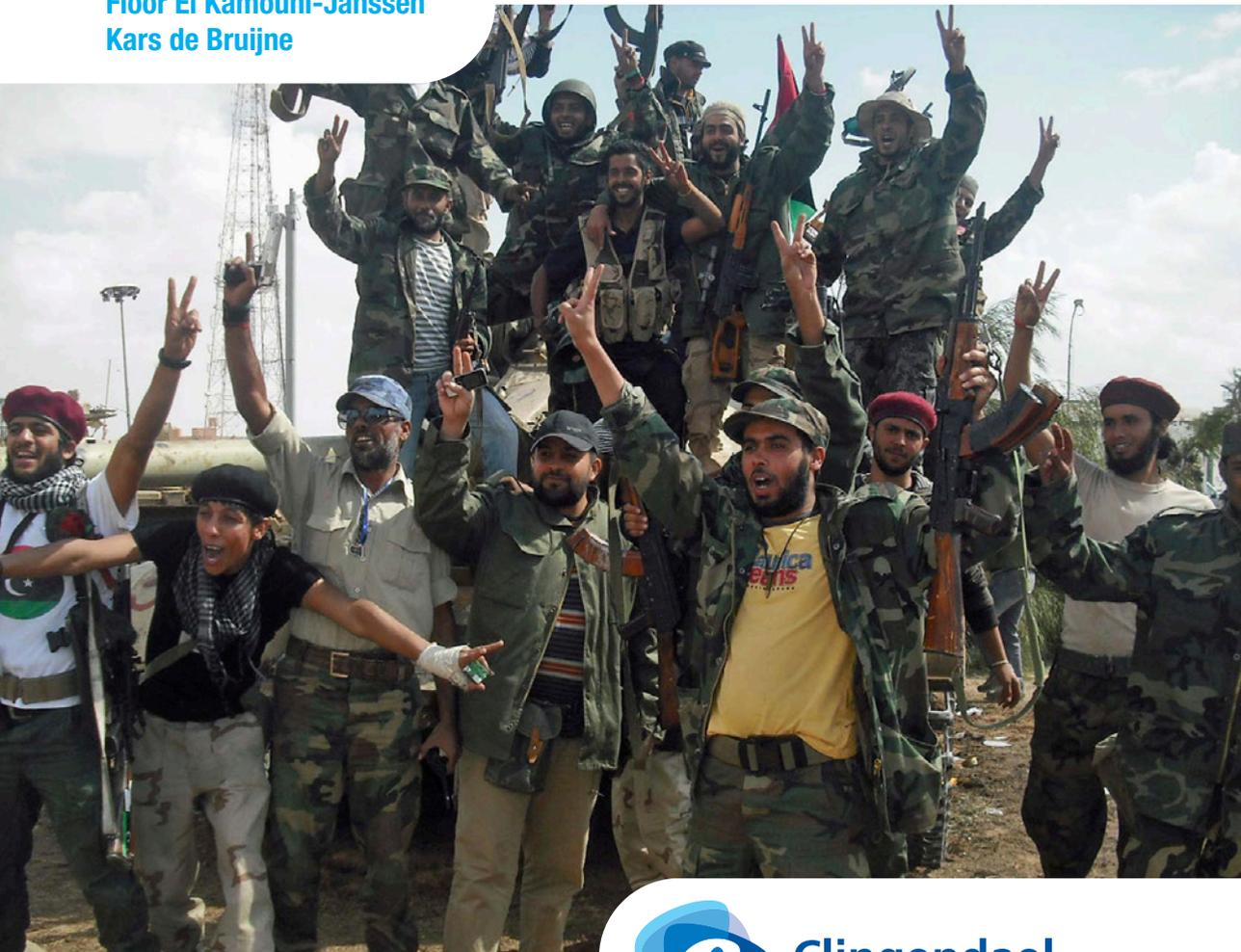


CrisesAlert 3

Entering the Lion's Den: local militias and governance in Libya

Clingendael Report

Floor El Kamouni-Janssen
Kars de Bruijne



Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations



Clingendael

Netherlands Institute of International Relations

CrisesAlert 3 Entering the Lion's Den: local militias and governance in Libya

Floor El Kamouni-Janssen
Kars de Bruijne

Clingendael report
October 2017

Clingendael CrisesAlerts Libya

Unpacking conflict trends, theaters and assumptions forms the basis of the Clingendael CrisesAlerts on Libya: where are the theaters of war, what are trends in fault lines, success and conflict activity?

European security interests at stake: this CrisesAlert explores why Europe should care about the ongoing conflict. What security interests are at stake? What are the mechanisms whereby the crises impact Europe and its member states? What should be done?

Militia coalition-building and governance: this CrisesAlert explores armed coalitions in Libya, and their implications for conflict and support for local and national governance.

The EU in the world: this CrisesAlert probes into the regional and geopolitical power dynamics. How do fault lines develop and what does this suggest for the EU's room for maneuver, foreign policy and actionable policy?

October 2017

© Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'.

