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**REVOLUTIONARIES AND REBELS:  
A CASE STUDY OF ARMED GROUPS IN POST-GADDAFI LIBYA**

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## **METHODOLOGY AND STRUCTURE**

We gathered the information for this work by reviewing existing literature, monitoring daily events and trends in Libya, and conducting in-person interviews with top Libya experts located in Washington, D.C. We performed an extensive review of literature published by think tanks, scholars, and journalists, and verified and expanded upon much of this work through our interviews. We would like to make specific note of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) survey of Libyans. There are limitations on survey data, especially considering the wide range of perceptions, people, and places in Libya. The NDI survey is vulnerable to some criticism about methodology and findings, but this survey is simply the best available information of its kind. The data from this survey is some of the most useful information about public opinion in Libya, and remains a valuable resource. We do share these concerns about the NDI survey and survey data in general, but we attempted to compensate for these shortcomings throughout our research by verifying any relevant findings through other sources.

The most significant limitation of this work is that we could not travel to Libya or other destinations to generate new, primary source information. This reality forced us to rely on secondary or tertiary sources to inform our research. This does not detract from the information in this case study, however. Our interviewees are highly experienced and respected Libya scholars and practitioners. These individuals are well informed on Libya, through research for their own projects, travel to post-revolution Libya, and meetings met with prominent Libyan figures.

We begin our analysis of the effect of armed groups on post-Gaddafi Libya with an overview of modern Libyan history. This section includes a discussion of Gaddafi's rule and a summary of the revolution. We offer this section to provide baseline context for the reader, but

also establish a foundation upon which we build the rest of our analysis. The history of Gaddafi's rule explains the political, economic, and social conditions that gave the Libyans cause to revolt in 2011. The revolution did manage to oust the Colonel, but many of these features continue to influence and react to the armed groups throughout the country. Therefore, Gaddafi's legacy is critical to understanding the underlying relationships between state and society that persist in post-Gaddafi Libya. The brief summary of the revolution explains how these factors influenced the structure of post-revolution Libyan society, and subsequently how this framework formed these armed groups during the war. The origin of the armed groups explains how they developed and why they continued to operate after the fall of Gaddafi. This is the final component of our historical context before we discuss how these armed groups influence the nascent government.

The following section is based largely on the Small Arms Survey, and classifies the armed groups into distinct categories. This lens attempts to disassemble the terms "armed groups" and "militias"<sup>1</sup> to properly identify the distinct nature of different types of armed groups, and classify them according to their behavior, origins, and goals. Accurately categorizing these groups allows us to demonstrate the similarities and differences between the groups, and how these types of groups influence Libya's transition. We describe how the government attempted to integrate these armed groups into the state apparatus. We critically analyze the effectiveness of these programs, and use our discussion of the institutionalized armed groups to introduce our typography of these groups in Libya. The armed groups' incentives, behaviors, and goals shifted over time, and we therefore employ a chronological analysis of the groups and their relationship with the state.

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<sup>1</sup> The term "militia" is widely used to describe all armed groups in Libya. We abstain from using the term for anything beyond a specific subset of all armed groups to provide a nuanced analysis of all of the groups.

This discussion of the typology, history, and relationships between the armed groups and the young government directly frames our analysis of the political impact of armed groups. Here we offer an analysis of the major political events since the fall of Gaddafi through the lens of the influence of the armed groups. Armed groups played a significant role in almost every major political development of post-Gaddafi Libya. We apply our armed group typology to these incidents to demonstrate how and why these groups exert their influence over the weak government.

We follow our discussion of the political impacts of the armed groups on the nascent state with a look at the influence these groups yield over Libya's economy. An analysis of Libya's economy and significant dependence upon natural resource wealth frames the parameters of the economic relationship between state and society in Libya. The armed groups' impact on this system can be measured through both hydrocarbon exports and economic opportunities available to Libyans. We also highlight high profile instances of specific actions taken by armed groups and measure their impact on Libya's economy.

Finally, we conclude our discussion with an analysis of how the prolonged reign of armed groups is affecting Libyan society. This section draws heavily on interviews and survey data in an attempt to gauge public perception of militia groups and Libya's future. We end our paper with a discussion of what the future of Libya's transition might look like, and offer some thoughts about how current policies and practices of both the Libyan government and the international community might affect Libya's future.

## INTRODUCTION

Following the Libyan revolution in 2011, Libyans were optimistic that a new era of freedom and prosperity would replace the repressive rule of Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi. Instead, Libya today is beset by political turmoil, economic hardship, and no established rule of law despite significant natural resource wealth and public support for a democratic government. Libya faces significant challenges in its democratic transition, at the heart of which are the armed groups that have become highly prominent actors in post-revolution Libya. These groups constitute the strongest military force in Libya and continue to wield their influence throughout the entire country. This has resulted in their significant impact on the nation's political, economic, and social development since the revolution. The central government supports and funds many of these groups but is still unable to exercise complete control over them, simultaneously empowering the armed groups, increasing their influence over the nascent state, and aggravating the systemic lack of security.

An important minority of these groups exert their influence over the government by kidnapping politicians, occupying government buildings, or taking control of key economic infrastructure. The primary counterweight to militia activity is deployment of other militias, with varying success, when they are willing to deploy. This situation of militia power over the government has ultimately forced the latter to enact policies that are arguably detrimental to the state and its people. Some armed groups are becoming so entrenched within the state that any attempts to disarm or dismantle them have been futile. This paper will examine the origins and nature of these groups, their relationship to the government and society, and how they have turned Libya into the state it is today.

The political transition remains a period of tremendous opportunity for Libya, despite significant challenges and demoralizing setbacks. There is abundant support for political reform and a successful transition to a democracy. There is widespread distaste for extremism, lawlessness, and instability. There is enough income from the nation's ample natural resource wealth to avoid the economic quagmires that faces Egypt and Tunisia. As one prominent GNC member said, "Goodwill is running the country now, but soon we have to build real institutions with real participation by the people."<sup>2</sup> While Libya today struggles with armed groups and instability, it still has the potential to become a success story in the post-Arab Spring Middle East and North Africa region.

## **GADDAFI'S LEGACY**

One cannot properly contextualize the current political and security environment in Libya without understanding the social and governmental institutions, or lack thereof, which existed under Gaddafi. The eccentric colonel developed his own form of government, which he called the "*Jamahiriya*,"<sup>3</sup> which translates loosely to "people's republic" or "republic of the masses." This system never permitted or fostered an independent political culture, and stymied the development of any real political capacity within Libya. In practice, the *Jamahiriya* created councils at the local level, and built committee on committee up to the national level. These committees remained under the supervision of the regime's Revolutionary Committees<sup>4</sup>, and

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<sup>2</sup> "Beyond Gaddafi: Libya's Governance Context", Mercy Corps, August 2011.

[http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/beyond\\_gaddafi\\_libyas\\_governance\\_context.pdf](http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/beyond_gaddafi_libyas_governance_context.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Vandewalle, Dirk. "*A History of Modern Libya*." Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. Print. 2006, 105.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with William Lawrence, Washington, D.C. 2014.

therefore denied any real political power<sup>5</sup>. The lack of legitimate political influence kept all contentious politics confined to the local level, and even at this level, political organization outside of the regime's system was prohibited<sup>6</sup>. This structure preserved local relationships and allowed local councils, which were often comprised of local tribal leaders, to maintain legitimacy. Like countless dictators before him, Gaddafi's strategy of divide and conquer kept both his political allies and opponents divided. After an assassination attempt in 1993 perpetrated by the military officers of Libya's largest tribe, the Warfalla, Gaddafi reinvigorated tribal identities he had long strived to weaken by inciting, encouraging, and in some cases manufacturing new tribal rivalries.<sup>7</sup> The final piece of the Gaddafi legacy is a culture of economic dependence. He provided significant subsidies for almost all goods in Libya, and paid salaries or gave grants to nearly all Libyans. This kept the population complacent, underdeveloped, and most importantly, dependent upon the state.

Gaddafi never fully implemented his vision of a utopian socialist Libya – the *Jamahiriyya*, for reasons he attributed, among other causes, to Libyans' lack of revolutionary initiative within the system. The system revolved around the idea of local governance, and established basic people's congresses throughout the country. These local bodies were comprised of nearly all adult Libyans within their administrative district and were de facto, but not de jure, subordinate to a higher tier of representative government.<sup>8</sup> This system of "direct democracy" was cumbersome and ineffective, depriving Libyans of political independence. The Councils had

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<sup>5</sup> Freedom House's Freedom in the World rankings consistently determined Libya to be "Not Free," scoring a 7 on a scale of 1-7; 1 being completely free and 7 completely not free.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; Fridé. "Arab Political Systems: Baseline Information and Reforms- Libya." [PDF link](#), page 1. Web, Accessed 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Law 71 prohibited political parties. Ibid, 10.

<sup>7</sup> William Lawrence, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Vandewalle, Dirk. "*A History of Modern Libya*." Cambridge; Cambridge University Press. Print. 2006, 105.

little influence over economic<sup>9</sup> or foreign policy,<sup>10</sup> and Gaddafi limited their scope to the local level. The General People's Congress (GPC) was officially the highest level of government, although deferred on all-important issues and whenever necessary to Gaddafi, his family and his representatives. The lower tiered Congresses' decisions and requests from the government went up the levels of Congressional representation, and could be discussed each year at the General People's Congress. The GPC would elect a Secretariat from its membership that would determine the agenda for the GPC. The Secretariat presented an image of democracy, but the regime actually directly appointed individuals to the Secretariat.<sup>11</sup> Gaddafi also established a Revolutionary Congress, populated and run by his ideological supporters. Together, these two checks on the democratic system and other more nefarious checks acted as valves to shut off the voice of the Libyan people while maintaining, primarily for (limited) domestic consumption, the appearance of a community-influenced socialist state. In sum, this structure and the police state behind it allowed the regime to tightly control the political sphere in Libya, prevented the growth of a political class, and institutionalized national divisions by restricting Libyan politics to the local level.

The legal system and this structure also prevented the growth of nearly all civil society or and the private sector. Gaddafi's "political experiment"<sup>12</sup> depended upon a monopoly of economic activity to subjugate Libya's population. He enacted a nationalization policy derived from the statement, *al-bait li sakininihi* (The house belongs to he who lives in it)<sup>13</sup> – essentially,

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<sup>9</sup> Gaddafi actually granted the Basic People's Congresses control over most economic activity on the local level – small businesses, cafes, shops - as part of his socialist, ideology. These businesses and services represented a mere fraction of Libya's GDP, unlike the oil and banking sector, which both remained firmly under the control of the Gaddafi regime. Vandewalle, 107.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 107.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 106.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

that all things in Libya should be owned by all Libyans. This justified state ownership of all economic activity in Libya, rupturing the private sector and fostering economic dependence on the state.

