

KINGDOM OF MILITIAS

LIBYA'S SECOND WAR OF POST-QADHAFI SUCCESSION

Jason Pack



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I - MACRO LESSONS ABOUT LIBYA'S ARMED ACTORS	3
• YET ANOTHER WAR IN LIBYA	3
PART II - AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT DYNAMICS	5
• MILITARY DYNAMICS AMID STATELESSNESS	5
• FRAGMENTATION	7
• THE CENTRALITY OF TRIPOLI – OPERATION FLOOD OF DIGNITY	8
PART III - THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY	10
• THE LNA'S METANARRATIVE	10
• THE NARRATIVE'S ADHERENTS	11
• THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY ADVANCE IN THREE STAGES	12
• THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO LNA NATIONAL DOMINANCE	15
PART IV - THE ANTI-LNA MILITIAS	21
• THE REAL AXES OF LIBYA'S POLITICS	21
• THE LATE SUMMER WAR, THE 7TH BRIGADE, AND THE RESILIENT BALANCE OF POWER	22
• ELUSIVE EFFORTS TO FORGE A JOINT CHAIN OF COMMAND	24
• THE TRIPOLI PROTECTION FORCE	24
• ANTI-HAFTAR FORCES FROM OUTSIDE TRIPOLI	26
• THE ANTI-LNA COALITION'S COHERENCE AND CAPABILITIES	29
• RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD	30
V - THE OUTLOOK FOR LIBYA	32
• LIBYA HAS NEVER HAD A TRULY NATIONAL ARMY	33
• A ROLE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY?	34
• WHAT DOES HAFTAR WANT FOR LIBYA?	35
APPENDIX: KHALIFA HAFTAR – A POTTED BIOGRAPHY	37
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	38

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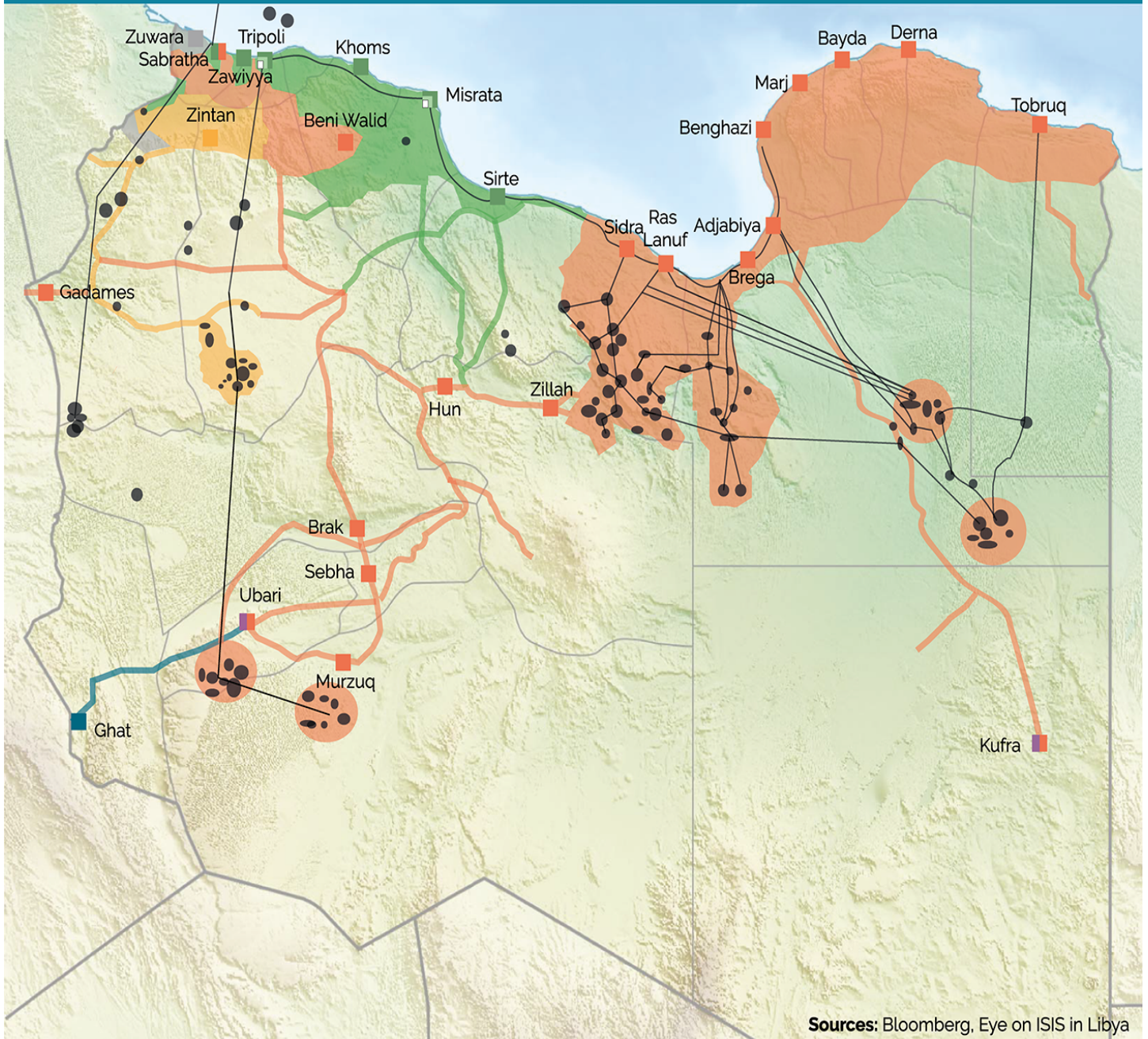
Jason Pack
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In early April 2019, General Khalifa Haftar instructed the Libyan National Army (LNA) to take Tripoli by force, initiating Libya's Second War of Post-Qadhafi Succession. Drawing upon the Libya-Analysis proprietary real time militia mapping project, this paper examines the main armed groups involved in the war: ascertaining their strengths, weaknesses, command and control structures, motivations, alliances, military capacities, and financing. It illustrates how all armed groups in Libya exploit the country's dysfunctional war economy. Unappreciated by most international policymakers, the current conflict has actually increased their leverage to pry Libya out of this downward spiral. Major international players have the tools to prevent Libya from becoming permanently enshrined as a kingdom of militias, but only if they transcend their divergent approaches and rally together to cut off the belligerents' purse strings. Failure to act is facilitating the growth of global jihadi movements, migrant flows to Europe, and the tragically avoidable humanitarian catastrophe currently engulfing Libya.

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Libya: The territorial gains of Haftar

(Late-April 2019)



Sources: Bloomberg, Eye on ISIS in Libya

PREDOMINANT MILITIAS BY AFFILIATION

- Government of National Accord
- Libyan National Army and allies
- Amazigh forces
- Tebu forces
- Tuareg forces
- Jihadist forces
- Petroleum Facility Guards

PREDOMINANT MILITIAS IN MAIN CITIES

- Government of National Accord
- Libyan National Army and allies
- Zintani forces
- Tebu forces
- Tuareg forces
- Jihadist forces
- Amazigh forces

ENERGY RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURES

- Oil and gas field
- Pipeline



PART I - MACRO LESSONS ABOUT LIBYA'S ARMED ACTORS

YET ANOTHER WAR IN LIBYA

The struggle for the post-Qadhafi future has been characterised by the dominance of non-state actors, feckless national leadership, endemic corruption stemming from the country's war economy and fluidity of allegiances. But more than any other trend, fragmentation has been the unifying theme (pun intended) for this eight-year-long struggle.¹ Groups that fought together in the 2011 anti-Qadhafi uprisings later turned against each other in the first civil war, which started in 2014, while groups that fought against each other in 2014² frequently fragmented into subgroups by 2018's late summer war over southern Tripoli. Presently, some of those who fought each other in the western region in 2014, joined together to fight against the LNA offensive in Tripoli in spring 2019.

Alongside this fragmentation and shifting of alliances, groups rebrand themselves – then merge and subdivide – as new coalitions come into being. Since Libya's first civil war broke out in 2014,³ and the country bifurcated into two rival governments, only one entity has progressively grown in logistical coherence: the disparate collection of rank and file soldiers and civilian paramilitaries that call themselves the Libyan National Army (LNA). The LNA has spread outwards from al-Marj in eastern Libya and grown in complexity and sophistication. Its financial networks, supply chains, social media capabilities and international relationships all experienced incremental strengthening. Despite this geographic and capacity growth, the LNA has always been mired in contradictions. Like the famous quip about the Holy Roman Empire, the Libyan National Army is neither entirely Libyan (it occasionally relies on foreign mercenaries), nor is it national (initially the majority of its top brass hailed almost exclusively from certain Eastern and Central tribes), nor is it a regular army (it does not answer to a national sovereign authority nor are its rank and file drawn by national conscription or volunteerism). The current conflict over Tripoli is the LNA's attempt to abolish these contradictions and become Libya's genuine Weberian sovereign by brute force alone.

This second civil war, which is the second discrete phase of the struggle for the post-Qadhafi future, is characterised, then, by the LNA's quest to conquer the whole country politically, and to actualise some version of its leader's frequently articulated mantra of "liberating Libya from Islamists." Either the LNA will succeed, and in doing

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so, become what it claims to be – a real national army – or it will fail and **be exposed as only one of the myriad armed groups** which profit from Libya’s war economy – the country’s fundamental problem that prevents the success of peace-making endeavours.⁴ And yet, the **international community has been long divided** in its approach to mediate the conflict – largely ignoring root causes, backing one side against another and focussing on high profile political summits, while ignoring concrete implementation or structural economic reforms.⁵

This paper seeks to evaluate the main actors in the current struggle and ascertain their motivations. It is based on Libya-Analysis’s ongoing proprietary **militia mapping project**, which traces the actions of Libya’s armed groups and their connections to key parts of Libya’s infrastructure, economy and institutions.⁶ More specifically, this paper highlights just one of the main conclusions to emerge from the study of our data set: namely that over the past five years the LNA has sought to expand into Libya’s *de facto* sovereign. It has made significant progress in this aim, and yet its actions galvanise very specific counter reactions from Libya’s other armed actors. Study of the data set reveals that the Libyan militia ecosystem seems to preserve a remarkably durable “balance of power”. Any actors attempting to usurp greater power tend to galvanise previously feuding actors to work together to restore the balance. The LNA’s attempt to “unify” Libya by taking Tripoli by force, rather than by unifying divergent political factions or militias and the army via negotiations, has caused – and will continue to cause – a more profound counterreaction, and hence a **horrific human and political toll on Libya**.⁷ Even in the event of an LNA victory, Libya’s struggle for post-Qadhafi succession will not be resolved without a consensual political process and reforms that change the economic incentives to be in a militia.

As Libya has been plunged into a second civil war by Haftar’s efforts to bolster his image as Libya’s supreme military commander of a united national army, a detailed understanding of the belligerents and actors participating in the clashes on the ground is critical. In the face of much uncertainty, this paper will first attempt to outline the main dynamics of the conflict: who the LNA and its allies are. It will then examine the armed groups opposing the LNA’s entrance into Tripoli – whom we will dub “the anti-LNA coalition.” Finally, the paper will assess the lessons that Libyan history sheds on the current struggle. Arriving at the overarching conclusion that Libya has never had a national army and has always been governed by a balance of powers, we seek to present a comprehensive overview of Libya’s armed groups,

Over the past five years the LNA has sought to expand into Libya’s de facto sovereign

Libya has never had a national army and has always been governed by a balance of powers



focussing on how their alliance structures and connections to local communities constrain their future evolution, and also likely contain the key points of leverage that international policymakers could use to halt the fighting. This paper illustrates that the balance of power persists in Libya due to its being sustained by the war economy. As such financial leverage, is the international community's sharpest policy instrument. Should it wish to halt the fighting it should block the LNA's funding streams, as well as those of other belligerents, and then facilitate a face-saving compromise.

