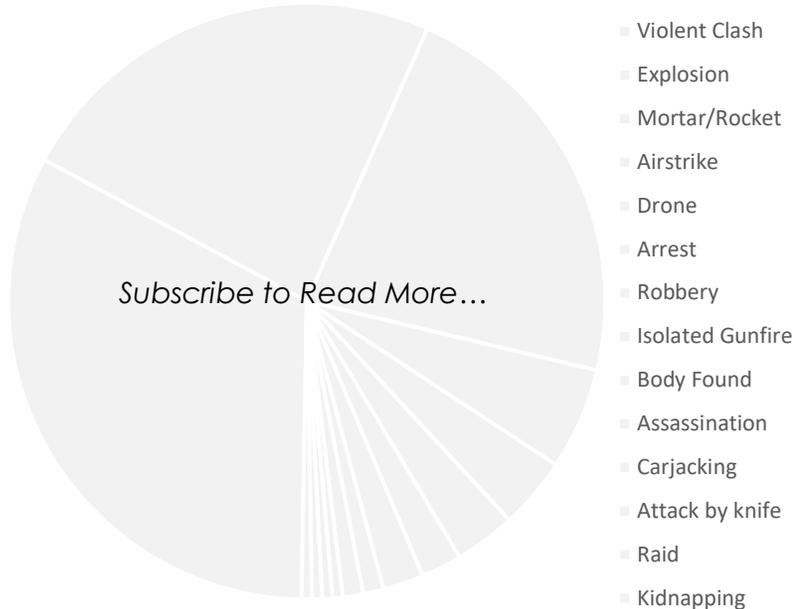
3. Nationwide Security Analysis

¾ of fatalities as a result of clashes & shelling on Tripoli's Ain Zara axis

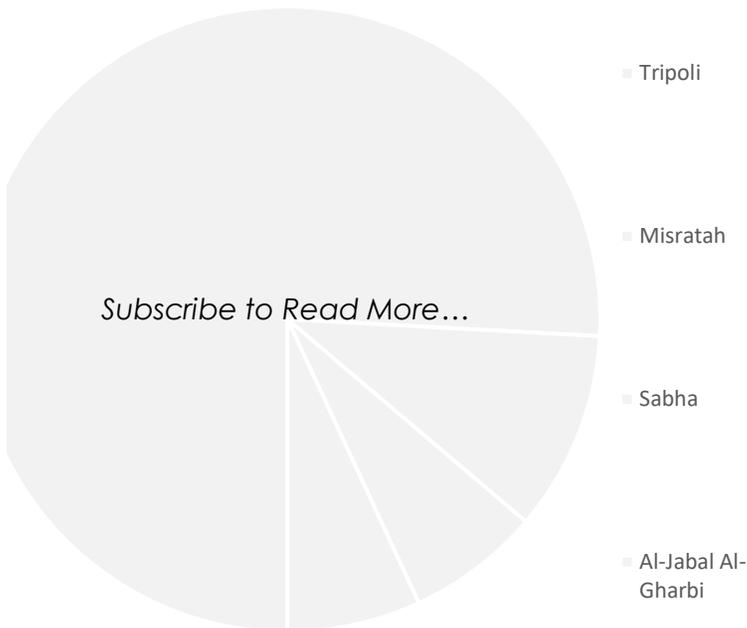
Nationwide fatalities by type of attack (Past week)