Cover photo: © Flickr – Magharebia

Unauthorized use of any materials violates copyright, trademark and / or other laws. Should a user download material from the website or any other source related to the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', or the Clingendael Institute, for personal or non-commercial use, the user must retain all copyright, trademark or other similar notices contained in the original material or on any copies of this material.

Material on the website of the Clingendael Institute may be reproduced or publicly displayed, distributed or used for any public and non-commercial purposes, but only by mentioning the Clingendael Institute as its source. Permission is required to use the logo of the Clingendael Institute. This can be obtained by contacting the Communication desk of the Clingendael Institute (press@clingendael.nl).

The following web link activities are prohibited by the Clingendael Institute and may present trademark and copyright infringement issues: links that involve unauthorized use of our logo, framing, inline links, or metatags, as well as hyperlinks or a form of link disguising the URL.

About the authors

Floor El Kamouni-Janssen is Research Fellow at the Clingendael Conflict Research Unit. Floor's research concentrates on security and stability in the Arab region and the policy implications of regional trends and developments including migration and violent extremism.

Kars de Bruijne is a Research Fellow at Clingendael and a Senior Researcher in the Armed Conflict Location Event Dataset Project (ACLED). His research focuses on intrastate conflict, fragile states, trend analyses and expert forecasting.

The Clingendael Institute
P.O. Box 93080
2509 AB The Hague
The Netherlands

Follow us on social media

 @clingendaelorg

 The Clingendael Institute

 The Clingendael Institute

Email: info@clingendael.nl

Website: www.clingendael.nl

CrisesAlert 3

Entering the Lion's Den: local militias and governance in Libya

Ongoing instability in Libya continues to be a concern for the European Union. To alleviate the situation for the Libyan population and address security threats like human smuggling and terrorism, the EU and its member states follow a two-tier policy track: striking a peace agreement while simultaneously building local governance. This CrisesAlert highlights the risks of both policy measures and shows how they affect the very local nature of the Libyan conflict. The Alert calls for a better understanding of a key determinant of the conflict: local alliance-building by armed actors.

Introduction

Libya's internal dynamics are compromised by multiple failed peace agreements and ceasefire negotiations. The latest breakdown came last July when the French president Emmanuel Macron achieved a "historic" deal between Libya's powerful and polarizing general Khalifa Haftar and the weak but internationally supported prime minister Fayez al-Serraj.¹ This agreement is an implicit recognition that Serraj's UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) failed, that the Presidential Council (PC) is unable to impose its authority definitively, and that the Libya Political Agreement (LPA) needs an overhaul at least.

Revamping the political process in Libya remains a policy priority for the Dutch government and the EU. Even though European initiatives have a strong bilateral flavor – with France and Italy playing divisive roles – EU member states agree that investing in Libya's political track should lead to an accord between the main rivaling parties to amend the LPA, build state institutions and bring armed forces under civilian control.²

1 MEAE (2017). Libya – Joint Declaration. <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/libya/events/2017/article/libya-joint-declaration-25-07-17>.

2 Vision expressed at Clingendael expert meeting on Libya's militias, 28 August 2017 (Chatham House Rules applied).

Yet achieving a sustainable agreement continues to be unlikely.³ This is partly because attempts to reach peace agreements have thus far failed to take sufficient stock of the local nature of the conflict and local power balances. Any national-level agreement needs to trickle down to largely independent militias whose primary concerns are often unrelated to agreements in Tripoli, Tobruk, and Paris. This Alert will show that, by failing to fully grasp the nature of local alliance-building, **EU-sponsored peace negotiations can and do contribute to a restructuring of local coalitions that in turn has the capacity to generate new fighting.**

Conflict in Libya: basics, players and interests

- There is not one conflict in Libya, there are multiple interconnected and unconnected conflicts. Our first Alert highlights four important theatres. In all theatres, there are many local fault lines and interests at play;
- The primary national fault-line is between the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA). The LNAs military position has been improving. The LNAs strongman Khalifa Haftar increasingly receives international diplomatic recognition;
- Libya is primarily a concern for Europe due to migratory pressures and terrorist threat. It is unlikely that Libya will anytime soon become a new geopolitical proxy conflict as the Trump administration has not taken major interest while Russian involvement is limited, cautious and economically motivated. Libyans generally view outside involvement with suspicion;
- Europe has been divided in its approach to Libya and a truly integrated EU policy has not taken off. Officially, the EU follows the UN-led mediation process. Former colonizer Italy supported the GNA (mainly to reduce migration) while France supported Haftar (mainly to counter terrorism) which has led to tensions between both EU countries as well as local conflict in Libya;
- Regional actors are also involved. Of Libya's neighbours, Tunisia and Algeria take a 'big tent' approach, striving for an integral agreement, while Egypt supports the LNA in various ways. Moreover, the Gulf rift impacts the conflict with the Saudi/Emirates side supporting the LNA and the Qatar/Turkey side tacitly supporting the GNA.

This is not to say that the local has been neglected entirely. For various reasons, such as the weakness of the central state and the pressing need to act "decisively" against

3 De Bruijne et al. (2017a). CrisesAlert 1: Challenging the assumptions of the Libyan conflict. The Clingendael Institute. <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/crisesalert-1-challenging-the-assumptions-of-the-libyan-conflict.pdf>.

migratory pressures and terrorist threats, the EU has turned to supporting local governance. The reasoning within the EU is that support for municipal governance responds to the needs of ordinary Libyans for improved service provision,⁴ and that local stability is expected to increase the chances of a resolution at the national level (a governmental Track 2 approach).