PART II - AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT DYNAMICS

MILITARY DYNAMICS AMID STATELESSNESS

Many people incorrectly believe that the majority of Libya's militias derive from the specific groups that fought for or against Qadhafi in 2011. This narrative stems, in part, from the fact that many militias justify their continued existence and control over the state security apparatuses by touting their sacrifice and martyrdom during the 2011 uprisings, as well as their desire to preserve the "principles of the revolution". In actual fact, many of the militias and the vast majority of the militiamen operating in Libya today did not participate in the anti-Qadhafi violence. For those militia leaders who commanded in 2011, it is **extremely rare** that they did so for an entity with the same name and command structures as ones that exist today.⁸

The militia landscape in 2019 came into being gradually for a number of interlocking reasons: 1) The national power vacuum required local authorities to provide security and services; 2) Government salaries were offered to those who claimed to be militiamen after Qadhafi's ouster; 3) Opportunities to exploit subsidies and smuggling/trafficking networks; 4) Vast supplies of arms which were readily available in Libya; 5) The strength of local, tribal and regional identities and the weakness of national institutions and narrative; and 6) Youth unemployment, the need for personal and community protection, and the personal status that militia membership confers. In short, being in a militia in Libya is profitable, because it can be leveraged to gain preferential access to state subsidies and semi-sovereign institutions; all other activities outside the oil sector or the state's myriad patronage networks are not.

This has led to a new system of incentives, in which militias now have a vested interest in perpetuating the current statelessness and fragmentation, at the expense of the public interest at large. Roughly put, being in a militia gets one a salary, as







The balance of power persists in Libya due to its being sustained by the war economy. As such financial leverage, is the international community's sharpest policy instrument. Should it wish to halt the fighting it should block the LNA's funding streams

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well as myriad other perks. Militias are afraid of any state building processes, which might undo this fundamental fact. Office holders, finance ministers, and central bankers, created and implemented this policy. Tragically, it has been state policy since 2014 to pay militiamen on all sides of the ongoing struggle for the post-Qadhafi future as a mechanism to legitimate incumbent holders of Libya's purse strings as 'connected to the armed struggle.' This appeasement cycle continues as officeholders perceive that if they cut off payments the militias would turn on them.⁹ Only profound international support for economic reformers could provide an exit to this vicious cycle.

The reasons for the emergence of militias in Libya **ISPI**

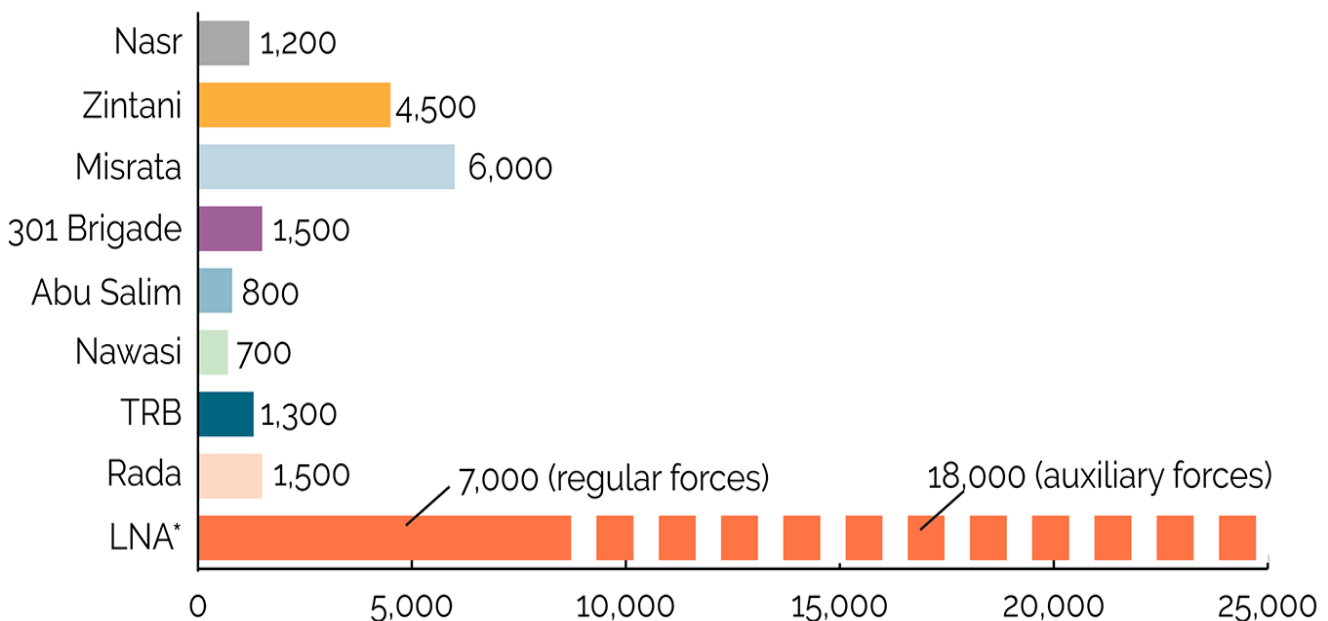
1.  The national power vacuum preventing the provision of **security** and **services**
2.  The **payments** offered to those who claimed to be militiamen
3.  The opportunity to exploit **subsidies** and **smuggling-trafficking** networks
4.  The vast supplies of **arms** which were readily available in Libya
5.  The strength of **tribal** and **regional identities** and the weakness of national institutions
6.  Youth **unemployment** and the need for personal and community **protection**

FRAGMENTATION

Events during the First Civil War of Post-Qadhafi Succession (2014-18) demonstrated that **no single group or national coalition** is capable of consolidating control over the whole country.¹⁰ Each time one actor made territorial gains, other actors emerged to oppose its further dominance.

Despite this, by early 2019, the LNA gained enough momentum across Libya to become the country’s most powerful and coherent armed actor. Still, it has not entirely bucked Libya’s trend of alliance fragility as, in reality, it is a loose grouping of constituent parts and individuals united for specific missions. Yet in February and March of 2019, it had expanded its influence into Libya’s southwest oil fields. Bolstered by these successes, it has undertaken further **attempts to consolidate alliances** with armed groups in western Libya for a prospective capture of the capital – either by force or by guile.¹¹ As a response to these developments, there were concurrent UN-backed attempts to facilitate alliance building among Tripoli-based militias and those in Misrata and Zintan to dissuade such an attempt. These events set the stage for the outbreak of the Second Civil War.

The main **militias** by **number** of fighters **ISPI**



* The LNA claims that their numbers of fighters are over 80,000



THE CENTRALITY OF TRIPOLI – OPERATION FLOOD OF DIGNITY

According to historical precedents and mainstream interpretations of international law, no Libyan faction can claim the mantle of “national army” without the internationally-recognised government acknowledging it as “its army” or without exerting control over Libya’s political capital, Tripoli. These two arguments have not, however, prevented the LNA from getting a modicum of international legitimacy and significant engagement on political and counterterror issues. Such “political successes” appear to have fed the perspective that full legitimacy as Libya’s sovereign was within reach for the LNA.

On 3 April, the LNA announced the launch of its long-anticipated operation to dominate western Libya. The following day, LNA leader Khalifa Haftar released a highly evocative statement declaring **Operation “Flood of Dignity”** (Toufan al-Karama) to liberate Tripoli from rival militia factions aligned with the Government of National Accord (GNA).¹² Shortly after, **LNA forces moved north** from Ghariyan towards the area surrounding the Tripoli International Airport (TIA) in southern Tripoli.¹³ Simultaneously, LNA forces west of the capital briefly seized the 27 km checkpoint on the coastal road between Zawiyya and Tripoli before being routed.

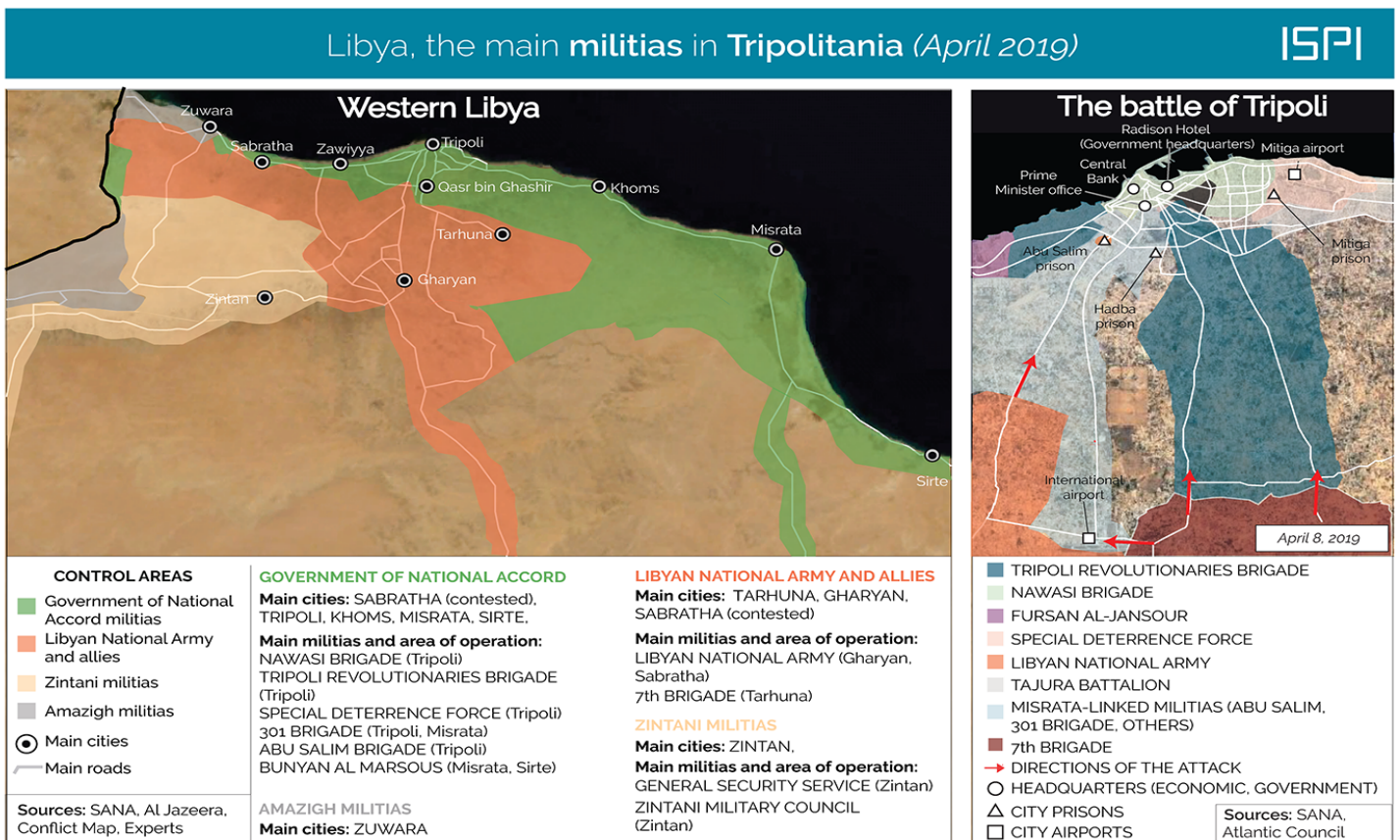
In response to the LNA statements and mobilisation of forces, various previously antagonistic armed groups in Tripoli and the wider western region undertook a coordinated mobilisation to the outskirts of Tripoli and fortified their positions ahead of the LNA’s advance. Many of these forces are nominally aligned to the internationally-backed GNA – including the Tripoli Protection Force, Zintani forces aligned with Osama Juwaili and forces from Misrata and certain militias from Zawiyya. The GNA has called this counter operation “Volcano of Rage” (Burkan al-Ghadab).

Since then, fighting has mainly been concentrated in the districts south and south-east of Tripoli, which can only be accessed via the roads from Ghariyan and Tarhouna. The rest of central Tripoli continues to be controlled by anti-LNA militias, predominantly under the umbrella of the Tripoli Protection Force.

For residents in central Tripoli during the first two weeks, life continued in “a more normal way” than most media outlets would have their readers believe. However, many international organisations and embassies, and multinational companies, including ENI, promptly evacuated their staff from Tripoli in the event fighting spread from the outskirts of the city to more central districts and neighbourhoods.

