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LIBYA

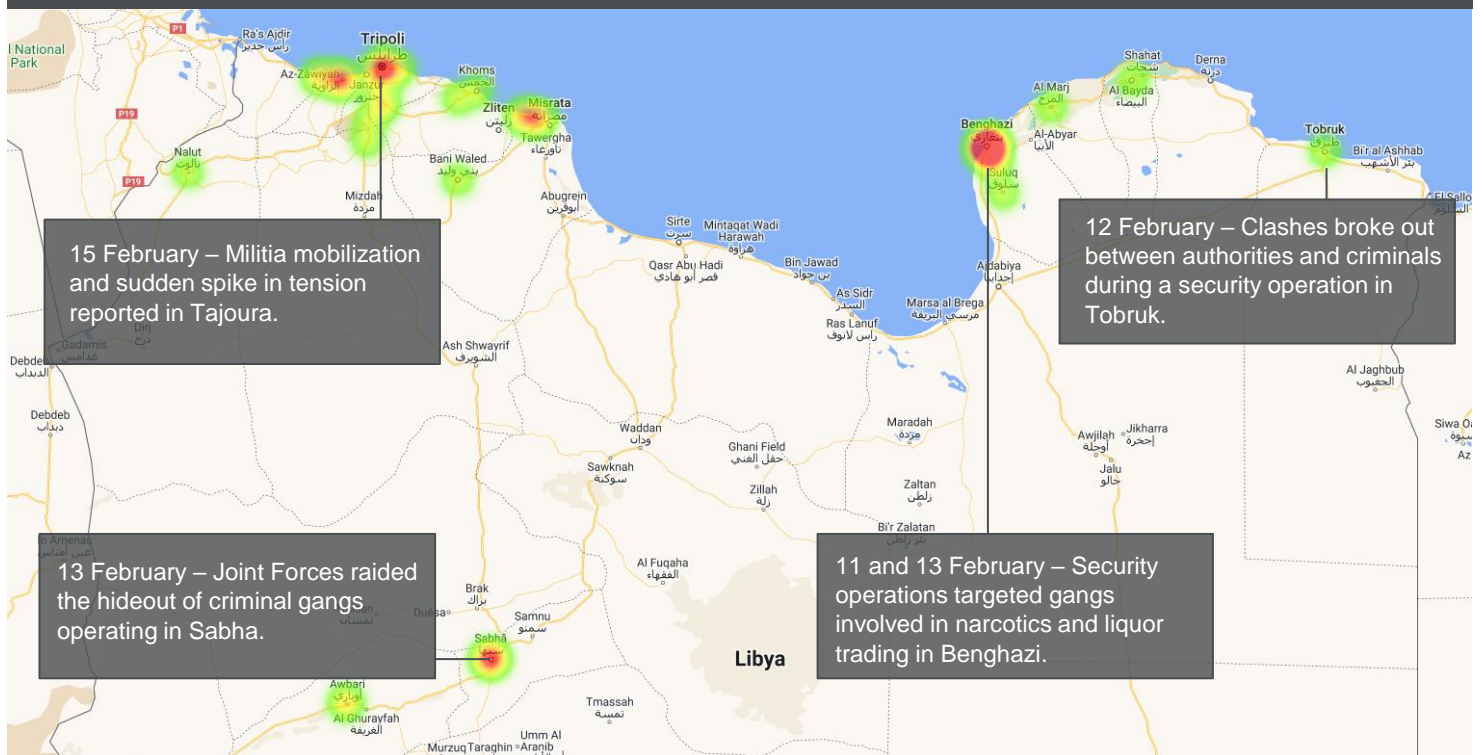
Weekly Political Stability,
Economic And Security
Threat Assessment