A substantial system of government subsidies is certainly one Gaddafi-era institution to have survived the revolution. He utilized the country's enormous oil wealth to buy stability, win allies, and to repress political rivals.<sup>14</sup> This is a common strategy for authoritarian regimes with such abundant wealth. The oil rents and government subsidized goods and services have become deeply ingrained in Libyan society. These included free electricity and substantial subsidies for cars, homes, and food. The state also provided financial incentives for marriage and childbirth and would pay unemployed Libyans a salary equal to that of the average wage in Libya.<sup>15</sup>

The majority of Libyan oil comes from the oil fields in the eastern region. Many in this region believe that when Gaddafi sold oil from the East and invested the revenue in the West, he actually robbed them of their own wealth. They correctly viewed this practice in the context of a broader campaign against people from historical Cyrenaica – the eastern province of Libya dating back to antiquity – a deliberate effort to deprive it of resources in order to maintain the superior position of Gaddafi's patronage network in the West.

Gaddafi's legacy is more than an entitlement culture. In the eastern region<sup>16</sup> of Libya and its second largest city, Benghazi, memories of oppression are fresh and painful. Gaddafi's tribal heritage is based in central Libya and his tribal network is concentrated in a remote eastern part of Libya's western region. From the administrative capital in his home region of Sirte, he wielded full control of the nation's oil revenue, which he used to solidify support. Gaddafi

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<sup>14</sup> Vandewalle, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Mercy Corps, The Governance Network. *Beyond Gaddafi: Libya's Governance Context*. 2011, Web. [http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/beyond\\_gaddafi\\_libyas\\_governance\\_context.pdf](http://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/beyond_gaddafi_libyas_governance_context.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> The Eastern region of Libya is commonly referred to as Cyrenaica, but this is not an official designation.

cracked down on the East after a series of challenges to his authority His response included arbitrary detention, torture, and other human rights violations.<sup>17</sup> Gaddafi intended for these tactics to crush any dissent or resistance in the East. This naturally increased resentment in the East, which only motivated the Colonel to employ harsher methods<sup>18</sup>. Gaddafi also invested significantly more into developing Tripoli than anywhere in the East.<sup>19</sup> Vandewalle also noted, “Remember that Libya was kind of artificially created in 1951... From the beginning there were issues with that partnership and that increased even further when oil was discovered that kind of straddled both provinces.”<sup>20</sup>

Gaddafi’s oppression is well remembered by all Libyans who lived during his rule, but easterners still harbor greater resentment toward the west from throughout modern Libyan history. During the Gaddafi era, although Libyans all suffered corruption, oppression, and international isolation at the leader’s hands, the eastern part of Libya often faced the most severe abuse. Following forty-two years of oppression after the fall of the monarchy, the people of Benghazi and historical Cyrenaica instigated the revolution and quickly united with their fellow countrymen to stand against the colonel and his violent revolutionary committees.

## **THE 2011 REVOLUTION**

The protests that spread from North Africa throughout the Middle East, commonly known as the Arab Spring, filled hundreds of millions with hope of a democratic future for the region. Mass demonstrations filled the streets of every capital from Rabat to Manama, with

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Abdel Salaam Madi, Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with William Lawrence, Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Abdel Salaam Madi, Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Dziadosz, 2011.

protests spreading to eighteen Arab countries and beyond.<sup>21</sup> These movements crashed against the bedrock of the entrenched and corrupt authoritarian regimes that dominated the region for the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the wake of centuries of colonial and imperial domination. The calls for political reform and regime change resonated with Libyans, who saw their neighbors in Egypt and Tunisia challenging their own respective dictators.<sup>22</sup> On February 15, 2011, inspired by similar events in neighboring countries, large, peaceful protests began in Benghazi and other cities demanding political and social reforms.<sup>23</sup> Gaddafi had a low tolerance for the public protests and, unlike the other North African strongmen, managed to unleash the full extent of his military apparatus on the demonstrators.<sup>24</sup> In Benghazi, the Libyan military slaughtered over 1000 protestors within a week of the initial demonstrations, but Benghazi remained undaunted.<sup>25</sup>

The savagery of Gaddafi's response quickly pushed the protest movement into rebellion, galvanizing protestors all across the country. The rebels were militarily outmatched; the regime's forces had superior technology, training, and funding. The increasing death toll grabbed the attention of the international community. One month after the beginning of the revolution, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, authorizing a NATO no-fly zone.<sup>26</sup> The international coalition supporting the rebels included 17 countries, which aided them against Gaddafi by striking ground targets and conducting bombing operations against the regime. As the civil war raged, the rebels organized themselves into a transition government called the National Transitional Council (NTC); it became the opposition

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with William Lawrence, Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>22</sup> Lynch, Marc. *The Arab Uprising: The Unfinished Revolutions of the New Middle East*. New York: Public Affairs Publishing, 2012. Print. Page 112.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 167.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 1973*. March 17, 2013. Web.  
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>

government of Libya. Despite efforts, the revolutionaries never established an effective central command during the revolution and instead operated as distinct groups with a common goal – the fall of the regime.

Both transition governments – the National Transition Council (NTC) and General National Congress (GNC) lacked the legitimacy and capacity to fully control revolutionary military forces and failed to reestablish a monopoly on the use of force within Libya. After the fighting ended in October 2011, elections were held in July 2012 at which time the NTC handed over power to the elected GNC. The GNC would have 18 months to set the country on track, and this mandate would expire in December 2013<sup>27</sup>. The nascent government could not enforce the rule of law and instead attempted to cultivate cooperative relationships with some of the revolutionary brigades to help provide security. Many brigades decided to cooperate with the GNC, while still pursuing their own interests on the side. Others were less confident and willing to trust the GNC and continued to operate outside of any formal system. This complicated power dynamic between cooperative armed groups, unaffiliated militias, and failed to strengthen the already weak government.

## **THE RISE OF THE ARMED GROUPS**

The various armed groups in Libya are collectively the most powerful actors operating in the state today. Those that formed during the revolution were largely autonomous, self-armed and self-trained, receiving a modicum of support from the National Transitional Council (NTC) or foreign governments. These municipality-based groups are largely the result of preexisting local networks based on the individual members' neighborhood, village, or kinship networks.

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<sup>27</sup> “Libya congress extends its mandate until end-2014”, Middle East Institute, December 23, 2013. <http://www.mei.edu/content/libya-congress-extends-its-mandate-until-end-2014>

Most of these groups are rooted in local geography, best identified by their relationship to specific towns or regions, rather than ideology, ethnicity, or tribal allegiances.<sup>28</sup> After the war, these groups consolidated control over tracts of local territory working with local military and civilian municipal councils. The revolutionaries eschewed what few state institutions did exist under Gaddafi, and these armed groups assumed the roles of the security sector. They recognized the state's serious lack of military and security capabilities and clung to their arms. The individuals that organized these groups usually did so with good intentions; many held onto their weapons in order to provide protection for themselves, their families, and their local communities.<sup>29</sup>

Well-intentioned groups are not precluded from pursuing rational political and economic self-interest, however. Libyans quickly calculated that their keeping their weapons to preserve their independence – at least until a new political system could be established – would be the best way to safeguard both the revolution and to ensure their voice in post-Gaddafi Libya.<sup>30</sup> The actual number of armed groups in Libya is unknown, but most sources believe this number well exceeds 500.<sup>31</sup> The majority of these groups are comprised of anywhere between 200 to 1500 members.<sup>32</sup> There are some brigades and coalitions, such as the Libyan Shield Forces throughout the country and the Misrata Brigades, which are considerably larger and

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<sup>28</sup> “Holding Libya Together: Security Challenges After Gaddafi”, International Crisis Group, December 14, 2011. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/115-holding-libya-together-security-challenges-after-Gaddafi.aspx>

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Fiona Mangan, Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Christina Murtaugh, Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>31</sup> McQuinn, Brian, “After the Fall: Libya’s Evolving Armed Groups”, Small Arms Survey, October 2012. 17-18. This number is impossible to verify, due to a lack of reliable data. The actual number may even be higher.

<sup>32</sup> McQuinn, 2012.

whose membership is in the tens of thousands.<sup>33</sup> These larger groups are significantly more powerful and therefore wield far more influence in the country than the smaller organizations.

A comprehensive typology is critical to understanding the development and influence of these armed groups. The reality is that these groups have distinct origins, goals, and employ different strategies and tactics to achieve them. One cannot simply describe all of these organizations as “militias.” We seek here to illuminate the distinctions between the various type of armed groups in Libya, and thus analyze how each type of armed group is impacting the political development of the post-Gaddafi state.

The Small Arms Survey report on Libya identifies four types of non-state armed groups in the country. The first they define as revolutionary brigades, which formed early on in the war and have a high level of cohesion and allegiance to their leaders. Revolutionary brigades are by far the largest non-state armed groups in Libyan, accounting for approximately 75 to 85 percent of all experienced fighters and weaponry not controlled by the state<sup>34</sup>. These fighters possess significant fighting experience, are the best armed of any group, and are closely integrated with local authorities and associations. Members of these brigades range in age from 15-65 and include students, private sector workers, public sector employees, professionals, and the previously unemployed.<sup>35</sup> Often, these revolutionary brigades are coalitions of smaller brigades from the same geographic location under a single organization. The Al-Zintan Revolutionaries’ Military Council and Misrata Brigades are the two prominent examples of revolutionary brigades operating in Libya today.

These brigades are characterized by some level of cooperation or integration into the state security apparatus. The process by which these groups integrated or partnered with the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> McQuinn, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

government has created a vicious circle, simultaneously weakening the government and its efforts to build up its own forces and all but institutionalizing these brigades in the new Libya. Although some argue there was a security vacuum after Gaddafi fell, we instead posit what actually occurred was an institutional vacuum – specifically security, judicial, and political institutions.<sup>36</sup> The process by which the National Transitional Council and the General National Congress partnered and integrated these groups allowed them to fill the institutional vacuum.

These successive bodies attempted to bring these armed groups under state control in order to provide the required forces to reestablish the rule of law by paying a salary to cooperative armed groups. Nearly all armed groups in Libya are authorized and encouraged to aid in stabilizing the country, serving as auxiliary forces for a state that has no effective military for itself.<sup>37</sup> The lack of state forces left the transition governments no choice but to rely on these armed groups for security. Some of the armed groups became part of the primarily urban Supreme Security Councils (SSC). These Councils provide much of the manpower and organizational backbone of the de facto Libyan police apparatus, notwithstanding that there are thousands of salaried Libyan police officers in various states of disarray. These police officers lack the legitimacy and capacity to conduct arrests, investigate crimes, and apply the rule of law.<sup>38</sup> The Supreme Security Councils theoretically bolster or replace moribund state capacity by policing the cities. These SSC groups are typically young men who fought in the revolution and are poorly educated. They have never received any training from the government or police on how to conduct police work, adding to the cycle of government and community dependence upon armed groups.

