

# THE STRUGGLE FOR SECURITY IN EASTERN LIBYA

Frederic Wehrey

MIDDLE EAST | SEPTEMBER 2012

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

WASHINGTON DC ■ MOSCOW ■ BEIJING ■ BEIRUT ■ BRUSSELS

# **THE STRUGGLE FOR SECURITY IN EASTERN LIBYA**

**Frederic Wehrey**

**MIDDLE EAST | SEPTEMBER 2012**

---

**CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT**

**FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

**WASHINGTON DC ▪ MOSCOW ▪ BEIJING ▪ BEIRUT ▪ BRUSSELS**

© 2012 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All rights reserved.

The Carnegie Endowment does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented here are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Endowment, its staff, or its trustees.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without permission in writing from the Carnegie Endowment. Please direct inquiries to:

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace  
Publications Department  
1779 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
Tel. +1 202-483-7600  
Fax: +1 202-483-1840  
[www.CarnegieEndowment.org](http://www.CarnegieEndowment.org)

This publication can be downloaded at no cost  
at [www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs](http://www.CarnegieEndowment.org/pubs).

# Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Summary</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>A Restive Region</b>                                  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>The Roots of Eastern Distinctiveness</b>              | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>The Movement for Autonomy and Its Opponents</b>       | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>Salafi Militancy in the East</b>                      | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>The Tabu-Arab Conflict in Kufra</b>                   | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Next Steps in the East: The Constitutional Hurdle</b> | <b>17</b> |
| <b>Formalizing the Security Sector</b>                   | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Institutional Development in a Security Vacuum</b>    | <b>20</b> |
| <b>Notes</b>   | <b>23</b> |
| <b>About the Author</b>                                  | <b>27</b> |
| <b>Carnegie Endowment for International Peace</b>        | <b>28</b> |



---

## Summary

Despite successful parliamentary elections in early July, localized clashes over identity, power, and resources persist in Libya, straining the capacity of the weak government, deterring foreign investment, and possibly stunting the emergence of democratic institutions. The most pressing of these conflicts—growing insecurity in Libya’s eastern region of Barqa, where Benghazi is located—is fueled by longstanding neglect, Salafi militancy, and fighting between ethnic Tabu and Arab tribes. Lacking an effective police and national army, the state is struggling for legitimacy and control of the east. It must act to restore the periphery’s confidence in the center.

### Key Themes

- Barqa suffered from political and economic neglect under Qaddafi; there are mounting fears that this discrimination will persist despite his overthrow.
- Although the parliamentary elections represented a referendum on national unity, the issue of federalism and decentralization is not dead; a host of new federalist parties have sprung up in the east and pro-autonomy armed groups can still play a spoiler role in national politics.
- A militant Salafi faction has emerged in the east that opposes electoral participation and has launched attacks on Western interests and Sufi sites.
- The most intractable eastern conflict is the ongoing violence in the Saharan town of Kufra, where clashes have erupted between the Tabu, a long-marginalized non-Arab African minority, and the Zway, an Arab tribe favored by Qaddafi.
- The central government has devolved enforcement and mediation in these conflicts to revolutionary brigade coalitions and tribal elders, frequently inflaming the situation and handing an unhealthy degree of leverage to informal actors.

### Findings

- Establishing an effective constitution and formalizing the security sector are the best ways to address the sources of eastern instability in the near term.

## 2 | The Struggle for Security in Eastern Libya

- The constitution must carefully strike a balance between the central government and local administration. The issue of local authority may lead to deadlock and polarization.
- The parliament must build consensus among the people on the institutionalization of the police, army, and judiciary. A top-down directive will be seen as a Qaddafi-like attempt to centralize authority.
- To help quell violence and restore eastern confidence in the state, the government must demobilize the country's numerous revolutionary brigades and strengthen the national army and police.
- A priority should be professionalizing the Supreme Security Committees, police-like bodies that have become unaccountable and widely distrusted.

---

## A Restive Region

Libya held its first parliamentary elections in sixty years on July 7. Despite sporadic violence, the polling went remarkably smoothly, defying predictions of both an Islamist landslide and a widespread boycott.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to many assumptions, the country is not headed toward a territorial breakup or a descent into widespread communal strife. Rather, it faces endemic instability resulting from a number of localized struggles over identity, power, and resources in the country's western, southern, and eastern regions. Troublingly, those conflicts are straining the nascent state's capacity, deterring foreign investment, and possibly stunting the emergence of democratic institutions. These conflicts are also empowering potent revolutionary brigades—that is, the numerous armed fighting units that were formed during the course of the anti-Qaddafi struggle, usually on the basis of neighborhood, town, or locale<sup>2</sup>—that the transitional government, bereft of an effective police and army, has been forced to co-opt to quell the fighting.

The most pressing of these local conflicts is the deteriorating security situation in Libya's eastern region of Cyrenaica (henceforth referred to by its Arabic name, Barqa), home of the restive city Benghazi. The roots of eastern insecurity run deep and are related in part to the legacy of Qaddafi's policy of marginalizing the region. But missteps by the National Transitional Council (NTC) have also fueled suspicion about continued neglect. Added to this are questions about the sharing of oil revenues; the east accounts for nearly 80 percent of the country's oil production and armed groups in that part of the country have already shown the capacity to shut down this production—a form of leverage over the central government in Tripoli. Although the July elections for the General National Congress (GNC), which replaced the NTC on August 8, represented a referendum of sorts on national unity, the issue of autonomy and federalism is not dead. A number of new federalist parties have sprung up and pro-autonomy armed groups can still play a spoiler role.

In addition to federalist agitation, other subregional conflicts in Barqa have rippled across the country. The region's deeply entrenched Salafi community is undergoing significant upheaval, with debate raging between a current that is amenable to political integration and a more militant strand that opposes democracy. In longtime hubs of Islamism in the east—Darnah, Baida, and, increasingly, Benghazi—Salafi brigades have rallied against elections and launched attacks on both western interests and Sufi sites. The most recent of these attacks was the assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, in which U.S. ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. diplomats were killed.



In many respects, Salafi violence has been empowered by the very same security vacuum that has exacerbated communal fighting elsewhere in the country.

Among these conflicts in the east, the most intractable is the ongoing violence in Kufra, a Saharan trade hub that lies far to the south of Barqa's coastal cities but is nonetheless connected to them via tribal linkages and commerce. Here, clashes have erupted between the town's long-marginalized non-Arab African minority, the Tabu, and the Zway, an Arab tribe favored by Qaddafi. Bereft of both legitimacy and the ability to project its authority, the NTC dis-

patched militia coalitions and delegations of tribal elders to quell the fighting—both have failed to cement long-term peace.

The multiple sources of eastern instability—federalist activism, Salafi extremism, and ethnic infighting—are best addressed in the long term by an effective constitution and the formalization of the security sector. Obviously, these are priorities that affect the country as a whole, but they have

special relevance to the eastern region. By delineating local and national authority over municipal services, budgets, and security, the constitutional process will be a litmus test for consolidating unity between east and west. Similarly, formalizing and integrating the country's numerous revolutionary brigades into the national army and police will help end a rising wave of violence in Benghazi, curtail the spread of Salafi militancy, and bring lasting peace to Kufra. It will also help restore eastern confidence in the national government by removing the disproportionate influence the western militia coalitions have on key ministries.

---

**The multiple sources of eastern instability are best addressed in the long term by an effective constitution and the formalization of the security sector.**

---

## The Roots of Eastern Distinctiveness

Stretching from the coastal town of Sirte to Egypt and southward to the Saharan border with Chad, the Barqa region comprises a population of 1.6 million—less than a third of the Libyan populace. Ethnically, the area is divided between a largely urban Arab population spread among towns in the mountainous coastal region and a more rural, black minority, the Tabu, who inhabit the south. The region is home to several hundred tribes; by one estimate, the largest concentration in all of Libya.<sup>3</sup> Nearly every tribe in the east has branches elsewhere in Libya, so much so that Barqa is sometimes referred to as a microcosm of the entire country. “The east is ‘Libya Minor,’” as one eastern activist interviewed by the author in July 2012 put it.