11 – 17 FEBRUARY 2023



COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

FIGURE 1: INCIDENT ACTIVITY IN LIBYA, 11 – 17 FEBRUARY 2023



KEY DEVELOPMENTS

- There have been further signs indicating possible efforts to bridge east-west gaps. These signs are summarized on page 2.
- Presidential Council head Mohammad Al Menfi arrived in Benghazi to meet with Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar and several local officials on 11 February. The meeting discussed the need to hold elections before the end of 2023 and to approve a widely-supported electoral law before April.
- As scheduled, the Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries took place on the outskirts of Zintan and in Tajoura on 11 February. The organizers of the Forum that the Revolutionaries have the right to lead the reconciliation process.
- Security operations targeting criminal groups took place in Benghazi, Tobruk, Ubari and Sabha. It is interesting to note how the simultaneous operations were coordinated across Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

OUTLOOK

- If the efforts to bridge east-west gaps are confirmed, they might result in a decreased risk of LNA-GNU conflict and of an LNA-backed oil blockade. Militias in Tripoli might also refrain from violent escalations amid the uncertainty at the countrywide level and the increased international attention.
- Based on the available information this seems unachievable by the HoR and the HCS. However, in the context of the other efforts to bridge east-west gaps, Menfi and Haftar might be trying to sideline the HoR-HCS process and achieve a breakthrough. This would be in line with the plan they announced on 9 January (see 13 January Weekly Threat Assessment).
- The future agenda of the Forum and its components remain unclear. This dynamic will require further monitoring in the coming weeks, to better understand how it relates to the countrywide context explained on page 2.
- This is likely a way to show that the LNA can enforce security across the entire country. It is relevant in the context of the efforts of Saddam Haftar to show that is increasingly in charge in and beyond Benghazi.

COUNTRYWIDE OVERVIEW

FURTHER POSSIBLE EFFORTS TO BRIDGE EAST-WEST GAPS

Following up on the 10 February Weekly Threat Assessment, there have been further signs indicating possible efforts to bridge east-west gaps.

- **15 February:** GNU PM Dbeiba met with UAE President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi. The two discussed prospects for cooperation and the reopening of the UAE Embassy in Tripoli.

The UAE has been one of the main backers of the LNA, but in the last year it established stronger ties with Tripoli. The 15 February meeting builds on previous high-level meetings between key stakeholders and representatives of the western and eastern blocs (see 10 February Weekly Threat Assessment) reinforcing the idea that there are high-level efforts to favor east-west dialogue.

- **14 February:** The NOC formalized the decision (taken on 8 February) to establish the General Administration of Natural Gas (GANS) in Benghazi. The GANS is tasked with devising strategies to improve gas production and delivery, and can award contracts and investment licenses in the sector. The GANS reports directly to the NOC Board of Directors, according to the available information. The creation of the GANS occurred on the sidelines of the strategic forum held by the NOC also in Benghazi. At the forum, the NOC said to be ready to raise oil production to 2 million bpd in three-to-five years.

The establishment of the GANS and the holding of the forum in Benghazi suggest that the LNA will gain additional stakes in the Libyan energy sector. In turn, this suggests increased east-west coordination and a lower chance of east-west escalations of tension.

- **13 February:** Abdul Hakim Belhaj celebrated the release of his friend and former LIFG fellow Siddiq Gaithi Al Obeidi, who was detained by the LNA in 2014. Gaithi, who served as Undersecretary of the Ministry of Defense until 2012, was arrested in 2014 while traveling to Benghazi as part of a delegation from Misrata which wanted to mend ties with the eastern tribes. His release lends further credibility to Belhaj's claim to have been in touch with and his conciliatory tone towards the LNA.

