# Key Social Institutions and Actors of the Libyan Conflict
## (Friend and Foe of the Libyan Political Milieu)

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*Abstract*. Recently, Libyan conflict has become one of the vital elements that determine the development of the geostrategic space in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Meanwhile all the governing mechanisms of this artificial state, the social structure of which still crucially depends on tribes and archaic principles of their interaction, were destroyed.

During the Libyan monarchy the social fabric of the country was held together among other factors by the network of Islamic institutions, while in Ghaddafi`s Libya it came down to his personal charisma and the network of his contacts and connections through tribal elders and elites. Since late 2011, there has been an apparent lack of such a factor, on the state level, that could contribute to reunification of the Libyan society or, at least, be used as an impetus for the main actors to compromise. Instead, there are multiple tribes, controlling territories and infrastructure, and numerous militias, controlling the cities, and three governments, each posing as the sole legitimated one.

This article is an effort to analyze the current political situation in Libya through activities of main actors and web of opportunistic interactions they create on the national and regional theatre. Beside the three governments and the tribal factor, the emphasis is made on a number of neocons recently entering the political milieu and claiming their stakes in the future of the country.

An attempt is made to look at the international relations theories, such as realist and liberal interdependency narratives, in their holistic approach to the state, through the lens of their applicability to the Libyan file, and their use as a pathway to understanding Libyan puzzle and forecasting the future to the possible development . Through our research we made an informed argument that these theories as they equate the state with the country, failing to distinguish between the state, government, society and so on (Thomson, 1995), their use in the argument becomes largely similar to a "parlor debate" when applied to our case study. The closest argument to be found is the radical Krasner's (1984) statism theory with the "us against them" dichotomy where

the state is "us" and "them" are seen as other states and own society. This layout is much closer in our view to the Libyan backstage than any other in circulation.

We further study a plethora of power centers in Libya including tribes and clans and their proximity to the heart of the crisis be it nationally or internationally, not simply because they exist, but in an effort to formulate relevant arguments for future debate which is inevitable from our point of view.

**Setting the research background**

Historically, the state of Libya was created rather artificially under the agreement of the Western powers in 1951 by bringing together three regions: coastal Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and the desert of Fezzan. UN declared them as a united independent state and trusted the three different regions, each with three different social and tribal systems into the hands of king Idris I al-Senussi (1951-1969). In a sense the country has been created through the international relations narrative and quite logically should be looked upon through the magic lantern of relations between internationally recognized actors. The Western powers that be, as it seemed, didn`t pay much attention to regional specifics, which became even more pronounced, after the oil was found in the eastern region, namely Cyrenaica (or, in Arabic, Barca) (Smits, 2013, p. 10-11). On the whole, through the years of the monarchical rule, the main unifying factors were religious, through the legacy of al-Senussi Sufi network, whereas the main factors of division were economic.

After Muammar Gaddafi (1969-2011) overthrew the monarchy, and introduced new socio-political model, he started a decade-long search for the factors that would strengthen the unification of the country. His reforms, which made concessions to tribes by granting them privileges and liberties, as well as his demographic policy towards several social groups (especially township youth and ethnic minorities) made a contribution in keeping Libya united, though three of its parts were never completely tied to each other neither by traditional and cultural bonds nor by developed infrastructure (Ladjal, 2016, p. 6); hypothetically, the two most advanced regions (namely, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica) still have potential to live separately from each other and from Fezzan, even though Fezzan supplies oil, which is crucial for Libya`s economy, but also water, which is a scarce commodity, and its discovery in the middle of the Libyan desert increased demographic and economic prosperity in the coast (Za'rab, 2016).

The regime of colonel Gaddafi led to the formation of the one-man state. Its unification since 1969 depended not so much on institutional structure (as it should be in "stateless society" according to new ideology, formulated in the "Green Book" (Smits, 2013, p. 11), but rather on the private charisma of the leader and his personal connections and archaic communication models (Lacher, 2011). Similar attitude was applied to the system of international relations of the country. It was not a surprise that after the death of Gaddafi, Libya fragmented into multiple factions. And also not surprising was the fall of Libya from the international relations stage, as a result of the loss of positive IR discourse during the Age of the Leader.

Since the overturn in 2011, which is often posited as being a part of the Arab Spring, Libya has lived through six years of instability, violence and civil war. Different groups and movements, shifting alliances, whose composition is not always connected to ideological views, different governments, each seeing itself as the sole legal authority, make the research of this conflict, in a certain way, not an easy task. The number of actors involved in this struggle, competing for resources, minds and power, is incredibly large, and their intentions, motives and possible future

behavior are far from clear. On top of local specifics international actors such as Italy and France rushed in to fill the void of Libyan space in international relations politically and economically.

