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WHO IS FIGHTING WHOM IN TRIPOLI?

How the 2019 Civil War is Transforming Libya's Military Landscape

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Fighters loyal to the GNA walk on the front line outside Tripoli, May 2019.
Source: Reuters

About the author

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Overview

The offensive that Khalifa Haftar launched in April 2019 to capture the Libyan capital, Tripoli, triggered the largest mobilization of fighters in western Libya since the revolutionary war of 2011. This latest round of civil war is transforming the landscape of armed groups fighting in and around Tripoli, provoking new rifts within and between communities, and laying the ground for future political struggles. This Briefing Paper examines the identities and interests of the forces fighting each other over control of Tripoli. It shows that the divides of 2011 are central in structuring the two opposing alliances and shaping the motivations of many forces involved in the war.

Key findings

- The bulk of the forces fighting against Haftar come from the same communities that supported the 2011 war against Muammar Qaddafi. Haftar's forces from western and southern Libya often come from communities that were perceived as loyalist in 2011 and experienced that war as a defeat.
- Contrary to widespread misconceptions, the forces fighting Haftar are mostly not standing militias, but volunteers. Political Islamists form a negligible element among them, whereas hardline Salafists are a key component of Haftar's forces. Known criminals are active on both sides of the conflict, but they are more essential to Haftar's forces.
- Haftar's offensive united a multitude of groups in opposition to him. Until then, some of them had been in conflict with one another. While they are currently[1] cooperating in an unprecedented way, their competition over positions and budgets in Tripoli could soon re-emerge as a key issue. Meanwhile, Haftar's alliance may be more fragile than is generally assumed.
- Continuing war could cause much greater damage to Libya's social fabric than it has to date. The conflict has provoked sharp rifts within and among communities in western Libya, and deepened the divide between the eastern and western parts of the country. Major military advances by either side risk involving indiscriminate inter-communal reprisals, or acts of revenge within communities.

Introduction

On 4 April 2019 forces loyal to 'Field Marshal'[2] Khalifa Haftar, leader of the self-styled Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF),[3] launched a large-scale offensive from LAAF bases in central and eastern Libya to capture the capital, Tripoli. The move caught armed groups in western Libya by surprise, allowing Haftar's forces to advance into Tripoli's southern outskirts in the first few days of the operation. Thereafter, the offensive stalled as armed groups across western Libya mobilized under the umbrella of the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) to counter Haftar's forces. After initial successes by GNA-aligned forces, a stalemate settled in from late April onwards. Only in late June did GNA-aligned forces score an important victory against the LAAF with the capture of Gharyan (80 km south of Tripoli), the LAAF's key forward base for its Tripoli operation.

Prior to Haftar's offensive, political actors and armed groups in western Libya were divided. A handful of armed groups in Tripoli exerted disproportionate influence over state institutions in the capital, provoking resentment across Libya, including in western cities that hosted major military forces. But efforts by some western Libyan factions to launch an offensive against the Tripoli militias failed to mobilize broad support: most leaders of armed groups in western Libya were distrustful of one another, and were reluctant to join what they saw as a struggle over spoils.

Haftar's offensive has radically altered this political landscape, uniting political and military factions that had been in rivalry or open conflict with one another for the previous few years. It has also provoked a large-scale mobilization of volunteers who had long gone back to civilian life, or are fighting for the first time. These forces are drawn from mainly the same communities and have many of the same leaders as those that supported the revolutionary armed groups against the regime of Muammar Qaddafi in 2011. The motivation that unites these forces is reminiscent of 2011, and stresses their common objective of preventing the re-establishment of a dictatorship. On the other side of the divide, the western Libyan forces that Haftar has mobilized are recruited primarily from communities that experienced the 2011 revolution as a defeat.

This Briefing Paper analyses the wide-ranging changes in western Libya's political and military landscape that have been set in motion by the mobilization for and against Haftar's offensive. The first part provides an overview of the conflicts in western Libya that formed the background to the current war. The second part analyses the composition of the two opposing alliances, as well as the diverging interests and emerging tensions within them. The Briefing Paper is based on 35 interviews held in June 2019 with GNA officials and officers, commanders, and members of armed groups, as well as local observers in Tripoli and Misrata. In addition, the paper draws on previous field research, as well as telephone conversations with actors on both sides of the divide prior to and during the current conflict.

Western Libya's complex divisions

Before Haftar united most western Libyan forces against him, multiple divisions structured the political and military landscape in the region—the product of successive wars and changing political alignments. The deepest rifts were those of the 2011 war, when cities such as Misrata and Zintan and the Amazigh towns became strongholds of revolutionary forces. These forces stigmatized some neighbouring communities as regime loyalists because they had failed to rise up against Qaddafi and had provided fighters for units of auxiliaries that the regime organized on a tribal basis. After the 2011 war, feelings of collective defeat and humiliation remained widespread in such communities (Collombier, 2016; 2017; Lacher, forthcoming).

With the Qaddafi regime's collapse, the revolutionary forces—and newly formed armed groups that pretended to be 'revolutionaries'—strengthened their military dominance by taking control of state arsenals. Subsequently they evolved into state-sanctioned units that expanded thanks to lavish government funds. Power struggles within the revolutionary coalition compounded rivalries over control of the security sector (Lacher and Cole, 2014).

Over time two competing camps emerged whose confrontation escalated into civil war in mid-2014. In western Libya Zintani forces were the only major component of the former revolutionary coalition to side with Khalifa Haftar's self-declared army in eastern Libya. To defend themselves against their former revolutionary brothers-in-arms, Zintanis encouraged the formation of armed groups in communities that had been considered the political 'losers' of the 2011 war, including the Warshafana, Si'aan, and Nuwail (Lacher, forthcoming).

These two camps disintegrated during the negotiations over the December 2015 Libyan Political Agreement that established the GNA. Rifts emerged within cities that had previously been united in their support for either of the two camps. The divide between supporters and opponents of the GNA supplanted the rifts of the 2011 and 2014 wars (ICG, 2016).

Divisions in western Libya multiplied further after the GNA moved to Tripoli in March 2016. State institutions fell under the influence of four large armed groups from Tripoli that gradually dislodged their rivals from the capital, establishing what was virtually a cartel. This even alienated factions that had supported the formation of the GNA (Lacher and al-Idrissi, 2018).

The GNA's support base in western Libya increasingly narrowed, with one significant exception: in June 2017 Prime Minister Faiez al-Serraj appointed Usama al-Juwaili as commander of the western military region, thereby co-opting the most powerful player in Zintan and undermining Haftar's influence. Together with other Zintani commanders who had fought against Qaddafi in 2011, Juwaili had long displayed aversion towards Haftar. He would henceforth compete for influence with Haftar's supporters in Zintan (Lacher, forthcoming).

With Zintan divided and Juwaili dislodging Haftar's units from the Warshafana area in November 2017, Haftar's western Libyan allies were confined to two types of constituencies: members of communities that had experienced the 2011 revolution as a defeat, and followers of the hardline Saudi Salafist preacher Rabi' al-Madkhali, whose doctrine stresses the imperative of absolute obedience to the ruler. Madkhalist Salafists formed the core of Haftar's supporters in Zintan and neighbouring Rujban, two revolutionary strongholds of 2011. Haftar's influence was strongest in towns that hosted both Madkhalists and supporters of the Qaddafi regime, for example Sabratha, Surman Tiji, and Badr (ICG, 2019; Wehrey, 2019).[4]

Meanwhile, anger grew across western Libya over the stranglehold Tripoli militias exerted over state institutions. Politicians and leaders of armed groups began forming alliances to change the balance of power by force. Such resentment brought together actors who had been on opposite sides of past divides. Among them were Misratan militia leaders who opposed the GNA, but also Zintani commanders loosely affiliated with the GNA. Another faction involved was the 7th Brigade from Tarhuna, also known as the 'Kaniyat' after the three brothers from the al-Kani family who controlled it. On paper the 7th Brigade was loyal to the GNA, but the Kani brothers' political affiliation remained unclear. Finally, attempts to build an alliance against the Tripoli militias also included armed groups from the Tripoli suburb of Tajura that opposed the Special Deterrence Force (SDF), the militia that controlled Mitiga airport in Tripoli (Lacher and al-Idrissi, 2018).

In late 2017 and early 2018 several attempts to launch a joint operation against the Tripoli militia cartel failed at the last minute. One reason was distrust among the disparate forces that were involved in these attempts. Another was that proponents of military action found it difficult to mobilize within their own communities. The principal military forces in western Libya did not consist of the standing militias that fought for control of Tripoli, but of armed groups that were generally demobilized. In line with public opinion in their cities, the leaders and fighters of such armed groups had grown weary of war and were reluctant to enter what they saw as a struggle over the predation of state wealth.[5]

When in August 2018 the Kaniyat finally launched an offensive, only a handful of Misratan militia leaders joined it, as did only one small group from Zintan. Other Misratan and Zintani forces deployed to Tripoli without supporting the attackers and converted their neutrality into political influence—most notably in the person of Fathi Bashagha, a Misratan power broker who became interior minister in the aftermath of the conflict. While Bashagha formed a counterweight to the cartel, the militias' influence over Tripoli institutions nevertheless remained largely unbroken (Badi, 2019).

In January 2019 the Kaniyat tried for a second time to push into Tripoli by force. This time its former allies from Misrata did not join the attack and the Tripoli militias rapidly defeated it, with backing from Juwaili. Isolated and without allies, the Kani brothers began looking to Haftar for support.[6]

Other actors in the Tripoli security landscape also secretly negotiated with Haftar in the months preceding the April 2019 offensive. Haftar's expansion in southern Libya during January and February heightened expectations that he would next attempt to gain a foothold in

Tripoli.[7] Southern Libya had experienced an unprecedented deterioration in security conditions and service delivery. Haftar's largely peaceful takeover of key southern cities and oil fields therefore met with widespread approval in the region. Public opinion in western Libya was also mostly supportive, adding to the arguments in favour of coming to some kind of agreement with Haftar. The context appeared even more favourable to such an agreement after Haftar's tentative understanding with Serraj on the formation of an interim government, at a meeting in Abu Dhabi in late February. Key Misratan figures negotiated with Haftar's representatives over the allocation of ministerial and military command posts, while various militia leaders from Tripoli and Zawiya discussed their possible cooperation with Haftar or his emissaries.[8]

At the same time, however, Haftar's opponents in western Libya prepared their defences. Zintan's Juwaili held talks with armed groups in Zawiya that had been amenable to siding with Haftar, persuading them to stick with the GNA. Juwaili also coordinated with commanders from Misrata and Tripoli to counter a potential advance by Haftar's forces. Few expected an all-out offensive to take Tripoli, even in the days before the operation started, as Haftar's forces built up in the Jufra area.[9] As Haftar's forces entered Gharyan and descended towards Tripoli on 4 April, neither those who had prepared to side with Haftar nor those who were mobilizing to confront him knew how key leaders of armed groups in and around the capital would react to the offensive.