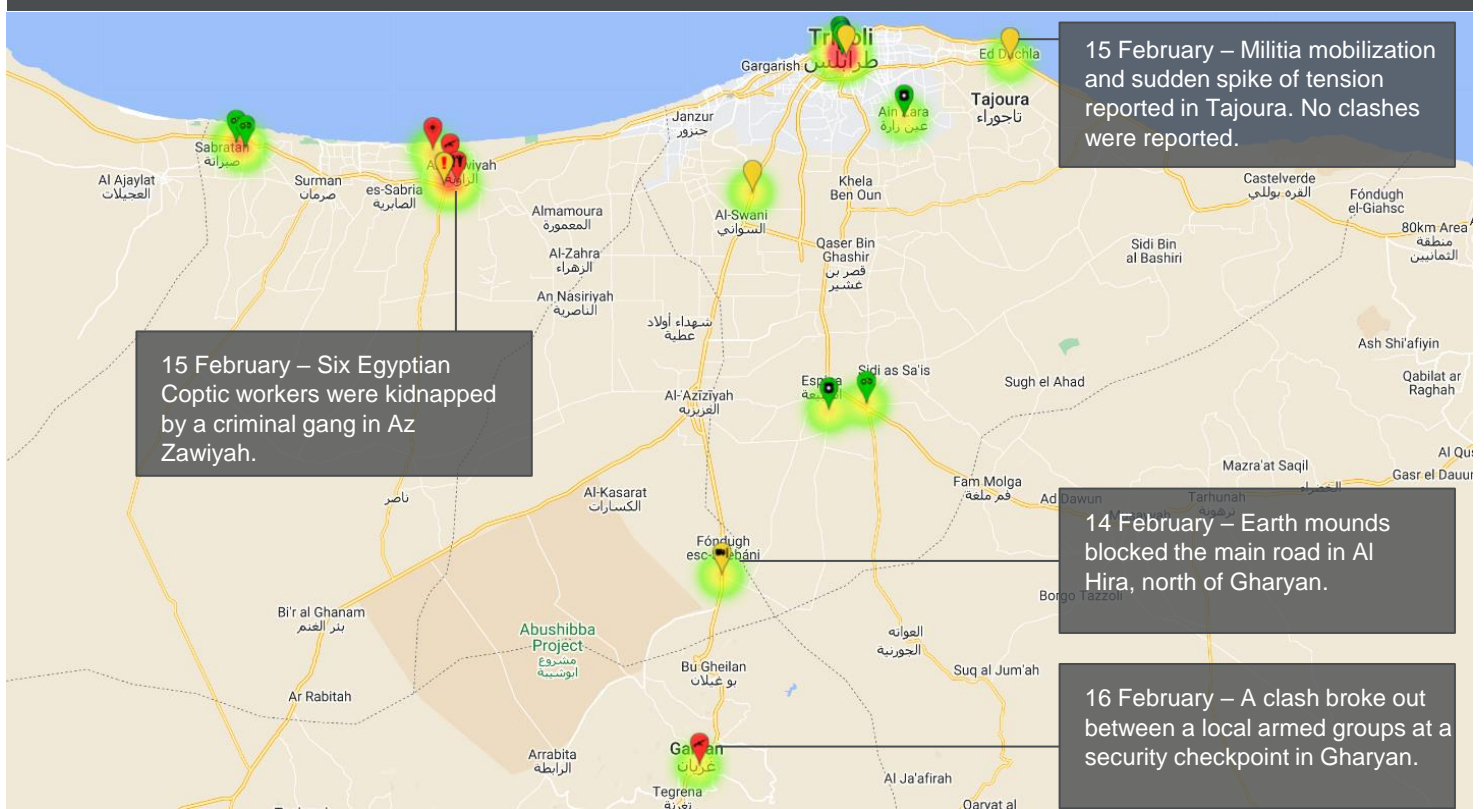
Former Islamists (including but not limited to Belhaj, Gaithi, and Abu Obaida Al Zawi) seem to be increasingly acting as a catalyst for the mitigation of east-west divisions.

- They are extraneous to the power struggle between the LNA and the various western governments which ruled Tripolitania in the last years, hence they can be seen as an impartial medium between the LNA and GNU.
 - They have a presence and ties both in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, so they are a natural bridge between eastern and western power structures.
- **11 February:** Presidential Council head Mohammad Al Menfi arrived in Benghazi to meet with Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar and several local officials.