Despite the prevalence of tribal affinities, eastern distinctiveness has largely urban roots; its epicenter is the area's largest city, Benghazi. There, a thriving merchant class, a long tradition of education, and a pervasive culture of cosmopolitanism combined to produce a distinctly political self-awareness. Added to this is the city's pivotal role in many of the country's defining events. The legendary anticolonial guerilla leader Omar Mukhtar is buried just south

of the city in Suluq, the Sanussi monarchy had its seat in Benghazi until 1954, and Benghazi is where Qaddafi himself launched his 1969 revolution, with many of his co-conspirators drawn from eastern families. And of course it was ground zero for the 2011 revolt against the dictator.

There is the widespread sense, therefore, that the city—and the east in general—has long served as the engine of historic change for the whole of the country. “When Benghazi sneezes, Libya catches a cold,” goes an old saying in the area. Much of this influence, again, stems from Benghazi’s connectedness via familial linkages to the rest of the country, particularly in Misrata, Zawiya, Zuwara, Nafusa, Zintan, and even specific neighborhoods in Tripoli: Tajura, Suq al-Juma’a, and Fashlum.

In the debate over federalism and self-government for the east, these relationships have served dual purposes. For opponents of autonomy, they are reminders of the artificiality of the east’s separateness from the rest of the country. For federalism’s advocates, these connections serve as alliances and networks of support—almost fifth columns of sympathy. “Benghazi and her sisters” (*Benghazi wa akhawatiha*) is a common refrain among federalists. Though it is important to note that in the Libyan context, many citizens do not have a common understanding of what is meant by “federalism.” For some, it implies decentralized, local governance; for others, outright secession.

Against this backdrop, the long period of neglect during the Qaddafi era was, for many easterners, especially ironic. Although many of his co-conspirators in the 1969 coup hailed from eastern families, Qaddafi realized that future resistance to his rule would ultimately emanate from the east, given the influence of the Sanussi monarchy and the area’s powerful Saadi tribes. Shortly after seizing power, he began purging Sanussi officers from the army, dismantling Sufi orders, and expropriating land from Saadi notables and granting it to tribes of lesser status. Although he did not officially declare a capital, he began moving the bulk of government offices from Benghazi to Tripoli and later, in 1977, to his hometown of Sirte. Other institutions of economic and symbolic value were relocated as well: the oil ministry, the Olympic committee, and the Libyan national airline. Even the venerable University of Benghazi—the Arab world’s third-oldest university—was considered for relocation. “If the university had wheels, I would move it,” Qaddafi is purported to have said.

The development of Libya’s hydrocarbon sector added another irritant into the already-combustible mix of eastern grievances. Roughly two-thirds of Libyan oil production comes from the Sirte Basin and the eastern Benghazi region, but oil revenues have had very little effect on easterners’ living conditions and infrastructure.

## The Movement for Autonomy and Its Opponents

The issue of federalism and autonomy in the east has emerged as a major source of political tension and instability in the post-Qaddafi period. Much of this may have been linked to the temporal character and questionable legitimacy

**The issue of federalism and autonomy in the east has emerged as a source of political tension and instability in the post-Qaddafi period.**

macy of the NTC, which spurred opposition not just from the east, but throughout the country. At one level, eastern suspicion was rooted in the composition of the NTC and its cabinet, which had a distinctly western hue. At another, it reflected widespread frustration that even routine administrative services, like passport renewal, required an arduous twelve-hour drive to Tripoli. Regardless, by late 2011 there was mounting concern in the east that the post-revolutionary government would continue the hypercentralization and neglect that defined the forty-two-year reign of Qaddafi.

On March 6, 2012, a conference of 3,000 delegates in Benghazi announced the creation of the Cyrenaica Transitional Council, also known as the Barqa Council. Its head is Ahmed Zubayr al-Sanussi—the great nephew of King Idris and a political prisoner under Qaddafi for thirty-one years.<sup>4</sup> According to a senior official in the council, its second-tier leadership is diverse, comprising over 350 members of tribes, professionals, and ex-revolutionaries (*thummar*), represented equally by the far east, the Green Mountains, Benghazi, and Ajdabiya. The council also maintains an armed wing, the Army of Barqa (Jaysh Barqa), commanded by Hamid al-Hasi, a former Libyan Army colonel with extensive frontline experience in the revolution.

In its initial statement, the Barqa Council appeared to reject the domestic legitimacy of the NTC entirely, accepting its writ only in the international arena. A senior member of the Barqa Council listed key grievances as the NTC's relocation of Libya's equivalent of the social security administration to Tripoli and the marginalization of easterners on recent lists for graduate scholarships abroad and ambassadorial appointments. The most significant complaint, however, was the NTC's allocation of seats for the GNC—60 for the east, 100 for Tripoli, and 40 for the southwest. In its statement of demands, the Barqa Council called for an election boycott but then shifted to demanding greater representation in the GNC. According to one analyst with a Western nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Libya, the federalists' boycott was only partially grounded in ideology; another reason was that they simply "didn't get their act together in time" to field an effective electoral campaign.

This constant shifting of the goalpost has led some observers to criticize the council for deploying what one activist called "a muddled and illogical discourse." There has been additional criticism, even from supporters of federalism, that the council never adopted a mass mobilization strategy or concerted

outreach effort. “They never socialized the idea,” noted one local politician. “They never peddled it or widened the circle of discussion.” An independent parliamentary candidate echoed this: “The problem with Zubayr is he wanted to force federalism on people. He never sought a popular mandate.” Much of this was undoubtedly rooted in public perceptions of the council’s elite and intellectual roots. (For instance, the council’s vice chairman is Abu Bakr Bu’ira, a U.S.-educated professor of management at Benghazi University.)

The council’s influence was further undermined when a number of high-profile figures and groups came out in opposition to its March declaration. These included important religious personalities such as the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Sadeq al-Gharyani; the leader of the Brotherhood-affiliated Justice and Construction Party, Muhammad Sawan; the longtime opposition group National Salvation Front; and the powerful east-based militia coalition the Union of Revolutionary Brigades (*Tajammu Sarayat al-Thuwwar*).<sup>5</sup>

In the run-up to the election, the Barqa Council began using armed action and violence to call attention to its demands. Most notably, its supporters set up roadblocks along Libya’s main east-west artery at a valley known as Wadi al-Ahmar, which marks the administrative boundary between Barqa and Tripolitania. According to Hamid al-Hasi, the closure was in protest of the parliamentary seat allocation. At another level, though, the closure reflected primarily local grievances related to reparations and mine removal. The protesters argued that force or the threat of force was the only means to get the NTC’s attention; sources cited the strong-arm tactics of western brigades from Misrata and Zintan, which were successful in securing concessions from the government, as examples of their strategy.

For many Libyans, however, the road closure was a bridge too far—it stopped thousands of citizens from traveling the east-west corridor and forced others to clog the country’s already-shaky domestic air service. The closure was followed on July 1 with an attack on the electoral commission’s offices in Benghazi by stick-wielding demonstrators—an effort to disrupt the voting by destroying the ballots and other key materials. (Libyan observers in Benghazi at the time referred to the instigators as club-wielding “thugs” or *baltijjya*.) The public response was swift and unequivocal. Benghazi’s local brigades mobilized to disperse and arrest the attackers, while the following nights saw massive counterdemonstrations in favor of elections. Public opinion seemed to be tilting sharply against the Barqa Council and its activism. A senior official in the council noted as much in an interview on July 3, arguing that the road closure was finally lifted because, “in the end, we realized we were hurting Barqa more than helping it.”