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Starting in the middle of April, after most internationals were evacuated, the fighting intensified into a genuine LNA siege and artillery bombardment, complete with Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV or drone) strikes (P. Wintour, *The Guardian*, 21 April 2019). However, by late May the LNA has failed to breach the southern districts of the capital and more than 500 people have been killed while as many as 75,000 have been forced to flee their homes (A. Elumami, A. al-Warfalli, and U. Laessing, *Reuters*, 26 May 2019).



Note: This map lists SABRATHA as (contested). To clarify, prior to April 2019, Sabratha's militias have long been supportive of the LNA, while functionally cooperating with the GNA. Since the start of the war for Tripoli, the city's main militias and security structures outright rejected the GNA. Therefore, as of the end of May 2019, Sabratha would make more sense to be considered in the LNA and Allies section. Under the subtitle Control Areas, there is no mention of Zawiyiyya's militias positioning in April 2019, we treat this in the text. Some Zawiyiyya militias could be categorized as GNA militias, while others have aligned themselves with the LNA and Allies and have a camp in the south of the city. Lastly, our categorization of Zintani Militias as their own category, may obscure that most Zintani militias are supporting the GNA at present while, some Zintani militias operate under the LNA under the command of Idris Madi (which has been the case for a long time - as has Zintan's relationship with the LNA/Haftar) - this is mentioned in the text.



PART III - THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY

Despite its claim to be the “national army” of Libya, the self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) is a collection of truly discrete military/militia units and tribal/regional-based armed groups. While having a total force of some 25,000, the LNA’s “Regular Army” or its core full-time militia, is made up of **some 7,000 troops**;¹⁴ it has **a limited air force** with approximately eight combat-ready aircraft,¹⁵ and its naval forces appear to be restricted primarily to coastal patrol vessels.¹⁶ The rest of the LNA is composed of around 18,000 auxiliary troops. This includes Chadian and Sudanese forces, tribal militias, and other armed groups, such as the eastern and central branches of the Petroleum Facilities Guard. The LNA claims on social media that it contains more than 85,000 troops (“**Libyan National Army Spokesman**”, 14 November 2018). Although the current conflict may be facilitating recruitment of rank and file soldiers from recently occupied areas around Tripoli that have embraced the LNA, it is highly unlikely that its pronouncements of troop figures are accurate.

Stemming from a series of smaller armed units that were component parts of the Libyan Army under the Qadhafi regime, the LNA emerged as a nascent force in mid-2014, when General Khalifa **Haftar launched “Operation Dignity”** to eradicate Islamist militias in Benghazi.¹⁷

THE LNA'S METANARRATIVE

Haftar **had announced a coup** in February of that year, but as the Zintanis failed to follow his lead in the West of the country, his momentum quickly dissipated.¹⁸ When Haftar tried again in late spring/early summer 2014, **dynamics had shifted significantly** as various Islamist and Misratan-aligned groups sought to cancel the June 25 election results.¹⁹

This was a propitious moment for Haftar: by seeking to defend “the will of the people” and their “elected body”, while purging “the enemies of the people” dubbed “Islamists”, Haftar had found a core metanarrative that would suit him well over the coming years. This narrative has helped his popularity grow as it has more than a ring of truth to it: the political entities targeted by Haftar – first in Benghazi, then in Derna, and now in Tripoli, have in certain instances, opportunistically embraced support from extremist forces such as Ansar Al-Sharia, the Libyan Islamic Fighting group, and on certain occasions even ISIS.

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Libyan National Army		Khalifa Haftar (Unofficial)
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
anti-Islamist pro-Arab Tribal	 Several parts of Libya	 ~7,000 (18,000 auxiliary forces)*
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECT TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Civilians, criminals, jihadists, extremist militias, minorities (Chadian, Tebu, Tuareg)	LNAspox Maktab.Alam. AlGhaida.ALama warinformationdivision	Yes

* The LNA claims that their numbers of fighters are over 80,000

Note: The “Targets” section of these tables is meant to amplify the text on each militia group, and not serve as a standalone. If taken in isolation this information can be misleading. We are not attempting to imply that the LNA deliberately targets random civilians or that other militias do similar actions. The situation is far more nuanced than that as the text of this paper makes clear. Similarly, we list the “Social Media” handles of the militias for reference only and we wish to make clear that this paper is not advertising the militia’s social media presence or seeking to call attention to their media relations campaigns.



By March 2015, the eastern-based House of Representatives (HoR) designated **Haftar as the Chief of Staff of the Libyan Army** – i.e. the remnants of the former professional army that remained affiliated to the then international-recognised HoR.²⁰ Over time, the LNA grew in cohesiveness and power, choosing to present itself as a “security sector reform project,” i.e. an attempt to build a national army capable of bringing order to a lawless country. The LNA presented its main goals as **purging Libya of Muslim Brotherhood affiliates** and jihadists as well as exercising control over the country’s other militias – either by eliminating them, demobilising them, or incorporating them into its patronage networks and command structures. These goals have remained constant from mid-2014 to the present.²¹ Through these public objectives, Haftar seeks to fulfil his primary personal ambition: securing autocratic power for himself or for the LNA as an institution.

As of April 2019, the LNA's power structure relies on traditional business families from the Eastern region, former Qadhafi-era top military brass, the nominally sovereign HoR legislature, and the Beida-based Abdullah Thinni government.²² These groups embrace the metanarrative of a centralised command structure, which has gradually emerged as a reality via the LNA’s gradual coalition building, targeted payments, projection of power and public support for the emergence of a supreme authority – due to growing discontent from insecurity and lawlessness across the country.

THE NARRATIVE'S ADHERENTS

In Eastern Libya, many young unemployed men are enticed by the LNA's metanarrative as they are imbued with a deeply rooted longing for order, personal dignity, and a centralised control of force as a legacy from the statelessness and arbitrary use of force during the Qadhafi period. Conversely in Western Libya, since the fragmented, Islamist-leaning or Islamist-accommodating factions have failed to deliver on their promises of restoring normalcy to the country, a portion of the public, especially those of an anti-Islamist bent, have turned their support to military-rule, even if this means authoritarian rule, which might offer a modicum of order to society. A paper by Clingendael (Netherlands Institute of Foreign Relations), based on polling in mid-2018 whose method likely implicitly overrepresents the educated and media-savvy, found that the Libyan public gradually evolved **greater confidence** in the “protective capacity” of the LNA rather than the security institutions of the GNA.²³

Haftar seeks to fulfil his primary personal ambition: securing autocratic power for himself or for the LNA as an institution



Over the years, the LNA has capitalised on these psychological and structural factors to gain support from specific communities in the western region, although acquiring the loyalties of certain groups does not necessarily mean the whole community or other militias from these towns or regions have become similarly aligned. For example, during the current fighting, some militias from southern Zawiyah have aligned themselves with the LNA, while the city’s more prominent militiamen – such as those from the Nasr brigade (also known as the Martyrs of Victory Brigade) under Mohammad Kushlaf (which will be explored later in this article) – are **fighting with the anti-LNA coalition** in the capital.²⁴ Similarly, in Zintan a minor contingent of its armed forces headed by Idris Madi is **under the command of the LNA**,²⁵ while a large portion of Zintan’s forces operating under Osama Juweili and Emad Trabelsi, have remained **aligned with the GNA**.²⁶ In some Western towns, such as Sabratha and Sorman, support of the LNA appears more unanimous.

THE LIBYAN NATIONAL ARMY ADVANCE IN THREE STAGES

STAGE 1: NEW TERRITORIAL GAINS, NEW CHALLENGES: THE SIEGE OF DERNA

With the metanarrative fully in place to justify and rationalise any brutality against enemy combatants or civilian populations that might eventually surface in the public domain, in May 2018 Haftar launched a final assault on Derna with the stated objective of removing the city’s al-Qaeda linked Shura Council of Mujahideen (SCMD). He **had sporadically besieged the city since 2016**, without committing significant forces to the campaign.²⁷ These attacks, like those in Benghazi before them, had led to **significant human rights violations** occasionally shared on social media – particularly Facebook.²⁸

Days after the concerted 2018 assault began, the SCMD **rebranded itself as Derna Protection Forces (DPF)**, likely in an attempt to distance itself from SCMD-linked Islamist groups connected with terrorism.²⁹ The LNA deployed as many as twenty-one, if not more, different brigades during the assault and **received overt support** (logistics, armaments, and airstrikes) from Egypt and the UAE.³⁰ After a “battle” that lasted nearly a year, the LNA announced **the capture of Derna** in February 2019.³¹ This cemented its dominance over the whole of coastal eastern Libya and proved the group’s military capability of conquering and then incorporate originally hostile territories.

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Derna Mujahideen Shura Council		Atayah al-Shaari
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
Jihadism (al-Qaeda)	South of Derna 	 -600
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Civilians, Security Forces, oil infrastructures, State Institutions	Unknown	Yes



STAGE 2: CEMENTING A NATIONAL ROLE - OPERATION SOUTHERN LIBERATION

On 15 January 2019, weeks after Libya’s largest oil field had been closed by protesters, an LNA spokesman announced that its forces, including the **Makdhali Salafist Khalid Bin Walid Brigade**,³² would undertake an operation to liberate southern Libya from extremist groups, and to “ensure the public’s continued ability to maintain and control Libya’s oil and gas sector.”³³ This offensive marked the first time that the LNA was willing to extend its supply lines to undertake a major operation far away from its main base of operations in Libya’s northeast. The LNA’s mobilisation into the southern region was on a much greater scale than the previous occasions from 2015-2018, when the LNA attempted quick southward forays to remove militant and extremist groups from the South.³⁴

Prior to the launch of the Fezzan campaign, there was a notable restructuring of LNA forces which saw brigades and battalions dissolve and amalgamate. Clear lines were drawn between campaign forces and those of local patrols and guards.³⁵ The establishment of the 73rd Brigade, that had at least seven units come under its command, is a notable example of this phenomenon.

THE LNA’S SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPORTERS UP THEIR GAME

The LNA went to great length to manage its perception and media coverage during their operations. Indeed, the successful image carefully crafted by social media influencers concerning the LNA’s southern operations did not reflect the reality on the ground.³⁶ Despite the very real gains that were made which facilitated the reopening of Sharara and al-Feel fields, rebel and opposition forces remained – though they were ejected from the main civilian centres. Regardless of this, the southern campaign was effectively utilised by LNA supporters on social media to present it as a supremely powerful and coordinated organisation, with the ability to guarantee genuine security free from oppressive tactics.³⁷ This image was meant to create a wave of positive support from local groups in the western region, which the LNA sought to capitalise on. The southern campaign, which has never officially ended, now appears to have become an afterthought.

But the momentum that the narrative around it acquired enabled the LNA to channel its focus upon Libya’s ultimate prize: Tripoli. In other words, the LNA leadership perceived that the moment had come to dominate the country’s domestic and international narrative and that their media apparatus was strong enough to

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Khalid Bin Walid		Yousif Hussain Salah
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
Makhdali Salafism		Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SABHA SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECT TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Criminals, Chadian militia groups	كتيبة خالد بن الوليد	No



project themselves as the overlords of Libya. These lessons in projecting a narrative of effortless and continual victory, honed in the Southern campaign, were then deployed in the Tripoli campaign. Yet in the battle for Tripoli, a full-on social media war was launched with the aim of influencing international coverage of the fighting. In this effort the LNA's effectiveness was further enhanced by a coterie of Saudi-based³⁸ and pro-LNA social media influencers.

STAGE 3: THE BATTLE FOR CONTROL OF LIBYA'S MAJOR MILITIA PRIZE: THE TRIPOLI CAMPAIGN

From the very start of Operation Dignity, Haftar stated that he intended to capture Tripoli – clearly demonstrating his understanding that no faction can truly be considered a “national army” without it. He and LNA spokesmen have long couched their desire for domination via the narrative of “liberating” the capital from terrorist and extortive armed groups, thereby justifying a future assault on the city. In truth, Haftar has had long-standing ambitions to lead Libya without civilian oversight and to oversee a militarisation of the state.³⁹

Haftar's decision to launch the offensive in early April appears to have been influenced by multiple factors: his increased international profile; his possible perception of being given a green light from foreign supporters and benefactors;⁴⁰ heightened confidence within the LNA leadership following its successful campaign to take southern Libya; improved reach and coverage on social media; a need for more cash to funnel through the LNA's patronage networks; and a view that the National Conference would alter dynamics in the country in ways that were unfavourable to the LNA. The LNA's launch of Operation “Flood of Dignity” followed mobilisation of its forces to Jufra, Sirte, and the northwest coastline over the preceding weeks. This coincided with outreach efforts to develop relationships with local municipalities, tribes, and militias along with the southern and western entrances to Tripoli.⁴¹ Moreover, as shown in the preceding section, the southern campaign helped the LNA bolster its image domestically and internationally as a “credible” national army-building project. By presenting itself in this manner, it has worked to entice groups to operate local LNA “franchises,” by providing them with both legitimacy and resources if they fly the LNA banner. For example, the LNA has successful co-opted Tarhuna's Kaniyyat and Gharyan's Adel Da'ab.⁴²

The LNA leadership perceived that the moment had come to dominate the country's domestic and international narrative and that their media apparatus was strong enough to project themselves as the overlords of Libya.