There is a realistic possibility that the events above and those reported in the 10 February Weekly Threat Assessment are the manifestation of international and Libyan efforts to bridge east-west gaps and create a united front able to counter Russia's influence in Libya. If this is confirmed, such efforts might result in:

- Decreased risk of GNU-LNA conflict in 2023.
- Decreased risk of an LNA-backed oil blockade.
- Unchanged risk of Wagner sabotage to Libyan oil and gas infrastructure, mainly driven by dynamics linked to the Ukraine war.
- Reduced appetite for Tripoli-based militias to cause significant violent escalations in Tripoli. Provided that the ongoing countrywide dynamics do not threaten the militias' business and security interests, the business environment in Tripoli might remain favorable throughout Q1 2023 despite the emerging tensions for the control of Tripoli International Airport and between the SSA and the Mol. Low-level tensions and skirmishes are likely to keep occurring, anyway.
- The blurring of eastern and western interests and the obsolescence of the east-west split as the main (not only) analytical lens to interpret developments in Libya.

FIGURE 2: HIGHLIGHTED INCIDENTS IN TRIPOLI FROM 11 – 17 FEBRUARY 2023



15 February – Militia mobilization and sudden spike of tension reported in Tajoura. No clashes were reported.

15 February – Six Egyptian Coptic workers were kidnapped by a criminal gang in Az Zawiyah.

14 February – Earth mounds blocked the main road in Al Hira, north of Gharyan.

16 February – A clash broke out between a local armed groups at a security checkpoint in Gharyan.

PERSISTENT MILITIA TENSION REPORTED IN TAJOURA

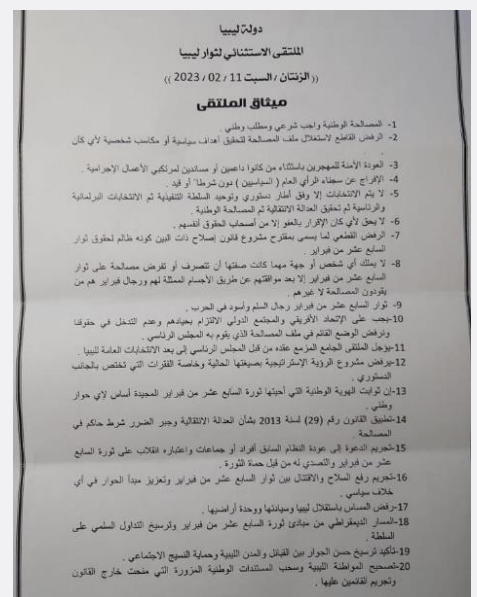
On 10 February, the Rahba al Durua Battalion (a.k.a. Al Bugra) and the Sabriya Martyrs Brigade clashed in Tajoura, causing the temporary disruption of operations at Mitiga International Airport (MJI). On 15 February, tension spiked again near the National Heart Center and the Second Ring Road in Tajoura after the two militias mobilized, without clashes. These episodes are part of usual low-level militia activities but are not indicative of an imminent escalation of tension in Tripoli. Further mobilizations and skirmishes remain possible.

FOLLOW UP ON THE EXTRAORDINARY FORUM OF LIBYAN REVOLUTIONARIES

As scheduled, the Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries took place on the outskirts of Zintan and also in Tajoura on 11 February. The Forum was led by Abdullah Naker, head of the Summit party, and resulted in a statement touching on these main points:

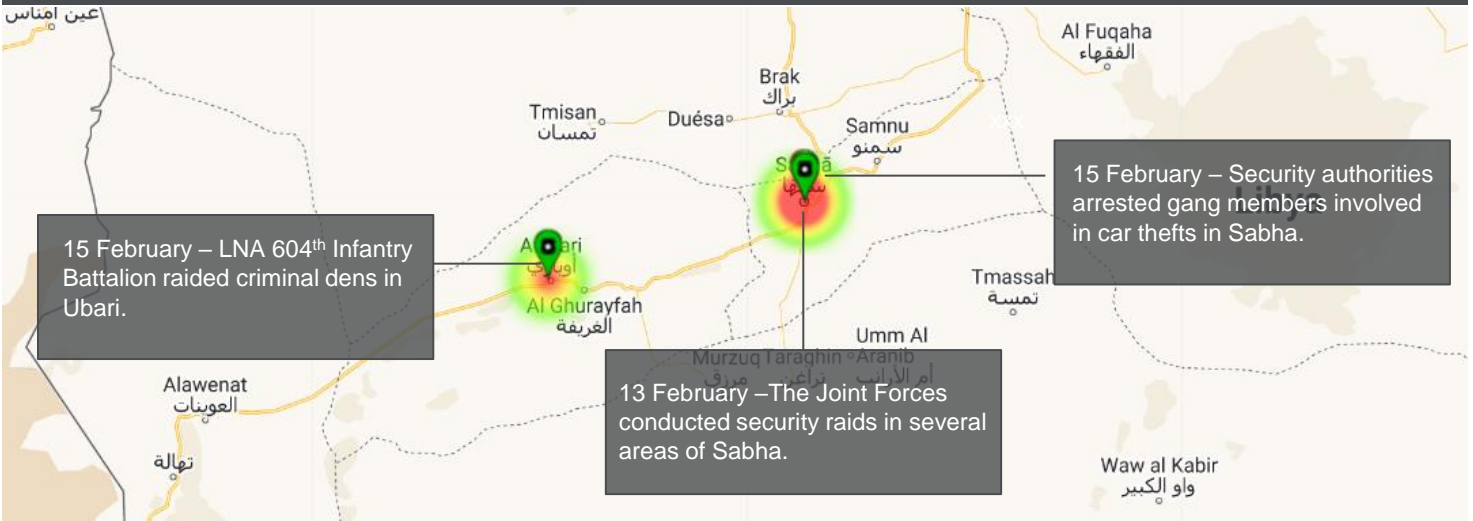
- The organizers of the Forum claimed that the Revolutionaries have the right to lead the reconciliation process and rejected all other initiatives, including the HoR-HCS process.
- The need to criminalize the calls for a return to the Gaddafi regime. This might cause tension with the Gaddafi tribal communities.
- The need to criminalize the fighting between Revolutionaries. This seems a step towards consolidating different armed groups.
- A constitutional framework and the unification of the executive authority are steps to be taken before presidential and parliamentary elections.

Below: Statement of the Extraordinary Forum of Libyan Revolutionaries, 11 February 2023



The future agenda of the Forum and its components remain unclear. It is worth noting that Abu Obaida Al Zawy did not attend and that neither the GNU nor Turkey commented on the Forum. It is also unclear if the faction of the Zintan Military Council (ZMC) which reportedly followed the invitation of the UK to organize the Forum has the upper hand within the ZMC. This dynamic will require further monitoring in the coming weeks, to better understand how it relates to the countrywide context explained on page 2.

FIGURE 3: INCIDENT ACTIVITY IN FEZZAN, 11 – 17 FEBRUARY 2023



CONTINUED LNA LOW-IMPACT SECURITY OPERATIONS

Several security operations targeting small criminal groups took place in Ubari and Sabha during the reporting period. These operations resulted in the arrest of at least nine suspects. They are summarized below:

