Libya: A Case Study of a Failed Revolution

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1. Introduction

The anti-Qaddafi movement that had spontaneously combusted the Libyan revolution in February 2011 was a demonstration of a leaderless revolutionary spirit that rejected the old political elite and state institutions altogether. *Thuwar*, or revolutionaries, came to represent an unorganized and unofficial vanguard of that spirit. These overwhelmingly young people vetted their frustrations, anger and disappointment through ever increasing violence as they were met with Qaddafi's security and military forces. The Western power's kneejerk reaction to the rapid deterioration of security situation in Libya during August 2011 to intervene militarily (under the approval of the united Nation Security Council) tipped the conflict scale in the favor of the revolutionaries bringing effectively the end of the Qaddafi regime. Soon thereafter the leaderless movement fractioned into local militias protecting their narrow interests, organized military units under the competing political opposition groups, and some even spawned into jihadist groups aligning themselves with the Islamic State (IS). In other words, the anti-Qaddafi movement fallout came to dominate social and political turmoil in the country, and which later evolved into the civil war that still goes on.

The failure of various political and military groups to agree on a long-term strategy on how to handle the post-Qaddafi transition became apparent already during the prelude to the country's first parliamentary elections in July 2012. Despite the enthusiasm of some observers that Libyan people will overcome the fragmentation of the revolutionary movement and the virtual absence of government institutions, the security situation quickly deteriorated into a full-fledged civil conflict (see Vandewalle 2012). In effect the Libyan territory is broken up into areas controlled by various military factions and which either actively or passively support one of the two political representative bodies, or governments in the country – namely, the New General National Council (NGNC) in Tripoli or its rival the House of Representatives (HR) in the eastern city of Tubruq. However, yet another military group that has emerged as a serious contender for territory in Libya is Islamic State, which complicates already volatile security situation in the country, particularly in and around the costal cities of Derna (northern Cyrenaica) and Sirte (eastern Tripolitania). Sirte was the *de-facto* administrative center of Libya due to Qaddafi's plan to relocate many of the state administrative institutions to this small city; Tripoli nevertheless remained the country's

capital.[1] Today, city is firmly managed by Islamic State militants and its serves as the group's base of operations in Libya (Kirkpatrick *et al* 2015).

As it will become apparent, the two governments that have been operating in Libya since the breakdown of unitary government in the summer of 2014 have ever since went through stages including full-scale war to ceasefires and serious attempt reconciliation. On the one side there is the Islamist dominated the NGNC in Tripoli under leadership of abu Sahmain, supported by Misratan militias and their allies. And on the other side, in the eastern city of Tubruq, the HR has succeeded in attaining international recognition as a legitimate representative of Libya. The HR is militarily backed by General Haftar's military units and occasionally even by the Egyptian military forces. The conflict between these two rivals has gradually developed into a zero-sum-game situation where each warring party seeks to secure its territory and fend of any attempt of unification of the state. Hence what has initially been seen as a popular revolution against a repressive regime and an opportunity to establish a pluralist political system had quickly deteriorated into a civil war (see Wehrey 2014). Until recently there have been few signs of settlement between the two sides. A window of opportunity came with the recent negotiations between the two major political factions brokered in part by the United Nations through its UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)[2] (*Libya's Chann*el 2015; *BBC News* 2015; *Reuters* 2015). Nevertheless, there are few signs of reconciliation on the ground, mainly due to the rival military factions' skepticism regarding their opponents' willingness to disarm and demobilize (ICG 2015).

2. Social Mobilization and a Failed State

Mobilization of the Libyan civil society against the Qaddafi regime in February 2011 was, until that time, an unprecedented show of unstructured popular uprising against socio-political repression in that country. The state security apparatus had virtually dissolved within a month into the uprising revealing the violent nature of the conflict (see Poljarevic 2012). In addition, the decision of the U.S. and European powers to intervene on the side of the rebels, supported by a United Nations Security Council resolution 1973, by which the Council authorizes its member states "to take all necessary measures, […] to protect civilians and civilian populated areas" (UNSC 2011). This decision opened up for primarily NATO's systematic bombardment of the regime's forces preventing them to advance on the rebel stronghold Benghazi in the east and any other rebel held populated area. Moreover, the NATO bombardment allowed various rebel militias to regroup, reinforce its supply routes subsequently advance on key regime bases in Tripoli and Sirte, but also in areas in and around Zuwara and area of Ajdabiya in the west. These events and spread of insecurity throughout the country signal a total collapse of democratization of the state.

