

# THE WAR REPORT 2017

## LIBYA: A SHORT GUIDE ON THE CONFLICT



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THE GENEVA ACADEMY A JOINT CENTER OF

## INTRODUCTION

The ongoing conflict in Libya is characterized by a myriad of armed groups and actors who are divided across different ideological, national, regional, ethnic and tribal lines. The tendency to depict the conflict as a rivalry between nationalist and Islamist camps suffers from oversimplification, because it tends to detract attention from other factors that come into play. These factors include regional tensions between the historical provinces of the country; tribal and ethnic tensions, which in some cases date back to discriminatory policies pursued in the era of the Gaddafi regime, in addition to conflicts between revolutionary forces and actors identified with the older regime. Moreover, armed groups are strongly embedded in their local context, which means that ideological and political agendas intersect with local identities as well. With growing competition over resources in the country, these conflicting allegiances and identities have further intensified with armed groups vying for a stake in Libya's future<sup>1</sup>.

## THE PROLIFERATION OF ARMED GROUPS

The current proliferation of armed groups in Libya is anchored in the settings of the 2011 uprisal, which led to the ouster of the Gaddafi regime later that year. The violent crackdown of the former regime on protestors led to the emergence of various local councils and armed militia groups on a city-by-city basis<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the Transitional National Council (TNC) was established in February 2011 by members of the exiled opposition and high-ranking defectors, to act as the military leadership of the uprisal and the political representative of the Libyan opposition. While the TNC eventually gained wide recognition from the international community, it failed to build close relations with local councils and armed groups leading the uprisal<sup>3</sup>. More importantly, the Transitional National Council did not succeed in disarming these armed groups or incorporating them effectively into the state security

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apparatus, which had almost entirely collapsed after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. As a result of a disarrayed process of integration, many armed groups were put on the payroll of the government but retained a high degree of autonomy from the state<sup>4</sup>.

In August 2012, the TNC transferred power to the newly elected General National Council (GNC). Yet, none of the successive governments that emerged from the Council managed to stop state funding for these armed groups or bring them under control, and the numbers of fighters on the government payroll was recorded to be around 200,000 at the beginning of 2014<sup>5</sup>. In fact, by that time many armed groups had bolstered their power, and some political parties and figures had aligned themselves with certain militias<sup>6</sup>. As a result, armed groups came to exert control over the work of the parliament and state institutions, thus hindering the basic functioning of the government and putting the viability of state institutions in peril. This was

evidenced on numerous occasions in 2013–2014, when armed groups allied with various political factions stormed the GNC and other government buildings, demanding political concessions<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> D. Gartenstein-Ross and N. Barr, *Dignity and Dawn: Libya's Escalating Civil War*, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Research Paper, February 2015, p 17, <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ICCT-Gartenstein-Ross-Barr-Dignity-and-Dawn-Libyas-Escalating-Civil-War-February2015.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Libya: Militias, Tribes and Islamists*, 19 December 2014, p 7, <https://www.government.nl/documents/reports/2014/12/20/libya-militias-tribes-and-islamists>.

<sup>3</sup> W. Lacher, *Fault Lines of the Revolution: Political Actors, Camps and Conflicts in the New Libya*, Research Paper 2013/RP, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 4 May 2013, p 9, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/libya-fault-lines-of-the-revolution/>.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Libya*, *supra* fn 2, pp 9–10. A large number of armed groups were incorporated into umbrella coalitions, mainly the Libya Shield Forces and the Supreme Security Committee, which were, respectively, under the authority of the Ministry of Defense's Chief of Staff and the Ministry of Interior. Yet, these armed groups retained a considerable degree of autonomy.

<sup>5</sup> H. Salah, 'Libyan Militias and the Quest for National Unity', Human Rights Watch (HRW), 27 October 2015, <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2015/10/27/282761>.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Libya*, *supra* fn 2, p 7; see also Al-Hussein al-Sheikh al-Alawi, 'Libya: A Reading of Military Combats an Political Polarizations'

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, *Libya*, *supra* fn 2, p 7; see also Al-Hussein al-Sheikh al-Alawi, 'Libya: A Reading of Military Combats an Political Polarizations'

## THE AMPLIFICATION OF CHAOS

The situation of violence deteriorated in mid-2014, when Ahmed Maiteeq, widely perceived as backed by Misrata-based Islamist groups, was appointed as the new Prime Minister. On 16 May 2014, General Khalifa Haftar launched Operation Dignity with the purpose of eradicating Islamist militias in Benghazi. Two days later, Zintani militias allied with Haftar raided the GNC and declared the legislative body suspended. Earlier that year, the GNC's decision to extend its mandate – which was originally due to expire on February 2014 – had been highly contentious<sup>8</sup>, leading Haftar to conduct an abortive coup d'état. This extension was all the more criticized given the GNC's failure to address the country's economic, political and security problems. The decision came after an Islamist/Berber/Misratan bloc gained control of the GNC, which was narrowly divided between a coalition generally described as nationalist (the National Forces Alliance) and a rival coalition composed of Islamist factions<sup>9</sup>. Consequently, new elections were scheduled on 25 June 2014.