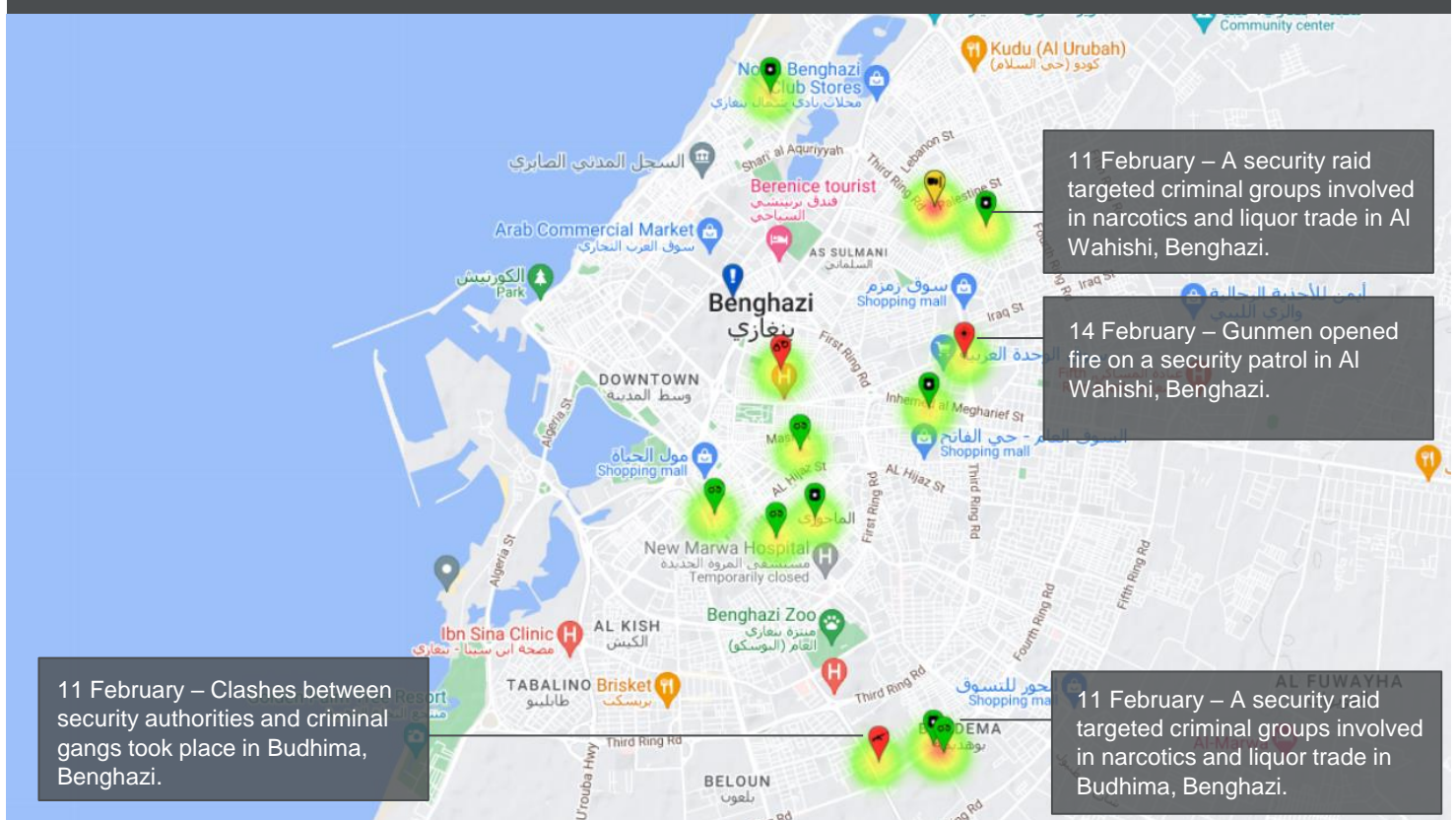
- **15 February** - The LNA 604th Infantry Battalion raided a criminal den in Ubari. Four individuals involved in various crimes were arrested.
- **15 February** - Security authorities arrested three gang members involved in car thefts in Mahdia, Sabha.
- **13 February** - The LNA First Brigade arrested two suspects who were moving narcotics from Sabha to Ubari.
- **13 February** - The Joint Forces arrested several criminals during a security operation in Sabha.
- **11 February** - Security authorities removed an illegal fuel station in Sabha.

It is interesting to note that these developments came in conjunction with the counter-crime operations in Benghazi (see page 5). It is possible that the operations in Benghazi and Sabha, the main population centers of Cyrenaica and Fezzan, were meant to take place simultaneously to spread the perception that the LNA can enforce security all over the country. This would be relevant in the context of the rumors saying that Khalifa Haftar may soon hand over power to one of his sons (see page 5).