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Christina Murtaugh. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Lawrence, William, “Libya’s Volunteer Peacekeepers”, *Foreign Policy*, September 24, 2012. [http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/09/24/libyas\\_volunteer\\_peacekeepers](http://mideastafrica.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/09/24/libyas_volunteer_peacekeepers)

<sup>38</sup> Many police officers are viewed as illegitimate because they are not in militias, an indication of the systemic lack of trust for the formalized security sector.

This complex SSC-police relationship manifests itself in a variety of ways. State police were fearful to be walking the streets, especially in the first 12-18 months after the revolution. So they were more than willing to leave the field police work to the SSCs. SSCs are better linked to the local communities and attempt, without police training, to investigate and enforce the rule of law. A community member might contact a friend or relative working in a local SSC after someone stole his car, and this SSC individual would then mobilize his local SSC network to go and investigate the case. Not only are these young men are not trained on proper police procedure or due process, but they often engage in unlawful arrests, arbitrary detention, and in some cases, torture to obtain confessions.<sup>39</sup> The accused is then brought to the police officer sitting in his office, who asks the SSC to turn over the evidence that proves they have the right man. The police are attempting to institutionalize sound police practices and ensure the implementation of a fair judicial system, but the SSCs do not fully comprehend why their tactics are not acceptable or why the police officer in many cases will not process the case. This response from the police reinforces popular perceptions that the state is corrupt, weak, and unwilling to prosecute criminals. This then encourages more people to rely on armed groups to provide security, decreases community perceptions of the Libyan state, and perpetuates incidences of extra-judicial arrests and punishment.<sup>40</sup> These arrests and punishments highlight the need to increase community security. This results in additional state funding for SSCs, and therefore perpetuates systemic insecurity.

This program failed to meaningfully improve state influence over the militias, and created much deeper institutional problems for the nascent democracy. The armed groups established their own command and control structures during the revolution. The primary failure

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Fiona Mangan. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

of the militia integration program is that the state actually institutionalized the power structure of these militias as by integrating them as cohesive groups and not as individuals.<sup>41</sup>

The second type of armed group in Libya is an unregulated brigade, which account for less than five percent of all armed groups in Libya. These groups are revolutionary brigades that broke away from the authority of local councils late in the war.<sup>42</sup> Unregulated brigades developed similarly to revolutionary brigades, but chose not to integrate with local military councils.<sup>43</sup> Unlike some of the well-intentioned local armed groups or the revolutionary brigades who tend to share some common interest with the government, the unregulated brigades often have divergent goals.<sup>44</sup> Unregulated brigades preserve more autonomy over their activities, but also typically costing them legitimacy.<sup>45</sup> There are far fewer of these groups than revolutionary brigades, but they typically operate beyond the law<sup>46</sup> However, despite the fact that these groups operate without any supervisory authority, their actions can be constrained by the social expectations of their constituencies. But this check on their practices has its limits. For example, unregulated brigades have been responsible for a much higher number of human rights abuses than other types of groups.<sup>47</sup>

Another main type of armed groups are the post-revolutionary brigades, which formed to provide local security services in towns after the revolution, and typically in towns that supported the regime during the 2011 civil war. These post-revolutionary brigades constitute approximately 5-10% of the total number of armed groups in Libya. Unlike the other brigades,

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<sup>41</sup> The state struck deals with militia leaders, or entire militias, rather than bringing their members under the command of a state agency.

<sup>42</sup> McQuinn, 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 21-24.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Karim Mezran. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>45</sup> "Committed to Democracy and Unity: Public Opinion Survey in Libya", National Democratic Institute and JMW Consulting, March 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>47</sup> McQuinn, 2012.

these groups formed quickly to fill immediate security roles after the conflict and therefore do not have the same level of cohesion, allegiance, or experience. The distinction is these groups formed after the revolution, and not during. Therefore, their command and control structures are less clearly defined and often more open to partnership with the government.<sup>48</sup> Lacking the same military capabilities and experience as other groups, they have slightly closing this gap by participating in post-revolution conflict.<sup>49</sup> They are also more prone to inter-communal violence based on ethnicity, religious, tribal, or local ties, and even split between themselves on these issues due to their lesser internal cohesion. In some ways, a subset of these groups are vestiges of the Gaddafi family's failed tribal strategies in 2011 in defense of the regime.

The last major armed group typology is militias, which account for roughly 5% of all armed groups. The Small Arms Survey study categorizes militias as a collection of armed groups ranging from criminal networks to violent extremists. Militias often lack both the support of a specific geographic community and integration or cooperation with local authorities.<sup>50</sup> They have little fighting experience and limited ongoing access to official stocks of weaponry. These groups are a small percentage of all armed groups in Libya, estimated at less than 5%, but they primarily operate outside the law and have been increasing the number of violent attacks since early 2012.<sup>51</sup> Groups such as AQIM, Ansar al-Sharia, criminal gangs, and smuggling networks can all be included within this category.

There are several specific armed groups worth exploring in greater detail. The first is the Libyan army itself. The Libyan army split during the revolution and remains weak. Only recently did it become even a remotely relevant force. The army is experiencing a significant shortage of

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Fiona Mangan. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>49</sup> McQuinn, 30.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 32.

experienced soldiers. Many of the trained and experienced soldiers went to fight with other armed groups or simply fled because they served under Gaddafi. The United States, NATO, and other Western countries have begun providing training for new soldiers and facilitating their incorporation to the new army. This process will take years—likely more than a decade—and the Army is unlikely to be an effective fighting force in the near future.<sup>5253</sup>

Another state-controlled group is the National Security Directorate (NSD). This is the Libyan police force, formed from several militias and other provisional armed groups. The NSD reports directly to the Interior Ministry and is deployed throughout the country performing duties such traffic enforcement, criminal investigations, and providing security for public buildings. The NSD is similar to the previously discussed Supreme Security Committees and consequently play a similar role in the state security cycle.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps one of the largest and most important state-affiliated armed groups is the Libya Shield Force (LSF). The LSF is an umbrella group comprised of smaller militias from western and central Libya, including the Misrata brigades. It was intended to integrate former rebel and militia fighters into a national force under the Defense Ministry. However, militia commanders created the LSF to prevent their units from being incorporated into the regular Libyan army.<sup>55</sup> It also allowed them to preserve the structure and cohesion of these groups within the Shield Forces. The government deployed this force to quell ethnic, tribal and local fighting throughout

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<sup>52</sup> “Guide to Key Libyan Militias and Other Armed Groups”, BBC News, November 28, 2013. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-19744533>

<sup>53</sup> Lawrence, William, “Against the Odds: The Black Swans of Libya’s Arab Spring”, World Politics Review, July 23, 2013. <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13112/against-the-odds-the-black-swans-of-libya-s-arab-spring>

<sup>54</sup> BBC, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> This is an illustrative example of how the militia commanders’ preferences supersede state prerogatives.

the country, with mixed results.<sup>56</sup> The Shield Forces have quickly become one of the most powerful forces in the country, due in part to the significant government salaries paid to their members. These salaries are often higher than what state policemen or army recruits could hope to earn.<sup>57</sup> The LSF has clashed with other government-funded forces in the past and caused problems for the Libyan government.

The two most prominent of the larger revolutionary forces that formed during the revolution are coalitions of brigades from the Western cities of Zintan and Misrata. The Al-Zintan Revolutionaries' Military Council, more commonly known as the Zintan brigades, formed in May 2011 as a collective force representing the smaller militias from Zintan and the Nafusa Mountains in Western Libya. It is by far one of the strongest and most influential armed groups in Libya, and even controls various media outlets, including a satellite television channel, Libya al-Watan. The Zintan brigades have entrenched themselves in Tripoli and other key areas in Western Libya by occupying Gaddafi-era military bases, former ministry buildings, and other easily defensible facilities.<sup>58</sup> As security degraded in the capital, the U.S. embassy and the GNC have relied on their security umbrella in 2013 and 2014

The other large coalition of revolutionary brigades hails from the western city of Misrata. Following the collapse of Gaddafi's regime, it was estimated that the Misratan Brigades had more than 200 armed groups under it and approximately 40,000 members. This brigade is one of the strongest in the country, possessing a large number of tanks and heavy weaponry.<sup>59</sup> The government and population of Tripoli forced the group out of Tripoli after a series of deadly clashes with protesters in November 2013, but is still deployed throughout central and western

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<sup>56</sup> Wehrey, Frederic, "The Battle for Benghazi", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 28, 2014. <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/02/28/battle-for-benghazi/h23t>

<sup>57</sup> Wehrey, 2014.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Frederick Wehrey. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>59</sup> BBC, 2013.

Libya.<sup>60</sup> Some Misratan brigades, including the main coalition known as the Misratan Brigades, are part of the Libyan Shield Forces and largely cooperate with the central government. Even amongst these government-sponsored groups, conflicts and competition frequently arise. Zintan and Misrata brigades have clashed in the past, most notably during Ramadan in 2013 when they both attempted to seize government property.<sup>61</sup> Other groups have had minor skirmishes over territory, resources, or simply to settle old scores.

Another segment of armed groups and political networks in Libya are the “Islamists.” Many Libyans claim the dysfunction in Tripoli stems from secret Islamist coalitions, working behind the scenes to derail the state and claim power à la Tunisia or Egypt. Some even argue that the criminal and violent armed groups are affiliates of extremist Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda. In a sense, Islamists have become a type of scapegoat in post-Gaddafi Libya. The reality is that these groups and networks, although they do exist, are nowhere near as powerful or comprehensive as popular opinion or international media might suggest. First, we must dismiss the idea that radical Islamists are dominating Libya – this is false. The reality is because of the rampant distrust for Islamist groups, their activities and influence are severely limited. Libyans are already socially conservative and are not interested in being told how to practice their faith, and so many of the Islamists that do operate within Libya choose to disguise their affiliations or risk losing whatever political capital they have.

The Islamist “problem” exists primarily in eastern Libya, and these groups require the support of sympathetic networks to facilitate their operations. One such Islamist group is the February 17<sup>th</sup> Martyrs Brigade, a Benghazi-based group that is largely Islamist in its ideology,

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<sup>60</sup> “Libya Clashes: Misrata militia ordered out of Tripoli”, BBC News, November 18, 2013.  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-24982399>

<sup>61</sup> Gall, Carlotta, “Show of Power by Libya Militia in Kidnapping”, New York Times, October 13, 2013.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/world/africa/libya.html?pagewanted=2&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/world/africa/libya.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0)

and believed to be one of the largest and best-armed groups in eastern Libya. The February 17<sup>th</sup> Brigade is one of the many groups funded by the Ministry of Defense and has been tasked with security and maintaining order in the eastern and southern areas of Libya.