Following the raid of the GNC, Misrata-based militias moved to the capital at the behest of political allies in the Council. This was followed by clashes between these groups and Zintani militias that initially occurred on a limited scale<sup>10</sup>. In Benghazi, Islamist factions were prompted to unite in order to rebuff Haftar's forces. On 20 June 2014, they announced the establishment of the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC), an umbrella group of Islamist militias, including Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL) and the 17 February Martyrs Brigade<sup>11</sup>. Meanwhile, the parliamentary elections in June resulted in gains for the nationalist bloc at the expense of the Islamist/Mistran bloc that had previously dominated the GNC<sup>12</sup>.

This shift lead to the emergence of a coalition of Islamist/Misratan militias, set to take control of the capital. On 13 July 2014, they launched Operation Libya Dawn in order to drive out Haftar-aligned Zintani militias from their positions in the capital, including the strategic Tripoli International Airport, which had been under the control of the al-Qa'qa'

<sup>8</sup> Middle East Institute, Libya Congress Extends its Mandate Until End-2014, 23 December 2013, <http://www.mei.edu/content/libya-congress-extends-its-mandate-until-end-2014>.

<sup>9</sup> Gartenstein-Ross and Barr, *Dignity and Dawn*, supra fn 1, p 16

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 22.

<sup>12</sup> M. Eljarh, 'Libya's Islamists Go for Broke', *Foreign Policy*, 22 July 2014, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2014/07/22/libyas-islamists-go-for-broke/>.

and Sawa'iq Zintani militias since the fall of the former regime in 2011. The intensity of clashes forced the newly elected parliament, now called the House of Representatives (HoR), to retreat to the city of Tobruk in the east of the country<sup>13</sup>. On 23 August 2014, Tripoli International Airport was seized by Libya Dawn forces, which had gained control over most of the capital<sup>14</sup>. Two days later, former GNC members from the losing Islamist/Misratan bloc announced the reinstatement of the GNC, thus marking the beginning of a harsh split in the political institutions of the country.

On 6 November 2014, the Libyan Supreme Court invalidated on procedural grounds a constitutional amendment on the basis of which the HoR was established.

While the court refrained from decreeing the dissolution of the HoR, the ruling de-legitimized the newly elected parliament and further complicated the political situation in the country. The HoR rejected the ruling by claiming that the decision was rendered under pressure from Islamist militias controlling the capital, and continued to hold its sessions<sup>15</sup>. In the same month, the HoR endorsed Operation Dignity as an operation under the General Chief of Staff of the Libyan Army, Abd-al-Raziq al-Nazuri<sup>16</sup>. On 2 March 2015, Haftar was eventually appointed by the HoR as Chief of Staff of the Libyan Army<sup>17</sup>.

## UN-BROKERED NEGOTIATIONS LEAD TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PRESIDENTIAL COUNCIL

The year of 2015 was marked by UN-brokered negotiations to reach a power-sharing deal between the conflicting parties. Negotiators included representatives of the two rival parliaments, the Tobruk-based HoR and Tripoli-based GNC, joined later by independent participants<sup>18</sup>. The negotiations eventually led to the adoption of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement

<sup>13</sup> B. Humphrey, 'Theoretical Implications of Moving the Libyan Government to Tobruk', *Arsenal for Democracy*, 24 August 2014, <http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2014/08/24/theoretical-implications-of-moving-the-libyan-government-to-tobruk>.

<sup>14</sup> Tripoli Airport "Seized by Islamist Militia", *Al Jazeera*, 23 August 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/tripoli-airport-2014823183122249347.html>.

<sup>15</sup> S. Ibrahim, 'Caught Between Law and Politics: Judicial Review of Constitutional Amendments in Libya', *ConstitutionNet*, 28 November 2014, <http://www.constitutionnet.org/news/caught-between-law-and-politics-judicial-review-constitutional-amendments-libya>.

<sup>16</sup> 'HoR Says Operation Dignity Under National Army', *Libya Herald*, 17 November 2014, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2014/11/17/hor-says-operation-dignity-under-national-army>.

<sup>17</sup> 'Libya Names Anti-Islamist General Haftar as Army Chief' *BBC News*, 2 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-31698755>.

<sup>18</sup> International Crisis Group, 'The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset', p 1, 4 November 2016, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libyan-political-agreement-time-reset>.