The federalists were dealt the most severe blow when voters in Benghazi handed a victory to party list candidates from Mahmoud Jibril’s National Forces Alliance, defying predictions both of a widespread boycott and of a landslide victory for the Justice and Construction Party, which has strong roots

in the east.<sup>6</sup> Certainly, there were outbreaks of violence, but not on the scale predicated. In Benghazi, pro-autonomy activists attacked a voting station, and a machine-gun assault on a helicopter carrying election materials killed one official. In Ajdabiya, local police shot dead a pro-federalism protester after he apparently tried to steal a ballot. Just days before the elections, the Army of Barqa shut down the oil terminals at Ras Lanuf, Sidra, Brega, and Zuwaytina.<sup>7</sup>

At the close of voting, however, the mood in the east was one of euphoria and relief. Jibril's National Forces Alliance adopted a conciliatory posture toward the region, offering to form a grand coalition.<sup>8</sup> There were subsequent statements from the Barqa Council that it was considering disbanding. "The people have spoken," Abu Bakr Bu'ira stated in a televised announcement shortly after the elections.<sup>9</sup> At a subsequent meeting of independents and smaller party delegates, the so-called "third force" that is unconnected to either the National Forces Alliance or the Justice and Construction Party agreed that the positions of prime minister and chairman/speaker of the GNC should be split between the east and the southwest.<sup>10</sup> In early August, the GNC selected Muhammad al-Magariaf, a longtime oppositionist and the head of the National Salvation Front, to be its chairman. The selection of al-Magariaf, who hails from Ajdabiya, was greeted with applause in the east—both as a signal of provincial inclusion and as a clean break from the Qaddafi era. Unlike many in the NTC, al-Magariaf was never connected to the dictator's government.

Moving forward, it is clear that the elections and the high turnout in the east represent an upset for the militant federalists and a referendum on national unity. That said, the issue of federalism is not dead. There is purportedly a split emerging in the council between Zubayr and Bu'ira, and it is unclear if the group as a whole will follow Bu'ira. The bulk of the Army of Barqa is comprised of tribes who still fall under Zubayr and may yet again agitate if they feel

marginalized during the constitutional process, according to one United Nations official based in Benghazi. A number of new federalist parties are also stepping out from the shadow of the Barqa Council. Most notably, on August 2, the Libyan Unionist Party announced its formation with the goals of opposing centralization and pushing for local control over budgets and municipal services.<sup>11</sup> While these

groups will lobby for their rights within the framework of the constitutional process and the GNC, there is still the potential for a more hardline stance. In particular, oil-revenue sharing has emerged as a major litmus test of the evenhandedness of the NTC's successor.

Successful elections do not, therefore, absolve the GNC and the next executive branch from remedying the long-standing disparities between east and west, building effective governance, and reconstituting the security forces. This imperative is especially pressing in the east's enclaves of militant Salafism.

---

**Oil-revenue sharing has emerged as a major litmus test of the evenhandedness of the National Transitional Council's successor.**

---

## Salafi Militancy in the East

Since early 2012, a rejectionist strain of Salafism in the east has asserted itself in a number of attacks on Western interests, such as World War II graves, the International Committee for the Red Cross, the U.S. consulate, and a motorcade of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. Added to this, Salafis have attacked Sufi graves, shrines, and mosques across the country. While these acts hardly represent mainstream Salafi sentiment in the country, they are symptomatic of an intense debate under way between an older generation of Salafis that has embraced political participation and a newer cadre that rejects democracy. In many cases, members of the militant current were residing abroad prior to the 2011 revolt, returned home, and have since been trying to assert themselves through excessive zealotry in the realm of Islamic social mores, eschewing electoral participation, and sending volunteers and material aid to Syria and Gaza.

Salafism in Libya is not a uniquely eastern phenomenon, but it has strong roots in the east, given the area's commingling of religion and politics under the Sanussiyya. Partly as a result of developments in neighboring Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood's influence in the east became great in the 1950s and 1960s. The industrial seaport of Darnah emerged as an especially active hub of Islamism. There, growing religiosity combined with mounting economic woes and the collective memory of the town's prominent role in the anticolonial struggle to produce a trend of jihadi volunteerism that sent thousands of young men to Afghanistan in the 1980s and to Iraq after 2003. A similar dynamic was at work in the poorer sections of Benghazi, particularly the Laythi neighborhood, which earned the nickname "Little Kandahar."

Returning veterans of this war formed the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which had the explicit goal of bringing down the Qaddafi regime. In the mid-1990s, the LIFG, once a clandestine group, came into direct confrontation with the government, resulting in fierce fighting, mass arrests, torture, and most notably, the incarceration of a significant number of key leaders in the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli. The LIFG subsequently renounced violence, a move that was rooted in the prison experience at Abu Salim, shifts in the personal thinking of key figures, and an amnesty program launched by Qaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam.<sup>12</sup> Without going into the full history of this shift, it is sufficient to note that with the fall of Qaddafi and the holding of parliamentary elections, a significant portion of the LIFG's cadre—known in local parlance as *muqatileen* (fighters)—had adopted democratic participation.

Yet the move into politics also produced splits among the *muqatileen*. One faction, led by Abd al-Hakim Bilhaj, the LIFG's former emir and the ex-commander of the Tripoli Military Council, formed the al-Watan Party. But many more *muqatileen* joined a separate party, the Umma al-Wasat, led by Sami al-Saadi, the LIFG's key ideologue who had once authored a seminal

anti-democratic tract. Al-Saadi was joined by another central figure in the LIFG, Abd al-Wahhab al-Ghayid (the brother of the late Abu Yahya Libi, widely regarded as al-Qaeda's number two), who ran successfully as a parliamentary candidate in the southern city of Murzuq. In many respects, this fracturing of the politicized *muqatileen* was related to differences over piety and ideological purity. Sami al-Saadi, who holds a master's degree in Islamic law, is regarded as more of a clerical authority than Bilhaj. The leader of the Taliban, Mullah Omar, is reported to have lauded him as the "sheikh of the Arabs." Similarly, Abd al-Wahhab al-Ghayid is known to be a compelling orator and master of jurisprudence (as was his brother), which was clear during a speech he delivered at a commemorative ceremony for the Abu Salim prison massacre in Tripoli on July 29.

While this current entered politics, a parallel faction was forming representing the second generation of Salafi jihadists. These are the sons and nephews of the first generation, who witnessed the 1990s crackdown and torture of their fathers or were incarcerated themselves and radicalized by their experiences. Some went to Afghanistan and Iraq after 2001, were imprisoned by coalition forces, and were repatriated to Libya by British and American intelligence services. In the tumult of the 2011 revolution, they reemerged as leaders of revolutionary brigades in Benghazi, Darnah, and other eastern cities.<sup>13</sup>

Unlike Bilhaj and his cohort, though, this group never relinquished their militant view. A key player is Abd al-Hakim al-Hasadi, who formed the Darnah Brigade in the early stages of the revolution, which was later renamed the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade. At some point, al-Hasadi was joined by Sufyan bin Qumu, another veteran of the LIFG, who was associated with Osama bin Laden in Sudan and fought with the Taliban before being arrested by Pakistani authorities and turned over to the United States.<sup>14</sup> Qumu reportedly trained the brigade but later had a falling out with the force, perhaps because of his explicit links to al-Qaeda. Another, more shadowy figure associated with this current is Abd al-Basit Azuz, a former veteran of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan, who fled Libya for Syria in the 1990s, then lived for a period in the United Kingdom before moving to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border in 2009.<sup>15</sup> According to one report, he was personally dispatched by Ayman al-Zawahiri to Libya in the wake of the 2011 revolts to establish an al-Qaeda foothold in Darnah. An undated online video (probably from the spring of 2012) shows Azuz speaking at a rally in Darnah in the presence of Salim Derby, who was al-Hasadi's successor as the commander of the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade and a fellow veteran of the LIFG.<sup>16</sup>

As of mid-2012, the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade had become a force unto itself in Darnah. It began closing down beauty parlors and enforcing strict social mores in the city. In Darnah's central court, it hung up a banner proclaiming Islamic law.<sup>17</sup> Outside the city, in the foothills of the Green Mountains, it is reputed to run a training camp for volunteers in Syria. There are also

indications that it is asserting itself through criminal enterprises such as drug smuggling and illicit weapons trafficking to Gaza. On March 2, 2012, the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade was reported to have assassinated Muhammad al-Hasi, a former colonel in the Libyan army who was in charge of internal security in Darnah and in line to be the head of the Darnah branch of the Ministry of Interior's new security force, the Supreme Security Committees (SSCs). It is likely that the brigade viewed him as a threat to both their lucrative black market activity and their control of the town's overall security. In any event, on April 11, the brigade had effectively been assigned to the SSCs. The brigade's new commander, Fathi al-Sha'iri, hails from Darnah's most prominent tribe.