This Alert shows, however, that **attempts to support local governance are equally problematic**. Under the current model for supporting local governance, the EU is embroiled in a complex, fluid framework of local alliances – a “lion’s den” of sorts. This has led to renewed tensions, those between national and local governance being just one example, and the *de facto* legitimization of militias upon which local officials hinge. While promoting local governance is a necessary approach, of equal necessity is to better understand the ever-shifting actors and alliances within Libya’s Lion’s Den.

Overall, this Alert concludes that there are both obvious and less obvious risks attached to attempts to improve governance at the national and local levels. Without a better understanding of the localized nature of the conflict and a proper understanding of how EU initiatives incentivize local conflicts, the EU and its member states risk that their good intentions are counterproductive at both the national and local level:

1. Given that the *de facto* authority in Libya is not a national government but rather localized armed groups, any effort to mediate between actors at the national level should be driven by a clear understanding of the local coalitions supporting them and the fluidity of interests driving these coalitions. Peace agreements will only reach as far as the power that national actors hold over their local partners to accept these deals.
2. As long as national stability remains out of reach, Libya’s future will continue to be determined by a patchwork of local support coalitions. Within such a context, conflict-neutral interventions do not exist. The work of international development efforts supporting local governance can strengthen some power holders to the detriment of others. Understanding local power dynamics is critical for making informed decisions about what or who to support.

The following sections spotlight four local conflict theatres, namely the East, Misrata, Tripoli and the Fezzan. These theatres evidence the interconnectedness of the national and local and show how any intervention in Libya should be informed by a clear understanding of local dynamics of conflict and alliance-building.

4 View expressed by mayor of Ghariane at Libya International Peace Forum in Tunis, 6 September 2017.

Understanding Libya's militias

Based on an assessment made in 2014, Libya had approximately 1,600 armed groups at that time.⁵ For these groups, being part of a powerful coalition prevents local rivals from acquiring political, military and territorial influence.⁶ Coalition-building between armed groups is therefore a key influencer of developments on the ground, as is shown in Figure 1: Allied versus non-allied events in 2016-2017. Critical moments in Libya's recent conflict history have all been driven by changing coalitions between armed groups. For example, the formation of the Dignity and Dawn coalitions polarized the conflict in 2014; the Bunyan al-Marsous coalition against Islamic State in Sirte halted IS expansion in Libya; and the creation of the Libyan National Army (LNA) changed the power balance in favor of Haftar.

Despite their relevance to the country as a whole, these were all coalitions of local actors. Operation Dignity, for example, consisted of army units, militias and armed civilians with the shared aim of defeating Islamists in the Benghazi area, as well as addressing criminality, settling tribal feuds and re-establishing general order in the city.⁷ Operation Dignity was a coalition of convenience between a myriad of localized groups. It was a key vehicle not only for the political aspirations of a Libyan figurehead but also for local militia trying to protect their interests. Haftar's self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) is also not a homogenous military force but rather an alliance of local militias that helped Haftar play a more influential role vis-à-vis powerholders in the East. Haftar, for instance, teamed up with Madkhali Salafis despite his self-proclaimed anti-Islamist/anti-terrorist agenda. They cooperated because Haftar and the Madkhalis shared a rejection of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸ In a similar vein, the Magarha tribe played a key role in shoring up Haftar's local power, even though the tribe has not always been acquiescent to his dominance. Appointing Magarha tribal leaders to important military positions helped Haftar to wield local influence in the East.⁹

5 Figures expressed at Clingendael expert meeting on Libya's militias, 28 August 2017

6 Lacher (2016). Libya's Local Elites and the Politics of Alliance Building. *Mediterranean Politics* 21 (1). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13629395.2015.1081451>.

7 Wehrey (2017). Whoever Controls Benghazi Controls Libya. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/07/benghazi-libya/532056/>.

8 Madkhali Salafis follow the teachings of Rabi' al-Madkhali, a Saudi Arabian Muslim scholar and a quietist (apolitical) Salafi. Madkhalis adhere to the principle *wali al-amr* (loyalty to the ruler) and therewith differ from the more activist Muslim Brotherhood discourse and violent tactics of jihadi. Wehrey (2016). Quiet No More? *Carnegie*. <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/64846>.

9 Carboni et. al. (2017). Between the Cracks: Actor fragmentation and local conflict systems in the Libyan civil war. University of Sussex working paper.