Despite the ample funding and support these groups receive from the Libyan government—at least on paper, as there have been huge delays in payments prompting brigades to “visit” the GNC and the Prime Minister’s office with regularity and with their weaponry—they remain one of the most significant challenges to the government. The Zintan militia, for example, has issued ultimatums and threatened coups against the central government, and others have kidnapped politicians in the capital. Another, the Supreme Revolutionaries’ Council, a coalition of militias, Islamists, and disgruntled politicians from Misrata, was part of the group that laid siege government ministries and forced the passing of a “political isolation” (or exclusion) law in April 2013.<sup>62</sup> This group was organized by Wissam bin Humayd, commander of the Benghazi-based Libya Shield group, which operates under the Ministry of Interior. This shows that even though these groups may be sponsored and funded by the government, they will on occasion go against it and pursue their own interests.

On the other end of the spectrum are the armed groups that actively oppose and undermine the central government. These groups constitute a tiny percentage of the total armed groups in Libya, but maintain the potential to severely hamper the state, for example through spectacular “terrorist” attacks. One significant example of how these groups exert influence over the government in Tripoli comes out of the eastern federalist movement and its self-described “leader” Ibrahim Jedhran. Jedhran was the head of the Petroleum Facilities Guards, a government body reporting to the Oil Ministry created in 2012 to help protect Libya’s oil

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<sup>62</sup> Wehrey, 2014.

facilities from external forces.<sup>63</sup> However, Jedhran accused the central government of corruption in the sale of oil and imposed a blockade on Libya's oil export centers. Jedhran and his several thousand men then joined with the eastern federalist movement, which seized several eastern Libyan ports and cut off oil exports for eight months.<sup>64</sup> Jedhran feels that he is defending the revolution from those within the government; however, his actions have had the effect of weakening the state.

Another such opposition group is Ansar al-Sharia of Benghazi, a Salafi group. Ansar al-Sharia of Benghazi stands accused of orchestrating and conducting the attack on the US Consulate and the murder of Ambassador Christopher Stevens on September 11, 2012; what is known for sure is that members of it were present during the attack by a confluence of different groups and individuals, including other Benghazi-based Islamist groups.<sup>65</sup> Prior to the attack, Ansar al-Sharia provided security throughout Benghazi, including at one of the city hospitals. They were chased out of the city by popular protest following the consulate attack, but have since returned to service on multiple occasions, only to be sent away again.. Many believe, particularly in terrorist tracking communities and "industry" in the United States that often overemphasize tenuous linkages between terror groups, that the group engages in terrorist activities in the east and has links to Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other Islamic extremist groups in the North Africa region.<sup>66</sup>

There are a variety of reasons for Libyans to join armed groups. Many of the original militia members during the revolution joined because of local affiliations. Nearly all militias

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<sup>63</sup> BBC, 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Khalidi, Suleiman and Shennib Ghaith, "Factbox: Libya's Rival Militia Groups", Reuters, October 10, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/10/10/us-libya-armed-groups-idUSBRE99900620131010>

<sup>65</sup> Kirkpatrick, David, "A Deadly Mix in Benghazi", New York Times, December 28, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/projects/2013/benghazi/#/?chapt=0>

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Abdel Salaam Madi. Washington, D.C. 2014.

formed within villages, towns, and urban neighborhoods and were then sometimes deployed to other areas in the country, and in particular the Zintani and Misratan Brigades. Individuals felt the need to form these groups to protect their homes and fight against Gaddafi's forces. However, since the end of the civil war the reasons for Libyans to join these groups have changed. The numbers in these militias have grown rapidly because they offer employment and better financial opportunities than working for the state or private industry. Membership in armed groups swelled since the National Transition Council began paying them. Some estimates suggest that only 30% of the fighters in these groups actually fought in the war, and the rest joined at some point in the weeks, months, and years following the revolution.<sup>67</sup> The financial reasons for regular Libyans to do this are clear. Unemployment in Libya is high and there are few economic opportunities available, especially for youth. Monthly salaries for a colonel in the Libyan army are approximately 1000 dinars (approximately \$800 USD), whereas a militia member can earn around 1900 dinars (~\$1500 USD).<sup>68</sup> Other sources suggest militias will pay up to three times as much as jobs with the Libyan police or army.<sup>69</sup> The decision is often easier than that for most Libyans – instead of choosing between two options, many simply register for multiple armed groups and collect multiple salaries.<sup>70</sup> Proper oversight over these groups is beyond the current government's capacity. Furthermore, many of these members have no particular regional or ideological loyalty to these groups and are simply trying to earn a living and provide for their families. As one Libyan official in Tripoli said, "If the Libyan government said tomorrow that it was going to pay fishermen, then everyone would become fishermen."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Christina Murtaugh. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Interview with Frederic Wehrey. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Christina Murtaugh. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Fiona Mangan. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Wehrey, 2014.

The militias offer the best salaries and therefore are able to attract more members at the expense of Libyan private and public sectors.

The capabilities of these groups can vary greatly as well. Some of the larger revolutionary brigades and coalitions have a wide variety of arms and resources at their disposal. These groups looted many of the Gaddafi-era armories, and consequently some of these groups possess significant firepower. The Zintan and Misrata brigades are both believed to have tanks and heavy weapons plundered from large weapon caches throughout the country. Smaller, local groups are more limited in their capabilities and typically only possess only small arms and some armed vehicles. Few, if any, of these groups can be compared to a foreign military, however. One example of the lack of professionalism and capacity of these groups is the March 2014 incident with the North Korean oil tanker. The GNC imposed a blockade around the eastern port of Sidra to prevent the ship from leaving Libya with oil purchased through non-state channels, but due to weather and limited capacity the government was unable to prevent the tanker from entering the open seas. A group from the Misratan brigade, lacking naval training and technology, attempted to stop the tanker by loading weapons-mounted vehicles onto tugboats and firing anti-tank missiles at it while at sea.<sup>72</sup> This anecdote highlights the limited capabilities of the armed groups, as well as the Libyan military's weakness and lack of a reliable command and control structure.

In conclusion, Libya's armed groups are far and away the most powerful military forces in the country. They face little opposition from the state military or police forces, and the government is dependent upon them to provide security and uphold the rule of law throughout most of the country. Although they do not collectively enjoy popular support from the majority

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<sup>72</sup> Hauslohner, Abigail, "Libya's absurdist anarchy, as told by two militias", Washington Post, April 14, 2014. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/04/14/libyas-absurdist-anarchy-as-told-by-two-militias/>

of the population, the financial benefits of joining one of these groups far outweigh the costs in the minds of most Libyans. The size and power of these groups provide them considerable influence on the direction of the Libyan state, and they have used this influence to affect its political and economic development on numerous occasions, often to the detriment of the democratic process.

### **EFFECT ON THE POLITICAL TRANSITION**

The Libyan armed groups have had a significant impact on the country's political development in the wake of the revolution. The central government's inability to exercise control over the various armed militias has contributed to their empowerment in influencing the direction of state policies and simultaneously bolstering and undermining the overall security situation in the country. Even though these militias may cooperate with the government on certain issues, they will ultimately pursue their own interests if the actions of the GNC threaten them. Militias have utilized a variety of tactics in order to achieve their political goals, including assassinations, boycotts, kidnappings, storming government ministries, and seizing territory. Militias have often and aggressively intervened in the state-building process, to the point of taking former Prime Minister Zeidan hostage in order to push their agendas. It is important to understand the development of the post-revolutionary state institutions in order to see why these armed groups have been able to exert as much influence as they have on them.

Just as armed uprisings against Libyan leader Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi began in early 2011, and following the fall of Libya's east in a largely non-violent collapse of the Jamahiriya state in the east on an Arab spring model, the National Transitional Council (NTC) was formed in Benghazi to serve as the country's official opposition organization and governing body. The NTC was quickly recognized by the French government on March 10, 2011, and by

the United States on July 15, providing it added legitimacy both internationally and domestically.<sup>73</sup> The NTC was comprised of new militia groups, defected former regime officials, and tribal leaders. In October 2011, after months of a NATO-led air campaign, military victory in Tripoli in August, and the death of Gaddafi, the NTC declared Libya to be officially “liberated” and pledged to turn the country into a pluralist, democratic state.<sup>74</sup>

The NTC faced considerable challenges after the defeat of the Gaddafi regime. There was a near complete breakdown of civil order due to the civil war and lack of police and other enforcement groups throughout the country. Rebel forces and armed militias were not beholden to the commands of the NTC. These groups proliferated and strengthened rapidly in the disarray after the conflict, allowing them to consolidate control in cities and regions.

The NTC had to address rebuilding the economy, which had been crippled by the civil war. Fortunately, Libya’s oil facilities had been protected and maintained during the conflict, making a quick economic turnaround look possible. The NTC had to create functioning government institutions and direct the transition to democracy and the rule of law.<sup>75</sup> These were ambitious goals for the NTC, especially due to the lack of democratic tradition in Libya and decades of repressive rule by the Gaddafi regime.

However, the NTC failed to address most of the challenges it faced. Economic and ethnic clashes threatened to derail the revolution. Security and the issue of armed groups remained a serious concern to the country’s and the region’s stability. However, the NTC did successfully guide Libya along a path to democracy, and on July 7, 2012, held an election for the new

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<sup>73</sup> Bellinger III, John B., “U.S. Recognition of Libyan Rebels Raises Legal Questions”, *The Atlantic*, July 18, 2011. <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/07/us-recognition-of-libyan-rebels-raises-legal-questions/242120/>

<sup>74</sup> “Libya Profile”, *BBC News*, March 18, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13754897>

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

General National Congress (GNC), a 200-member assembly that would replace the NTC.<sup>76</sup> The election turnout was a massive success for the country and indicative of the feelings of optimism held by the population after the revolution. In total, approximately 2.8 million Libyans out of 3.5 million potential voters registered to vote in the GNC elections, 1.3 million of which were women.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, more than 2600 people ran as independent candidates and over 1200 ran as party candidates, including 634 women candidates.<sup>78</sup> The turnout showed the public's support for the democratic process, as well as the improved role for women in the post-Gaddafi state.

The GNC took control of the government on August 8, 2012, and was tasked with several duties. First, it was to appoint a new prime minister within 30 days of its first session. The GNC first selected Mustafa Abushagur in September 2012, but he resigned soon after due to his inability to get a cabinet approved. The second prime minister elected was Ali Zeidan, a GNC member and human rights lawyer, who was sworn into office in November. The GNC had several other tasks as well, including forming a body to draft a new constitution, holding a national referendum on that constitution, and planning official parliamentary elections for a later date.<sup>79</sup> Thus far the GNC has failed to make sufficient progress on any of these tasks, which has resulted in growing disillusionment and resentment of the government among the population.

