

# Briefing Paper

April 2017



Security Assessment  
in North Africa



## SOUTHERN LIBYA DESTABILIZED

### The Case of Ubari

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## Front cover photo

Tuareg representatives gathered in Ghat to discuss the battle at Ubari, 2015.  
Source: Mauricio Morales Duarte, 2015

## About the author

**Rebecca Murray** is a field researcher and freelance journalist who covers the Middle East and Africa, with a primary focus on Libya since its 2011 revolution. She has filed stories for outlets such as Al Jazeera English, McClatchy, and Vice News, and has conducted research for the Small Arms Survey and the United States Institute of Peace. She is a contributing author to *The Libyan Revolution and Its Aftermath* (Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2015) and holds a master's degree in international affairs from the New School in New York.

## Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the members of southern Libya's Tuareg and Tubu communities who agreed to be interviewed, many repeatedly, as well as the Libyan and international commentators, who provided valuable insight. Gratitude also goes to Nicolas Florquin, Ali Arbia, Matt Johnson, and Tania Inowlocki at the Small Arms Survey for their time, support, and guidance through the field research, writing, and editorial process of this report.

## Overview

From late 2014 to early 2016—in the security and governance vacuum that has characterized Libya since its 2011 revolution—a conflict raged between the indigenous Tuareg and Tubu tribes of the south-western town of Ubari. At the local level, the battle revolved around economic assets as well as identity rights. Yet as the country’s rival national governments and international powers increasingly meddled in the fighting, the Ubari conflict came to be viewed as a proxy war. This report explores the events, context, and outcome of the Ubari conflict, as well as the lingering threats to the stability of south-western Libya and the wider region.

## Key findings

- Outside interference played a significant role in prolonging the conflict in Ubari. Regional and international meddling exacerbated fault lines in the south, while locals aligned themselves with national-level factions and competing governments to receive arms, logistics, and political support.
- Unresolved issues regarding the citizenship status of the indigenous Tuareg and Tubu in southern Libya limit their employment options and curtail their freedom of movement. As a result, members of these communities are not only more likely to engage in the trafficking of migrants and contraband, but are also more vulnerable to recruitment as paid fighters by Libya’s warring parties and extremists.
- The main threats to a lasting peace in Ubari and its surroundings are the absence of a unified Libyan government and neutral security institutions; ongoing battles for national and local power and territory; and a lack of investment in infrastructure, service delivery, and the local economy.
- Should the peace agreement in Ubari collapse, repercussions are likely to be felt at the regional level. Local communities could remobilize cross-border kin as they did during the recent conflict, destabilizing neighbouring countries; at the same time, the security void could allow traffickers and extremist armed groups to thrive.

## Introduction

Since the start of the revolution against Muammar Qaddafi’s rule in 2011, Libya has experienced successive political upheavals and security challenges. The country is now split between rival governments—each of which lacks democratic legitimacy, is supported by international interests, and is underpinned by loose coalitions of disruptive armed groups. At the risk of bankrupting the state, these factions are fighting primarily over the oil industry, which bankrolls government institutions and the salaries of the heavily dependent population (ICG, 2015b, pp. 6–17).

Across the south of Libya instability reigns as mostly tribe-based local groups continue to grapple for control of the area’s lucrative border trade, oil fields, and strategic military installations (UNSC, 2016a, pp. 16–17). In the absence of a unified national government, state institutions that deliver basic services and security are failing, infrastructure is falling apart, and the population is suffering. In this security void, criminal networks flourish and the infiltration of extremist groups has been identified as a threat (UNSC, 2016b, pp. 4–6). For years, scholars have warned that the stability in the south of Libya and the Sahel region is a fragile one.<sup>1</sup>

This Briefing Paper is focused on a conflict that shook the remote south-western town of Ubari from September 2014 to February 2016. During those 18 months, the area’s indigenous Tuareg and Tubu communities were pitted against each other in a battle that is emblematic of post-revolutionary power struggles across Libya. Since a ceasefire brought an end to hostilities, a fragile peace has held. However, the truce is threatened by warring political and military factions, weak governance, a volatile security situation, and a shortage of jobs, services, and aid for the area, whose young, impoverished population remains well armed. This report explores the extent to which these factors threaten southern Libya’s stability and that of the region.