The main purpose of this research is to determine, if there is still a factor worth indicating, powerful enough to influence unification of the country. To achieve this, we have to seek answers to several crucial questions, such as, what are the centers of power in Libya today? How did they shape up? What the leaders of these centers are trying to achieve? And, last but not by any means least, what are the interdependencies between the National and International in the framework of the Libyan crisis.

We have to determine as well, who exactly we might be considering the true leaders of Libya. In the environs of the conservative tribal state, the leaders are not only those who arrive at positions of power and merit certain political leverage, but those who enjoy enough legitimacy as well. The power position in Libya is seen in its traditional hierarchical way, where the pedigree plays the role equal to money and military resources, in fostering position of influence, we have to revisit the history of the modern Libya in order to determine, who is capable enough to reunite the country, his support base, intentions and the ways of communication with the others, what are his strong and weak sides,  allowing him to gain power or playing hindrance on him.

As the historiographic material dedicated to the Libyan crisis is rather diversified and complex, and, we have to acknowledge, rather inaccurate, explicit or unbiased, we resorted to a wide selection of sources, from strict academic researches like the works of Wolfram Lacher to news releases, from Arabic outlets, dedicated to specific problems, to the general American "guides" and provocative Russian essays on several urgent issues.

Although the exact answers were not formulated to our satisfaction (it is hardly believable someone is ever capable of making precise forecast and naming exact persons and political groups), we hope that the scrutiny of the Libyan crisis through prism of the leadership evolution brings about the understanding of the current trends,  power balance and political hierarchy in modern Libya.

**Libya: from February 2011 to December 2015**
As the unrest began in February 2011 in Benghazi (Cyrenaica), mutinies flooded all eastern cities of Libya, which were under economic and political discrimination under the long rule of Gaddafi, and soon militias, comprising local civilians, appeared in many towns, in rural areas and desert regions. Some of the opposition forces in the eastern provinces of the state succeeded to form a united coordinating body (NTC, National Transitional Council), whose brigades immediately got air support from NATO (Smits, 2013, p. 15).

When the Western states intervened in the conflict, the Libyan state collapsed, creating power vacuum. The last significant strongholds of Gaddafi`s regime were Tripoli and the leader`s native city of Sirte. In August 2011, the opposition and the NATO captured the capital, and in October Sirte fell as well while Gaddafi himself was killed by the rebels.

After that, it became clear that the unity of multilayered opposition forces was rather fragile (not that there was any in the first place). Several groups from Cyrenaica felt nostalgic towards the monarchy (Lacher, 2013, 20), and that was expressed in adopting the old flag of the Libyan Kingdom as the official flag of the state. The liberal-nationalist parties voted for democratic elections and the transformation of the entire political regime into a progressive one, along the Western paradigm.

After the parliamentary elections, which took place in July 2012, the NTC disbanded itself, and was replaced by the General National Congress (GNC). As a result of the elections, the most popular political force turned out to be the National Forces Alliance, closely followed by the

Justice and Construction Party (JCP), namely political wing of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. 120 seats from 200 were divided between independent candidates in order to prevent the formation of a clear-cut majority and to take into account the interests of each group and movement (Smits, 2013, p. 19).

But in fact, these elections showed the absence of democratic traditions in Libya, as the leading actors gained their votes through simple establishing contacts with tribal leaders (Report Libya, 2014). As a result, the divisions in the failed state became evident even more. The government soon lost (or rather haven`t even established) its control over the natural resources in the south of Cyrenaica as well as over the cities of Bani-Walid and Misrata (Lacher, 2013, p. 13). Local tribal councils replaced the GNC councils in many cities and towns, and the government had nothing left but to recognize them as local governing bodies. In a short while Misrata became a center of consolidation of an impressive military force.

The crisis was aggravated by blockade of oil supplies, which provided the biggest share of Libyan national income: the so-called Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) partly took under its control several oil fields and major oil ports, and by shutting down the pipelines they stopped the oil delivery from the southern parts of the country to the coast.

At the same time, the Islamists from such groups as Ansar al-Sharia (associated with al-Qaeda, estimated at about 5000 fighters in Libya (Report Libya, 2014)) established control over Benghazi, Derna and Ajdabiya in Cyrenaica and Sirte in Tripolitania. Ansar al-Sharia became one of the most powerful organizations due to its charity funds that had to attract local population, and to support training camps for foreign fighters, as lots of extremists arrived from Tunisia and Egypt (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016).

In the year 2014, the main events related to the confrontation between general Khalifa Haftar and the Islamists from Benghazi. In February, Khalifa Haftar, formerly the general of Gaddafi and after that a self-proclaimed opposition activist from abroad, declared the beginning of Operation Dignity against the Islamists in Benghazi, which was supposed to create a coalition between different groups, including secular militias, tribal armed groups and even some Salafis. Haftar called this coalition "Libyan National Army" (LNA) and claimed it to be the only effective Libyan military force. As a counterforce to LNA a new coalition front appeared on the stage, called Libya Dawn, which included different actors, varying from strictly Islamist groups to senior military figures.