It became clear early in the conflict that the fragmentary and spontaneous nature of the popular rebellion against the regime would be a source of great concern in terms of providing a stable and sustainable alternative to the state-bearing power of the authoritarian Qaddafi regime. The multitude of power-interests represented by numerous armed militias without strong interest coordinating mechanisms and group-incentives to provide a forum for

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[1] N.B. Sirte was Qaddafi's birthplace

[2] By passing the resolution 2144, the United Nations Security Council created a UN body to facilitate the national dialogue between various opposition and social groups in order to promote the Libyan state's transition to democratic and liberal political order, see UNSMIL's mission statement, http://unsmil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=3544&language=en-US

negotiation resulted in wide-ranging lawlessness and total institutional collapse. It can be argued that the plurality of civil society groups' (CSO) interests is to be expected in situations like that in post-Qaddafi Libya, where state authorities repressed the population's civil and social rights for decades (AI 2007; AI 2009; Poljarevic 2012).

It has become increasingly clear that whatever signs of a loosely coordinated social movement mobilization that existed at the outset of the uprising on February 17, 2011 have all but disappeared. The country and its civil society are more divided than ever before. The lack of effective state institutions, lack of basic public security, existence of two parallel governing bodies (Tripoli and Tubruq) renders Libya effectively to the rank of a failed state (Di John 2008; Fund for Peace 2014). The failure here describes primarily a state's inability to assert its control over a territory and thereby its capacity to impose the monopoly of violence within the borders of that territory. What is more, the inability of any one side in the civil conflict to gather the necessary amount of public support concerns the issue of legitimacy to govern the country. These are just some necessary conditions that a functioning state must fulfill.[3]

Furthering the analysis about the macro-dynamics of the failure of the Libyan state proposing various solutions to such a condition could be developed by identifying the strongest armed groups asses their immediate goals, ideologies, international alliances, and military capacities and thereby propose which (socio-political) group will potentially become a dominant political force in the country (see Ashour 2012; Bell *et al* 2011). Such analytic exercises are useful as an overview of the power-dynamics in the country. Clearly, the *realpolitik* framework of contemporary international relation dictates such analyses, intentionally or not.[4] This focus on power-dynamics is important as it swiftly describes and explains the shifting capacities to control territory and exhort power over rival factions. Nevertheless, such and similar assessments dynamics, fall short of critically examining the importance of socio-political undercurrents that underlie the building blocks of the Libyan civil society. It is by assessing the main CSOs interests, their evolving militancy and inability to negotiate solutions to growing tensions between various groups, that we can understand the intricate failure of the revolutionary goals (see Ahmida 2012). Addressing the issue of Libyan civil war from that analytical angle might also provide more robust and lasting explanations of the failure of democratic transition.

As it will become clearer, the breakdown of authoritarian rule in Libya revealed the weakness, or rather ambivalent nature, of its civil society. It is perhaps not the absence of common rules of operation among various CSOs that are the primary reason for the break down of transitional process, as "rules do not enjoin, prohibit, or warrant substantive actions or utterances [of CSOs]; they cannot tell agents what to do or say. They prescribe norms of

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[3] See Ghani and Carnahan (2006) for an overview of definitional conditions of failed state. Assertion of (popularly and internationally granted) legitimacy and administrative capacity are two conditions that are necessary, however insufficient, for a modern nation state to function. It is also useful to critically examine the usefulness of the concept "failed state more thoroughly and an excellent critique is presented in Call (2010), I am therefore aware of the caveats such use in, primarily, policy communities produce and which is later popularized by various research communities. Nevertheless, the term "failed state" here reflects upon Libyan civil society's inability to agree upon a unitary government that could represent all social groups in that country.

[4] There are variations of understandings of realpolitik idea: "We can, then, discern a variety of different realist orientations. One defends the status quo, prioritizing great power stability and order above the pursuit of other values. It is a form of international conservatism, insisting that the immutable character of politics renders significant change undesirable, even dangerous. *Realpolitik* flows from this position" (Bell 2008,)

conduct" (Oakeshott 1991, 126). These norms of conduct was harshly controlled and dictated by the regime's security apparatus, which ultimately obeyed the Qaddafi-family's directives.

3. Transformation of CSOs

Libyan civil society is fragmented to such a degree that no *one* group alone can suppress others and form a political apparatus powerful enough to control the territory effectively. There are two primary reasons behind the continuous state of war. Firstly, there is a lack of effective socio-political mechanisms through which, the warring parties can productively negotiate their the end of the conflict, Secondly, ever more increasing involvement of international and regional powers are creating deeper the fissures between the primary two rival factions, Tripoli and Tubruq governments. What are the primary features of the each side, what is their main disagreement and how have they developed into the organization they are today.

In the immediate aftermath of the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime we could see regular violent skirmishes between various factions of Libyan civil society. In the prequel to this paper I wrote that during the popular uprising; "the military fragmentation of the opposition remained constant throughout the conflict as various cities, regions and even some neighborhoods in larger cities formed independent militias primarily equipped with weapons they themselves had seized from the regime troops and loyalists. The protest form, or rather the internationally assisted civil war, therefore remained violent and its effects clearly affected the remaining transition process" (Poljarevic 2012, 22). The fragmentary state of Libyan revolutionary forces in the aftermath of the Qaddafi regime's fall had quickly spiraled into a low-intensity civil conflict between several tribal and ideological opponents.