(LPA) on 17 December 2015<sup>19</sup>. The agreement established the Presidency Council of the Council of Ministers, known as the Presidential Council (PC), which functions as a head of state and Supreme Commander of the Libyan Army<sup>20</sup>. The PC consists of nine members and is presided over by Faiez al-Serraj, a former HoR member from the Tripoli constituency, who became Council President upon signature. According to the agreement, Serraj would head the Government of National Accord (GNA), which had to be endorsed by the HoR<sup>21</sup>, and the two governments linked to the HoR and GNC would be dissolved. Moreover, the HoR would remain as the legitimate parliament of the country, whereas members of the GNC would be integrated into the consultative High Council of State, a new body with a say in appointments for key positions<sup>22</sup>.

On 23 December 2015, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2259, welcoming the formation of the PC and calling upon states to cease support for and official contact with parallel institutions that claim to be the legitimate authority but are outside of the Agreement. It further urged states to actively support the GNA in responding to security threats posed by ISIL, ASL and other al-Qaeda affiliates<sup>23</sup>. By January 2016, most states recognized the PC as the executive power of Libya and stopped engaging with al-Thinni's government<sup>24</sup>, despite the fact that the HoR did not endorse the GNA as required by the Agreement. The stumbling of the peace deal was due to a major drawback in the LPA: it did not represent all of the important stakeholders in the country, as major opponents who disagreed on key components in the negotiated Agreement were left out. These included the GNC's President, Nuri Abu Sahmain, and his counterpart in the HoR, Ageelah Saleh, General Haftar and forces affiliated to the Libyan National Army (LNA), as well as several armed groups in western Libya<sup>25</sup>. By August 2016, the HoR gave the GNA a vote of no confidence<sup>26</sup>.

The GNA initially operated from Tunisia until Serraj and six other members of the PC arrived in Tripoli on 30 March

19 'UN Welcomes "Historic" Signing of Libyan Political Agreement', UN News Centre, 17 December 2015, [http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52845#.WT\\_ARmiGOUk](http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=52845#.WT_ARmiGOUk).  
20 Libyan Political Agreement, as signed on 17 December 2015, <https://unsmil.unmissions.org/libyan-political-agreement>.

21 Ibid, Art 3.

22 Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, *supra* fn 21, p 3.

23 UNSC Res 2259, 23 December 2015.

24 Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, *supra* fn 21, p 20

25 Ibid, pp 1–4.

26 A. Assad, 'Tobruk-based HoR Gives No Confidence to UN-proposed Government', The Libya Observer, 22 August 2016, <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/tobruk-based-hor-gives-no-confidence-un-proposed-government>.

2016, defying threats from city militias affiliated with the GNC leadership<sup>27</sup>. Yet, there was no substantial military opposition, and several local militias declared their support for the PC. Many western municipalities as well as the main financial institutions in the capital, the Central Bank and the National Oil Corporation, also recognized the authority of the PC.<sup>28</sup> On 5 April 2016, a number of members declared the GNC's dissolution and the establishment of the High Council of State as its replacement<sup>29</sup>.

## THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ISLAMIC STATE IN LIBYA

In mid-March 2015, the Islamic State in Libya (ISIL) went on to seize the coastal town of Sirte. The group had first emerged in Libya in early October 2014, when Islamist factions in the eastern city of Derna pledged allegiance to the Islamic State<sup>30</sup>. Following the release of a video on 15 February showing the mass beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians who were captured earlier in Sirte, Egyptian warplanes conducted a series of airstrikes on ISIL positions in the east of the country<sup>31</sup>. The Egyptian intervention received the approval of the HoR-aligned government led by Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni, who called for western

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military intervention against Islamist militants in the country. Conversely, the GNC condemned Egypt's military action, calling it "an assault against Libyan sovereignty"<sup>32</sup>.

A year and a half later, on 5 December 2016, Sirte was liberated from ISIL after a six-month military campaign led by armed groups loyal to the GNA<sup>33</sup>. The operation, called al-Bunyan al-Marsous ('Solid Foundation'), was supported by airstrikes by the US Air Force at the request of the Government of National Accord<sup>34</sup>. Sirte was the last significant urban centre under ISIL control in Libya, and by

27 H. Amara, 'Libya's U.N.-backed Presidential Council Reaches Tripoli by Ship', Reuters, 30 March 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-politics-idUSKCN0WW1CG>.

28 Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, *supra* fn 21, p 10.

29 K. Hanly, 'Op-Ed: Libya's State Council Meets in Tripoli Ignores Rules of LPA', Digital Journal, 5 April 2016, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/politics/op-ed-libya-s-state-council-meets-in-tripoli-ignores-rules-of-lpa/article/462105>.