The experience of Derna should have taught the LNA that an assault on Tripoli would not lead to a swift victory, but a rather long and protracted conflict



Despite these preparations and alliance shifts, the experience of Derna should have taught the LNA that an assault on Tripoli would not lead to a swift victory, but a rather a long and protracted conflict. However, during the long Derna siege, many of the LNA's attacking forces were benefiting from "relatively" local and secure supply lines, enabling ready access to capabilities and fresh troops. Conversely, during the current fight, the anti-LNA forces benefit from internal supply lines.

Given these logistical issues, the LNA has become a victim of overstretch. Areas it previously secured have been left vulnerable to spoilers and opposition groups sensing an opportunity to reassert themselves into the Libyan context.⁴³ Moreover, for it to succeed the LNA would need to secure its supply routes from Tripoli tracing all the way back to Jufra airbase in central Libya. As a result, three approaches or axis towards Tripoli have governed the military logic of the current fighting: a southeast axis via Bani Walid and Tarhouna; a southern axis via Ghariyan; and a western axis via Zawiyya and Sabratha.

THE MAIN CHALLENGES TO LNA NATIONAL DOMINANCE

FIRST CHALLENGE: TRIPOLI IS NOT DERNA

In Tripoli, the militia opponents the LNA faces are far greater in number than they were in Derna. They are also much better equipped (as we will discuss in greater detail later in this paper). Tripoli is also a much larger city with many narrow streets and historic neighbourhoods, which would undoubtedly result in fierce house-to-house fighting should the battle ever reach the city centre. Reports suggest that the LNA forces are aware of this and have adapted their tactical approach accordingly. Their supposed "Tripoli-tactic" is to lure anti-LNA forces into areas on the fringe of the city – such as the non-functional Tripoli International Airport (TIA) – by temporarily capturing the location, withdrawing hours later following a symbolic skirmish. Then, allowing opposition forces to move in, at which point they respond with a counter attack or airstrike – then rinse and repeat.⁴⁴ It is unclear if this **cat and mouse game** by the LNA largely explains the fluidity of control of locations on the ground – TIA, Yarmouk Barracks and the Sawani district changed hands on a daily basis throughout most of April.⁴⁵ Their reliance on the "Tripoli-tactic" indicates that LNA units cannot capture fortified chokepoints against a determined opposition defending the neighbourhoods in which they live.

Tripoli is also a much larger city with many narrow streets and historic neighbourhoods, which would undoubtedly result in fierce house-to-house fighting should the battle ever reach the city centre

The LNA is heavily dependent on keeping its extended supply lines open and winning over support from more local groups in and around Tripoli to sustain its operations. Given ongoing GNA airstrikes against LNA supply routes in the Jufra area, the stability of these lines is in doubt.



Moreover, the LNA is heavily dependent on keeping its extended supply lines open and winning over support from more local groups in and around Tripoli to sustain its operations. Given ongoing GNA airstrikes against LNA supply routes in the Jufra area, the stability of these lines is in doubt. The LNA also seems to have undermined a lot of its local relationships as a result of its advance on Tripoli, but it may be able to coerce or convince individual groups to strike deals with it, especially if the conflict drags on. Finally, the LNA would lose a great deal of legitimacy among its supporters and within the LNA itself if it admits defeat and withdraws without good reason. So even though it seems unlikely that the LNA could win this conflict without significant external intervention – unlikely to be forthcoming in the immediate term, but not impossible as it could receive air support from Egypt or the UAE and special forces/reconnaissance support from either Russia or France – the LNA may still opt to pursue the conflict to the bitter end even in the absence of profound external support. Viewed from the sidelines, the LNA's continuation of its Tripoli campaign into May appears [a classic example of the sunk cost fallacy](#).⁴⁶

SECOND CHALLENGE: LNA'S PURSE STRINGS

But the [LNA also has another big problem](#): money.⁴⁷ Eastern Libya and the LNA are suffering from a liquidity crisis and urgently need a cash injection. The LNA receives funding from the eastern-based commercial banking sector, the state institutions of the parallel HoR-affiliated government, and likely from outside backers. Correspondingly, LNA troops receive wages indirectly through the Tripoli-based Central Bank of Libya (CBL) and budgetary allocations from eastern-based institutions, such as the Interim Abdullah al-Thinni Government and the eastern Central Bank of Libya both based in al-Bayda. Recent reports indicate that the LNA is even undertaking business enterprises such as [selling scrap metal to supplement its financing](#).⁴⁸ Rather than conceived as forms of illicit economic activity, Haftar likely looks eastward across his border to Egypt and sees these forms of financial generation as part and parcel of army-led state building. It has been suggested that the LNA also engages in highly profitable real estate transactions and 'owns' or has appropriated a significant portion of Cyrenaica's most valuable land. All of this has [direct parallels to the Egyptian Army](#), which is said to control more than 20% of Egypt's GNP and much of its super-prime commercial real estate.⁴⁹

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While its salary and operations budget has vastly increased, the LNA's control over Libya's oil fields and ports has not translated into increased revenues given that receivables are all directly accepted by the CBL.



Yet these revenue streams are still not enough. When the LNA has expanded its territorial ambit with minimal fighting – such as over the oil crescent in September 2016 or over the Fezzan in February 2019 – it has done so by vastly extending its patronage network. While its salary and operations budget has vastly increased, the LNA's control over Libya's oil fields and ports has not translated into increased revenues given that receivables are all directly accepted by the CBL. Only the National Oil Corporation (NOC) based in Tripoli can sell Libya's oil – and only the CBL in Tripoli can collect payment for it. As a result, Libya's oil wealth essentially passes through a central spigot in Tripoli before it is distributed outward in the form of subsidies, salaries and Letters of Credit. Consequently, access to Libya's fiscal resources is only achieved through the control of Tripoli. Hence, if the LNA gains control of Tripoli, it could presumably force Tripoli-based financial institutions to grant itself access to the money it desperately needs. Recently, reports that the Tripoli-based CBL has restricted access to Letters of Credit for three eastern-based commercial banks (Wahda, Commerce and Development Bank and Ijmaa al-Arabi Bank) will make life even more difficult for the LNA and its patronage networks. The last time the LNA and the parallel Eastern institutions were facing a liquidity crisis in 2016-2017, they received from Russia over 4 billion counterfeit dinars. This contraband currency was honoured throughout Libya, even though it was distinguishable from official dinars which are printed in England. The fake dinars bailed out the profligacies of the East and caused the [dinar to lose value in the black market throughout Libya](#). Anonymous Western diplomats have told the author that to deal with the LNA's current liquidity crunch 1.9 billion in Russian printed dinars are said to be coming in this year for the LNA's and the Eastern Institutions' discretionary use. This could tip the balance of the financial dimension of the fighting in unknown and dangerous ways. Given the destabilising effects of these dinars, the GNA could in advance declare any Russian printed currency null and void. Similarly, the Central Bank could, after a period of time, refuse to accept it.

In short, the longer the fighting goes on, the more the LNA's expenditure will likely mount. The LNA may, therefore, experience an acute balance of payment crisis over the next few months. This fact may actually hold the key to halting the fighting. Should international policymakers wish to do so, they could facilitate this payment crisis by using sanctions to block 1) financial transfers to the LNA from its Gulf and Russian allies as well as injection of counterfeit Russian-printed hard currency and 2) the Eastern branch of the CBL and the Eastern commercial banks access to foreign

If the LNA gains control of Tripoli, it could presumably force Tripoli-based financial institutions to grant itself access to the money it desperately needs

Jadhran's attack on the oil crescent during the LNA's siege of Derna illustrated that the LNA lacks the capabilities, manpower and internal organisation to maintain control over the whole region it occupies while fighting a prolonged battle elsewhere



currency inflows. If implemented coherently by a united front of Western actors, these steps (even in the face of a Russian UN Veto) would curtail the LNA's access to funds, likely bringing it to its knees in a short period of months.

THIRD CHALLENGE: OVERSTRETCH

Ibrahim Jadhraan, the revolutionary militia commander and former head of the eastern branch of the PFG, attacked the oil crescent during the LNA's siege of Derna. This fact illustrated that the LNA lacks the capabilities, manpower and internal organisation to maintain control over the whole region it occupies while fighting a prolonged battle elsewhere. This is a key point. The LNA has efficient patrolling units, relatively well-trained special forces units, and experienced siege units, yet all of these exist in limited numbers, and can only be deployed in certain areas at particular times. As such, given Libya's vast geography and myriad armed challengers, the LNA's recent expansion has made it **permanently overstretched**, threatening its hold over any particular region or city at any given time.⁵⁰

One might think as the LNA expanded it would have acquired or integrated more core troops. This is not necessarily the case. The number of core troops and officers it can raise from the appropriate tribes with relevant battle experience or specialised credentials is likely mostly already maxed out. Yet, there are counterexamples of former Qadhafi era officers or Qadhafi and Magraha tribesmen who have sat out the post-2011 wars for post-Qadhafi succession reemerging in April 2019 to join the LNA,⁵¹ but these limited examples serve to prove the rule. Unless the LNA wants to rely more on mercenaries and Emirati, Russian, or French advisors, its capacities and size are relatively static.

Hence, the phenomenon of overstretch is a fundamental property of the LNA as currently constructed. For example, in May 2018, Ibrahim Jadhraan launched an **assault on oil facilities** in the Oil Crescent region leading to significant damage and loss of hundreds of millions in national oil revenue.⁵² Jadhraan was able to briefly retake the Oil Crescent – partially because the LNA's forces were bogged down in Derna and partially because the region is sparsely populated and he enjoys vestigial tribal support from that area. In other words, the LNA faces the constant threat of new challengers, even in their core areas of control, emerging anytime they mobilise their limited forces for campaigns elsewhere in the country.

In May 2018, the revolutionary militia commander and former head of the eastern branch of the PFG, Ibrahim Jadhraan, launched an assault on oil facilities in the Oil Crescent region leading to significant damage and loss of hundreds of millions in national oil revenue

The LNA's campaign on Tripoli commenced less than two weeks before the UN's initial dates for the National Conference, then slated for 14-16 April in Ghadames



FOURTH CHALLENGE: TIMING

As explained in the second challenge, the financial crunch may have, in part, dictated the timing of the current assault on Tripoli. Another factor was likely the timetable of the international political dialogue process. The LNA's campaign on Tripoli commenced less than two weeks before the UN's initial dates for the National Conference, then slated for 14-16 April in Ghadames. As a result, it has been assumed by many analysts that the LNA's mobilisation of forces and increased posturing was a tactic to intimidate or coerce groups in the western region into striking deals with the LNA and strengthening its hand during the upcoming conference, rather than as a precursor to a full offensive.

Giving credence to this, only a week before the operation, Haftar told a crowd in eastern Libya that there would be a unified government in Tripoli very soon. Many analysts, this author unfortunately included, felt that once the UN set concrete dates for the frequently postponed conference, that would make it unlikely for any militants to upset the apple cart for fear of being uninvited and then losing influence in any post-conference power-sharing deal. We also assumed that the conference would have to go ahead no matter what fighting was unleashed or [the credibility of the UN would be irrevocably compromised](#).⁵³

Surprisingly, Haftar's actions appear, in retrospect, to turn that logic on its head. By using military action to derail the conference and to create new facts on the ground, Haftar's actions have nullified the potential changes to the status quo and the best-laid plans of the international community. Haftar has proven himself the ultimate spoiler.