The interests of these armed groups are very much in flux. Madkhali Salafis, for example, have an additional presence in the West, where they support Haftar's opponent, the GNA.¹⁰ Consider the Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB, *Soraya Difa' Benghazi*), a coalition of fighters that tried to recapture the oil facilities in Sirte in March of this year. The BDB consists of professional soldiers, ex-policemen, and a significant number of jihadi fighters expelled from Benghazi, as well as factions from the West between Tripoli, Misrata and Jufra.¹¹ There are sundry political allegiances within the BDB: some factions support the Presidential Council, while others support Khalifa Ghwell's shadow government (Government of National Salvation, GNS) in Tripoli or the GNS-allied and conservative Muslim leader Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani.¹²

A consequence of this fluidity of interest and coalition preferences is that it is extremely complicated to discern types of militias or armed groups based on their interests. It is impossible to categorize groups as exclusively "unregulated" (not recognizing any authority), "criminal" (involved in illicit activities) or "government-allied" (acting in compliance with one of Libya's governments). In reality, many militias wear different hats at the same time. Some militias from Tripoli for instance are allied with the GNA and "manage" migrants around formal migrant detention centers. However, the same militias are often involved in the human smuggling business.¹³ We find militias on different sides of the conflict that may formally comply with political institutions but in practice pursue their own quest for power and control, thereby overruling any political actor.

10 They also clash with other groups with an Islamist profile, such as militias supporting the conservative Muslim leader Grand Mufti Al-Ghariani.

11 McGregor (2017). Libya's Military Wild Card: The Benghazi Defense Brigades and the Massacre at Brak al-Shatti. Terrorism Monitor 15 (11). The Jamestown Foundation. <https://jamestown.org/program/libyas-military-wild-card-benghazi-defense-brigades-massacre-brak-al-shatti/>.

12 The BDB describes itself as a non-Islamist coalition, rather as a group of *thuwwar* (revolutionaries), but it has both Islamists and non-Islamists among its ranks. What unites the BDB, at least momentarily, is that they heavily oppose Haftar and his "oppressive militias" and that they want to secure a steady flow of oil revenues to Benghazi and return to their lives in Benghazi safely. BDB denies UN claim it is a "coalition of Islamist armed groups". Libya Herald (2017a). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/04/19/bdb-denies-un-claim-it-is-a-coalition-of-islamist-armed-groups/>.

13 El Kamouni-Janssen (2017). Only God can stop the smugglers. The Clingendael Institute. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/only_god_can_stop_the_smugglers.pdf.

Figure 1 Allied versus non-allied events in 2016-2017



Theatres of Coalition-building

How do the main players in Libya navigate, maneuver, and develop coalitions of armed groups and relations with local power holders? Analysis of allied events across Libya, as shown in figure 2 (Geographic distribution of allied events in 2016-2017) shows there are two recent developments to consider:

- After consolidating his control in the East, Haftar is now expanding his military coalition locally in the West and South.
- The national-level PC-LNA divide has become a key influencer in local conflicts throughout the country, sometimes also in areas far from Tripoli or Tobruk.

1. Haftar: looking for new friends

Haftar is now widening his campaign to the south and west of Libya as he tries to strengthen and build an armed coalition with other powerful actors. The LNA has taken a blocking position south and west of Tripoli with international military backing (from

Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Russia, and with countries like Tunisia, Algeria and France sympathetic to the LNA's cause). Haftar plays the legitimacy card internationally, but meanwhile continues to signal his intent to enter Tripoli. His strategy in the past year – to forge local alliances in order to advance into key oil ports and military facilities in central Libya, expelling among others the Misrata Third Force from central Libya with the help of Egyptian bombings – will be more difficult and dangerous in the case of Tripoli, where powerful militias hold sway.¹⁴

Haftar has already begun courting the Warfalla and Tarhouna tribes¹⁵ from the Tripolitana region. Haftar's rhetoric praises the work of the Bunyan al-Marsous (BAM) fighters (mostly Misratans) and under the auspices of Egypt, talks have been held in Cairo between top political figures from Misrata and eastern representatives supporting the LNA.¹⁶ Though yet to take place, the next step for Haftar is a military meeting in Cairo with Misrata factions, with the aim of unifying military units.¹⁷

In conjunction with cultivating new alliances, Haftar is making efforts to upkeep his military support in the city of Zintan, a revolutionary anti-Islamist bulwark which is generally supportive of Haftar.¹⁸ Haftar draws support from Zintani militias such as the Sawaiq militias of Emad Trabelsi which typically act on the side of the LNA.¹⁹ However, some Zintan groups are now distancing themselves from Haftar. The Zintan Revolutionary Military Council, originally a pro-LNA brigade, is becoming particularly more critical of Haftar and less willing to support LNA military operations.²⁰ One of

14 Lewis (2017). After long Benghazi campaign, Libyan commander eyes capital. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-libya-security/after-long-benghazi-campaign-libyan-commander-eyes-capital-idUSKBN1A4250>.

15 Cusack (2017a). Libyan tribes defecting from Tripoli towards Haftar. Al Araby. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2017/3/21/libyan-tribes-defecting-from-tripoli-towards-haftar>.

16 Mixed reaction to Cairo talks between Misrata and eastern representatives. Libya Herald (2017b). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/08/03/mixed-reaction-to-cairo-talks-between-misrata-and-eastern-representatives/>.

17 Why Haftar wants a military meeting in Cairo? Libya Prospect (2017). <http://libyaprospect.com/index.php/2017/07/31/why-haftar-wants-a-military-meeting-in-cairo/>.