The failure of the transition process became increasingly evident after the first parliamentary election on July 7, 2012, upon which the newly elected General National Council (*al-Mu'tamar al-Watani al-'am*), dominated by the Nationalist Forces Alliance (NFA) (*Tahaaluf al-Qiwa al-Wataniyya*), failed to form a unitary government (see Lacher 2013). The NFA has been an alliance of a broad spectrum of a wide variety of CSOs that had few common goals besides all of them looking for political and economic stability. Some common features included their respective populist nationalist agendas and liberal-based economic programs that promoted the development of the state's institutional infrastructure (POMED 2012). The NFA's primary parliamentary rival has been the Justice and Construction Party (JCP) (*Hizb al-'Adala wa al-Bina*), readily recognized as an Islamist organization and the party of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (Ashour 2012; *Libya Herald* 2012).

Subsequently, the two political adversaries have developed into two opposing military alliances that are the main parties in the current civil conflict. During the writing of this report (January 2014) the two factions have established two parliamentary bodies, each claiming the legitimacy as a state government of Libya. It is important to note that the political culture were people's interests are represented by political parties are totally new in Libya. That means that there is a complex voting pattern that is primarily based on the interests of civil society groups, of simply tribes, towns and regional groups. If we take a look at the ideological spectrum, there were more Islamist representatives (MB and Salafis) in the parliament than the nationalists and/or liberals. This is only true if we count all of the party and independent representatives (Lacher 2013, 10ff.).

As of August 2014, the NFA has established the Council of Deputies of Libya, an internationally recognized government of Libya, based in the eastern city of Tubruq (alt. Tubrouk). The military alliance that supports this political entity is composed primarily out of Zintan Brigades based in the western city of Zintan and the Libyan National Army. By far the most powerful ally to the Tubruq-based government is Khalifa Haftar's militia group, which launched a large-scale military offensive, "Operation Dignity" (*Amaliya Karama*) on May 16, 2014, against multiple Islamist militias in Benghazi. Haftar who, in the 1960s, had been one of the closest associates of Qaddafi and who in 1980s defected to the U.S., extended the operation to Tripoli on May 18, by which his forces attacked primarily Islamist affiliated militias based both in Benghazi, but also in the western parts of the country. The armed clashes intensified throughout the summer and fall of 2014 resulting in clearer differences between the two sides in what has developed in a full-scale civil war.

4. Prelude to the Libyan civil war – structural elements

The build-up to the large-scale civil war in 2014 is based on three initial differences between civil society groups, namely tribal, regional, and ideological factors. This consequently means that social and political mobilization is occurring primarily along the collective agents' tribal and/or regional belonging. Ideological divisions are also relevant, however to rather lesser degree. During the numerous conversations and few interviews I had with Libyans, primarily in exile, I have noticed that most of them are reluctant talking about tribal tensions in the country for undetermined reasons. Nevertheless, the fact of tribal allegiances seems to play a significant role as both a cause of insecurity and an element of peace in the country. During authoritarian rule of the Qaddafi regime tribal differences were maintained as one the important traits of Libya civil society and through which Qaddafi, himself from a small tribe in Sirte, Tripolitania, could rule and manipulate various tribal differences and conflicts to his own advantage (Bruce 2011; Dehghanpisheh 2011).

This form of tribalism represents social ties based on kinship affiliation and it has very little to do with, what we usually consider, civic allegiances to a nation state. The rapid armament of tribal groups across Libya in the wake of the popular uprising opened up the wounds of old grievances among various tribes and their antagonism against the regime and its supporters, contributed to swirling the conflict against Qaddafi into total anarchy and the situation where tribal identity became particularly relevant (Oborne and Cookson, 2012; Markey and El-Yaakoubi 2014; Schruf 2014). For instance, numerous armed clashes between tribes in the southern regions of Kufra and Sabha confirm both the breakdown of any central authority and the revival of tribal political economy (Abu Zayd 2012). What is more, ethnic tensions between self-identified Arab tribes and their Amazigh (Berber) neighbors are another sign of the revival of ethnic tribalism which further complicates any ambitions to unify the country and centralize its administration.

In the far northeast we find another example where the renewed sense of ethnic pride and struggle for cultural rights has been supported by armed forces. The Amazigh tribes from Zuwara, a city to the east from Tripoli, as well as the Nafusa mountain Amazigh tribes are continuously promoting their cultural rights often arguing for federalization of Libyan political system (*AlJazeera* 2013; Zurutuza 2013; Maddy-Weitzman 2015). Those tribes are clearly not a unified force, but rather a multi-voiced group that has had similar experiences with the political control from Tripoli (see Bruce 2011; Cole and McQunn 2015).

Tribal identification in the end is one of the major structural mechanisms in Libyan polity and thereby a major source of social and political mobilization (see Obeidi 2013; Bruce 2011). This means that democratic mobilization that is usually based on the idea of citizenship and civil society is seriously weakened, in favor to more selective activist commitments such as tribe and regional allegiances.