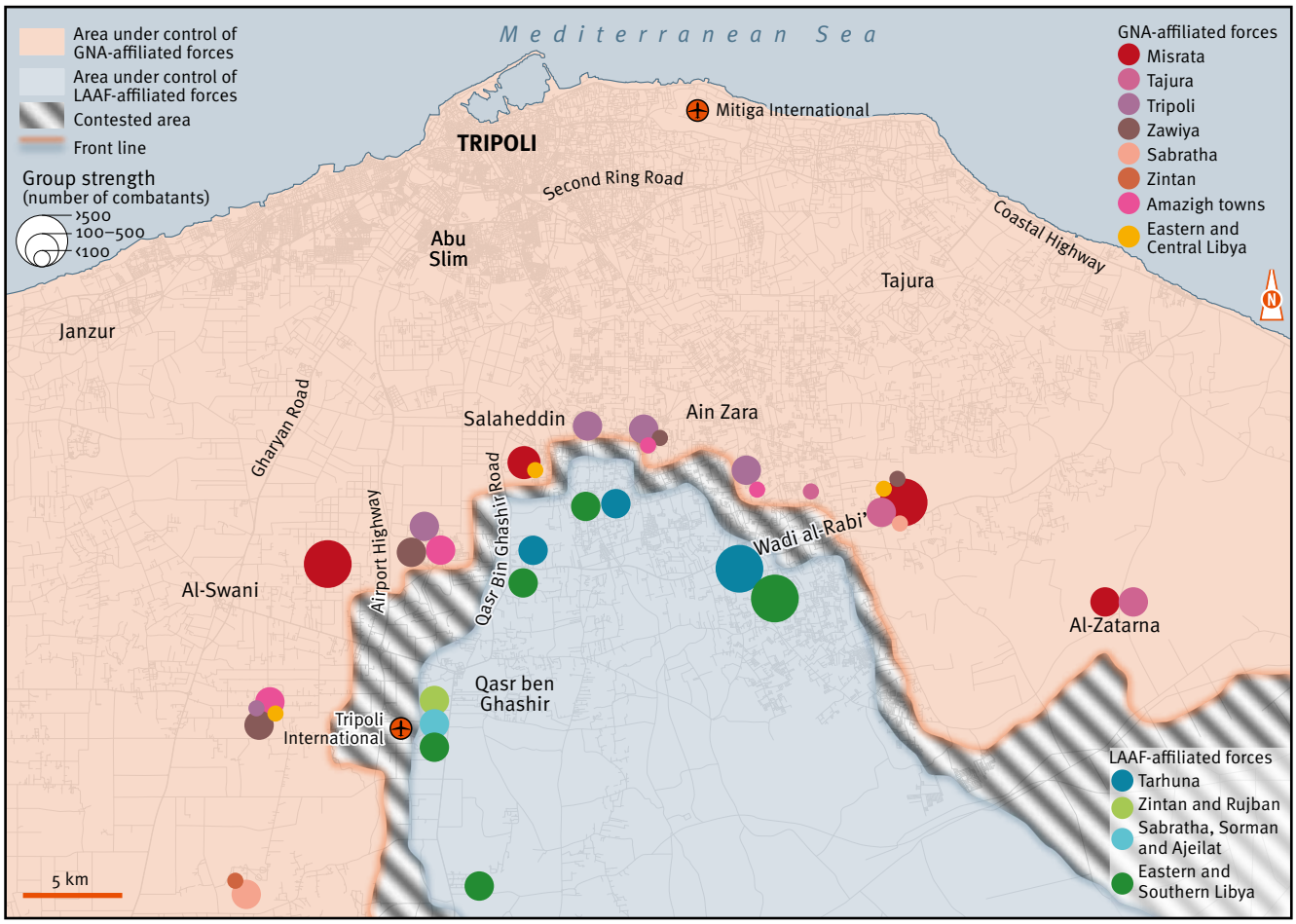
How Haftar's Plan A failed

The events of the operation's first 24 hours, seen in conjunction with the negotiations that took place in the weeks preceding the offensive, suggest that Haftar's initial plan to capture Tripoli relied on a number of erroneous assumptions.

In the night of 4 April, a battalion of the 106th Brigade[10]—headed by Haftar's son, Khaled, and considered the best armed and most loyal to Haftar among his forces—took over Checkpoint 27 between Tripoli and Zawiya (Abdallah and Nasr, 2019).[11] Just east of this checkpoint lies Janzur, a Tripoli suburb that hosts the headquarters of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). The battalion's mission apparently was to reach the immediate vicinity of the UNSMIL base, where adversaries would find it difficult to attack because of the UNSMIL presence.[12] To enable this plan, Haftar had met with representatives of a key Zawiya faction in the weeks leading up to the offensive and had reached an understanding with Naji Gneidi, the leader of Fursan Janzur, the armed group controlling Janzur.[13] Once an LAAF advance

Photo 1 Fighters from a Misratan armed group allied to the GNA prepare their ammunition before heading to fight Haftar's forces on the outskirts of Tripoli, April 2019. Source: Mahmud Turkia/AFP Photo

Map 1 Greater Tripoli (as of 19 August 2019)



Source: Wolfram Lacher (base map data source: OpenStreetMap)

party had gained a foothold in Tripoli, other Tripoli militia leaders who had been in talks with Haftar could be expected to switch sides. In addition, some Misratan politicians had met Haftar in his headquarters outside Benghazi during March and assured him that Misratan armed groups would not intervene against his forces' entry into Tripoli.[14]

Confounding these expectations, forces of the Zawiya faction that had been in talks with Haftar surprised his soldiers at Checkpoint 27, capturing 128 of them and causing the rest to flee (Abdallah and Nasr, 2019).[15] After discovering Naji Gneidi's collusion with Haftar, his lieutenants in Fursan Janzur tried to capture him, and set his house on fire when they did not find him. Gneidi escaped to Gharyan with about 15 close loyalists.[16] The Misratan-dominated Anti-Terrorism Force (ATF) mobilized on 4 April to counter the LAAF advance.[17] So did a small group of fighters from two Tripoli groups—the Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion (TRB) and the Nawasi Battalion—which set out to confront Haftar's forces at the foot of the mountains north of Gharyan.[18] Tripoli militias also began to arrest officials suspected of colluding with Haftar, such as the deputy defence minister and the deputy director of the intelligence service.[19]

With these setbacks, Haftar's attempt to quickly gain a foothold in Tripoli and trigger defections had failed. But during the first few days of the war the resistance to Haftar's forces remained weak and uncoordinated. On the second day of the offensive the mainly eastern forces that had come from Gharyan reached al-Swani, just south-west of Tripoli. The next day the Kaniyat from Tarhuna joined Haftar's offensive—contrary to promises the Kani brothers had given to Misratan leaders only the day before—and pushed into the Wadi al-Rabi' area to the south-east of the capital.[20]

By then, however, armed groups across western Libya had begun mobilizing to counter Haftar's offensive. The failure of his initial plan locked Haftar into the role of an outside aggressor that he had sought to avoid. With responsibility for the war so squarely on Haftar's shoulders, much of western Libya united behind the GNA to defend the capital against the attack.

The forces fighting Haftar: not merely an alliance of convenience

The alliance to resist Haftar's offensive has brought together groups that had stood on opposite sides of political divides, and in some cases had recently fought each other. Yet it is not merely an opportunistic alliance: these forces are united by ties that originate in the 2011 war against Qaddafi (see Figure 1).

Who is fighting against Haftar?

The forces currently fighting Haftar overwhelmingly trace their origin back to the 2011 war. Many are deeply rooted in local communities and are highly cohesive due to their collective struggle in 2011.

Tripoli groups

The militias that dominated Tripoli's security landscape in recent years—and are largely post-revolutionary formations—

form a minor component of the forces opposing Haftar. The largest contingent of fighters from Tripoli (around 300)[21]—and one that has suffered heavy losses—is that commanded by Abdelghani 'Ghaniwa' al-Kikli, who has for years headed militias in the Abu Slim district of the capital. Kikli's forces are fighting on the front around Tripoli International Airport (see Map 1). They include fighters from the tight-knit community of Kikla.[22]

Next in terms of numbers are the TRB and SDF. The TRB is virtually unrecognizable from its shape in 2017 and 2018, when the group's commanders were notorious for their role in predatory economic activities. The most infamous TRB commanders were killed or forced into exile in an internal purge in late 2018 and early 2019 (Badi, 2019). The mobilization against Haftar in April 2019 saw the return of the group's historical commanders from 2011, who had kept their distance from the group's activities in recent years.[23] These former commanders brought with them fighters from the Nafusa Mountains town of Nalut, where the TRB had formed and fought in 2011. Those currently fighting in the ranks of the TRB are a tight-knit group, and few among the salaried militiamen that TRB commanders had recruited in recent years are on the front lines.[24]

The SDF is the militarily most powerful Tripoli militia, but the bulk of the force refrained from joining the fight against Haftar until mid-June 2019. The group's detractors had long suspected Madkhalist Salafist commanders in the SDF of colluding with Haftar. In mid-June a group of fighters approximately 150–200 strong under the command of Mahmoud Hamza entered the war to oppose Haftar, clarifying the SDF's stance.[25]

Several Tripoli groups are participating in the fighting in smaller numbers, including the Nawasi, Bab Tajura, and al-Dhaman battalions, as well as Fursan Janzur. All four have been notorious for the predatory practices that characterized the Tripoli 'militia cartel' in its heyday. They are all deployed on the Ain Zara and Salaheddin fronts (see Map 1)—except Fursan Janzur, who are fighting on the airport[26] front.[27]

Finally, several medium-sized groups from Tajura that had been on bad terms with the cartel militias prior to Haftar's offensive have mobilized: Bashir Khalfalla's ('al-Bugra') Rahbat al-Duru' Battalion, which numbers around 200, as well as the smaller Usud Tajura, al-Rawased, and Fath Mekka battalions. They are deployed on the easternmost front lines of Wadi al-Rabi' and al-Zatarna (see Map 1). The fighting power of most Tajuran armed groups does not lie in the small standing militias they had fielded prior to the war, but in combatants who have remobilized after having returned to civilian lives years earlier. They and their social surroundings remain firmly rooted in a belief in the 2011 revolution.[28]

