

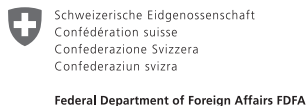
Politics by Other Means

Conflicting Interests in Libya's Security Sector

by Wolfram Lacher and Peter Cole



A Working Paper of the Small Arms Survey/Security Assessment in North Africa project, with support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



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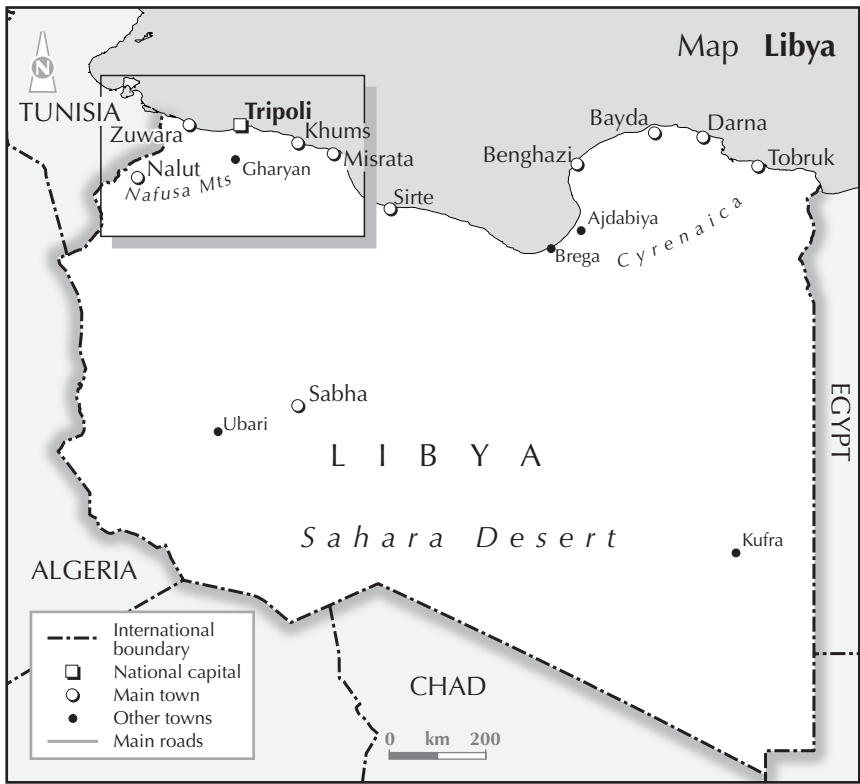
List of abbreviations

GNC	General National Congress
GRC	Gathering of Revolutionary Companies
HoR	House of Representatives
LROR	Libyan Revolutionaries' Operations Room
LSF	Libya Shield Forces
NTC	National Transitional Council
PSA	Preventive Security Apparatus
RSC	Rafallah al-Sahati Companies
SSC	Supreme Security Committee

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Introduction

Since Col. Muammar Qaddafi's death on 20 October 2011 and Libya's formal declaration of liberation three days later, the transitional authorities have faced enormous challenges. Chief among these have been controlling and managing the armed groups that emerged to fight Qaddafi and his security services. The political roadmap for the transition—the Constitutional Declaration chartered by the National Transitional Council (NTC) on 3 August 2011—set strict deadlines for elections to a new interim body, the General National Congress (GNC), as well as a timetable for the committee to draft a constitution (NTC, 2011a). However, the political coalition that drew up the declaration presented no vision for security sector reform—neither with respect to the remainder of Qaddafi's armed forces, nor with respect to the field commanders who had done the bulk of the fighting.

The transitional authorities were swiftly overwhelmed by the rapid evolution and growing fragmentation of the security sector. Libya's army, which had partially disintegrated during the revolution, has since undergone major changes that have been driven largely by its component elements, rather than by the government or army leadership. The Supreme Security Committee (SSC) began as a 'top-down' initiative by the NTC to register revolutionary fighters (*thuwwar*) under the Ministry of Interior, but the groups it included quickly developed interests of their own. In contrast, the 'bottom-up' initiative known as the Libya Shield Forces (LSF)—which was then recognized officially by the state—was composed of large revolutionary armed groups that intended to replace or obstruct the army.

As Libya's fragmented political scene coalesced into two rival camps in 2014, the component elements of these three institutions—the SSC, the LSF, and the army—emerged as key actors in escalating conflicts. Much of the SSC has been dismantled; the LSF has broken up into its regional and political components; and the army continues to undergo rapid and chaotic change. Competing interest groups within these three institutions, however, have remained largely constant and engaged in fierce power struggles over the security sector's future. These power struggles are at the heart of Libya's political crisis. By October 2014, they had given rise to two rival governments, two military leaderships, and two distinct claims to legitimacy. ■

Objectives and findings

This paper examines the rise and fall of hybrid security sector institutions in Libya, and the political interests at stake in security sector reform. It charts the evolution of the Libyan army, the SSC, and the LSF, as well as their interaction with the transitional authorities. The paper thereby contributes to an understanding of conflicts among the armed groups, as well as of the challenges involved in integrating or dissolving them in the process of establishing a new security sector.

The paper's findings include:

- Hybrid security institutions emerged immediately after the Libyan revolution, blending formal and informal elements and allowing competing interests and loyalties to flourish.
- In parallel, the Libyan army fragmented into rival interest groups, and new units formed to represent particular local or ideological interests. The boundaries between formal and hybrid units blurred.
- As hybrid institutions evolved and many units sought the cover of officialdom, the entire security sector became defined by political factionalism. Power struggles over the security sector increasingly extended into the top levels of government institutions.
- Competition over security sector institutions is both a means to an end—to exert political influence or gain control over economic assets—and an end in itself. Competition over budgets for salaries and equipment is a significant aspect of these struggles.
- The rivalries within the security sector have been among the main drivers of the conflicts that in mid-2014 led to the bifurcation of state institutions and the emergence of two rival governments, army leaderships, and claims to legitimacy. These conflicts render the notion of loyalty to the state meaningless.

- The balance of power that ultimately emerges from the current struggles will necessarily be reflected in the security sector's hierarchy and structure. Yet this process cannot occur as long as there are two rival poles, neither of which is strong enough to seize and consolidate state authority across the country. Nor is consolidation likely to emanate from either of the two power centres.

This paper is based on fieldwork undertaken by the authors, who conducted interviews on repeated visits to Tripoli, Benghazi, and several other cities in 2012–14. The interlocutors included government and security officials, national and local political actors, leaders and members of armed groups, as well as local observers. 📖

The origins of Libya's hybrid security sector

Competing legitimacies: revolutionary vs. legal authority

Libya's transitional institutions are a patchwork of formal and informal elements that loosely cooperate, despite their competing claims of legitimacy and differing political agendas (see Box 1). This situation has its roots in the NTC's approach to the state security sector in August–October 2011, when Qaddafi's regime collapsed. At that time, the NTC, its Executive Committee, and its international interlocutors were all mindful of the experience of Iraq.¹ Consequently, the NTC took control of the remaining institutions of the state in August 2011, appointing interim leadership for existing ministries. Later, it also appointed a chief of police and chief of general staff of the armed forces (Sterling, 2012). The NTC thus preserved both the institutions and the continuity of legal authority. Beyond these stopgap measures, however, the NTC had no coherent plan for longer-term security governance.²

Revolutionary armed groups—known in Libya as the *thuwwar*—contested the wisdom of preserving the army and police from the very beginning. The *thuwwar* asserted 'revolutionary legitimacy' as the groups that had fought Qaddafi's regime. The government of Prime Minister Abd al-Rahim al-Kib, which was in power from November 2011 to November 2012, appointed members of the *thuwwar* from Misrata and Zintan, as well as from Islamist groups, to ministerial positions in an attempt to preserve a modicum of political harmony. These former revolutionary commanders (and their sympathizers), however, objected to the continued presence of Qaddafi-era officials in the armed forces, ministries, and security services (ICG, 2011; 2012). Moreover, they believed their revolutionary legitimacy gave them the standing to be consulted not only on the appointment of officials in state institutions, but also on the formation of new institutions, with the dual aim of being a part of them and defining their remit.³

Box 1 Hybridity in security sector reform

'Hybridity' is a term used in recent scholarship on security sector reform to describe state institutions that rely on interaction between a 'formal' state apparatus and 'informal' non-state actors such as militias.⁴ Hybridity in weak or emerging states is caused by competing power structures, none strong enough to displace the other. A fragile state, unable to exert either direct control or indirect 'security governance' at the local level, will enter into some arrangement with local actors whose legitimacy differs from that of the state.⁵ The resulting 'hybrid' institutions can incorporate multiple types of authority: the legal authority of formal political institutions, traditional authority such as that of a tribe, or the charismatic authority of an individual (Boege et al., 2009). Within such institutions, formal and informal elements co-exist, overlap, and intertwine (Kraushaar and Lambach, 2009, p. 1). This creates unique problems for national governments and external assistance (Bagayoko, 2012).

In accordance with this literature, Libya's transitional state institutions can be described as hybrid. The boundaries between formal and informal elements within the security sector are blurred. Hybridity in Libya's security sector institutions is a function of political factionalism, which has posed persistent obstacles to efforts aimed at transforming armed groups into formal state institutions.

The hybridity of Libyan institutions has also complicated international technical support to the security sector, which has focused on formal institutions. Foreign governments and international organizations are reluctant to engage with informal actors such as local militias, and both the Libyan authorities and the public would probably have serious misgivings about such engagement by foreign actors. But the official organs of the Libyan state with which foreign governments interact often have little authority over security institutions that claim revolutionary legitimacy and, at times, the two are fiercely opposed to each other. This makes it difficult to formulate an approach to security sector assistance and to assess its impact.

Further complicating matters was the ill-defined nature of the legal authority of the state the NTC had inherited. This problem was the result of Qaddafi's dissolution of Libya's constitution and the centralization of military and security power outside state institutions. Key positions in the security sector had been abolished (such as the minister of defence), sidelined (such as the chief of general staff), or granted informal powers (such as the military governor of the south).⁶ Since the security sector thus needed substantial redefinition, both the NTC and the General National Congress (GNC) passed relevant legislation. Yet the new laws were ambiguous and allowed decision-makers in security sector institutions to sponsor their 'own' groups within

the ranks of the *thuwwar*. For example, the NTC's February 2012 law on the competencies of senior military officials designated the 'head of state' as the 'supreme commander of the armed forces', despite the fact that the position of 'head of state' had been neither created nor defined by any other law (NTC, 2012a). The law also allocated shared responsibilities for many tasks to the 'supreme commander', the defence minister, and the chief of general staff. As a result, all three would later sign orders to create new units, and the GNC president's assumption of the 'supreme commander' title caused confusion between executive and legislative branches of government.⁷ Multiple and overlapping chains of command emerged.

The NTC's lack of a long-term policy for security sector reform has allowed armed groups—especially those claiming revolutionary legitimacy—to act with the imprimatur of the state's legal authority, though not necessarily in the state's interests. Indeed, the absence of clear, centralized structures has left security sector institutions vulnerable to contradictory and competing interests. In mid-2014 the struggles between interest groups culminated in the bifurcation of state and security institutions, and in the emergence of two competing claims to legitimacy.

The *thuwwar* and post-revolutionary armed groups

Perhaps unusually following a revolution, the victors—the *thuwwar*—did not seize control of the state, nor did they immediately force purges of state security institutions (although many senior officials fled of their own accord). Instead, the *thuwwar* remained largely autonomous, with each group holding on to its weapons. There were several reasons for this. First, the revolution largely targeted the Qaddafi family and the security institutions that protected it rather than the government ministries or the army or police services, which the regime had essentially relegated to supporting the regime security apparatus.⁸ Second, rebel forces were allied with the NTC as the revolution's political representative and had no alternate political preparations. The NTC's leadership under Mustafa Abd al-Jalil and Mahmud Jibril, in turn, prioritized stability and continuity. Third, significant commanders within the *thuwwar* had defected from the army and police.

Box 2 *Brigades, battalions, and companies: terminology for Libyan armed groups*

The word *katiba* is often used as a blanket term for and by Libyan armed groups. Its translation as ‘brigade’ by the English-language media, however, is in most cases misleading. Base units within Libyan armed groups tend to be small bodies, normally numbering a few dozen, though sometimes as many as 200 men, rotated in and out of deployment. In Arab armies, the rough equivalent is a ‘company’ or *sariyya* (pl. *siraya*). Larger armed groups in Libya usually subdivide themselves into *siraya*, with some even taking on that name.⁹

An army *katiba* (pl. *kata’ib*), by contrast, denotes a force of several hundred to around a thousand soldiers. For the vast majority of *thuwwar* units, ‘battalion’ is thus a more appropriate translation for *katiba* than ‘brigade’. Only in Benghazi, Misrata, and Zintan did groups the size of an army *katiba* actually develop, in large part because, during the war, these towns were hubs for weapon deliveries and coordination with the NATO air campaign.

The largest military grouping, rarely used by Libyan armed groups, is the *liwa’*, or brigade. In Arabic military terms, the *liwa’* is a collection of *kata’ib* or battalions with at least 10,000 men.

Although there were attempts to create larger brigades in the Libya Shield Forces, these have tended to subdivide or fragment into battalion-sized groups.¹⁰ To date, few armed groups have recruited significant numbers of men from outside their core communities or areas.¹¹ There have been some attempts at establishing larger formations through mergers, though most such efforts have been unsuccessful.¹²

The *thuwwar* proved to be a diverse group united only by the goal of overthrowing Qaddafi. After the revolution’s success and the loss of a common goal, no single armed entity or coalition was capable of controlling Libyan territory, monopolizing the use of force, or assuming sole responsibility for national security. The vast majority of revolutionary battalions and post-revolutionary armed groups comprised fewer than 1,000 members (see Box 2). These individual armed groups took control of their own regions, either via ‘military councils’ (in the west) or via coalitions of fighting groups (in Benghazi and Misrata). Some groups took up more or less permanent residence in Tripoli itself. Instructive examples include:

- Two major umbrella organizations of revolutionary battalions emerged in the eastern part of the country: the 17 February Coalition and the Gathering

of Revolutionary Companies.¹³ After Qaddafi's demise, these two groups turned their attention to security affairs in that region. Elements of the 17 February Coalition split into two institutions. The first—the Preventive Security Apparatus—acted as a counter-intelligence and border security force to respond to the risk of what members referred to as 'fifth-column' attacks from Qaddafi loyalists. The second—the Libya Shield—was a composite force of smaller battalions that had fought on the front lines at Brega and that found themselves stationed across eastern Libya after the war.¹⁴

- In Misrata, a more structured administration emerged, influenced by an army officer (Salim Joha) who defected to the rebel side early on with some like-minded colleagues. During the long fighting in and around Misrata, civilians formed 236 battalions, the largest of which contained more than 1,000 fighters while the smallest comprised 10–20 men (McQuinn, 2012). Some battalions possessed specialist functions, such as vehicle repair or the maintenance of artillery or tanks.¹⁵ Most battalions registered with both the Misrata military council and the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries, an administrative entity that coordinated and registered brigade members and their weapons. At its largest, in November 2011, the Union counted around 40,000 registered Misratans (McQuinn, 2012, p. 13). Members of both groupings largely joined the Libya Shield project as it gained political momentum in mid-2012.
- In the western part of the country—the Nafusa mountains and coastal areas—military councils emerged. Towns in this area were too small to support their own major fighting forces and too politically diverse to allow a single force to assert hegemony. The town with the largest number of fighters was Zintan, which initially boasted up to 6,000 fighters distributed among eight brigades, followed by Nalut, with 5,000 fighters and six brigades. Other significant forces existed in Jadu, Zawiya, and Zuwara. These forces primarily joined the Border, Petroleum Facilities, and Vital Installations Force,¹⁶ the National Guard, and the Libya Shield Forces, among other security institutions.¹⁷
- In Tripoli, following the capital's fall, 17 military councils and a large number of neighbourhood vigilante groups formed.¹⁸ In addition,

Tripolitarians who had trained in the Nafusa mountains under the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion also established entities, as did armed groups from Misrata, Zintan, and eastern Libya. These politically diverse groups, which rapidly expanded with the enlistment of an uncounted number of local youths, were fed into the Supreme Security Committee, while some Zintani groups allied with the Ministry of Defence. None of these groups were powerful enough to assert their authority over each other, nor over an estimated 16,000 criminals released from the capital's prisons by Qaddafi in his final days.¹⁹

- A large number of post-revolutionary armed groups also formed in other areas that had remained under regime control until late in the revolution. Some of these areas were strongholds of communities that revolutionary groups saw as pillars of the regime, including much of the south, as well as Bani Walid, Tarhuna, and the Warshafana area (Lacher, 2013). Most armed groups in these areas mimicked the revolutionary forces in their names and self-legitimization, without having fought in the revolution. In some cases—such as in Tarhuna and among the Awlad Suleiman tribe—they combined former revolutionaries and members of Qaddafi's security battalions from the same tribe. In the south, such groups quickly began fighting over the country's borders and trade routes. Many later joined the Border or Petroleum Facilities Guard (Cole, 2012; Lacher, 2014).

In sum, across the country, the number of armed groups exploded in the chaos that ensued after the Qaddafi regime's demise. The prospect of material benefits from the new government spurred the formation of local military councils. During late 2011 and early 2012, the transitional authorities' various moves to offer payments to armed groups through these councils further encouraged their proliferation (ICG, 2012). Such armed groups mostly recruited from among local or tribal constituencies. Many revolutionary groups expanded significantly through new recruitment among civilians. For others, the revolutionary label was little more than a front for criminal activities.

The state security sector

The revolution provoked major upheaval in the state security sector, which had been highly fragmented under Qaddafi. The regular army, under the control of the chief of general staff, had been deliberately neglected under the former regime. Qaddafi had built a parallel security sector that reported not to the chief of general staff but to two bodies: the Temporary General Committee on Defence (that is, the Defence Ministry, headed by Abu Bakr Yunis Jabr) and the Permanent Security Committee, a core regime security institution based in Bab al-Aziziyya, with rotating heads appointed personally by Qaddafi. The security brigades (*al-kata'ib al-amniya*) under this command were recruited from tribes considered loyal to the regime. They included Brigade 32, commanded by Khamis al-Qaddafi, as well as the Mohamed al-Maqariaf, Sahban, Fadhil Abu Umar, Faris, Hamza, Suqur Abu Minyar, and Maghawir brigades.²⁰ These brigades bore the brunt of fighting on Qaddafi's behalf during the 2011 war; they had been destroyed or scattered by the end of the conflict.

The regular armed forces, meanwhile, essentially split in two. The eastern units defected. These included the Saeqa special forces—under the chief of general staff's direct control—as well as other army units, the air force, and military intelligence. Some Saeqa members joined with civilians to form a revolutionary battalion: the Zawiya Martyrs Battalion (Quryna, 2012b). In western revolutionary strongholds, many military officers defected to the *thuwwar*. The NTC's chiefs of staff—Gen. Abd al-Fattah Yunis and, after his assassination in July 2011, Gen. Sulaiman Mahmud al-Ubaidi—maintained loose oversight over the eastern military units but exercised no control over military officers who had defected to the *thuwwar* in Misrata, the Nafusa mountains, or elsewhere. Nor did the NTC chiefs exercise effective authority over eastern soldiers who joined revolutionary battalions led by civilians, such as the Umar al-Mukhtar Battalion (Fitzgerald, 2014).