Regionalism is another structural hurdle that is has obstructed democratization process primarily due the different regions representatives wanting to assert more influence in the process of state building. The first manifestation of such an issue came to the wake of Libya first parliamentary elections where the representatives of the eastern region of Cyrenaica, with Benghazi as its capital, demanded equal representation in the parliament as the east. Distribution of 200 parliamentary seats has been 120 for the (south-) western provinces of Tripolitania and Fezzan, and 80 for Cyrenaica, something that has been interpreted as a power grabbing policy by the political elites in the west (see Kjaerum *et al* 2013). Representatives of both sides consist out of multiple tribes and are linked through common interests and personal links between them (ref.). The national public debates in the wake of the first parliamentary elections revealed some of the regional tensions by demonstrating tensions in regard to the construction of majoritarian system of voting. These debates between representatives from the regions of Tripolitania (with 67% of Libya's population), Fezzan (8%) and Cyrenaica (28%) resulted in a compromise where, besides majoritarian distribution of parliamentary seats, an amendment to constitution was added where a parallel system of proportional representation could be incorporated (Kjaerum *et al* 2013).

It must be remembered that the population of the capital Tripoli is not ethically or tribally homogeneous. The metropolitan area of Tripoli is thoroughly urbanized and therefore not representative of the rest of the country. During the initial phase of the popular uprisings against the regime we could see how urbanized youth from Tripoli and, even more frequently, from Benghazi in the east, shouting slogans, "Libya! Libya!" and spraying the words "No to tribalism!" on walls in Tripoli (Dehghanpisheh 2011). Nevertheless, such outbursts of nationalism have been limited and clearly insufficient to defuse regional tensions. Instead what we saw has been increased regionalization of the country wherein distribution of resources can to be seen as one of the priorities.

One of the primary reasons behind increased fragmentation is directly related to the large oil resources. In fact, Libya has the continent's largest oil reserves with largest oil fields located in the east parts of the country (EIA 2014). It is therefore strategically important for any military group to control and exploit. Added to this port cities Ras Lanuf and al-Sidr, equipped with facilities to load crude oil into tankers, are as important the oil fields, and therefore a battleground between forces loyal to "Operation Dignity coalition" under the command of General Khalifa Hafter and "Libya Dawn coalition" (Malsin 2014). At the moment of writing this paper Operation dignity forces were in control of both oil ports successfully fending attacks from the opposing side (Wehrey 2015).

5. Organizational structures of the two rivals

The two sides in the conflict are made out of a kaleidoscope of various militias pledging their allegiances to one of the two political bodies represented in Tripoli and Tubruq. The

organizational structures of the two groups are such that they mirror the appearance of state institutions, such as parliament, various ministries and institutional bodies. In Tripoli the new General National Council (GNC) a reformed version of the first GNC that was Libya's first elected parliament in July 2012. Between November 2012 and March 2014 the first GNC functioned under the government of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan (alt. Zaydan) (b. 1950) who was earlier a career diplomat until his defection from Qaddafi government in 1981 when he joined the opposition group National Front for the Salvation of Libya. His task to coordinate and lead sessions of the parliament was difficult (Weymouth 2013; Georgian 2014). The level of difficulty of leading a fiercely fragmented parliament led to his kidnapping on October 2013 by, what he described a group of "young boys with weapons and guns […] Extremists. […], members of the Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room" (LROP) (Weymouth 2013). After being held in a building belonging to the Ministry of Interior Zeidan was released 6 hours later as a large mass of people went out into the streets of Tripoli demanding his release. The LROP is a group originally formed by Nouri abu Sahmain (alt. Nuri Abusahmain), himself a president of the GNC between June 25, 2013 and August 04, 2014, the day when the new GNC was formed and the unitary government officially collapsed (*France Diplomatie* 2013). Abu Sahmain is currently a president of the new GNC. He is a member of Amazigh ethnic minority and a native of the western city of Zuwara and therefore a uncharacteristic part of the Libyan political elite which consists primarily of ethnic Arabs (Maddy-Weitzman 2015, 2506).

The growing tensions between Islamist and their nationalist opponents of the GNC escalated gradually during the summer of 2014, only to erupt in full-scale street battles in Tripoli on August 4 (Kirkpatrick 2014). The powerful militias from the city of Misrata backed by Islamist militias argued their case against the nationalists as representatives of the old regime (*adhlaam*). On the other hand the eastern militias backed by their allies from the western city of Zintan argued against what they saw as the growing threat from Islamist forces. Underneath the rhetoric of ideological differences it is important to note that the militias from Misrata and Zintan in effect battle for the control of the capital and the state institution as means of political power and economic resources (Wehrey 2014).