This paper draws on author interviews and observations made during field visits to the Tuareg communities in the south-western Libyan towns of Ghat, Sabha, and Ubari in 2014, 2015, and April 2016. It is also informed by research trips to Libya’s Tubu communities in south-eastern and south-western Libya in 2012–14, as well as interviews with representatives from the Tubu and Ahali communities in downtown

Ubari in 2016. The report covers developments through December 2016.<sup>2</sup>

Following a brief description of Libya's southern region and its people, this paper discusses the impact of historical and more recent political dynamics on the Tuareg and the Tubu in particular. It then focuses on the Ubari conflict—examining why it escalated, how external forces used local opponents as proxies, and what obstacles had to be overcome in the peace talks. Finally, it identifies the factors that could disrupt the fragile peace in Ubari and beyond.

## Libya's south and its people

Libya's south is home to sprawling oil fields, such as Sarir and Sharara, and prospective mineral wealth. Its rich water aquifers feed into Qaddafi's 'Great Man-

Made River' pipelines, which run north through the desert to Libya's coastal cities (see Map 1). No single road spans the width of southern Libya's Sahara, as Qaddafi feared that such a thoroughfare could facilitate a revolution. Navigating these parts requires an ingrained understanding of the desert terrain, as well as skill.<sup>3</sup>

Libya's land border is porous and insecure. The indigenous tribes that inhabit the sparsely populated areas along the southern frontier, the Tuareg and the Tubu, have kin in the neighbouring states of Algeria, Chad, Niger, and Sudan (see Box 1). South Libya is home to less than 10 per cent of the country's six million inhabitants (UN Statistics Division, n.d.).

Arab tribes in the south-west, especially in and around the city of Sabha, include the Qadhahfha—Qaddafi's own,

which he favoured—as well as the Awlad Buseif, Awlad Suleiman, Hassawna, Magarha, Mahamid, and Warfalla. The area is also home to the Ahali—communities of mixed Arab and sub-Saharan African descent. The Zwayya are the most prominent Arab tribe in the south-east, around the Kufra oasis.

The oasis town of Ubari lies at the heart of the Fezzan. Its estimated 30,000 inhabitants belong to distinct Tuareg, Tubu, and Ahali communities (Stocker, 2015).<sup>4</sup> Ubari is uniquely situated near the country's second-largest oil production site, Sharara oil field, which is jointly run by the Spanish concern Repsol and Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC).<sup>5</sup> It is also close to smuggling routes that have long been used to traffic migrants, petrol, food goods, alcohol, drugs, and weapons across desert borders with Algeria, Chad, and Niger (Shaw and Mangano, 2014).





## Historical and political dynamics

### The Qaddafi years: discrimination against indigenous tribes

Influenced by Egyptian president Gamal Abdul Nasser's call for Arab nationalism, Qaddafi favoured Libya's Arab communities to the detriment of its indigenous people, their culture, and their language (Al Jazeera, 2008).<sup>6</sup>

Over decades, he alternated between suppressing indigenous groups, and exploiting them for military and political ends, typically by enticing them with promises, many of which he would not keep. Tuareg who had lived in Libya for at least a century generally possessed 'family books', which were required by the 1954 citizenship law. However, many of those who arrived in the following decades lacked documents required for citizenship and have consequently been barred from travelling as well as accessing jobs, universities, and bank loans (IRIN, 2012; see Box 1).

In the 1970s, Qaddafi recruited Tuareg from Mali and Niger into the Libyan army, promising them salaries and citizenship. As members of Qaddafi's 'Islamic Legion', the Tuareg were paid to fight in Libya's interventions in Chad, Lebanon, and Uganda. In the 1980s, military losses and economic depression prompted Qaddafi to disband this fighting unit.<sup>7</sup> In 2004, he created the Maghawir Brigade, which was exclusively Tuareg, headed by army general Ali Kanna, and based at Ubari's Tendi Mountain (Lacher, 2014, pp. 2–3).