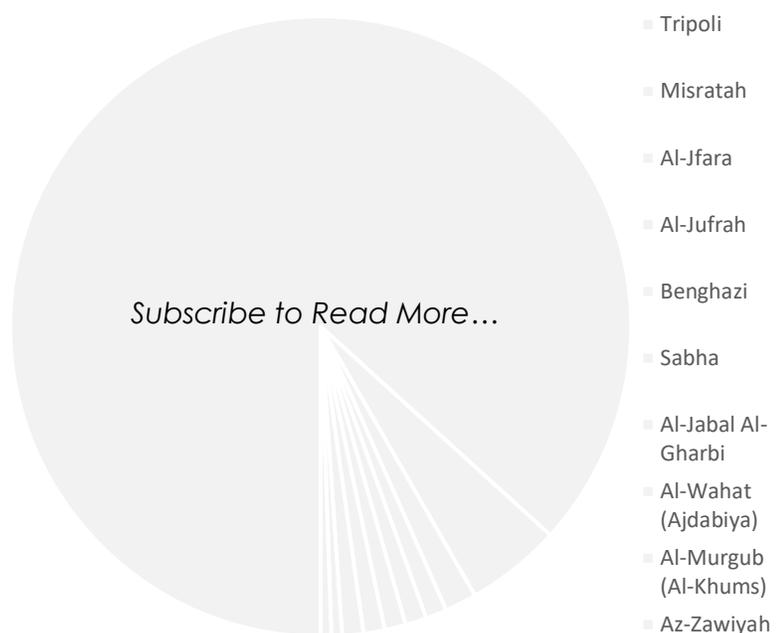
Nationwide incidents by type of attack (Past week)



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 29 confirmed deaths in Libya, which compares to 10 deaths reported last week and 24 the week before, marking an increase in the number of fatalities recorded in contrast to the previous week largely due to heavy clashes & shelling on the Ain Zara frontline resulting in at least 17 fatalities among Government of National Accord and Libyan National Army (LNA) forces. Similar to the pattern witnessed over previous weeks, the highest number of fatalities was recorded in Tripoli, followed by the Misrata, Al-Jabal Al-Gharbia and Sabha districts. Beyond fatalities recorded as a result of clashes, this week saw four fatalities as a result of indiscriminate shelling, four bodies found, two assassinations, one carjacking, and one attack by knife. Meanwhile, this week saw a significant uptick in violent clashes coinciding with LNA advances across multiple fronts. In addition, airstrikes increased from one airstrike last week to ten this week, including five conducted in Tripoli and five in Misratah. Beyond military activity, this week saw ongoing acts of criminality across the country, including assassinations, kidnappings, robberies, and gunfire-related incidents. Several incidents were recorded throughout the country including 59 violent clashes, 43 audible explosions, 40 mortar/rocket shelling incidents, 10 airstrikes, 7 drones reported flying over the capital city, 6 arrests, 4 robberies, 4 isolated gunfire cases, 2 assassinations, 2 cases of bodies found, 1 carjacking, 1 raid, 1 attack by knife and 1 raid.

In western Libya, WB recorded a total of 173 incidents, including 157 in Tripoli, marking an increase in security incidents recorded in Tripoli coinciding with an LNA push across Tripoli's southern frontlines. In Tripoli, and beyond military activity, reports indicate the National Heart Center in Tripoli's Tajoura area received the body of an unidentified man on 14 March. The cause of the man's death remains unclear. WB sources reported three men driving a white Hyundai Sonata stole a parked cabover truck and a white Hyundai Porter in front of a shop near Al-Dawahy Traffic Lights in Tripoli's Tajoura area at approximately 0430hrs on 16 March. Separately, sources reported a parked white KIA Optima was stolen in front of a house in Tripoli's Al-Batata area at approximately 0800hrs on 17 March.

In the wider western region, the Peace and Relief Society team recovered three unidentified bodies in the Wadi Souf Al-Jin area, south of Bani Walid. The bodies were recovered after a local reported their presence. The bodies likely belonged to Sub-Saharan African illegal migrants. Meanwhile, there were reports of LNA airstrikes targeting Abu Grein and Al Qaddahiyah villages in the morning and in the evening of 16 March. Separately, a man travelling from the southern region toward Misrata was killed in a carjacking incident in Kikla located in the Jabal Al-Gharbi district, whilst two LNA officers were kidnapped on Zawiya's Coastal Road.