In contrast, most military units in the west and south remained largely loyal and intact.²¹ Some regular artillery and tank units fought during the war, although revolutionary commanders in the Nafusa mountains claim that—in some cases—regular army units would deliberately disarm

explosive projectiles or inform revolutionary forces of plans to shell certain areas.²² The remainder provided logistical support to the regime's war effort or stayed in their barracks. For these reasons, revolutionary forces by and large did not treat the army as the enemy when the regime fell, although they continued to distrust the military institutions.

Following Qaddafi's death, western and southern units joined military councils in towns where the armed forces had a strong presence and the *thuwwar* were weak, such as in Gharyan, Jumail, Khums, Sabha, Surman, and Tarhuna. Units recruited from the armed forces generally had limited capacities, however. NATO airstrikes and raids by the *thuwwar* had depleted major ammunition depots at Aziziyya, Gharyan, Sabha, Tarhuna, Ubari, and elsewhere. The *thuwwar* had also stripped bare or occupied many army bases and facilities.²³

When the regime fell, therefore, the army had already partially disintegrated. However, the NTC and its successive executive arms made no attempts to dismantle or reform the army, despite multiple lobbying efforts from the *thuwwar*. This was in part due to growing political divisions among the *thuwwar* themselves, such as between Misrata's Fawzi Abd al-Al at the Interior Ministry and Zintan's Usama Juwayli at Defence, who might have otherwise united around a single vision of reform.

The emergence of hybrid institutions

Conflicts over legitimacy, mutual suspicion between the *thuwwar* and old institutions, and, increasingly, political differences among the *thuwwar* prompted two developments. On the one hand, some *thuwwar* groups formed their own separate military, security, and intelligence units. On the other hand, some joined state security institutions, with the support of allies in the state security apparatus. These developments occurred amid a rapidly changing security situation that required an immediate response from the *thuwwar* and the government. Armed conflict erupted among several communities, leaving hundreds dead (ICG, 2012). The threat from pro-Qaddafi loyalists was perceived to be extremely high. And, although state security forces continued to man border crossing points, they lacked the capacity to

assert actual control over the border regions. The inability to formally secure the borders facilitated a trade in illicit drugs and weapons that allowed armed gangs to become powerful.

This unstable context fostered the formation of a new set of hybrid institutions, including:

- the Supreme Security Committee, as discussed below;
- the Libya Shield Forces, as discussed below;
- the Preventive Security Apparatus, initially established by the Benghazi-based 17 February Coalition to neutralize anti-revolutionary elements in eastern Libya and still active in Benghazi despite efforts to dismantle it;²⁴ and
- the National Guard, an umbrella for revolutionary battalions set up in late 2011 by Khalid al-Sharif, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group; its component elements have since joined other institutions.²⁵

In addition, certain state institutions that survived the 2011 revolution became hybrid by absorbing various armed groups and political interests. These include the armed forces, as discussed below, and their subsidiary institutions, such as the Border Guard and its sister organizations, the Petroleum Facilities Guard and the Vital Installations Guard. 🇺🇦

The challenge of integration and the path to disintegration²⁶

Since the revolution, rifts within Libya's security sector have continued to grow, and attempts at building integrated security institutions have been frustrated. Factionalization has been common among newly established institutions and those that developed out of the former state security sector. Both the Libya Shield Forces and the Supreme Security Committee were intended to be temporary institutions, designed as interim solutions in response to the post-war challenge of integrating *thuwwar* units into largely unreformed government ministries. Instead, they persisted and operated less as elements of the government as a whole than as units loyal to *parts* of the government, depending on ideological, regional, or personal ties. In the absence of a unifying principle, the weak ties between state security institutions allowed competing political interests to flourish.

These competing interests have been among the main drivers of Libya's escalating conflicts. Although the SSC has been formally disbanded and the LSF has partially disintegrated, the powerful interests that operated through these institutions persist. Many are now disguised as new, official, or hybrid security units. Some elements have gone underground to become criminal or extremist groups. Within the armed forces, meanwhile, competing interest groups have emerged, engaging in rivalry both with each other and with units formed by the *thuwwar*. As discussed below, these divisions in the armed forces were the genesis of an internal rift in the aftermath of Maj.-Gen. Khalifa Haftar's declaration of the 'General Leadership of the Armed Forces' in May 2014 (Haftar, 2014d).

The rift through the army and hybrid bodies widened into a bifurcation of government institutions after a coalition of *thuwwar* units, led by Misratan forces, launched a major offensive for the control of Tripoli in July 2014. Meeting in Tobruk, the rump²⁷ of the newly elected parliament, the House of Representatives (HoR), labelled the *thuwwar* coalition that called itself Libya Dawn terrorists and appointed a close ally of Haftar, Abd al-Razaq al-Nadhuri,

as the new chief of general staff (AFP, 2014). Nadhuri's predecessor, Abd al-Salam al-Ubaidi, has refused to step down, declaring the *thuwwar* units leading the offensive loyal forces and their actions legitimate (Office of the Chief of General Staff, 2014b). Under Umar al-Hassi, a government backed by the *thuwwar* coalition and remnants of the GNC has emerged in Tripoli, rivalling that led by Abdallah al-Thinni and appointed by the rump HoR in Tobruk (Wehrey, 2014b).

Rifts through government institutions

The bifurcation of Libya's polity had its origins in rifts within government institutions that corresponded to the fragmentation of the security sector. At the top, these rifts have been reflected in the ambiguous relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government. The two successive presidents of the GNC—Muhammed al-Magariaf from August 2012 to May 2013 and Nuri Abu Sahmain from June 2013 to August 2014—assumed the title 'supreme commander of the armed forces' on a controversial legal basis.²⁸ With fluctuating majorities within the GNC, Abu Sahmain was given emergency executive powers in August 2013 and was stripped of them three months later, only to have them restored in January 2014 (GNC, 2013b; 2013g; Elumami, 2014). Abu Sahmain's actions sparked widespread unease within the GNC, and his designation of the minister of defence as the army's 'general commander' left the division of powers uncertain (Abd ar-Rahman, 2013; GNC, 2013c; Libya al-Mostakbal, 2013c). As power struggles in the GNC escalated through the first half of 2014, the president's title of 'supreme commander' was openly contested, including by Deputy GNC President Izz al-Din al-Awami.²⁹ In the crisis that erupted in mid-2014, Abu Sahmain re-emerged, arguing that the GNC remained in power since it had not formally handed over control to the HoR. Acting as GNC president and 'supreme commander', Abu Sahmain confirmed Ubaidi as chief of general staff after the latter had been dismissed by the HoR (GNC, 2014b).

The problem has not been limited to the blurred lines between the executive and legislative branches of government. Rivalry in the executive branch itself—between the minister of defence and the chief of general staff—has

been a constant, dating from the leadership of Usama Juwayli (defence) and Yusuf al-Manqush (general staff) in the government of Abd al-Rahim al-Kib (November 2011–November 2012). The conflict continued in the government of Ali Zeidan, from November 2012 to March 2014, with Abdallah al-Thinni (defence) rivalling Ubaidi, who succeeded Salim al-Qnaydi (general staff). According to Zeidan, Ubaidi refused to take orders from the government and failed to cooperate with the Ministry of Defence. Ubaidi retorted that his orders had come from the GNC—which appointed him—and its president (Al-Anba, 2012; Al-Gharyani, 2014). Both Ubaidi and Qnaydi accused Zeidan of blocking the army's reconstruction by starving it of funds and circumventing command structures (Al-Manara, 2014). In a thinly veiled reference to the National Forces Alliance, al-Qnaydi further alleged that a bloc in the GNC was holding meetings with army officers to persuade them to take sides in political squabbles (Libya al-Mostakbal, 2013a).³⁰

Prior to the emergence of two rival governments, such conflicts had also existed inside the Defence and Interior Ministries, with ministers and their deputies representing competing local and political factions. In turn, these rivalries thwarted attempts to formulate and implement policies.³¹ Such political struggles translated into institutional deadlock; they have prevented the government from acting against militias that are blocking some of Libya's largest oil terminals and have caused ongoing controversies over the legitimacy of forces charged by one government entity or other with intervening in conflicts.³² The footholds gained by competing factions in the ministries have also been reflected in procurement patterns for arms and equipment. Various officials within ministries have been able to prepare and sign off on deals, and then channel shipments to their allies or clients.³³ Former *thuwwar* military officers who have been appointed as defence attaches to embassies in arms-exporting countries have also played a role in facilitating procurement for their constituencies back home.³⁴ With the bifurcation of institutions in mid-2014, these rivalries turned into struggles over who could lawfully occupy which positions; not only were there two rival chiefs of the general staff after Nadhuri's appointment, but Deputy Minister of Defence Khalid al-Sharif contested his dismissal by Thinni and asserted that he remained in office (al-Sharif, 2014a).

Ill-fated reform attempts

In view of the conflicting interests at work in the highest levels of government, the authorities' inability to conceive any coherent strategy for the establishment of new security sector institutions has been unsurprising. The factionalization of the security sector has overwhelmed successive governments, eliminating their ability to develop plans for security sector reform as they are constantly forced to react to events on the ground. Three years after the revolution, no plans exist for security sector reform, nor has there been any work on building the political consensus required to begin the process.

Since the state institutions were torn apart in mid-2014, two rival visions have emerged, reflecting competing claims to control over the security sector. On the one hand, an alliance of military officers from Cyrenaica and the Zintani leadership of hybrid units, backed by the rump parliament in Tobruk, has been mobilizing support from Egypt to gain the upper hand and establish an army under its authority (Al-Wasat, 2014j; Wehrey, 2014b). The rump parliament has issued a decision dissolving all 'irregular armed entities', without specifying how those would be identified (HoR, 2014a). On the other hand, the Libya Dawn coalition, an alliance of hybrid units aligned with the 'revolutionary camp' (see below), contests the legitimacy of the rump HoR and its chief of general staff. The Dawn coalition denounces the Tobruk-based alliance as harbouring a counter-revolutionary agenda and is promoting the establishment of a new security sector with the former revolutionary battalions at its core (Libya Dawn, 2014).

Prior to the crisis of mid-2014, reform attempts had been undertaken piecemeal, generally provoking tensions rather than attenuating them. Among Abu Sahmain's first actions as 'supreme commander' was the establishment of an Integrity and Reform Commission for the armed forces, in late June 2013 (MoD, 2013b). The Commission primarily focused on excluding officers who had participated in Qaddafi's counter-revolutionary war effort, although it also aimed (more generally) to retire senior officers to make space for 'fresh blood' (Quryna, 2013d). The initiative also sought to improve the prospects for integration of *thuwwar*, who often held out against joining the army on the grounds that it was an unreformed institution of the former

regime. The Commission's efforts fuelled discontent within the army and contributed to the formation of dissident groups, including the faction now led by Maj.-Gen. Haftar (al-Rishi, 2014).³⁵ At the time of writing, the majority in the rump HoR was planning to enable retired officers to be reinstated (Al-Wasat, 2014h).

The HoR's attempt to reverse earlier decisions was not the first time that efforts to carry out security sector reform fell victim to power struggles and rapid shifts in the public mood after key events. The Zeidan government's attempt to establish a so-called National Guard in 2013 is a case in point. During early 2013, a high-level committee appointed by Prime Minister Zeidan led efforts to establish the new organization, which was intended to protect interim government institutions. The unit was to exist only until the constitutional process and reform of old security structures had laid the basis for a new security sector. The National Guard would be recruited primarily from the LSF and other *thuwwar* factions, individually rather than by unit. Once the security sector was reformed, the National Guard was to become a reserve force.³⁶

The idea fell prey to the political struggles that paralysed the GNC throughout 2013, pitting the 'revolutionary camp' against their political opponents in the National Forces Alliance (Lacher, 2013). The Alliance opposed the project, not least because the Guard was intended to report to the GNC president, who, at the time, was the revolutionary camp's figurehead.³⁷ The project was abandoned in early July 2013. By June, when protests in front of a Benghazi LSF base turned into clashes in which several dozen people were killed, the government had already embarked on a revision of its plans to integrate *thuwwar* units into government forces (Libya News Agency, 2013a). Instead of establishing new interim forces, the prime minister set up another committee to plan for the integration of *thuwwar* into the *existing* structures of the army and police (PMO, 2013). In October 2013, following the temporary abduction of Ali Zeidan, the government sought to speed up the integration process by handing responsibility to the Ministry of Defence and granting military ranks to *thuwwar* (Al-Watan al-Libiya, 2013d). A plan to integrate around 300 *thuwwar* leaders as military officers was shelved, however, after Zeidan's dismissal in March 2014.³⁸

If the integration of the *thuwwar* into government structures has proved elusive, efforts to establish new, depoliticized units from scratch have fared no better. The training programmes designed to set up such units have also been subject to the political uncertainty and institutional paralysis of the Libyan government. Under an agreement with former prime minister Zeidan's Ministry of Defence, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States agreed to train some 15,000 recruits abroad. A further 15,000 were to be trained in Libya by Egyptian, Jordanian, and Sudanese instructors. British, Italian, and US officials publicly described this effort as the basis for the creation of a 'general-purpose force'. In private, however, these officials admitted that a scheme based on a request by an interim prime minister was inherently shaky. Libyan officials seemed even less convinced, describing the scheme as a training programme—with no evidence of plans to create cohesive units of new recruits, let alone support for such a new force from Libya's fragmented defence sector.³⁹

The former affiliations of the recruits themselves was also unclear; while recruits came through one of eight national recruitment centres, neither foreign officials involved in the programme nor officers at the Libyan Defence Ministry possessed information concerning their past engagements. In one case, the Ministry of Defence lost track of one designated list of trainees, necessitating the creation of further vetting committees within partner and training institutions. Although the recruiting process was open, most recruits were probably drawn from hybrid institutions.⁴⁰ Given the uncertainty surrounding who is being trained and what will become of them after the training is completed, it is unclear what impact—if any—the programme would have on current hybrid units and institutions, and on the political interests those units represent. The problems associated with training members of an army that has fragmented into political factions are obvious; in July 2014, for example, a unit that was being trained in the United Kingdom announced its support for Haftar's campaign, despite the fact that Haftar was acting in open rebellion against the chief of general staff (Al-Wasat, 2014g).

In sum, there has been no evidence of any coherent strategy to establish integrated, depoliticized units recruited from the pool of *thuwwar* and regular soldiers. As the case studies below demonstrate, revolutionary and

post-revolutionary battalions have been left largely intact, even after their 'integration' into the army or their incorporation into new hybrid institutions. Such integration is better understood as the work of individual political or regional factions within the security apparatus, rather than the government as a whole. As long as political rivalries over and within the security sector persist, armed groups and their backers in the security institutions are unlikely to transform into depoliticized units. Indeed, dissolving these units into an integrated whole can happen only once power relations within the institutions themselves are settled.

This process of consolidation has not yet started, and the emergence of two rival power centres in mid-2014 will delay it further. In this context, the rump HoR's plan to dissolve 'irregular armed entities' implies that the Tobruk-based leadership considers certain units to be regular forces loyal to the state, while it sees the others as unlawful (HoR, 2014a). This approach contradicts realities on the ground. As demonstrated throughout the case studies in this paper, the 'regular' Libyan army ceased to exist with the revolution. The boundaries between formal and hybrid units, as well as between the army and the *thuwwar*, have blurred, and the entire security sector has become defined by political factionalism. Intense contests over legitimacy have produced a bifurcation of state institutions that renders the notion of loyalty to the state meaningless.

This assessment has direct implications for external attempts to support the establishment of a state security sector. Even before the open bifurcation of mid-2014, training of new recruits and the formation of new units were unlikely to alter the government's inability to act. In the best-case scenario, such efforts will have prepared the ground for units that can be at the disposal of future governments, once the post-revolutionary balance of power has become clearer. In the worst-case scenario, those efforts will have exacerbated existing tensions. The rift that has split Libya's armed forces in two since May 2014 means that training programmes are no longer a viable means of support; they would merely serve to back one alliance of forces over another, thereby fuelling the conflicts between them. 📌

Case studies: the SSC, the LSF, and the armed forces

The following case studies illustrate the arguments made above with a detailed analysis of three key institutions: the Supreme Security Committee, the Libya Shield Forces, and the armed forces.

The Supreme Security Committee

The Supreme Security Committee is a hybrid institution that allowed a diverse range of armed groups to operate under official cover and thereby emerge as powerful actors in the security sector. The SSC has been considered dissolved since late 2013, but many of its component elements have successfully withstood the institution's break-up. They continue to operate under different guises, as part of hybrid institutions or on their own.

The NTC initially devised the SSC as a rapid and temporary solution to the security vacuum in Tripoli in August 2011. Reacting to the 'bottom-up' emergence of military councils in western Libya, the NTC's executive committee created the SSC to oversee the 17 different military councils in Tripoli's neighbourhoods. The SSC also had a political objective in isolating the Tripoli military council, formed under Abd al-Hakim Bilhadj with the support of Tripoli's NTC representatives, as well as several Tripolitanian and Misratan battalions.⁴¹

Initially overseen by a group of NTC members,⁴² the SSC was dissolved in December 2011 and its personnel transferred to Fawzi Abd al-Al after his appointment as minister of interior (NTC, 2011b).⁴³ On 28 December, the minister's Decision 388 re-established the 'Temporary Supreme Security Committee' and set up a 'First Recruitment Subcommittee' headquarters in Tripoli (MoI, 2011). Unlike the initial Committee, the Temporary SSC was granted nationwide authority.

Membership

During the SSC's initial phase, from September to December 2011, its target membership consisted primarily of Tripoli neighbourhood vigilante groups, which were loosely coordinated by a network of military councils that started with 17 such groups, but simultaneously mushroomed and fragmented into more than 100 by 2012.⁴⁴ This loose, largely self-determining collection of groups operated their own checkpoints and detention facilities in the greater Tripoli area. They were incentivized to join the SSC to receive state-issued registration cards and, more importantly, salaries and one-off bonuses.⁴⁵ Armed groups were registered and paid as a unit, with the NTC relying on military councils to distribute initial payments. Later, armed groups self-registered with the Interior Ministry's payment committees and presented their own lists of members to the armed forces' military accounts offices, which effectively left oversight of recruitment and membership to individual commanders.⁴⁶

This lack of oversight led to the dramatic swelling of registrants, as group leaders quickly added recruits in competition for state funding and influence.⁴⁷ The Interior Ministry set a nationwide target of 25,000 fighters for the SSC, a figure that was quickly eclipsed as more and more armed groups joined (AFP, 2011). By August 2012, the number of fighters formally registered with the SSC had reached 149,000.⁴⁸

The government's promised payments became a political liability, as the Libyan Central Bank made out cheques directly to brigade heads but did not request any confirmation of payment to the intended recipients, nor try to confirm that intended recipients were real persons (ICG, 2012, p. 14).⁴⁹ Both the Interior Ministry and the SSC attempted to streamline and remove fighters who were double-registered in other institutions or who simply did not attend work; by the end of 2012, both institutions were reporting the actual size of the SSC at just over 60,000 members.⁵⁰ According to one estimate, this number included approximately 300 unreformed armed groups that had merged into the SSC. Although the SSC was divided into just over 50 regional branches, the bulk of its effective force was based in Tripoli. The official Tripoli branch of the SSC, commanded by Hashim Bishr, numbered over 16,000;

however, other branches and SSC-registered armed groups based in Tripoli put the total at 35,000, according to one SSC leader.⁵¹

Interests and factions

Although the SSC was created by the transitional authorities, its units soon escaped central control, not least because of diverse interest groups who used the institution as an official cover for their political or economic activities—or simply as a source of salaries. These interest groups ranged from Islamist factions to police officers and criminal groups.