During the conflict with Chad, Qaddafi awarded citizenship to Tubu who were living in the contested Aouzou Strip and recruited them to fight. After Libya's loss in 1994, however, many Tubu were stripped of their citizenship and were generally excluded from the armed forces, including the Sabha-based Faris Brigade (Lacher, 2014, p. 4).<sup>8</sup>

Discriminatory policies reached new heights in November 2008, when the Qaddafi regime brutally suppressed a Tubu protest demanding citizenship rights and access to education and health care in Kufra, leaving 33 dead. Statelessness was common among Kufra's Tubu, as were forced evictions (UNHRC, 2010, p. 7; USE Tripoli, 2008).

#### Box 1 The Tuareg and the Tubu: origins and demographics

For more than a century, an 1893 treaty known as the 'Midi Midi' kept the peace between southern Libya's Tuareg and Tubu. Specifically, the treaty's delineation of turf was able to prevent territorial disputes (Menas Associates, 2015). Even during the revolution that overthrew Qaddafi, when the desert communities found themselves on opposing sides, they did not turn their weapons against each other (Murray, 2015a).<sup>9</sup> Only in the post-revolutionary free-for-all was the truce broken.

##### The Tuareg

Historically, the nomadic Tuareg criss-crossed the Sahara as traders and pastoralists, unhindered by state borders. They remain stretched across Algeria, Burkina Faso, Libya, Mali, and Niger.<sup>10</sup> In modern Libya, they comprise two groups: the first traces its roots back many hundreds of years, to ancient families along the border with Algeria.<sup>11</sup> The second consists of relatively recent arrivals. These Tuareg fled repression, drought, and poverty in Mali and Niger starting in the 1970s and call themselves *Ishumar*, which is derived from the French word *chômeur* (unemployed person) (Jalali, 2013; Perrin, 2014, p. 299).

The size of Libya's Tuareg population is difficult to ascertain, not only due to their semi-nomadic lifestyle, but also because thousands lack government-issued identification records.<sup>12</sup> Estimates for the number of Tuareg in Libya range from 60,000 to 250,000 (ACHPR and IWGIA, 2009, p. 13; IRIN, 2012).<sup>13</sup> They are mostly concentrated in Al-Aweinat, Ghat, Sabha, and Ubari, as well as in Awal and Dirj. Before the 2011 revolution they accounted for a sizeable portion of the population of Ghadames, on the border with Algeria and Tunisia, but conflict with Arab neighbours in 2011 caused them to flee.<sup>14</sup>

##### The Tubu

The traditionally nomadic Tubu have also lived in Libya's south for centuries. Their livelihood, like that of the Tuareg, is historically tied to transporting cargo—which in recent years has included migrants, subsidized goods such as fuel and food, alcohol, drugs, and weapons—across desert frontiers (Stocker, 2014).

As is the case for the Tuareg, a precise population figure for the Tubu is difficult to establish.<sup>15</sup> In Libya, the Tubu number about 50,000 and are concentrated in Kufra and Rabyanah in the south-east, as well as westwards in Murzuq, Al-Qatrun, and Sabha. There is also a longstanding minority presence of Tubu in Ubari (Stocker, 2014; Murray 2015a). The Tubu have family ties to communities in Chad, Niger, and, to a lesser extent, Sudan.<sup>16</sup>



Fighters on the frontline in Ubari.  
Source: Maurício Morales Duarte, 2015





“The Tuareg were stigmatized for their association with Qaddafi, disenfranchised and impoverished as a result of being denied Libyan identity.”