Western Libyan groups

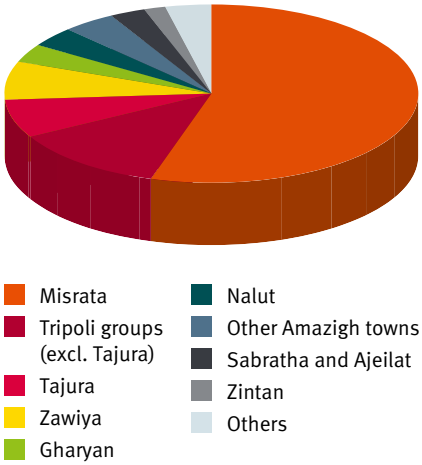
Among groups from the region to the west and south of Tripoli, one of the smallest contingents of fighters has an outsized role: that of Zintani forces led by Usama al-Juwaili. Zintani anti-Haftar fighters only number around 100, because the town is divided between opponents and supporters of Haftar, and roughly the same number of Zintanis are fighting for Haftar. The internal divide is new for Zintan, which was united in both the struggle against Qaddafi in 2011 and the fight against the Misratan-led Libya Dawn coalition in 2014. The rift has unsettled the community and, as a result, the vast majority of potential Zintani fighters have not mobilized.[29]

The Zintanis' allies in the forces fighting Haftar are acutely aware that they need to avoid alienating Zintan, lest the bulk of the town's forces join Haftar's offensive.[30] This explains why Juwaili, in addition to being the commander of the western military region, was also appointed as head of the joint operations room of all GNA-affiliated forces in Tripoli. It also explains why forces from Amazigh towns have shied away from attacking the al-Wutiya air base, which is controlled by fighters from Zintan and Rujban who are loyal to Haftar.

The largest contingent of fighters in the region comes from Zawiya. Approximately 400 fighters from Zawiya are deployed on various front lines, most of them around the airport. Many are members of armed groups that trace their origin back to the 2011 war, such as the Faruq and Martyr Mohamed al-Kilani battalions, which had mostly been demobilized prior to the April 2019 offensive. Two Zawiyan groups currently have a number of Islamist ideologues among their commanders: the Faruq Battalion and the fighters of the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Room, who are deployed at the Ain Zara front. Dozens of combatants and officers from Zawiya have also joined the forces of the western military region under Juwaili, which are deployed between Tripoli and Gharyan. In addition to fighters at the front, significant forces remain in Zawiya itself to pre-empt a possible attack by Haftar loyalists based in neighbouring Sabratha and Surman.[32]

Smaller in numbers than the Zawiyan forces, fighters from Gharyan and Nalut nevertheless form sizeable contingents of approximately 200 each. A 150-strong Naluti battalion is deployed at the airport front and about 40–50 combatants from the town are fighting with the TRB in Ain Zara.[33] Haftar's capture of Gharyan with the help of local militia leader Adel Da'ab

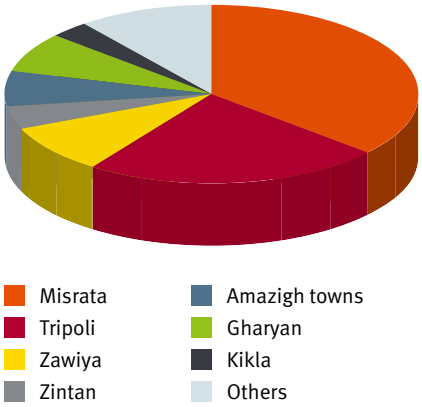
Figure 1
Origins of GNA-affiliated fighters on the greater Tripoli front lines



Total: approximately 5,750 fighters

Note: Figure 1 does not include Misratan forces deployed in Sirte and on the southern front, nor forces retained in Zawiya and Amazigh towns to prevent offensives from neighbouring towns. Source: Author[31]

Figure 2
Origins of 527 GNA-affiliated fighters killed prior to 30 July 2019



Source: Unpublished list of names of killed fighters compiled on behalf of senior commanders in GNA-affiliated forces, cross-checked by author

> “Many commanders see the government as infiltrated by officials with ties to Haftar, and as deeply corrupt and incompetent.”

initially drove approximately 70 Gharyan fighters out of their town. As they fought under Juwaili’s command to regain control of Gharyan their numbers grew: after the town was recaptured the force had grown to at least 200 fighters.[34] Approximately 150 fighters from Sabratha and Ajeilat form part of Juwaili’s Zintani forces, the Zawiyan forces at the airport, and the Misratan-dominated ATF in Wadi al-Rabi’. These fighters were inactive and demobilized prior to Haftar’s offensive.[35]

The National Mobile Force is deployed at the airport and Salaheddin fronts. Groups from Amazigh towns that fought in the war against Qaddafi formed the force in 2011. Under routine conditions, the National Mobile Force has around 60–70 fighters at the front at any given moment, but they rotate every few days, so the force that has joined to date is approximately 120–140 strong. Separately from the National Mobile Force, smaller groups of fighters of 30–60 each from the Amazigh towns of Jadu and Yefren have joined armed groups from Tripoli at the Ain Zara and Salaheddin fronts. About the same number of fighters from Yefren and Nalut have joined Juwaili’s western military region and are deployed in the Gharyan area. The primary reason why so few have joined the war from these towns, as well as from Kabaw, Nalut, and Zuwara, is that they face potential threats from forces loyal to Haftar in neighbouring towns and bases. The majority of potential fighters from the Amazigh towns therefore remain in their communities to forestall advances by these Haftar-affiliated forces.[36]

Misratan forces

Misratan forces form by far the largest contingent among the various groups fighting Haftar. They are deployed at all Tripoli front lines, as well as in Sirte and to the south of Misrata, from where they harass Haftar’s supply lines. The larger Misratan brigades, such as al-Mahjub, al-Halbus, and Hatin, often have groups deployed in both Tripoli and Sirte or on the southern front. All but a fraction of Misratan fighters who are now participating in the war had gone back to civilian life years previously, and only mobilized in reaction to Haftar’s offensive.[37]

The largest concentration of Misratan forces is on the Wadi al-Rabi’ front, where approximately 1,200 fighters have mobilized under the ATF, which is an administrative and command structure comprising a part of the forces that fought the non-state armed group Islamic State (IS) in Sirte. Around 40 Misratan battalions operate under the ATF in Wadi al-Rabi’. These battalions originated in the 2011 war, and have largely retained their internal composition and leadership. Each has its own base at the front line.[38]

Several large Misratan groups deployed in Salaheddin are known for their previous hostility towards the GNA: the al-Marsa, al-Tajin, and al-Sumud battalions, which together have approximately 500 fighters at the front.[39] Salah Badi, the leader of the al-Sumud Battalion, is subject to UN sanctions for his ‘leading role’ in the August 2018 Tripoli conflict, when he had supported the Kaniyat’s offensive—and fought against the Tripoli armed groups at whose side he is now fighting (UNSC, 2018b). These forces include former members of the Benghazi Defence Battalions (BDB). Since their deployment to the front, these groups have reacted negatively to attempts to integrate them into formal GNA command structures.[40]

Two large Misratan forces are fighting at the airport front: the al-Mahjub Brigade—which has around 800 fighters deployed—and Brigade 166. Both are umbrella organizations that comprise a number of battalions that formed in 2011 on the basis of individual neighbourhoods in Misrata. Like most other Misratan battalions, these forces last mobilized in 2016 for the war against IS in Sirte; most of their fighters had returned to civilian life and remobilized in reaction to Haftar’s offensive.[41]

In Sirte, as well as forward bases near al-Sdada, Bir Dufan, and Abu Njem, Misratan groups have deployed approximately 550–600 vehicles—the number of fighters being four times that of vehicles. They include around 40 former BDB members, as well as other fighters from central, southern, and eastern Libya.[42]

Since the conflict started a common misperception among Western diplomats and foreign observers has been that Misratan mobilization has been limited to date.[43] But although there is still potential for further mobilization if the threat from Haftar’s forces increases, the present discussion shows that Misratan participation in the war is considerable. This is further confirmed by the number of Misratan fighters killed in the conflict: almost 200 by end of July 2019, representing more than a third of all fighters killed in the ranks of GNA-affiliated forces (see Figure 2).

Fighters from the east and south

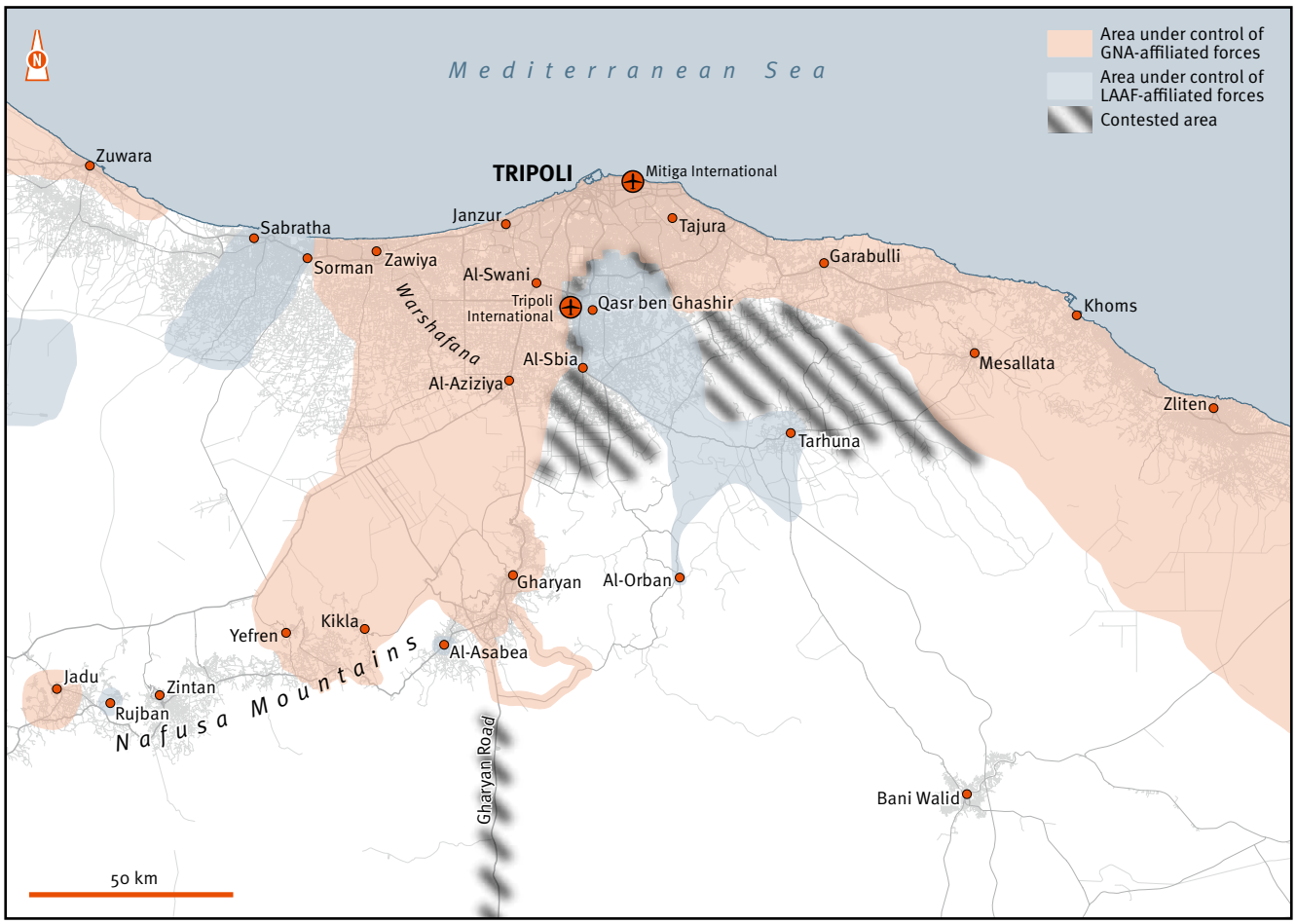
Most of the forces mentioned above are rooted in particular western Libyan communities. They are often deeply embedded in such communities, with ties among combatants reinforced by relationships of kinship, friendship, or proximity.