In March 2019, the GNA Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj and Haftar met in Abu Dhabi under the auspices of the UN for what was pegged as the beginnings of a unity government and power-sharing arrangement between the eastern and western factions which would be bolstered by a new electoral roadmap and 'ratified' by the Libyan people at the UN's National Conference. Whatever the precise details reached in Abu Dhabi, any such power-sharing agreement would almost certainly force Haftar to accept that he could only ever become the head of the Libyan armed forces or a similarly high-ranking position, under civilian oversight. As a result, the understandings likely formally prevented him from achieving his not-so-secret ambition of becoming the 'supreme commander' – i.e. with no elected officials to answer to. This might explain his decision to derail the UN process.

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The Tripoli cartel has profited from preferential access to subsidised products, smuggling opportunities, and the ability to exert political pressure on the GNA, with which the majority of Tripoli's militias are nominally affiliated, even though they operate outside of legitimate civilian controls



FIFTH CHALLENGE: THE WAR ECONOMY PROMOTES THE BALANCE OF POWER

The ‘spoiling’ behaviour engaged in by the LNA’s Tripoli offensive is merely another iteration of larger patterns at play with other armed factions in Libya. All [armed groups in Libya benefit from the ‘war economy’](#).⁵⁴ It stands to reason that they then allow the current balance of power to be perpetuated as it contains the structural and institutional arrangements which sustain the war economy. Therefore, with few exceptions, the main objective of the majority of Libyan armed groups is to protect their access to money-making opportunities by maintaining their current status and positions. Haftar appears to have felt the National Conference could threaten the LNA’s preferential access to certain resources and upset the balance of power as he perceived it.

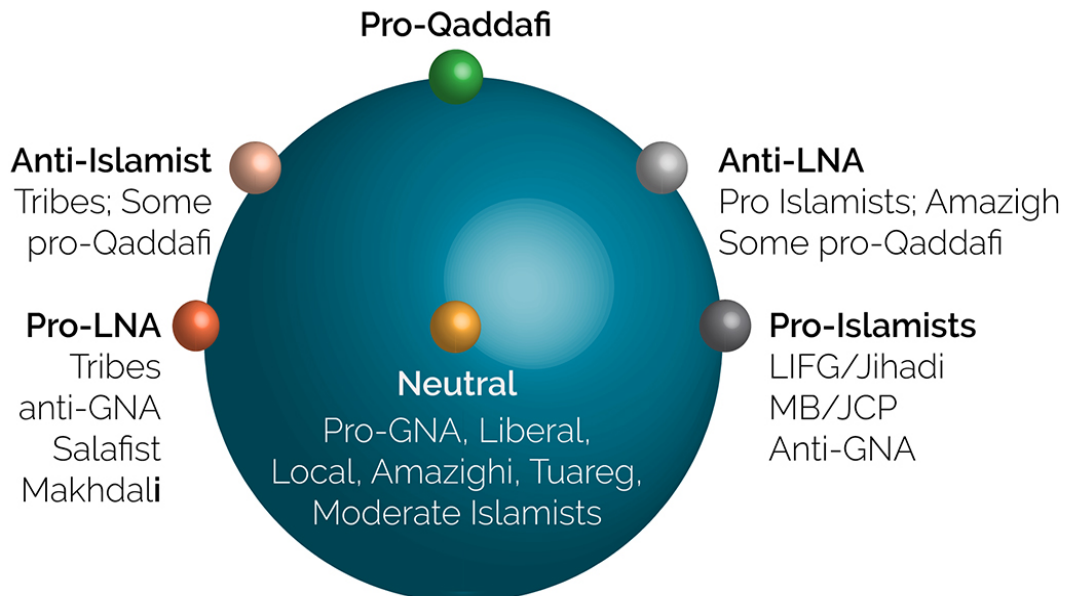
Conversely in Tripoli, when the balance of local power is threatened, the dominant cartel of militias rally around each other to evict whoever challenged the status quo. This is a deep seated Arab tribal behaviour, akin to the oft-quoted Bedouin proverb, “My brother and I against my cousin; my cousin, my brother and I against the outsider.” This, plus the financial dimension of their control, is why Wolfram Lacher’s characterisation of the [Tripoli militias as “a cartel”](#) is particular apt.⁵⁵ The Tripoli cartel has profited from preferential access to subsidised products, smuggling opportunities, and the ability to exert political pressure on the GNA, with which the majority of Tripoli’s militias are nominally affiliated, even though they operate outside of legitimate civilian controls. Indeed, the militias aligned to the GNA do not directly follow its directives, and in many cases actively work to undermine the establishment of coherent security command-and-control structures. As shown throughout this paper, all major military actors in Libya can act as spoilers – especially when the rudiments of the war economy, from which they all benefit, are threatened. Should the international community wish to halt the fighting, it should undertake steps to curtail the flow of salaries, subsidies, and smuggling opportunities to the militias. Given the financial underpinnings of the conflict, the remainder of this paper seeks to explore the balance of power in Tripoli and to demonstrate that all actors, even paradoxically the LNA, have an interest in seeing the current balance of power and financial arrangement is maintained.

PART IV - THE ANTI-LNA MILITIAS

THE REAL AXES OF LIBYA'S POLITICS

For the majority of the GNA-aligned militias, it is not loyalty to the GNA that constitutes a group's primary allegiance, but rather its fierce opposition to Haftar and the LNA. In fact, a fairly scientific way to conceive this grouping of actors is as 'anti-LNA' rather than 'pro-GNA.' A mapping of Libya's radio and TV stations conducted by Libya-Analysis and its partner organisations determined that the primary fissure in Libyan politics was the pro/anti-LNA and pro/anti-Islamists axes (see figure below), whereas **no pro/anti-GNA axis** existed in the discourse of Libya's media landscape.⁵⁶

Libya-Analysis proprietary **political spectrum** code derived from the categorisation of 172 **Libyan media outlets**



Source: Analysis and graphic comes from Libya-Analysis Proprietary media mapping







THE LATE SUMMER WAR, THE 7TH BRIGADE, AND THE RESILIENT BALANCE OF POWER

Although the roots of the current fighting over Tripoli can be loosely traced back to the last all-out scramble for the capital in the summer of 2014, the most recent catalyst occurred less than a year ago with what we have termed “the Late Summer War” of 2018. In late August of that year, the Tripoli Cartel was challenged by the 7th Brigade (aka Kani Militia) from Tarhuna; rather than pursuing any clear political goal, the Brigade’s initial objective appears to have been to break into, or break up, existing smuggling rackets and to acquire short-term territorial gains in areas where it had previously exerted authority. Clashes occurred between the 7th Brigade, and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB), Gheniwa, and the 301 Brigade, as these three militias controlled the areas of southern Tripoli into which the 7th Brigade had advanced.

The 7th Brigade’s unexpected success and popular support encouraged other external groups – most notably the “Steadfastness Front” or “Samoud Brigade” under the command of Salah Badi from Misrata (See below for more on the Steadfastness Front) – to capitalise on the situation and advance the idea of cleansing the capital of the predatory “Tripoli Cartel.” They framed the assault on Tripoli as a fundamental attack on the balance of power and the incumbents ability to profit from the war economy. As such Badi’s narrative caused a rallying of incumbent forces, which then defeated him and his 7th Brigade allies.

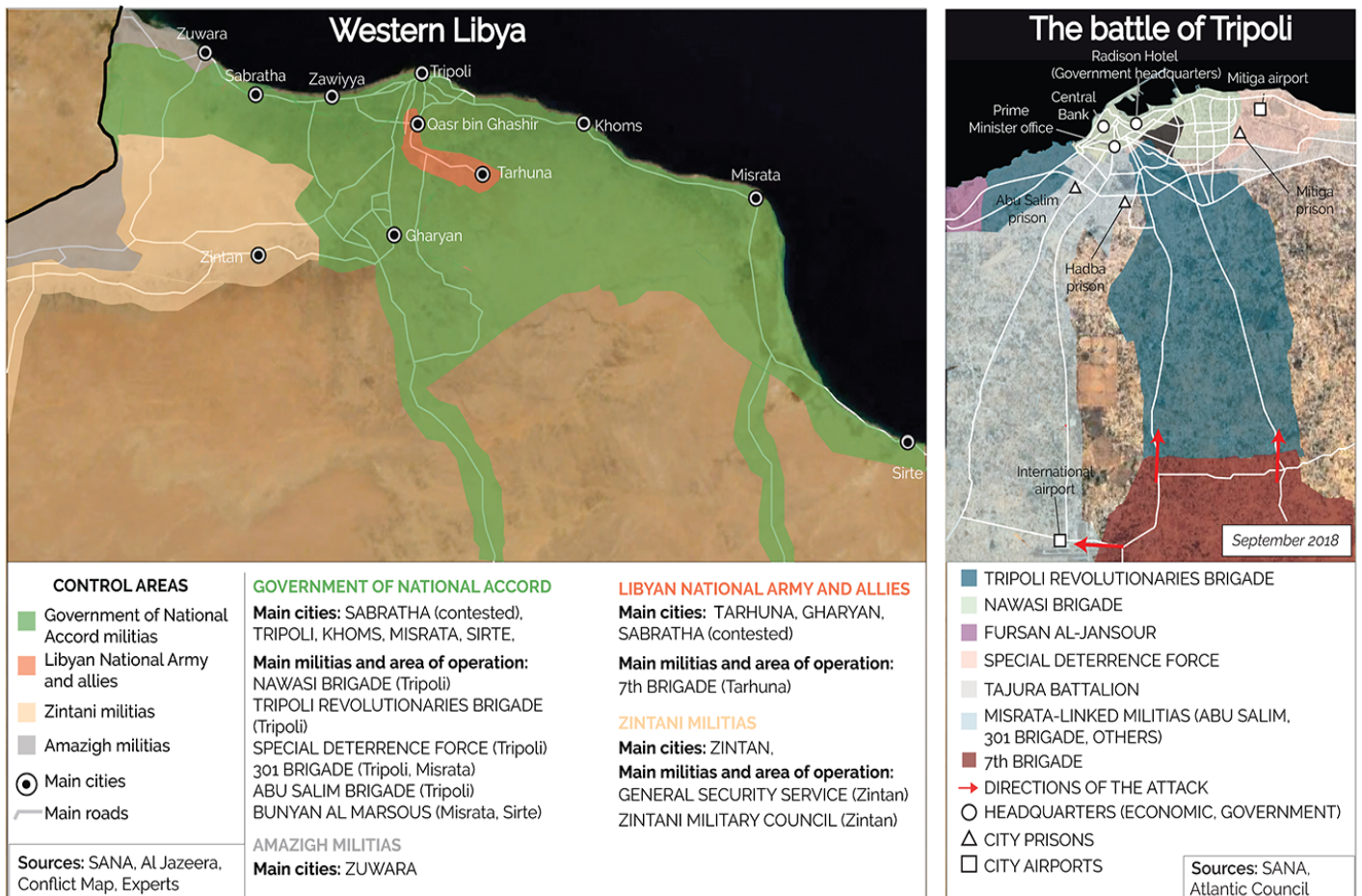
Badi’s entrance into the conflict in Tripoli was primarily opportunistic, taking advantage of an impromptu land grab by the 7th Brigade that extended further into central Tripoli than expected. With the aim of overturning the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) and bringing down the GNA and the Serraj premiership, Badi intended to gain control of a significant amount of Tripoli territory, which would earn him a seat at the table in political negotiations. Although the late-summer war failed, it seems to have set a template. In fact, during it Haftar was emboldened, and despite the LNA’s lack of involvement in those clashes, he threatened that, “When the time is right, we will move towards Tripoli.”

Intermittent clashes lasted for nearly a month, and saw the precursor to the Tripoli Protection Force with the so-called “Tripoli Cartel” united under a singular pro-GNA banner, to uphold the balance of power at all costs. The 7th Brigade and the

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
7th Liwa - Kani Brigade - Kaniyyat		Muhsin Khalifa al-Kani (unofficial)
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation	 Tarhuna	Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Tripoli militias, local Tarhuna tribes and families against the Kani clan	 seventhbrigade  7thBrigadeLibya	No

Steadfastness Front were finally expelled from the city by mid-September, under the provision that new security arrangements by the GNA were to be initiated – supposedly characterised by more professionalism and less by ‘brand loyalty’ towards specific militia commanders.