FIGURE 4: SECURITY TRENDS IN FEZZAN, 20 NOVEMBER 2022 - 17 FEBRUARY 2023



FIGURE 5: HIGHLIGHTED INCIDENTS IN CYRENAICA 11 – 17 FEBRUARY 2023



PC-HEAD AL MENFI MET WITH HAFTAR IN BENGHAZI

Presidential Council head Mohammad Al Menfi arrived in Benghazi to meet with Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar and several local officials on 11 February. The meeting discussed the need to hold elections before the end of 2023 and to approve a widely-supported electoral law before April.

Based on the available information this seems unachievable by the HoR and the HCS. However, in the context of the other efforts to bridge east-west gaps, Menfi and Haftar might be trying to sideline the HoR-HCS process and achieve a breakthrough. This would be in line with the plan they announced on 9 January (see 13 January Weekly Threat Assessment).

SECURITY OPERATIONS LAUNCHED IN BENGHAZI

Between 11 and 13 February the LNA implemented a series of security operations targeting criminal gangs in several areas of Benghazi. These operations occurred in Budhima (where clashes also erupted), Al-Wahishi, and Al Majouri. According to some reports, at least 50 were arrested, and several houses, vehicles and equipment used by the criminal groups were destroyed.

Similarly, clashes were also reported in the outskirts of Tobruk after the Garnada Investigation and Arrest Office raided some criminal hideouts on 12 February. A policeman was killed and three others were injured during the operation, which resulted in the seizing of 380 kilograms of hashish and weapons and the arrest of several suspects.

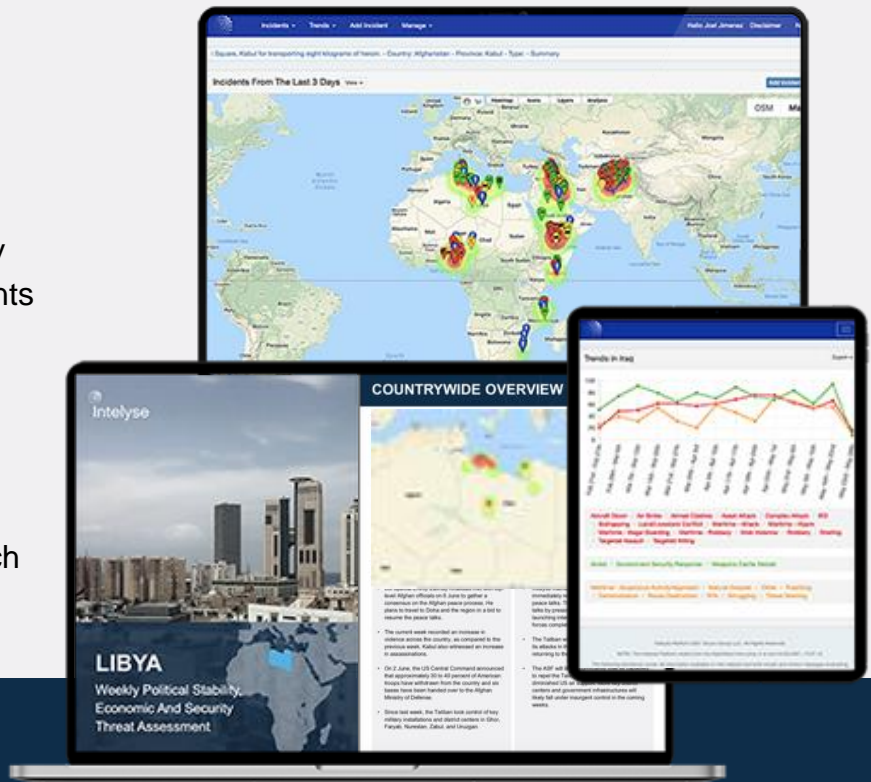
These developments follow the implementation of the security campaign in Benghazi launched by Saddam Haftar on 1 February (see 3 February Weekly Threat Assessment). It must be noted that tribal leaders have lifted the social cover for their constituents, indicating that the LNA may carry out more operations without interference from local groups. Similar security operations are likely to occur again in the short term. Until the campaign continues, there will remain a heightened risk of skirmishes between LNA forces and criminal and local armed groups.

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