At the same time, scores of Libyan embattled radicals, who had waged wars in several parts of the world, started to return from abroad, and pledged their allegiance to ISIS, like other foreigners and mercenaries did. These ISIS militias succeeded in consolidating their positions on the Libyan coast, making Sirte their stronghold.

In May 2014 the GNC was replaced by the House of Representatives (HoR), which mainly represented the forces associated with Operation Dignity. However, many of GNC`s members and their supporters, in particular the Islamists, resisted Haftar`s secular orientation and didn`t recognize the new HoR. They took their revenge and occupied Tripoli, so that the HoR had to hold its first session in Tobruk (Cyrenaica, under Haftar`s control), as former GNC members and some representatives from radical forces formed in August the New GNC (to be referred to as the GNC further on).

By the end of summer 2014 Libya actually turned into a collection of city-states (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016) that clashed one against the other and juxtaposed or intersected with multiple tribes, all challenging the state sovereign right to authority and control, thus summarily defining the arguments of both realist and, to the certain extent, liberal international relations theorists. The

struggle continued through the year 2015, when in November, a new Special Representative of UN in Libya, Martin Kobler, insisted on the track of political dialogue, which was held between some opposing factions in Morocco and concluded in December with the signing of the Skhirat Agreement. According to this document, the Government of National Accord (GNA) and the President Council (PC) were formed, and Fayez al-Sarraj, a former minister from the GNC, became the Prime Minister and Head of the state.

**Libya in 2016: the GNA against the HoR**

Though the political dialogue resulted in the formation of the new government, it didn`t solve all Libyan problems, and next months were overflown by events and struggle. The failure to reach compromise between all major actors was evident. In March 2016 the GNA moved from abroad to Tripoli, and as the interests and proposals of the HoR were considered in the negotiations only to a lesser degree, by the end of summer 2016 the HoR once again declared itself the only legal authority in the state and refused to comply with the provisions of the agreement.

To legitimize his position, Fayez al-Sarraj decided to start his term in the office by clearing Sirte of ISIS forces. Actually, Tripoli didn`t have enough military power and had to negotiate with other forces, among which the most powerful were the LNA, Misrata brigades and the PFG groups. Khalifa Haftar, who often claimed to be the conqueror of Sirte, refused to cooperate with al-Sarraj and preferred to wait for the campaign to end. Misrata authorities decided that this war might have been an opportunity to widen their own sphere of influence and supported resolutely the GNA; as did the PFG too, in order to consolidate their control over the oil ports and infrastructure, situated not far from Sirte.

The city was cleared from the Islamists by December 7. The battle of Sirte was not only a test for the military capacity of the GNA, but also the test for its political stability. As many brigades were acting in Sirte campaign, some supporters of the GNC unleashed street fighting in Tripoli in an attempt to bring back their old government, but the GNA successfully pushed them away to Misrata.

The victory over Sirte mustn`t be considered as a single-valued positive step because al-Sarraj and Misrata seniors set all their forces to this goal and totally ignored other impelling social problems (cash and electricity). This victory though impressed foreign actors, who began to consider al-Sarraj and the GNA more seriously. Moreover, it was likely one of the factors that hindered the Eastern Libya separation movement: on the background of the hesitant leaders of Cyrenaica and the large gap between political elites and tribal leaders, the success of Tripoli could not go unnoticed.

Historically, Barca was the core and heart of Libyan statehood, as during the period of colonial occupation it had been the most centralized region. The network of Sufi Senussi brotherhoods in towns and tribes created strong ties between different local forces, and as the aims of tribal sheikhs and Senussi leaders converged their alliance against Italy and then Britain made the starting base for a strong nationalist movement.

At the beginning, the Senussi Sufis pretended only to rule Barca (Ladjal, 2016, p. 9), and in 1949 their leader, sheikh Muhammad Idris, supported by the tribal council, published the Barca constitution (Dustur, 1949). During the reign of Muhammad Idris, who became the king of united Libya, the eastern tribes enjoyed a lot of privileges, and even though the capital was moved to Tripoli (though Benghazi kept its status of the Royal city), Cyrenaica held the position of the most developed economic region, which was further strengthened by the discovery of oil reserves in

1959 on the southern edges. As-Senussis didn`t belong to any tribe, as they originated from Algeria, and that eased their legitimacy as national power broker (Borisov, 2007).