30 E. Banco, 'ISIS Establishes Stronghold in Derna, Libya', International Business Times, 11 October 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-establishes-stronghold-derna-libya-1721425>.

31 J. Malsin and C. Stephen, 'Egyptian Air Strikes in Libya Kill Dozens of Isis Militants', The Guardian, 17 February 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/16/egypt-air-strikes-target-isis-weapons-stockpiles-libya>.

32 M. Fetouri, 'Could Libya's IS Suck Egypt into Endless War?', Al-Monitor, 17 February 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/egypt-copts-libya-islamic-state-military-action.html>; see also U. Laessing, 'Libya Prime Minister Calls for International Strikes on Islamists', Reuters, 16 February 2015,

33 'Libya Officially Declares Liberation of Sirte from ISIS', The Arab Weekly, 18 December 2016, <http://www.thearabweekly.com/article/7388/Libya%20officially%20declares%20liberation%20of%20Sirte%20from%20ISIS>.

34 'Mapping Libya's Jihadists', Hate Speech International, 7 June 2017, <https://www.hate-speech.org/mapping-libyas-jihadists/#fn-3327-1>.

the end of 2016, the group's presence was reduced to desert areas in the south and some cells around the country<sup>35</sup>. The number of deaths resulting from the Sirte campaign was reported to be 720, approaching half the death toll in Libya for the year 2016<sup>36</sup>.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE OIL TRADE

In late July 2016, the PC reached an agreement with the



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former head of the Petroleum Facilities Guards (PFG) for central Libya, Ibrahim Jadhran, to reopen the oil terminals in Ra's Lanuf and Sidrah and reinstate him<sup>37</sup>. Jadhran had taken control of the main oil terminals in eastern Libya in July 2013 and later attempted to sell oil. The seizure of the oil terminals cost Libya billions of dollars in revenue<sup>38</sup>. Yet, despite hefty payments to Jadhran, oil exports did not resume<sup>39</sup>. On 11 September, LNA forces attacked the oil crescent area and seized control of oil ports in Sidrah, Ra's Lanuf, Burayqah and Zuwaytinah with the support of tribal leaders.

Oil exports resumed shortly after the LNA called on the National Oil Corporation to assume the management of the

35 A. Lewis, 'Islamic State Shifts to Libya's Desert Valleys After Sirte Defeat', Reuters, 10 February 2017, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-libya-security-islamicstate-idUKKBN15P1H1>; see also 'BM Forces Hunt IS Encampments near Bani Walid', Libya Herald, 29 December 2016, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/12/29/bm-forces-hunt-is-encampments-near-bani-walid/>.

36 S. Zaptia, 'A Total of 1,523 Violent Deaths Were Reported in Libya in 2016: Libyanbody-count', Libya Herald, 5 January 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/05/a-total-of-1523-violent-deaths-were-reported-in-libya-in-2016-libyanbodycount/>.

37 A. Mustafa, 'Presidency Council Members in Ras Lanuf for Deal with Jadhran', Libya Herald, 28 July 2016, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2016/07/28/presidency-council-members-in-ras-lanuf-for-deal-with-jadhran/>.

38 M. Toaldo and M. Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', European Council on Foreign Relations, p 5.

39 Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, supra fn 21, p 16.

facilities<sup>40</sup>. At the same time, the capture of the oil terminal increased tensions between the two major armed coalitions in the country<sup>41</sup>.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN 2017

On 18 January, the US Air Force conducted airstrikes against ISIL positions in southwestern Libya, resulting in the killing of 80 people.<sup>42</sup> On 31 January, the Misrata Military Council (MMC) announced that all brigades under its control would join the Central Military Zone of 'the Libyan Army', in apparent reference to forces loyal to the GNA<sup>43</sup>. On the opposite side, a coalition of militias announced on 10 February the formation of the Libyan National Guard (LNG), which supports the GNC-linked government of Khalifa al-Ghweil.

On 18 March, the Libyan National Army fully captured the district of Gandoufa in southwest Benghazi, after having made major breakthroughs in January against BRSC fighters occupying the district<sup>44</sup>. The group's presence in Benghazi was thus reduced to the districts of Sabri and Souk al-Hout in the city centre<sup>45</sup>. Reports about alleged war crimes committed by Libyan National Army forces emerged shortly after. According to a Human Rights Watch report, these include the killing and beating of civilians, as well as summary execution and the desecration of bodies of opposition fighters<sup>46</sup>. The LNA has issued a statement describing the unlawful killings as 'isolated' incidents, and ordering that those responsible be brought to military trial<sup>47</sup>.