Tuareg fighters on Tendi Mountain, outside Ubari. The mountain commands a strategic view over Ubari and Sharara oil field in the desert beyond. Source: Mauricio Morales Duarte, 2015

## Taking sides during the revolution of 2011

During the revolution in 2011, Tuareg soldiers largely sided with the regime. Qaddafi once again recruited Tuareg from Mali and Niger, promising to pay them to fight alongside the 32nd Reinforced Brigade, headed by his son Khamis, and the Tariq

bin Ziyad Brigade—which was based in Ubari and consisted of fighters who were largely drawn from the Qadhahfha and Awlad Suleiman (Gwin, 2011; Lacher, 2014, p. 3).

In an attempt to win over the Tubu, Qaddafi announced he would reinstate their citizenship. But it was too late. Sensing the opportunity to reverse their fortunes

and gain their rights,<sup>17</sup> the Tubu were quick to join the rebellion against the regime—in allegiance with north-western Libya's Amazigh, as well as brigades from Zawiya, Benghazi, Misrata, and Zintan. Having formed revolutionary brigades, they played a crucial role in securing Libya's southern frontier from regime infiltration, and in taking control of strategic assets such as Sarir oil field and the military base at Al Wigh (Murray, 2015c, pp. 312–15).

### Box 2 From one civil war to another: Libya since the 2011 revolution

In the six years since Libyans rose up to topple Qaddafi's regime, the country has been riven by strife as multiple political entities and the military coalitions that back them jockey for power.

Ten months after the end of the war, in August 2012, the revolutionary National Transitional Council that had governed Libya was replaced by the General National Congress (GNC), which was elected by popular vote and tasked with drafting a democratic constitution within 18 months. During that time, the GNC was not able to fulfil its mandate, nor was it able to maintain control of the economy, the security situation, or proliferating armed groups—many of which were funded by the ministries of interior and defence (Lacher and Cole, 2014, p. 11).

In 2014, when the GNC was duly replaced by a newly elected House of Representatives (HoR), some outgoing GNC members, who had the backing of influential armed groups, refused to step down. Heavy clashes broke out in the capital in July and August, and the HoR was forced to relocate to Tobruk, in north-eastern Libya.

As two main rival groupings emerged, they unleashed Libya's second civil war. On one side was army general Khalifa Haftar and his 'Operation Dignity' or 'Karama' military coalition, mostly drawn from the north-east and from Zintan, a small but powerful town in the north-west. Supported prominently by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, the coalition forged an alliance with the displaced HoR, which was then recognized by the United States and the European Union (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016).

In opposition was the 'Libya Dawn' or 'Fajr Libya' military coalition, a mix of religiously conservative armed groups formed during the revolution, from north-western cities including Al-Zawiyah, Misrata, and Tripoli, as well as the Amazigh community. This coalition defended the rump GNC—which was attached to the National Salvation Government—in the capital. While this side was largely isolated internationally, it did receive support from Qatar, Turkey, and, to a lesser extent, Sudan (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016, pp. 2–3).

Besides engaging in fierce fighting in Tripoli in 2014, Haftar's coalition forces battled in Derna and in Benghazi, where Operation Dignity took on 'extremist' armed groups that had joined forces as the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council. Haftar's coalition later fought Libya Dawn forces for control of key oil terminals at Al-Sidr and Ras Lanuf, as well as for military bases in Libya's south and far west (ICG, 2015b, pp. 6–17).

In December 2015, following United Nations-mediated talks designed to unify Libya's government, representatives from opposing sides, despite much dissent, signed what became known as the Libyan Political Agreement. The treaty ushered in a new executive branch, the Government of National Accord (GNA), which was to be presided over by the Presidential Council, a body operating as the head of state (Fitzgerald and Toaldo, 2016, p. 2).

Led by Prime Minister Fayeaz Seraj and backed by the United Nations, the United States, and the European Union, the Presidential Council abruptly displaced the National Salvation Government upon its arrival in Tripoli on 30 March 2016. The body was initially welcomed by a wide coalition of municipalities, including powerful Misrata, all of which were desperate to end the political rivalries and violence. However, the Council was unable to secure the votes required from the HoR to legitimize the GNA (Al-Warfalli, 2016).

