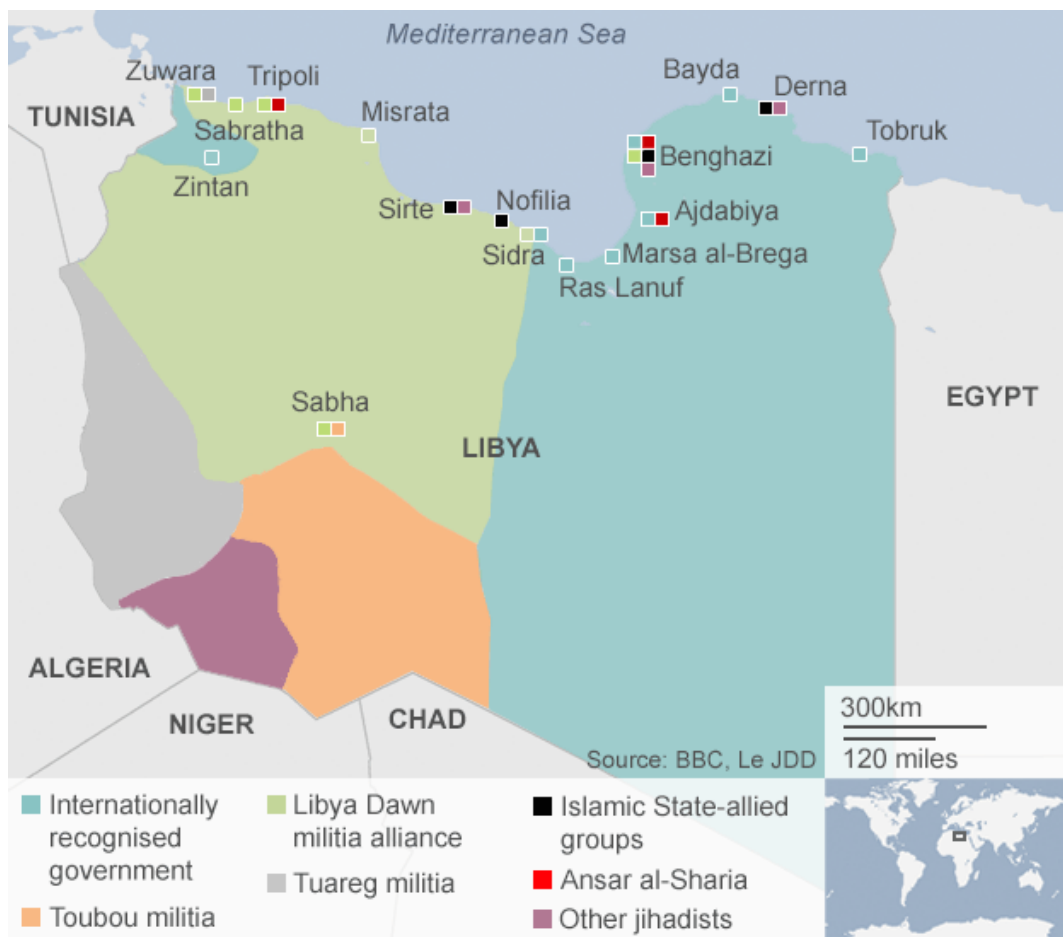


**Editor’s Note:** Below is the third segment of a four-part regional document that includes analyses on MENA hotspots: 1. Egypt 2. Yemen 3. Libya 4. Tunisia. This note has been designed by *OTHER SOLUTIONS Consulting* research team as an overview of the developing crisis in Libya.

### 3. Libya

Libya has become a major point of concern arguably rooted in the miscalculated NATO intervention in 2011. The fall of Muammar Gaddafi, previously known as the ‘King of Kings’, essentially left an ‘empty throne’ for contending militant factions to fight for. The pro-Islamist (Muslim brotherhood) Tripoli government along with the authorities based in Tobruk loyal to ex-general Khalifah Haftar have both declared legitimacy over the country, triggering what is now considered the second Libyan Civil War. Unable to maintain dialogue, peace or stability this oil-rich North-African nation is seemingly heading towards the same path as Syria, with increased levels of foreign interference, violent opposition forces as well as a significant Jihadist presence.

#### 3.1 Map



(Source: BBC April 2015)

#### 3.2 Key Players

The second Libyan civil war, commonly known as Operation Dignity, began as a coup attempt by General Khalifah Haftar against the General National Congress in Tripoli. General Haftar, once an army General under Gaddafi who turned dissident to his regime, emerged from the political shadows in February 2014 to announce that “the national command of the Libyan army is declaring a movement for the new road map, to recover the



country from its upheaval.”<sup>1</sup> At first, his stunt was ridiculed by the Tripoli government, but over the coming weeks and months Haftar would galvanise and consolidate support from other political and military factions which rejected the Islamist-leaning General National Congress (GNC). Officially, Libya’s second civil war was short-lived as talks negotiated by the UN in early 2015 resulted in a cease-fire. However, in this short period, the conflict deeply polarised Libya’s power-struggle between the Islamist-held Tripoli and the coalition based around Operation Dignity which would form a parallel government in the eastern city of Tobruk.

While Libya was clearly experiencing a sudden power-vacuum after a regime long of half a century, it is nevertheless remarkable that the struggle which ensued turned former allies against each other, to the brink of permanently dividing their common homeland. So what exactly is driving the current crisis in Libya?