On paper, the minister of interior was responsible for the SSC. Fawzi Abd al-Al, a Misratan lawyer, oversaw the SSC's growth from December 2011 to December 2012. His successor, Ashur Shwail, a police chief from Benghazi, attempted to implement the integration of the SSC into the Ministry of Interior during his tenure from December 2012 to May 2013; he was succeeded by a former Tripolitanian police official, Muhammad Shaikh. Both Shwail and Shaikh came into conflict with other political interest groups within the ministry, particularly the Islamist-leaning figures who dominated the SSC. The deputy minister of interior, Umar al-Khadrawi, effectively oversaw the organization. Khadrawi was a close associate of Abd al-Rizaaq al-Arabi in the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood; in May 2011, both had been in the planning committee behind Bilhajj's Tripoli military council. Appointed deputy interior minister in August 2011 (Al-Manara Media, 2011), Khadrawi retained the post under Prime Ministers Kib and Zeidan until he was dismissed in September 2013. Khadrawi's singular longevity underlined his influence within the rapidly changing Interior Ministry (Libya al-Jadida, 2013b). Rather than being the project of the Interior Ministry as such, the SSC was backed by recent appointees to the ministry who had an Islamist or revolutionary background, such as Khadrawi, as opposed to the ministry's career police officers, such as Shwail and Shaikh. It thereby reflected the emergence of rival political camps in state security institutions.

Neighbourhood vigilante groups, whose members were largely youths, formed the bulk of the SSC's contingent in Tripoli. An important subset of these groups were Salafists who followed mainstream Saudi currents, as

opposed to jihadi strands of Salafism. Focused primarily on controlling a burgeoning drug trade in Tripoli, they tended to support and work with the Ministry of Interior even if they did not always see eye to eye. The most powerful commanders in Tripoli emerged from the Salafist spectrum. One, Abd al-Latif Qaddur, a religious judge from Suq al-Jum'a who had been an important cog in the arms network from Misrata to Suq al-Jum'a during the revolution and a leading commander in the Martyrs of Suq al-Jum'a, became the SSC's first head. A peer of Qaddur's, Abd al-Rauf Kara, commanded the Suq al-Jum'a Nawasi battalion (*Jeune Afrique*, 2014). Kara subsequently became the head of the Tripoli SSC's 'support branches'—almost 40 neighbourhood groups divided into 17 branches, many of which⁵² shared Kara's Salafist leanings. Forces such as Kara's Nawasi battalion—renamed the eighth support branch—or the fourth support branch in Abu Salim, headed by the Salafist sheikh Salah al-Burki, saw their mandate as inherently political: finding and arresting former regime security officials and policing Tripoli according to their interpretation of Islamic principles.⁵³ Their vision included enforcing their own brands of morality by targeting alleged alcohol drinkers and, in at least one case, alleged homosexuals (Grant, 2012).

The head of the SSC's Tripoli branch, Hashim Bishr—a former commander in the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion—also came from a Salafist background. Although they were initially drafted in to support Abd al-Hakim Bilhajj's Tripoli military council, Bishr and the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion were far less influenced than the Tripoli military council by networks of former jihadi Salafist individuals and members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.⁵⁴ Bishr merged the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion into the Tripoli branch of the SSC, creating an 'elite force' (*Quwat al-Nukhba*) from its two most potent battalions, led by himself and a fellow commander, Haitham al-Tajuri. The force was based at Mitiga airport and operated nine branches across Tripoli and a private detention facility in Ain Zara.

In Tripoli, the Ministry of Interior provided ineffective oversight of the SSC, permitting fiefdoms to emerge. The heads of the three major mobile and armed divisions of the SSC in Tripoli—the support branches, elite force, and crime-fighting committees, the latter of which had been created in May 2012 and been placed under the SSC in July 2012 (MoI, 2012)—allegedly supplied

cars and weapons to groups that responded to their orders.⁵⁵ The result was the formation of isolated and competing divisions (see Figure 1).

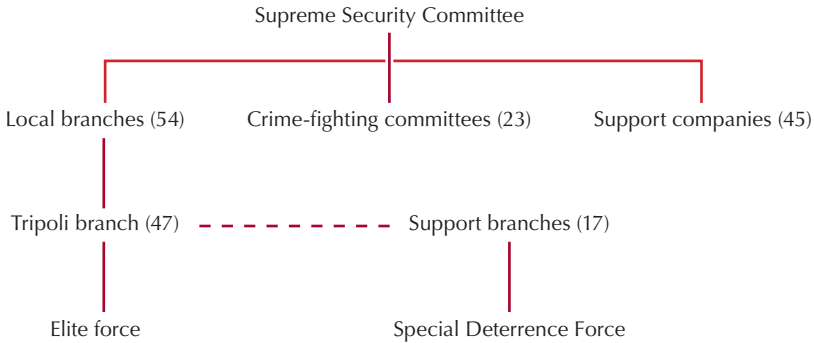


Figure 1 The highly fragmented divisions of the SSC, January 2013⁵⁶

Rivalries between a wide range of interest groups and factions within the SSC led to a high degree of fragmentation. In the capital, the elite force and support branches were under the umbrella of the Tripoli SSC branch. But a large number of SSC units operated separately in Tripoli, formally reporting directly to the SSC’s central administration. These units included the 45 ‘support companies’, which were distinct from the support branches and included many defected police officers and allied neighbourhood vigilante groups.⁵⁷ They further included the Tripoli branches of the crime-fighting committees, which in turn comprised a variety of individual armed groups with their own political and social agendas. Among them were *thuwwar* from Misrata and the Nafusa mountains who had remained in Tripoli following the capital’s fall; many of them pursued political opponents allied to the former regime and operated their own detention facilities. Except for Bishr’s group, the *thuwwar* had largely resisted joining the SSC, as they were wary of integrating into the Ministry of Interior; the SSC branches in Misrata and Zintan were negligible in number and power. By mid-2012, however, these groups in the capital found their interests best served by acquiring ‘official’ government sanction for their duties via the SSC. Along with neighbourhood militias drawn from Tripoli residents, such groups entered the crime-fighting committees.

Another constituency of the SSC comprised serving police officers. The incentives for police to join the institution were twofold: first, across the country, the police's lack of weaponry left them unable to deal with many front-line policing tasks.⁵⁸ Second, the SSC offered easy access to a second salary. In some towns, the local police branch was simply reformed as a branch of the SSC, using its surviving infrastructure and personnel (Walker-Cousins, 2012).

The armed groups that sought the cover of one of the SSC's multiple divisions also included criminal and counter-revolutionary groups. During the Tripoli SSC's first year, seven units were found to be composed exclusively of former members of the Qaddafi regime's People's Guard (Bishr, 2013a; Libya Gate, 2013). SSC commanders in Tripoli claimed that some SSC units were selling on narcotics they had seized out of SSC cars. Local residents alleged that a division of the crime-fighting committees in the central suburb of Ben Ashur comprised exclusively escaped convicts.⁵⁹ Another SSC division allegedly made significant profits out of its control over Tripoli's port and rejected the Tripoli SSC's attempts to dismantle the unit.⁶⁰ The elite force and the support branches raided other elements of the SSC during 2012 and 2013, after accusing them of engaging in criminal activity; both maintained intelligence offices dedicated to gathering information on other SSC branches.⁶¹ According to Bishr, the Tripoli SSC often had difficulty establishing which sub-unit of which SSC branch operating in Tripoli was responsible for abductions and other alleged criminal acts reported by citizens.⁶²

Dissolving the SSC

The SSC was designed as a temporary institution, with December 2012 initially set as its time horizon. The process of dissolving the SSC to return policing responsibilities to formal Interior Ministry institutions, however, entailed a range of obstacles. These included resistance from individual SSC units with vested economic interests or a pronounced political tendency—in the case of some Tripoli SSC units, a revolutionary or Salafist *esprit de corps*. Rifts within the Interior Ministry and the SSC administration, as well as the rapid turnover of senior ministry staff, also acted as impediments.

Under Interior Minister Fawzi Abd al-Al, the ministry stopped recruitment into the SSC in August 2012 and embarked on an effort to survey the institution's members in preparation for its dissolution. It identified 49,000 SSC members who were willing to join the formal security institutions, out of a total of 149,000 on the SSC's lists. However, the process was shelved when the government of Ali Zeidan took over from that of Abd al-Rahim al-Kib, and recruitment into the SSC resumed. In December 2012, with the SSC now at 162,000, a new attempt at dissolution was made.⁶³ This triggered mixed reactions from SSC units. The head of the Tripoli SSC, Hashim Bishr, who was to sit on the Interior Ministry committee overseeing the process, supported the initiative. Yet parts of the Tripoli SSC and units under the direct control of the central SSC initially rejected it; the idea was also opposed by numerous SSC branches across Libya, including Kara's support branches and many crime-fighting committees. The Interior Ministry threatened to suspend salaries of SSC members who refused to integrate as of January 2013, triggering violent protests in front of the GNC, where SSC fighters assaulted several GNC members. Payment of salaries was resumed thereafter, including for SSC members who had refused to integrate.⁶⁴

The dissolution initiative that began in December 2012 relied on new criteria for integration into formal security structures and thus required a fresh survey. Of 162,000 people on the SSC's payrolls, 61,000 failed to respond to the Interior Ministry's survey, suggesting that they most probably had other jobs—and, in some cases, were members of other hybrid units—and were simply drawing salaries without working for the SSC. Of the remainder, 30,000 did not meet the criteria or declared themselves unwilling to join the security institutions. Another 30,000 were still being processed as of February 2014. Of the 40,000 SSC members who had declared their willingness to join the security institutions—which largely meant the police—20,000 had already undergone the necessary training and were considered integrated by February 2014.⁶⁵

By January 2014, only one-tenth of the 53,000 SSC members who had responded to the survey in Tripoli were considered integrated after having completed their training.⁶⁶ The vast majority of the remainder continued their training, were vetted, or were declared unfit. According to former SSC

officials, most of those who had completed training in Tripoli were rapidly frustrated with police service, in which they encountered sceptical officers and a very different institutional culture. Many returned to their old armed groups, joined criminal gangs, or simply stayed at home. Overall, the dissolution process met with little success, and the official figures hid not only a variety of ways in which former SSC units persisted, but also major variations from one city to another.⁶⁷

The varying reactions to the Interior Ministry's approach reflected the divergent backgrounds of SSC branches in different cities. In Benghazi, the SSC had rapidly disintegrated from mid-2012 onwards, in large part due to irregularities in payment, as well as growing insecurity in the city and the resignation of the local SSC head Fawzi Wanis in September 2012. At the end of 2012, one-quarter of the Benghazi SSC's 12,000 men had already joined a unit of the Libya Shield Forces. Around 7,000 agreed to join the police; the remainder simply vanished.⁶⁸ As in Tripoli, those who joined the police rapidly stopped showing up for work—in the case of Benghazi, due to the deteriorating security situation. In more stable eastern towns with a shortage of other employment opportunities, such as Bayda, Marj, or Tobruk, integration into the police was more successful.⁶⁹ The same went for towns in southern Libya, where recruitment into the police represented an opportunity for low-risk employment. In Sirte, by contrast, the vast majority of SSC members simply stayed home from January 2013 onwards, taking more than 70 vehicles provided to the local SSC branch by the Interior Ministry with them (Ahmad, 2013).

By far the biggest challenges to the SSC's dissolution emerged in Tripoli, where the bulk of its active members were located and its units ranged from highly effective entities with a fervent revolutionary spirit to criminal gangs. Bishr's initial support for dissolving the SSC was rejected by Kara and other leaders of SSC units who had a strong *thuwwar* component, or who positioned themselves in the revolutionary camp. They demanded that the interior ministry and police first be purged of officials perceived to be corrupt or responsible for past acts of repression.⁷⁰ Other units, such as the one that controlled the port of Tripoli, broke away from the Tripoli SSC to protect their interests and joined the SSC central organization, where oversight was weaker and efforts at dissolving Tripoli branches only began in mid-2013.⁷¹

Individual considerations of SSC leaders also played a role. Aware of the need to address its leaders' ambitions, the Tripoli SSC identified 50 unit commanders to be offered career paths in the diplomatic service or state-owned companies. In response to the Tripoli SSC's refusal to expand the number of candidates offered this option, however, some units rejected the integration process.⁷² Eventually, the Interior Ministry and other government branches failed to cooperate with the Tripoli SSC's promotion of leading figures, which meant that most of these commanders had little incentive to join the police.⁷³ Only two prominent leaders were integrated as police officers.⁷⁴ Even if their rank and file joined the police, SSC unit leaders often retained close ties with their former men and were able to mobilize them as needed.⁷⁵

Units with a strong *esprit de corps*—in most cases, groups with Salafist leanings or a will to protect the revolution against perceived threats from former regime elements—proved robust enough to withstand the dissolution process. Abd al-Rauf Kara's Special Deterrence Force (*Quwat al-Rada' al-Khassa*) continued to operate as a separate unit, as did the SSC's Abu Salim units under Salah al-Burki and Abd al-Ghani al-Kikli. Some contingents of 'revolutionary' SSC members joined military intelligence, where they represented sufficiently large groups to operate autonomously.⁷⁶ Two new organizations were established to subsume the SSC units that refused to dissolve: the Rapid Intervention Force (*Quwat al-Tadakhul al-Sari'*), under the Interior Ministry's umbrella, and the Joint Intervention and Deterrence Force (*Quwat al-Rada' wal-Tadakhul al-Mushtaraka*), under the chief of general staff.⁷⁷ Inside these new organizations, the old command and group structures typically persisted, and the Joint Intervention and Deterrence Force's functions remained largely those of its ex-SSC components, despite the fact that the new organization was part of the Libyan army. These units' control of assets such as Mitiga airport or Tripoli port also remained unaffected.

In sum, the units that gained power through—and organized themselves within—the SSC continued to form powerful interest groups within the security sector, particularly in the capital. From July 2014 onwards, some factions of the former SSC in Tripoli played an important role in the Libya Dawn offensive—notably Burki and Kikli's Abu Salim units, as well as former elements of the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion. Others, such as units under

Kara's command, stayed in their local turfs.⁷⁸ Led by forces from Misrata and other revolutionary strongholds, Libya Dawn was directed first against Zintani battalions in the Tripoli area, and subsequently against armed groups in the Warshafana area south of Tripoli (see below).

The Libya Shield Forces

By backing the Libya Shield Forces, *thuwwar* leaders sought to establish themselves as a temporary substitute to the armed forces, or even as the core of a new, permanent army. While the LSF has been indispensable to the transitional governments in the context of stabilizing local conflicts, it has also been at the centre of major political struggles. The LSF's role in these struggles eventually contributed both to its own fragmentation and to the rift opening up in the armed forces in mid-2014. The LSF's component elements remain key actors in Libya's security sector and political landscape, including in the acute conflicts in Tripoli and Benghazi.

In contrast to the 'top-down' nature of the SSC, the LSF emerged in early 2012 as a 'bottom-up' *thuwwar* initiative. As inter-communal conflicts erupted in north-western and southern Libya in late 2011, the fragmented *thuwwar* units faced the challenge of responding to these conflicts. Simultaneously, they wished to preserve for themselves a role in securing the country's territory, to pursue their fight against loyalists, and to maintain their autonomy while lobbying against the unreformed armed forces. The *thuwwar* had often fought alongside the military on the same fronts, but in separate units bonded by different loyalties, and united only in loose coalitions designed largely to improve interaction with NATO forces. At this stage, the *thuwwar* needed new institutions to justify their legitimacy, and to meet more complex goals.

The *thuwwar*'s first initiative was launched in western Libya, where representatives of local military councils from the coastal plain and the Nafusa mountains met in January 2012 to form a joint, 1,500-strong 'peacekeeping force' with headquarters in Jadu and Surman.⁷⁹ Though the initiative had the blessing of Defence Minister Usama Juwayli, it was driven by the *thuwwar*.

The name 'Libya Shield' emerged from a similar—and almost simultaneous—initiative centred in Benghazi. Led by Wissam bin Hamid, the Libya

Shield was formed from a composite force of groups fighting on the Brega front line. These had joined the Coalition of Libyan Revolutionary Battalions, one of the first alliances of revolutionary armed groups set up in Benghazi in 2011, with the 17 February Coalition at its core (Quryna, 2012a).⁸⁰ In early 2012, bin Hamid's group approached the defence minister with a proposal for the formation of a stabilization force drawn from Benghazi-based and other eastern units. The defence minister agreed in February 2012, when violence erupted in the south-eastern town of Kufra (Al-Tarhuni, 2012). Units drawn from the groups under bin Hamid's leadership were sent south under a contract with the Office of the Chief of General Staff, which identified them as the 'Libya Shield' (see below). The contract tasked the groups with securing the airport and other significant installations. The Libyan army arrived several weeks later.

The initiatives in Benghazi and the western region were a compelling model for other *thuwwar*. Only a few days after the Benghazi Libya Shield was charged with stabilizing Kufra, a meeting of eight military councils in Misrata established a 'military division' of 7,000 fighters aimed at stabilizing the central region (Al-Manara, 2012b). At the core of the Misrati initiative was a rotating system organized by Salim Joha, the head of the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries, for the deployment of local units to locations such as Sabha for periods of up to one month. Joha also set the selection criteria for the deployed units' commanders.⁸¹

Building on this institutional development, the *thuwwar* conducted several nationwide conferences in March and April 2012, in an effort to create a representative body to advocate on their behalf with the government. The third such conference, on 1–2 April in Misrata and attended by Prime Minister Abd al-Rahim al-Kib, saw the leadership of these new units call on the government to designate them as 'the new nucleus' of the Libyan army and forcing army officers who 'stayed at home' or did not fight on the revolutionaries' behalf into retirement (ICG, 2012, pp. 18–19).

The chief of general staff, Yusuf al-Manqush, facing fierce opposition from the armed forces, refused to designate the *thuwwar* as the nucleus of a new army; instead, he tried to co-opt *thuwwar* fighters by offering benefits to those who rejoined the existing army. By the end of April 2012, the

revolutionary groups had altered their demands and, at a meeting in Benghazi, they requested official status as a temporary 'Libya Shield Force'. The goal was to develop a unit that could carry out military security tasks and border protection under the chief of general staff's command, while serving as an interim step to future (if undefined) integration into the Libyan army (ICG, 2012, pp. 19–20). Manqush acquiesced and, in June, the NTC created the Libya Shield Forces as a 'temporary reserve force', placing it under the command of the chief of general staff (NTC, 2012b). In practice, however, questions persisted as to who truly held the ultimate authority between the LSF and the chief of general staff. Henceforth, the LSF was deployed in parallel to, and disconnected from, the army, including in Kufra (February 2012), Sabha (April 2012), the Nafusa mountains (from April 2012 onwards), and at critical installations such as the Mellita oil refinery near Zawiyah.⁸²

Over the following year, the LSF grew into 13 different divisions, as thurwar and other armed civilians mimicked the LSF model to gain official legitimacy and access to salaries. The western initiative for a 'peacekeeping force' turned into the LSF's western division, split into two sub-units for the mountains and the coastal plain. In the east, the Libya Shield formed under Wissam bin Hamid became the first division, Libya Shield 1. Its members increasingly defined themselves as Islamist and, while continuing to recruit from Koranic schools and mutual social networks, began to restrict their membership and view other security groupings with suspicion. Subsequently, a second division—Libya Shield 2—emerged from other parts of the Coalition of Libyan Revolutionary Battalions; it opposed the increasingly Islamist and urban direction of Libya Shield 1 and recruited mainly among tribal constituencies from Ajdabiya, Bayda, and Benghazi.