The largest problem facing the Libyan transition so far, while nonetheless protecting it, has been the armed groups operating throughout the country. The NTC and GNC both have

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<sup>76</sup> "Elections in Libya: 7 July General National Congress Elections- Frequently Asked Questions", Libya Herald, June 30, 2012. <http://www.libyaherald.com/2012/06/30/elections-in-libya-july-7-general-national-congress-elections-frequently-asked-questions/#axzz2xqG9TtDo>

<sup>77</sup> "Libyans turn out to vote in landmark elections, women's role lauded", United Nations Development Programme, July 10, 2012. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2012/07/10/libyans-turn-out-to-vote-in-landmark-elections-women-s-role-lauded/>

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> "Q&A: Libya's General National Congress", BBC News, July 7, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-18341022>

attempted to rein in these various armed groups since the end of the war, with poor results. Part of the reason lies with the actions of these governing bodies themselves. As noted above, the NTC granted official recognition to a large number of these groups to carry out policing duties. It also, due to direct pressure applied by the militias, gave them immunity for crimes carried out during the revolution and in its defense after. The GNC followed a similar path as the NTC, sanctioning the actions of government-affiliated armed groups to police and secure certain areas and also seize suspected individuals without due process.<sup>80</sup> The GNC has also been funding most of the armed groups in the country, paying them, or promising to pay them, millions of dollars to provide security. Not only has this further strengthened and empowered these groups—including to collect on government debts by force—it has undermined the state security forces, made it more difficult to disband these groups in the future and placed further strain on state finances.

These policies did make some sense early on after the revolution. The army and police forces were scattered and in disarray. Many officers and soldiers had defected, fled, been killed or jailed, and those that remained lacked the necessary equipment to carry out their duties. The rebel groups were well-armed and unwilling to surrender their weapons or come under full state control. The NTC chose to essentially subcontract security to the larger armed groups, under the umbrella of the Libyan Shield Forces, Supreme Security Committee, and other entities since the government could not secure the country without them.<sup>81</sup> However, this was viewed as a temporary measure while the state would build its own security forces and transition militia

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<sup>80</sup> “Trial by Error: Justice in Post-Gaddafi Libya”, International Crisis Group, April 17, 2013. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/140-trial-by-error-justice-in-post-Gaddafi-libya.aspx>

<sup>81</sup> “Divided We Stand: Libya’s Enduring Conflicts”, International Crisis Group, September 14, 2012. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya/130-divided-we-stand-libyas-enduring-conflicts.aspx>

members into the official security apparatus, actions that have taken longer than hoped and faced much resistance.

There are several difficulties facing the government in attempting to secure Libya.. One of the largest is the proliferation of weapons. During the war and after the fall of Gaddafi's forces, armed groups seized weapons depots and took arms from regime forces. Libya is awash in weapons, from basic firearms to heavy weapons and tanks.<sup>82</sup> This equipment can be moved quickly and easily, and the vast, uninhabited deserts provide ideal routes for smugglers. The absence of a formal security sector has also weakened border control efforts, which has in turn benefited smuggling and the easy movement of individuals and groups in the western and southern border areas. Terrorist groups have also been able to take advantage of these circumstances and now operate virtually unrestricted in the country's vast desert areas. Groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Ansar al-Sharia have operated largely unimpeded in Libya.<sup>83</sup>

Lack of government forces and law and order also resulted in widespread crime. However, despite the absence of police and any semblance of security sector, general crime is relatively moderate. As high as the crime rate is in Libya, it has the potential to be even higher. Karim Mezran attributes this to Libyan society, and the local ties that many armed group members have. Mezran states that most Libyans have a large amount of respect for one another and often self-police their own neighborhoods, which is important since it helps maintain order in a state without police.<sup>84</sup> Additionally, smaller local armed groups, staffed by members of that same community, run the security of many towns. This helps discourage some armed group

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<sup>82</sup> Lederer, Edith, "UN Panel: Libyan Weapons Spread at Alarming Rate", Associated Press, April 9, 2013. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/un-panel-libyan-weapons-spread-alarming-rate>

<sup>83</sup> While terrorism is not a major part of this study, it is important to highlight as a security issue for the Libyan government since the revolution.

<sup>84</sup> Interview with Karim Mezran. Washington, D.C. 2014.

members from taking excessive or illegal actions, as they are known throughout the community and typically have family relations there as well. While these local ties do not always exist, particularly in the larger cities or towns with armed groups from other regions, they have the capability to lessen crime and maintain higher levels of civil order.

Although the GNC funds many armed groups, and they cooperate on policing, law and order, and other security issues, this does not mean that they are a part of the government or will support state policies. In fact, the Libyan government has had a difficult time reining in all of the militia groups, not just those that actively fight against it. For one, there is very little oversight over the cooperative state militias, allowing for widespread corruption among them. The actual size and strengths of these militias is often unknown, largely because one Libyan can join several of them, collect paychecks from each of them, and provide no service to the group or state when called upon. This practice is common throughout the country, exposing the extreme lack of oversight and general ambiguity of many of these groups.

The government's inability to control these militias has had serious consequences for security and the political development of Libya. These groups are counted on by the government to maintain law and order in most cities and throughout the countryside. However, many of them have used this opportunity to settle old scores, retaliate against perceived injustices, and to seize as much control as possible. As expected, this has led to higher rates of crime, fighting in the streets, and corruption, as well as failing to curb the proliferation of weapons and potential terrorist groups in remote areas. Crime and instability have worsened throughout much of the country.

After a period of time, the armed groups began exerting their influence over policy decisions in Tripoli. They have often and aggressively intervened in the institution-building

process, altering the political landscape in a way that suits their interests. There was no greater example of this than when revolutionary brigades and other armed groups forced the passage of the Political Isolation Law in May 2013. For over a week prior to and after the vote, armed groups in Tripoli laid siege to the GNC and the ministries of foreign affairs, justice, interior, finance, water, and electricity. These groups effectively took over the capital and pressured GNC members to pass the law, which undermined Libya's democratic transition.<sup>85</sup>

The Political Isolation Law targeted all officials who ever worked with Gaddafi, from the day he took office on September 1, 1969 to the fall of Benghazi in October 2011, and banned several categories them from holding office for ten years. This includes all former senior officials who were a part of the Gaddafi regime, regardless of whether or not they support the regime during the revolution or not. It also barred politicians who were in the GNC at the time the law was passed, including the GNC President at the time, Mohammad Magariaf, former Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, and other key figures who played a prominent role in the revolution, essentially likening them to the same Gaddafi officials they fought against.<sup>86</sup> This was a significant blow to the GNC and the direction of Libya's government, as these influential and experienced figures would no longer have a voice or opportunity to guide the country in the right direction.

Support for the law was split nearly evenly among the Libyan population. A survey by the National Democratic Institute in March 2014 found that only 28% of participants supported the law, while 66% opposed it and 5% were unsure.<sup>87</sup> Those in favor of it viewed the law as an

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<sup>85</sup> Eljarh, Mohammad, "Isolation Law harms Libya's democratic transition", Foreign Policy, May 8, 2013. [http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/08/isolation\\_law\\_harms\\_libya\\_s\\_democratic\\_transition](http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/05/08/isolation_law_harms_libya_s_democratic_transition)

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> "Committed to Democracy and Unity: Public Opinion Survey in Libya", National Democratic Institute and JMW Consulting, March 2014. Page 5.

opportunity for those who did not serve in the Gaddafi regime to play a larger role in rebuilding Libya, as well as ensuring justice, security, and political stability. Opponents of the law felt that it would exclude too many officials who could help rebuild Libya—in a country of a small population and limited expertise—and that was unfair to those who defected from and fought against the regime.<sup>88</sup>

Regardless of public opinion regarding the law, the armed groups who took control of the ministries believed it was in their best interests to force its passing. Not only did this show the power of these armed groups relative to the central government, it also demonstrated that they were not working in the interests of the Libyan people as well. For Libyans, the passing of the political isolation law, and particularly the manner in which it was done, undermined their trust and faith in the democratic process. Even if their elected representatives were responsive to their needs, the possibility would remain that armed groups would pressure the GNC to go in another direction. The success of the brigades and armed groups in this instance set a dangerous precedent for other groups around the country, as it showed that the government was too dependent on them for security and too weak to exercise any control over them. These same instances would manifest again, not only in Tripoli, but also in eastern Libya, where the federalist movement has become increasingly active in recent years.

These armed groups became bolder in attempting to influence government decisions since the passing of the Political Isolation law. Hanan Salal, a Libya researcher for Human Rights Watch, called the manner in which the law was passed “a turning point” and that “since then, it is absolutely legitimate that you use force to achieve your objectives.”<sup>89</sup> Some armed

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<sup>88</sup> NDI, 26.

<sup>89</sup> Michael, Maggie, “In Libya, politicians in fear of powerful militias”, Associated Press, April 10, 2014, [http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML\\_LIBYA\\_BLACKMAIL\\_NATION?SITE=VALYD&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT](http://hosted.ap.org/dynamic/stories/M/ML_LIBYA_BLACKMAIL_NATION?SITE=VALYD&SECTION=HOME&TEMPLATE=DEFAULT).

groups have since embraced this type of political forcing mechanism, to the point of one even taking Prime Minister Zeidan hostage in order to push their agendas. On October 10, 2013, members of one militia kidnapped Prime Minister Ali Zeidan from his hotel room in Tripoli. He was held while other members of the government negotiated his release, which occurred peacefully several hours later. It was believed that the group who kidnapped him was among those who had been calling for Zeidan's resignation as prime minister. A few days earlier, a group of armed men stormed Zeidan's office to demand back pay, stayed for hours and then ransacked the office before leaving.<sup>90</sup> The incident further highlighted the strength of the militias relative to the country's official military and security services, as well as the difficulties the interim government has had in bringing stability to the country.

Further actions taken by these armed groups against the government continue to occur. Assassinations and kidnappings of police, military, government officials, and their families occur nearly daily, especially in Benghazi. While these instances may not necessarily be related, they have the combined effect of showing the weakness of the central government and its security services.<sup>91</sup> Other groups have stormed prisons and released prisoners, or will carry out their own judicial processes against alleged criminals. On March 2, 2014, armed men stormed the GNC building demanding that the body be dissolved and a date set for early parliamentary elections, wounding two members of the GNC in the process.<sup>92</sup> In mid-April, the Jordanian ambassador to Libya and a Tunisian diplomat were both kidnapped in Tripoli by armed groups with likely ties to Islamists or other criminal networks. The kidnappers demanded the release of terrorists in

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<sup>90</sup> Kirkpatrick, David, "Show of Power by Libya Militia in Kidnapping", New York Times, October 10, 2013. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/world/africa/libya.html?pagewanted=2&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/11/world/africa/libya.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0)

<sup>91</sup> "POMED Notes: SFRC Hearing 'African Political, Economic and Security Issues'", Project on Middle East Democracy, November 21, 2013. <http://pomed.org/blog-post/us-policy/congress/committee-meetings/pomed-notes-sfrc-hearing-african-political-economic-and-security-issues/>

<sup>92</sup> "Libya MPs shot and wounded as congress stormed", BBC News, March 2, 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26411967>

Tunisia and Jordan, and there is evidence that they are related to these prisoners. Foreign officials have steadily become more attractive targets for armed opposition groups due in part because they want these countries to lessen their support for the GNC, which will weaken it long-term. Furthermore, videos have surfaced of politicians being openly coerced and blackmailed by militiamen, showing just how much power these groups have over individual members of the government.<sup>93</sup> Unfortunately, these incidents have become common in Libya and will likely continue unabated, as the government has yet to implement any control over these groups or instituted a convincing plan on to how to overcome these challenges.