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On 15 April, Serraj called for international help concerning the escalation of hostilities in southwestern Libya between the pro-GNA Misratan Third Force (now called the 13th Brigade) and the BDB on one side, and the LNA on the other side. On 22 April, a meeting took place in Rome

40 UNSC, Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, UN doc S/2016/1011, 1 December 2016,

41 Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, supra fn 21, p 25.

42 S. Ackerman and C. Stephen, 'US Planes Strike Isis Fighters in Libya "Planning Attacks in Europe"', The Guardian, 19 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/19/libya-us-airstrikes-isis-islamic-state>.

43 K. Hanly, 'Misrata Military Council Brigades Will Join the "Libyan Army"', Digital Journal, 31 January 2017, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/world/misrata-military-council-brigades-will-join-the-libyan-army/article/484881>.

44 'Update: The Final Fall of Ganfouda', Libya Herald, 18 March 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/03/18/update-the-final-fall-of-ganfouda/>.

45 C. Macé, 'En Libye, un mois de combat tous azimuts', Libération, 3 April 2017, [http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/04/03/en-libye-un-mois-de-combats-tous-azimuts\\_1560242](http://www.liberation.fr/planete/2017/04/03/en-libye-un-mois-de-combats-tous-azimuts_1560242).

46 HRW, 'Libya: War Crimes as Benghazi Residents Flee', 22 March 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/03/22/libya-war-crimes-benghazi-residents-flee>.

47 Amnesty International, 'Evidence Points to War Crimes by Libyan National Army Forces', 23 March 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/03/evidence-points-to-war-crimes-by-libyan-national-army-forces/>.



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between the President of the HoR, Ageelah Saleh, and the head of the High Council of State, Abudrahman Sewehli, under the sponsorship of the Italian foreign minister<sup>48</sup>. A breakthrough in the talks occurred on 2 May, when Haftar met with Serraj in Abu Dhabi. The two sides reportedly agreed to the annulment of Article 8 of the LPA and the restructuring of the PC<sup>49</sup>. The foreign minister of the GNA subsequently stated that Haftar would be head of the army provided that he recognized the GNA as the legitimate government of the country.

Tripoli witnessed heavy clashes on 26–27 May between militias loyal to the GNA and to the GNC. The clashes resulted in the death of 52 pro-GNA fighters, 17 of whom were reportedly summarily executed<sup>50</sup>. Meanwhile, following a terrorist attack by the Islamic State on 26 May that led to the death of 30 Egyptian Copts in the Egyptian province of Minya, the Egyptian Air Force launched new airstrikes on Islamist positions in Derna and Jufra<sup>51</sup>. The city of Derna and its environs are the last eastern areas not under the control of the LNA, and Derna has been blockaded by the LNA since June 2015, when the Derna Mujahideen Shura Council (DMSC) ousted ISIL from the city<sup>52</sup>.

On 5 June, the HoR-linked government announced the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Qatar following a similar decision by the UAE and Egypt, which are considered key allies of the eastern administration. In a statement, the HoR accused Qatar of destabilizing the country by

48 K. Hanly, 'Op-Ed: Rivals from Competing Libyan Governments Meet in Rome', Digital Journal, 24 April 2017, <http://www.digitaljournal.com/news/politics/op-ed-rivals-from-competing-libyan-governments-meet-in-rome/article/491073>.

49 Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, 'The Haftar-Sarraj Rapprochement and Prospects for a Resolution of the Libyan Crisis', 25 May 2017, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/positionpapers/2017/05/haftar-sarraj-rapprochement-prospects-resolution-libyan-crisis-170525101108118.html>.

50 'Rival Factions Clash in Libya's Tripoli', Al Jazeera, 27 May 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/rival-factions-clash-libya-tripoli-170526154255187.html>.

51 'New Egyptian Derna Airstrikes as Cairo Warns of Libyan Islamist Threat', Libya Herald, 29 May 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/05/29/new-egyptian-derna-airstrikes-as-cairo-warns-of-libyan-islamist-threat/>.

52 'LNA's Derna Blockade to be Eased for Ramadan', Libya Herald, 25 May 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/05/25/lnas-derna-blockade-to-be-eased-for-ramadan/>.

supporting terrorist groups with 'money and weapons'<sup>53</sup>. However, the GNA is unlikely to endorse this move given its warm relationship with Qatar<sup>54</sup>.

In a very recent development, Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi, son of the former leader, Muammar Gaddafi, was released from his detention on 9 June. His captor, the Zintani militia Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Brigade, which had detained him for more than five years, cited an amnesty law passed last year by the HoR as the reason for his release<sup>55</sup>. Saif al-Islam is accused of the murder and persecution of civilians as crimes against humanity, and since 27 June 2011, he has been facing an arrest warrant from the International Criminal Court<sup>56</sup>. He was sentenced to death in absentia by a Tripoli court in July 2015. His current whereabouts are unknown.