However, during the Gaddafi`s era the tribes from Tripolitania became the most influential, as the positions of Barca`s leaders significantly declined (Smits, 2013, p. 27). They didn`t have straight access to the oil incomes and couldn`t control such infrastructure as airports, sea ports and, the most important, oil ports.

After 2011, the eastern tribes established their control over some natural resources, which included oil, gold, water, uranium. In order to restore their superiority, they formed the Council of sheikhs (elders) in Tobruk and cooperated with the HoR against Tripoli, as the tribal leaders were not sure that the GNA would not try to regain exclusive control over their resource base, thus preventing the sheikhs from the distribution of the income (Lacher, 2011).

By the beginning of July 2016 several documents were drafted, to the effect that the sheikhs of Cyrenaica tribes made a declaration by which their support to a Barca state was declared publicly (Shibh at-taqsim, 2016). In the nearest six months, the elders had to appoint the Head of the Council to play the role of the President, and to elaborate the Draft Constitution that had to be accepted by the people of Barca through a referendum; they also were expected to form initial political structures and executive bodies and appoint authorities, but in six months' time none of these points were realized.

To understand reasons of this failure, one has to look carefully at tribal structure of Libya, treating the tribe as an institution within the framework of the modern Libyan society.

**Libyan tribes**

The Libyan tribes are the main factor of the state`s development, and thirty of them have a strong impact on domestic and foreign politics (Ladjal, 2016, p. 2). Most of the Libyan cities are rather small groups of buildings that are surrounded by thousands of tents, as the tribes still prefer to keep their nomadic lifestyle.

Each Libyan tribe has its own sphere of control, named *watan*, and its reach is linked to the degree of settlement. The southern tribes (in the south of Cyrenaica and in Fezzan) have less developed relations with the village and the town, but they take control of larger areas even if smaller in absolute numbers compared to the northern tribes. At this turn, two main points should be mentioned:

First, the Libyan south is the most valuable region from the economic point of view, as there are large oil and water reserves. If the tribes fail to reach agreement with the political centers on the coast, these reserves become inaccessible for coastal cities, which could cause a nationwide economic crisis.

Second, the south is an uncontrolled region that was often used by extremist groups that channel weapons and manpower through the roads that extend over the Sahara Desert. If not controlled, the borders between Libya and neighboring states like Chad, Niger, Algeria, Sudan become an opened gate for the Islamists (Sayigh, 2016, p. 12).

The first of these two points means that without an agreement with the tribes not only the international trade is under threat (as oil is the main export commodity) but the whole layers of existence in the coastal areas. The second point means that the extremist groups also have some forms of agreement with the nomads, using their *watans* as supply routes.

To understand the social model by which Muammar Gaddafi succeeded in ruling such complicated society, we must look at his concept of the "clan state" whose roots lie in the

monarchist model. Similar to king Idris' reign, the problems of tribalism and *'asabiyya* (could be used as the synonym for tribalism, but this Arabic term is in some way deeper, meaning the tribal pride and clan devotion (Ladjal, 2016, pp. 3-4)) were solved by using the network of Sufi Senussi brotherhoods and centers (*zawiyas*): one zawiya for each town or clan (Sayigh, 2016, p. 8). The religious factor was positioned above the ethnic factor, and that provided the tribes not only with some unity, but also with the sense of equality. It also allowed the king to control the roads, the borders and the desert regions, rich with economic resources and vital for the development of the state.

No doubt, this system didn't solve all local conflicts arising in the intersection points of different *watans*. Usually the disputes concentrated on trade roads (since 1960-s also on pipelines) and while each tribe tried to strengthen its own control over the routes, these remained safe for traders and travelers, and such conflicts, overshadowed by the religious umbrella of unification, rarely influenced the overall economic situation in the country.

In the Ghaddafian era, this system was reproduced once again. He adhered to the Islamic laws (didn't drink wine etc.), to the tribal customs (as it can be marked from his clothing style and a soft spot in his heart for tents) and to the military culture. Although his reign had always had an authoritarian character, he elaborated an absolutely new model for the clan state, which meant that every tribe had a chance to participate in governing the state (Borisov, 2007).

But the real base for Gaddafi's regime was on several personal alliances that the leader concluded with the sheikhs. His power represented not an authoritarian regime in the Western meaning of this word; rather, the ancient model of a charismatic leadership, in which personal connections, devotion and skill of negotiating deals with different forces, not through papers and documents but through material resources, were crucial.

Gaddafi originated from the Gaddadfa tribe, and this is not a surprise that the members of his tribe held the essential position in the state, while the influence of dominating Barca tribes declined. As the colonel, who came to power at September 1st, 1969, was careful to avoid conflicts with the tribes and with the monarchical ruling elites, he made three important moves:

In September 1969, he began to build up the alliance between four tribes: namely, the Gaddadfa (Central Libya), Warfalla (in Tripolitania), Magarha (in Northern Fezzan) and al-Awaqir (Cyrenaica, between Derna and al-Bayda). Thanks to the central position, the *watan* of Gaddadfa tribe became an essential junction for inter-tribe relations, including where economic resources were in question.