In September 2012, the Rafallah al-Sahati Companies (RSC) and the 17 February Martyrs' Battalion, under heavy public pressure, opted for the Shield's official cover to become its seventh division (see Box 3). The move came after protesters, reacting to the attack on the US liaison office in Benghazi on 11 September 2012, had ransacked the bases of both the RSC and the jihadi group Ansar al-Sharia.⁸³ In addition to subsuming the battalions under 'Libya Shield 7', the office of the chief of general staff appointed military officers to oversee them (Graff, 2012). In practice, however, the groups retained

Box 3 Contractual relationships between hybrid units and the government: the case of the RSC

Relationships between hybrid units and the government are often based on contracts issued by ministers, the president of the GNC, the prime minister, or the chief of general staff. The Rafallah al-Sahati Companies (RSC), for example, emerged in the revolution's first weeks and subsequently merged into the 17 February Martyrs' Battalion, which in May 2011 moved under the administrative umbrella of the Gathering of Revolutionary Companies (*Tajammu' Sirayat al-Thuwwar*, GRC). By May 2011, the GRC was formally under the direction of the NTC's newly created Ministry of Defence, which began to authorize the GRC to act on its behalf. However, the RSC would not take orders from the NTC or its ministry. Thus, rather than orders, the ministry issued 'contracts'. In September 2011, for instance, the ministry issued a contract to the RSC to protect the Sirte–Brega Oil Company facilities. The contract also ordered all other 'revolutionary military units and battalions of the eastern front' to withdraw from those facilities (see Photo 1 in Annexe 1).

Subsequent contracts, issued by several government ministries, were addressed to the GRC, to be assigned to its component elements by the GRC head, Fawzi Bukatf. In February 2012, the RSC received its first significant government contract, from the Office of the Chief of General Staff (see Photo 2 in Annexe 1). The contract charged the GRC with 'preparing and sending a force to the Kufra area'. The GRC's deployment included the RSC as well as the Libya Shield Force.

By July 2012, the RSC was considering joining the Supreme Security Committee and received contracts from the Ministry of Interior to provide protection during the 7 July 2012 elections (see Photo 3 in Annexe 1). At the same time, it continued to carry out Defence Ministry contracts, since the GRC remained under the formal authority of the Office of the Chief of General Staff (see Photos 4–6 in Annexe 1). Finally, in October 2012, the RSC entered into a direct relationship with the Office of the Chief of General Staff as a branch of the Libya Shield Forces, in large part to protect itself against accusations that it was an illegal entity. In 2013, the Office of the Chief of General Staff redeployed the RSC to Kufra as part of Libya Shield 7.

their old leadership, identity, and political alignments. The seventh division, which also included many members of the Umar al-Mukhtar battalion that had emerged out of the orbit of former fighters of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, became the Shield's most explicitly Islamist unit.

The Misratan initiative mentioned above was designated Central Shield. In addition, Misrata's military council later created a new Shield unit intended to dissolve katiba structures entirely and reorganize individuals

within a more centralized command structure, which was named Libya Shield 3, or simply the Third Force (*al-Quwa al-Thalitha*). In doing so, they copied the designs for integration into the armed forces, which Misratan leaders were at that point pressing upon the chief of general staff.

Other, smaller units of the LSF emerged. In Gharyan, Libya Shield 4 gradually grew through the steady recruitment of civilians. Some Tripoli-based forces reconstituted themselves as Libya Shield 5, which remained mainly an administrative umbrella for its component battalions, in which unit commanders had a high degree of autonomy. A tenth Shield division was established in Benghazi after around 3,000 of the disbanding Benghazi SSC branch joined the LSF in late 2012.⁸⁴ In Sabha a southern LSF division emerged, with Islamist-oriented leadership surrounding Ahmad al-Hasnawi. The southern division remained a loose grouping of smaller battalions and never developed into a force that could counter-balance the city's powerful Awlad Sulaiman and Tubu armed groups (Lacher, 2014).

Not unlike the SSC, the LSF included units with strongly divergent backgrounds, degrees of cohesion, and ideological or local loyalties. But the units that came to define public opinion towards the Shield—the 1st and 7th divisions in Benghazi, the two Misrata-based divisions, and the western division's coastal unit—were all dominated by *thuwwar* who positioned themselves firmly in the revolutionary camp and became key actors in the escalating power struggles defining Libya's transition.

Political alignments

In 2012 and 2013, the LSF's core divisions rapidly transformed from stabilization forces into conflict parties. Though LSF leaders and allies insisted on the force's loyalty to the Office of the Chief of General Staff, the LSF's official status actually reflected divisions at the highest level of government and security institutions. The LSF was able to operate thanks to backing from factions within state institutions, including in the fragmented executive branches of government.

The LSF's political adversaries and many media outlets increasingly described the force as a militia allied with the Muslim Brotherhood, or even

that organization's armed wing (*Economist*, 2013; Stephen, 2013). Another popular shortcut consisted in reducing political dynamics to a conflict between Zintan and Misrata, with the latter identified as both a stronghold of the Brotherhood and the main Shield force (Laessing and al-Khalidi, 2013). In reality, however, the LSF's political alignments were more complex, as was the nature of the political landscape. As outlined above, the social base of Shield units differed even among the Benghazi-based divisions. What explained the political actions of Shield divisions from Misrata, Zawiyah, or the Nafusa mountains was not their alignment with any political party, but their cities' roles as revolutionary strongholds. Islamist currents did not play any more of a prominent role in the Misratan divisions than they did in Zintan-based units. Salafist and jihadi tendencies were influential in the Benghazi-based 1st and 7th divisions, as well as some units in the western coastal division, but such ideological currents were often in conflict with those of the Brotherhood. In fact, the LSF had not a single prominent Brotherhood figure as a commander.

What united these diverse groups with the coalition of political forces in the GNC that were supporting their deployment was their promotion of a revolutionary agenda: the marginalization of elites that had arranged themselves with the Qaddafi regime and the cleansing of the army and security institutions of former regime elements. The revolutionary camp's political adversaries were led by Mahmud Jibril's National Forces Alliance, representatives of tribal constituencies that had not backed the revolution (Zintani interest groups having broken with revolutionary forces to assume a leading position in the opposite camp), and disgruntled army officers (Lacher, 2013).⁸⁵

The political nature of LSF units was clear from their very first deployment, that of bin Hamid's division to Kufra in February 2012. As the Tubu perceived the unit as siding with the Zwayya, the division had to withdraw in mid-2012 to pave the way for a ceasefire (Wehrey, 2012).⁸⁶ More significant, however, was the capture of Bani Walid by parts of the LSF's central and western divisions in October 2012. The decision to enter Bani Walid was taken by a minority within the GNC, which accused the town of being a refuge for wanted former regime elements. The group mainly included deputies from Misrata, Zawiyah, and the Tripoli neighbourhoods of Suq al-Jum'a

and Tajura, as well as Islamist deputies from other cities, representatives of the emerging revolutionary camp (Lacher, 2013, p. 13). Defence Minister Juwayli, who had opposed the establishment of the LSF, publicly spoke out against the LSF's move on Bani Walid and was prevented from entering the city during the LSF's operations there (Al-Anba, 2012). The LSF's western division split over the deployment, with Zintanis refusing to participate. In Nalut, only a handful of Salafist fighters followed the LSF's call. By contrast, the strongly revolutionary and Salafist Shield contingent from Zawiya was prominent in the operations.⁸⁷

LSF units played an even more explicitly political role as power struggles escalated during 2013. The Coordination for Political Isolation, a group formed to push for a law that would exclude former regime officials from holding public office, relied heavily on *thuwwar* leaders from the LSF to exert political pressure.⁸⁸ These LSF leaders and associated political factions from Benghazi, Misrata, Zawiya, and the Nafusa mountains were pushing their political agenda in a Supreme Council of Revolutionaries (Lacher, 2013, pp. 22–23). In late April 2013, the same constituencies established the Libyan Revolutionaries' Operations Room (LROR) for coordination and political representation, focused on the issue of political isolation (LROR, 2013a; 2013b). By occupying ministries in May 2013 and exerting pressure on GNC members, this group successfully forced the passage of the Political Isolation Law in the GNC, drawing mainly on LSF forces, as well as on the Tripoli SSC's more explicitly revolutionary groups.⁸⁹

Following the law's passage, the revolutionary camp gained the upper hand in the GNC, electing Nuri Abu Sahmain as GNC president, while relations with the revolutionary camp's adversaries worsened. In early July 2013, as units associated with Zintan seized the main Interior Ministry building on Tripoli's airport road,⁹⁰ Abu Sahmain, in a brazen usurpation of executive powers, tasked the LROR with securing Tripoli, in a letter that was not made public (GNC, 2013e; LROR, 2013c).⁹¹ Against the background of perceived threats from the revolutionary camp's adversaries, the GNC in early August gave Abu Sahmain emergency powers to deal with the security situation (GNC, 2013b). Abu Sahmain, who had single-handedly assumed the title of 'supreme commander of the armed forces', turned the LROR from a political

initiative of the *thuwwar* into an official institution reporting directly to him (GNC, 2013e).⁹² The LROR had no forces of its own, but served to coordinate the deployment of selected units from Misrata, Tripoli, and the central and western regions. These included both LSF and SSC units (Bishr, 2013b).⁹³ No information about the LROR's membership and structure was made public. All available evidence suggests, however, that it was dominated by LSF commanders.⁹⁴ The new body's role and the ensuing deployment of LSF units to Tripoli provoked considerable irritation among Tripoli residents. It also fuelled tensions between units from outside Tripoli and *thuwwar* from the capital, who in June had joined with Tripoli's local council and civil activists to form a 'council for the protection of Tripoli'.⁹⁵

The fragmentation of the LSF

Several other major incidents fuelled the controversies surrounding the LSF and the LROR, eventually leading to the abandonment of the LSF model by government officials as well as some of its core *thuwwar* constituencies. In Benghazi, protests at the LSF's first division on 8 June 2013 turned into clashes in which 31 people were killed when the Shield unit opened fire (Kirkpatrick, 2013). Before resigning over the incident, Chief of General Staff Manqush ordered the Benghazi-based Shield units to hand over their bases to army units (Al-Watan al-Libiya, 2013b; Quryna, 2013a). The GNC, in turn, issued a decision requiring all armed groups operating under Defence or Interior Ministry authorizations to be dissolved into the army or the police by the end of 2013 (GNC, 2013a). The Shield's 7th division, which had successfully enforced the ceasefire in the southern town of Kufra, abandoned its mission in protest and returned to Benghazi (Quryna, 2013b).

The LSF's core Benghazi units effectively discarded the Libya Shield label and reconstituted themselves, partially fragmenting into the revolutionary battalions that had made up the component elements of Shield divisions. Some frustrated former members of the 1st and 7th divisions joined Ansar al-Sharia and became involved in an increasingly bloody conflict over the control of Benghazi with the Saeqa special forces.⁹⁶ Others camouflaged as official army units; formerly part of the 7th division, the Umar al-Mukhtar

battalion, headed by Ziyad Bal'am, became the army's Brigade 319 (Huwayl, 2014). Some joined yet other hybrid institutions, such as the Vital Installations Guards (Mohamed, 2013). By late 2013, the LSF label and idea had been discredited in Benghazi, and tense coexistence gave way to intense conflict with the Saeqa, seen by many as out of control in its war against armed groups of Islamist tendency.⁹⁷ After a coalition of renegade army officers launched 'Operation Dignity' in Benghazi in May 2014 (see below), the majority of Benghazi's Islamist-leaning revolutionary battalions entered into a close alliance with Ansar al-Sharia. Their joint Shura Council of Benghazi Thuwwar, formed in June 2014, made no reference to state institutions, in stark contrast to the ambivalent relationship these groups had maintained with the state while operating as LSF units. From hybrid units, these battalions evolved into armed groups at war with 'Dignity' forces that were equally outside state control and in rebellion against the army leadership (Wehrey, 2014b).

In the western region, the Bani Walid operation of October 2012 was the beginning of the end of the Shield's western division as a force with common objectives. Zintan's growing aversion to demands for cultural and linguistic rights in neighbouring Amazigh towns, its disputes with neighbours over the control of economic assets, and its political alignments within the GNC combined to rupture the unity between the region's former revolutionary strongholds (Lacher and Labnouj, 2014). In March 2013, Zintani forces attacked a Zuwaran army unit at the Mellita refinery near Sabratha (Krir, 2013); in August, they looted an LSF base at Ajeilat.⁹⁸ Following the latter incident, Zintani forces effectively abandoned the Shield. The western division became a loose coordinating mechanism for units that remained based in individual towns, with a rapid turnover in commanders and erratic commitment of its component elements to joint operations.

An alternative to the Shield emerged in the western region with the National Mobile Force (*al-Quwa al-Wataniya al-Mutaharrika*), a unit created in the NTC's final days under the Office of the Chief of General Staff, and drawn from most revolutionary strongholds in the area—except Zintan.⁹⁹ Like the Shield, the Mobile Force was not a standing unit but could be mobilized when needed. According to observers, however, it was more closely integrated than the western Shield units.¹⁰⁰ In late 2012, it was tasked with

evicting illegal armed groups and seizing criminal gangs in Tripoli's outskirts. In January 2014, it took part in a major operation against criminal groups in the Warshafana area southwest of Tripoli, which involved a week of heavy fighting. With the Mobile Force operating alongside former Tripoli SSC units and forces acting under the LROR, the episode showed that decision-making and command structures among the former *thuwwar* forces were becoming more diffuse, the LSF having lost their function as the principal alternative to the regular army in the west (Abdul-Wahab, 2014b; Al-Watan al-Libiya, 2014; Libya al-Jadida, 2014a).

In Tripoli, the role of LSF units triggered both a public backlash and a rift between *thuwwar* from Tripoli and those from other towns, which eventually left the LSF model discredited. Rising political tensions led a large force affiliated with the LROR to briefly kidnap Prime Minister Ali Zeidan in October, only days after GNC President Abu Sahmain had appointed the Salafist sheikh Shaaban Hadiya as head of the LROR (GNC, 2013d). Though an LROR spokesperson denied that the organization's leadership was implicated, at least some senior figures are likely to have overseen the operation (LROR, 2013d).¹⁰¹ Elements of the SSC's crime-fighting committees were also involved, thus clashing with former SSC leader Hashim Bishr and other Tripoli SSC elements.¹⁰² The incident provided fresh momentum for both political forces seeking to curb the revolutionary camp's ascendance and civil society groups opposing the presence of armed groups in Tripoli. The GNC placed the LROR under the Office of the Chief of General Staff's control, demanded that the government speed up the dissolution of hybrid institutions according to the June decision, and called for the immediate removal of 'illegal' armed groups from Tripoli (GNC, 2013f). Shortly afterwards, a protest organized by Tripoli's local council escalated into armed clashes with a Misrati unit in the Gharghur area of central Tripoli, leaving 43 people dead (Khan, 2013). Though not part of the LSF, the unit involved had been part of the LROR's force.¹⁰³ The incident partly reflected rising tensions between units from the capital and those from outside Tripoli: in the week preceding the incident, the Misrati unit had clashed with the Suq al-Jum'a-based Nawasi battalion.¹⁰⁴

Amid intense public pressure after the incident, Misrata's local and military councils ordered the town's units to leave Tripoli, and the GNC withdrew emergency powers from Abu Sahmain (Misrata Local Council, 2013; GNC, 2013g). The Muhammad al-Madani, Nawasi, Qa'qa', and Sawa'iqa' battalions, as well as the Special Deterrence Force, organized ceremonies during which they ostensibly handed over their bases to the army (Khan and Essul, 2013). But in most cases, this simply meant that these forces would henceforth camouflage themselves as army units; indeed, the retreat of Misratan units allowed those with Zintani leadership to expand their influence in the capital.¹⁰⁵ The LROR was abandoned by many of its more moderate members, and although Misratan Shield divisions remained intact, they were less willing to project force in pursuit of the city's political interests. By early 2014, given the disintegration of LSF units in Benghazi and the western region and the damage done to the LSF's image by its members' political activities, the Shield experiment appeared to have failed.

Despite the partial fragmentation of the LSF, however, the government remained dependent on forces based on former revolutionary battalions. Unlike the government, these forces were able to act because they had clear—albeit parochial—political backing and goals. This was clearly demonstrated in January 2014, when Zeidan had to send his defence minister to Misrata to implore the city's leaders to deploy units for the stabilization of Sabha (Adel, 2014). Misratans agreed to dispatch the Third Force—reluctantly, after the slights suffered following the November 2013 Gharghur killings—and, for political balance, forces from Zintan were also mobilized. Both were allegedly allocated major budgets for their efforts.¹⁰⁶ In March 2014, when the GNC charged the chief of general staff with mobilizing forces from the army and the *thuwwar* to dislodge federalist militias from Sirte, units drawn from Misrata's LSF were once again the ones that took action (Libya al-Jadida, 2014d; Press Solidarity, 2014b).

Both the Sabha and the oil port episodes showed that hybrid units, representing particular political interests, remained decisive forces, regardless of the label they carried. Without the *thuwwar* elements, the government could not exert force, let alone provide security. And rather than benefiting from command and control over the *thuwwar* elements, the state was forced

to rely on contracts with what were, for all intents and purposes, independent contractors rather than elements of the state security sector. Thuwwar units continued to shift their affiliation from one government department to another, and they continued to pursue self-interest rather than any national interest. By doing so, they inevitably became part of the political struggles that characterize Libya's transition. Time and again, LSF units have been mobilized by political interest groups in Libya's fragmented government institutions, against substantial resistance within these same institutions.

'Operation Libya Dawn': LSF factions form a political alliance

In July 2014, an alliance of thuwwar units and post-revolutionary armed groups launched a large-scale offensive against Zintani positions in Tripoli and the so-called Army of Tribes (*Jaysh al-Qaba'il*) in the Warshafana area. The fighting involved sustained shelling of civilian areas on both sides of the front line, as well as substantial damage to Tripoli International Airport and other vital infrastructure. By August, the thuwwar coalition had taken control of the airport and forced Zintani factions to withdraw from the capital (Kirkpatrick, 2014b). By September, it had scattered the armed groups that were resisting the coalition's advance in the Warshafana area.