Fighters from southern, central, and eastern Libya whom Haftar’s forces have uprooted from these regions have joined western Libyan groups. These include mostly civilian members of the BDB and of armed groups from Ajdabiya and the Jufra region, but also dozens of military officers from the east. Most see their struggle in Tripoli as a prelude to their return to eastern Libya. The fact that Haftar’s forces destroyed or confiscated and reoccupied the properties of Benghazi families whose members had fought against Haftar is a powerful motivation for many of these fighters.[44]

The principal southern Libyan group fighting in the Tripoli area is Tubu combatants under the command of Hassan Musa, who have joined Zintani forces.[45] Like Musa himself, many are veterans of the 2011 war against Qaddafi. Having initially supported Haftar’s campaign in Benghazi in 2014 and subsequently fought with the militia leader Ibrahim al-Jadhran against Misratan forces in early 2015, this group has since been consistently opposed to Haftar.[46]

Finally, fighters from southern Libya and beyond have also joined armed groups for payment, rather than out of commitment to the cause of fighting

Map 2 North-western Libya (as of 19 August 2019)



Source: Wolfram Lacher (base map data source: OpenStreetMap)

against Haftar. Such fighters include members of the Tuareg and Mahamid communities, many of whom do not have Libyan citizenship. But such paid hirelings make up a very small proportion of the forces fighting to protect Tripoli.[47]

Command, coordination, and integration

The forces now fighting Haftar include groups that had been hostile to each other and had even fought each other over the past years: in 2014–15 Zintani forces had fought against most of the groups they are now allied with, while in 2017–18 some Misratan groups had on repeated occasions clashed with armed groups from Tripoli. These forces also include many groups that had until recently been opposed to the GNA. Unsurprisingly, relations between some of these groups are sometimes tense and marked by a lack of trust. But in light of this history, the degree of integration and coordination among them is even more remarkable.

On most front lines numerous groups of different local origins fight in immediate proximity to one another. For example, eight major groups of different origins are deployed on the semi-circular front around Tripoli International Airport. Some of these groups comprise a number of subgroups. Although most liaise with the GNA's official command structure, the battalions on this and other fronts are effectively autonomous in their decision-making. Their leaders emerged out of the groups themselves—often as early as in the 2011 or 2014 wars—rather than being appointed by the GNA. The GNA army command has made gradual progress in connecting the armed groups to the formal chain of command. Nevertheless, most day-to-day coordination takes place directly among field commanders rather than through official command structures. This creates challenges in the direction of operations. Commanders frequently recount how they agreed on plans for a coordinated attack, only to be abandoned by one of the groups involved when the time came.[48]

Several factors explain such coordination problems. Firstly, relations between some of the forces are marked by distrust, owing to previous conflicts between them. Misratan politicians and commanders, for example, do not hide their continuing resentment of the Tripoli militias that have exercised disproportionate influence in state institutions in recent years. For many, the war against Haftar has merely deferred the conflict with these Tripoli groups. Given this context, some groups suspect others of seeking to conserve their own arsenals and let their allies exhaust theirs, in anticipation of a future struggle among themselves.[49]

Secondly, distrust towards the government runs even higher among the armed groups. This is partly due to the fact that the government's composition is largely unchanged from the period preceding Haftar's offensive. Ministers and senior officials were appointed in an effort to accommodate diverse political factions, including ones that were—and in some cases, remain—on good terms with Haftar. Many commanders therefore see the government as being infiltrated by officials with ties to Haftar or his regional backers. They also perceive the government as deeply corrupt and incompetent, and frequently blame the lack of progress on the battlefield on the weakness of political leadership. Demands that key officials be dismissed are frequent. Most commanders, however, are acutely aware

that they cannot replace Prime Minister Serraj, because this could jeopardize the Tripoli government's status as the internationally recognized authority in Libya.[50]

Another source of distrust towards the government is the fact that the authorities have provided only limited support to the armed groups fighting the war. This particularly applies to ammunition and funds to compensate for vehicles and heavy weapons that are destroyed in the fighting. The government appears to have real difficulties in importing ammunition due to the UN arms embargo; instead, it tries to source ammunition from the local market. In the first weeks of the war top GNA officers issued cheques to commanders for them to purchase ammunition on the local black market. Such purchases also included acquisitions from commanders in Haftar's forces.[51]

Four months into the war these problems persist. Since June, the command in charge of supplies and training has moved to a system where it buys ammunition from the armed groups upon inspection, then returns half of the ammunition to the group that has supplied it and keeps the other half. In this way the army command is gradually building up ammunition stocks of its own.[52] The command's conservative stance towards armed groups' demands for ammunition may be partly a means of reducing wasteful use. But according to field commanders and close observers, the government is still not meeting the needs of the armed groups on the battlefield.[53]

While the arms embargo may explain the government's cautious approach to ammunition, its failure to replace destroyed vehicles and compensate armed groups for heavy weapons destroyed by enemy fire causes greater frustration among commanders. These armed groups mostly built up their stocks of heavy weapons during the 2011 war and in its immediate aftermath, and therefore consider the weapons to be theirs. The army command has only paid compensation for a fraction of the 'technicals'[54] destroyed so far—estimated to be in the hundreds[55]—and none for heavy weapons. Some smaller battalions have already depleted substantial parts of their arsenals in this way and now lack firepower .[56]

This lack of government support leaves the army command with little to offer in exchange for cooperation by armed groups. It also fuels suspicions among fighters and commanders that the government seeks to exhaust the armed groups' arsenals in order to strengthen its authority. As a result, the armed groups are reluctant to use their own stocks of ammunition—which in many cases are substantial.

The government's contribution to date has focused on filling key gaps in its military capabilities through support from Turkey. This notably includes a number of Turkish-made Bayraktar combat drones—at least three of which Haftar's warplanes and drones have destroyed to date, but more are in operation—as well as armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and anti-tank guided missiles (ATGMs). Turkish officers are widely believed to operate the drones. The armed groups have not competed over who controls the drones, since they lack the expertise to operate them.[57]

The distribution of the APCs and ATGMs has increased tensions among GNA-affiliated forces. The APCs were distributed in equal proportion to the commanders of the three military regions—Western, Tripoli, and Central. Some Misratan commanders, however, complained that since they had deployed far more forces, they should also be given a much greater number of APCs than Tripoli armed groups.[58] Similar tensions have also emerged over the allocation and control of funds for the treatment of wounded fighters abroad.[59]

The longer the war continues, the more demands for government support and rivalries over its allocation could come to define the politics among GNA-affiliated forces. Commanders with privileged access to state budgets and foreign support could seize the opportunity to strengthen their own forces, potentially creating new, more powerful militias.

Bottom-up integration

A remarkable development since the war began is the extent of integration among numerous groups in the battlefield. Separate units have chosen to fight together and small groups of combatants have joined armed groups of different local origins. This process of integration is largely the work of armed group commanders themselves rather than of the official command structure. It is generally based on personal ties among commanders that often go back to the 2011 war.

To give a few examples: at the airport front, forces from Zintan are fighting together with their erstwhile enemies of 2014—the Amazigh fighters of the National Mobile Force, Fursan Janzur, and forces from Zawiya. Fighters from Gharyan and Sabratha were also the Zintanis' enemies in 2014, and are now integrated in Zintani-led forces south of Tripoli—between al-Aziziya and Gharyan—together with combatants from Zawiya and the Amazigh towns. Small groups of fighters from Jadu have joined the Bab Tajura Battalion in Ain Zara; similarly, small groups from Nalut have joined the TRB in the same area. The forces deployed under the Misratan-dominated ATF in Wadi al-Rabi' also include fighters from Sabratha and eastern Libya, as well as armed groups from Tajura—all of which only joined these forces after the start of the war.[60] Such instances of incorporation could potentially serve as a starting point for the creation of properly integrated forces—units that no longer have an attachment to a particular community, but have a common esprit de corps and loyalty to a unified command structure.

Extremists and criminals?

Libyan media and foreign governments that support Haftar have sought to portray the forces fighting Haftar in Tripoli as being dominated by extremists and criminals.[61] To a lesser extent some international media coverage has also supported such claims (Kirkpatrick, 2019a). The narrative has been sufficiently influential for France to insert language into a European Union statement to express 'concern at the involvement of terrorist and criminal elements in the fighting, including individuals listed by the UN Security Council' (European Council, 2019; Viscusi, 2019). Language of this type has since been a recurrent feature of international statements on the situation in Libya.