In December 1969, he married the daughter of a Senussi high officer from Magarha tribe (Report Libya, 2014), which can be considered not only an act of reconciliation with former elites, but also marked Gaddafi as their successor.

In July 1970, he married Safia Farkash from the Barasa tribe from Cyrenaica, and this could have been considered a personal alliance between the leader and the Barca's peoples.

As we mentioned previously, Barca was subjected to certain levels of discrimination, as Muammar Gaddafi leaned on his own tribe. But the alliance of the four tribes continued to widen, as the influence of Safia did. So, even if it seemed that Cyrenaica turned into an economic base but lost any other value, in fact Gaddafi managed to create the semblance of Barca's participation in all state affairs. His methods of integrating different parts of Libya and different tribes worked very effectively. The conflicts between Arabs and Berbers were partially managed, and the most socially dangerous group – the youth – was integrated and disciplined into different military,

social, sportive and other kinds of organizations and movements, usually led by close relatives of Gaddafi himself.

But Gaddafi also had another goal – to prevent the strengthening of any local power that was not connected to his personal network of alliances. In order to hinder the tribes who could form opposition, he successfully provoked several conflicts. And if during his reign these conflicts were a part of his pattern of governance, after his death they turned into one of the major factors of instability, with each tribe and tribal faction vying for territorial and, by extension, economic gains. As the old Libyan saying goes: the tribe is great if controls desert, mountain and sea (water/oil, agricultural land and port).

As it could be seen, the success of Senussi reign derived from its Islamic base (counterpart to the ethnic relations and *'asabiyya* (Ladjal, 2016, p. 10)) and the success of Gaddafi reign came as a result of his personal agreements, achievements and principle of charismatic rule. Tailoring these principles to nowadays Libya faces, seemingly, certain difficulties.

First, an emphasis on Islam as a unifying force is not only considered dangerous from the point of view of foreign political actors, but also is seen unacceptable, to some extent, to the tribes themselves. The Kingdom of King Idris despite its Senussi network as a unifying factor was mostly secular in its character, while recent Islamism is based on radical ideas that are negatively perceived not only by Western democratic societies, but also by a great part of the Muslim population and, to a larger extent, the tribes.

The tribes in their lifestyle rely on the customary law (*'adat* or *'urf* (Report Libya, 2014)) that in many cases counters the religious law (*shari'a*), and they do not tolerate the implementation of the *shari'a* in its radical strict interpretation, for this would mean an end to their liberty (Report Libya, 2014). In tribal psychology, the possibility to adhere to *'adat* equals to liberty, as it is considered one of the main dignities of every tribe. And in addition, radical Islamists usually stand up against the *'asabiyya* principles, identifying them as belonging to the pre-Islamic "Ignorance Era". However, the Islamic concept of heteronomy as opposed to the principal of tribal "watans", becomes more and more alluring to even the tribal elites. The initial manifestation of that may be found in the so called "migrants' crises", the result of people freely crossing the sovereign borders in the attempt to claim their new territory of habitat.

The second point concerns the charismatic rule of Gaddafi. Maybe it could be reproduced in the modern Libyan society, but the main difficulty here is to find such a person who has the ability to fill the shoes of the deceased leader. We argue that in the Libyan case any new democratic procedures such as referendums could be implemented only under the strong rule of a charismatic man, who could explain their necessity and legitimize their implementation.

**Two governments, two authorities, sans sovereignty**

There are three centers of power, though one of them doesn`t control any important structure and may be sometimes ignored.

The first one is the Government of National Accord (GNA) with its Presidential Council (PC) under the leadership of Fayez al-Sarraj. Their base of support lay with the Misrata brigades. As GNA is also present in Sabha, it can keep under observation the lands of Warfalla and Gaddadfa – the main former allies of the colonel`s regime.

Fayez Mustafa al-Sarraj has an experience in working on social infrastructure, he is a rather good manager and is able to understand the social aspect of the state from its inner perspective. But he doesn`t seem to be a strong leader who can keep the state with the iron hand in crisis conditions. Two main arguments would support him to be appointed as the head of state.

First, al-Sarraj is something like a compromise between different political forces. This was meant to maintain a semblance of political equilibrium in Libya and to contribute to its peaceful integration.

Second, al-Sarraj has close relations with senior figures (his vice-premier Ahmad Maitig is his relative, as Abd al-Rahman al-Suwaihili, leader of Union for Homeland Party and the head of the State Council, is an uncle of Maitig and a member of one of two leading clans of Misrata (Lacher, 2011)). He`s also suspected of connections with radical groups and movements, like the "Muslim Brotherhood", without himself being an active member of the movement. This makes him a bridge between secular and religious actors.