In many respects, this institutionalization of the Salafi jihadists marked another phase in their development, a branching off by an even more radical group that coalesced under the name of Ansar al-Sharia, which announced its establishment in April. It is purportedly led by the aforementioned Sufyan bin Qumu in Darnah and is composed of more hardline elements of the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade who opposed the brigade's incorporation into the SSC. It is reported to field roughly 300 members and, like the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade, is said to maintain a small training camp in a forest outside of Darnah. In an April interview with a jihadist forum, Qumu argued that the brigade was in the forest to guard the city's "steam plant."<sup>18</sup>

An Ansar al-Sharia Brigade also exists in Benghazi, led by Muhammad Ali al-Zahawi.<sup>19</sup> According to the group's Facebook page, al-Zahawi is a former political prisoner under Qaddafi who fought in the battle for Benghazi on March 19 with Rafallah Sahati (a prominent LIFG veteran who was killed in the battle), assumed command of the Rafallah Sahati Brigade, then went on to lead a contingent of eastern fighters in the defense of Misrata. On the political front, he is one of the founders of the High Authority for the Protection and Achievement of the February 17 Revolution and the Society for Islamic Dawa and Reform. According to its pamphlets, Ansar al-Sharia aims to unify all Islamist groups in Libya, wage jihad against "tyrants and polytheists," and eliminate secular courts in the country.<sup>20</sup> Al-Zahawi also made a rare public appearance on local television to condemn the July 7 elections as un-Islamic and to forbid participation in them.<sup>21</sup>

While similarly hardline in its views, the group and its leaders deny any linkages to Qumu's Ansar al-Sharia Brigade in Darnah. The Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi operates openly in the city and reportedly performs some public service functions such as guarding a hospital, but has refused to fall under the Ministry of Interior's authority. Ansar al-Sharia vehicles and members were reportedly present in the initial assault on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, although the group made a statement steadfastly denying involvement while at the same time praising the culprits.

Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi made its most visible entrée into eastern politics in early June, when it organized a rally for likeminded Islamist brigades



in support of Islamic law. On the morning of June 7, over 150 vehicles representing fifteen brigades (eleven based out of Benghazi) paraded along the city's waterfront. According to one of the commanders of the participating brigades the parade was "meant to intimidate those who do not want God's law." Yet the rally met with fierce opposition. By late afternoon, groups of civil society activists, including large NGOs and women's groups, had appeared on Benghazi's waterfront to oppose the rally. Many bore flags and placards emblazoned with "Libya is Not Afghanistan."<sup>22</sup> Importantly, the Benghazi counterdemonstration was not an isolated incident. Throughout the east, there has been burgeoning opposition and outreach to Salafi militancy from a range of societal actors.

### Local Counterweights to Salafi Militancy

In each of the enclaves where it has enjoyed support, the Salafi rejectionist current has also encountered opposition from civil society activists, tribes, and religious figures. This opposition has been particularly evident in Darnah, a city that, despite its long-standing notoriety as a hotbed for Islamism, has a robust educated class and a thriving NGO scene. Voter turnout in Darnah during the GNC elections was relatively high and Islamists did not make strong gains. Over 140 NGOs operate in Darnah, of which 60 are led by women. A number of liberal theater groups that challenge the Islamic orthodoxy of Ansar al-Sharia have also sprung up—the most notable of these is a troupe called Breeze of Freedom (Nasim al-Huriya). Darnah's university has become a particularly contested area in the struggle, with Salafi groups attempting to impose social restrictions on students. At the same time, it has emerged as a sort of neutral ground for mediation and conflict resolution. A prominent faculty member, Adl al-Unaybah—also a member of Darnah's local council—has emerged as a key mediator with the area's Salafi groups. According to several interlocutors, al-Unaybah convinced the Abu Salim Martyrs' Brigade to affiliate themselves with the SSC. He reportedly tried a similar approach with Ansar al-Sharia but was unsuccessful.

Aside from these interlocutors, there are religious mediators. These clerics hail from the same Salafi milieu as the rejectionists and were perhaps themselves incarcerated at Abu Salim prison, but they evince a more moderate outlook.<sup>23</sup> Chief among these is the Grand Mufti of Libya, Sheikh Sadeq al-Gharyani. Appointed as Grand Mufti by the NTC in May 2011, al-Gharyani has emerged as one of the NTC's foremost conflict mediators, not just on religious issues, but on tribal fighting in the south and west. On the Salafi issue, he has played a central role in condemning the desecration of Sufi shrines.<sup>24</sup> Former *muqatileen* who have joined Bilhaj's al-Watan Party have also played a role in outreach. According to one member of al-Watan: "We try to talk to Ansar al-Sharia. We tell them: 'You can protest, but bring your women and children, not weapons. Don't wear Afghan clothing.' We tell them, you

should talk to the media.” The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood is another counterweight; it maintains a robust media network in the east that frequently posts condemnations and counterpoints to Salafi militancy.

Yet the tribes have proven to be the strongest counterweights to Salafism in the east. Tribal elders (known in the local dialect as *wujaha*) have engaged in outreach to the Salafists, attempting to woo them into local councils and incorporate their brigades into the formal security services. And their voices have weight. In an April 2012 interview, Qumu stated that he would obey the dictate of the *wujaha* to integrate Ansar al-Sharia into the Libyan Army or SSC.<sup>25</sup> The tribes have also been a source of extraordinary pressure, which was illustrated on two occasions. First, following the killing of Muhammad al-Hasi, his tribe, the al-Shalawiya, removed Abu Salim Martyrs’ Brigade checkpoints in Darnah and briefly chased the brigade out of town for three days. Second, the killing spurred a major conference of eastern tribes south of Darnah sometime in late June. It was agreed that the tribal elders would prevent their youth from joining the Abu Salim Martyrs’ Brigade, the Ansar al-Sharia Brigade, and likeminded Salafi groups. Moreover, the tribes agreed that they were not responsible for anyone who entered the ranks of these groups; if a tribal member who joined was killed or detained by police or security services, the traditional tribal law of retribution would not apply.

The results of the elections have further put the Salafi rejectionists on the defensive by revealing that the majority of the Libyan electorate, even in eastern Islamist enclaves like Darnah, is focused on pragmatic, technocratic agendas for developing the country, rather than piety, charity, and social justice—the traditional selling points of the Islamists. In many respects, the Salafis have yet to find a niche or a compelling cause that will resonate in Libya. Much of this has to do with the country’s already-conservative social mores and piety; alcohol is banned and many women adopt the hijab. The more radical elements of the Salafi movement have therefore taken to destroying Sufi shrines and graves that they regard as idolatrous and un-Islamic. These incidents provoked an unprecedented public outcry against the Salafis, as well as the Interior Ministry for failing to prevent the attacks and allegedly permitting them. By many accounts, this violence is not a sign of the Salafis’ influence in Libyan society, but rather their isolation and marginalization. “I met with several of the Ansar al-Sharia members,” noted one local activist. “They seemed scared. They are constantly under fire because of public anger over their attacks on Sufi sites.”

A key priority in the wake of the U.S. consulate attack will be to build policies of inclusive governance, development, and security sector reform in the east. This holds true not just for Barqa’s urban coastal areas, but also on the Saharan periphery where conflict has raged in Kufra since February 2012.

---

**The tribes have proven to be the strongest counterweights to Salafism in the east.**

---

## The Tabu-Arab Conflict in Kufra

A longtime hub of trans-Saharan commerce, human labor, and narcotics trafficking, Kufra is a remote town located approximately 540 miles from the coast, in the tri-border area between Egypt, Sudan, and Chad. Of its estimated population of 43,500, the majority are ethnic Arabs from the Zway tribe. Around 10 percent are ethnic Tabu, a group which is found mostly in Chad but also in Libya—in Sabha, al-Qatrun, and Kufra. Since February 2012, fighting between the Tabu and Zway in Kufra has left over 200 killed.