18 Massive LNA military graduation ceremony in Zintan. Libya Herald (2017c). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/07/26/massive-lna-military-graduation-ceremony-in-zintan/>.

19 Toaldo (2017). A quick guide to Libya's main players. ECFR. http://www.ecfr.eu/mena/mapping_libya_conflict.

20 Cusack (2017b). Haftar has 'betrayed Libyan revolution' by appointing Gaddafi's ex-generals. Al Araby. <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2017/4/1/haftar-has-betrayed-libyan-revolution-by-appointing-gaddafis-ex-generals>.

the Military Council's leaders, Ossama Juwaili, is already siding with the GNA.²¹ Within Zintan we therefore find tensions between pro and anti-LNA groups; this volatile situation creates fertile ground for these tensions to reach a boiling point. For example, the release of Qadhafi's son Saif al-Islam by the Zintani Abu Bakir al-Siddiq brigade was vehemently opposed by both Zintan's Military Council and municipality.²² Haftar needs to operate within this combustible system while trying to attract Zintani recruits to the LNA.²³

2. Misrata: strong but fragmented

Libya's third largest city, Misrata, is home to some of the country's most powerful militias. Hardline Misratan forces describe Haftar as a "rogue general",²⁴ and LNA and BAM forces are pitted against each other. Nonetheless, the recent discontent of BAM forces with the PC in Tripoli may eventually open the door for **more flexibility in Misrata's alliances and potential future support for other actors than the PC and GNA.**

Misrata is not a unified revolutionary bastion. For one, it is fragmented between hardline (armed) forces represented by the Misrata Military Council and more moderate (civilian) actors represented by the Municipality Council. Second, several key players in the city, including powerful brigades and Misrata's mayor, support the GNA, which has an influential Misratan businessman as deputy PM. Disagreement exists though over whether Misrata's brigades should prioritize consolidating the GNA's position in Tripoli versus directly confronting the LNA in support of the GNA.²⁵ Finally, there are Misratan forces that side with Khalifa Ghwell's Government of National Salvation in Tripoli, like Salah Badi, a militia leader who played a central role in the Dawn military coalition and

21 Heras (2017). A Look at the Commander of the Zintan Military Council: Who Is Osama al-Juwaili? Militant Leadership Monitor 8 (3). The Jamestown Foundation. <https://jamestown.org/brief/look-commander-zintan-military-council-osama-al-juwaili/>.

22 Assad (2017a). Haftar-led forces hail release of Saif Gaddafi, Zintan city rejects. The Libya Observer. <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/haftar-led-forces-hail-release-saif-gaddafi-zintan-city-rejects>.

23 Massive LNA military graduation ceremony in Zintan. Libya Herald (2017c). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/07/26/massive-lna-military-graduation-ceremony-in-zintan/>.

24 Misrata's militias to join the "Libyan army". Libya Herald (2017d). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/01/30/misratas-militias-to-join-the-libyan-army/>.

25 Risk Report: Libya Scenarios. Assessment Capacities Project. Relief Web (2017). <http://reliefweb.int/report/libya/risk-report-libya-scenarios-23-february-2017>.

rejects the GNA because he sees it as a “western product”.²⁶ Contestation over the unity government in Tripoli and local rivalries between hardliners and moderates resulted in the overthrow of Misrata’s Municipal Council by the Military Council, and a series of armed protests eventually led to the resignation of the mayor of Misrata.²⁷

In addition to conflict in the city itself, there is also still a great deal of Misratan resentment against the LNA and Haftar’s advances in the west.²⁸ Misratan forces comprised most of the BAM that fought on behalf of the Presidential Council (PC), a campaign that came with heavy human losses. A military delegation of BAM was welcomed recently in Qatar for “talks”, to the PC’s dismay.²⁹ The visit is another example of how Libyan military actors overrule political actors with their actions. It can also be interpreted as a sign that the BAM is dissatisfied with the PC’s weak recognition of its sacrifices in the battle against IS, as also expressed by a BAM spokesman,³⁰ and is looking for recognition elsewhere.

At present, however, alliance-formation between Misrata and the LNA seems far off, with the commitment of hardline forces in Misrata to Tripoli’s political institutions. But its internal conflict may make factions in the city more susceptible to cooperation with outside forces down the line, possibly further integration and coordination with the GNS or new ties with the LNA.

-
- 26 Porsia (2014). Q&A: ‘Libya will become a haven for radicals. Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/12/qa-libya-will-become-haven-radicals-201412235130190233.html>; Assad (2017b). Misrata Military Council slaps UN-proposed government as illegitimate and treacherous. The Libya Observer. <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/misrata-military-council-slaps-un-proposed-government-illegitimate-and-treacherous>.
- 27 Ben Ibrahim (2017). Misrata Military Council topples municipality. The Libya Observer. <https://www.libyaobserver.ly/news/misrata-military-council-topples-municipality>.
- 28 Ibrahim (2017). Misrata militia topples city leaders in blow to Libya ‘unity’ plan. Middle East Eye. <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/misrata-based-militias-overthrows-municipal-council-146366016>.
- 29 Al-Bunyan Al-Marsous military delegation from Libya arrives in Qatar. Libyan Express (2017). <http://www.libyanexpress.com/al-bunyan-al-marsous-military-delegation-from-libya-arrives-in-qatar/>.
- 30 [المستشارة نعيمة جبريل: “تعديل الاتفاق السياسي سيأخذ وقت طويل وجولات كثيرة”](http://www.libya-al-mostakbal.org/94/26713/المستشارة%20نعيمة%20جبريل%20:تعديل%20الاتفاق%20السياسي%20سيأخذ%20وقت%20طويل%20وجولات%20كثيرة.html)