Ahmad Maitig was a Libyan premier in May-June 2014 in the GNC, but since his election was somehow disputable, the High Court decided on his and his cabinet resignation. Maitig is an economist and not a politician, and that`s why he cannot be expected to assume the role of the head of state.

The vice-premier from Cyrenaica is Ali al-Gatrani, and he is one of the most effective and active figures in HoR as well. He`s also a confidential agent of Khalifa Haftar, and his election aimed at creating a connection between Tripoli and Tobruk, and their military groups. But as the HoR refused to recognize the GNA and the PC, Ali al-Gatrani boycotted PC`s working process and has been since scarcely taking part in attempts to rally the state (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016). His political line is quite clear: Libya needs federalization and must be divided into three regional autonomies, and the main role, alongside with politicians, must be played by military commanders.

Though al-Sarraj himself is not a strong political leader, and his competence lay in economics rather than politics, he has a powerful and capable cabinet (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016). It represents not only different regions and parties, but different spheres of activities and networks of influence. But, for now they must first execute effective policy in Tripolitania and Fezzan, as the tribal elders in Cyrenaica won`t consider them as an overall legitimate authority until the GNA starts to reap the rewards of success. Their image must be confirmed not only by the capture of Sirte, but also by establishing an adequate social system and restoring the damaged economy and infrastructure, as well as guaranteeing revenues for tribal groups. In other words, the GNA has been expected to reassert the sovereignty of the state but is failing to do so yet.

The HoR, represented by its spokesman Aguila Saleh Issa, officially replaced the GNC in summer 2014, but after that the new GNC was formed by the Islamist parties, the HoR had to move from Tripoli to Tobruk. According to the Skhirat agreements, HoR had to act alongside with the GNA and the PC, but the greater part of HoR members disagreed, and continued to position themselves as the only legal ruling body of the state, making HoR the model victim to the Krasner's statism.

The HoR still enjoys the support of some states such as Egypt, UAE, and Russia (and, maybe, France (Bibbo, 2017)). Its main military body (though being the object of controversy) is LNA, which HoR is relying upon for all security affairs. As a matter of fact, its role reduces to a narrow sphere of arbitration between the tribes and implementing slight economic reforms. But, at the same time, being "the only legal government and legislature", the HoR doesn`t lose hope to spread its authority over the whole Libyan state, and here the ambitions run counter to the actual level of activities and capability of effective policy.

The HoR may totally rely on LNA, but skeptical feelings about Haftar and the HoR aren`t rare. Though their external support remains significant, the scale of successes is somehow modest:

the LNA didn`t achieve any victory (Sizer, 2016) worth mentioning, and its effectiveness was just a result of well-made propaganda, and not of real military power as it is sometimes insinuated.

The HoR Speaker Aguila Saleh studied and worked in the judicial institutions. Like al-Sarraj, he isn`t a politician or inborn leader, on the other side, his knowledge of the judiciary system may help him to settle all the disputes with Barca tribes and elaborate such a balance between *‘adat*, *shari’a* and legal state law that would be recognized by all the sides of the conflicts.

### The third government and the Islamist question

The third center of power is the New GNC with its ruling body – the Government of National Salvation (GNS). When the GNC was dismissed in April 2016, its Islamist core, headed by Khalifa al-Ghweil, unsuccessfully tried to gain power and replace al-Sarraj and his cabinet (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016). However, in March 2017 GNC lost their last base in Tripoli, and in fact, this third government ceased to exist. Al-Ghweil himself was wounded, and all the political activity stopped (Fragile Ceasefire…, 2017).

If we try to forecast the future of Islamism in Libya, it`s highly doubtful that it has a chance to take strong positions in the society. There are two main centers of Islamist discourse in Libya, one of which is the cities of Barca, such as Derna, and the other is Tripoli. In Barca Islamist networks existed throughout the Italian occupation and the monarchical rule, but they were never radical. The Senussis were Sufi by character, and that meant that their doctrine allowed combination of Islamic dogma and *‘adat*, and this principle ascertained the success of Senussis within the tribal structure of the country, as it didn`t contradict the tribal law. In Tripolitania, there was no such network, and Islamist elements were limited to isolated brotherhoods and official structures, which were founded under suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire. As for Fezzan, different ethnic groups had different versions of Islam, and the common law dominated over *sharia‘*. Idris the First was a religious figure, but his reign didn`t turn Libya into a religious state (and wasn`t aimed on that at all). Muammar Gaddafi encouraged Islam because he needed to show himself as tribal, military and religious leader at the same time, but he didn`t develop the network of Islamic agencies such as universities or *fiqh* schools. And Islamism on the Libyan soil lacks sufficient roots that could help it spread among the population.