The Zway-Tabu conflict has rippled across Barqa and the whole of Libya on multiple levels. Citing indiscriminate attacks by the Zway and the NTC's inability to stop them, Tabu leader Issa Abd al-Majid threatened to boycott the GNC elections, demanding an international peacekeeping force be stationed in Kufra, and for Tabu representatives to be given seats in the country's cabinet.<sup>26</sup> He has warned of setting up a separate Tabu state in the south as well.

Members of the Zway have also threatened to declare a semiautonomous zone if the fighting continues. Unlike the Tabu, the Zway have a powerful economic lever at their disposal: oil. With vast fields under their sway they can plausibly claim to control up to 17 percent of Libya's oil output; Zway tribesmen serve as security guards at several refineries and processing stations.<sup>27</sup> On multiple occasions the tribe has threatened to shut down oil production if the NTC did not intervene in Kufra.<sup>28</sup>

### A Struggle Over Identity and Resources

The current conflict in Kufra reflects a confluence of national, ethnic, local, and economic factors. At one level, the fighting is a contest over the town's lucrative smuggling networks—by various accounts, the violence erupted in February 2012 when Tabu guards arrested Zway smugglers or when a Zway shopkeeper was killed in a Tabu armed robbery. More broadly, the conflict is a struggle by the Tabu to undo the vestiges of Qaddafi's discriminatory policies that deprived them of citizenship, housing, and medical care and condemned them to serf-like status under the Zway. Qaddafi's policies of Arabization fueled Tabu grievances with the state. During the Libyan-Chadian war (1975–1994), the Tabu in Kufra fell under further suspicion as fifth columns for Chad, while the Libyan government showered the Zway with arms and money to enlist them as state proxies. Added to this, Tabu refugees from northern Chad fled to Kufra, further upsetting the tenuous balance of power between the two groups.

Throughout the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the Tabu in Kufra saw their livelihood decline precipitously, with the majority of Tabu confined to ghetto-like conditions in the districts of Swaydiya and Qaderfi. In 2007, Qaddafi withdrew Libyan nationality from many Tabu in Kufra, effectively depriving them of health care, housing, jobs, and education. In response, local Tabu

formed the Front for the Salvation of Libyan Tabu; widespread rioting and protests ensued. In 2008, the regime suppressed a major Tabu uprising in Kufra, deploying helicopter gunships and tanks.<sup>29</sup> During the 2011 revolt, however, the Zway and the Tabu temporarily shelved their differences and fought together against Qaddafi.

But in the aftermath of Qaddafi's ouster, the conflict reemerged. Each side feels increasingly disenfranchised, believing that the other is quickly gaining economic and political advantage. The absence of the state as a mediator and the general security vacuum has only intensified this perception. Flush with heavy weaponry from the area's local arms depots, Tabu and Zway brigades have mobilized to provide local security and have wrestled for control of cross-border smuggling routes. On this front, the Tabu appeared to have seized the advantage with the tacit endorsement of the government. Suspicious of the Zway as longtime Qaddafi supporters, the NTC invested authority in Issa Abd al-Majid to monitor and guard the southeastern border. In effect, the NTC handed him a near monopoly over the area's illicit economy.<sup>30</sup> Emboldened by this newfound wealth, the Tabu are attempting to reclaim their citizenship, demanding better social services and access to political power. Many complain that, rather than addressing these demands, the government is simply continuing the discriminatory policies of the Qaddafi era.

This perception has been undoubtedly worsened by the contentious cross-border dimension of the conflict. In the wake of Qaddafi's ouster, thousands of Tabu from Chad returned to Kufra, many claiming Libyan citizenship. The lack of accurate record keeping has meant that it is impossible to verify claims. In the run-up to the July 7 GNC elections, the registration of roughly 1,000 Tabu voters in Kufra was rejected by the NTC on the grounds of fraudulent citizenship—approximately 15 percent of Kufra's 7,000 Tabu. While the move undoubtedly had justification in some cases, it inflamed an already-tense situation.

Added to this, many Libyan media outlets and Zway leaders in Kufra have charged that local Tabu are aided by Chadian and Sudanese militias, specifically the Darfurian opposition group, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM).<sup>31</sup> In many respects, this accusation is convenient scapegoating for what is ultimately a localized Libyan conflict over power and resources. That said, the JEM does have a history of interference in Kufra's affairs that has exacerbated Zway-Tabu tensions. During the 2011 war, for example, the JEM attacked Kufra and fought with Qaddafi's army against revolutionary forces as far west as Misrata. JEM forces fighting in Brega captured a Zway revolutionary leader from Kufra and spirited him to Darfur; he was released only after a ransom of 100,000 Libyan dinars was paid.

### The Government Response: Subcontracting Security and Mediation

Hampered by a lack of capacity to project its authority, the government has relied upon coalitions of local militia to restore security and delegations of tribal elders to negotiate ceasefires. In both cases, this informal strategy has failed to provide lasting peace or address the entrenched roots of the conflict. In some instances it has ended up inflaming tensions even more.

In place of the army, the NTC dispatched a coalition of revolutionary brigades known as the Eastern Libyan Shield to Kufra.<sup>32</sup> (In June, a group of Majabra tribal sheikhs from Ajdabiya stopped a contingent of Ansar al-

**The government’s strategy of relying on coalitions of local militia to restore security and delegations of tribal elders to negotiate ceasefires has failed to provide lasting peace or address the entrenched roots of the conflict.**

Sharia fighters from moving south to join the fighting in Kufra.<sup>33</sup>) By many accounts the Shield has ended up aggravating the situation in Kufra by adopting a markedly partisan approach to the fighting, with forces augmented by Zway tribal brigades. On several occasions, the Shield was reported to have shelled the Tabu neighborhood of Qaderfi, causing civilian casualties, and at one point undertook a mass expulsion of Tabu from Kufra that, according to Issa Abd al-Majid, amounted to ethnic cleansing. Some Shield commanders appear to believe they are fighting an influx of African volunteers from Kenya, Somalia, Sudan,

Chad, and Mauritania who have come to assist the Tabu.<sup>34</sup> One of the Tabus’ key demands has been the withdrawal of Eastern Libyan Shield forces and their replacement by regular units from the Libyan Army.

As of mid-July, the Shield purportedly withdrew and was replaced by new militia coalitions from the Libyan Army and the Union of Revolutionary Brigades, which is also guarding the border. While this is not a viable, long-term solution, it does appear to have quieted the unrest somewhat; the commanders of these brigades are viewed by both Tabu and Zway as neutral and impartial. That said, there may be other costs to this approach. As in other instances throughout the country, the NTC’s policy of “deputizing” the brigades to quell local conflicts or exert control over the borders has endowed those forces with an unhealthy degree of autonomy and leverage. The Union of Revolutionary Brigades has been allegedly asking for payment directly from European diplomats in return for preventing migrants from sub-Saharan Africa from traversing Libya and flooding southern Europe.

In tandem with the dispatch of brigades, the NTC sent teams of tribal elders, principally from Ajdabiya, to Kufra.<sup>35</sup> When they failed, other tribal sheikhs from Misrata, Nafusa, and Zawiya were dispatched.<sup>36</sup> As of early August, the elders negotiated a shaky truce that appeared to be largely the result of the Eastern Libyan Shield withdrawing from the area.<sup>37</sup> It is uncertain whether this ceasefire will hold. A United Nations official in the area likened

it to a “Band-Aid” that failed to address the broader issues of social and economic inequality in the town.

At the same time this mediation has been under way, the NTC took nascent steps to control the tri-border region between Sudan, Chad, and Libya. In March 2012, a joint border force was established by the three countries, but its deployment has been plagued by delays.<sup>38</sup> Recent weeks have also seen government efforts to register former Tabu revolutionaries and integrate them into the police and army. But there is reportedly hesitation among many Tabu about joining because of concerns about the army’s perceived infiltration by Qaddafi-era holdouts.<sup>39</sup> This highlights the need for reforming the security sector which, in tandem with the drafting of an effective constitution, represents the critical next step for the east.