3. Tripoli: militia playground

Dozens of militias operate in Tripoli – around 30 in 2016 alone³¹ – with both shifting territories and loyalties.³² For example, Abdel Raouf Kara's armed Special Deterrence Force, or RADA, acts as a Salafist-leaning police and counter-terrorism unit on behalf of the GNA.³³ Other powerful militias, for example the Tripoli Revolutionaries Brigade of Haitham al-Tajouri, are less politically engaged but defend their own interests and often work together to prevent outside forces from entering the city.³⁴ Much of the conflict in Tripoli centers around support for the city's two governments. There are militias that are explicitly supportive of Fayez al-Serraj's GNA, militias that are more ambivalent, and militias that reject the GNA and side with Khalifa Ghwell's Government of National Salvation.

After a period of relative calm earlier this year, clashes between forces aligned with both governments have picked up.³⁵ These inter-militia conflicts have been generated by national political developments. Since the talks between Haftar and Serraj in Abu Dhabi and Paris, the tone of hostility between GNS and GNA forces in Tripoli has increased.³⁶ GNS-allied factions – with Misratan militia leader Salah Badi as their mouthpiece and their most visible public persona – launched Operation Fakhr Libya (Operation Dawn/ Fajr Libya II) with the objective of ridding the city of GNA forces and preventing the LNA from entering, but Fakhr forces were driven out of the city by opposing militias.³⁷ That is not to say that Fakhr's role is played out or that its brigades have given up their goal of taking over Tripoli -- especially since Fakhr Libya was joined by not only Tarhouna's notorious and hardline Islamist Kani Brigade³⁸, but also the Mobile Forces, an Amazigh

31 De Bruijne et al. (2017a). CrisesAlert 1: Challenging the assumptions of the Libyan conflict. The Clingendael Institute. <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/crisesalert-1-challenging-the-assumptions-of-the-libyan-conflict.pdf>.

32 Libya on edge as militias enter Tripoli. Africa News (2017). <http://www.africanews.com/2017/02/11/libya-on-edge-as-militias-enter-tripoli/>.

33 خطاب الاخ عبدالرؤوف كارم شتان بينه وبين عبد الله ناكر 4libyafreedom (2014). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18j4a9gBRMY>

34 Bishr and Tajouri warn no armed force from Zintan to enter Tripoli with refugees. Libya Herald (2017e). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/05/30/warning-no-armed-force-to-enter-tripoli-with-refugees-from-zintan/>.

35 Rival factions clash in Libya's Tripoli. Al Jazeera (2017). <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/05/rival-factions-clash-libya-tripoli-170526154255187.html>.

36 «فخر ليبيا»-عملية عسكرية جديدة في طرابلس-أهدافها وأطرافها» #فخر-ليبيا»-عملية عسكرية جديدة في طرابلس-أهدافها وأطرافها» Afrigate News (2017). <http://www.afrigatenews.net/content//#فخر-ليبيا»-عملية عسكرية جديدة في طرابلس-أهدافها وأطرافها»>

37 Ghwell said his fighters withdrew to prevent further damage in Tripoli. Libya Herald (2017f). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/05/29/ghwell-said-his-fighters-withdrew-to-prevent-further-damage-in-tripoli/>.

38 The Kani Brigade has taken over Tripoli's international airport from Misrata forces before, and recently shut down all roads to Tripoli.

militia group that supports Khalifa Ghwell. Tripoli remains the stage of militia clashes daily, a clear indication GNA forces are still unable to assert control in the wider Tripoli area and that former Dawn forces are still relevant. Fakhri Libya's forces were not included in the Skhirat talks leading up to the Libyan Political Agreement, and they are not included in any of the current negotiation efforts. Should the negotiations between Serraj and Haftar materialize, it is possible that Fakhri forces will intensify their activities and possibly attract more hardline and disenfranchised militias in the process.