In order to explain the reasons for the Islamist parties still existing and playing an important role in the country's politics, we have to acknowledge several factors:

Some Libyans left the state and took part in military campaigns in other regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq (Smits, 2013, p. 14).

The vacuum of power attracts Islamist movements in general, and we must acknowledge, that after Tunisian and Egyptian experiences they perfected methods of filling the void.

The transborder heteronymic concept of Umma, as proselytized by Islamist ideologues has undoubtedly attracted scores of active disenfranchised youth.

Though there exist a strong argument of Makhdali Salafis attaining strong positions in Libyan political landscape (Fitzgerald, 2018), we still posit the two main reasons for the Islamists` failure i.e. the tribal-secular character of Libyan society, and the clashes between different groups of the radicals themselves, prevent the Islamists to build a unified core, or base. From this point of view, there are no strong reasons for the Islamist strengthening their role in Libya. The last failures of the GNC and GNS to find any powerful allies, and to put under control any important structures in Tripoli seemingly validate this thesis.

**The military formations and the security dilemma**

Every political center of power is served by a number of military formations, which simultaneously play the role of the army and security force. Due to the number of governments, these military bodies multiply too: the LNA in the East, the Misrata brigades, coupled with most of Tripoli brigades in the West, and the so called Libyan Shield Force in different parts of the state (Guide, 2016).

In fact, the LNA isn`t an army in the strict sense of the term, as it represents an alliance of different militias and tribes (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016). They neither have a unified program nor are recognized by military seniors in the region. However, as Operation Dignity started with multiple private contacts, now the LNA controls, or pretends to control, quite a big part of Libya.

Haftar had two major goals. One was Benghazi, despite facing complicated relations with al-Awaqir tribe and Derna, and the second was Misrata and Tripoli (Sizer, 2016). However, the siege of Benghazi lasted for quite a long time, and after the liberation of the city, Haftar faced the necessity to share power and influence with local tribal leaders. His refusal to render the control over Benghazi to the al-Awaqir sheikhs led to a split within the LNA, and if Haftar does not find solution to the problem with al-Awaqir, he may face similar problems in the relationship with other tribes and clans. In the hierarchy, which is built upon the base of private contacts, the trust is still a major determinant.

Though Haftar has the air force support from UAE and Egypt, his further success or failure in operations depends neither on these forces nor on the tribal core of his militias, but on making deals with urban inhabitants. And here lays the problem because Haftar is considered by a large part of the Cyrenaica population as a second Gaddafi and if the clans of Barca may feel nostalgic of the monarchy, they don`t feel so at all for the Gaddafi`s era (Lacher, 2013, p. 20).

The Misrata brigades as well as Tripoli brigades like Rada (Special Deterrent Force), control the only operating airport in the capital (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016)) but they are not totally unified, as they are multiple (about 200 brigades (Report Libya, 2014)) and some of the leaders don`t support GNA. But the majority of the most respected figures in both camps is rather loyal to PC, as three crucial politicians (as mentioned, al-Sarraj, Maitig and Suwaihili) are connected to the powerful Misratan clan.

The Tripoli brigades now carry out functions of the security force in the capital, replacing the police and opposing the Islamists. Their head is Mahdi al-Harati, who is well known as a founder of Liwaa al-Umma battalion in Syria, which is now associated with Free Syrian Army, and then as a major actor in the Battle of Tripoli. Currently, he is the mayor of the capital, and since he is rather young and thanks to the efficacy of his security activities he has become popular among ordinary people, he might one day transform into a military leader who can unite the forces of Tripoli and Misrata.

The leadership is becoming an urgent problem, as in January 2017 the Misrata Brigades announced their merger with the LNA, though they still describe Haftar as a rogue and have just declared their loyalty to "God Almighty and the state". The commander of Misrata Military Council, Ibrahim Beitulmal, is now popular as the conqueror of Sirte, and if he unites the brigades under his own command and cooperates with Tripoli commanders, it will undermine all Haftar`s efforts to position himself as the main leader of all military forces in Libya.

An attempt to unify the Misrata Brigades was made not long time ago. A new group known as "United Libya" appeared a couple of years ago headed by a sometime popular figure of Abdel Hamid al-Dabiba and supported by important economic and social agencies. Al-Dabiba is not only a businessman with connections, but he also has experience in politics, in settling down conflicts and in connecting different spheres (politics, economy) into one process.