One factor complicating the weakening of the militias and the transition to official state security forces is the complex relationship between these militias and politicians in the GNC. For instance, the group that initially claimed responsibility for kidnapping Prime Minister Zeidan was the Joint Operations Room of Libya's Revolutionaries, which had been founded only a few days earlier by the speaker of the GNC, Nuri Abusahmen. Additionally, one of the main negotiators who helped with Zeidan's release was deputy defense minister Khalid Sharif, who was once a deputy leader of the former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, an Islamist armed group that fought against the regime.<sup>94</sup>

## **THE EASTERN FEDERALIST MOVEMENT**

Perhaps the most significant intersection of militia politics and Libya's hydrocarbon-economics is the ongoing power struggle between the federalist movement in eastern Libya and the General National Congress in Tripoli. Gaddafi undoubtedly deprived the East of their fair share of the revenue, regardless of one's definition of what their fair share should actually be. A

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<sup>93</sup> Michael, 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Kirkpatrick, 2013.

constant theme of the revolution, which began in the Eastern region, is a deep-seated fear of returning to the injustice of the pre-revolution political system. Renegade Petroleum Facilities Guard leader Ibrahim Jedhran employed this narrative in the summer of 2013 in the oil fields of eastern Libya, using a combination of force and rhetoric to motivate the oil extraction workers to strike and organize against the perceived corruption of Tripoli. The Petroleum Facilities Guards created in 2012 to help protect Libya's oil facilities from external forces was a government body reporting directly to the Oil Ministry<sup>95</sup> However, Jedhran accused the central government of corruption in the sale of oil and imposed a blockade on Libya's oil export centers. There is little doubt that corruption is a systemic problem in Libya, partly due to the institutionalized nepotism of the Gaddafi regime, but also due to the lack of viable political and economic alternatives. Jedhran and his several thousand men then joined for a period with the eastern federalist movement, which seized several eastern Libyan ports and cut off oil exports for several months. Federalist leaders later cut ties with Jedhran due to his unwillingness to negotiate with them or through them.<sup>96</sup>

There are two competing narratives of exactly how Jedhran's relationship with the General National Council evolved, but there are also some established facts. Some argue that Jedhran's strikes and blockades were actually manifestations of the east's political voice and that impeding oil production was simply the only way to get the GNC to respect the views of the citizens of historical Cyrenaica. Others give Jedhran substantially less credit, and instead characterize the man as an opportunist seizing control of the country's most valuable source of income in order to cement his position of power in the young state. In any case, the facts are this: once the worker strikes began in the oil production plants, Jedhran garnered significant support

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<sup>95</sup> BBC, 2013.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with William Lawrence. Washington, D.C. 2014.

from his employee-constituents. Jedhran and his men did not fully cease all oil production, but caused it to drop nationally at times to roughly 15% of peak production. The GNC was completely ineffective at neutralizing the Jadhran threat, and chose not to meet Jedhran's excessive demands and not to attack him, surviving on Libya's sovereign wealth. Jedhran became increasingly frustrated that his claims for increased oil revenue for the east fell on deaf ears, and he began to escalate his rhetoric. He named his group the Council of Cyrenaica and declared Cyrenaica to be a semi-autonomous region. By December 2013, Jedhran, in combination with other protesters in the West, had nearly halted Libyan oil production. Jadhran then declared Cyrenaica to be completely autonomous. He and his group, the "Council," viewed the lack of cooperation from the GNC to be proof of purpose. They argued that if the GNC did not listen to their demands, this proved that they were corrupt and could not be trusted to manage the oil revenue. Furthermore, Jedhran began to claim that the rest of Libya had no legitimate claim to eastern oil revenues at all. Jedran had overplayed his position by this point, losing his local legitimacy and influence both in the west and the east.

The people's rejection of Jedhran and his tactics mark an important feature of both Libyan society and the oft-cited push for federalism. First, it signals that Libyans are much more responsive to legitimate political channels instead of strong-arm politics. Secondly, the lack of popular support for Jedhran's actions reveals that the federalism envisioned by eastern Libya is not a monolithic movement nor does it yet have a clear definition of what "federalism" actually means. Finally, this is a clear example of how public perception is still an important factor in the decisions of militia leaders. Jedran learned this lesson the hard way, and after spurning the increasing lack of support from his community, began to negotiate deals with the GNC and reopened the ports. Libyans will be wary of following a strong-armed leader again, and the

failure of Jedhran's independence movement is an important moment in Libya's development. Jedhran still controls the oil fields, but in a deal with the government is beginning to reopen production. He has no choice – the people of Cyrenaica have come to believe he is a thug and do not appreciate their livelihood being held hostage for what they perceive to be personal politics.<sup>97</sup>

The armed militias under Jedhran's control in eastern Libya also influenced the dismissal of Prime Minister Zeidan in March 2014. The federalist movement under Jedhran had seized several oil ports in the east, cutting of oil production and greatly restricting Libya's revenues. The government's weakness manifested itself first by its failure to reclaim these ports militarily, and second in its failure to negotiate a deal with the armed groups in control. These issues came to a head in March 2014, when Jedhran, in an act of defiance against the GNC and international law, force-loaded a North Korean-registered tanker at gunpoint with oil taken from these controlled ports and attempted to transport it out of the country. Zeidan called upon the military, but they ignored his requests and the pro-government armed groups that went after the tanker had limited naval resources and were unable to prevent it from breaking the blockade.

While there had been opposition to Zeidan for over a year and calls for his dismissal for several months prior, Jedhran's actions proved to be the either the last straw or the pretext for Zeidan's ouster. Following both Jedhran's actions and the military's blatant disregard for Zeidan and the government, members of the GNC called for a vote of confidence and Zeidan was dismissed as prime minister.<sup>98</sup> Controversy surrounded the vote, and Zeidan still claims the GNC never produced sufficient vote and his ouster is the result of an Islamist conspiracy<sup>99</sup>. Zeidan fled

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Karim Mezran. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>98</sup> "Libya PM Zeidan dismissed as oil tanker 'breaks blockade'", BBC News, March 11, 2014.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26533594>

<sup>99</sup> "Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan ousted", AlArabiya. March 11, 2014.

<http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/03/11/Libyan-parliament-ousts-Prime-Minister-Ali-Zeidan.html>

the country soon thereafter and, although Zeidan was more popular than the GNC and seen as a counterweight to Islamist and militia influence on it, some government officials and members of the public called for his arrest on allegations of corruption.

Following Zeidan's dismissal, defense minister Abdullah al-Thinni was appointed several times as Libyan interim prime minister by the GNC for periods of a week or more at a time and tasked with forming a new government. Thinni's appointment came as the result of a political deal between various groups within the GNC, who did not offer him a longer appointment due to lack of agreement over who should succeed Zeidan. In addition to the dismissal of the former Prime Minister, the deal called for early parliamentary elections and the indefinite postponement of the presidential elections.<sup>100</sup> The deal disregarded the people's desires for early elections across the board and only fulfilled the interests of a few groups in the GNC. Protestors staged demonstrations in front of the GNC building the following days, but the damage to the democratic process was done and further disillusioned the Libyan people with the GNC.<sup>101</sup>

Thinni's term proved to be a short one, as less than two months after his appointment, an armed group attacked him and his family outside of his home.<sup>102</sup> The incident prompted Thinni to resign his post after pledging to lead the transition to find a new prime minister. He directly attributed his resignation to the armed attack against him, and stated that he did not want to "drag different sides into fighting when there can be no winner."<sup>103</sup> Once again, actions by armed groups directly affected the operations and direction of the central government. While the group that attacked Thinni remains unknown, the attack and Thinni's subsequent resignation because of

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<sup>100</sup> Eljarh, Mohammad, "In Libya, It's One Step Forward, Two Steps Back", Foreign Policy, April 17, 2014.

[http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/04/17/in\\_libya\\_its\\_one\\_step\\_forward\\_two\\_steps\\_back](http://transitions.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2014/04/17/in_libya_its_one_step_forward_two_steps_back)

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Associated Press, "Prime Minister of Libya Says He Will Resign", New York Times, April 13, 2014.

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/14/world/africa/prime-minister-of-libya-says-he-will-resign.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/14/world/africa/prime-minister-of-libya-says-he-will-resign.html?_r=2)

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

it undermined Libya's democratic transition. The loss of a second prime minister in less than a two-month span added to uncertainty and paralysis in the government, weakening its legitimacy and adding to the ongoing problems within the country.<sup>104</sup> The impetus of the attack remains a mystery as well. It is possible that it was related to Thinni's intention to fight terrorism and reestablish law and order in the major cities, or due to Thinni's refusal to give in to pressure to appoint cabinet ministers from specific blocs, such as those from the former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.<sup>105</sup> Thinni's refusal to acquiesce to the demands of these factions, which sought to expand their control over the country's vital institutions, may have led them to take unorthodox measures, namely using their affiliated armed groups to exert pressure. Both internal political pressure and the armed violence that is becoming increasingly associated with it are indications that the next prime minister will face extreme challenges to their authority from day one.

### **ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ARMED GROUPS**

Libya's revolution, much like the revolutions of its neighbors Egypt and Tunisia, began as a response to a corrupt and ineffective authoritarian government. Each political movement successfully removed its respective dictator, and the focus shifted from regime change to democratic transition. Similar to its neighbors, Libya still faces systemic economic problems that were some of the causes of the revolution in the first place. These problems include a growing youth population with few economic prospects, the absence of a robust private sector, and a lack of foreign domestic investment.

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<sup>104</sup> Eljarh, 2014.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

However, Libya is better equipped than most Middle East and North Africa states to address these challenges due to its vast natural resource wealth. The new government is dependent upon the natural wealth revenue to provide the livelihood that Libyans have come to expect from the government. Armed groups are able to capitalize on this cycle of dependence by exploiting both the government's dependence on the oil income and the citizens' fiscal dependence on subsidized income.