The primary example of the continued power struggle in the country was demonstrated by the armed campaign of General Haftar who, without prior government mandate, had organized Operation Dignity as establish control over main Libyan cities in February 2014. In May, Haftar's campaign gained a momentum allowing him to demand the suspension of the GNC and the dissolution of government (Daraghi 2014). The reason has been to oust the Islamist representatives from the GNC and thereby rid them of any legitimacy. The former Primer Minister Zeidan had later agreed with this assessment.

> The problem arose with the Congressional elections. The previous National Transitional Council (NTC) of Libya represented the average Libyan society – and included five supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the GNC, the extremists obtained up to the 40 seats. They are the reason for the wrong turn of Libyan politics (Gerlach 2014).

As a result of a stalled parliamentary situation and increasingly violent clashes between the militias, the GNC agreed to hold new parliamentary elections on June 25, 2014. No political party was allowed to contest the parliamentary seats. Instead only independent candidates were approved to contest the 200 parliamentary seats. The voter turnout was as low as 18 %, which was reflected in the low support for the Islamist candidates (only 30 seats). Due to worsening security situation in and the takeover of Tripoli by the

Misratan dominated alliance of militias, the elected parliament relocated from Tripoli to Tubruq in the east on August 4, 2014 (The Economist 2015). The power for the control of state institutions that had been initiated by Haftar's military offensive starting in May 2014 seemed to have encouraged coordination of Islamist militias. In other words, the situation escalated when Islamist militias (loyal to the JDP) together with its Misratan allies formalized their operational cooperation by launching Libya Dawn coalition that succeeded in capturing the Tripoli airport from Heftars primary allies, the Zintan mountain militias, in August 2014 (Daraghi 2014). This also meant that the former Islamist GNC members and its president Nouri abu Sahman re-formed the assembly in Tripoli calling it the New GNC, thus creating an alternative national parliament.

Libya Dawn consists out of a diverse group of militias including Islamists, among the most powerful groups is the Misratan militia and other locally based groups including a number of the Amazigh tribes in Tripolitania and Fezzan (CFR 2014). The Tubruq-based government under the leadership of Abdullah al-Thini and its representative body, *Majlis al-Nuwaab* (House of Representatives) received international recognition shortly after its relocation. In November 2014; however, Libya's Supreme Court overturned the legality of the Tubruq based government. This was something that was welcomed by the Tripoli based General National Council, which was reinstated as an alternative government and thus becoming one of the two major parties in the ongoing civil war (Eljarh 2014).

It seems that the primary contention between the two competing popular assemblies is the issue of how to deal with the remnants of the old regime. Thus, the willingness on Tubruq parliament to include the politicians and government representatives that have at one point or the other worked for and with the Qaddafi regime is seen by the Islamists and their allies as a morally and ethically unacceptable (interview no. 3). In other words, the old regime technocrats, military officers and state security men have, perhaps by default and inevitable necessity become a part of the new political and institutional system. Such developments have provoked former prisoners relatives of killed dissidents majority of who were Islamists (interview no. 1).

6. The Organic Radicalization

As long the conflict wears on the risks of radicalization of either side is likely to increase. Much of the same dynamic, though in a more destructive spiral of violence can be observed in Syria. The early signs of religious militancy in Libya came it the form of Salafi groups that targeted primarily religious sites that they considered blasphemous. The destruction of sufi shrines al Shaab Mosque in Tripoli, tomb of Sidi Abdul-Salam al Asmar al-Fituri in Zliten, and Zubeida in Bani Walid are just some examples of destruction of religious sites for explicitly religious reasons (UNHR 2012). In the wake of endemic lawlessness and failed central authority, this form of violent Islamism became a substantial mobilizing force spawning into several powerful militias. Ansar al-Shari'ah (AS) in Benghazi has probably been the most powerful Islamist force in the country. It was, for instance, blamed for the attack on the American consulate in 2012, something that they had denied (Wehrey 2012).

The organization's primary goal has been to establish a political system based on Shari'a, thus rejecting parliamentary elections as not compatible with their understanding of Islamic sources (Maher 2012). This inadvertently means that AS and other jihadist militias are the

third warring party in Libya (see Wehrey 2015). They are on the other hand a heterogeneous and uncoordinated part of the civil war consisting of scattered militias, which often considers other militias as a direct threat.

Much like in Syria, most Islamist groups have developed increasingly violent tactics in their opposition to other militias and political groups in the country (see Dettmer 2013). Their insistence on excluding any old regime operatives in the process of institutions building has provoked increased opposition to any cooperation between AS and the nationalists. Haftar's forces have therefore become central in protecting the House of Representatives (HR) in Tubruq and al-Thini's government (MEMO 2014; Mahmoud 2015).