## MAIN ACTORS AND WARRING PARTIES

**General National Council (GNC):** Libya's first democratically-elected parliament (in July 2012) after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. Following the parliamentary elections of June 2014, which resulted in a considerable loss for the Islamist/Misratan bloc that previously dominated the GNC, some members of that bloc refused to hand over power to the newly elected HoR and announced, in August 2014, the reinstatement of the GNC. In April 2016, some members of the GNC, in a contentious move, declared its dissolution and the establishment of the High Council of State in its place. The GNC is presided over by Nuri Abu Sahmain and its aligned government, the National Salvation Government, is headed by Khalifa al-Ghweil

53 J. Prentis, 'Beida Government Cuts off Diplomatic Relations with Qatar', Libya Herald, 5 July 2017, <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/06/05/beida-government-cuts-off-diplomatic-relations-with-qatar/>.

54 Ibid.

55 C. Stephen, 'Gaddafi Son Saif al-Islam Freed by Libyan Militia', The Guardian, 11 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/11/gaddafi-son-saif-al-islam-freed-by-libyan-militia>.

56 ICC, Warrant of Arrest for Saif Al-Islam Gaddafi, Pre-Trial Chamber I, ICC-01/11, 27 June 2011.

Both are strong opponents of the PC and the LPA.

**House of Representatives (HoR):** Libya's elected and internationally recognized parliament, which came into being following the 2014 June elections. It is headed by Ageelah Saleh who has strong links with General Haftar. Due to Operation Dawn, the HoR had to retreat to the city of Tobruk in the east of the country. The HoR-linked government is headed by Abudullah al-Thinni and sits in the eastern city of Bayda. Until late 2015, al-Thinni's government was the internationally recognized government of Libya.

**Presidential Council (PC):** born out of the UN-brokered LPA in December 2015, and functions as a head of state and Supreme Commander of the Libyan Army. It consists of nine members and is presided over by Faiez al-Serraj. According to the LPA, Serraj would head the GNA, while the two governments linked to the HoR and GNC would be dissolved. The GNA came to be recognized by the international community as the legitimate government of Libya, though it was not endorsed by the HoR as required by the LPA.

**Operation Dignity:** a military campaign launched in May 2014 by General Khalifa Haftar with the purpose of eradicating Islamist militias in Benghazi, but which gained wider scope with time. Besides the LNA, the alliance of armed groups behind Operation Dignity includes Zintani militias from the western town of Zintan (most notably the al-Qa'qa, Sawa'iq and Muhammad al-Madani militias), the Benghazi-based al-Sa'iqa Special Forces and Cyrenaica Army in the east, and ethnic Tubu and Tuareg fighters in the south<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> United Kingdom Home Office, Libya: Security and Humanitarian Situation, Country Policy and Information Note, p 18, 27 January 2017.



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**Operation Dawn:** a military campaign launched by a coalition of Islamist/Misratan armed groups in July 2014 in order to drive out Haftar-aligned Zintani militias from their positions in Tripoli. The coalition included a number of Misratan militias (most notably, Libya Central Shield Force), Islamist-aligned militias from Tripoli, the LROR, Zawiya brigades, the Knights of Janzour militia, and various Berber militias. The coalition had fractured long before the entry into force of the LPA in late 2015, with tensions growing between Misratan factions and Tripoli-based groups in particular<sup>58</sup>. The Steadfastness Front established by Saleh Badi in mid-2015 is considered to be the successor of the former coalition<sup>59</sup>.

**Libyan National Army (LNA):** although proclaimed by its leader, General Khalifa Haftar, to be the national army of Libya, it is in fact a mixture of military units, former police officers and tribal or regional-based armed groups<sup>60</sup>. The LNA came to the fore in Mid-2014 with the launch of Operation Dignity. In March 2015, Haftar was designated by the HoR as Chief of Staff of the Libyan Army. The LNA has a strong hold on the eastern part of the country with control over some parts in Central Libya.

**Zintani Militias:** armed groups from the western city of Zintan, who are allied with LNA forces. They were driven out of Tripoli as a result of Operation Dawn. Some later joined the so-called Tribal Army – comprising fighters from the Warshefana region and other tribal elements from western Libya – to confront Libya Dawn forces<sup>61</sup>. They held Saif al-Islam in captivity for over five years until his alleged release in June 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', supra fn 35, p 4.

<sup>59</sup> F. Wehrey and A. Alrababa'h, 'Taking on Operation Dawn: The Creeping Advance of the Islamic State in Western Libya', Carnegie Middle East Center, 24 June 2015, <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/60490>.

<sup>60</sup> Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', supra fn 35, p 4; see also Missaglia, 'Libya's Political Stalemate', supra fn 53.