4. The Fezzan: tribal turf

The Fezzan is an area where political-military actors from the north of Libya vie for influence (especially control over roads and infrastructure). The conflict between eastern and western authorities is in the south primarily fought by Misrata's Third Force, which nominally acts on behalf of the PC, and armed actors that claim to be loyal to the LNA. Despite a military presence, both parties had to seek local alliances with the tribes of the Fezzan under a pretext of "policing" the area. The Third Force claimed it partnered with the Awlad Suleiman tribe from Sebha and to a lesser extent the Tuareg, whereas pro-LNA forces, like the Zintan tribe, traditionally partnered with the Tebu tribe.³⁹ Partnering in reality largely meant arming and financing young men from the south and forging loose coalitions of convenience. In addition, in a bid to expand his control, Haftar is supporting Sudanese militias and Chadian Tebu opposition groups that have a presence in Libya's south. These actions may further Haftar's interests but they also add another layer of instability in the Fezzan.⁴⁰

Northern factions inserted themselves, their interests, and their conflicts in previously existing competition between southern tribes, which are largely about access to smuggling routes and oil fields.⁴¹ Yet, none of the warring camps from the north have been able to gain real control in the south, implying that none of the national peace agreement attempts are very likely to have a real effect in this part of Libya. For example, despite Haftar's claims that the LNA controls the Fezzan,⁴² there are no eastern or western government security forces in a city like Sebha. Instead, this city is carved up into neighborhoods controlled by local militias tied to the Fezzan's tribes, with none of

39 Murray (2014). Libya's Southern Rivalries. Carnegie Endowment. <http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/57470>.

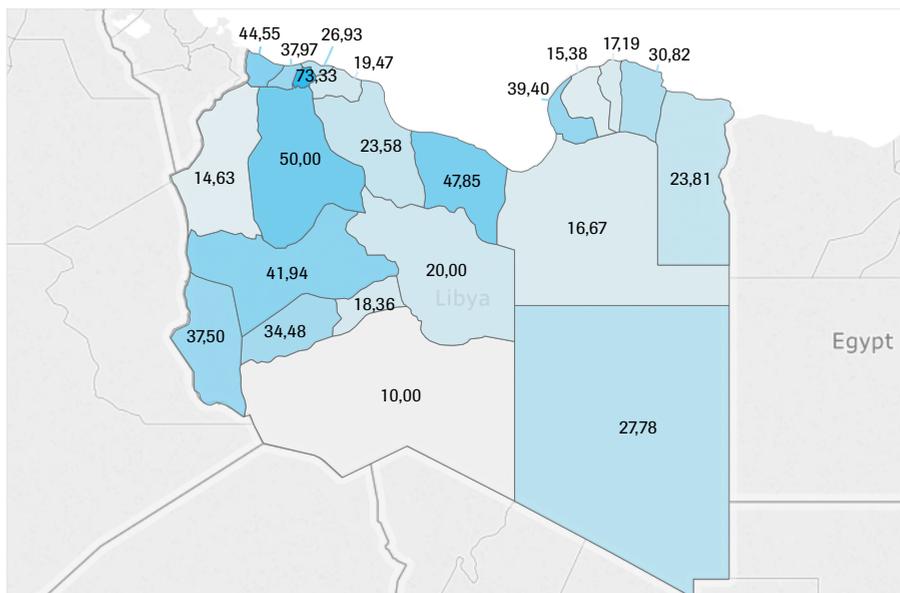
40 De Bruijne et al. (2017b). CrisesAlert 4: Into the bazaar: how the EU can promote security in Libya. The Clingendael Institute (forthcoming).

41 Wehrey (2017). Insecurity and Governance Challenges in Southern Libya. Carnegie Endowment. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/30/insecurity-and-governance-challenges-in-southern-libya-pub-68451>.

42 خليفة حفتر: على السراج "أن يتعد عن العنصرة" ولا وقف إطلاق نار مع الإرهابيين France 24 Arabic (2017). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chpRNewZPA8>.

the groups able to command the whole city.⁴³ The recent move of Tebu militias from Al-Qatroun to close the Niger-Libyan border for human smuggling can be seen as another sign that militias rather than political-military actors from the north are calling the shots locally.⁴⁴

Figure 2 Geographic distribution of allied events in 2016-2017⁴⁵



How EU dealings impact local militias and governance

There are clear indications that EU member states need to develop a stronger sensitivity to local dynamics in Libya. Two examples underscore this point.

43 Gazzini (2017a). Traversing the Tribal Patchwork of Libya's South West. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/traversing-tribal-patchwork-libyas-south-west>.

44 Southern border reported blockaded as Qatrun leader confirms "big" drop in migrants coming from Niger. Libya Herald (2017g). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/09/07/southern-border-reported-blockaded-as-qatrun-leader-confirms-big-drop-in-migrants-coming-from-niger/>.

45 The number of events varies between 1 and 60 per administrative division.

First, from the start it has been difficult to 'bring home' the results of the UN-led Skhirat talks to (hardline) local factions in Libya, and the intended result of avoiding further military confrontation was lost.⁴⁶ Instead, the Skhirat process provided Libyan armed actors with a window of opportunity to consider new strategies and forge new coalitions. Haftar, in particular, managed to reconsider his tactics and consolidate his position as commander of the self-styled LNA and strongman in the East by tying local actors to his cause. In a recent and similar fashion, against the backdrop of Serraj and Haftar's dialogue in Paris, a coalition of Tripoli-based militias instigated Operation Fakhir Libya (Operation Libya Dawn II) with the objective of eliminating the capital of all GNA and LNA allied forces.⁴⁷