The intensive battles in and around Benghazi between the local Islamist coalition and Haftar's Operation Dignity alliance are increasing the chances of further radicalization of Islamists and the forces loyal to Haftar (Ibrahim *et al* 2014). Such development has already been noted in the costal city of Derna east from Benghazi with some 100,000 inhabitants. There, the Islamic Youth Council (IYC), an offshoot of an Islamist rebel group the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade (ASMB)[5] pledged allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) in November 2014 (Fowler 2014; Mustafa 2014). The ASMB was one of the first groups to rise against the Qaddafi regime and thereby one with the longest fighting experience among the Libya's militias. Ever since the uprising began in February 2011, the organization has been active in promoting what the understood to be the Islamic moral order together with public provision of social services in the city of Derna.

In April 2014 however, a new jihadist group, the IYC, had emerged as an internal opposition to the ASMB's power domination in the city. The IYC emerged as a more radical group claiming authority over vital functions in the city, upon which violent clashes between the groups broke out. After the IYC pledged its allegiance to the Islamic State the ASMB formed a Mujahideen Shura Council (MSC) in order to counteract the spread of IS.[6] Derna had remained divided between IS and the MSC (Joscelyn 2015). Nevertheless, the fighting in and around the city continues unabated. On the contrary, the IS leadership is intensifying efforts to establish control of the city of Derna as its strategic base of operations in eastern Libya (Cruickshank 2015; Saleh 2015; Torelli and Varvelli 2015). At the same time the IS-backed operations are intensifying in other parts of Libya, not least in Tripoli where it launches limited attacks on rival militias (including the powerful NGNC supporters, the Misratan milita). The area under IS control seems to be expanding around the areas of Sirte thereby posing ever growing threat to both the NGNC and HR, including all other Islamist militias and al-Qaida affiliates.

It seems that the older generation of jihadists, such as those old supporters of, now disbanded Libyan Islamic Figthing Group (LIFG) and its former leader Abd al-Hakim Belhaj,[7] have a more pragmatic and reconciliatory view on political process and its political rivals (see Ashour 2011).

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[5] The group's choice of name is connected to the infamous prison (Abu Salim) where numerous Islamist and other political prisoners were massacred in June 1996, indicating their vehement opposition to any old regime officials (see HRW 2003; Poljarevic 2012)

[6] The formation of the MSC by the Abu Salim Matryrs Brigade mirrors a similar mobilizing tactic used by al-Qa'idah in Iraq in 2007 and most likely a way o demonstrate its rejection of the IS authority (see Felter and Fishman 2011).

[7] The LIFG was created in 1990 and dismantled in 2010. Belhaj was initially involved in the overthrow of the Qaddafi regime and became later the leader of Tripoli Military Council. After resigning from the Council in 2012, he formed Islamist political party of his own, *Hizb al-Watan* (the Homeland Party).

In a recent interview Belhaj explained his role as a military leader during the popular uprising in 2011 and thus inadvertently his understanding of violence as a political tool.

> [T]he war we fought against the Muammar Gaddafi dictatorship. That battle was linked to the spatial and temporal conditions at the time. Because we were fighting a dictatorial regime in Libya, it was necessary for us to use weapons in order to save the Libyan people from Gaddafi's rule. This was the role of the Group [LIFG] in the past, but I would like to clearly affirm that the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group has been terminated (*Euronews* 2015).

On the other hand we find a young generation of militant Islamists, so called jihadis, who are clearly attracted to a more radical form of political order. The IS expansion to the rest of Libya can therefore seen as a process of radicalization that is a part of protracted civil conflicts (see Hellesøy 2013; Bigo *et al* 2014). This by no means mean that all Islamist, or for that matter jihadist groups are willing to join the IS and become a part of its international ambitions. There is a clear mobilization and strategic division among the jihadist camp in Libya out of which some are ready to be (conditionally) integrated into the larger framework of Libyan politics while others, such as the IS affiliate groups are engaged in a zero-sum-game of war (see Fowler 2014).

Haftar's Operation Dignity coalition dominates the eastern part of Libya and is directly engaged with fighting all jihadi militias. In the western part the Libya Dawn coalition backed by the New GNC dominated by Islamists is also facing jihadi groups most notably the growing IS forces. As of now the forces of Libya Dawn are not engaged in battles with Ansar al-Shari'ah, however, it seems that the conflict between them is inevitable, primarily due to their very different understandings of politics in post-conflict Libya, but also due to the dynamic of the Libyan civil war, where the warring parties are unwilling to compromise. The civil war has reached a point of a stalemate where the two sides in Tripoli and Tubruq aim to firmly hold to territorial battle gains making only tactical battle operations. The flash point of conflict seems to be oil ports. In the east, Haftar is battling the AS militants for the control of Benghazi and ever more frequently the IS forces with occasional support of Egyptian and United Arab Emirates air forces (*Middle Easy Eye* 2015; Tawil 2015;). Despite the recent UNSMIL supported talks between the representatives from Tripoli's NGNC and Tubruq's HR there are few signs of de-escalation of military activities on the ground (see UN News Centre 2015; BBC News 2015b).