Libyans were soon dismayed by the Presidential Council's inadequate response to the worsening security and economic crisis, and by further deterioration of basic services, such as electricity and salary delivery (Elumami, 2016a). During the latter part of 2016, Haftar's armed coalition—with backing from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and, increasingly, the Russian Federation—consolidated military control over eastern towns and took over key oil terminals along the coast (Pianigiani and Walsh, 2017). Meanwhile, members of the deposed National Salvation Government resurfaced in Tripoli to challenge the GNA (Gazzini, 2016; Mathi, 2016).

At this writing, it remained unclear whether the GNA would be able to avoid collapse in the face of ongoing opposition.

## After the revolution: a new disorder

After the collapse of Qaddafi's regime, rival factions began to vie for power at the national level (see Box 2). Meanwhile, the country continued to face shortages and cuts in public services, delayed payments of salaries, an ineffectual rule of law system, a lack of security, and infiltration by extremist armed groups (see Box 3).

In the Libyan south, desert communities saw their fortunes rise or fall after the 2011 revolution. The Tuareg were stigmatized for their association with Qaddafi, disenfranchised and impoverished as a result of being denied Libyan identity documents, and increasingly hemmed in by foreign military and local armed groups (IRIN, 2012).<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the Tubu found themselves in control of large swathes of Libya's southern border; as a result, they secured better access to cross-border kin and a more empowered role in illicit smuggling (Murray, 2015c; Tubiana, 2016).

## The Tuareg after the 2011 revolution

Regardless of whether they had fought on behalf of Qaddafi's regime, were part of the minority that joined the revolution, or survived as non-combatants, Libya's Tuareg were ostracized in the new state. Their livelihoods were jeopardized and their aspirations for Libyan citizenship—which had largely been maintained by Qaddafi—were crushed.<sup>19</sup>

As Qaddafi's system fell apart, Tuareg soldiers had few viable options. Hundreds fled to Mali or Niger to escape persecution. Some plundered weapon stockpiles to sell, or to transport across the Sahara for the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad<sup>20</sup> and the renewed uprising for a Tuareg homeland in northern Mali (Nossiter, 2012). Yet, when extremist groups Ansar Dine and AQIM appropriated



## Box 3 Terrorist threats in and around Libya

### The IS presence

In late 2014, militants of the non-state armed group Islamic State (IS) co-opted the Salafist militia Ansar al-Sharia and exploited Libya's political chaos to take hold, expand, and consolidate their base in Sirte, on the Mediterranean coast (UNSC, 2016b, pp. 3–6). Yet the militants suffered setbacks in Benghazi, Derna, and Sabratha, and by the end of 2016, a Misratan-led military alliance known as Bunyan Marsous ('Solid Structure') was credited with the defeat of IS in Sirte (Wintour, 2016). The alliance was backed by Libya's internationally recognized Government of National Accord and received military assistance from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Italy (DW, 2016; Smith, 2016).

The defeat was not absolute, however. Some IS fighters have reportedly resurfaced in the desert south of Sirte and are a suspected presence near Bani Walid (*Libya Herald*, 2016; Schmitt and Gordon, 2017). IS militants are also fighting in Benghazi and are allegedly in the south-east, along transnational supply routes around the remote town of Kufra, near the borders with Sudan and Egypt (UNSC, 2016b, p. 4).

Although IS claimed to have established 'Wilaya Fezzan' or 'Fezzan Province' in Libya, these assertions have not been substantiated (Porter, 2016; Zelin, 2015). The militants appear to have encountered challenges in the more populated south-west, except in sympathetic pockets in the populous city of Sabha. This part of the country may be less prone to infiltration, not only because of the multitude of strong, competing tribes, but also due to the US-backed French military presence along the border with Niger (BBC, 2015). In addition, Algeria has ratcheted up its intelligence apparatus and guards along the western border, especially since the 2013 terrorist attack on its In Amenas gas facility, which Mokhtar Belmokhtar and Al-Mourabitoun had orchestrated from Libya's south-west (Matarese, 2016; UNSC, 2016b, p. 9).