A combination of political and military developments had provoked the offensive. The gradual expansion of Zintani influence over the capital, in the aftermath of the Misratan withdrawal of November 2013, had caused increasing resentment within the revolutionary camp.¹⁰⁷ Some Misratan units of the Central Shield had returned to Tripoli in May 2014, to secure the GNC against Zintani attacks and thereby enable the election of Ahmad Maitiq as the new prime minister.¹⁰⁸ Redeployed Misratan units faced renewed confrontation with Zintani forces. At the same time, the revolutionary camp harboured growing suspicions of a deepening Zintani alliance with former regime elements, as reflected in the presence of former members of Qaddafi's security brigades in the Zintani-led Qa'qa' and Sawa'iq Battalions. The emergence of two militias in the Warshafana area that did not seek official recognition and represented counter-revolutionary forces, the Warshafana Battalion and the Army of Tribes, exacerbated those concerns. In this context of

rising tensions, the revolutionary camp's political leaders were increasingly reluctant to travel via Tripoli International Airport, fearing that they might be prevented from travelling or be exposed to abduction by the Zintani-led units that controlled the facility.¹⁰⁹ In May, attacks by Zintani forces in Tripoli had revealed their alliance with Haftar's Dignity offensive in Benghazi, and Dawn was therefore partly a response to Dignity.

Finally, the results of the June 2014 HoR elections provided a major additional motivation for the offensive. In Misrata, politicians with close links to revolutionary battalions won a clear victory, but elsewhere in the country, their allies in the revolutionary camp suffered severe losses. Faced with the prospect of diminishing influence in parliament, the revolutionary camp's political leaders saw territorial control over Tripoli as an effective political bargaining chip.¹¹⁰

On 13 July, the *thuwwar* coalition launched a three-pronged attack on Zintani positions at the 7 April army base, the Islamic Call society, and Tripoli International Airport. The coalition, which called itself *Qaswara* (Lion) before adopting *Fajr Libya* (Libya Dawn) as the name of the operation, included two Misratan battalions commanded by Salah Badi and Salim Zufri; former Tripoli SSC units headed by Abd al-Ghani al-Kikli and Salah al-Burki; a Zawiyah force led by former LROR commander Shaaban Hadiya; and the Fursan Janzur battalion, part of the National Mobile Force. Among the groups that launched the offensive, only the Zawiyah units and a company of the Misratan Hatim battalion were part of the LSF.¹¹¹

Shortly after the launch of the offensive, Misratan LSF leaders sought to negotiate a compromise that would have seen control over the airport handed over to a force from Jadu (Tripoli Local Council, 2014). On 17 July, the deputy commander of the Central Shield, Hassan Shaka, while clearly distancing himself from the units that had attacked the airport, gave Zintani forces an ultimatum to cede control of the facility (Shaka, 2014). However, Misratan commanders failed to prevent the coalition from attacking before the ultimatum had expired.¹¹² Around ten days into the hostilities, with fighting escalating further, the large Misratan battalions under the LSF umbrella—including the al-Barkan, al-Halbus, al-Marsa, al-Mahjub, al-Tajin, and Hatim Battalions—joined the offensive.¹¹³

Leading the offensive was a tactical alliance of forces that escaped rigid institutional structures. The leadership hid behind the anonymous Dawn label; as was the case with the LROR, no information about the operation's command structures was published. Indeed, the LROR itself initially issued statements about the operation, suggesting an overlap between the LROR and the Dawn networks (LROR, 2014). But with the entry of the large Misratan battalions, the centre of gravity within the operation shifted from the coalition that had launched it to the LSF units that now constituted the bulk of its forces. In addition to the initial coalition's operations room, Misratan LSF units established a separate command centre; eventually, another operations room was set up to oversee both.¹¹⁴ The spokesperson for the Central Shield, Ahmad Hadiya, also appeared as the Dawn spokesperson, but in one instance had to deny any link between the Shield and a Dawn statement rejecting negotiations (Hadiya, 2014; Quryna, 2014b). The Central Shield, dismissed deputy minister of defence Khalid al-Sharif, and Libya Dawn itself all stressed that the forces leading the offensive were loyal to the chief of general staff and sought to re-establish state authority (Al-Sharif, 2014b; Libya Dawn, 2014).

The LSF's official authorization expired on 31 August, and salary payments to LSF units stopped.¹¹⁵ Proposals to establish formal army units from the pool of LSF fighters were thwarted by the bifurcation of institutions and the emergence of two rival chiefs of general staff. The battalions nevertheless continued to operate under the LSF umbrella and, in Misrata, efforts began to mobilize funds from the local business community to bridge the gap until a solution was found.¹¹⁶

In the international media, the alliance was invariably described as 'Islamist-led militias' or 'a coalition of Islamist and Misrata forces' (Stephen and Penketh, 2014). This coverage was misleading and undoubtedly influenced by the alliance's political adversaries. The leadership of the Qa'qa' and Sawa'iqa Battalions referred to its enemies in the revolutionary camp as 'apostates' and 'extremists', while the HoR called the alliance a terrorist group (al-Qa'qa', 2014; HoR, 2014b). Salafist and jihadi tendencies were indeed influential among the leadership of the units that initially launched the operation—although Zintani-led units were equally affected.¹¹⁷ Some prominent Islamist figures, such as Sharif, were among the operation's leading

proponents (al-Sharif, 2014b). Yet on the whole, local loyalties and a shared revolutionary agenda were decisive for the participation of the bulk of the forces. This could be said for the vast majority of forces from the Central and Western Shield, the National Mobile Force, including from Janzur and Zuwara, and Libya Shield 4 from Gharyan. While Amazigh towns in the Nafusa mountains maintained an ostensibly neutral position until the fighting reached the area in October 2014, substantial numbers of their fighters joined the offensive as part of the Western Shield or the National Mobile Force.¹¹⁸ Indeed, in August 2014 many leaders of the participating units resented the role of Islamist networks in the operation. Leading field commanders from Misrata and Zliten set up a Committee of 17—later renamed Committee for the Correction of the Path—to act as their political representation. The body’s goal was to ensure that the *thuwwar* units would not be used as the armed wing of Islamist movements or political parties.¹¹⁹

Libya Dawn underlined not only the dominance of forces aligned with the revolutionary camp in western Libya, but also their continued internal fragmentation and aversion to rigid command structures. An LSF experiment lasting more than two years has done little to forge coherent units out of its local component elements; if anything, the resources channelled to these groups through the LSF have further strengthened individual factions. During the offensive, divisions emerged among the revolutionary camp’s political leaders over whether, how, and what to negotiate with their Tobruk-based rivals. These divisions partly reflected rifts among the leadership of the armed groups themselves, casting doubts over their willingness to adhere to any agreement negotiated by their political representatives.

The armed forces

The army’s disintegration into political factions accelerated after the revolution and was compounded by the establishment of new units with a specific local, tribal, or political background. As a result, the boundaries between the army and ‘hybrid’ units predominantly recruited from civilians have blurred, and struggles between now official army units have become as common as rivalries between revolutionary forces. With the establishment of a

rival army leadership under Maj.-Gen. Haftar in May 2014, a split emerged within the armed forces; that split widened into a bifurcation of institutions after the HoR appointed Haftar's ally Abd al-Razaq al-Naduri as the new chief of general staff in August 2014. In practice, command structures have remained loose on both sides, and the majority of the armed forces' members have stayed out of the conflict.

Post-revolution politicking

After the revolution, the armed forces experienced—as one officer put it—a *déjà vu*: whereas they had previously been outgunned and supplanted by Qaddafi's security brigades, they were now outgunned and supplanted by the *thuwwar*.¹²⁰ In this context, political manoeuvring by army officers, who now organized on a local or tribal basis, prevented a rapid re-establishment of centralized command structures. Rival camps emerged among army officers styling themselves as defenders of the military institutions. Many positioned themselves in opposition to Yusuf al-Manqush, the chief of general staff appointed by the NTC in January 2012, who soon set about promoting the Libya Shield Forces as a temporary substitute for the army.¹²¹

Prior to Manqush's appointment, around 200 officers had met in Bayda in November 2011 and designated Maj.-Gen. Khalifa Haftar as their candidate for the post of chief of general staff (Quryna, 2011). At a larger meeting of army officers in Benghazi a few days later, the NTC blocked an attempt to elect a chief of general staff.¹²² A group of army officers from Cyrenaica subsequently coalesced around the Barqa military council, which was quick to reject the appointment of Manqush in January 2012 (Al-Watan al-Libiya, 2012). Activism among eastern army officers seeking a greater stake in the re-establishment of the army continued over the following months (Karkara, 2012).

Opposition to Manqush also emerged among officers in Zintan, driven by Manqush's rivalry with the Zintani defence minister in the Kib government, Col. Usama Juwayli. Although both groups opposed Manqush, federalist officers in the east and Zintanis also saw each other as rivals (Abdul-Wahab, 2012). Tarhuna, which was strongly represented in the army, was another

centre of discontent. After the war, Tarhunan army officers led by Abu Ajaila al-Hibshi had created a force that combined early defectors to the revolutionary camp, former members of the security brigades, and civilians. Hibshi was abducted by revolutionary forces in June 2012, after he allegedly began conspiring with Haftar and counter-revolutionary officers in Bani Walid.¹²³ Two months later, a major force dispatched by the SSC in Tripoli seized a large part of Tarhuna's tank contingent, decisively weakening the Tarhuna group (ICG, 2012; Lacher, 2013).

An alliance between these camps finally materialized in late 2012, when Zintani and Cyrenaican army officers were the key constituencies behind a series of 'extraordinary conferences of the Libyan army', whose chief purpose was to demand Manqush's dismissal and the replacement of the chief of general staff by a collective leadership body (Libya News Network, 2012b).¹²⁴ Such demands were reiterated in April 2013, at yet another conference at Brega, whose most prominent attendees were Haftar and several Cyrenaican officers close to the region's federalist movement, including Hamid al-Hasi, the Barqa military council's spokesperson, and Hamid Bilkhair, the head of the Benghazi-based first infantry division (Al-Watan al-Libiya, 2013a). In short, just like their civilian counterparts in revolutionary brigades, military officers organized to promote specific political interests, often on a local or regional basis.

The factionalization of the army

Developments in the army also mimicked the evolution of civilian armed groups in other ways. Army officers formed new units composed of soldiers and civilian recruits, many of which subsequently obtained official status in the army. Even regular units that had survived the war intact embarked on their own recruitment independently of the chief of general staff.¹²⁵ This was partially an effort to overcome the regime's legacy of an understaffed army with an overabundance of senior officers and a lack of younger recruits.¹²⁶ It was also driven by officers who sought to build clientelist networks by recruiting relatives and by army units that sought to curb the power of revolutionary groups.¹²⁷ The latter clearly applied to Benghazi and the east, where

the Saeqa and first infantry division both recruited strongly (Moheir, 2014). The Barqa military council also functioned as a vehicle for the registration of salary recipients, copying a technique that had driven the rapid expansion of civilian armed groups during the first half of 2012.¹²⁸

Successive defence ministers, their deputies, and the chiefs of general staff all registered dozens of new military units, in many cases without specifying their strength, thereby giving a blank cheque to unit commanders to enrol recruits. The drive to access budgets has been a key factor behind the proliferation of new units. Commanders have often pushed for a direct relationship with the Office of the Chief of General Staff, undermining the command structure, which is formally based on military regions.¹²⁹

Several regional and political constituencies have benefited from this development. Under Usama Juwayli, Zintani officers with personal ties to the defence minister pursued a deliberate strategy to cement Zintani influence in the army forces.¹³⁰ These included two battalions in Tripoli. The Zintani Muhammad al-Madani battalion became the army's Brigade 24 (Tajoura Media Center, 2013). In addition, Juwayli allocated substantial resources to the establishment of the Sawa'iq, a unit with Zintani leadership that was designed as a special force of the army.¹³¹ The Sawa'iq later emerged as a leading proponent of Zintani political interests. Other Zintani units were established as border guards in charge of vast stretches of the western borders or as petroleum facilities guards in control of key assets.¹³² Col. Mukhtar Firnana of Zintan used his position as director of administration for military police and prisons to establish units under Zintani leadership in those departments.¹³³

Interest groups rivalling the Zintanis pursued similar strategies. In 2013 in Tripoli, the al-Awfiya battalion from Suq al-Jum'a, a group that had temporarily deployed to Bani Walid in January 2012 to counter alleged former regime elements there, became the army's Brigade 155.¹³⁴ Former members of the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion entered a newly formed Brigade 127.¹³⁵ Both units were given responsibility for securing the GNC and other vital buildings in Tripoli during 2013 and early 2014.¹³⁶ A Zuwaran force combining soldiers and civilians became Brigade 105. Khalid al-Sharif, a former leader in the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group who after the revolution had organized dozens of revolutionary brigades of diverse origin under the umbrella of his

National Guard, integrated many of these groups as formal army units, turning the mostly civilian members into soldiers with the stroke of a pen, after he became deputy defence minister in January 2013.¹³⁷

In the south, 13 new brigades were formed out of the pool of surviving southern units, supplemented by young civilian recruits and organized primarily on a tribal basis (al-Fakhri, 2012). In Sabha, members of the Awlad Suleiman tribe dominated the army's newly established sixth division. Libyan media consistently—and misleadingly—portrayed this unit's involvement in local conflicts as a confrontation between the 'national army' and 'armed groups' (Lacher, 2014).

The Border, Petroleum Facilities, and Vital Installations Force provided another vehicle for efforts to re-invent local armed groups as official units. These institutions had existed prior to the revolution—the Border Guard reporting to the chief of general staff, while the Petroleum Facilities Guard came under the Ministry of Petroleum and later the National Oil Corporation—but after the war they largely became umbrellas for units predominantly recruited from among civilians.¹³⁸ Essentially, registration as border guards or petroleum facilities guards was a means of officially sanctioning de facto territorial control by armed groups that had established themselves across the south and along the borders following the regime's collapse. In practice, the central administration of these institutions exerted little or no authority over their units, which often engaged in smuggling or negotiated payments from oil companies. From November 2011 to January 2013, the Border Guard was under the remit of another former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Deputy Defence Minister Siddiq Mabruk al-Ghithi. The latter's attempts to build up the Border Guard as a political power base largely failed.¹³⁹

Intensifying struggles

Discontent within the remnants of the old army grew throughout 2013, particularly in the east, where members of the armed forces, the police, and the dissolved internal intelligence apparatus became targets of an escalating campaign of assassinations. From mid-2012 onwards, such assassinations

occurred on a weekly basis in Benghazi, accelerating throughout 2013 to reach a rate of several per day in early 2014 (Gall, 2014; Wehrey, 2014a). A similar pattern, though on a smaller scale, emerged in Derna over the same period. Successive governments failed to take action against the perpetrators.¹⁴⁰

By late 2013, Benghazi-based army units, spearheaded by the Saeqa special forces, were increasingly taking matters into their own hands.¹⁴¹ An armed group called the Barqa Defence Force emerged, promoting itself as the armed wing of the region's federalist movement, and recruiting from the pool of disgruntled eastern soldiers and officers. In apparent alliance with the Saeqa, this group manned the Barsis checkpoint on Benghazi's eastern outskirts to apprehend suspected members of Islamist groups (Radwan, 2013). In late December 2013, one month after four suspected extremists from Derna disappeared at the checkpoint, a car bomb attack killed 13 soldiers at Barsis (Libya News Agency, 2013b). Officers from army bases across the east began issuing statements demanding that the Office of the Chief of General Staff take measures against the campaign of assassinations (Al-Rawaf, 2014; Benina, 2014; Libya News Agency, 2014b).

Both federalist leaders and retired Maj.-Gen. Haftar sought to exploit such discontent to mobilize support. A clear illustration of factional conflict within the army came in February 2014, when Haftar announced that the army's 'general leadership' was preparing to suspend the transitional institutions and install a 'temporary presidential body' (Haftar, 2014a; Kirkpatrick, 2014a). The coup announcement was not accompanied by any actual moves, but nevertheless triggered a fierce reaction from forces aligned with the revolutionary camp. In one instance, representatives of several army units that had emerged out of revolutionary brigades joined up with former units of the Tripoli SSC and the Libya Revolutionaries' Operations Room to denounce Haftar's move.¹⁴² Repeated threats by the Office of the Chief of General Staff that members of the armed forces who engaged in political activity would be prosecuted went unheeded (Libya al-Jadida, 2014b). In March 2014, a number of senior military officers in eastern Libya, including the chief of staff of the air force and Hamid al-Hasi, the Barqa military council's spokesperson, backed Haftar's initiative and supported his appointment as 'general leader of the Libyan army' (Haftar, 2014b; 2014c).¹⁴³

The collective political mobilization of army officers, in alliance with the federalist movement and in opposition to Islamist armed groups, has been specific to Cyrenaica. In the greater Tripoli area, rivalries over political influence, control of territory, and institutional fiefdoms increasingly played out between ostensibly official units that, underneath their facades, represented political factions.

After the departure of Misratan battalions in November 2013, the two main camps were affiliated either with Zintan or with groups from the capital itself. With apparently good access to government budgets, units under Zintani leadership gradually expanded their reach by recruiting among former members of Qaddafi's security brigades and politically marginalized groups.¹⁴⁴ (Political adversaries denounced such practices as the establishment of mercenary units under the control of figures linked to Zintani political interest groups.) At the same time, the affiliation of units in the greater Tripoli area with Zintan became increasingly opaque. Zintani battalion leaders took over existing army units with the lure of mobilizing budgets and equipment, or moved their recruits into other units and institutions.¹⁴⁵ In parallel to their recruitment drive, units affiliated with Zintan aggressively sought to seize terrain in Tripoli. Qa'qa' and Sawa'iq leaders in February 2014 gave the GNC a 24-hour ultimatum to dissolve, or face attack—a threat that turned out to be empty (Shennib and Laessing, 2014). The following month, forces affiliated with the two units attacked and looted the base of the army's 2nd division in southern Tripoli. In addition, their repeated attacks on the Office of the Chief of General Staff forced the latter's relocation.¹⁴⁶

Such actions prompted army units recruited from among Tripoli thuwwar and former SSC members—the bulk of which are from Suq al-Jum'a forces—to mobilize against Zintani encroachment. In late 2013, former thuwwar leaders joined with GNC members from the capital to re-activate the Tripoli military council, with the aim of coordinating army units from Tripoli. The council clearly represented a bottom-up initiative by newly established army units, whose leaders chose their head from among their ranks.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it obtained official recognition and a budget, being charged with securing Tripoli by GNC President Abu Sahmain in March 2014 (Press Solidarity, 2014a).

'Operation Dignity': rifts emerge into the open

With the launch of 'Operation Dignity' in May 2014, the struggles outlined above irrevocably cleaved the armed forces in two, and a rebel army leadership emerged. The operation was led by renegade officers commanded by Maj.-Gen. Khalifa Haftar against Islamist-leaning battalions and Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi, whom they collectively labelled 'terrorists'. The rebel army leadership used its fighter jets and helicopters to conduct air strikes on enemy positions. Shortly after the operation's start in Benghazi, three groups affiliated with Zintan—the Qa'qa', Sawa'iq, and Muhammad al-Madani battalions—attacked the seat of the GNC in Tripoli, just as the body was set to vote on a new government under Ahmad Maitiq (Elumami and Laessing, 2014).