## Next Steps in the East: The Constitutional Hurdle

In the months ahead, the General National Congress will face tough questions about the balance between central government and local administration. Many of these questions will hinge upon the drafting of an effective constitution. Already, there has been significant debate about the process for drafting this document, with many in the east viewing it as a post-election litmus test for the GNC’s commitment to resolving east-west differences. In March 2012, the NTC made a remarkable amendment to Article 30 of the constitution when it decreed the document would be drafted by a 60-member commission—the so-called “Committee of 60”—that would be formed along the lines of the body that drafted the 1951 constitution. Its sixty members would be appointed by the GNC to represent each of Libya’s three regions. This was seen as a clear effort to win support from the Barqa region. The amendment does differ significantly from the 1951 precedent by stating that any measure must be passed by two-thirds majority plus one—a caveat designed to prevent a single region from overruling the other two, as happened during the 1951 process.<sup>40</sup>

On July 5, 2012—just two days before the elections—the NTC went even further in an effort to head off the expected boycott from the east. It decreed that the Committee of 60 would be elected by popular vote, rather than appointed. The measure met with widespread support in the east, but there were certainly critical voices as well. Some believed that the constitution-drafting process would become excessively politicized and that the members of the commission should be drawn from legal experts, political scientists, and technocrats rather than popularly elected. Others argued that treating each region as a single constituency would marginalize towns and villages with smaller population densities.<sup>41</sup> In a statement after the election, the NTC appeared to leave the door open to even further modification by stating that

the eleventh-hour amendment was not legally binding on the GNC.<sup>42</sup> As of August, according to a United Nations official in Benghazi, there are indications that the new GNC is going to formally repeal the NTC's amendment, since they view it as illegal. Were this to happen, it would almost certainly rekindle eastern suspicions of marginalization and possibly empower more militant advocates of federalism.

Aside from these debates, the commission and the GNC face an ambitious timeline for adopting a constitution. According to a recent amendment, the commission has one hundred and twenty days to draft a constitution and then hold a referendum within thirty days. It will then go to the GNC for ratification and promulgation. Many have pointed to likely turbulence in this process, citing the inexperience of both the commission and GNC delegates, the lack of a clear parliamentary bloc, and the potential to conflate national with municipal issues. Others have called for an extension of the timeline, citing the precedent of the 1951 constitution which was formulated in twenty-five months.<sup>43</sup>

## Formalizing the Security Sector

Irrespective of the constitutional timeline, the GNC will face the daunting challenge of rebuilding the country's security sector, a task with particularly dire implications in the east given a recent spike in violence in Benghazi and other cities. In July alone, over thirteen Qaddafi-era officials were killed in Benghazi and surrounding cities. Benghazi also witnessed a string of grenade and rocket-propelled-grenade attacks against a courthouse and prisons, kidnappings, and improvised explosive attacks against local security headquarters.<sup>44</sup> The perpetrators of these attacks remain unknown. Some have attributed them to an Islamist vigilante group with a hit list. It may also be attempts by local militia to strike at the formal organs of the state security apparatus, which are believed to be staffed by Qaddafi-era officials.

Overlaid on all of this is an ongoing feud between tribal opponents and supporters of the late Abd al-Fatah Yunis, the former minister of interior under Qaddafi who defected to become the opposition's military commander during the revolution. He was assassinated under mysterious circumstances in Benghazi on July 28, 2011, and much of the recent violence was clustered around the anniversary of his death. For instance, on the evening of July 31, masked gunmen stormed the Ministry of Interior building in Benghazi and freed his alleged killer.

Regardless of origin, the attacks point to the urgency of addressing the security situation in the east within the framework of broader security sector reform in the country. Specifically, the numerous revolutionary brigades must be integrated into the regular police and army, and young, ex-revolutionary *thunwar* must be given opportunities for job training or further education. Much of the work will have to focus on the ad hoc and temporary security

bodies that have been created or tolerated by the NTC. In some cases, they are billed as holding pens or halfway houses for revolutionary brigades on the road to dismantlement and integration into the police and army. In others, they are bottom-up initiatives by the brigade commanders themselves, to resist the incorporation of their fighters into the army or police and to preserve the cohesion of the brigades—albeit under a different name. The central government will have to find a way to either dismantle those forces or bring them under tighter control.<sup>45</sup> Otherwise, they run the risk of evolving into a sort of shadow state that subverts the development of democratic institutions.

Among these bodies, the most problematic is the Supreme Security Committee, which falls under the Ministry of Interior. Numbers of the force remain murky, with some estimates ranging from 90,000 to 100,000 members. Ostensibly, the force is composed of revolutionary fighters and is meant to temporarily harness their zeal and fighting experience in the service of transitional security, particularly during the election period. Most ominously, the committees have left the brigade structure intact—entire brigades have joined en masse and their commanders have simply switched hats. In late August 2012, there were worrisome indications that the committees in Tripoli were infiltrated by hardline Salafis who had desecrated Sufi sites in Tripoli and Zlitan.<sup>46</sup> Paradoxically, then, the committees are perpetuating the very brigade system the NTC is trying to dismantle, running at loggerheads with other demobilization programs under the prime minister's office and minister of defense.<sup>47</sup>

Among Libyan citizens, the SSCs have hardly engendered confidence or trust. While the local police (which also fall under the Ministry of Interior) are derided as Qaddafi-era holdouts, the SSCs are feared as unruly thugs or derided as misfits. Accusations of torture, kidnapping, and murder are widespread. Increasingly, there are signs of a worrisome formality—the uniforms have gotten more standardized and the SSCs now have a website—that suggest they are not going away anytime soon.<sup>48</sup> Most recently, the SSC in Tripoli forced the GNC to back down by threatening a strike after it had called for the resignation of SSC leaders following the desecration of Sunni shrines in late August.

Equally problematic as the SSCs over the long term is the Libyan Shield coalition of brigades from the east, Misrata, and Zintan that effectively functions as a parallel to the anemic Libyan Army. The Shield has often ended up inflaming tensions in the east because its commanders are seen as being party to the local conflict. In many respects, the force is a bottom-up initiative by brigade commanders themselves, designed to resist the incorporation of their fighters into the official army or police departments and to preserve the structure of the brigades—albeit under a different, more official-sounding name.

One Misrata brigade commander, arguably the most powerful military leader in the city, plans to transform the Shield into Libya's reserve military



force, which would operate alongside the country's army, navy, and air force, and would be directly run by Libya's chief of staff. According to his plan, Shield members would train one month a year and receive a stipend and medical benefits for themselves and their families. In exchange, they would hand over their heavy weaponry—artillery, tanks, rockets, recoilless rifles—to the Ministry of Defense. The government would buy back the fighters' medium-size weaponry—the 14.5 and 23 millimeter anti-aircraft guns that were staples of the revolution. All these weapons would be stored in regional “military zones,” overseen by local Shield commanders. The scheme is purportedly intended to break up the brigades, since recruits join as individuals, not as part of a group. It is hard not to imagine, however, that it is just an ingenious way of preserving the prerogatives of the regional brigades and positioning the Shield as a hedge against an unfavorable political situation in Tripoli.<sup>49</sup>

Yet another militia initiative that serves as a counterweight to the Libyan Army is the Supreme Revolutionaries' Committee—a coalition of brigades from Tripoli, Misrata, and the Nafusa Mountains that was announced in late July. The committee has asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff to exclude all army officers that fought on Qaddafi's side from the new Libyan Army. The body also agreed on establishing a “political wing” for the committee that will be responsible for holding ministries and state institutions accountable to combat corruption in the Libyan state.<sup>50</sup>

In the last months of its tenure, the NTC took some steps to demobilize the brigades and integrate their young fighters into society. At the forefront of this effort is an initiative from the prime minister's office called the Warrior's Affairs Commission for Development (known locally as the WAC). The WAC has registered nearly 215,000 revolutionary fighters and collected data on them as well. It functions as a sort of placement service, moving these young men into the police and the army, or sending them on scholarships abroad, furthering their education at home, or giving them vocational training. After vetting and screening, roughly 150,000 are now eligible for placement; what happens to the other 65,000 remains to be seen. According to one WAC official, the implied goal of the commission is to break up the brigades by appealing to individual interest, “We need to appeal to the *thummar*'s ambitions and desire for a better life. We need to tell him that the brigades cannot offer you anything.” Unsurprisingly, the reaction from the brigades has been tepid.