7. Internationalization of the civil war

There are several international components that play a significant role in the dynamics of the internal conflict since the fall of the Qaddafi regime. Firstly, the UN-approved NATO's military intervention included the bombing of Qaddafi's troops outside Benghazi on March 19, 2011 had facilitated the fall of the old regime. Subsequently the UN approved the creation of the UNSMIL in September 2011 as the primary international body through which to support reconciliation between various revolutionary groups. Secondly, due to the spiraling violence between local groups and increased instability of the state several regional powers saw an opportunity to promote its interests. Under the support of the Arab League, Egyptian and UAE warplanes bombarded the IS position in and around Derna thus directly contributing to the military efforts of HR and its backer Haftar (Kirkpatrick 2015). Egyptian action seems

to have been a response to the IS militants' execution of about 20 Egyptian guest workers (Copts) that were abducted in Sirt and brought to Derna. IS on the other hand justified the execution as a response to Egyptian regime's (secret) backing of Haftar's campaign against their positions (see Al-Warfalli and Laessing 2014). Thirdly, on the porous southern border of Libya, Tuareg tribes, Tobou militias and other transnational jihadi groups have created a microcosm of security concerns for Chad, Niger, Algeria and not least Sudan and Mali. The movement of people, goods (both legal and illicit), arms, and etcetera without proper border controls exacerbates the internal tensions in Libya, both political and ethnic (ICG 2015; Economist 2015; Maddy-Weitzman 2015; Reeve 2015; Malsin 2014).

Even though the EU and U.S. are the most important international actors in the Libyan civil war, they are careful not to over-emphasize their role in the peace-talks between the two governments in Libya. Their strategy has been to engage with the two governments primarily through the UNSMIL. It has nevertheless been clear that the bias of the international actors (the Arab League, the EU and U.S.) has lied with the Tubruq government which has meant that the Islamist dominated Tripoli government has been inadvertently relegated. Since the armed conflict between the opponents has reached a stalemate, the political efforts have been stepped up largely as a result of political elites' realization that a new powerful military adversary is gaining ever larger support from young militants from their own militias (see Dalil 2015; Markey and Umami 2015).

The stalemate of armed conflict between the NGNC and HR, endemic insecurity, corruption, economic instability, a perception of the political elite's lack of political vision, and similar factors all contribute to the cycle of radicalization ad the ultimate growth of Islamic State in the country. At the same time the two rivals for power, despite their differences, agree that no outside political actors should dictate the terms on which to solve the conflict. At the same time there seems to be a growing disengagement from the political leadership their armed factions and the people they say they represent. In their effort to create a unity government the political/representative disconnect between the political elites and Libyan population is growing larger posing a whole set of grievances that might exacerbate the tensions both between the population and their political leaders but also between the various segments of the population: Amazigh and Arab tribes, urban and rural dwellers, ideological rival groups, youth and older generations representing different sets of values and ideas about the society and political authority etc.).

8. The Political Elites and Civil Society

Struggle for control of territory and resources, endemic distrust of political authority and "traditional" enemies have, in combination with other related factors, caused exceedingly violent interaction between rival groups. The violence and the intermittent process of negotiations have also revealed the complexity of issues at stake for these various groups. Few civil society mechanisms that can provide a way out from the cycles of violence – for instance – the vibrant independent media landscape that started to emerge in 2012 has now shrunk and to the great extent coopted by the various warring factions.

As noted above, a significant part of the political elite has previously been either directly or indirectly connected to the Qaddafi regime, often as its employees many of whom defected at various points in time. The various militias that are protecting their vested interests usually ally themselves with a particular political faction that will represent these interests. In

between these alliances we find Libyan civilians consisting out ordinary citizens and refugees fatigued by the endemic insecurity and absence of state services such as efficient medical facilities and schooling. This has mean that much of the initial revolutionary fervor, the general hope of political reform and popular representation including the revolutionaries' ambition to create functioning state institutions have been downgraded to survival instincts and disillusionment with the February 17th revolution (see Daragahi 2015). Amid disintegrating state institutions and endemic insecurity groups such as Islamic State and other similar groups invoking religious symbols, extreme forms of violence as tools of intimidation and strength, and a sense of control may be able to sway a noteworthy part of disappointed young men and women to support an ideological cause(s) that is/are anti-systemic and reactionary. The political elites on the other hand function within a new post-revolutionary Libyan political culture that is dominated by the zero-sum-game approach to politics.