These claims are misleading. Among Libyans who are subject to UN sanctions, Salah Badi is the only one involved in the fighting. Badi was sanctioned for participating in a military offensive that was led by the Kani brothers—who are now fighting with Haftar—and whose consequences for civilians and the political process in Libya were far less serious than that led by Haftar, who has not been sanctioned.[62] Moreover, contrary to what some reports have asserted, Badi is not 'a (hardline) Islamist commander' (Kirkpatrick, 2019a); in fact, Badi himself denies he is an Islamist, and there is no evidence to contradict him.[63]

Media reports have repeatedly claimed that three other listed individuals have joined the forces fighting Haftar: Abderrahman al-Milad from Zawiya and Ahmed al-Dabbashi from Sabratha, who have both been sanctioned for their involvement in people smuggling, as well as Ibrahim al-Jadhran, who has been

sanctioned for his repeated attacks on the oil ports in the east (Al-Marsad, 2019a; 2019b; Al-Hurra, 2019). But while Milad and Dabbashi initially did join the fighting, other commanders quickly persuaded them to withdraw due to the negative attention they attracted, and Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha charged several units with searching for and arresting them.[64] Jadhran issued a statement in support of the resistance against Haftar's offensive, but has not taken part in the fighting. Misratan forces that include fighters from Jadhran's hometown, Ajdabiya, have kept their distance from Jadhran and his core followers, which they now estimate to be no more than 30 in number.[65]

There is no doubt that some of the groups and individuals involved in the fighting, while not listed by the UN Security Council, have a record of criminal activities. This notably applies to the Tripoli militias that engaged in unprecedented predation on state institutions after the establishment of the GNA in 2016—and were tacitly supported in this by Western governments and UNSMIL until this state of affairs provoked renewed conflict in Tripoli (Lacher and al-Idrissi, 2018). Some groups are also engaged in the business of extorting and exploiting migrants who were confined in official detention centres, after they were intercepted by the Libyan Coast Guard in operations that European states supported (Amnesty International, 2017; Micallef, Horsley, and Bish, 2019). The issue received widespread attention after an air strike that foreign warplanes most likely carried out in support of Haftar's forces killed 53 people in a detention centre in Tajura on 2 July. The detention centre was next to a base of the al-Dhaman Battalion, which effectively controlled the detention centre and forced detainees to help with the maintenance of its weapons (UN News, 2019; Hill, 2019). But the militias that engage in such predatory practices now form a minority in the forces fighting Haftar.

Media reports also use the participation of fighters from the BDB as evidence of the presence of extremists (Kirkpatrick, 2019a). The BDB was a group of fighters from Benghazi that formed in Misrata in 2016 and led several offensives towards the Haftar-controlled east. The group initially included some former members of extremist group Ansar al-Sharia—a group that the UN and United States has designated as an al-Qaeda affiliate—or allied itself with such individuals in its eastern offensives. It also comprised former members of the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council (BRSC), a coalition that included both Ansar al-Sharia and non-jihadist armed groups and was formed in 2014 in response to Haftar's operation in Benghazi.[66] The vast majority of BDB

Photo 2 Fighters loyal to Haftar receive food at a holding station in Zawiya, Libya, after being captured by GNA-allied militias, April 2019. Source: Mahmud Turkia/AFP Photo

> “The anti-Haftar forces are held together by the unifying threat they face, but Haftar needs to win to keep his coalition together.”

members were not extremists, however, but were motivated by the desire to fight what they saw as the injustice they and their families had suffered at the hands of Haftar’s forces (Toaldo and Fitzgerald, 2018). By mid-2018 the BDB had divided into several factions after disagreements over strategy. The core group in a military base at al-Sdada, south of Misrata, purged its ranks of individuals with an extremist background and cut ties with Jadhran, with whom the BDB had been allied in several eastern offensives.[67]

Two groups of former BDB members are participating in the current fighting. One, led by Col. Mustafa al-Sharkasi, is fighting with Salah Badi’s Sumud Battalion in Ain Zara.[68] According to GNA counter-terrorism officials and commanders on the Ain Zara front, there is no evidence of the presence of extremists among them.[69] The other group has joined Misratan forces on the southern front. Misratan commanders of these forces say they screened BDB members to make sure none with a known extremist background was among them—a step that reflects both a change in attitudes towards extremist elements among Misratan armed groups over the past years and an awareness that the presence of extremists could quickly become a liability for them.[70]

More generally, pro-Haftar media outlets tend to describe all fighters from Benghazi who have joined GNA-affiliated forces as extremists (Al-Marsad, 2019d). This is highly misleading and often involves fabricated claims. One report, for example, described a young combatant from Benghazi who was killed in the fighting as a former inmate of the notorious Abu Slim prison and a suspect in the assassination of the former US ambassador to Libya in 2012 (Al-Marsad, 2019c). But the person in question had been too young to be imprisoned under Qaddafi, law enforcement agencies had not connected him to the death of the US ambassador, and he was not known as an extremist among friends from Benghazi and fellow combatants from Tripoli.[71]

Similarly, pro-Haftar Libyan media have focused on Ziyad Balam, a revolutionary commander from Benghazi who in recent years was at times allied with the BDB (Al-Marsad, 2019b). Contrary to what such media reports claim, Balam is not an extremist, was never a BRSC member, and is not even participating in the current Tripoli war. Early on in the conflict he announced he was joining the battle, but other commanders quickly persuaded him to withdraw.[72] According to a former leading figure in the Benghazi armed groups from which Balam came, ‘Ziyad isn’t fighting. He sometimes comes to the front, takes some pictures, then goes back to Istanbul.’[73]

Pro-Haftar media outlets have published many other reports that misleadingly lump anti-Haftar fighters from Benghazi together as ‘terrorists’. The task of such media outlets has been made easier by the fact that distinguishing extremists from ordinary fighters can at times be difficult due to their past ties within the BRSC and continuing social relations among them—for example, in the form of public expressions of condolences. In recent years this proximity had also led militias and law-enforcement agencies in Tripoli and Misrata to regard all fighters from Benghazi who had found refuge in western Libya with suspicion.[74]

In the current war many fighters from Benghazi have joined armed groups from Tripoli as individuals rather than in groups, and have begun to regain the trust of Tripoli factions. Law enforcement and intelligence professionals working for the GNA and its attorney general rely on the cooperation of commanders and combatants to monitor suspected extremists and individuals thought to retain ties with extremist groups.[75] Their detailed information on such individuals suggests that the extent to which extremists may be present among the forces fighting Haftar is a matter of isolated cases rather than of cells or groups. Many Libyan fighters who are known to have ties to IS or Ansar al-Sharia are based in Turkey and have not returned to join the war, fearing they would be arrested on their return.[76]

The current war provides a much more difficult environment for extremist groups than the civil war of 2014–15. If some western Libyan forces displayed ambiguity towards Islamist and jihadist groups up until 2015, this has long ceased to be the case. The most important development to change perceptions of jihadist groups was the 2016 fight against IS in Sirte. For the armed groups who participated in this conflict there could no longer be any tolerance for those who had allowed IS to establish itself in Libya. At the same time the dominant militias in Tripoli turned hostile towards Islamist forces—partly out of ideological motivations, partly as a result of struggles over territory (Lacher and al-Idrissi, 2018). Aversion towards the Muslim Brotherhood also became ubiquitous among western Libyan armed groups for what they saw as the Brotherhood’s political opportunism in the post-Qaddafi era.[77]

As a result, there is now a widespread hostility to Islamist ideologues among the forces fighting Haftar in and around Tripoli. Unnerved by the media allegations that they are Islamists, commanders frequently raised the issue in interviews with the author, and almost unanimously stressed that they would not accept Islamists in their forces.[78] There are some exceptions, however. A few groups from Zawiya and Sabratha appear to remain open to radical Islamists. In May 2019 an LNA air strike that targeted the facility of the al-Faruq Battalion in Zawiya killed an IS member from Sabratha, raising questions over why he had been present at the location—an occurrence made all the more puzzling by the fact that al-Faruq had fought against IS in Sabratha in 2016.[79] The overall picture, however, is one of unequivocal intolerance for jihadists in the forces fighting Haftar.

Who is fighting for Haftar?

Judging from the fighters in Haftar’s forces who GNA-affiliated groups have taken prisoner, the bulk of the forces Haftar sent to Tripoli were initially from the east. Over the first month of the operation, however, this changed, and since then at least half of the forces fighting for Haftar in the Tripoli area are from western and, to a lesser extent, southern Libya.[80] By far the most important contingent of fighters from western Libya is from Tarhuna, and more specifically from the Kaniyat militia—which operates as the

9th Brigade since its integration into Haftar's LAAF (Dale', 2019). As a result, the conflict has not only deepened societal divides between eastern and western Libya, but has also taken on the character of a western Libyan civil war whose divisions largely match those of the 2011 war.

Eastern forces

Most of the eastern forces active in the Tripoli area come from units that are particularly closely linked to Haftar's inner circle and have therefore been favoured with the modern weaponry Haftar has obtained from foreign states (UNSC, 2017; 2018a). These include the 106th Brigade headed by Haftar's son, Khaled; the 73rd Brigade headed by Saleh al-Quta'ani; and the Tareq ben Ziyad Brigade led by Omar Mraje'. These units' members mostly come from eastern Libya, particularly the Benghazi area. All three units—but most notably the Tareq ben Ziyad Brigade—also include Madkhalist Salafists (ICG, 2019, p. 13; Harchaoui and Lazib, 2019; Wehrey and Badi, 2019).[81] The same applies to the contingent of fighters from Ajdabiya, which is the most sizeable after those from Benghazi. An officer from the Ajdabiya area, Fawzi al-Mansuri, commands operations on the Wadi al-Rabi' front.[82]

There are signs that Haftar faces limits in his efforts to mobilize fighters in eastern Libya. Among these signs is the fact that key eastern units, such as the Saeqa Special Forces, have sent very few fighters to the Tripoli battlefield. Contrary to previous operations in Benghazi, Darna, and southern Libya, Saeqa Special Forces commander Wanis Bukhamada has been conspicuously absent from the battle in Tripoli. In addition to a reportedly heavy death toll, several hundred men from eastern Libya were taken prisoner in the Tripoli area in the operation's first weeks, which may explain the reluctance to join the war. Nevertheless, eastern forces deployed to Tripoli in rotations—fighting for three weeks, then returning home for two—at least until the fall of Gharyan in late June 2019.[83] Since then the supply lines between eastern Libya and the Tripoli front lines have become much more vulnerable and the rotation of units more difficult.[84]

Few among Haftar's eastern forces fought against Qaddafi in 2011. Three prominent figures did play a role in the revolutionary forces in 2011: Haftar himself, Bukhamada, and Abdesselam al-Hassi, who until July 2019 was the commander of operations for the Tripoli war. The bulk of Haftar's eastern forces, however, have tended to follow the line propagated by pro-Haftar media, according to which revolutionaries are synonymous with extremists and criminals. Former Qaddafi regime loyalists have gained prominent positions in Haftar's power structure, increasing fears among many eastern protagonists in 2011 that Haftar is leading a counter-revolution (Lacher, forthcoming).