Haftar's operation quickly caused a large number of senior military officers and army units across the country to declare their support for Dignity. For many, it represented a forceful attempt to re-assert the army's role, in open defiance of a chief of general staff who was seen as powerless.¹⁴⁸ By extension, this implied disloyalty to the army leadership in Tripoli, although such disloyalty was rarely made explicit. Very few units unequivocally expressed their allegiance to the 'supreme council of the armed forces' in whose name Haftar on 21 May announced his plan to hand over power to an emergency government, without defining who sat on this council (Haftar, 2014d). Moreover, many declarations were fake: the acting interior minister, for example, had to deny a statement of support issued in his name (Press Solidarity, 2014c). Others did not reflect the official position of a unit: officers in charge of units based in Tobruk, for example, strongly contested the declarations of support made by some of their members.¹⁴⁹

A brief analysis of the different groups involved in this campaign shows that it was hardly an operation led by the 'Libyan National Army', as Haftar and others described it. Haftar's inner circle revealed two key interest groups: Haftar himself as well as his deputy head of operations, the former chief of staff of the air force, Saqr al-Jarushi, were former officers excluded from official positions.¹⁵⁰ Another key player, Col. Hamid al-Hasi, represented the constituency of officers from eastern tribes who had thrown their weight behind the federalist movement. Together, they mobilized the support of

soldiers furious about their constant exposure to attacks in Benghazi, as well as irregulars from eastern tribes. The interests of Zintani battalion leaders, however, were quite separate from those of the eastern groups: they focused on the power struggle in Tripoli. This rapidly caused their paths to diverge and the offensive in Tripoli to peter out.

Disagreements between Zintani leaders and the group surrounding Haftar were partly related to the question of leadership. Even before Haftar's 21 May announcement, Col. Mukhtar Firnana appeared on television declaring the GNC dissolved, in the name of the 'leaders of the Libyan army' (Firnana, 2014). His speech had not been coordinated with that of Haftar, prompting the latter to speak in the name of an undefined 'supreme council', a term his spokesperson used interchangeably with 'the general leadership of the Libyan army' (al-Wasat, 2014f). Several days later, Sawa'iq commander Jamal Habil from Zintan issued threats against the GNC in the name of an 'Operations Room of the Libyan Army'. Habil, who read the statement dressed in military uniform, had also issued the Qa'qa's and Sawa'iq's February ultimatum to the GNC, but in civilian clothes and wearing a bandana (Habil, 2014). Shortly afterwards, Zintani battalions suspended their action in the context of the campaign, at least partly as a result of such rivalries with Haftar's group.

Despite Operation Dignity, relations between army units and the Office of the Chief of General Staff remained ambiguous. Units across the country continued to receive salaries, regardless of whether they had declared support for Haftar.¹⁵¹ Prime Minister Thinni and Chief of General Staff Abd al-Salam al-Ubaidi met publicly with Saeqa commander Wanis Abu Khamada in Benghazi, despite the fact that he had joined Dignity two weeks earlier (Quryna, 2014a). Rather than immediately causing a formal division of the armed forces, Operation Dignity underlined the extent to which the institution had succumbed to hybridity and was characterized by competing loyalties and interests. Indeed, the groups attacked by Haftar's forces included not only officially recognized units such as the 17 February Martyrs' Battalion, but also a former revolutionary battalion that had become a formal army unit: Brigade 319 (Umar al-Mukhtar). As several of Benghazi's Islamist-leaning revolutionary battalions entered into a close alliance with Ansar al-Sharia to fight Haftar's forces, under the umbrella of the Shura Council of

Benghazi Thuwwar, they shed their hybrid character and dropped all references to the legitimacy of state institutions (Wehrey, 2014b). But their enemy also remained in open rebellion to the army leadership.

With the establishment of the rump HoR in Tobruk and the launch of Libya Dawn in Tripoli, the tables have been turned on the chief of general staff. Amid the boycott of 30 members of parliament aligned with the revolutionary camp, the new majority in the rump parliament has tacitly supported Dignity and ardently opposed Dawn. Although no public steps have been taken to bring Haftar's command structures back into formal institutions, the appointment of Haftar's close ally Nadhuri as chief of general staff has left little doubt that Haftar's forces are now enjoying official backing. Haftar and his spokesperson, in turn, have refrained from speaking in the name of the army leadership. Nadhuri has vowed to focus on rebuilding the army with support from Egypt—a proposition that, in view of the Egyptian leadership's fierce opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood at home and abroad, suggested a highly partisan approach (Al-Wasat, 2014j). The rump HoR's support for rebuilding an army with the old units at its core has also found expression in its decision to dissolve all 'irregular armed entities' (HoR, 2014a). However, the analysis of the armed forces has demonstrated that hybridity has long blurred the distinction between regular and irregular forces. In this context, establishing which units should be considered irregular becomes a purely political decision—and one that the rump HoR would be unable to enforce, as the advance of Dawn and Shura forces in Tripoli and Benghazi showed.

The conflicts in western Libya have underlined just how misleading the Tobruk-based leadership's insistence on the 'Libyan army' is. In September 2014, following the defeat of Zintani units in Tripoli and the advance of Dawn forces through the Warshafana area towards the Nafusa mountains, Nadhuri established the 'western region operations room'. The body oversees the Zintani-led hybrid units, as well as the Army of Tribes, despite the fact that the latter has no official status. The operations room is headed by Brig.-Gen. Idris Madi, a Zintani officer who had fought on the side of regime forces in 2011. He was later reinstated by Defence Minister Juwayli.¹⁵²

At this writing, Ubaidi was the one who was in rebellion against the HoR's decision to dismiss him, clinging to his post in Tripoli. While a number

of GNC members—including former GNC president Abu Sahmain—have provided Ubaidi with a veneer of legitimacy, he has also been able to count on support among military officers, principally from western revolutionary strongholds (Al-Wasat, 2014i; Office of the Chief of General Staff, 2014b). However, this does not mean that two centralized, rival command structures have emerged. On the one hand, Ubaidi retains little—if any—influence over the Dawn forces. On the other hand, the units which the Tobruk-based leadership could consider loyal have largely remained limited to the eastern forces that had previously supported Haftar and, to a lesser extent, to the Zintani-led hybrid units whose political calculations continued to differ from those of eastern army officers. The bulk of army units across southern and western Libya stopped short of openly taking sides during August and September 2014. Much will depend on the outcome of the struggles between the two camps over the ultimate prize: control over the Central Bank, the National Oil Corporation, and therefore the ability to allocate budgets (Wehrey and Lacher, 2014). 📖

Conclusion

Conflicts over and within Libya's security sector are an extension of the struggles in the civil political arena: they are the continuation of politics by other means. For the first two years of the transition, the fragmentation of the security sector mirrored that of the political scene, in which there were no dominant forces but, instead, a plethora of local or ideologically defined interest groups. Over the past year, the alliances built among political forces have led to the emergence of two broad opposing camps, reflected in the escalation of local conflicts into large-scale confrontation in Benghazi and Tripoli. It is unlikely that the current political transition will result in the establishment of a depoliticized security sector. Rather, should a hierarchical and coherent security sector emerge, it will reflect the balance of power that ultimately emerges from the current struggles. This process cannot occur as long as there are two rival poles, neither of which is strong enough to seize and consolidate state authority across the country. Consolidation is also unlikely to emanate from either of those power centres. In the best case scenario, a political deal to overcome the current rift and form a single government would re-establish the conditions under which consolidation can proceed, albeit very slowly.

This paper analyses the numerous interest groups competing for influence in the security sector. Although making recommendations to international policy-makers is not the primary aim of this paper, a basic lesson can be drawn from this analysis: international support should aim to bolster processes, structures, and institutions that can manage and mediate the struggles under way. Supporting individual forces, units, or coalitions would merely exacerbate existing tensions, as would prematurely merging competing factions into a single force while broader political struggles are ongoing. Assistance in the security sector should also try to steer clear of value judgements. Over the past three years, Western governments have often been reluctant to provide assistance to actors who represent the various Islamist

tendencies in Libya's security apparatus. However, as discussed in the case studies, in the many episodes of disruptive behaviour by hybrid units, forces whose loyalties are based on local or tribal ties are just as prominent as those with a strong Islamist identity. Both are proponents of particular political interests, and it would be a mistake to expect that the strong Islamist leanings of some major *thuwwar* units will not be reflected in the future culture of Libya's security sector.

Libya's hybrid units, representing rival political factions, continue to change labels and institutional affiliation. Their relationships with state authority undergo sudden shifts that reflect changes in the balance of power within formal institutions. The core players and their interests have been largely constant. These interests go beyond the security sector itself and ultimately concern the economy, the political scene, and the emerging state. 🇺🇦

Annexe 1

Coordination or control: hybrid units and their government contracts

Table A1 Sample Rafallah al-Sahati Companies contracts

Date	Authorizing body	Receiving body	Order
3 July 2012	Ministry of Defence	GRC	Following a meeting with the head of the High Electoral Commission and Special Security Committees, orders the GRC and Rafallah al-Sahati to 'secure the path of GNC elections in Benghazi and its outskirts in the presence of Benghazi Local Council', cooperating with 'groups registered to the Interior Ministry, SSC, and National Army'.
3 July 2012	Ministry of Defence	GRC	Orders Rafallah al-Sahati to provide armed protection to Benina Airport in coordination with the chief of general staff.
17 July 2012	National Transitional Council	GRC	Re-establishes the GRC as an entity appended to the Ministry of Defence and 'requires communication and co-ordination' between the GRC and the chief of general staff on missions that both the Ministry of Defence and the Office of the Chief of General Staff may charge it with.
28 July 2012	Ministry of Interior	GRC	Orders Rafallah al-Sahati to secure and control several checkpoints in Benghazi and near the Egyptian/Libyan border, including al-Hawari, Buzireeq, Tazarbu, and Jalu al-Janubiyya.

Source: 'official' documentation provided by the Rafallah al-Sahati Companies/Peter Cole

Photo 2 February 2012 contract between the Libyan Ministry of Defence and the GRC for the deployment of units (including RSC) to Kufra.

Source: Rafallah al-Sahati Companies/Peter Cole

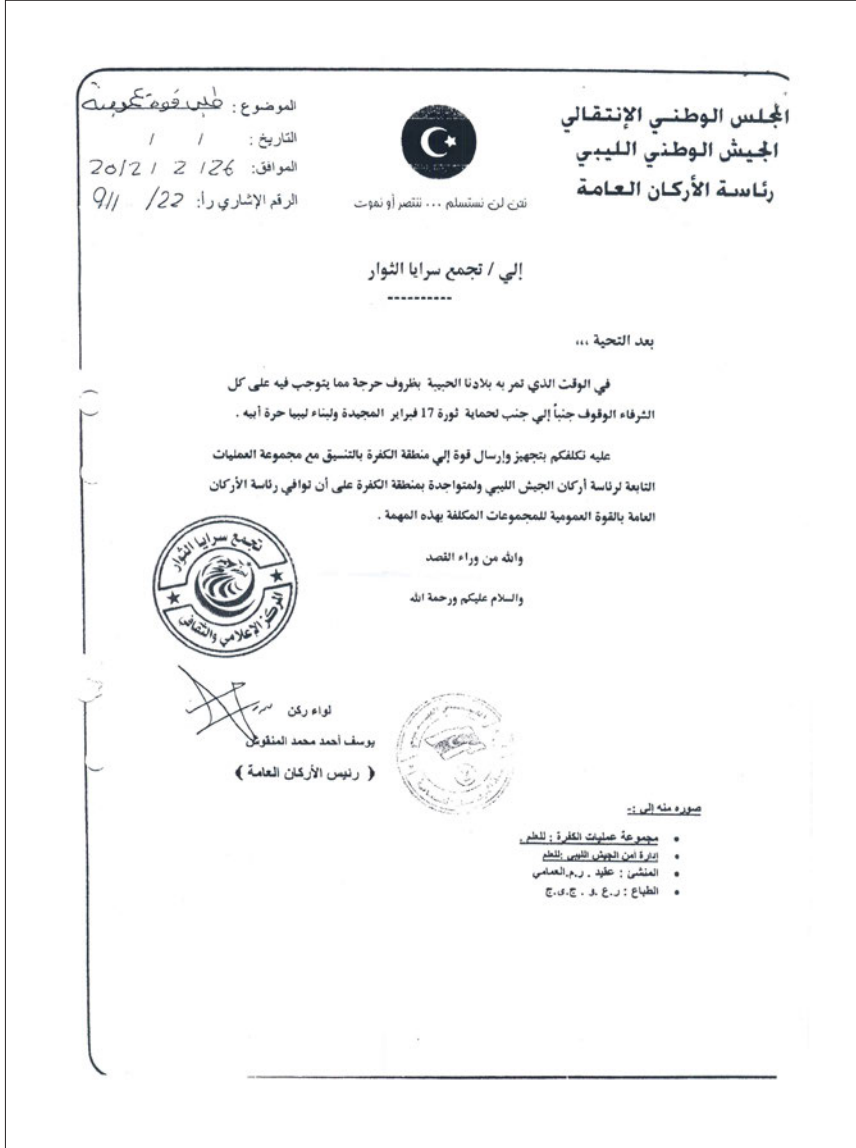


Photo 3 July 2012 contract between the GRC and the Libyan Ministry of Defence requesting the Rafallah al-Sahati Companies to join groups affiliated with the Ministry of Interior as well as the Supreme Security Committee and Libyan army in order to support the security of election procedures in Benghazi.

Source: Rafallah al-Sahati Companies/Peter Cole

الموضوع: لتأمين خابض الانتخابات
التاريخ: 2012/7/3
الموافق: 3
رقم الإشاري: 5148/8

وزارة الدفاع
حكومة الإنتقالية

إلى /

تجمع سرايا الثوار

بعد اللحية،،

- أئشير إلى الاجتماع مع السيد رئيس المفوضية العليا للانتخابات بنغازي واللجان الأمنية الخاصة بتأمين سير انتخابات المؤتمر الوطني الدائرة الثالثة بنغازي وضواحيها وبحضور المجلس المحلي بنغازي.

- ونظرا لأهمية سير عملية الانتخابات في موعدها المقرر وهو يوم 7-7-2012 والتحديات الأمنية الكبيرة وما تعرض له مقر المفوضية من أعمال شغب وتخريب.

- عليه فقد تقرر وللمصلحة العامة لمدينة بنغازي إشراككم في تأمين هذه الانتخابات عن طريق تكليف (سرايا راف الله السحاتي) والتابعة إلى التجمع ضمن المجموعات التابعة إلى وزارة الداخلية واللجنة الأمنية العليا والجيش الوطني.

سرايا راف الله السحاتي تكليف أمر السرية ضمن العرفة الرئيسية الأمنية لتأمين الانتخابات.

وفكم الله لخدمة الوطن و المواطنين
والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

م. محمد الفيلالي
وكيل مساعد وزارة الدفاع

م. م. الفيلالي
الإدارة العامة للطعم
الملف الدوري / للحفظ
م. م. الفيلالي

Photo 4 July 2012 contract between the GRC and the Libyan Ministry of Interior requesting GRC groups (including Rafallah al-Sahati Companies) to take control of certain border and security checkpoints in eastern Libya.

Source: Rafallah al-Sahati Companies/Peter Cole

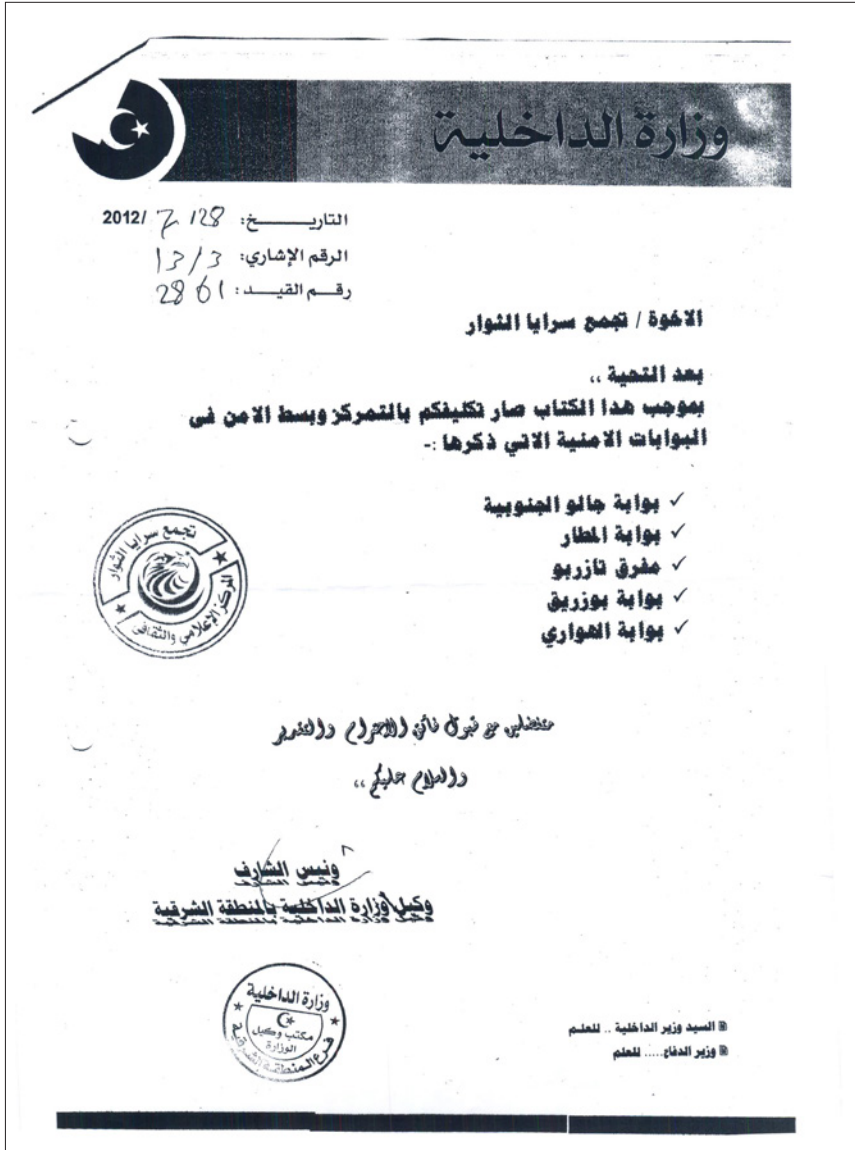


Photo 6 July 2012 NTC document reaffirming the GRC's affiliation with the Ministry of Defence and requesting further coordination between the GRC and the Office of the Chief of General Staff.

Source: Rafallah al-Sahati Companies/Peter Cole

المجلس الوطني الانتقالي - ليبيا
National Transitional Council - Libya



Date 2012/07/17 التاريخ
Ref. 2012/07/37 رقم

السيد / فوزي أبوكثف

رئيس تجمع سرايا الثوار ...

المحترم ...

بدرتعية ...

بإشارة إلى قرار المجلس الوطني الانتقالي رقم (83) لسنة 2011 والذي يتضمن اعتماد اتحاد سرايا الثوار وتبعيةكم لوزارة الدفاع .

عليه نفيدكم باستمرار تبعيةكم لوزارة الدفاع ويطلب منكم التواصل مع السيد / رئيس الأركان العامة للجيش الليبي والتنسيق بخصوص المهام المكلفين بها من الوزارة والرئاسة العامة للأركان .


ندعو الله أن يوفقكم في مهامكم خدمة للبلاد والعباد

والله المستعان ...

والسلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ...