We focus our assessment of the impact of militias' behavior on the economic development of post-Gaddafi Libya by showing the value of Libya's vast natural resource wealth and comparing levels of oil production during various periods after the revolution. Libya holds the largest amount of oil reserves on the continent and the fifth largest in the world.<sup>106</sup> Libya began exporting oil in 1961<sup>107</sup>, and joined the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) one year later<sup>108</sup>. The country exported close to 3 million barrels per day (bbl/d) when Gaddafi assumed power in 1969, although this number decreased to approximately 1.8 million bbl/d just before the revolution in 2011<sup>109</sup>. Oil production came to a halt during the civil war, but quickly rebounded to 1.4 million bbl/d in 2012.<sup>110</sup> The country reported 47.1 billion barrels of proven reserves that same year.<sup>111</sup> Libyan oil is light, sweet crude<sup>112</sup> – the most desirable and

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<sup>106</sup> British Petroleum. Statistical Energy Review, 2011. Web.

[http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp\\_internet/globalbp/globalbp\\_uk\\_english/reports\\_and\\_publications/statistical\\_energy\\_review\\_2011/STAGING/local\\_assets/pdf/oil\\_section\\_2011.pdf](http://www.bp.com/liveassets/bp_internet/globalbp/globalbp_uk_english/reports_and_publications/statistical_energy_review_2011/STAGING/local_assets/pdf/oil_section_2011.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. Annual Statistical Bulletin; Libya. 2009, Web.

<http://www.opec.org/library/Annual%20Statistical%20Bulletin/interactive/2009/FileZ/XL/T36.HTM>

<sup>108</sup> Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. 2014. Web.

[http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/166.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/166.htm)

<sup>109</sup> U.S. Energy Information Agency, Country Analysis Brief; Libya. 2012, Web.

<http://www.eia.gov/countries/analysisbriefs/cabs/Libya/pdf.pdf>

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

valuable type of oil. Libya primarily exports their oil to Europe,<sup>113</sup> and its position on the Mediterranean Sea makes it an appealing option for European importers. Libyan oil can be shipped directly across the Mediterranean, instead of passing through the Persian Gulf, circling the Arabian Peninsula, and paying for access to the Suez Canal. This ultimately lowers the overhead cost of importing Libyan oil.

The combination of oil, natural gas, and petroleum exports accounts for 99% of government income and 80% of GDP.<sup>114</sup> Oil imports alone accounts for 75% of all government income, and 25% of GDP.<sup>115</sup> The natural gas sector is also a significant segment of the Libyan economy. Libya is home to the fourth largest natural gas reserves in Africa. Similar to the more lucrative oil sector, natural gas production recovered rapidly following the civil war and continues to expand. Libya currently exports 60% of its natural gas, mostly through a pipeline to Europe<sup>116</sup>.

Since the revolution, Libya's oil production has yet to return to pre-revolution levels. The country had the capacity to produce 1.6 million per day as of July 2013, slightly below its capacity of 1.8 million b/d prior to the revolution in 2011, and was producing approximately 1.4 million b/d at that time.<sup>117</sup> However, armed groups under Jedhran in eastern Libya seized four of Libya's nine oil export terminals in July 2013, and forced the country's largest oilfield, Waha, to close.<sup>118</sup> As a result, by March 2014, output had fallen to a low of 150,000 barrels per day,

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook*. Libya, 2014.

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ly.html>

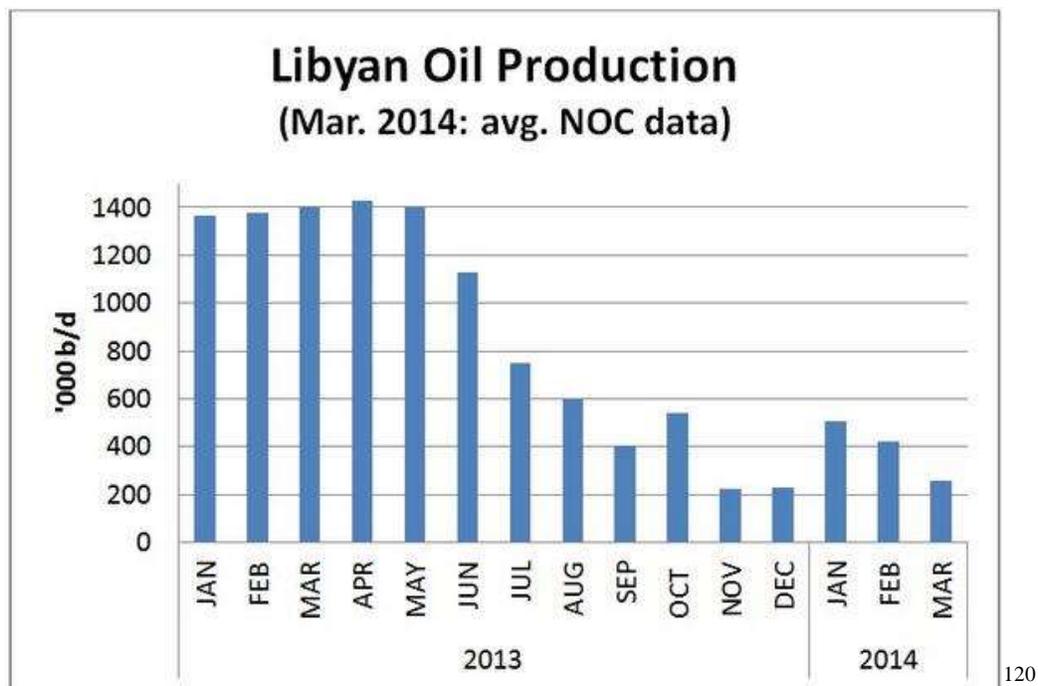
<sup>115</sup> U.S. Energy Information Agency, Country Analysis Brief; Libya. 2012, Web.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Chmaytelli, Maher, "Libyan Oil Output Plunges to Six-Month Low as Elephant Halted", Bloomberg, March 24, 2014. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-03-24/libyan-oil-output-plunges-to-six-month-low-as-elephant-halted.html>

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

causing the worst budget crisis in Libya for decades.<sup>119</sup> The Libyan central bank was forced to use its reserves to keep the country operating in the wake of substantial shortages in oil sales. While the country has enough monetary reserves to keep it running for several months, the failure of the government to reclaim these oil ports will continue to increasingly strain Libya's finances as more time passes.



Problems with oil production have not been limited to eastern Libya either. In March 2014, protestors forced the western Elephant oil field to halt production, compounding problems with the country's already limited production. Additionally, Libya's second-largest oil field, Sharara, was also closed at this time because of similar protests.<sup>121</sup> These demonstrations have

<sup>119</sup> Bosalum, Feras and Ulf Laessingm "East Libyan rebels to end oil port blockage within days: senior leader", Reuters, April 1, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/04/01/us-libya-oil-idUSBREA301WA20140401>

<sup>120</sup> Matthew Reed.

<sup>121</sup> Chmaytelli, 2014.

become fairly common in western Libya, with workers and citizens demanding projects to improve public health, education and water resources to the areas around these oil fields.<sup>122</sup>

These ongoing issues with oil production since summer 2013 show the inability of the government to exercise control over its most valuable resources. Jedhran has controlled several of the country's main oil ports for months, with the GNC unable to reclaim them. It was only after the United States intervened in the tanker crisis that the GNC was able to force Jedhran to the table and negotiate the return of these facilities to the government. Under a deal agreed to in mid-April 2014, the federalist rebels reopened two of the smaller ports, Hariga and Zueitina, with negotiations for the two remaining ports, which are also Libya's two largest, ongoing.<sup>123</sup> Though the government was able to take back some of the ports and is in the process of negotiating the remainder, it would not have been able to do so without international military support. This ties back to the weakness of the central government and its dependence on other actors for security and enforcement. The GNC has no way to control its industries without the support of armed groups, but it is these government-sponsored armed groups that seized them in the first place. It is a frustrating paradigm for the Libyan government as it continues to be hampered by its reliance on armed groups, while being unable to exert authority over them at the same time. This problem will likely persist for the Libyan government until it is able to fully exert its control in the country.

## **SOCIAL IMPACT**

We turn now from our analysis of armed group behavior on the politics and economy of Libya to gauge how Libyans feel about these developments. The relationship between the

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Noueihed, Lin, "Libya to export first oil since rebel deal", Reuters, April 15, 2014. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/04/15/libya-oil-hariga-idUKL6N0N73C220140415>

nascent government and the armed groups has directly influenced Libya's transition from autocracy to democracy. This relationship also affects the society of 6 million Libyans in profound and real ways. This transition is more than political institutions and theoretical concepts of security. There is no way to separate the increasing popular disillusionment with the government, armed groups, and national leadership from the behaviors of the armed groups.

Libyans are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the armed groups and supportive of efforts to disarm them. Initially, many armed groups enjoyed significant public support immediately following the war. The groups and individuals who fought in the war against Gaddafi earned the title *thuwar*, or revolutionaries. This became a title of respect and gratitude, along with the post-mortem designation of *shuhada*, or martyrs. As the militia membership increased, the distinction between the *thuwar* and the other armed groups became less clear. In fact, there are even indications that the majority of the *thuwar* returned to their normal lives after the war and gave up the "militia" life.<sup>124</sup> People noticed the persistent lack of security and began to wonder what good these groups were doing for the revolution. People noticed armed and well-paid young men driving around in pickup trucks, drinking and starting fights.

It should be noted that many of those who fought in the war are now far wealthier than before and are primarily young men. Many of these youth are suffering the residual effects of the war, and both post-traumatic stress disorder and self-medication through substance abuse are common.<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, these sometimes unruly youths are at the heart of much of Libya's systemic localized violence -- petty conflicts, accidental killings and subsequent revenge killing.<sup>126</sup> The Libyan people lament that the spirit of the *thuwar* transformed into a spirit of

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<sup>124</sup> Interview with Christina Murtaugh. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Fiona Mangan. Washington, D.C. 2014.

opportunism.<sup>127</sup> By the end of 2013, over 30% of Libyans indicated that disarming the “militias” is the most important step for Libya.<sup>128</sup> Libyans see people joining up for the salary, but little is done to resolve the perpetual security problems; they feel that these groups are the problem instead of the solution and are actually the cause of violence.