Western and southern forces

The groups that Haftar has mobilized in western and southern Libya come predominantly from communities that were collectively stigmatized and marginalized by revolutionaries as supporters of the former regime after 2011.[85] Unlike what happened in eastern Libya, the 2011 war divided western and southern Libyan cities and communities into 'revolutionaries' and 'loyalists'. These divisions gradually receded after the 2014–15 civil war, but they have been revived once more.

The most important example is Tarhuna, where Qaddafi had heavily recruited for his regime's protection units. After 2011 the city found itself with a large number of military professionals who had served in Qaddafi's forces, but it had no weapons or significant representation in successive transitional governments. From 2015 onwards the Kani brothers drew on this reservoir of unemployed soldiers to staff their militia, which eventually established exclusive control over Tarhuna—a singular feat among western Libyan cities.[86] During their unsuccessful attempts to enter Tripoli by force in August 2018 and January 2019, they imitated Haftar's military rhetoric, claiming that they represented the 'army' and their adversaries the 'militias'. But their attitude towards Haftar remained unclear until the day they joined his operation in Tripoli. Concomitantly with their entry into the war, the Kaniyat absorbed yet more officers of Qaddafi's security forces—who had previously been with Haftar's forces in the east—and were renamed the LAAF's 9th Brigade.[87] The perception among GNA-affiliated forces that Tarhuna by and large supports the war in Tripoli makes it difficult for Tarhunan fighters to withdraw: as one observer from Tarhuna put it, 'they are now defending Tarhuna in Tripoli'.[88]

Several other groups that have mobilized to fight with Haftar come from communities that were among the 'losers' of the 2011 war. They include the Si'aan communities of Tiji and Badr; the Warshafana area south-west of Tripoli; the towns of Ajeilat, Sorman, al-Asabea and Bani Walid; and the Magarha tribe in southern Libya.[89] Another marginalized community among which Haftar's forces have recruited is that of the Mahamid of southern Libya, most of whom arrived from Chad during the Qaddafi era. Mahamid fighters have joined the 128th Battalion led by Hassan al-Zadma, which also includes combatants from the oil crescent, as well as a small number of Awlad Suleiman from southern Libya and the Sirte area. An Awlad Suleiman militia from Sabha initially participated in the offensive before withdrawing in June. This was the 116th Battalion led by Massoud Jiddu, a commander who is well known for his role in recruiting Chadian and Sudanese mercenaries.[90]

Unlike Tarhuna's Kaniyat, these groups generally do not have broad-based community support. Bani Walid, for example, is deeply divided over pro-Haftar forces' use of the town's airport. Even deeper divisions exist in Sabratha, from where most former revolutionaries—among them migrant smuggling kingpin Ahmed al-Dabbashi, who contrary to claims is not participating in the Tripoli war—were forcibly dislodged in October 2017 by a coalition of Haftar supporters and former regime loyalists who are now fighting for Haftar.[91]

The groups that have joined Haftar's forces from Sabratha, Sorman, Tiji, and Badr are dominated by Madkhalist Salafists.[92] This also applies to many of those who have joined Haftar from two former revolutionary strongholds: Zintan and Rujban.[93] In all these towns Madkhalist preachers have made significant inroads in recent years and provided staunch support for Haftar (ICG, 2019). Part of the Madkhalist Subul al-Salam Battalion from al-Kufra in Libya's far south-east has been sent to Sabratha to bolster local forces there.[94]

In addition to hardline Salafists, another notable category among western Libyan groups in Haftar's Tripoli operation are known criminals who have faced arrest warrants since long before they started fighting for Haftar. Four figures from Bani Walid who have joined the war on Haftar's side are subject to arrest warrants issued by the GNA attorney general in recent years for their alleged involvement in criminal cases related to migrant smuggling, including two incidents in which migrants were killed in Bani Walid.[102] The leader of an armed group from Zintan who is fighting for Haftar at Tripoli International Airport, Abdelmonem Dardira, is wanted for his role

Box 1 Drones and other new weaponry entering Libya since April 2019

Since the beginning of Haftar's offensive on Tripoli both sides in the conflict have acquired sophisticated new weapons and their foreign supporters have significantly stepped up their direct involvement—all in violation of the UN arms embargo on Libya. Each attempt by foreign powers to ensure the superiority of their Libyan allies has prompted the foreign backers of the opposing side to increase their support.

Air strikes in support of Haftar's forces by Chinese-made Wing Loong drones, which were almost certainly owned and operated by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), began less than two weeks after Haftar started his offensive (Delalande, 2019; Nichols, 2019). Initially these strikes occurred only at night, causing several weeks of speculation about their origin among GNA commanders.[95] After Haftar's forces lost control of Gharyan in late June 2019, his foreign supporters increased the intensity of air strikes: drone strikes began occurring more frequently and also during the daylight hours. In addition, foreign warplanes began attacking the positions of GNA-affiliated forces: one of the first such strikes was that on a migrant detention centre in Tajura on 2 July, which killed 53 migrants (UN News, 2019).[96] Throughout the offensive the heavy use of ATGMs and laser-guided artillery shells by Haftar's forces caused heavy casualties in the ranks of GNA-affiliated forces.[97] Haftar's foreign supporters had already supplied his forces with such guided weapons during previous operations, while GNA-affiliated forces had very few of them (Delalande, 2017).

The most surprising discovery among the foreign-supplied weaponry in Libya since April 2019 has been that of several US-made Javelin ATGMs, which are powerful guided weapons that are subject to tough US end-use restrictions. The missiles, which did not include the command launch units needed to fire them, were found in an LAAF base after GNA-affiliated forces captured Gharyan (Walsh, Schmitt, and Ismay, 2019). It later emerged that the United States had initially sold the missiles to France. This revelation forced the French government to admit that the missiles were intended to protect French troops deployed in Libya, contradicting its earlier denials that it had deployed forces with Haftar's units for his Tripoli offensive (Schmitt and Walsh, 2019; Guibert and Bobin, 2019).

In response to Haftar's foreign-backed offensive, GNA officials obtained support from Turkey. Commanders of GNA-affiliated forces openly trumpeted the arrival of dozens of Turkish APCs in mid-May 2019. At around the same time Turkish-made Bayraktar combat drones began operating in support of GNA-affiliated forces (Megerisi, 2019; Al-Atrush, 2019b).[98] Foreign drones and warplanes supporting Haftar's forces repeatedly destroyed Turkish combat drones on the ground, but Turkey has continued to supply more drones to replace these losses. Turkey also provided Russian Federation-made Metis ATGMs (see Photo 4).[99]

Reacting to the deployment of Turkish combat drones, the LAAF—again, almost certainly through the UAE—obtained several Russian Pantsir mobile air defence batteries (Binnie, 2019b). GNA-affiliated forces claimed to have destroyed one of these batteries on its way to the battlefield, but several more are in operation.[100] The downing of a Wing Loong drone south of Misrata in August 2019 has provoked speculation that GNA-affiliated forces may have acquired jamming equipment to interfere with Haftar's foreign-operated drones (Middle East Monitor, 2019).[101] In addition to combat drones, both sides have also obtained a variety of surveillance drones from their foreign backers (Magdy, 2019; Binnie, 2019a; Kenyette, 2019).

Photo 3 A GNA officer displaying US-made Javelin missiles and other weaponry to journalists, Gharyan, June 2019. Source: @BurkanLy Twitter account, 29 June 2019

Photo 4 A fighter from the Ruhbat al-Duru' Battalion of Tajura wielding Metis ATGM. Tripoli July 2019. Source: @rahbatajoura Twitter account, 15 July 2019

Photo 5 APCs arrive in Tripoli port from Turkey, May 2019. Source: @BurkanLy Twitter account, 18 May 2019

in the kidnapping of the parliamentarian Suleiman Zubi in 2014, who was held captive for more than two years (*Al-Wasat*, 2016a).[103] The leader of an armed group of former regime loyalists in Sabratha and Ajeilat who has joined Haftar's forces, Mohamed al-Shtiwi, is accused of numerous murders in Ajeilat (Akhbar Libya, 2017; Elmanassa, 2018). The Kani brothers also face arrest warrants for their alleged responsibility for numerous extrajudicial executions in public—a practice that was key to their establishment of control over Tarhuna—as well as the killing of 12 members of a single family in the town in 2017 (Al-Marsad, 2017; Libya al-Ahrar, 2019).[104]

The involvement of criminal elements and hardline Salafist groups is being felt on the ground. In areas where armed groups from Tarhuna, Bani Walid, or southern Libya are active, looting by elements of Haftar's forces is rampant, and a market for stolen white goods has emerged in Tarhuna. But theft of this kind is absent in areas under the control of Madkhalist-dominated groups from Sabratha, Sorman, or Ajdabiya.[105]

A final component of Haftar's forces are mercenaries from neighbouring Chad and Sudan. Judging from the prisoners taken by GNA-affiliated forces, Haftar's commanders have to date mostly shied away from using hired fighters at the front lines, instead using them to secure rear bases in Gharyan and Jufra. When GNA-affiliated forces seized Gharyan in a surprise operation they captured approximately 120 prisoners, half of whom were Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries.[106] As Haftar faces limits to the mobilization of additional Libyan recruits, he may rely more heavily on foreign fighters. In early July a large group of fighters from Darfur arrived in Tarhuna.[107] At about the same time Haftar also began recruiting members of pro-government Darfur militias, in addition to the Darfur rebels who have been part of his forces for years (de Waal, 2019; Radio Dabanga, 2019).

A fragile alliance

The alliance Haftar has mobilized to fight in Tripoli may be more fragile than that of his opponents. The anti-Haftar forces are held together by the unifying threat they face, but Haftar needs to win to keep his coalition together.

The Kaniyat are a very recent addition to Haftar's forces, and if they were to withdraw from the war on the basis of a ceasefire agreement, it would be impossible for him to continue the war. Former Qaddafi regime loyalists have been an important component of Haftar's power structure for years, but he mobilized additional support from this constituency by launching his offensive on Tripoli. Many supporters of the former regime may hope to use Haftar to obtain both weapons and a foothold in Tripoli before turning on their ally.[108]

This alliance could founder if Haftar fails to make progress. Militias from southern Libya and criminal elements from western Libyan towns probably joined the war expecting a quick victory. Contrary to western Libyan groups that are fighting Haftar, many have the option to withdraw—and some, such as the militia from Sabha led by Massoud Jiddu, have already done so.[109] Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries have served Haftar well in supporting his largely unopposed expansion in the oil crescent and southern Libya, and in securing remote outposts that are rarely attacked. They are less likely to accept an engagement that involves heavy losses, even less so if events in Sudan open up the possibility of some of them returning home.