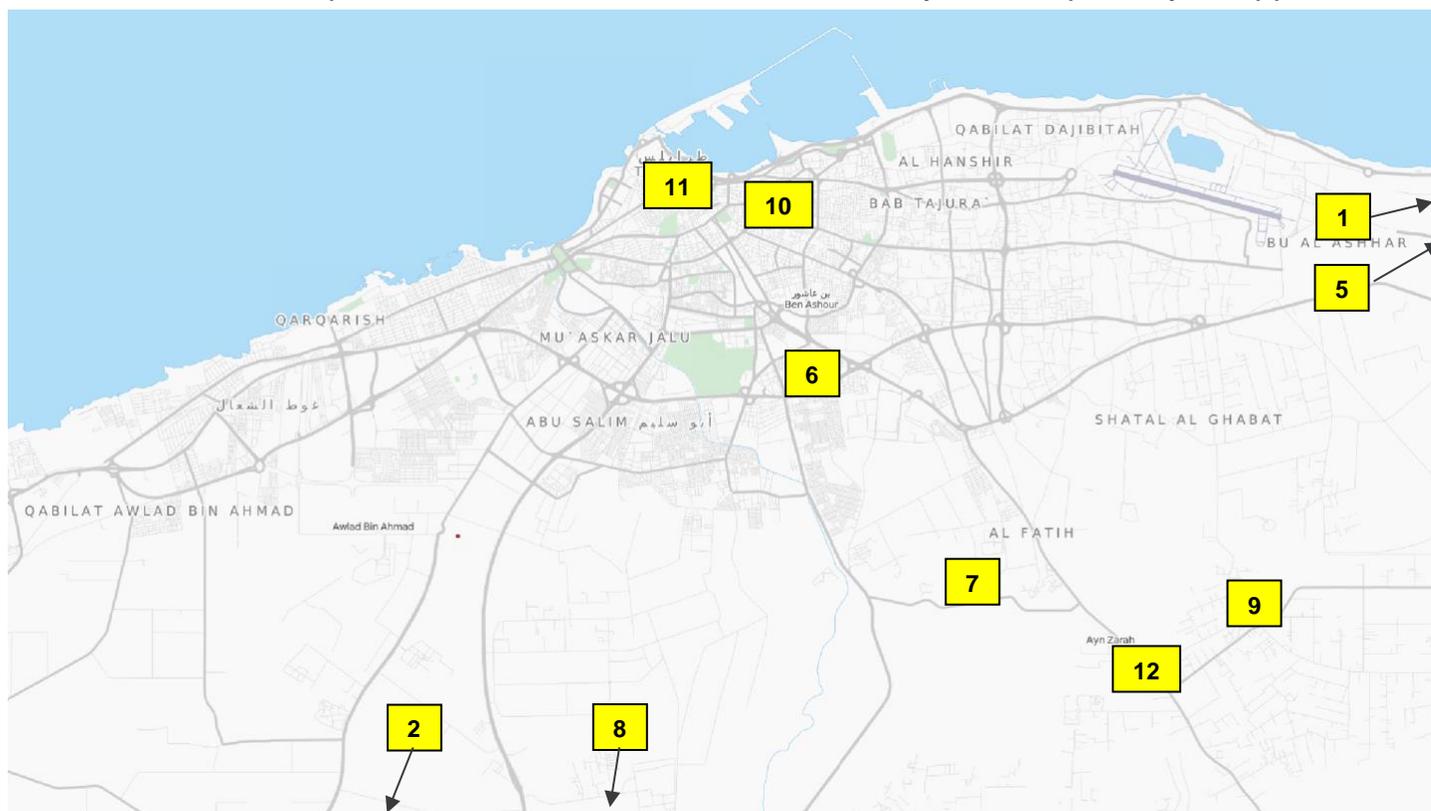
Turning to the central region, the LNA claimed its air defense systems shot down a GNA-affiliated Turkish unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) conducting a reconnaissance mission over Al-Jufra Airbase on 14 March. Separately, reports indicate heavy explosions in Houn and Waddan located in the Jufra District at approximately 1730hrs on 14 March. Initial reports indicate a GNA airstrike targeted Al-Jufra Airbase. Beyond, a curfew was announced in Sirte between 1800hrs-0600hrs starting from 19 March.