Tuareg and Tubu representatives who were interviewed for this study overwhelmingly dismissed the possibility that radical IS ideology could take root in their communities, which they described as traditional, less religiously conservative, rooted in local culture, and loyal to strong tribal leaders. Nevertheless, some interlocutors admitted that militarized, unemployed, and marginalized youths could be vulnerable to recruitment by radical groups, such as IS videos aimed at Tuareg and Tubu fighters (Casey and Pollard, 2015; Horowitz, 2015).<sup>21</sup>

### Terrorist and counterterrorist activities along Libya's southern border

After the revolution of 2011, international intelligence and media sources were quick to depict south-west Libya as a hotbed for terrorism (ICG, 2015a, p. 14). They pointed to the outflow of weapons and fighters to Mali and Niger in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution (Anders, 2015, p. 175; de Tessières, 2017, p. 6); they also called attention to the attack on the In Amenas gas plant in Algeria, which, as noted above, had been launched from Libya's south-west (Bowcott, 2015).<sup>22</sup> Further reports have focused on alleged links between Iyad Ag Ghaly, the leader of Ansar Dine in Mali, and the activities of his cousin, Salafist school proprietor Sheikh Omar Ahmed al-Ansari, the founder of border guard Brigade 315 in Ubari (Heras, 2014; Menas Associates, 2015; Metcalf, 2012).<sup>23</sup>

Some charges that terrorists are active in south-western Libya may be exaggerated since few international observers are on the ground and able to assess the situation accurately;<sup>24</sup> other overstatements may simply be rooted in self-interest. Indeed, since 2012, numerous Tubu military and civilian leaders have claimed that al-Qaeda was active in the south-west, including with Brigade 315. At the same time, they have promoted the idea that they themselves were best placed to combat terrorism in conjunction with international powers in the border area. By exaggerating the threat and positioning themselves as natural allies to international counterterrorist forces, the Tubu have hoped to strengthen their community's standing within Libya.<sup>25</sup>

Notwithstanding exaggerations, extremist elements—including members of al-Mourabitoun, al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and Ansar Dine—are indeed present in the south-west, even if they mainly transit through the area or use it as a logistics base (UNSC, 2016b, pp. 4–5, 8). The Tuareg attribute such movement and activity more to geography and a lack of border control resources than to any penchant for radicalism among the local population.<sup>26</sup>

France has a particularly strong fear that southern Libya might succumb to radicalization, given that the country—the Sahel's former colonial power—has a substantial military and economic stake in the region (Oneko, 2016).<sup>27</sup> To complement its fight against extremist insurgencies in the Sahel, France established a counterterrorism base under 'Operation Barkhane' at Madama in north-eastern Niger.<sup>28</sup> The base lies 100 km south of Libya's Toummo border crossing, an active route for Tubu smugglers who traffic migrants and goods into Libya (Murray, 2015b; Shaw and Mangan, 2014, pp. 9–22).<sup>29</sup>

As of late December 2016, French counterterrorism patrols, backed by US aerial surveillance, were also traversing the territory around the Salvador Pass in northern Niger, a notorious smuggling corridor that leads to south-western Libya and nearby Tuareg communities (BBC, 2015; Turse, 2016).

the Tuareg cause in Mali, splits emerged. While some Tuareg stayed with the jihadists, others returned to Libya, disillusioned and empty-handed (Murray, 2015a).<sup>30</sup>

The Tuareg soldiers and police officers who stayed in Libya after the regime was toppled were paid intermittently or not at all. The proliferation of revolutionary armed groups across Libya had left the national army and police force in tatters. In 2015, a Tuareg military commander put the number of unemployed tribesmen in Ghat and Ubari at 7,000 and police at 1,000.<sup>31</sup>

The remainder of Qaddafi's Maghawir Brigade—soldiers who had either stayed in Ubari or returned after initially fleeing to Mali or Niger—rebranded their force the Tendé Brigade. The force would later serve as the umbrella for Tuareg armed groups in the Ubari conflict (Lacher, 2014, p. 2).