There have already been signs of tensions among the various forces in Haftar's alliance—often between the eastern units that closely follow orders from Haftar's command structure and the more independent western armed groups. Rumours abound that several western commanders—among them the Warshafana officer Massud al-Dhawi and the notorious leader of the 'Brigade of Arabism' from Ajeilat, Mohamed al-Shtiwi—might have been killed by their rivals in Haftar's coalition (*Al-Wasat*, 2019; al-Shabaka al-Arabiya, 2019).

Outlook: conflicts to come

A negotiated settlement to the war in Tripoli currently appears to be out of reach. Even if both the commanders of the GNA-affiliated forces and Haftar concluded that they could not gain by continuing the war, there is no credible third party that could guarantee the implementation of a deal and thereby help overcome the distrust between the two sides. Western governments and UNSMIL have refrained from taking any steps against Haftar, despite the fact that he started the war. In addition to continuing military support from regional backers such as Egypt and the UAE, Haftar has also enjoyed support from key Western governments such as those of France and the United States (Kirkpatrick, 2019b; Guibert and Bobin, 2019). This makes it almost impossible for GNA-affiliated forces to trust international stakeholders to act as honest brokers, let alone enforce an agreement and hold Haftar to account should he violate it.

Short of a ceasefire agreement between Misratan and Tarhunan forces that would end the conflict in Tripoli without a wider political deal, this means that fighting is currently the only way forward for the combatants. In view of the societal divides this conflict has created or deepened, the continuing war risks causing much greater damage to Libya's social fabric than it has to date. Any major victory for GNA-affiliated forces—such as the capture of Tarhuna or Sabratha—could result in indiscriminate reprisals by members of another community or members of the same community taking revenge on one another. Any major advance by Haftar's forces would bring them to communities that are overwhelmingly hostile to them. To establish control they would have to resort to highly destructive warfare or brutal repression. And should GNA-affiliated forces succeed in seizing Haftar's bases in western Libya, the divide between east and west would become the key fault line of the conflict, and separation could become a much more realistic scenario.

The longer the war continues, the more struggles over power and resources are likely to play out within the two opposing alliances—but particularly so in the GNA-affiliated anti-Haftar alliance, which lacks a central arbiter. While many fighters in GNA-affiliated forces are still unpaid volunteers and government support in the form of funds, ammunition, and weapons has to date been limited, this is likely to change as the war drags on. A first indication of such change came with the August 2019 order by Prime Minister Serraj to pay out a one-off sum of LD 3,000 (USD 810) to each fighter involved in the war against Haftar (GNA, 2019). Leaders of armed groups with privileged access to state funds or foreign assistance could well use it to expand the firepower of their own groups and turn them into new state-sanctioned units. In this way powerful new militias could arise from the current war.

The sacrifices fighters and their families are making in the war against Haftar also provide a basis for new political struggles. As after previous conflicts, commanders of strong or victorious factions and their political representatives are set to demand their share of positions in government, the administration, and the

security forces. Politicians associated with the forces fighting Haftar repeatedly call for the formation of a crisis government—or at least for the replacement of certain officials whom they accuse of insufficient fervour in the war effort. Such struggles have been kept in check to date by the general realization that fundamentally reshuffling the government could jeopardize its status as Libya's internationally recognized authority. But amid mounting resentment among fighters and commanders over perceived incompetence and corruption in the government, politicians are likely to seize the opportunity to advance their interests. The rivalries that would inevitably ensue could threaten the cohesion of the anti-Haftar alliance.

The issue of the post-war balance of power in Tripoli looms large in the ongoing conflict. The war has brought large forces to Tripoli that had left the capital years ago, including groups from Misrata, Zawiya, and the Amazigh towns. Some may not easily give up their new foothold in Tripoli after the war. Many had resented the excesses of the handful of militias that controlled much of Tripoli in recent years, but this is not to say that they would not engage in similar predation if they gained control of state institutions. Clearly, however, many commanders in the forces currently defending Tripoli expect a confrontation with the Tripoli militias in a future phase of the conflict.

The challenge of negotiating widely acceptable security arrangements for Tripoli will once again become an issue if the threat to the capital from Haftar's forces recedes. Indeed, negotiating such arrangements would likely have to be part of any agreement among western Libyan forces to end the fighting. No progress has been made since the August–September 2018 conflict in forming regular units that could ensure the security of state institutions and citizens in the capital. Like this previous conflict, the current war could also offer an opportunity to negotiate more ambitious solutions to Tripoli's long-lasting security dilemma. With an array of newly empowered military forces present in the capital, however, the obstacles to any such solution will be formidable. ●

Abbreviations and acronyms

APC Armoured personnel carrier
ATF Anti-Terrorism Force
ATGM Anti-tank guided missile
BDB Benghazi Defence Battalions
BRSC Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council
GNA Government of National Accord
HoR House of Representatives
IS Islamic State
LAAF Libyan Arab Armed Forces
LNA Libyan National Army (see also LAAF)
SDF Special Deterrence Force
TRB Tripoli Revolutionaries Battalion
UAE United Arab Emirates
UNSMIL United Nations Support Mission in Libya

Endnotes

1 Throughout this Briefing Paper terms such as 'currently' and 'to date' refer to its time of writing, July 2019.

2 The controversy over Haftar's military rank is closely linked to the struggle over political legitimacy between rival Libyan administrations. In 2013 Haftar was among dozens of military officers who were retired by the—then still unified—Libyan authorities. After he announced a coup attempt in February 2014, the authorities issued an arrest warrant for him. He launched his Benghazi operation in May 2014 in open rebellion against the government and without holding an official position (Eljarh, 2014). In March 2015 the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk promoted Haftar to *fariq* (lieutenant general) and appointed him as general commander of the armed forces of the eastern government. This position was created specifically for Haftar; it is superior to the chief of staff and is accountable—on paper—only to the HoR president, not to the government (Al-Warfalli, 2015). The Tripoli government recognized neither Haftar's appointment nor his promotion. The HoR was split at the time, with only about half of its members typically attending sessions in Tobruk, while about half of the members of the former parliament continued to meet in Tripoli and contested the HoR's legitimacy. Haftar exerted substantial influence over the HoR in Tobruk, a city that was located in territory he controlled (ICG, 2016; author interviews with active and boycotting HoR members, Misrata, Tripoli, and Tobruk, October 2014, January and April 2015). In September 2016 HoR president Agilah Saleh single-handedly promoted Haftar to field marshal (*Al-Wasat*, 2016b).

3 When Haftar started his rebellion in 2014 he initially called his group the Libyan National Army (LNA) (Eljarh, 2014). This name has since been used in the international media. But in months the LAAF became the name by which Haftar's forces generally referred to themselves in Arabic, and which featured on their official documents. For this reason this report uses LAAF. Neither LNA nor LAAF is the official name of the Libyan army under current Libyan law.

4 Author interviews with community leaders and observers, Nalut and Zawiya, November 2018; ICG (2019).

5 Author interviews with leaders of armed groups and community leaders, Misrata, Zintan, and Nalut, March, April, and November 2018.

6 Author interviews with leaders of armed groups and an observer of Tarhunan origin, Tripoli and Misrata, January–February 2019.

7 Author interviews with politicians and leaders of armed groups, Misrata and Tripoli, February 2019.

8 Author interviews with Western diplomats, Tunis; author phone interviews with politicians and observers from Tripoli, Zawiya, and Misrata, March 2019.

9 Author phone interviews with commanders and community leaders from Zintan, Misrata, Tripoli, and the Amazigh towns, March–April 2019.

10 This Briefing Paper uses 'brigade' for groups that are particularly large—usually more than 500 combatants—and 'battalion' for all smaller ones, irrespective of the names they themselves give their groups.

11 Author phone interview with an observer from Zawiya, April 2019.

12 Author phone interviews with Western diplomats, April 2019.

13 Author phone interview with an observer from Zawiya, March 2019; author interviews with commanders and observers from Tripoli, Tripoli, June 2019.

14 Author interviews with Misratan politicians, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

15 Author phone interview with an observer from Zawiya, April 2019.

16 Author interviews with commanders and observers from Tripoli, Tripoli, June 2019.

17 Author phone interviews with Misratan commanders and politicians, April 2019.

18 Author phone interview with a commander involved in the group of anti-Haftar fighters, April 2019.

19 Author phone interviews with commanders and observers from Tripoli, April 2019.

20 Author interviews with Misratan politicians and commanders, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

21 All estimates are of the number of fighters participating in the war, not the nominal strength of groups. Estimates are based on multiple sources and observations, and have not simply been adopted from group commanders at face value.

22 Author interviews with commanders of Tripoli armed groups, observers with close

ties to Tripoli armed groups, and an advisor to Abdelghani al-Kikli, Tripoli, June 2019.

23 Author interviews with former and current TRB commanders, Tripoli, March and November 2018 and June 2019.

24 Author interviews with TRB commanders and an observer with close ties to the TRB, Tripoli, June 2019.

25 Author interviews with observers with close ties to Tripoli armed groups, Tripoli, June 2019.

26 Hereafter, references to the 'airport front' refer to Tripoli International Airport.

27 Author interviews with commanders of anti-Haftar forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

28 Author interviews with Misratan commanders and observers with close ties to Tajuran armed groups, Tripoli, June 2019.

29 Author interviews with officer and commander from Zintan, Tripoli, June 2019.

30 Author interviews with politicians, commanders, and observers from Misrata and Amazigh towns, Tripoli, June 2019.

31 Author's observations and estimates based on multiple interviews and phone interviews with commanders, combatants, and observers, Tripoli and Misrata, June–July 2019.

32 Author interviews with officers, commanders, and an observer from Zawiya, Tripoli and Tunis, June 2019.

33 Author interviews with commanders from Nalut and observers with close ties to Tripoli armed groups, Tripoli, June 2019.

34 Author interviews with a Gharyan combatant and a Zintani commander working closely with Gharyan forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

35 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces and a combatant from Sabratha, Tripoli, June 2019.

36 Author interviews with commanders and observers from Amazigh towns, Tripoli, June 2019.

37 Author interviews with commanders in Misratan armed groups, Tripoli and Misrata, March–April 2018 and June 2019.

38 Author observations and interviews with an ATF front commander, battalion commanders, and combatants, Wadi al-Rabi', June 2019.