In the southern region, WB recorded an assassination and attack by knife in the region's main city of Sabha. Separately, tribes continue to mobilise in support of the LNA. The High Council of Libyan tribes, led by Tarhunah's tribal figure Salah Al-Fendi, gathered with southern tribes in Germa, a town southwest of Sabha, in the morning on 16 March. The gathering included the LNA's Kufra region military commander, Major General Abdelqasim Al-Abaj.

In the east, arrest campaigns continue to dominate the overall security environment. Four arrests were reported in Benghazi and in the Al-Wahat district, including two in Benghazi, one near Zueitina Port, and one in an unidentified area under the control of the Oil Crescent Security Directorate.

4. Tripoli Neighborhood Report

Multiple LNA advances; Turkish air defence systems reportedly disappear at MJI



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (14 Mar) National Heart Centre receives unidentified male body
2. (15 Mar) LNA claims full control over Al-Ramla; Sources report LNA reached Tariq Ben Ziad School
3. (15-16 Mar) Sporadic security incidents & closure of shops/restaurants/mosques/pharmacies/salons due to soaring prices & preventive measures against COVID-19 pandemic
4. (16 Mar) LNA claims Tripoli-Gharyan Rd cut off after advancing in Al-Hira & Al-Kassarat
5. (16 Mar) Vehicle theft in the Tajoura area
6. (17 Mar) Vehicle theft in Al-Batata
7. (18 Mar) LNA advances on Sedra Road in Salah Eideen & Al-Hadba Al-Mashro'
8. (18 Mar) Exchange of gunfire during local dispute between two families; no casualties
9. (18 Mar) LNA advances on Ain Zara's main road; shella land near Zweita Mall killing four
10. (18 Mar) Ministry of Communications lockdown after suspected COVID-19 case
11. (20 Mar) Two shells land on Old City injuring woman & young girl
12. (21-22 Mar) Heavy shelling in Ain Zara

Disappearance of Turkish air defence systems

Reports corroborate the disappearance of five air defence systems manned by Turkish operators from Mitiga International Airport (MJI) on 20 March. The reports suggest the air defence systems were previously visible to airport employees and travellers but have not been seen over the past 48 hours. In addition, the reports speculate the Turkish military officers have likely maintained a presence at the airport but are adopting a low-profile approach in an effort to avoid detection. The reports are unverified but would corroborate recent reports Turkish military officers were spotted leaving MJI and heading towards Misrata in the aftermath of a sustained LNA shelling campaign.

LNA: Turkish servicemen killed in MJI attacks

In his latest briefing, the LNA spokesperson, Ahmed Al-Mesmari, claimed that attacks on MJI killed Turkish servicemen stationed at the airport. Al-Mesmari stated that the LNA struck Turkish military targets, including radars and air defenses, located at MJI's military base over the past few days, though he did not disclose the number of fatalities among Turkish ranks. In addition, Al-Mesmari claimed that the LNA destroyed all sites with a Turkish presence in Misrata, including military depots. Similar to past LNA rhetoric, Al-Mesmari noted that forces continue to adhere to the truce and carry out operations solely as a response to GNA violations. Of note, MJI has been consecutively targeted with shells despite being indefinitely closed. On 03 March, all flights were diverted to Misrata International Airport (MRA) after a barrage of LNA shells (approximately 15) landed inside MJI between 2300-0000hrs.

Gunfire & explosions heard during local dispute

WB sources reported heavy explosions and

sporadic gunfire in Tripoli's Souq Al Jum'aa area between 0700hrs-0900hrs on 18 March. Initial reports indicate a local dispute erupted between two families on 20 Ramadan Road, specifically near the 10 March Institute. There is no further information on the motive, though reports indicate relatives of one of the families are members of the Nawasi Brigade.