Libyans have responded negatively to strong-arm politics, and disapprove of the use of force outside of the government’s control. There are some high profile incidents of violence and extra-governmental force that truly affected the general public’s perception of the armed groups. One of the first significant incidents was when armed militiamen stormed the General National Congress in Tripoli and forced the members to adopt the Political Isolation Law as mentioned above. Libyans were and still are divided on this law, but there was broad consensus that the militias forcing the passage of the law was unacceptable. Next was the kidnapping of Prime Minister Zeidan in October 2013. Although Zeidan was released unharmed, this incident simultaneously highlighted the abject weakness of the state while indicating that armed groups could and would target anyone. The residual feelings of intimidation caused by the abduction shattered confidence in Zeidan’s government, a loss of confidence from which the former Prime Minister never recovered. Third is the infamous Gharghour Incident, during which several members of the Mistratan Brigade opened fire on anti-militia protesters in the streets of Tripoli’s Gharghour district in November 2013. The demonstrators had been protesting the role of armed groups in Libya; the systemic insecurity, the perpetuation of a weak security state, and exploitative abuses of power. Human Rights Watch reported over 500 casualties and 43 fatalities

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with Frederick Wehrey. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>128</sup> “Committed to Democracy and Unity: Public Opinion Survey in Libya”, National Democratic Institute and JMW Consulting, March 2014. Page 5.

in the assault.<sup>129</sup> A group of fighters from the Zintan Brigade cleared out the perpetrators of the incident, but the damage was done. These events sent a clear message across Libya -- these groups are not the *thumar* who fought for us in the revolution; these people are criminals and opportunists.<sup>130</sup>

All of these events have significantly diminished the public's opinion of the militias and showed the weakness of the government. Libyans remain largely optimistic about their future, however. According to the November 2013 NDI survey of Libyans, 64% of those polled say they are optimistic or very optimistic in the future of Libya, even after the kidnapping of then-Prime Minister Zeidan, which 92% of Libyans did not feel was justified.<sup>131</sup> This is down slightly from a survey done in May 2013, in which 81% of Libyans said they were optimistic, but up from September 2013 (61%).<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, while support for the GNC has declined over time due to beliefs that it has taken inadequate steps to improve security, fight corruption, and advance the political transition, the majority of Libyans still strongly support a democratic government. 80% of those surveyed continue to have faith in the democratic process, despite their satisfaction with the GNC and its leaders falling.<sup>133</sup> However, the number of Libyans who said that they intended to vote in future elections has declined, showing that even though they may continue to support the democratic process, they may not want to participate in it. In the November 2013 poll, only 50% of Libyans said they would vote in elections, compared with 74% in May of that year.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Engel, Andrew, "Libya on the Brink After Militia Violence in Tripoli", Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 19, 2013. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/libya-on-the-brink-after-militia-violence-in-tripoli>

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Christina Murtaugh. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>131</sup> National Democratic Institute, 5.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

This decline in participation is reflected in the voting numbers from the February 2014 elections for the constitutional assembly. Less than 498,000 people voted and only one million registered, a far lower number than three million who registered for the 2012 parliamentary elections.<sup>135</sup> Several major factions boycotted the elections, including the federalist movement in the east and the Berber population in the west.<sup>136</sup> The voting numbers are indicative of the social changes that have occurred in the fractured political environment throughout the country. The optimism that was pervasive in 2012 has been lessened by disillusionment with the government and its failure to address the leading problems in Libya. However, despite the sharp decline in voting numbers, they do not reflect the ongoing optimism in Libya for the future.

The main takeaway from this is that the Libyan people still are optimistic about their country even with the myriad of problems it continues to face. They have hope in the democratic process, despite the failures and problems with the current GNC. The government has the opportunity to take advantage of this public support if it is able to overcome its weakness and dependence on various armed groups.

Regarding Islamists, like many political relationships in Libya, the linkage between Islamist groups and sympathetic non-Islamist supporters is based on local relationships rather than ideology. Libyans who know Islamists are supportive of them due to relationships and linkages that developed long before Gaddafi fell. This indicates that Islamists in Libya are primarily Libyans, unlike Iraq or Syria where foreign Islamists create a spoiler effect due to any substantial link to the success of a political transition. Islamists are widely viewed negatively, however. Many Libyans use the Arabic word “*khuwarij*” to describe Islamists, which literally

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<sup>135</sup> Laessing, Ulf and Ghaith Shennib, “Poor Turnout in Libyan vote for Constitution-drafting body”, Reuters, February 20, 2014. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/02/20/us-libya-vote-idUSBREA1J0ZP20140220>

<sup>136</sup> Laessing, 2014.

means “those who went out.” The term is a reference to the time of the Caliph ‘Ali, when a collection of radical groups developed some of the first radical ideology in the religion’s history. The name “*khuwarij*” indicates a group that has gone out of Islam, but also implies they have gone out of their mind. A *kharji* (singular) is responsible for the assassination of the Caliph ‘Ali himself, and maintains this deeply negative connotation to this day. *Khuwarij* do not use this term to describe themselves, and therefore common use of the term for Libyan Islamists indicates the widespread disapproval for their beliefs, practices, and tactics. All of this essentially boils down to one simple fact: Islamists have little political capital in Libya. There should be a brief distinction between political capital and influence on the GNC. There are suspicions, even among external observers, that savvy Islamists are working behind the scenes to manipulate and influence the GNC<sup>137</sup>. This is not the same as being able to generate a popular political party or produce a platform which would be palatable for most Libyans<sup>138</sup>.

At first glance, this sounds somewhat contradictory. Close to 97% of all Libyans insist on shari’a being at least a source of the nation’s legislation, but this number fails to indicate what exactly all of these Libyans believe shari’a means.<sup>139</sup> Additional survey data reveals that many of the tenets of what would be considered “Islamist” politics are incompatible with the majority’s opinion of shari’a law. The data indicate a strong priority for the institutionalized establishment of protections for women’s rights and representation, freedom of expression, human rights, education, and even religious freedom. Conversely, only 4% of Libyans believe that the implementation of shari’a law is a priority for the democratic transition.<sup>140</sup> Islamists by definition seek to institutionalize and implement shari’a law, and this low number helps verify the highly

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<sup>137</sup> Interview with William Lawrence. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>138</sup> NDI Survey indicates unfavorable views of Islamist parties.

<sup>139</sup> NDI Survey, 2013.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

limited scope of Islamism in Libya. This brings us to the reality of the Islamist situation in Libya – despite the widespread misconception that Islamists are behind every political failure and every act of violence; Islamism is actually not the primary political force in Libya.<sup>141</sup>

The most important observation of the impact of the armed groups on Libyan society is the optimism that exists despite the dysfunctional relationship between the groups and the government. Libyans still believe in the revolution, and still claim it is not yet finished.<sup>142</sup> The lack of security and political violence demonstrably impact Libyan perception of their transition, and further diminish popular support for the armed groups that perpetrate these acts. Furthermore, despite the presence of some Islamist groups, Libyans are disenchanted with political Islam and more precisely view Islamist organizations as criminal or subversive groups rather than genuine contributors to the transition. The observable lack of confidence in elections, politicians, and political parties is not a reflection of Libyan views on democracy but rather a reflection of their perception of the space these armed groups occupy in their society.

## CONCLUSION

It is clear from looking at Libya's post-revolution history that the actions of the armed groups played a significant role in the shaping the present day state. The legacy of Gaddafi's rule, in particular the lack of political tradition and the population's reliance on entitlements, weakened the potential for a strong central government from the start. The government's dependence on armed groups for security after the revolution and its inability to control them has further weakened its authority. As a result, armed groups wield vast influence in the state, control key institutions, and can shape the direction of state policies. Armed groups have not improved

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Frederick Wehrey. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Abdel Salaam Madi. Washington, D.C. 2014.

security in Libya; rather, their often selfish and misguided actions have produced a climate of fear and uncertainty.

However, despite these setbacks, the prospects for political development remain bright. The Libyan people and many militia groups continue to support the idea of a democratic Libya, in spite of the failure of the GNC. While militias have been a large part of the problem with state building, they remain one of the best chances for a successful solution. Facilitating fair elections and participation in the political process by these militia groups is vital to state development and creating legitimacy for the central government. Public support for democracy remains high among the population, and if militia groups want to sustain their influence in any future state, they will have to advance their interests through legitimate political actions.

The key to resolving the political issue in Libya is convincing these militia groups that what is in the states interest is in their interests as well. These groups want the central government to remain weak so they can influence more control over the country.<sup>143</sup> A strong central government is more likely to rein in their activities, lessen their impact, and ultimately co-opt their members into the official state security apparatus. It is clear that armed groups could easily win any military battle against government forces and seize control of the state. The militias had the ability to force the political isolation law, but did not go all the way and assume control of the state, despite their ability to do so if they wished. The reason for this is that armed groups do not want to rule the state or seize control illegally, as this could lead to economic sanctions and embargos and they would lose their legitimacy with the people, ultimately weakening their power in the end.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Interview with Karim Mezran. Washington, D.C. 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

Armed groups also have to gain power through legitimate institutions because the Libyan people do not recognize them as their legitimate representatives. Most of these groups recognize the importance of legitimacy in the eyes of the people, and are therefore playing the political game to gain power. This is one of the most important aspects of the armed groups' political goals. Most want a stable state and the revolution to succeed, and are willing to go through the democratic process in order to see this happen. Even when these groups intervene in the process, as they did in forcing the political isolation law, they do so with the belief that this will preserve the goals of the revolution. The goal for the new government moving forward is convincing these groups that the policies put forth by the GNC and any other ruling body reflect the will of the people and are in their mutual interest. Obtaining buy-in from these groups will stabilize the political system and make it easier to deal with these groups in the future.

This is not to say that there are no other options for the government to reestablish control over the country. One opportunity for the Libyan government is the General Purpose Force (GPF), a new Libyan army and counterterrorism force trained by the United States and other NATO allies. The force originated in 2013 after a plea from then-Prime Minister Zeidan to help build a government force of approximately 20,000 soldiers so the government could operate with less interference by the country's armed groups. The Libyan government has even gone so far as to pay \$600 million for the training and logistical support of this force.<sup>145</sup> There are some problems that could arise with the creation of such a force. The first is that it could become fractured due to the diverse ethnic and tribal backgrounds of the soldiers, or that they will return to the militias after completing their training. The GPF must have a diverse background to make it non-partisan, making a cohesive identity difficult to attain. Second, there are fears, both within Libya and without, that this force will become a type of praetorian guard and subvert the

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<sup>145</sup> Wehrey, 2014.

democratic process. Third, some groups within Libya, in particular the Islamists, are concerned that this force will act as a political tool for some factions or even the United States.<sup>146</sup> Finally, the creation of the GPF could lead to serious conflicts down the line with the armed groups they are meant to supplant.<sup>147</sup> Most of these armed groups have become entrenched in their positions and will likely not surrender their authority or weapons willingly. This sets up potential violent confrontations between these entities that could result in even greater violence in the future. Regardless of these concerns, the GPF has the potential to allow the GNC to weaken the government's dependence on the militias, thereby weakening their influence and allowing the state to reassert control.

While this is a comprehensive summary of armed groups in post-Gaddafi Libya, it is by no means complete. Throughout our research and interviews with Libya experts, we heard mentions of a "shadow government" that has had considerable influence in the country since the revolution. Without being able to travel to Libya and research this further, we were forced to leave this out of our final analysis, but with the hopes that future research could investigate this claim further. We also hope scholars will better illuminate the structure of these armed groups and provide accurate statistics on them. Post-Gaddafi Libya remains in a state of transition, with major political events occurring all the time. It will take time before the government is strong enough to respond to the will of the people and overcome the armed group obstacle. Libyans hope that their country will one day become a prosperous democracy has not yet been extinguished and will burn brighter if the country continues along its democratic path.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Frederick Wehrey. Washington, D.C. 2014.

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