39 Author interviews with commanders in GNA-affiliated armed groups from Tripoli and Misrata, Tripoli, June 2019.

40 Author interviews with Salah Badi and a senior officer in the GNA command structure, Tripoli, June 2019.

41 Author interviews with commanders and combatants in al-Mahjub Brigade and Misratan observers close to the city's armed groups, Tripoli and Misrata, November 2011, April and September 2016, March and November 2018, and June 2019.

42 Author observations, and interviews with commanders of Misratan forces in Sirte and on the southern front, Misrata and al-Sdada, June 2019.

43 Author interactions with European diplomats, London, Brussels, and Tunis, April–June 2019.

44 Author interviews with BDB leaders and officers from eastern Libya, al-Sdada and Tripoli, November 2018 and June 2019.

45 Author phone interview with observer from Murzuq, June 2019; author interview with Zintani commander, Tripoli, June 2019.

46 Author interviews and phone interviews with Hassan Musa and Tubu observers, Tunis and Tripoli, January 2015, March 2017, and June 2019.

47 Author observations and interviews with commanders of and combatants in GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

48 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

49 Author interviews with politicians and commanders, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

50 Author interviews with politicians and commanders, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

51 Author interviews with commanders and officers of GNA-affiliated forces and Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, Tripoli, June 2019.

52 Author interviews with commanders and officers of GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

53 Author interviews and phone interviews with commanders of and combatants in GNA-affiliated forces and observers with close ties to these forces, Tripoli, June–July 2019.

54 These are usually open-backed four-wheel-drive vehicles with heavy or medium weapons mounted on them.

55 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces and Interior Minister Fathi Bashagha, Tripoli, June 2019.

56 Author interviews with commanders of and combatants in GNA-affiliated forces and observers with close ties to these forces, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

57 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces and politicians with close ties to GNA-affiliated groups, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019. See Al-Atrush (2019a).

58 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces and observers with close ties to GNA-affiliated groups, Tripoli, June 2019.

59 Author interview with an observer from Zawiya, Tunis, June 2019.

60 Author observations, and interviews with commanders of and combatants in GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

61 With regard to the forces fighting in Tripoli, France's foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, has promoted the idea that the attitudes of some groups 'linked to political Islamism' are unclear regarding jihadist groups (Le Drian, 2019). In what resembles a concerted effort, unnamed French diplomats have repeatedly told reporters that some groups fighting in Tripoli are 'at the end of the day allied to al Qaeda' (Laessing and Irish, 2019; Vespierre, 2019). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) minister of state for foreign affairs, Anwar Gargash, has explicitly referred to Le Drian's statements in his own comments about 'the extremist militias in Tripoli' (Gargash, 2019).

62 Author interview with Salah Badi, Tripoli, June 2019.

63 Author interview with Salah Badi, Tripoli, June 2019.

64 Author interviews with officers and leaders of armed groups from Zawiya, the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator, and Fathi Bashagha, Tripoli, June 2019.

65 Author interviews with Misratan commanders, Tripoli, Misrata, and al-Sdada, June 2019.

66 Author interviews with BDB commanders and former leaders in armed groups from Benghazi, Tripoli, Istanbul, and al-Sdada, March and November 2017 and November 2018.

67 Author interviews with Misratan and BDB commanders, Misrata and al-Sdada, November 2018.

68 Author interview with the former leader of a Benghazi armed group, Tripoli, June 2019.

69 Author interviews with a TRB commander, the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator, and the former leader of a Benghazi armed group, Tripoli, June 2019.

70 Author interviews with Misratan commanders, Misrata and al-Sdada, June 2019.

71 Author interviews with an advisor to the lead investigator in the Attorney General's Office and a former leader of Benghazi armed groups working with the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator, Tripoli, June 2019.

72 Author interview with the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator, Tripoli, June 2019.

73 Author interview with a former leader of Benghazi armed groups, Tripoli, June 2019.

74 Author interviews with leaders of armed groups and BDB commanders, Tripoli, Misrata, and al-Sdada, March–April and November 2018.

75 Author interview with the former leader of Benghazi armed groups working with the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator, Tripoli, June 2019.

76 Author interviews with the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator and the former leader of Benghazi armed groups working with the GNA counter-terrorism coordinator, Tripoli, June 2019.

77 In Libyan public opinion the Muslim Brotherhood's Justice and Construction Party is widely seen as sharing responsibility for the political deadlock in the General National Congress during 2013 and early 2014 that eventually caused the post-Qaddafi transition process to fail. Many leaders of armed groups in western Libya view the Brotherhood in the same way. But, more specifically, many believe that the Brotherhood helped to provoke the escalation into civil war in mid-2014,

and then cynically exploited the ensuing negotiations to gain a share in the GNA, thereby betraying the armed groups that had led the war. Author interviews with leaders of armed groups, Tripoli, Misrata, Zawiya, and Nalut, 2014–19.

78 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

79 The IS member, Safwan Jaber, had been imprisoned in the al-Juddaim prison in Zawiya since 2016. Officials and military officers from Zawiya claim that Jaber had recently been transferred to the al-Faruq facility due to renovation work at al-Juddaim, and that the prison's director had refused to take him back after the work had been completed. Local sources in Zawiya, however, claim that Jaber had been in military fatigues when his body arrived at the hospital after the air strike on 13 May, which would seem to contradict the hypothesis that he was held prisoner at the facility. Author interviews with the commander of the western military region, Usama al-Juwaili; military officers from Zawiya; a combatant from Sabratha; and a local observer from Zawiya, Tripoli and Tunis, June 2019.

80 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli; author phone interview with a Benghazi resident with close ties to senior LAAF officers, June 2019.

81 Phone interview with Benghazi resident with close ties to senior LAAF officers, June 2019.

82 Phone interview with Benghazi resident with close ties to senior LAAF officers, June 2019.

83 Phone interviews with a resident of Qasr ben Ghashir and a Benghazi resident with close ties to senior LAAF officers, June 2019.

84 Phone interviews with local observers in western, central, and eastern Libya, July 2019.

85 During the 2011 civil war communities rapidly became categorized as collectively 'revolutionary' or 'loyalist'. Although these categorizations concealed splits within communities, they became self-reinforcing as the war continued, and had lasting consequences for the post-Qaddafi era (Lacher, forthcoming).

86 Author interviews with advisors to the Kani brothers and an observer of Tarhunan origin, Tarhuna and Tripoli, March 2018.

87 Author interviews with commanders of GNA-affiliated forces, a Misratan community representative, and an observer of Tarhunan origin, Tripoli and Misrata, June 2019.

88 Author phone interview with an observer of Tarhunan origin, June 2019.

89 Author interviews and phone interviews with local observers from Bani Walid, the Nafusa Mountains, Sabratha, and southern Libya, as well as commanders in GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli and Misrata, June–July 2019.

90 Author phone interview with an Awlad Suleiman politician, July 2019. In January 2019 Jiddu was among 37 Libyan, Sudanese, and Chadian nationals for whom the attorney general in Tripoli issued arrest warrants for their alleged involvement with Chadian and Sudanese armed groups operating in Libya. Jiddu featured on the list of those to be arrested as being a member of the 'Chadian opposition' (Attorney General's Office, 2019).

91 Author interviews with a group of former revolutionaries, a migrant smuggler, a politician, and a fighter in GNA-affiliated forces (all from Sabratha), Misrata, Zawiya, and Tripoli, March and November 2018 and June 2019.

92 Author interviews with community leaders and observers, Nalut and Zawiya, November 2018.

93 Author interviews with GNA-affiliated army officers from Zintan and Rujban, Tripoli, June 2019.

94 Author phone interviews, residents of Sabratha and Zawiya, June 2019.

95 Author phone interviews with commanders in GNA-affiliated forces, April 2019.

96 GNA interior minister Fathi Bashagha accused the UAE of having carried out the strike with F-16 warplanes, without offering tangible evidence (Balkiz, 2019). Doubtlessly, however, the precision and power of the Tajura air strike—and other, similar strikes over the following weeks—was such that the LAAF air force cannot be at its origin. The bomb crater at the Tajura migrant centre was consistent with that of a 500 pound bomb. The warplane that carried it out likely was either an F-16 or a Mirage 2000, owned and operated either by Egypt or—more likely—by the UAE (author interviews and phone interviews with Western diplomats, foreign weapons experts, and commanders in GNA-affiliated forces, July 2019).

97 Author interviews with commanders in GNA-affiliated forces, Tripoli, June 2019.

98 Author interviews with commanders in GNA-affiliated forces and observers with close ties to GNA command structures, Tripoli, June 2019.

99 Author interviews with commanders in GNA-affiliated forces and observers with close ties to GNA command structures, Tripoli, June 2019.

100 Author interviews and phone interviews with commanders in GNA-affiliated forces and Western diplomats, June–July 2019.

101 Author phone interviews with commanders in Misratan armed groups and foreign weapons experts, August 2019.

102 Confidential letter from the Attorney General's Office to the GNA Presidency Council seen by the author, 15 May 2019. The letter lists the names of four people from Bani Walid allegedly involved in the fighting—two of whom were later killed at the front—and the migrant-smuggling-related criminal cases in which they are suspects.

103 Author interviews with community leaders, Zintan, April 2016.

104 Confidential letter from the Attorney General's Office to the GNA Presidency Council seen by the author, 15 May 2019; author interview with an observer of Tarhunan origin, Tripoli, March 2018.

105 Author phone interviews with residents of Qasr ben Ghashir and Ain Zara, and an observer of Tarhunan origin.

106 Author phone interviews with Misratan and Zintani commanders involved in the operation, July 2019; see also Arabi21 (2019) and Libyan Pen (2019). Haftar's reliance on Sudanese and Chadian mercenaries is well documented (UNSC, 2017; 2018a).

107 Author phone interviews with an observer of Tarhunan origin, commanders of GNA-affiliated forces, and a politician from southern Libya, July 2019.

108 Author phone interview with a former senior official in the Qaddafi regime, April 2019.

109 Author phone interviews with southern Libyan politicians and observers from Bani Walid, April–May 2019.

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About the **SANA project**

The **Security Assessment in North Africa** is a project of the Small Arms Survey to support those engaged in building a more secure environment in North Africa and the Sahel-Sahara region. The project produces timely, evidence-based research and analysis on the availability and circulation of small arms, the dynamics of emerging armed groups, and related insecurity. The research stresses the effects of armed conflicts in the region on community safety.

The Security Assessment in North Africa receives ongoing funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. It has previously received grants from Global Affairs Canada, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the US State Department.

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