Al-Bivio residents warn over criminal activity

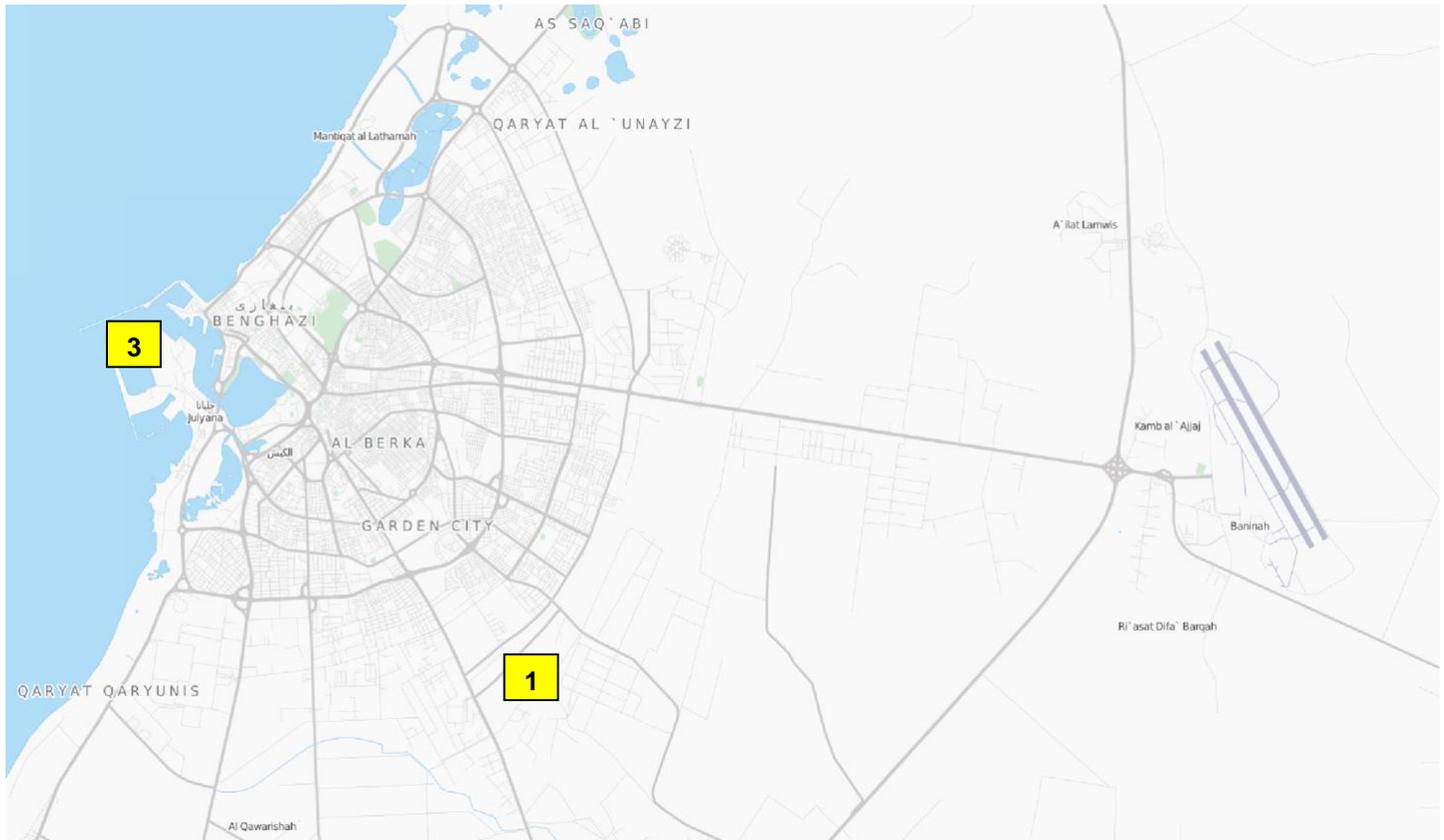
WB sources reported residents of Tripoli's Al Bivio area warned over a gang of gunmen driving a khaki-coloured pick-up Toyota, a grey BMW, and Hyundai Azera, engaging in criminal acts in the areas near the Hospital of Dermatology and Tripoli Mall over the past few days.