## Institutional Development in a Security Vacuum

Although fears of the east's secession and potential autonomy have subsided, many pressing security concerns that will challenge GNC remain. The recent GNC elections represented a mandate for territorial unity, but there is still the

potential that high expectations for economic growth and political inclusion will be unmet. A number of armed groups in the east maintain the capacity to play a spoiler role. Added to this is the mounting scale of assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings that have afflicted Benghazi.

Aside from the security vacuum, the most pressing conflicts within the east are the rise of Salafi militancy and Tabu irredentism. In both cases, the gap between central authority and local governance has exacerbated long-standing tribal and generational conflicts. The weakness of the formal security sector has meant that the state has devolved enforcement and mediation to informal actors—brigade coalitions and tribal elders. These stopgap measures have frequently inflamed the situation and handed an unhealthy degree of leverage to the brigades and tribal leaders.

One of the new parliament's core tasks, therefore, will be to hasten the institutional development of the police and army, as well as the judiciary. Much of this is already happening, unplanned, at the local level. The new government would be wise to harness this momentum, rather than implementing a top-down approach that does not take local considerations into account, which will be regarded as yet more evidence that Qaddafi's centralizing policies are alive and well. In tandem, the GNC must carefully steer the country through the constitutional process. The prospect for deadlock and polarization remains high, particularly on two issues that could animate violence in the east: local autonomy and the role of Islam in legislation.

In many respects, the outside community has limited leverage over these events. Already, a number of multilateral and bilateral efforts are under way to assist the Libyans with strategic planning in the ministries of defense and interior, to train the police, and to hasten the integration of young fighters. For models of constitution writing and decentralized government, the Libyans could benefit from other countries' experiences—the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Brazil. But for now, they appear to be drawing both positive and negative lessons from their own country's brief experiment—the 1951 constitution. Regardless of which model is used, the new government must restore the periphery's confidence in the center, repairing the political disconnect between the national government in Tripoli and local councils. Only then will the country's numerous brigades be persuaded to relinquish their autonomy.



## Notes

Unless otherwise stated, this paper draws from interviews conducted by the author in eastern Libya in March and July of 2012.

- 1 For a representative example, see Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi, “Libya Heading Toward Islamism,” *American Spectator*, November 11, 2011. It is important to note that raising the specter of an Islamist advance in Libya was more prevalent among Western than Arab observers, with the latter noting the fractured nature of Libya’s Islamist movement as a key check on its strength. Kamel Abdallah, *Al-Siyasa al-Dawliya* (Arabic-language international affairs periodical), “Ihtimalat Iqamat Dawla Diniya fi Libya” (Possibility of Establishing a Religious State in Libya), October 2011.
- 2 For more on this typology in the Libyan context, see Brian McQuinn, “Armed Groups in Libya: Typology and Roles,” *Small Arms Survey Research Note*, no. 18, June 2012.
- 3 Faraj Najem, *Tribe, Islam and State in Libya*, unpublished PhD dissertation, 241.
- 4 See the website of the Barqa Council at [www.ctc-ly.org](http://www.ctc-ly.org). *New Quryna*, July 20, 2011, <http://qurynanew.com/?p=4356>; al-Jazeera.net, July 21, 2011, [www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6C403781-A193-45F8-A392-2A900CB1CD4E.htm](http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6C403781-A193-45F8-A392-2A900CB1CD4E.htm).
- 5 “Creation of Cyrenaica Council Sparks Furious Federalism Row,” *Libya Herald*, March 7, 2012. Also, Rafiq Taqsim Libya ‘ila Fedralyaat, “Rejection of Dividing Libya Into Federal States,” al-Jazeera.net, July 21, 2011, [www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6C403781-A193-45F8-A392-2A900CB1CD4E.htm](http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6C403781-A193-45F8-A392-2A900CB1CD4E.htm).
- 6 “Jibril’s Bloc Wins Party Seats in East Libya,” Al-Jazeera, July 7, 2012, [www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/07/2012711202926521918.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/07/2012711202926521918.html).
- 7 “Gunmen Close Libyan Oil Terminals Ahead of Vote,” *NOW Lebanon*, July 6, 2012.
- 8 “Libya Leader Threatens ‘Force’ to Foil East Autonomy Bid,” *Jordan Times*, March 8, 2012.
- 9 See the website of the Barqa Council, [www.ctc-ly.org](http://www.ctc-ly.org).
- 10 Michael Cousins, “Congress Independent Members Mull PM and Chairman Choice,” *Libya Herald*, July 28, 2012.
- 11 “Federalists Launch Political Party,” *Libya Herald*, August 1, 2012.
- 12 For background, see “Al-Islamiyun fi Libya: Tarikh wa Jihad” (Islamists in Libya: History and Jihad, parts 2 and 3), *Al-Manara*, January 2012, [www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/01/7420/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA](http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/01/7420/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA); [www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/01/8240/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA-2](http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/01/8240/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%82-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%8A%D8%B9%D9%8A-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A8%D9%8A%D8%A7-%D8%AA-2).
- 13 For background on the Islamists role in the defense of Benghazi see the interview with Fawzi Bu Katif, al-Manara, February 14, 2012; available at [www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/02/10675](http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/02/10675).
- 14 For more, see Charles Levinson, “Ex-Mujahedeen Help Lead Libyan Rebels,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 2, 2011.
- 15 Nic Robertson and Paul Cruickshank, “Source: Al Qaeda Leader Sends Veteran Jihadists to Establish Presence in Libya,” CNN, December 30, 2011; and Nic

- Robertson, Paul Cruickshank and Tim Lister, “Growing Concern Over Jihadist ‘Safe Haven’ in Eastern Libya,” CNN, May 15, 2012. Azuz is also cited in an Amnesty International Report for Syria in 1995.
- 16 See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ytkhjMd4PQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ytkhjMd4PQ).
- 17 See the Abu Salim Martyrs’ Brigade’s “*shari’a* session” at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYIF74yCRxw&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYIF74yCRxw&feature=related).
- 18 See interview in the jihadist web forum Tamimi: <http://tamimi.own0.com/t97883-topic#686380>.
- 19 See [www.facebook.com/anssarelsharieah](http://www.facebook.com/anssarelsharieah).
- 20 The Ansar al-Shari’a’s pamphlet is found at [http://a5.sphotos.ak.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ak-ash3/541262\\_337055756351449\\_310853968971628\\_938176\\_1789504486\\_n.jpg](http://a5.sphotos.ak.fbcdn.net/hphotos-ak-ash3/541262_337055756351449_310853968971628_938176_1789504486_n.jpg).
- 21 *Al-Hurra* TV (Libya), June 19, 2012.
- 22 Misbah al-Awami, “Khilal Al-multaqa al-Awal Li-Ansar al-Sharia bi-Benghazi ... Muslahun Yasta’radun Quwatahum ... Wa Makhawif Min Tahu Libya li-Dawla Mutatarrifa” (During the First Gathering of Ansaar Al-Shari’a in Benghazi, Armed Men Displayed Their Strength Amidst Fears of Libya Turning Into an Extremist Country), *New Quryna*, June 14, 2012, [www.qurynanew.com/36582](http://www.qurynanew.com/36582).
- 23 For a representative example see the article: Sa’ad al-Na’as, “Ansar al-Shari’a wa Islam” (Ansar al-Sharia and Islam), *al-Watan* (Libya), June 28, 2012.
- 24 At the same time, some observers have criticized him for ambiguity on the desecration of shrines and for not being forceful enough. For video of his rulings on Sufi shrines, see [www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8OZvLDvCkI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8OZvLDvCkI).
- 25 See the interview posted in the jihadist web forum, <http://tamimi.own0.com/t97883-topic#686380>.
- 26 “Libyan Tabu Tribe Threatens Election Boycott,” Associated Press, July 2, 2012.
- 27 Geographic Services, Incorporated, “Geographical and Tribal Factors at Play in Kufrah, Libya,” September 22, 2011.
- 28 “Zway Tribesman ‘Cut’ Oil Production,” *Libya Herald*, July 4, 2012, [www.libyaherald.com/?p=10480](http://www.libyaherald.com/?p=10480).
- 29 For background on the conflict, see Philip Martin and Christina Weber, “Ethnic Conflict in Libya: Toubou,” Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, June 21, 2012 and “Libye: Quand les Toubous se Réveillent,” *Jeune Afrique*, May 5, 2012.
- 30 “Jibril’s Bloc Wins Party Seats in East Libya,” *Al-Sharq al-Ansat*, July 7, 2012, [www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/07/2012711202926521918.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2012/07/2012711202926521918.html).
- 31 Shuhood ‘Ayan: Hajum Quwat Muslaha min al-Tabu al-Chadiyeen wa Harakat al-Adl wa Masawah ‘ala Madinat al-Kufrah” (Eye Witnesses: Attacks by Armed Forces of Chadian Tabus and Justice and Equality Movement on the City of Kufrah), *Al-Manara*, February 13, 2012, [www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/02/%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA](http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/02/%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D8%AC%D9%88%D9%85-%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D9%84%D8%AD%D8%A9-%D9%85%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D8%A8%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA).
- 32 There are three branches of the Libya Shield forces: a Western Shield (a Zintan-based coalition), a Center Shield (led by Misrata), and an Eastern Shield (based in Benghazi).
- 33 “Al-Kata’ib al-Musharika bil-Multaqa al-Awal Li-Ansar al-Shari’a bi-Benghazi Tatwajah ‘ila Kufrah” (The participating brigades in the first gathering of Ansar Al-Sharia in Benghazi head to the city of Kufrah), *New Quryna*, June 12, 2012, [www.qurynanew.com/36410](http://www.qurynanew.com/36410).
- 34 See the April 21, 2012, interview with a commander of the Eastern Libya Shield in Kufra, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mgP6opsyS4&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mgP6opsyS4&feature=related).
- 35 “Kufra Mediation Moves Slowly,” *Libya Herald*, June 18, 2012.
- 36 See the April 21, 2012, interview with a commander of the Eastern Libya Shield in Kufra, regarding the Shield’s goals in Kufra and the extent of tribal mediation, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mgP6opsyS4&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mgP6opsyS4&feature=related).