<sup>61</sup> Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', supra fn 35, p 5.

**Libya Shield Forces (LSF):** an umbrella coalition of armed groups that was established in 2012 and is nominally under the authority of the Ministry of Defense. It comprises three largely independent divisions that are named after their geographical locations: the Eastern, Central and Western Shields. The eastern branch (also called Libya Shield One) is part of the BRSC. The Central Shield Force is predominantly composed of Misratan militias and, together with the Western Shield, was a key component of the former Libya Dawn coalition.

**Misratan Third Force:** an armed group falling under the authority of Misrata's Military Council and led by Jamal al-Treki. The Third Force was originally deployed in the southern part of Libya by the National Salvation Government in early 2015, in order to stabilize communal fighting in Sabha<sup>62</sup>. The group had to withdraw from some of its positions in the region following heavy clashes with LNA forces in mid-2017. It is considered to be loyal to the GNA.

**Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC):** an umbrella group of Islamist militias that united in June 2014 to rebuff Haftar's forces in Benghazi. It included the former ASL, the 17 February Martyrs Brigade, the Rafallah al-Sahati Brigade and Libya Shield One. Its presence in Benghazi today is limited to the districts of Sabri and Souk al-Hout in the city centre.

**Former Ansar al-Sharia in Libya (ASL):** a radical Islamist group that was originally established in Benghazi in 2011. The group is affiliated with al-Qaeda and is considered to be responsible for the September 2012 attack on the US Consulate in Benghazi<sup>63</sup>. Following the attack, the group went through a process of rebranding, changing its name from Katibat Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi to Ansar al-Sharia in Libya. This change reflected the group's plan to expand its activity to the rest of the country, later leading to the emergence of affiliates in the cities of Derna, Sirte and Ajdabiya<sup>64</sup>. Until recently, it was the leading force in the BRSC. It announced its dissolution in May 2017, citing heavy losses that have wiped out its leadership.

**Islamic State in Libya (ISIL):** first emerged in Libya in early October 2014, when Islamist factions in the eastern

<sup>62</sup> F. Wehrey, 'Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 30 March 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/30/insecurity-and-governance-challenges-in-southern-libya-pub-68451>.

<sup>63</sup> Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', *supra* fn 35, p 7.  
<sup>64</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Libya, *supra* fn 2, p 17.

city of Derna pledged allegiance to the Islamic State. It was, however, ousted from the city in mid-2015 by the DMSC. In March 2015, ISIL went on to seize the coastal town of Sirte, which was only liberated in late 2016 following Operation al-Bunyan al-Marsous. Currently, the group's presence in Libya is limited to desert areas in the south and some cells around the country.

**Derna Mujahideen Shura Council (DMSC):** a coalition of jihadist militias that was formed in December 2014 in opposition to ISIL and the Islamic Youth Shura Council in Derna<sup>65</sup>. It managed, half a year later, to oust ISIL from the city, which has since remained under an LNA blockade. Following the terrorist attack on Egyptian Copts in May 2017, the Egyptian Air Force launched several airstrikes against DMSC positions in Derna. The city remains the last key centre in eastern Libya that the LNA has been unable to take<sup>66</sup>.

**Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB):** formed in May 2016 with the purpose of supporting the BRSC and retaking Benghazi from Haftar-aligned forces. It is comprised of a number of anti-Haftar army and police personnel as well as militiamen of various political stripes, including hardline Islamists. The group was recently involved, together with the Misratan Third Force, in heavy clashes against LNA forces in South Libya.

**Libyan National Guard (LNG):** a coalition of militias formed in February 2017 in support of the GNC-linked government of Khalifa al-Ghweil. The LNG is composed largely of Misratan militias with a number of Amazigh militias, and also includes the LROR. The coalition is reported to exert control over almost all of western Tripoli, whereas the rest of the capital is controlled by forces loyal to the GNA.

**Presidential Guard:** an armed force created by the PC in May 2016 to secure government buildings and vital installations in Tripoli. Some units of the Presidential Guard later turned against the PC by supporting an attempt of the GNC-aligned government to reassert itself in the capital in October 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Mapping Libya's Jihadists', *supra* fn 42.

<sup>66</sup> 'LNA Air Strikes on Derna After Haftor Appoints New Head of Operations', Libya Herald, 17 January 2017. <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/17/new-lna-air-strikes-on-derna-after-haf-ter-appoints-another-new-head-of-operations-against-it/>.