LNA advances between 15-18 March

LNA units advanced in Al-Ramla in the evening on 15 March. Pro-LNA accounts claimed full control over the area. However, sources reported LNA units only advanced up to Tariq Ben Ziad School. On 16 March, pro-accounts reported a new advance by the LNA with LNA units cutting off a strategic road linking Gharyan and Tripoli after gaining control over Al-Kassarat and Al-Hira areas in its latest attempt to advance toward Tripoli. The LNA advances came amid reports of multiple LNA units mobilising towards Tripoli frontlines, including large LNA 9th Brigade "Al-Kaniat" reinforcements leaving Tarhunah. In the morning of 18 March, LNA units advanced in Al-Hadba Al-Mashro'. In addition, LNA units advanced in the Salah Eddien area on Al-Sedra Road, linking Ain Zara with Salah Eddien. Further, several families were forced to leave their homes in Ain Zara due to consecutive indiscriminate shelling in the area, coinciding with an LNA advance on Ain Zara's main road.

5. Benghazi Neighborhood Report

Haftar calls on LNA to impose curfew; NOC reports illegal jet fuel shipment from UAE



KEY INCIDENTS

1. (15 Mar) Haftar orders preparation of emergency hospital in the Hawari area to fight potential spread of COVID-19
2. (16 Mar) Morality Police arrest local distributor of Dettol for inflating prices
3. (16 Mar) NOC documents illegal fuel shipment from UAE to Benghazi
4. (18) Interior Ministry announces curfew in eastern region from 1800-0600hrs
5. (19 Mar) Al-Thinni meets cabinet to discuss implementing decision to return NOC HQ to Benghazi
6. (20 Mar) Rescue Police seize vehicle loaded with RPGs & cannabis resin

Preventive measures against COVID-19

Similar to the recent decision taken by Tripoli's authorities, the Interim Government's Interior Minister, Ibrahim Bushnaaf, instructed the General Administration of Ports to suspend travel via to/from Libya via its land, sea, and air ports starting from 19 March. The decision excludes ambulance cases, cargo deliveries, and domestic flights. In addition, the Interim Government's Interior Ministry announced a curfew in the eastern region from 1800hrs to 0600hrs on 18 March, with the exception of ambulances and vehicles assigned to implement the curfew. The LNA's general command ordered his units to implement the curfew starting from 19 March.

Separately, the Interim Government Prime Minister, Abdallah Al-Thinni, ordered for mosques to be closed down as a preventive measure against the COVID-19 pandemic on 17 March. Al-Thinni stated that Imams of mosques, residents, and security agencies are expected to adhere to the instructions and subsequently warned that violators will be held legally accountable. Of note, the General Authority of Endowments and Islamic Affairs prohibited congregations inside mosques for previous Friday prayers, though it allowed gatherings in the mosque's yards. Of note, similar measures have been taken by GNA religious affairs authorities.

Local Dettol distributor arrested

Benghazi's Morality Police arrested the local distributor of Dettol cleaning products (Matlaa El-Fajr Co.) for hiking prices of antiseptics by 25% on 16 March. The inflated prices come amid awareness

campaigns over the potential spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Morality Police warned over strict measures taken against shop owners inflating prices of essential supplies.

Vehicle seized with RPGs & narcotics aboard

Benghazi's Rescue Police seized a vehicle loaded with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and 86 pieces of cannabis resin on 20 March, according to the Benghazi Security Directorate.