Libya, the main militias in Tripolitania (September 2018)





ELUSIVE EFFORTS TO FORGE A JOINT CHAIN OF COMMAND

Suppositions that the upshot of the Late Summer War would be Tripoli's Cartel of Militias becoming progressively integrated into a single security force under a genuine unified command proved to be short lived. The failure in the Fall of 2018 to achieve a joint command and control structure for the nascent Tripoli Protection Force illustrated that the very remote possibility of uniting them could only be potentially realised only by an existential Haftar attack, if ever. This is because, as discussed in the previous section, the main theme banding these militias together is their anti-LNA stance, rather than any mutual interest in establishing a truly integrated security force under the authority of the GNA.

THE TRIPOLI PROTECTION FORCE

In reality, most of the militias continue to act under their original identity, and simultaneously under the banner of a formalised "Tripoli Protection Force," (TPF) which only formally announced itself on 18 December 2018.⁵⁷ This initially fairly fictitious grouping has acquired some actual coherence during the current fighting. We will now investigate the TPF's major component parts – the Special Deterrence Force, the Nawasi Brigade, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade, the 301 Battalion, and the Abu Salim Central Security Force.⁵⁸ It is critical to keep in mind that these five main groups constitute both the main pillars of the Tripoli Cartel – which benefits from the "War Economy" and sought to repel the challenge to their profitability represented by the Kani offensive in the Late Summer War – and the Tripoli Protection Force now tasked with repelling Haftar. Libya Analysis data suggest that these five major status quo actors will morph into whatever new forms are necessary to preserve the balance of power. That said, due to the fact that they have stashed significant hordes of cash abroad, the commanders of these five groups are unlikely to want to go down fighting and there are always ongoing rumours that the most prominent of them have already fled the country to Tunis.

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THE SPECIAL DETERRENCE FORCE (RADA)

The lynchpin of Tripoli’s current security architecture is the **Madkhali Salafist-leaning Special Deterrence Force**, also known by its Arabic acronym as Rada.⁵⁹ Founded in the capital’s Suq al-Juma’a neighbourhood and led by Abdul al-Rauf Kara, Rada came to national prominence for managing to operate successful counter terrorism operations, while remaining politically unaffiliated with the GNC and the political Islamist-leaning forces that took control of Tripoli between 2014 and 2016. In May 2016, the Chairman of the Presidential Council attempted to rebrand Rada as the “Deterrence Apparatus for Combating Organized Crime and Terrorism,” indicative of **Rada’s importance to the GNA** and its functional entrenchment in the capital.⁶⁰ To date, it remains nominally affiliated with the GNA’s Ministry of Interior (Mol). Rada’s members number as many as 1,500 with its formal territory limited to a small north-eastern part of Tripoli, but its influence is widespread across the city. **It controls key infrastructure** such as the Mitiga Airport complex – Tripoli’s only functional international airport – and the prison situated therein.⁶¹ The group’s influence also extends beyond Tripoli to parts of Zuwara, Sabratha, Surman and Zawiyya along the western Coastal Road, where it has undertaken counter-terrorism operations and conducts its de facto criminal investigation functions. Rada’s crime fighting units in the Sabratha and Surman area are known as the Mabathith Al-Gharbiya.

THE NAWASI BRIGADE

The Nawasi Brigade is led by Mustafa Qaddour and nominally affiliated with the GNA’s Mol. Nawasi rose to international prominence after **it assisted the GNA Presidential Council’s** relocation to Tripoli in March 2016 amid significant political tensions and potential security threats to the new internationally-recognised government. It acts as an intelligence and private security service.⁶² **Numbering approximately 700 troops,**⁶³ **the militia’s headquarters are based in the Port of Tripoli** near the Abu Setta Naval base – the exact same location where the GNA’s Presidential Council is based, highlighting their importance to the internationally recognised government.⁶⁴

THE TRIPOLI REVOLUTIONARIES BRIGADE (TRB)

Emerging during the fall of the city in 2011, the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB) was progressively consolidated into a powerful standalone force by Haithem Tajouri. TRB is now one of the most powerful Tripoli-based militias. And it is also nominally

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Special Deterrent Forces (RADA)		Abdul Rauf Kara
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
Makdhali Salafism	Tripoli (Mitiga)	 >1,500
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Islamists, jihadists, homosexuals, drug users, criminals	QwAlrada Alhaast	No

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Nawasi Brigade		Mustafa Qaddour
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation	Tripoli	Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Islamists, jihadists, homosexuals, drug users, criminals	Nawasi	No

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Tripoli Revolutionary Brigade (TRB)		Haithem Tajouri
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation	East Tripoli	Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Criminals, competing militias and armed groups.	كتبية نوار طرابلس	No



affiliated with the GNA's Mol. It also helped the GNA establish itself in Tripoli. Based in the Suq al-Juma'a area, it also controls the elite coastal neighbourhood of Gargarish and significant parts of eastern Tripoli containing most of the top ministries, major state institutions, and the headquarters of the major state-owned companies. Control over the physical locations of ministries and institutions in Tripoli often translates into real power, access to preferential smuggling and Letters of Credit fraud opportunities, and perceived influence on the ground. In late 2018, **the group's leadership underwent a radical change** following the targeted assassination of several of its prominent leaders when Tajouri returned after an enforced absence of several months under house arrest in the UAE.⁶⁵

301 BATTALION

Under the command of Abdul Salam al-Zoubi, the 301 Battalion is a subset of one of the largest Misratan brigades, Al-Halbous. **The 301 is nominally affiliated with the GNA's Ministry of Defence (MoD).** Firm in its stance that it is a battalion and not a brigade,⁶⁶ the 301 has pledged to support and assist all legitimate security and military apparatuses, and has vowed to **"hit with an iron fist** any attempts to undermine security in Tripoli by either terrorists or military coup plotters."⁶⁷ Previously led by Mohammed Al-Haddad, the ~1,500 strong battalion draws troops from across the Western region, but its leaders are mostly from Misrata, making it **one of Tripoli's most influential groups** to derive its power from external supporters.⁶⁸

ABU SALIM CENTRAL SECURITY FORCE

Abu Salim Central Security Force, also known as the Kikli Militia after its leader Abdul-Ghani Kikli (also known by his nom de guerre of Ghneiywa), was involved in the Libya Dawn Coalition, which was formed to expel rival Zintani forces from the capital in July 2014. Based in the Abu Salim district of southern Tripoli, it is estimated to have approximately 800 fighters.⁶⁹ Nominally affiliated with the GNA's Mol, it has also been referred to as the Central Security Apparatus (CSA) Abu Salim Unit.

ANTI-HAFTAR FORCES FROM OUTSIDE TRIPOLI

MISRATA

Arguably the key powerbroker in western Libya, the mercantile city of Misrata has developed its military forces since 2011 into the most significant impediment to Haftar's

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
301 Battalion		Mohammed al-Haddad
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation	South-West Tripoli	 >1,500
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Criminals, competing militias and armed groups		No
NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Abu Salim Central Security Force		Abdulghani Kikli (aka Ghineiywa)
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation	Abu Salim Tripoli	Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Criminals, competing militias and armed groups		No



attempts to take over the capital. Despite being politically split between moderate factions and more hard-line Islamist-aligned factions, these groups share a mutual desire to maintain the status of their city-state, both politically and economically. Misrata has had a chequered relationship with the GNA, though several of the most influential Misratan representatives have taken roles in the GNA government, such as the Minister of Interior Fathi Bashaaga⁷⁰ and the head of the Central Military Region, Mohamed Haddad.

Misrata has as many as 200 militias, with potentially 18,000 fighters at their disposal. The following forces have already deployed to support anti-Haftar forces in the past: Misrata’s Joint Security Operations Room’s “Special Task Force,” Halbous Brigade, Marsa Brigade, and 166th Brigade.⁷¹ Moreover, warplanes based at Misrata’s Civil Aviation College have also participated in the conflict, launching several airstrikes on LNA positions throughout Tripoli.⁷²

BUNYAN AL-MARSOUS

At this time, it is impossible to determine whether the alleged 6,000 strong Misratan based GNA-aligned Bunyan al-Marsous Forces (BAM) will participate directly in the Tripoli clashes or remain closer to home should the LNA plan a feint or direct assault on Misrata or Sirte. This possibility for a new front was significantly increased following the creation of a Misrata Operations Room by the LNA in mid-April. BAM is nominally affiliated with the GNA and technically under the authority of the GNA’s Central Region Command. Under General Bashir al-Qadi, BAM controls territory in Misrata, Sirte and surrounding areas, and provides general security services by conducting operations with other smaller militias under its command.

ZINTAN

A city-state in the Nafousa Mountains that was instrumental in the 2011 uprisings against Qadhafi, Zintan also participated in Haftar’s 2014 Operation Dignity by clashing with forces from Misrata and Tripoli, before eventually being expelled from the city. As previously stated, Zintan has certain fighters supporting the LNA, operating under Brigadier General Idris Madi, who leads the LNA’s Western Military Zone, as well as other elements who have previously given verbal support to Haftar in order to benefit from the LNA’s logistics network and arms procurement. However, the majority of its armed forces remain aligned with the GNA under the Zintan Military Council (ZMC), led by Osama Juweili, and the Zintani General Security Service led by Emad Trabelsi who used to lead the al-Sawaiq Brigade prior to its defeat in 2014.

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Bunyan al-Marsus Forces		Mohammed al-Ghasri (Spokesperson)
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
Some Islamism, Some anti-Islamism Makhdali Salafism	Misrata Sirte	~6,000
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Criminal, competing militias, IS, Tawergha ethnic group	BMCLY, centre_ly	Yes

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Zintan Military Council		Osama al-Juwali
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation	Jafarah Zintan	~3,000
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Criminals, competing militias, armed groups	Unknown	No



Formed in 2011, with the objective of organizing the efforts of the anti-Qadhafi Zintani militias, the ZMC is one of the most unified, cohesive and experienced armed coalitions in Libya. The group played a prominent role in the 2011 revolution, before its expulsion from Tripoli in the summer of 2014 by the Libyan Dawn movement.

The General Security Service, led by Emad Trabelsi, moved into the Janzour region in early September 2018, upon the request of the GNA to secure the suburb amidst the clashes between the Tripoli-based militias, and the 7th Brigade and Steadfastness Front. Despite long-standing links with the LNA, Trabelsi stated that those under his command were acting as a security force in support of the PC, the Security Committee and the UN, and that his forces were a part of the GNA's Mol. Trabelsi has aligned himself with ZMC Head and the GNA's Western Military Commander Osama Juwaili – who previously allied himself with Haftar, but now opposes the LNA.⁷³ Trabelsi's position in the LNA's assault on Tripoli proved instrumental in tilting the balance against the LNA. Local sources we interviewed who wish to remain anonymous said that the LNA initially relied heavily on Trabelsi and the Fursan Janzur militia defecting from the GNA. Trabelsi's sticking with the GNA and the arrest of Fursan Janzour's head Al Gneidi was a major blow to the LNA's strategy – arguably significant enough to prevent it from penetrating into central Tripoli in the early days of the war.

SALAH BADI'S - STEADFASTNESS FRONT

The self-styled “George Washington of Libya,” Salah Badi was placed on the UN Sanctions list in November 2018, but for years prior to that he has been considered to be one of Western Libya's biggest spoilers. [He encouraged the outbreak of the 2014 civil war.](#) Similarly, he has inserted himself into the recent clashes currently taking place in southern Tripoli.⁷⁴ In June 2015, Badi formed the Steadfastness Front in Tripoli in support of a now-disbanded third government led by Khalifa Ghwell – called the National Salvation Government (NSG) ; it was affiliated with the already defunct General National Council (GNC). In May 2017, it was driven out of Tripoli, but participated in a pro-NSG offensive against the capital in July 2017, and joined forces with the 7th Brigade during the August/September 2018 assault to remove the so-called “Tripoli Cartel” militias.