## FOREIGN INVOLVEMENT

**Egypt:** The neighbouring country plays an active role in the Libyan conflict. It is reported to have provided military support for LNA forces in both training and equipment<sup>67</sup>. The Egyptian Air Force has allegedly conducted airstrikes against Operation Dawn forces, together with the UAE Air Force, in August 2014<sup>68</sup>. It was reported to have conducted additional airstrikes in Benghazi in October 2014<sup>69</sup>. These attacks were not openly admitted by the Egyptian authorities. The country's involvement became overt in early 2015 when Egyptian warplanes conducted a series of airstrikes on ISIL positions in the east of Libya. In April 2016, Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, publicly voiced support for LNA forces, citing the need to rid Libya of extremist elements<sup>70</sup>. Egypt recently launched new airstrikes on Islamist positions in Derna and Jufra.

**United Arab Emirates (UAE):** According to a recent report of the panel of experts of the UN Sanctions Committee, the UAE has been providing both material and direct support to the LNA, significantly increasing the air support available to the LNA<sup>71</sup>. Together with Egypt, the UAE is also alleged to have launched airstrikes against Operation Dawn forces in August 2014. The country hosted an important meeting between Haftar and Serraj in early May 2017.

**France:** The presence of French military personnel in Libya was confirmed by the French Ministry of Defense, following the death of three officers in a helicopter crash near Benghazi in July 2016<sup>72</sup>. Although openly supporting the GNA, France had been reportedly providing intelligence support to LNA forces around Benghazi<sup>73</sup>. The new government recently stated that it was reviewing its position on the Libyan conflict, and called for a united national army that would include Khalifa Haftar to battle Islamist militants<sup>74</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Egypt Regime "Sends Military Support to Libya's Haftar", The New Arab, 23 October 2016, <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2016/10/23/egypt-regime-sends-military-support-to-libyas-haftar>.

<sup>68</sup> Gartenstein-Ross and Barr, *Dignity and Dawn*, supra fn 1, p 26.

<sup>69</sup> M. Michael and O. Almosmari, 'Egypt Warplanes Hit Libya Militias, Officials Say', Associated Press, 15 October 2014, <https://apnews.com/fe66b72c56a49479c46d19ef2e3bf66>.

<sup>70</sup> 'Al-Sissi Confirms His Country's Support for Haftar's Forces', 18 April 2016 <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2016/4/18/>

<sup>71</sup> UNSC, Final Report of the Panel of Experts on Libya Established Pursuant to Resolution 1973 (2011), UN doc S/2017/466, 1 June 2017, Para 132.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, Para 133; see also C. Bensimon, F. Bobin and M. Zerrouky, 'Trois membres de la DGSE tués en Libye, le gouvernement libyen proteste', *Le Monde*, 21 July 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, supra fn 21, p 22.

<sup>74</sup> 'France Under Macron Signals Shift in Libya Policy, Toward Haftar', Reuters, 18 May 2017.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-libya-idUSKCN18E2UU>.

**Qatar:** The Gulf state has reportedly provided military support to Islamist groups in Libya<sup>75</sup>. In addition, it has maintained links with jihadist Abdelhakim Belhadj, the former leader of the defunct Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, since 2011<sup>76</sup>. In early June 2017, the HoR-linked government broke diplomatic relations with Qatar, accusing it of destabilizing the country by supporting terrorist groups with 'money and weapons'<sup>77</sup>.

**Turkey:** In 2014, al-Thinni's government accused Turkey of providing weapons to GNC-linked groups in Tripoli, but Turkey denied these allegations<sup>78</sup>. According to the UN panel of experts, Turkish companies previously delivered weapons to the defunct Libya Dawn coalition<sup>79</sup>. Both Turkey and Qatar are considered to have less influence on actors in Libya than Egypt or the UAE<sup>80</sup>.

**United States:** The US has voiced strong support for the GNA, and former Secretary of State, John Kerry, said he would support any requests from the PC for an exemption from the arms embargo<sup>81</sup>. Throughout 2016, the US deployed special forces, mainly for intelligence gathering, and offered to train and equip Libyan forces<sup>82</sup>. The US supported Operation al-Bunyan al-Marsous forces in recapturing Sirte from ISIL, and has launched airstrikes against the group's positions in the country on numerous occasions since 2015.

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<sup>75</sup> Gartenstein-Ross and Barr, *Dignity and Dawn*, supra fn 1, p 41.

<sup>76</sup> Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', supra fn 35, p 3.

<sup>77</sup> J. Prentis, 'Beida Government Cuts off Diplomatic Relations with Qatar', supra fn 71.

<sup>78</sup> A. Tolba and A. al-Warfalli, 'Libyan PM Says Turkey Supplying Weapons to Rival Tripoli Group', Reuters, 27 February 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security-turkey-idUSKBNOLVIS120150227>

<sup>79</sup> Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 'A Quick Guide to Libya's Main Players', supra fn 35, p 3.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Crisis Group, The Libyan Political Agreement, supra fn 21, p 23.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.



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