In April 2017 a conference was held in Moscow (Torin, 2017), and its participants, beside the Russian officials, were al-Dabiba himself, the President of the Libyan Academy of higher education, Muhammad Eshtevi, and Muhammad Khalil Issie, the head of the irrigation project "the great man-made river". This latter is important because "the great man-made river" is an irrigation system, built by Gaddafi, to supply the coast with drinkable water from the desert. As this system was damaged by air strikes of NATO, one of the most urgent goals for the Libyan government, whatever its name, is to rebuild it.

Among other military forces, the Libyan Shield Force is a common name for three different military groups (in Benghazi, west of Tripoli and east of Tripoli) and it formally serves the GNC (Report Libya, 2014). It is considered as a terrorist movement by both the GNA and the HoR, and, being outnumbered and lacking significant resources, it has little chance for success.

The Zintan Brigades, previously the most loyal allies to Haftar, are famous for holding in custody Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of the deceased leader (Guide, 2016). For several years, they imprisoned him in Zintan, but then freed him (2016), and now he probably stays in the city, rallying militias and tribes. If he joins his efforts with neighboring Bani-Walid, loyal to his sister Ayesha, they may form a strong alliance of several tribes and militias at once and begin to spread their influence.

The Zintan Brigades are not as diversified and large as the Misrata militias, but they have a strict organization. The main body is Zintan Revolutionaries` Military Council, and the main commander is Mukhtar Khalifa Shahub (Report Libya, 2014). Shahub was once a navy officer and has a good experience in military activities. The Zintan Brigades also have a media network and can communicate with people by TV channel and Internet.

The Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) now hold a base on the coast of Barca, around Ras-Lanouf oil port. They tried to organize oil trade since 2013, but when Operation Dignity began, some difficulties arose, and the trade stopped. The leader of PFG Ibrahim Jadhran, who also became a leading figure of Cyrenaica Protection Force and Political Bureau of Cyrenaica (Report Libya, 2014)) rallied near 15-20 thousand fighters and opposed Khalifa Haftar: he even said that Haftar and IS are "two sides of the same coin" (Guide, 2016). He also made contacts with some authorities in the GNA, as al-Mahdi al-Barghati (former Minister of defense) who was his close ally. After Jadhran`s defeat and the liberation of some oil ports by the LNA, the PFG lost their monopoly over the oil infrastructure, and their political relevance as a consequence.

**Conclusion**

There are several major centers of power in Libya, and two of them are governments. The first is Fayez al-Sarraj, the GNA and the Misrata brigades. The second is represented by Abdallah al-Thani with his government in al-Bayda, the HoR, and the LNA.

The former is based on two principles: it represents all regions and groups, including Islamists and Gaddafi`s officials, and it is partly build on the relationship between two important cities, Tripoli and Misrata. Its military assets are diversified and, probably, the most effective. Provisionally, projects of combining the military, economic, political, security and social power centers here may prove successful. However, the government lacks strong leadership. Al-Sarraj and his closest assistants are economists, who make their contribution into restoring Libya after the war (like Rafiq Hariri did in Lebanon), but they are much less fit for the crisis politics. As a result, they are able to gain support only within urban centers: there, they are responsible for the local economic infrastructure, and may succeed in re-building it up in shortest time, whereas in the tribal contexts of the villages and the desert they face a permanent challenge of legitimacy. To

secure welfare in such regions, al-Sarraj has to restore all big projects (oil pipelines, system of water supplies), which will take quite a long time, and keep the borders safe because the southern borders are still the main gateway for terrorists (Sayigh, 2016, p. 17). What is urgently needed here is a good cooperation between al-Sarraj and his allies from Misrata, and a clear-cut focus on tackling social and economic problems.

The main advantage of the second power center is Haftar`s personality. His behavior, his style of waging war, and participating in negotiations has proved quite successful, coupled with savvy propaganda campaign. At the same time, his camp has no working government, as neither the HoR nor al-Thani and his ministers are competent and fit enough to tackle problems in Barca or in the whole of Libya. Moreover, they lack initiative, which is necessary to cope with all challenges in due time and efficiency.

To extrapolate the prosperous model of future Libyan state, we should take into consideration the demands of the tribes: any government of Libya must operate with the support of the Libyans, and not with endless help from abroad. Nowadays, there is no leader who is capable to act without foreign support: the GNA is backed by Western powers, the LNA gets its support from UAE and Egypt whereas Misrata from Turkey, Qatar etc. (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016). Last but not least, the political culture of the tribes demands a strong, charismatic leader, who might rally up the state in difficult times. However, until today there is no one to fit the bill.

The main question here is whether there is a prospect of non-state and exterritorial actors to gain the upper hand thus guiding the country more or less to the state defining future or there is a clear possibility of restoration of the sovereign nation-state in Libya along the state-centric concept.

Will Libya become the beginning of the new Post-Westphalian track in international setup or will return by a magical turn-around into the stables of traditional structure.

We hereby argue that the former option is more viable today than the latter.

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