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Steadfastness Front		Salah Badi
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
Islamism	Misrata 	Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECT TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Civilians, anti-Islamists, competing militias, armed groups	 alssmoood	Yes

Note: The Steadfastness Front have multiple pages being run most likely by suspected, but competing members of its forces. Additionally, arguably the logo we list here is not definitive and the more accurate facebook page (with the more definitive logo) can be reached [here](#)



ZAWIYYA'S SHUHADA NASR BRIGADE

Zawiyya also has a notable number of forces that have reportedly been fighting the LNA, particularly around Tripoli International Airport, as individuals but not as a Brigade. The most prominent Zawiyyan force is the Shudaha Nasr Brigade, a 1,200 strong militia which belongs to the Abu Hmira tribe. Nominally affiliated to the GNA and operating as a part of the PFG, the group effectively controls Zawiyya's port and refinery. Under the command of Mohammed Kashlaf (aka "al-Gasb"), who, along with his cousin Abd al-Rahman al-Milad (the head of the local coast guard), have participated in local clashes in Zawiyya and Sabratha in recent years. A relative of theirs Abdul Rahman Al-Bidja has volunteered in the anti-LNA cause bringing his group of fighters with him.

THE ANTI-LNA COALITION'S COHERENCE AND CAPABILITIES

Haftar's assault on Tripoli has forged all the above listed Western militias into a loose "Anti-LNA coalition," exactly as Libya-Analysis's militia mapping and the principle of balance of power would suggest. Yet, the coherence and sustainability of this coalition is highly fragile and susceptible to sudden fragmentation or even collapse. Within a few days of the assault, the GNA started referring to their forces as *al-Jaysh al-Libi*, "the Libyan Army." They even created a spokesman for this "Libyan Army." None of these groups had ever undertaken a joint operation, and have had little time to facilitate communications, but they seem to grasp the need to coordinate both their battle field actions and to jointly combat Haftar's media offensive.

As for efforts to coordinate military actions, the defence of Tripoli is likely being coordinated among leaders in the TPF. Juwaili, Haddad, and Bashaaga communicate via informal commander-level discussions without a formal structure. Bashaaga is likely to be instrumental in coordinating between major groups. He has reportedly been given the role of Defence Minister days after the siege occurred, but subsequent events, such as Serraj's instructions to the Military Attorney General on April 23 to arrest LNA top brass including Haftar as traitors suggest that Serraj wishes to remain formally as the actual minister of defence. This arrangement allows him to not upset the precarious relationship of the GNA to Zintan (Misrata's traditional opponent) while also not allowing non-Misrata forces to simply blame Misrata in the event of an LNA victory over Tripoli.

NAME OF THE MILITIA	SYMBOL	LEADER
Nasr Brigade		Mohammed Kashlaf (aka "al-Gasb")
IDEOLOGY	AREA OF OPERATION	NUMBER OF FIGHTERS
No ideological affiliation		Unknown
MAIN TARGETS	SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE	MEMBERS SUBJECTED TO SANCTIONS AND/OR WAR CRIME HEARINGS
Opposing tribes, migrants, civilians	Unknown	Yes

Haftar's assault on Tripoli has forged all the above listed Western militias into a loose "Anti-LNA coalition," exactly as Libya-Analysis's militia mapping and the principle of balance of power would suggest



Concrete examples of coordination of the anti-LNA forces are that: the TPF have established their own operations centre. The Misrata Air College is clearly in coordination with Juwaili/Zintan, due to the proximity of Misratan airstrikes to Juwaili's front and former airstrikes. These illustrate that the anti-LNA coalition has been successfully communicating and coordinating to facilitate airstrikes on the LNA without hitting pro-GNA forces confronting them. Juwaili has the most experience in the areas around Tripoli fringes, hence it is not surprising that he is undertaking the attacks against the LNA's major forces in areas of major strategic and symbolic importance such as the Aziziyah (A key southern gateway to central Tripoli).

So, in essence, as expected, the anti-LNA coalition's coordination is unstructured, and will likely gain in coherence as the threat from the LNA increases. However, it will never achieve the coherence enjoyed by the LNA. At any moment, random defections from its ranks could lead to its collapse. Should the international community wish to bring these anti-LNA forces to the negotiating table, they should force the GNA to implement the stalled economic reform program, especially dinar devaluation, subsidies reform, and cracking down on letter of credit fraud and smuggling. If the International Community made such action the price of its continued support for Fayez Serraj as GNA Prime Minister and Sadiq al-Kabir as Central Bank Governor, they would be forced to comply. In fact, the international community has more leverage than ever over these actors. If international legitimacy for the CBL and GNA was removed Haftar would surely takeover both institutions and displace these incumbents.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Despite the fact that the anti-LNA coalition is functioning sufficiently well to keep Haftar out of central Tripoli, it remains relatively fragile and its continued viability is dependent on a number of factors, such as its commanders' willingness to stay and fight rather than flee to enjoy their wealth abroad, the continued international legitimacy for the GNA and its ability to deliver supplies and diplomatic cover to the component parts of the coalition. While coordination on troop movements, deconfliction, and friendly fire prevention measures are apparently functioning adequately, a number of episodes of disagreement on the positioning of forces, as well as, accusations of "betrayal" (especially after the death of Misratan Mahmud Bayo, also known as Sherikhan, head of the Misratan Amateen brigade in Yarmouk camp on 29 April) highlight major fault lines and mistrust still present inside

Despite the fact that the anti-LNA coalition is functioning sufficiently well to keep Haftar out of central Tripoli, it remains relatively fragile and its continued viability is dependent on a number of factors, such as its commanders' willingness to stay and fight rather than flee to enjoy their wealth abroad, the continued international legitimacy for the GNA and its ability to deliver supplies and diplomatic cover to the component parts of the coalition



the anti-LNA coalition. This has also extended to the distribution of provisions, as was highlighted when a shipment of armed vehicles and military equipment – allegedly transported from Turkey via the Moldavian ship Amazon to Tripoli port on 18 May is said to have resulted in a confrontation between Misratan militias and the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade (TRB). (J. Binnie, *Janes 360*, 23 May 2019).

One of the major fears of militia commanders is that their former rivals who are now their allies will use this war to settle old scores and assassinate other militia leaders. For this reason, Misratans do not fight with the Tripoli militias on the same front, but instead fight with the Bugra forces from Tajura. The same goes for Tripoli's main militias – the Nawasi brigade will only advance if the Abu Salim brigade protects its rear, but refuses to trust Misratan brigades to perform the same function despite their having advantageous geographic positioning.

These outcomes are in line with the findings of the Libya Analysis militia mapping project⁷⁵ which found that militia allegiances in the densely populated areas of Tripoli and the western region are more opportunistic and that the rate of change of alliance patterns is higher than in more sparsely populated areas like the South and East. As such, coordination could also collapse quickly the moment the LNA manages to make a genuine breakthrough into the densely populated Tripoli areas. This would likely coincide with key militia commanders flipping their allegiance or fleeing Libya. At that point, past iterations of changes in military dominance over Tripoli (namely 2011 and 2014) would indicate that at that point, all but the most ardently anti-Haftar militias will care more about being on the winning side than about their former allegiances. At that point, the calculus of militia leaders, and even senior political figures for that matter will likely become much more individualistic and self-interested. In the event of an LNA victory, a profound realisation may dawn on the previously anti-LNA forces: the population will not support fighting inside the city and could choose to give up perceived “spoilers” to the new sheriff in town. Also Tripolitans have shown a strong predilection to be on the winning side: the moment the anti-LNA forces fail to deter the LNA from entering central Tripoli, the entire allegiance system of both the population and the militias is likely to shift instantaneously – just as from 18-21 August 2011, as the rebels were poised to take Tripoli, much of the population switched sides instantaneously.⁷⁶

Past iterations of changes in military dominance over Tripoli (namely 2011 and 2014) would indicate that at that point, all but the most ardently anti-Haftar militias will care more about being on the winning side than about their former allegiances



PART V - THE OUTLOOK FOR LIBYA

In light of the current crisis, divining a final outcome appears to be an insurmountable task, especially amid under the table negotiations, hidden agendas, fake news, and overt deception – tactics all Libyan armed groups have no qualms about using in pursuit of their own interests. What is crystal clear, however, is that Tripoli is unlikely to enjoy real stability anytime soon, undermining Haftar’s claims in early April that he would quickly “restore order across the country” by installing a new regime in the capital and creating a genuinely national army, as discussed in Part III. Yes, Haftar may eventually acquire the upper hand, but this will not mean that he ever acquires unfettered access to Tripoli’s resources.

Even the short sketch in Part IV of the six main armed groups involved in Tripoli and another six in Western Libya demonstrates the immense challenge of the LNA subsuming all of these actors under its aegis, or of permanently eliminating their leaders, or coaxing them into exile. Any hopes in that quarter are likely unfounded, unless Haftar receives massive support from external backers like Saudi Arabia, Russia, the UAE, Egypt or France that he can simply punch through resistance – abandoning the typical Libyan (low casualty/low intensity) way of war (J. Pack, *Al-Monitor*, 15 May 2019) in the process – or buy off or intimidate his leading opponents into exile causing the resistance to find itself commander-less and be forced to scatter. And yet if those countries are seen to be delivering external support, why then would Italy, Turkey, and Qatar not intervene to support their ally, the GNA? Moreover, recent reports suggest that this has already begun (S. Al-Atrush, *Bloomberg*, 19 May 2019).

Many supporters of the LNA have seen President Donald Trump’s surprise announcement of a phone call with General Haftar on April as indicating [a shift in the American position](#) towards the LNA.⁷⁷ Yet American policy is inchoate and multipolar.⁷⁸ Trump Administration mixed signals are nothing new. In this instance they are indicative of the broader division within the international community, and the UN Security Council (UNSC) in particular about resolving the Libya crisis. On 21 April, the UK attempted to pass a UNSC statement to initiate a cease-fire, which would have identified Haftar as the aggressor. Both Russia and the US vetoed the proposal. Likewise, on 18 April, the US and Russia vetoed a UNSC proposal calling for an immediate ceasefire to the clashes, with the US requesting more time, while Russia requested the UNSC refrains from directly referring to Haftar in any of its resolutions. Seen a month into the new civil war, international unity to support, or to oppose Haftar, seems impossible to craft.

Many supporters of the LNA have seen President Donald Trump’s surprise announcement of a phone call with General Haftar on April as indicating a shift in the American position towards the LNA



Yet even in that scenario of extensive external support for Haftar suddenly materialising and leading to a breakthrough, the prospect of establishing a unified and truly national army under the auspices of the LNA will still likely be exposed as a mere pipedream. As it stands, the ingrained tribalism and self-interest underlying Libya's militias show no signs of dissipating. If Haftar had held back on his Tripoli offensive, negotiations could have peeled some groups (possibly the Madkhali Salafists) away from the GNA and towards Haftar, but the full-frontal assault has been causing almost all of the Western Libyan militias to rally in defence of their home turf – their chances of being integrated into the LNA is far less than it would have been via negotiations. Seen in this context, the LNA looks the most overstretched it has been in years, and may find itself refighting old battles in various regions and cities it considered previously conquered and secured. Even if it were to win in Tripoli, a new balance of power with new spoilers would undoubtedly emerge.

Hence, political upheaval, factional reshuffling and a lack of security are set to stay, as long as the country's main players seek to maintain or redesign the status quo to their own advantage and continue to calculate their actions based on balance of power calculations.

If Libya's immediate history teaches us anything, it is that the emergence of new fault lines will only serve to further entrench existing factional positions; in all likelihood, the divisions between those who support the LNA and a militarised state-building project, and those who oppose it and wish to preserve the status quo, will only become more embedded. Such divisiveness does not bode well for Libya's future and will undoubtedly hinder any future establishment of a capable centralised government and the creation of a true Libyan Army under its direct authority. In fact, for many the mere concept of a "Libyan Army" is now anathema, dooming Libya to remain a decentralised power vacuum until a new generation emerges for which these ideas have different resonances.