Tuareg revolutionaries—some of whom had defected from the Maghawir Brigade to form the Ténéré Brigade in 2011<sup>32</sup>—established the headquarters of the revolutionary border patrol unit 411 in Ubari, with additional groups in Al-Aweinat, Issayen, Maknussa, and Tahala. Although they patrolled more than 500 km of territory alongside the Algerian border, the government paid them only sporadically and provided virtually no vehicles, fuel, weapons, or training.<sup>33</sup>

Besides work in the security forces, post-revolutionary Libya offered few legitimate economic opportunities. During Qaddafi's twilight years, the tourism industry had flourished in the country's south-west, which emerged as a travel destination replete with desert guides and safari hotels. With the revolution, however, this sector ground to an abrupt halt, choking off another source of income for Tuareg residents.<sup>34</sup>

Some Tuareg took to blockading Shara oil field to agitate for citizenship and rights (ANSAméd, 2014). Others turned to smuggling to earn a living, yet as borders tightened up and monitoring increased, this livelihood became an increasingly dangerous alternative to a job with the security forces.<sup>35</sup> In this context, Tuareg stressed that growing international scrutiny—particularly French and US military surveillance along the border—had led their communities to be ever more confined to south-west Libya.<sup>36</sup>

Complicating matters further, the Tuareg community suffered from internal tensions. For one, the Tuareg from Libya did not always see eye to eye with those who had immigrated from the Sahel,

largely due to differing economic and political circumstances. Nor was there agreement between the Tuareg who saw themselves as natural allies of the House of Representatives (HoR) in Tobruk and those who gravitated more to the 'revolutionary' Libya Dawn coalition in Tripoli.<sup>37</sup>

## The Tubu after the 2011 revolution

In contrast to the Tuareg, members of the Tubu community were more empowered after the revolution. Critically, the Tubu were able to make substantial inroads into the oil sector. Tubu forces, including the Kufra-based Martyr Ahmed al-Sharif Brigade under army commanders Ali Ramadan Sida and Hasan Musa, were responsible for securing prized National Oil Corporation installations such as Sarir.<sup>38</sup> When Zintani revolutionary fighters expanded their reach south—taking over Libya's second-largest oil field, Sharara, on Ubari's outskirts, as well as the smaller El Feel, which is nearby—they recruited Tubu fighters into the NOC's petroleum facilities guard (PFG) (ICG, 2015b). The PFG cooperated with the only Tubu armed group inside downtown Ubari at the time, the Sheikh Mohammed Salah Martyrs Brigade.<sup>39</sup>

The Tubu also gained control of border areas and smuggling routes that had been in their capacity during the 2011 revolution. They sought approval from the revolutionary National Transitional Council, which governed Libya for nearly a year after Qaddafi's regime collapsed, to set up desert checkpoints, patrol much of the southern border, and increase their reach. The Council tasked the border guard with patrolling hundreds of kilometres of territory adjoining Chad, north-eastern Niger, and Sudan.<sup>40</sup> Tubu fighters were also included in the ministry of defence's auxiliary force, Libya Shield<sup>41</sup>—which comprised the Desert Shield Brigade, led by Murzuq's Barka Wardagou, and the Martyrs of Umm al-Araneb Brigade in Murzuq and Al-Qatrun, led by Ramadan Laki (Lacher, 2014, p. 4).<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, the Tubu also gained control of cross-border smuggling routes used for trafficking migrants, fuel, goods, drugs, and weapons, as well as access to artisanal gold mines in northern Niger and Chad (Tubiana, 2016). In response to emerging opportunities, Tubu from Chad and Niger migrated to Libya in pursuit of economic opportunities (Murray, 2015c;

Tubiana, 2016). For disenfranchised, undocumented Tubu who had originally immigrated from Chad's Aouzou Strip, the revolution had restored some confidence that Libyan citizenship might be attainable after all.<sup>43</sup>