مصطفى محمد عبد الجليل

رئيس المجلس الوطني الانتقالي



رئيس
الدور / رئيس ديوان رئاسة المجلس
الدور / مدير مكتب المتابعة والمعلومات
للمجلس
م.م - المملتي

Endnotes

- 1 The 'de-Baathification' of Iraqi ministries following the toppling of Saddam Hussein in 2003 was of paramount relevance to the NTC, not to mention the international community. Interview with Mahmud Jibril, conducted by Peter Cole with journalist Mary Fitzgerald, Tripoli, November 2012.
- 2 Peter Cole interview with Ali Tarhuni, Tripoli, May 2013.
- 3 These powers included holding on to prisoners, launching counter-narcotics efforts, and engaging in more localized uses (or abuses) of power, such as destroying Sufi shrines.
- 4 Volker Boege's studies on small South Pacific and Southeast Asian states represent the defining work on hybridity in security forces (Boege, 2006; Boege et al., 2009).
- 5 The term 'security governance' (Krause, 2012, p. 47) refers primarily to the outsourcing to private security and military companies as legitimate providers of security outside of the formal/state security sector. The market's interaction with state institutions has created 'security assemblages' involving many armed actors in security governance, only one of which is the state (Abrahamsen and Williams, 2009).
- 6 The military governor of the south had special jurisdiction over other branches of the state, given the area's status as a 'military zone' (ICG, 2012).
- 7 Wolfram Lacher interviews with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, February and June 2014. See also GNC (2014a).
- 8 Peter Cole interviews with former employees of the Qaddafi regime's intelligence services, Bani Walid, February 2012, and with internal security service employees who had defected to rebel groups, Benghazi, May 2013.
- 9 Examples include the Sirayat al-Suwaihli in Misrata and the Sirayat Rafallah al-Sahati in Benghazi.
- 10 There are some exceptions to this generalization, namely in Misrata, where two branches of the Libya Shield Forces are probably battalion-sized or larger. One of those branches consists of several dozen smaller 'battalions', while the other is organized as a single unit made up of individuals recruited from across Misrata. Armed groups' own efforts to create pan-area political and administrative entities, such as the Misratan Union of Revolutionaries (McQuinn, 2012) or the Gathering of Revolutionary Companies, are primarily administrative in nature. The Misratan and Zintan military councils, which still exist, temporarily centralized some organizational and administrative procedures (including weapons storage), but they never formally aggregated revolutionary brigades into a single unit.
- 11 Eastern Libya Shield divisions (that is, divisions 1, 2, 7, and 10) comprised fighters from across eastern towns, albeit overtly divided into ideological camps that reflect sociopolitical backgrounds; Islamist fighters tended to hail from towns such as Benghazi and Darna, while fighters from Ajdabiya, Bayda, and Tobruk were more likely to oppose Islamist

- groups, with some supporting the federalist movement. The Preventive Security Apparatus, an eastern counterintelligence unit, also appears to have successfully merged fighters from across the east. Peter Cole interviews with members of various armed groups, diverse locations in Libya, January–July 2012, November–December 2012, and February–May 2013.
- 12 Peter Cole interviews with members of various armed groups, diverse locations in Libya, August 2011–July 2012, November–December 2012, and February–May 2013.
- 13 Peter Cole interviews with members of the Rafallah al-Sahati Companies, Benghazi, November 2012 and May 2013; with Fawzi Bukatf, former head of the Gathering of Revolutionary Companies, Benghazi, May 2013; and with Wissam bin Hamid, the former leading member of the 17 February Coalition, Benghazi, May 2013.
- 14 The Libya Shield included the Libya al-Ahrar, the Martyrs of Zintan, the Martyrs of Benghazi, and Umar al-Mukhtar battalions, as well as the Rafallah al-Sahati Companies (out of which Ansar al-Sharia would later emerge in Benghazi). Peter Cole interview with Wissam bin Hamid, Benghazi, May 2013.
- 15 Peter Cole interview with the head of a Misratan battalion, location withheld, November 2012.
- 16 The Border, Petroleum, and Vital Installations Force resulted from a February 2012 merger of three separate forces: the Border Guard, Petroleum Facilities Guard, and the Vital Installations Guard. After Ghithi’s dismissal, the three forces resumed operations as separate entities.
- 17 Peter Cole interviews with thuwwar leaders and local security officials, Tripoli, August–September 2011.
- 18 Peter Cole interviews with thuwwar leaders and local security officials, Tripoli, August–September 2011. See also Cole (2014).
- 19 Peter Cole interview with Col. Mahmud Sharif, former chief of police, Tripoli, September 2013.
- 20 Wolfram Lacher interviews with former thuwwar who investigated the structures of Qaddafi’s security apparatus, Tripoli, September 2013 and January–February 2014.
- 21 A significant number of sympathizers in Gharyan, Tarhuna, and Tripoli, however, sold arms to the opposition.
- 22 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Tareq al-Tayyeb, the former head of the Yefren Revolutionaries’ Armament, Tripoli, January 2014, and Khaled al-Azzabi, former speaker of the Nalut military council, Nalut, January 2014. See also Quryna (2012b).
- 23 Peter Cole interviews with members of armed groups, diverse locations in Libya, August 2011–July 2012, November–December 2012, and February–May 2013.
- 24 The Preventive Security Apparatus (PSA) first operated under an NTC authorization granted by Interior Minister Ahmad Darrat. After Qaddafi’s death, the 17 February Coalition began focusing on intelligence and border security functions. The PSA was founded and continues to be headed by Ibrahim Barghathi, an Islamist-leaning figure (Walker-Cousins, 2012, p. 16). After efforts began in early 2012 to integrate the PSA into the newly established intelligence service, the PSA altered its institutional affiliation from the Interior Ministry to the army chief of general staff (Libya News Network, 2012a). Although plans to dissolve the PSA into the intelligence service persisted, the organization remains active as a separate entity in Benghazi (Libya al-Jadida, 2013a; 2014c).

- 25 The National Guard was set up by Sharif under the auspices of the Tripoli military council. It operated mainly in Tripoli, where it had 26 units, but it also included units elsewhere in western and southern Libya (Al-Haras al-Watani, 2012; Walker-Cousins, 2012, p. 23). The National Guard focused on internal security, counter-intelligence, and border security. In these domains, it functioned independently and alongside the Supreme Security Committee and other institutions in western Libya. The unit also guarded two of the most prominent imprisoned officials of the deposed regime: former intelligence chief Abdallah al-Sanusi and former prime minister Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmudi. In February 2012, the National Guard was nominally integrated into the Border, Petroleum Facilities, and Vital Installations Force, then under the direct control of another former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, Deputy Defence Minister Siddiq Mabruk al-Ghithi (MoD, 2012). After Khalid al-Sharif replaced Ghithi as deputy minister of defence, many of the National Guard's units were integrated into the army. Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 26 The analysis in this section is underpinned by information presented in case studies on the SSC, the LSF, and the armed forces (see below).
- 27 The HoR established itself in Tobruk during the boycott of 30 of its 188 elected members. (Twelve seats had been left unfilled due to insecurity and an electoral boycott by the Amazigh minority.) The boycotters comprised all eight of Misrata's members of parliament as well as other representatives of Islamist and revolutionary interests. As the rump HoR adopted an increasingly partisan stance from mid-August onwards, attendance plummeted, and by September hovered between 90 and 110 (Wehrey and Lacher, 2014).
- 28 Magariaf and Abu Sahmain assumed the contested title based on a February 2012 law adopted by the NTC; Article 3 of that law designates the 'head of state' as the 'supreme commander of the armed forces' (NTC, 2012a). However, opponents of the GNC presidents argued that supreme power was vested in the GNC as a whole, not in its president.
- 29 In a formal letter to the prime minister, defence minister, and chief of general staff in June 2014, Awami states that no orders issued by Abu Sahmain as 'supreme commander' should be followed (GNC, 2014a).
- 30 The National Forces Alliance is a political party led by Mahmud Jibril, head of the NTC's Executive Committee during the revolution.
- 31 A brief sketch of the Defence Ministry's staff under the Zeidan and Thinni governments until August 2014 reveals the potential for conflict. Defence Minister Abdallah al-Thinni, who became acting prime minister following the dismissal of Zeidan in March 2013, is a career army officer. Thinni's two deputies were from outside the military establishment: First Deputy Khalid al-Sharif was a former leading member of the now dissolved insurgent Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and founder of the National Guard, a post-revolutionary hybrid unit. Second Deputy al-Tuhami Buzian was a Salafist sheikh from Misrata who led the revolutionary Faruq battalion, parts of which later formed the nucleus of Ansar al-Sharia in Sirte.

Similar divisions affected the Ministry of Interior. Until September 2014, Thinni's acting interior minister, Saleh Maziq al-Bar'assi, was a career police officer. His deputy, Abd al-Basit Abu Hliqa, was a former member of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's

shura council; under the nom de guerre Abdallah al-Zwayy, he was among the co-founders of the Umar al-Mukhtar battalion (see the LSF case study, below). See also Fitzgerald (2014). Another deputy minister was Ahmad Dromba, from Zintan—a town whose political interest groups are highly influential in the security sector. Bar’assi himself ascended to his position as acting minister from his former post as deputy interior minister in January 2014. He succeeded Muhammad al-Shaikh, who resigned in August 2013 over Prime Minister Zeidan’s ‘interference’ in his work. According to Deputy Minister Abu Hliqa, Sheikh had not held a single meeting with his deputies during his brief tenure between May and August 2013. Such rifts had also existed under Sheikh’s predecessor, Ashur Shwail—a career police officer—and his deputy, Umar al-Khadrawi, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Wolfram Lacher interviews with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, February 2014, and with businesspeople, Misrata, April 2013. See also Reuters (2013) and Al-Sharq al-Awsat (2013).

- 32 See Libya News Agency (2014a), Libyens (2014), and Westcott (2014).
- 33 In its February 2014 report, the UN Panel of Experts on Libya notes: ‘the fact that several channels still exist within the Ministry of Defense that negotiate arms contracts indicates that there is no centralized oversight of weapons procurement’ (UNSC, 2014, p. 17).
- 34 In March 2014, an armed group forcibly seized a weapons shipment from Belarus at Tripoli International Airport, which is under the control of battalions from Zintan. According to the former head of the Tripoli SSC, Hashim Bishr, the shipment had been ordered by the Defence Ministry and was destined for southern Libya. Bishr asserted that Mukhtar Shuhub, the former head of the Zintan military council and Libya’s defence attaché in Belarus, ordered the plane to refuel in Tripoli to facilitate the seizure (Al-Wasat, 2014b).
- 35 According to an army officer at the Ministry of Defence who supported the revolution, the Integrity and Reform Commission’s approach is seen as political in nature and widely rejected within officer ranks. In his words: ‘They only look at association with the former regime, not at corruption or personal conduct’ (Wolfram Lacher interview, Tripoli, February 2014). There are opposing views as well. As an officer from Tobruk opined: ‘The existing army should be wound up and built from scratch, with thuwwar at its core’, suggesting that the Commission was not doing nearly enough (Wolfram Lacher interview, Tripoli, January 2014).
- 36 Nuri al-Abbar, head of the High National Elections Commission, promoted the National Guard proposal together with Mustafa al-Saqizli, the head of the Warriors’ Affairs Commission. Both are considered close to the Muslim Brotherhood. Wolfram Lacher interview with Nuri al-Abbar, Tripoli, January 2014.
- 37 Wolfram Lacher interview with Nuri al-Abbar, Tripoli, January 2014. See also NFA (2013).
- 38 Wolfram Lacher interviews with an official working on the proposal, Tripoli, January and June 2014.
- 39 Political wavering was also reflected in the Libyan government’s erratic payments, which hampered early implementation of the training programmes. Wolfram Lacher interviews with an officer in the Defence Ministry and with officials at foreign diplomatic missions engaged in security assistance to Libya, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 40 Wolfram Lacher interviews with an officer in the Ministry of Defence and officials at foreign diplomatic missions engaged in security assistance to Libya, Tripoli, February 2014.

- 41 Peter Cole interview with Mahmud Jibril, Tripoli, November 2012.
- 42 The NTC members were Abd al-Rizaaq al-Arabi in Tripoli, Fawzi Abd al-Al in Misrata, and Abd al-Majid Saif al-Nasr in Sabha. Peter Cole interview with Mahmud Jibril, Tripoli, November 2012.
- 43 Peter Cole interview with Ali Tarhuni, Tripoli, May 2013.
- 44 Peter Cole interviews with SSC commanders Abd al-Latif Qaddur, Tripoli, March 2012, and Abd al-Rauf and Khalid Kara, Tripoli, April 2012.
- 45 Registration cards were particularly desirable, first to demonstrate allegiance to the revolution and, second, as proof of membership necessary for receiving promised handouts and salaries from the state, which began in February 2012.
- 46 Peter Cole interviews with SSC commanders Abd al-Latif Qaddur, Tripoli, March 2012, and Abd al-Rauf and Khalid Kara, Tripoli, April 2012.
- 47 This competition for recruits even involved the handing out of ID cards from cars to prospective members. Peter Cole interview with Mahdi al-Harati, head of the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion, Tripoli, March 2012.
- 48 Wolfram Lacher interview with Col. Mohamed al-Harari, member of the Interior Ministry's SSC integration committee, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 49 Promised payments included salaries of LYD 1,000 (USD 800) for the SSC fighters as well as one-off handouts of LYD 2,500 (USD 2,000) to individual fighters and LYD 4,000 (USD 3,250) for families (ICG, 2012, p. 14).
- 50 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Alfitouri Gharbil, former national head of the SSC; Abdallah Khalafallah, senior official in the SSC's central administration; and Hashim Bishr, head of the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, March–April 2013.
- 51 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Hashim Bishr, head of Tripoli SSC, and with an official in the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, March 2013.
- 52 One exception was the ninth support branch, which was formed by the Bashir al-Saadawi battalion, a group of Tripolitarians with family ties to the western mountains towns of Qal'a and Yefren. This branch was commanded by Fawzi al-Usta, the brother of Jum'a al-Usta, the owner of the al-Asema television channel, which is closely associated with Mahmud Jibril's National Forces Alliance. The Saadawi battalion therefore represented political interests opposed to those of Kara's Salafist circles. Wolfram Lacher interviews with local observers, Tripoli, September 2013.
- 53 When receiving visitors, Kara liked to pull out a small notebook filled with names of individuals who were allegedly implicated in the former regime's crimes. Wolfram Lacher interview with Abd al-Rauf Kara, Tripoli, March 2013. In September 2013, Kara's Nawasi battalion, the Tripoli SSC's eighth support branch, publicly burned books by Sayyid Qutb, a theoretician of jihad and member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (Katibat Shuhada Suq al-Jum'a, 2013). This act served to demonstrate that the unit espoused mainstream Saudi Salafism and was therefore fiercely opposed to both Muslim Brotherhood and jihadi currents. In August 2012, members of the SSC had been involved in the destruction of the Sha'ab mosque and its Sufi shrine, opposite one of Tripoli's main international hotels (Al-Manara, 2012c). In October 2012, after Bani Walid was captured for the second time by a coalition of revolutionary forces, SSC elements from Tripoli secured the area surround-

- ing two Sufi shrines while radical groups went about destroying them over several days. Wolfram Lacher interviews with eye witnesses, Bani Walid, November 2012.
- 54 Peter Cole interviews with former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and a member of Tripoli military council, Tripoli, November 2012.
- 55 Among the commanders said to have supplied groups were Haitham al-Tajuri, Hashim Bishr, Abd al-Rauf Kara, and Abd al-Latif Qaddur. Peter Cole interviews, interviewee names withheld, Tripoli, January–July 2012.
- 56 The chart reflects information provided by SSC members, a Tripoli-based journalist, and human rights organizations in Tripoli in May 2013 as well as research kindly provided by Frederic Wehrey of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- 57 Wolfram Lacher interview with Hashim Bishr, Tripoli, April 2013.
- 58 In Sabratha, for example, the leadership and core membership of the SSC was formed of police officers. Wolfram Lacher interview with the deputy head of the Sabratha SSC, Sabratha, April 2013.
- 59 Peter Cole interviews, Tripoli, January–July 2012 and November–December 2012.
- 60 Wolfram Lacher interviews with a former official in the Tripoli SSC and a Defence Ministry official, Tripoli, April 2013.
- 61 Peter Cole interview, details withheld.
- 62 Wolfram Lacher interview with Hashim Bishr, Tripoli, April 2013.
- 63 Wolfram Lacher interview with Col. Mohamed al-Harari, member of the Interior Ministry’s SSC integration committee, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 64 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Hashim Bishr, Tripoli, April 2013; Abd al-Rauf Kara, Tripoli, March 2013; and a former official in the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, April 2013.
- 65 Documents produced by the head of the committee overseeing the processing of SSC members, dated 10 January and 23 January 2014, on record with the authors. See also Faruq (2014).
- 66 Documents produced by the head of the committee overseeing the processing of SSC members, dated 10 January and 23 January 2014, on record with the authors. See also Faruq (2014).
- 67 Wolfram Lacher interviews with a former senior staff member of the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, September 2013, and with Col. Mohamed al-Harari, member of the Interior Ministry’s SSC integration committee, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 68 Wolfram Lacher interview with a former senior member of the Benghazi SSC, Benghazi, March 2013.
- 69 Wolfram Lacher interview with Col. Mohamed al-Harari, member of the Interior Ministry’s SSC integration committee, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 70 Wolfram Lacher interview with Abd al-Rauf Kara, Tripoli, March 2013.
- 71 Wolfram Lacher interviews with a former senior staff member in the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, April and September 2013.
- 72 Wolfram Lacher interview with a former senior staff member in the Tripoli SSC, April and September 2013.
- 73 Wolfram Lacher interview with Col. Mohamed al-Harari, member of the Interior Ministry’s SSC integration committee, Tripoli, February 2014.

- 74 Abd al-Rauf Kara, formerly a civilian, entered the Interior Ministry as first lieutenant (*malazem awal*). A former commander in the Tripoli Revolutionaries' Battalion and later the head of the Tripoli SSC's first support brigade, Haitham al-Tajuri, obtained the rank of captain (*naqib*). Before the revolution, Tajuri had been a low-ranking police officer. Wolfram Lacher interviews with a former senior staff member in the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, April and September 2013.
- 75 Wolfram Lacher interview with a former senior staff member in the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, September 2013.
- 76 Wolfram Lacher interviews with a former senior staff member in the Tripoli SSC, Tripoli, April and September 2013.
- 77 The Joint Intervention and Deterrence Force was established by decision 244/2013 of Prime Minister Zeidan in March 2013 and began operating in August 2013 (Quryna, 2013c). The Rapid Intervention Force was established by Interior Minister Ashour Shwail through his decision 978/2013 (Bishr, 2013b).
- 78 Wolfram Lacher interviews with local observers, Misrata and Tripoli, October 2014.
- 79 The head of the Zintan military council, Abd al-Hamid Abu Dirbala, was appointed head of the force, with the head of the Zuwara military council, Abd al-Aziz Abu Sanuqa, as his deputy (Al-Manara, 2012a).
- 80 The eastern-based Coalition of Libyan Revolutionary Battalions brought together a number of armed groups, the largest of which was the 17 February Coalition—itsself an alliance of various smaller fighting groups on the front line in Brega (ICG, 2012, p. 17).
- 81 Peter Cole interview with the head of a Misratan battalion, location withheld, November 2012.
- 82 Specifically, the western division of the LSF policed checkpoints between Jumail, Riqdalin, and Zuwara; Mizda/Shqayqa and Zintan; and Nalut and Tiji/Badr. At times they were deployed between Gharyan and Zintan. In all cases, the LSF was deployed between towns strongly represented in their ranks and neighbouring towns alleged to be pro-Qaddafi. Most anecdotal evidence suggests that the LSF were genuine in selecting impartial elements from their own ranks to police such ceasefires. At Mellita, throughout 2013, the army had placed a nominal guard outside the refinery. Access roads to the refinery were still controlled by western battalions within the LSF. Two communities, Zintan and Zuwara, competed over control of these access roads on various occasions in 2013. The army ceded similar autonomy to others who guarded critical infrastructure, including civilian militias within the Border Guard. Assertions based on observations of checkpoints at Mizda and Zuwara in 2012, as well as Peter Cole interviews with the head of the Zuwaran military council, Zuwara, May 2012, and with a Mizda elder, Mizda, May 2013.
- 83 Eleven people were killed in the ensuing clashes, including six soldiers of the army's first infantry division. RSC members suggested the events had been exploited by army officers. Wolfram Lacher interviews with Muhammad al-Gharabi and other members of the RSC, Tripoli, November 2012. See also Graff and Shennib (2012) and Lacher (2013, p. 12 and n. 99).
- 84 Wolfram Lacher interview with a former senior staff member in the Benghazi SSC, Benghazi, March 2013. See also Farkash (2012).