Second, the EUs attention for local governance is on the radar of local militias. For example, the primary incentive of the Tebu brigade from Al-Qatroun for closing the Niger-Libyan border for migration seems to be earning recognition and resources from the powerholders in the north.⁴⁸ Other examples are the militias in Sabratha that interceded in order to thwart human smugglers. These militias are co-opted and receive cash, aid and equipment from local municipal authorities, allegedly with EU support, which legitimizes their existence.⁴⁹ Compensating militias as a sort of payoff is risky, not only because it legitimizes them, but also because it provides certain factions with resources and not others, which will only reinforce local divisions and conflict between militias. Recent events in the city of Sabratha are perhaps the clearest example how EU interventions in local Libya are not sensitive enough to the local context. In Sabratha, the Anas al-Dabbashi Brigade forged a EU-sponsored deal with the GNA to block migration from Sabratha in turn for protection, jobs in the security forces and recognition.⁵⁰ Yet this resulted in a backlash from a coalition of fighters called the Anti-ISIS Operations Room (AIOR) who violently expelled the rival Dabbashi Brigade from the city.⁵¹ Hence, the actions by one EU member state (Italy) incentivized the formation of local armed alliances and sparked intra-militia fighting.

46 International Crisis Group (2016). The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a Reset. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/libyan-political-agreement-time-reset>.

47 «فخر ليبيا» - عملية عسكرية جديدة في طرابلس - أهدافها وأطرافها, Afrigate News (2017). <http://www.afrigatenews.net/content/#فخر-ليبيا-عملية-عسكرية-جديدة-في-طرابلس-أهدافها-وأطرافها>

48 Qatrun Tebu brigade clamps down on southern border smuggling. Libya Herald (2017h). <https://www.libyaherald.com/2017/09/11/qatrun-tebu-brigade-clamps-down-on-southern-border-smuggling/>.

49 Dettmer (2017). Italian Government Accused of Paying Libyan Militias to Curb Migrant Trade. VOA News. <https://www.voanews.com/a/italian-government-accused-of-paying-libyan-militias-migrant-trade/4003690.html>.

50 Libya Analysis (2017). Sabratha clashes spark fears of greater conflict. <http://www.libya-analysis.com/sabratha-clashes-spark-fears-of-greater-conflict/>

51 Shennib (2017). Libyan Fighters Say They've Captured Smuggling Hub of Sabratha. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-10-06/libyan-fighters-say-they-ve-captured-smuggling-hub-of-sabratha>.

EU policies therefore risk the formation of (new) local armed alliances and intra-militia fighting. Aside from the moral objection that EU policies benefit local militias, such policy measures also feed a “militia culture”⁵² at the local level which stands in the way of the formation of an effective, civilian-based national government which Europe ostensibly supports.

Conclusions: when international meets local

This Alert has shown that **EU-supported negotiations between national political powerholders need to be sensitive to continuously changing local relations. EU policy interventions at the national and local level may incentivize the creation of new local alliances and strategies of armed groups.**

For one, the contents of any national political agreement cannot be enforced locally without the consent of local militias, but local militias may frustrate a political process if that suits them best. We have seen before that armed groups do not necessarily cater to a political settlement. One of the pitfalls of the 2015 UN-brokered Skhirat agreement was that it intended to resolve the dispute between the House of Representatives in Tobruk and Al-Bayda and the General National Congress (GNC) in Tripoli but failed to involve key security and military actors in the process. **A disconnect emerged between progress at the negotiation table and the reality on the ground, where armed factions further imposed their authority and only aggravated the conflict.**

Moreover, the report has shown that **international support for local governance structures needs to be reconsidered in order to avoid further local conflict.** A much-heard phrase in Libya is that everything is local. Support for local governance structures therefore seems a natural alternative to governmental paralysis at the national level. However, the performance of local councils and municipalities does not happen in a vacuum. Governance competencies are fulfilled by a combination of political, social and security (armed) actors.⁵³ Support for local governance may therefore legitimize and cement the real power of militias who have carved out a role for themselves in local governance provision, which in turn may prevent municipal councils from exercising their lawful powers.

Appreciating the localized nature of Libya's conflicts and a proper understanding of how EU initiatives incentivize local tensions is key to ensure that the EU's and its member

52 Gazzini (2017b). Quick Fixes Won't Block Libya's People Smugglers for Long. International Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/quick-fixes-wont-block-libyas-people-smugglers-long>.

53 Observation expressed at Libya International Peace Forum in Tunis, 6 September 2017.

states' good intentions are not counterproductive – both at the national and the local level. This leads to two policy recommendations:

1. Given that the *de facto* authority in Libya lies with localized armed groups, any effort to mediate between actors at the national level should be driven by a clear understanding of the coalitions supporting them and the fluidity of interests that drives these coalitions. Peace agreements will only reach as far as the power that national actors hold over their local partners to accept these deals.
2. As long as national stability remains out of reach, Libya's future will continue to be determined by a patchwork of local support coalitions. Within such a context, conflict-neutral interventions do not exist. The work of international development efforts supporting local governance can and does strengthen some power holders to the detriment of others. Understanding local power dynamics is critical for making informed decisions about what and who to support.⁵⁴

54 Clingendael's Conflict Research Unit is currently undertaking a research project on the organization and performance of local governance (security and justice provision) throughout Libya, to provide context-specific input for informed policy decisions.