Such conditions are not conducive to producing a functioning civil society, which is the basis for the evolution of social movement mobilization and transition and sustainability of pluralist politics. For such conditions to emerge, civility as the basis of social interaction and not strict dichotomizing between "friends" and "enemies" should dominate the social order. As shown earlier, the existing social networks in Libya, those based on extended family ties, tribal allegiances and ethnic groups are largely intact and serve oftentimes as interest groups providing a collective voice to their members. These group's representatives oftentimes assume the role of political elites and thereby offer a sense of representation. This emerging new political elitism seems to be untainted by the brutal history of the old regime, and can therefore become a potential source of stability and civility in future. It is through political inclusion and construction of mechanisms of social expressions (of grievances, opinions, political claims, rights etc.) and participation (ability to engage in constitutionally sanctioned practices, e.g. formation of political parties and associations). Subsequently, the Libyan civil society will be able to project citizens' attitudes, views, and orientations towards the state, which in turn is expected to respond with appropriate measures and policies that reflect citizens' needs and desires. The political elites are therefore responsible to react to the interests of their respective constituencies. At the same time, they are responsible to open up room for negotiations and compromise with the competitors. Civility therefore comes from the ability of state structures to enable the climate of tolerance of opposing views and at the same time protect the minority views.

It seems that the conflict stalemate in Libya has forced the political representatives from Tripoli (NGNC) and Tubruq (HR) to engage in a serious attempt to form a unity government through which to enable an institutional structure to engage with the civil society. The intermediate part in the negotiations is the armed militias that are only partly controllable by the political elites. Besides the growing presence of IS in Libya, bringing the militias under the control of a unitary government seems to be the next crucial challenge in the process of conflict resolution. At the moment however, the civil war has increased detachment of the political elites from the fragmented Libyan public. Due to the ongoing military operations and general sense of insecurity in virtually all parts of the country and especially in the costal urban areas the general public is unable to express its opinions or organize any grassroots conflict resolution initiative.

9. Conclusion

Initiative During and in the immediate aftermath of the revolutionary uprisings against the

Qaddafi regime we could observe that various groups of *thuwar*, or revolutionaries, revealed a multiplicity of self-contained interests and visions for the country. The political elites that claimed to represent the *thuwar* and their immediate interests ultimately failed to negotiate and introduce a thoroughly inclusive institutional framework. One of the most difficult tasks was to convince the various armed militias to demobilize and submit to the control of frail state institutions. As the negotiations about the unity government went on, parts of the political elites allied themselves with more powerful militias as to force other factions to either submit to their political program. The spiral of revolutionary violence had spun out of control into a full-fledged civil war creating a power vacuum in parts of the country allowing for the growing influence of reactionary jihadist groups, including IS.

The plethora of collective interests in the civil war Libya and the ongoing military confrontation has cancelled much of the popular revolutionary fervor. Instead the power-play between able factions in the conflict have fragmented the civil society into the primordial units of extended family, tribe, religious community and ethnic group wherein the individual survival is equaled to that of the immediate group one belongs to. Civil society organizations are therefore reduced to interest groups focused on basic needs of its members and their mere survival. Besides the two main political factions the NGNC and HR, and their military supporters Misratan-led "Libya Dawn coalition" and Haftar-led "Operation Dignity coalition" there is increasing presence of IS militants including affiliate groups of these military constellations across Libya three main regions, Tripolitania in the west, Cyrenaica in the east and Fezzan in the south.

The December 17, 2015 signing of the "UN-brokered" peace agreement between the two political factions represents an important signal that could result in the establishment of unitary state infrastructure (UN News Centre 2015b). Formation of a single government, despite absence of popular elections, can potentially create a synergy effect where political negotiations and an increased sense of tolerance for political opponents may result in the important pockets of stability and urban safe zones where the new government can prove its ability to provide security and stability for its population. The political elites have therefore a monumental task to agree on the broad strategic vision for the country. This means that the short-term tactical disagreements need to be relegated to open-ended political negotiations using democratic mechanisms such as elections, party campaigning and civil forms of public debating – all of which need time to develop and assume the local character of Libyan multiethnic polity.

The risks that the recent agreement and its signatories face are multidimensional. Besides the presumably ideological differences, where the NGNC represents a form of democratic Islamism and the HR a nationalist neoliberalism, there are regional disputes between primarily representatives from Tripolitania (west) and Cyrenaica (east) where the eastern region, despite its oil-rich fields, has been underrepresented in the 2012 government. In the post-Qaddafi Libya the ethnic conflicts between Arab Libyans and Amazigh Libyans (including Tabu and Tuaregh tribes in the Fezzan region) have revealed another form of tension that will provide a challenge for the new government. Another significant threst to stability is the presence of IS in Libya. The IS militants have utilized the power vacuum in Sirte and Derna creating an important foothold on territory which might prove extremely difficult to tackle. Nevertheless, the most contentious issue that might cause the failure of the recent agreement is the ability of the new government to control the two military coalitions of "Libya Dawn" and "Operation Dignity" both of which distrust the other's willingness to disarm or to be included in the national army. All these challenges and conflicting collective

interests are far from being settled; nevertheless, with the realization of the most important power brokers in Libya that there is no military solution to the conflict, a first step seems to have been made towards a political solution, however fragile the path might be.

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Interview no. 2, (January 15, 2015), Libyan university student in the UK

Interview no. 3, (February 18, 2015), a Libyan doctoral student from Tripoli (a sympathizer of the Tubruq-based government)