NOC: illegal jet fuel shipment to Benghazi

The official NOC based in Tripoli reported a jet fuel shipment was recently received by the East in Benghazi. The NOC declared a vessel called Gulf Petroleum 4 unloaded the shipment of jet fuel used to supply aircraft. S&P Global Platts data indicates the vessel discharged 10k metric tons from 13-16 March. Open source vessel tracking software corroborates the vessel's presence at Benghazi Port during this period. NOC chairman Mustafa Sanallah reiterated that sufficient fuel is sent to the east, adding the latest illegal shipment is likely destined for military purposes. The development highlights the lack of international enforcement of UN resolutions. Of note, UN Security Council Resolution 2150 in Feb authorised measures against the "illicit export of crude oil and other petroleum products from Libya and continuing to allow member states to inspect designated vessels on the high seas." Such shipments enable the LNA to continue to sustain military operations and overcome the challenges posed by the current blockade on oil exports.

6. What's next

LNA continues to target GNA ports; Tarhunah retaliates in Gharaboli

POLITICAL FORECAST

While UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed hope that GNA and LNA forces will take this opportunity to sign the ceasefire agreement from the 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC), prospects remain bleak to turn the temporary coronavirus truce into a permanent ceasefire. The coronavirus crisis is expected to halt all political resolution efforts in the medium term. Even domestically, control measures and curfews are suspending tribal gatherings and other political meetings. Of note, the interim government announced the suspension of all meetings, with the exception of extraordinary cases, until further notice. On the GNA's side, Prime Minister Fayez Al-Serraj received the Italian Ambassador to Libya, Giuseppe Buccino, in Tripoli on 16 March. Pro-GNA accounts stated that Buccino reiterated his country's support for the GNA and stressed the importance of enforcing the UN Security Council Resolution 2510 of 2020 endorsing the outcomes of the Berlin Conference on Libya. In addition, Buccino called on all Libyan parties to cease hostilities and commit to a ceasefire. Meanwhile, the GNA's Interior Minister, Fathi Bashagha, met with French officials in Paris to discuss ways of developing a civil defense system and the construction of field hospitals to respond to natural disasters on 17 March. Reports indicate Bashagha was due to hold several meetings in Paris. The meetings reportedly aim to modernise the Interior Ministry across several areas, including the National Safety Authority. Meanwhile, on 17 March, UNSMIL expressed deep concern over a recent increase in abductions and enforced disappearances across Libyan towns and cities carried out by "armed groups with total impunity", later singling out the LNA's 9th Brigade (Al Kaniat militia of Tarhuna), the Special Deterrence Force (SDF) and the Nawasi Brigade in its statement.

WHAT OTHER EXPERTS SAY

US Ambassador to Libya, Richard Norland, described the cornerstones of US policy in Libya in an interview with *The Arab Weekly's* Michel Cousins. Norland reiterated Washington seeks to work with all parties involved to solve the Libyan conflict. Norland pointed to the fact the Libyan conflict is not within anyone's interests at the moment. Norland stated "Those who say that they are concerned about the rise of Muslim extremism or the rise of militias in Tripoli and use this as a justification for the offensive on Tripoli miss the point that the offensive is having precisely the opposite effect. It is empowering militias. It is making the government more dependent on militias. It is giving extremist voices a greater say in what happens". Norland also alluded to the possibility to begin naming and shaming those contributing to the conflict and adopt a tougher approach. Further, the article reads "The path is there for people to take if they want to. The 5+5 talks in Geneva can reconvene once the parties have looked at the ceasefire draft document and made some refinements to it and are ready to come back together again," Norland said. A UN call for the talks to reconvene would be issued shortly, Norland said, although because of the coronavirus threat, the meeting may have to be virtual. That would not necessarily be a bad thing. "Maybe it is easier to get people who disagree together on a screen rather than in the same room," the ambassador said. The coronavirus pandemic provides another paradoxical reason for hope. The United States is among those that backed an international call for a "humanitarian pause" in the Libyan conflict to concentrate on dealing with the virus outbreak. Addressing that crisis in the United States is proving difficult enough, said Norland. "In a country that's at war, where the public health system is under huge stress already, you can see how an outbreak of coronavirus could be hugely problematic," he added. "This could be a great opportunity for the country to work together, averting a major public health crisis and at the same time creating a positive atmosphere for trying to move forward on the 5+5 ceasefire discussions in Geneva," Norland said."