LIBYA HAS NEVER HAD A TRULY NATIONAL ARMY

None of Libya's Imperial rulers – the Ottomans, the Italians, or the British – ever unified Libya administratively or militarily. Its domestic potentates have fared only slightly better. During his monarchy, Idriss al-Sanussi was a polarising figure who drew support from very specific segments of the population and was terrified of creating a truly national army, correctly surmising that some disgruntled subaltern or colonel might eventually overthrow him. He preferred a Pretorian guard, the Cyrenaican Defence Force, which drew its manpower primarily from the sada tribes of

For many the mere concept of a 'Libyan Army' is now anathema, dooming Libya to remaining a decentralized power vacuum until a new generation emerges for which these ideas have different resonances

All of Libyan history highlights this. The country has never had a national army. None of Libya's Imperial rulers – the Ottomans, the Italians, or the British – ever unified Libya administratively or militarily



Cyrenaica.⁷⁹ During the Qadhafi period, the country was further unified economically and institutionally, but never militarily. Qadhafi eviscerated the army, creating his own Pretorian guard from the previously disadvantaged Magraha, Warfalla, and Qadhadhifa tribes.⁸⁰ He too was terrified that equipping and training a national army might lead to some part of it eventually overthrowing him – exactly as eventually came to pass.

Unlike other Arab States, even those with artificial colonial borders like Algeria, Iraq or Syria, Libya has, therefore, never had a coherent national army. In most Arab states cobbled together by the Imperial powers out of diverse Ottoman wilayat, mid-20th century state building was conducted by an army which acted as a sovereign. Not in Libya. The ability of a financial central authority to distribute vast oil revenues to a small and dispersed population granted it power, not the Army. Even if he were to conquer Tripoli, why would Haftar be able to break this pattern of forging a truly national army when he lacks access to both oil revenues and international legitimacy?

A ROLE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY?

Politically, the National Conference has now been postponed and UN Envoy Ghassan Salamé may step down in the near future. Hence, a political solution to the current crisis caused by the conflict in Tripoli – let alone the broader, longer-term issues Libya needs to address – looks increasingly hard to achieve. Seen in retrospect, it is quite possible that late March 2019 will represent the high-water mark for a political solution to the institutional fragmentation that has bedevilled Libya since the summer of 2014. The blocking power of HoR Speaker of the House Agilah Saleh to prevent elections or a constitutional referendum was nearly bypassed, as the National Conference would have opened up a new pathway to elections.

And yet it was not to be. Viewed from late-May 2019, it appears that too many actors benefited from the status quo of militia domination to allow any political progress to proceed unchecked. Only **concerted leadership** by a neutral power, such as the UK, Germany, or the EU⁸¹ could correct these issues and create an alternative political process. In the absence of decisive action, the international community and UNSMIL is likely to lose the ability to effectively mould developments on the ground. So far in the first weeks of the crisis, there has been no indication that major players are willing to exert determined or far-sighted leadership on the Libya file ("**Stopping the War for Tripoli**", International Crisis Group, 23 May 2019).

It is quite possible that late March 2019 will represent the high-water mark for a political solution to the institutional fragmentation that has bedevilled Libya since the summer of 2014

Haftar appears either stubborn or megalomaniacal. He was on the verge of being anointed Libya's most powerful actor by the UN political process, yet that was not enough for him



WHAT DOES HAFTAR WANT FOR LIBYA?

Understanding [Haftar's underlying motivations, strategy and psychology](#) is arguably the most critical factor to forecasting how the current crisis in Libya will unfold.⁸² It now seems that Haftar's intention was never to compromise on his desire to achieve complete leadership of the Libyan armed forces, unfettered by civilian oversight. His intention was to increase his power and leverage before the National Conference by taking control of Tripoli or creating a media perception of dominance, allowing him to dictate the terms of the political process or ignore it completely (see "Tripoli Campaign" section in Part III). Seen in this light, Haftar appears either stubborn or megalomaniacal. He was on the verge of being anointed Libya's most powerful actor by the UN political process, yet that was not enough for him. Psychologically, he appears incapable of accepting defeat. If the international community does not propose a genuine face-saving solution, Haftar may feel that he has little choice but to redouble his current efforts to take Tripoli, as he may never get another chance, due to his advanced age and ill-health. As such, we believe that Haftar's health, psychology, and decision making, as well as international actions either in support of the various combatants or to provide concrete, face-saving ways out the current impasse, will remain the decisive factors in how the conflict is resolved.

As international actors have not shown any willingness to insert peacekeeping forces into the fray, financial pressure is likely their most potent policy tool (J.M. Winer, [Middle East Institute](#), 19 May 2019). First, financial muscles should be flexed, then the warring sides required to desist from fighting and invited to parlay. As stated in the "Second Challenge: LNA's Purse Strings" section of Part III, international policymakers possess the ability to occasion a cash flow crisis for the LNA by using sanctions to block 1) financial transfers to the LNA from its international backers and 2) to prevent the Eastern branch of the CBL and the Eastern commercial banks accessing foreign currency reserves and inflows. If implemented coherently by a united front of Western actors, these steps (even in the face of a Russian veto at the UN) would curtail the LNA's access to funds, likely bringing it to its knees in a short period ("[Stopping the War for Tripoli](#)", International Crisis Group, 23 May 2019).

Conversely as mentioned in the "The Anti-LNA Coalition's Coherence and Capabilities" section of Part IV, should the international community wish to bring the anti-LNA forces to the negotiating table, they should force the GNA to implement the stalled economic reform program, especially dinar devaluation, subsidies reform, and cracking down

Libya's Second War of Post-Qadhafi Succession has given international actors more leverage over developments in Libya than they have had in many years. Failure to act will facilitate the growth of global jihadi movements, increase migrant flows to Italy, and eventually lead to oil price shocks and decreased energy security for Southern Europe



on letter of credit fraud and smuggling.⁸³ If the International Community made such actions the price for its continuing to uphold the legitimacy of Fayeze Serraj as GNA Prime Minister and Sadiq al-Kabir as Central Bank Governor, they would have no choice but to comply.

Paradoxically, Libya's Second War of Post-Qadhafi Succession has given international actors more leverage over developments in Libya than they have had in many years. Failure to act will facilitate the growth of global jihadi movements, increase migrant flows to Italy, and eventually lead to oil price shocks and decreased energy security for Southern Europe. Conversely, the above mentioned, even-handed approach could smooth intra-European tensions and provide a unified platform for action. If major international players genuinely wish to exit the dysfunctional squabbling over the Libya file – which has heretofore prevented a unified approach – and definitively prevent Libya from becoming permanently enshrined as a kingdom of militias, the international community must swiftly rally together to cut off the belligerents' purse strings.



APPENDIX: KHALIFA HAFTAR – A POTTED BIOGRAPHY

As a military man rather than a politician, the LNA's leader, 76-year-old Khalifa Haftar, has famously proclaimed that "[Libya is not ready for democracy](#)."⁸⁴ Originally from Ajdabiya, Haftar was involved as [a junior military officer under Muammar al-Qadhafi](#) during the coup which seized power in September 1969.⁸⁵ During the 1980's, Haftar headed the Libyan forces dispatched to the conflict in Chad, but was [defeated and captured](#) by the French-backed Chadian forces.⁸⁶ Consequently, Haftar was disowned by Qadhafi, who paradoxically denied that any Libyan troops were present in Chad. Haftar [sought exile to the US](#), where he was granted citizenship and progressively developed ties with US intelligence services.⁸⁷

When the uprisings began in 2011, Haftar returned to his native Libya and attempted to present himself a commander of the rebel forces in the east, but [was denied a commanding position](#) by the top National Transitional Council (NTC) brass who viewed him with suspicion.⁸⁸ Due to the killing of Abdul-Fattah Younis in late July 2011, the rebel forces never had an acknowledged and respected leader, leaving the door open for Haftar to attempt to fill the void.

As mentioned in Part III, [in February 2014, Haftar re-emerged](#), calling on Libyans to overthrow the General National Congress (GNC), the first elected legislative body to appear in the wake of the fall of the Qadhafi regime.⁸⁹ Haftar initially claimed that the Zintanis would support him; this support never materialised, causing the putsch to be aborted. Three months later, [Haftar launched "Operation Dignity"](#) to drive out Islamist militias from Benghazi and eastern Libya.⁹⁰ In 2015, Haftar was [declared the commander of the LNA](#) by the HoR and, by February 2016, his forces declared that they "liberated" Benghazi.⁹¹ He then pivoted towards getting invited to international conferences and burnishing his international image. On 10 April 2018, [Haftar spent several weeks in a French hospital](#), leading to a torrent of contradictory reports regarding his health, ranging from LNA spokesperson Ahmed al-Mismari stating that he was alive and well, and due to return to Libya any moment, to reports by Islamist-leaning media on 13 April suggesting that he had died.⁹² After 17 days of speculation and mix messaging, on 26 April, [Haftar landed at Benghazi's Benina Airport](#), where he was welcomed with great fanfare by senior LNA commanders, as well as political and tribal leaders from Eastern Libya.⁹³ In the weeks that followed, the [LNA's leadership was reshuffled](#) in response to rumours about a potential coup in Haftar's absence.⁹⁴



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I initially approached ISPI hoping to publish a concise table containing the key details and background information that the Libya Analysis team had gathered on Libya's twenty-five most important armed groups. ISPI requested a long-form essay instead. The publication that has actually emerged is a far more impactful contribution than any reference table could ever have been. It has sought to not only to catalogue Libya's key armed actors, but also reframe the root causes of Libya's ongoing war for Post-Qadhafi Succession, and hence, to propose to international policymakers a financial silver bullet for halting the fighting and pushing for a durable peace.

This project would not have seen the light of day except for Arturo Varvelli, Co-Head of ISPI's Middle East and North Africa Centre, commissioning it and seeing eye-to-eye with me about the centrality of economic drivers throughout much of Libyan history. Immense gratitude is due to Matteo Colombo, an ISPI Associate Research Fellow, for his elegant graphics, promptness in arranging the layout, and excellent eye for flow, structure and balance. It has been a real pleasure working with the whole ISPI team and I hope this is only the first of many such collaborations.

This project, like so many before it, has constantly morphed due to Libya's shifting sands. Throughout this uncertainty and flux, my team at Libya-Analysis has remained vigilant in their monitoring of developments on the ground and tireless in their support of this project. Late night phone calls asking for battlefield conditions on the Gharyan axis or the confirmation of a given commander's official connection to a long defunct militia have always been answered with warmth and intellectual comradery. The team has toiled to create a robust data set: logging thousands of incidents ranging from bombings, to diplomatic meetings, propaganda on Youtube, and attacks on infrastructure. To host and curate this information, the militia map and data management system that they have created is truly a thing of wonder. For those who are interested in monitoring developments in Libya in real time – and having access to targeted political and economic forecasting – please do reach out so you can learn if Libya-Analysis products can be of use to you and your organisation.

It truly takes a village to research and write a think tank report. First and foremost, I must recognise Dr. Lachlan Wilson, Programme Manager at Libya-Analysis. It has been a pleasure getting to see your talents as a writer and researcher progressively blossom over these last eighteen months. Your capacity for gruelling work, at all hours and to rigorous deadlines, borders on the superhuman. This paper would not have been possible without the initial genius of your Top 25 militia table. Secondly, thanks are due to Rhiannon Smith, Managing Director at Libya-Analysis, for her broad perspective on all things Libyan and immense creativity in how to solve practical problems.



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Jason Pack

New Jersey, May 2019

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Maps and infographics:

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shared vision for Libya's transition to a stable, democratic political system." Several days later on 19 April another administration official US Acting Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan confirmed the US connections to Haftar. Shanahan noted his role in counterterrorism and establishing regional democratic stability, while commenting that a "military solution is not what Libya needs" adding that he appreciates "Haftar's support in terms of his role in counterterrorism but where we need Field Marshal Haftar's support is in building democratic stability there in the region". When questioned whether the US President contacted Shanahan prior to his phone call with General Haftar, Shanahan stated, "The Department [DoD] and the Executive branch are well aligned on Libya." On 22 April, Government of National Accord (GNA) Prime Minister Fayez al-Serraj played down the conversation between Haftar and Trump, saying that while he hadn't spoken to Trump, but his engagement with other parts of US government suggested they opposed Haftar's military actions. This alleged opposition to military action was reinforced on 18 April when US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo held a phone call with UK Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt to discuss ways to approach resolving the conflicts in Libya and Yemen. The statement declared senior administration figures "reaffirmed their commitment to continue diplomatic efforts to achieve a freeze on the ground and a return to the political process."

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