Aside from the Muslim Brotherhood-led GNC and Haftar’s Tobruk government - which has since gained international recognition - there are a number of other external and internal actors with invested stakes. Namely, the Tobruk government has succeeded in gaining crucial military and financial support from the UAE and Egypt. Egypt’s leader ex-General Abdel Fattah Sisi, whose rise to power more than resembles Haftar’s, outlined his reasons for supporting the Tobruk government in February 2015: “There is no other choice, taking into account the agreement of the Libyan people and government and that they call on us to act...we abandoned the Libyan people as prisoners to extremist militias.”<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, typical Muslim Brotherhood financiers Qatar and Turkey have been instrumental in aiding the Tripoli government (also referred to as Libya Dawn), which supports the narrative that Libya’s conflict is actually a result of wider, geopolitical interests.

A third major branch has developed in the country’s power-struggle in the shape of the Islamic State and its Libyan subsidiary Ansar al-Sharia. Concentrated around the strategic, central city of Sirte (as well as the north-east town of Derna), these extremist militant groups have been committed to destabilising both the Tripoli and Tobruk government; and are gradually succeeding in doing so. For what its aims are worth, the Islamic State in Libya/Ansar al-Sharia has managed to dominate global headlines through actions such as the assassination of the US Ambassador in Benghazi in February 2012, or the beheading of 21 Coptic Egyptians in February 2015.

Although the current conflict in Libya appears to be motivated by political and religious ideology, the role of oil has also played an interesting role in the instabilities. In fact, events which have marked the battle for Libya’s lucrative energy sector have developed somewhat independently of other struggles. Up until mid-2013 the industry enjoyed pre-revolution output levels at near-all-time high global oil prices. However in July of that year, Ibrahim Jathran, head of the Petroleum Facilities Guard<sup>3</sup> set in motion an all-against-all scrap for the vast resources, which would cripple production beyond recognition. What prompted the battle for Libya’s oil, that is, what led to a climate of chaos rather than order in a post-revolution economy?

Jathran and other eastern federalists simply rejected the power-sharing means which the Islamists were offering. In their eyes, the GNC were abusing their constitutional powers, denying the oil-rich east more autonomy and enjoying the sky-high oil revenues all for themselves. Having seized most of the major oil terminals, including Ra’s Lanuf and Al-Sidra, Jathran was able to cut over \$5bn worth of vital revenues from the Tripoli government and would later align the Guard with Haftar’s forces.

In turn, Islamist rebels have continuously pledged to sabotage the Tobruk government’s attempts to restore production levels for their own gains. In December 2014, Libya Dawn launched ‘Operation Sunrise for the Liberation of Oil Ports’, which attacked the Al-Sidra oil terminal with speedboats equipped with rockets, costing Tobruk 1.8 million barrels of crude. Tensions over Libya’s oil wealth have resumed in 2015 with the Tobruk government announcing on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2015 that it will sell oil independently to the establishment in Tripoli. Subsequently, the Islamists in the west responded by threatening to take military action against ports and oil fields to stop any such ‘illegitimate’ transactions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Independent, *Libyan Government should be suspended, says military commander*, Available online at : <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/libyan-government-should-be-suspended-says-military-commander-9127861.html> (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

<sup>2</sup> The Guardian, *Egyptian president calls for United Nations military action in Libya*, available at : <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/egyptian-president-sisi-libya-islamic-state-lukewarm-europe-coptic-un> (Accessed 13<sup>th</sup> April 2015)

<sup>3</sup> Petroleum Facilities Guard is the group responsible for protecting Libya’s oil fields

### 3.3 Latest Developments: Forecast

On 12<sup>th</sup> April 2014 a bomb exploded at the gate of the Moroccan embassy in the Libyan capital early on Monday, causing some damage but hurting nobody, only hours after gunmen attacked the South Korean mission in Tripoli. Militants claiming loyalty to the Islamic State said on twitter they were responsible for both attacks, the latest strikes against foreigners, embassies or oilfields in Libya. It was not possible to verify the authenticity of the claims. The latest updates reconfirm the vast struggle for stability in Libya with IS affiliates complicating matters greatly for both internal and international actors.

Ansar al-Sharia in Libya has also been a security concern for other regional countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and even across the Sahel in countries like Mali. The vast geographical size of Libya accompanied by its scarcely concentrated population has made it an ideal Yemen-like training ground for jihadists. During the last 4 turbulent years, Libya has also become a notorious route for African migrants and weapons trafficking.

As regional powers fear the threat of the IS caliphate project destabilizing their own security and interests there is an increasing possibility of military interference. Likely scenarios for the country include a possible intervention lead by Egypt and a joint Arab force which president Sissi announced the formation of during the last Arab League summit on 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015. Noteworthy is that the success or failure of current operations in Yemen by the Gulf States and other Arab nations may also determine the likelihood of another similar campaign in Libya.

The proximity of Libya to Europe is another alarming factor as jihadists have posed threats of carrying out attacks overseas, specifically targeting nations such as Italy. This may further legitimize an Arab intervention in Libya at least in the eyes of the European Union and the wider international community. However, regional alliances with Tripoli and Tobruk respectively may lead to long term instability as even if the IS threat is contained, civil strife will remain. With more than 3,000 casualties since May 2014, the prospect of a unified and stable Libya is narrowing by the day.

#### Libya: Human Impact

- **287,318 internally displaced out of 6.2 million total population**
- **36,984 refugees**
- **Population at risk**