- 37 “Kufra Leaders Agree to Meet and End Violence,” *Libya Herald*, August 2, 2012.
- 38 “Sudan, Chad and Libya Establish Joint Patrols to Control Common Border,” *Sudan Tribune*, March 9, 2012.
- 39 “Tebu Fighters in Kufra to Be Integrated Into Security Forces,” *Libya Herald*, May 13, 2012.
- 40 Translation of the amendment provided by the Project on Middle East Democracy (POMED); available at <http://pomed.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Constitutional-Amendment-No-1-2012-en.pdf>.
- 41 “Harak Mujtama’i fi Benghazi Hawal al-Mu’atammar al-Watani al-‘Am wa al-Hay’ah al-Ta’ssiyyah wa Dustur Libya al-Muqbil” (Benghazi Community Enthusiastic About the General National Conference, the Constitutional Drafting Committee, and Libya’s Future Constitution), *Al-Manara*, July 26, 2012.
- 42 Umar Khan and George Grant, “NTC Takes Responsibility for Constitution From National Conference,” *Libya Herald*, July 5, 2012.
- 43 “Harak Mujtama’i fi Benghazi Hawal al-Mu’atammar al-Watani al-‘Am wa al-Hay’ah al-Ta’ssiyyah wa Dustur Libya al-Muqbil” (Benghazi Community Enthusiastic about the General National Conference, the Constitutional Drafting Committee, and Libya’s Future Constitution).
- 44 “Benghazi: Jum’a Sakhina wa Ghayib ‘Amni Muqlaq Li-Muwatani al-Madina Benghazi” (A Hot Friday and A Troubling Police Absence for the City’s Citizens), *Al-Manara*, July 28, 2012, [www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/07/20701/%d8%a8%d9%86%d8%ba%d8%a7%d8%b2%d9%8a-%d8%ac%d9%85%d8%b9%d8%a9-%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%ae%d9%86%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%ba%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d8%a3%d9%85%d9%86%d9%8a-%d9%85%d9%82%d9%84%d9%82-%d9%84%d9%85%d9%88%d8%a7](http://www.almanaralink.com/press/2012/07/20701/%d8%a8%d9%86%d8%ba%d8%a7%d8%b2%d9%8a-%d8%ac%d9%85%d8%b9%d8%a9-%d8%b3%d8%a7%d8%ae%d9%86%d8%a9-%d9%88%d8%ba%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%a8-%d8%a3%d9%85%d9%86%d9%8a-%d9%85%d9%82%d9%84%d9%82-%d9%84%d9%85%d9%88%d8%a7).
- 45 See background on these structures, Frederic Wehrey, “Libya’s Militia Menace,” *Foreign Affairs*, July 15, 2012.
- 46 George Grant, “Why the Supreme Security Committee Must Be Brought to Heel—Before It’s Too Late,” *Libya Herald*, August 29, 2012.
- 47 Author’s interview with U.S. and European defense officials, Tripoli, Libya, July 2012.
- 48 “Insihab al-Lajna al-Amniya min Shawara’ Benghazi wa Mudiriyat al-Amn al-Watani Tu’akid Qudratiha ‘ala Bast al-Amn” (Withdrawal of the Security Committee From the Streets of Benghazi and the National Directorate of Security Confirms its Ability to Establish Security), *New Quryna*, July 24, 2012, [www.qurynanew.com/38949](http://www.qurynanew.com/38949). Also, see the Facebook page for the Benghazi SSC at [www.facebook.com/#!/ssc.benghazi](http://www.facebook.com/#!/ssc.benghazi).
- 49 Pamphlet on the Libyan Shield provided to the author, Misrata, Libya, June 28, 2012.
- 50 “Al-‘Alan Rasmiyan ‘an Ta’ssis al-Majlis al-‘Ala Li-Thuwwar” (Official Announcement of the Supreme Council of Revolutionaries), *New Quryna*, July 29, 2012, [www.qurynanew.com/39268](http://www.qurynanew.com/39268).



---

## About the Author

**Fred Wehrey** is a senior associate in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. His research focuses on political reform and security issues in the Arab Gulf states, Libya, and U.S. policy in the Middle East more broadly. Prior to joining Carnegie, he was a senior policy analyst at the RAND Corporation and in 2008, he led a RAND strategic advisory team to Baghdad, Iraq, focusing on post-surge challenges in support of Multi-National Forces-Iraq (MNF-I). Wehrey is also a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Air Force reserve and has completed tours in Iraq, Turkey, Libya, and Uganda.

Wehrey's articles have appeared in *Foreign Affairs*, *Washington Quarterly*, *Current History*, *International Herald Tribune*, *Survival*, *Sada*, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and the *Chicago Journal of International Law*. He has been interviewed by major media outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, PBS *NewsHour*, NPR, BBC, and CNN. He is the author of a forthcoming monograph with Columbia University Press, *Sectarian Politics in the Gulf: From the Iraq War to the Arab Spring*.



# Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

The **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing cooperation between nations and promoting active international engagement by the United States. Founded in 1910, its work is nonpartisan and dedicated to achieving practical results.

Carnegie is pioneering the first global think tank, with flourishing offices now in Washington, Moscow, Beijing, Beirut, and Brussels. These five locations include the centers of world governance and the places whose political evolution and international policies will most determine the near-term possibilities for international peace and economic advance.

---

The **Carnegie Middle East Program** combines in-depth local knowledge with incisive comparative analysis to examine economic, sociopolitical, and strategic interests in the Arab world. Through detailed country studies and the exploration of key cross-cutting themes, the Carnegie Middle East Program, in coordination with the Carnegie Middle East Center, provides analysis and recommendations in both English and Arabic that are deeply informed by knowledge and views from the region. The Carnegie Middle East Program has special expertise in political reform and Islamist participation in pluralistic politics throughout the region.

WASHINGTON DC ■ MOSCOW ■ BEIJING ■ BEIRUT ■ BRUSSELS

# THE GLOBAL THINK TANK

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT

---

FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

[CarnegieEndowment.org](https://www.CarnegieEndowment.org)