SECURITY FORECAST

The truce is unlikely to hold on the ground in the medium term. In Tripoli, this week's clashes were concentrated in side roads between the Airport road and Salah Al-Dein road. LNA intent is likely to seize the central part of Tripoli's south, from where Haftar's forces could later make a concerted push northward towards key central areas, including areas with GNA offices and buildings. This prioritization strategy would reduce the LNA's need to focus on peripheral engagement axes such as Ain Zara and Wadi Al-Rabei. Meanwhile, the threat of LNA targeting against GNA-controlled critical infrastructure such as airports and ports remains extant. Of note, the head of the LNA's Moral Guidance, Major General Khaled Al-Mahjoub, claimed GNA forces unloaded a shipment of weapons and military hardware via Misrata Port and to the Abugrein frontline. Meanwhile, the documented shelling of Tarhunah by GNA forces at approximately 0500hrs on 23 March highlights the possibility of an upcoming offensive on the pro-LNA town. The incident is the first documented attack on the town since the conflict erupted in April 2019. The GNA has hinted on multiple occasions at a possible offensive on Tarhunah. Meanwhile, Tarhunah's retaliation may come in the form of a renewed push on Gharaboli. Of note, the pro-LNA 9th Brigade from Tarhunah has carried out multiple tactical operations in the area over the past few months and even reached the coastal road. In relation to the security impact of the coronavirus, the discovery of cases would affect LNA and GNA postures across frontlines. Pro-LNA accounts have already alleged some Syrian elements fighting in GNA ranks are infected. Of note, the Tripoli government officially acquired the capability to test for the virus via polymerase chain reaction (PCR) after the machine was shipped via Mitiga International Airport (MJI) on 20 March.

LIBYANS AND THE ARAB STREET

Bloomberg reporter Samer Al-Atrush published an account of meetings held between Gaddafi's son, Saif Al-Islam, and Russian political consultant Maxim Shugaley and his colleague Samir Seifan. The Bloomberg report is based on meeting notes by the two Russian consultants who were arrested by the GNA in Tripoli on charges of meddling in elections and espionage. The two consultants claimed they worked for Russian NGO "Foundation for National Values Protection", although they are believed to be closely linked to the Wagner Group, which has been documented to send private military contractors (PMCs) to Libya. The Russian consultants reportedly held at least three meetings with Saif Al-Islam with the last one being in April 2019. Overall, Bloomberg's report sheds light on Moscow's attempts to exert influence in the region. The meetings were part of attempts to bring back Saif Al-Islam to power in Libya. The head of the Wagner Group of private military contractors (PMCs), Yevgeny Prigozhin, was reportedly of the view that Saif Al-Islam would be the perfect candidate to preserve Russia's commercial interests in Libya. According to the notes presented by Bloomberg, Saif Al-Islam believed people fighting in Haftar's ranks supported the former regime and would change sides once Haftar enters Tripoli. At the final meeting in April 2019, Saif Al-Islam reportedly promised the two consultants to present a list of commanders loyal to him. Of note, on 05 July 2019, the Russian Foreign Ministry stated it was verifying reports of the detention of two Russians in Tripoli accused of influencing upcoming elections in the country, whilst noting that the ministry has yet to receive an official notice by Libyan authorities. Local media reported the Public Prosecutor detained two Russians and three Libyans on charges of meddling in Libyan elections, where the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) head, Siddiq Al-Sour, was quoted stating that the two Russians arrived in Libya in March and were detained in May 2019.

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