- 85 Zintan's break with other revolutionary strongholds following the regime's demise was due to a combination of alliances with the tribal establishment of former regime constituencies, such as the Warfalla (Lacher and Labnouj, 2014); it also had roots in the close association of the Zintan-based Qa'qa' Brigade with Mahmud Jibril's National Forces Alliance, which, in the GNC, formed the main bloc opposed to sweeping political isolation. The Qa'qa' Brigade had been founded by Abd al-Majid Mliqta, who became a leading figure in the Alliance; it was later led by Mliqta's brother Uthman and officially operated as the 1st division of the Border and Petroleum Facilities Guard (Lacher, 2013, p. 11).
- 86 Indeed, the maternal side of the family of Hafidh al-Aquri, the LSF's Kufra field commander, hails from the Zwayya. Statements by an LSF figure ahead of the deployment to Kufra also indicated that the LSF was influenced by Zwayya propaganda, which suggested that Chadian mercenaries were invading Kufra (Al-Tarhuni, 2012).
- 87 Wolfram Lacher interview with Atef Barqiq, Naluti LSF commander, Nalut, February 2014.
- 88 Wolfram Lacher interview with Atef Barqiq, Naluti LSF commander, Nalut, February 2014.
- 89 Members of the SSC and LSF did not participate in the ministerial blockades in their 'official' capacities; that is, they were not acting in their capacity as elements of those organizations, nor were they using SSC- or LSF-registered vehicles. Observations by Peter Cole in Tripoli, May 2013; see also Shennib and Donati (2013).
- 90 Following the passage of the Political Isolation Law, Zintani armed groups engaged in increasingly bold attacks on Tripoli institutions. In late June, Zintani petroleum facilities guards attacked their administration in Tripoli in a dispute over jobs in southern Libya. The incident triggered heavy clashes with the Abu Salim SSC unit and other branches of the SSC (Al-Gharyani, 2013). In early July, Zintani forces led by the Sawa'iq Battalion seized the Interior Ministry building and held it for more than a week (Al-Watan al-Libiya, 2013c). As negotiations over a revision of the Political Isolation Law stalled during July, rumours spread of an imminent attempt by Zintani groups to seize the GNC.
- 91 According to a press conference by Abu Sahmain in October 2013, his letter to the LROR, dated 7 July, referred to 'suspicious media discourse against the 17th February Revolution' as the reason why the LROR had been tasked with 'securing Tripoli's entry and exit points'. He said he had given the order for the LROR deployment 'in my capacity as the president of the GNC, the GNC being the chief commander of the armed forces, and in these circumstances I consider it necessary to assume this function for the protection of the nation'. Abu Sahmain further explained that he discussed the letter 'with some GNC members' in a meeting on 27 July (GNC, 2013e).
- 92 Like the 7 July letter, Abu Sahmain's decision 143/2013, which established the LROR as an organization to provide security across Libya, only became public in October 2013 (GNC, 2013e).
- 93 According to Atef Barqiq, a Nalut-based commander who is a member of the LROR's military committee, the LROR commanded some 2,000 men drawn mostly from the Nawasi battalion and LSF units from Misrata, Nalut, and Zawiya. Wolfram Lacher interview with Atef Barqiq, Nalut, February 2014.
- 94 Members of the LROR's leadership—structured into political, military, security, and media committees—included the coastal commander of the LSF's western division, Umar al-

Mukhtar from Sabratha; Atef Barqiq, a Nalut-based LSF commander; the head of the LSF Benghazi-based first division, Wissam bin Hamid; and Ahmad Jibril Baba, a commander in the Sabha-based southern LSF division. All aforementioned men adhere to strands of Salafist thought. However, the LROR also included leaders from Amazigh mountain towns who were not associated with Islamist currents. Wolfram Lacher interviews, Nalut and Tripoli, January–February 2014.

- 95 Without official recognition and support, the ‘council for the protection of Tripoli’ remained largely ineffective; it was significant primarily as a sign of increasing mobilization against units from outside the capital. Key figures behind the initiative included two former commanders of revolutionary battalions formed by Tripoli residents in the Nafusa mountains—Mahdi al-Harati of the Tripoli Revolutionaries’ Battalion and Hisham Abu Hajar of the al-Hamra Companies—as well as the head of Tripoli local council, Sadat al-Badri (Libya al-Mostakbal, 2013b).
- 96 Wolfram Lacher interview with a former senior member of the Rafallah Sahati Companies, Tripoli, January–February 2014. See also Wehrey (2014a).
- 97 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Benghazi residents and political figures, Tripoli, January–February 2014.
- 98 Wolfram Lacher interview with Atef Barqiq, LSF commander, Nalut, February 2014.
- 99 Zintani commanders view the National Mobile Force as having been created ‘explicitly to counter Zintan’, with one commander referring to it as ‘an alliance of Islamists from Sabratha and Zawiya with the Amazigh against Zintan’. The force now includes fighters not only from Amazigh towns, but also from Rujban, Sabratha, Zawiya, and even Misrata. Wolfram Lacher interviews with a Zintani commander, Tripoli, February 2014; with Atef Barqiq, LSF commander, Nalut, February 2014; and with former *thuwwar*, Jadu and Yefren, February 2014.
- 100 Wolfram Lacher interviews with former *thuwwar*, Jadu, Nalut, Tripoli, and Yefren, January–February 2014.
- 101 The abduction was presented as an arrest on corruption charges, linked to a controversy over government payments to the federalist armed groups that were blocking oil ports in Cyrenaica. Another trigger was the US-led abduction of purported al-Qaeda member Abu Anas al-Libi from Tripoli several days before the incident. Zeidan portrayed his abduction as part of political power struggles, arguing that a heavily armed convoy of 100 vehicles such as the one that kidnapped him could not move without political backing, and accusing an extremist faction in the GNC led by Mohamed al-Kilani from Zawiya of being behind the incident, together with LROR leaders. His kidnappers told Zeidan that they were ‘*thuwwar* from every Libyan city excluding Zintan’ (Zeidan, 2013). Al-Kilani, a Salafist former revolutionary commander from Zawiya, had close relations with Hadiya, the Zawiyan Salafist scholar who had been appointed by Abu Sahmain on 6 October to head the LROR.
- 102 Over the preceding months, the LROR had built up relations among units of the crime-fighting committees in Tripoli that had links to Misrata and Zawiya. During his abduction, Zeidan was held at a facility of a crime-fighting committee in Fornaj. Among the actors contributing to his release were the former head of the Tripoli SSC, Hashim Bishr,

- and the army's Brigade 127, a unit dominated by Suq al-Jum'a thuwwar. The incident underlined once more the rifts within the SSC's former units in Tripoli (see the section on the SSC).
- 103 The force concerned was the Nusur battalion, led by Nuri Friwan. The unit's members had formally integrated into military intelligence and other official institutions, but in reality they had remained in their old battalion structures. Wolfram Lacher interviews with Atef Barqiq, LSF commander, Nalut, February 2014, and with a Misratan politician, Misrata, June 2014.
- 104 The clashes had been triggered by the assassination of the unit's leader by unknown perpetrators on 4 November. For an account of the background to the incident, see Ben Wafa (2013).
- 105 Despite the handover ceremony, the Sawa'iq Battalion kept its headquarters at the Islamic Call society. The Qa'qa' did the same, posing as the 1st division of the Border and Petroleum Facilities Guard. Abd al-Rauf Kara's Nawasi brigade, supposedly dissolved in November 2013, was a key component of the force that carried out operations in the Warshafana area in January 2014. Wolfram Lacher interviews with Tripoli residents, Tripoli, January–February 2014; see also Abdul-Wahab (2014a; 2014b).
- 106 Zintanis withdrew from Sabha shortly after having deployed. Documents issued by the Prime Minister's Office and the Office of the Chief of General Staff, and subsequently leaked on the Internet, show that the government authorized payments totalling LYD 52 million (USD 41 million) to the Zintan military council between 26 January and 4 February 2014. Documents on record with the authors.
- 107 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Misratan politicians and observers, Misrata, June 2014.
- 108 Maitiq's election was later declared invalid by the Supreme Court, a verdict Maitiq and his allies accepted.
- 109 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Misratan politicians and thuwwar leaders, Misrata, October 2014.
- 110 Wolfram Lacher communication with Misratan observers, July–September 2014.
- 111 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Ahmad Hadiya, spokesperson for Libya Dawn and Central Shield, and Misratan observers, Misrata, October 2014.
- 112 Wolfram Lacher interview with a battalion commander who attended the negotiations, Misrata, October 2014.
- 113 Wolfram Lacher interviews with Ahmad Hadiya and Misratan battalion commanders, Misrata, October 2014.
- 114 Wolfram Lacher interview with Ahmad Hadiya, Misrata, October 2014.
- 115 Wolfram Lacher interview with Ahmad Hadiya, Misrata, October 2014.
- 116 Wolfram Lacher interviews with local observers, Misrata, October 2014.
- 117 Promoted by Ansar al-Haqq, a local organization closely linked to an eponymous battalion, conservative Saudi strands of Salafism gained increasing influence in Zintan after the revolution. This influence was reflected in an August 2014 statement issued jointly by Zintan's local and military councils, its social committee, and the leadership of the Qa'qa' and Sawa'iq battalions. The statement's purpose was to counter allegations that Zintan supported 'secular, liberal, democratic or other deviant ideologies' (Zintan Municipal

- Council, 2014). The ideological tendencies promoted by Ansar al-Haqq are fiercely opposed to those of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, as well as those of Salafist jihadis.
- 118 Wolfram Lacher interviews with thuwwar leaders and observers from Misrata and Yefren, Misrata and Tripoli, October 2014; also see *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (2014b).
- 119 Wolfram Lacher interviews with members of the Committee for the Correction of the Path and Misratan observers, Misrata, October 2014.
- 120 Wolfram Lacher interview with a colonel in the Defence Ministry who had served as a revolutionary commander, Tripoli, January 2014.
- 121 Manqush, a Benghazi-based officer whose family hailed from Misrata, had defected from the army at the beginning of the revolution and was captured and imprisoned by government forces in March 2011.
- 122 Wolfram Lacher interview with an army officer from Tobruk who attended the meeting, Tripoli, January 2014.
- 123 Haftar had longstanding ties with al-Hibshi and other officers in Bani Walid and Tarhuna. In 1993, Haftar had supported a coup plot against Qaddafi in which al-Hibshi and officers from Bani Walid had been involved; see *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (2012) and Barfi (2014).
- 124 Wolfram Lacher interview with Zintani thuwwar commanders and an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 125 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 126 According to a television interview by Usama Juwayli in July 2012, the army inherited by the Libyan state was exceedingly 'top-heavy', with 55 major generals, 537 brigadiers, and 1,350 colonels, and a dearth of new recruits; see ICG (2012, p. 14). Meanwhile, the army's enlisted ranks were negatively affected by potential recruits' preference for the better wages and prospects of the security brigades.
- 127 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 128 Wolfram Lacher interview with an army officer from Tobruk, Tripoli, January 2014.
- 129 As of June 2014, 36 new units were enjoying direct relations with the Office of the Chief General Staff. Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014.
- 130 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Ministry of Defence, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 131 Wolfram Lacher interview with the commander of a Zintani unit, Tripoli, February 2014.
- 132 Defence Ministry decrees 168, 188, and 189/2012, Tripoli, 21 July and 2 August 2012, documents on record with the authors.
- 133 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014.
- 134 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014. A YouTube video of Brigade 155, deploying in the context of tensions over the GNC in mid-2013, shows a member of the brigade warning 'militias' that only the 'Libyan army' was legitimate, while at the same time boasting that he belonged to Suq al-Jum'a thuwwar (Brigade 155, 2013).
- 135 The unit's commander, Lt.-Col. Zakaria al-Sharif, is considered close to the former head of the Tripoli military council, Abd al-Hakim Bilhadj, who is said to exert informal influence over the unit. Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Ministry of Defence, Tripoli, June 2014.

- 136 When members of Brigade 127 were suspected of having abducted four protesters at the GNC in March 2014, the speaker for the chief of general staff insisted that the battalion was 'an official army unit' (Libya News Agency, 2014c).
- 137 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Ministry of Defence, Tripoli, February 2014. The National Guard had subsumed a diverse range of forces, not all of which entered the army. Its units had included the Darna-based al-Nur battalion, which emerged in the orbit of former members of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and was led by alleged al-Qaeda member Abd al-Basit Azuz; the Ubari branch of the Zintani Khalid bin al-Walid battalion; the Sabha-based Lions of the Sahara, a Tuareg battalion; the Sahara Knights battalion, a Zintani-led unit with a strong Tubu contingent in Ubari; the Martyrs of the Capital battalion, a force with a strong Libyan Islamic Fighting Group/jihadi component that had been established in Nalut during the revolution; parts of the 17 February and Lions of the Capital battalions in Tripoli; and the Tawhid (Monotheism) battalion, a radical Salafist group that was responsible for the destruction of Sufi shrines in the Tripoli area (al-Haras al-Watani, 2012; Tanasuh, 2011; Wolfram Lacher interviews with local observers, Nalut, Sabha, and Tripoli, September 2013 and January–February 2014).
- 138 According to statements by Zeidan after he was dismissed in March 2014, the Petroleum Facilities Guard counted 2,000 members at the outbreak of the revolution, and by early 2014 membership had grown to between 25,000 and 30,000 (Sabah al-Khair Libya, 2014).
- 139 When Ghithi was dismissed following an exchange of fire between his men and the defence minister's convoy (Al-Misrati, 2012), only a small group of Border Guard members from north-eastern Libya retained their loyalty to Ghithi. Most others were indifferent to the Border Guard's move from the deputy defence minister's remit to the chief of general staff.
- 140 It has not been established who is behind the assassinations, since nobody has to date been held to account, nor has any group claimed responsibility. The killings are probably the result of a combination of factors, including criminal activity and the activity of *takfiri* groups—that is, extremists who designate former regime officials as infidels (*kuffar*), who may legally be killed. See Pargeter (2014) and Salah (2014).
- 141 In February 2014, a Saeqa contingent attacked bases of the 17th February Martyrs' Battalion and Ansar al-Sharia, after the son of Saeqa commander Wanis Abu Khamada had been kidnapped. According to Abu Khamada, the attackers had acted without having received orders. In televised statements after the incident, Abu Khamada stated that the Saeqa expected no help from the government and were acting 'for the sake of Benghazi' (Abu Khamada, 2014; Al-Wasat, 2014a). People close to Islamist battalions saw the Saeqa as deeply indoctrinated by anti-Islamist sentiment since the Qaddafi era. As one leading national political figure from Benghazi argued: '[T]he Saeqa is out of control. It's being led by people who are out of control, who have become part of the conflict. For Benghazi to be stabilized, the Saeqa has to leave.' Wolfram Lacher interviews with Benghazi residents and political figures, Tripoli, January–February 2014.
- 142 The units whose commanders issued the statement included the army's second and third divisions, as well as Brigades 121, 127, 155, and 161. Units that had emerged out of the SSC included the Joint Reaction and Intervention Force (*Quwat al-Rada' wal-Tadakhul*

- al-Mushtaraka*), the Rapid Intervention Force (*Quwat al-Tadakhul al-Sari'*), and the Mitiga Airport Security Battalion; the former head of the Tripoli SSC, Hashim Bishr, was also involved (Tripoli Revolutionaries, 2014).
- 143 Following the meeting at Benina airbase, the chief of general staff dismissed the head of the air force, Gen. Ahmad al-Mismari, and four other officers, referring them to the military prosecutor (Office of the Chief of General Staff, 2014a).
- 144 According to a senior Zintani battalion leader with access to Qa'qa' records, the Qa'qa' battalion had recruited 69 former members of Qaddafi's Brigade 32 as of January 2014 (Wolfram Lacher interview, Tripoli, February 2014). The Qa'qa' and Sawa'iq each also enrolled around 100 former members of the Ubari-based Maghawir Brigade, a Qaddafi-era unit recruited from Tuareg of Sahelian origin. Some of these Tuareg members were later recruited into Amazigh units of the western Libya Shield, in an attempt to weaken the link between Zintani leaders and Tuareg communities (Wolfram Lacher interview with an Amazigh politician, Tripoli, April 2014). The Zintani-led airport security unit recruited among the Tubu community (Wolfram Lacher interview with a Tubu politician, Tripoli, April 2014). Zintani brigade leaders have also sought to recruit in Bani Walid, a politically marginalized and militarily weak town, in which resentment against the post-revolutionary order continues to run high (Wolfram Lacher interview with a local politician, Bani Walid, April 2014).
- 145 The first was the case when Sawa'iq members took control of Tripoli-based Brigade 121; the second was the case in March 2014, when Sawa'iq members were moved into the new Police Support Force (*Quwat al-Da'm li-Mudiriyat al-Amn*), which ostensibly reported to the Interior Ministry. Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014; see also al-Wasat (2014e) and Bishr (2014).
- 146 The 2nd division is a newly established unit recruited partly from among former SSC members. Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014; see also al-Wasat (2014c; 2014d).
- 147 The council is headed by Brig.-Gen. Abd al-Rahman al-Twil. Wolfram Lacher interview with a member of the Tripoli military council, Tripoli, June 2014.
- 148 Wolfram Lacher interview with an army officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014.
- 149 Wolfram Lacher interview with an officer from Tobruk, Tripoli, June 2014. See also Libya News Agency (2014d) and Akhbar Libya 24 (2014).
- 150 After his coup announcement in February 2014, the Defence Ministry had issued orders to arrest Haftar (*Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 2014). Jarushi had been dismissed in January 2013, following a decision by the Integrity Commission, the predecessor of the institution implementing the Political Isolation Law (MoD, 2013a).
- 151 Wolfram Lacher interview with an army officer in the Defence Ministry, Tripoli, June 2014.
- 152 Wolfram Lacher communication with observers from the Nafusa mountains, October 2014.

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