Although wary that Qaddafi's discriminatory Arabization policies could persist, the Tubu loosely affiliated themselves with Haftar's military coalition and the HoR. They also forged bonds with local Arab tribes such as the Qadhadhfa, mostly as transporters in illicit trade partnerships.<sup>44</sup> All the while, Tubu leaders sought to secure access to skilled jobs and to overturn the restrictions that limited the Tubu to smuggling and security work. 'We don't want to be dogs guarding the border,' said one Tubu peace mediator from Qatroun. 'We want to be equal to other Libyans.'<sup>45</sup>

## Heightened tensions between the Tuareg and the Tubu

After the revolution, the Tuareg and the Tubu excoriated each other in rival propaganda narratives. Anxious to secure a firm foothold in the post-revolutionary state, the Tubu aimed to sell themselves as trustworthy guardians of the border and allies in the international war against terror.<sup>46</sup> They repeatedly accused Tuareg brigades in Ubari—including Brigade 315 and Ansar al-Haqq—of being affiliated with AQIM, arguing that the Salvador Pass was rife with extremists (see Box 3).<sup>47</sup>

In turn, the Tuareg community felt wrongly smeared as 'terrorists', misunderstood, and increasingly under siege. The grievances they held with respect to colonial conduct in neighbouring countries fed their conviction that France was in league with the Tubu—whom they largely perceived as 'foreigners'—to brand the Tuareg in Libya as terrorists, while simultaneously encroaching on mineral-rich territory inhabited by the Tuareg.<sup>48</sup>

## Arab–Tubu aggression

Local Arab communities also resented the Tubu power shift. They perceived Tubu territorial expansion after the revolution as coming at their expense and alleged that many Tubu were foreign interlopers in Libya.<sup>49</sup>

Tensions quickly erupted into violence, in both the south-east and the south-west. In February 2012 in Kufra, more than 100 people were killed when the Arab Zwayya, who had long enjoyed preferential treat-

ment by Qaddafi, clashed with the Tubu over illicit trade (AFP, 2012). Upon entering the town to enforce a ceasefire as 'neutral' keepers of the peace, Libya Shield fighters from the north further exacerbated tensions due to their perceived bias towards the Zwayya, who are fellow Arabs (Murray, 2012).<sup>50</sup>

In Sabha, 150 people were killed when the Tubu and the Awlad Suleiman clashed over turf in March 2012. The Awlad Suleiman had emerged to claim dominance after having been overshadowed by the favoured, less numerous Qadhadhfa under the former regime (AP, 2012).

Since the 2011 revolution, shifting tribe-based alliances for economic, military, and political gain have also triggered clashes in Brak al-Shati', Ghadames, and, as discussed below, Ubari. These local conflicts across the south illustrate how difficult it has been to mediate lasting peace and stabilize the post-revolutionary state. Successfully negotiated ceasefires by tribal elders were fragile and fell apart sporadically due to the absence of strong national security institutions and a lack of alternative livelihoods for young fighters.<sup>51</sup>

## Intervention in the south

At end of 2012, the newly elected Tripoli-based General National Congress (GNC) had declared the south a 'military zone' in an effort to end the continuous conflict. The area was ostensibly to be administered by the national army. The decree was practically useless, however: the national army lacked the strength, backing, and cohesiveness to administer such a vast territory, including in Ubari, and it was weaker than local Libya Shield units and other militias (McGregor, 2013).

In early 2014, in view of the failure of successive interventions by northern factions to 'police' southern conflicts, Misrata's Third Force arrived in Sabha to contain the tribal violence. It was affiliated with the Tripoli-based Libya Dawn military coalition, which was backed by Turkey and Qatar. With reference to their checkpoints, patrols, and the capture of key assets such as the military airport at Tamenhint, the Force's operations chief said:

We are saving security in the south. You have a gun, I have a gun—it makes a balance. So we don't take guns from men but we find out who they work for, where they got it, and if they belong to a bad group.<sup>52</sup>

The Third Force formed alliances with the Awlad Suleiman, the Hassawna, and some Tuareg, whom they provided with weapons and logistical support (Cole and Mangan, 2016; Stocker, 2015).<sup>53</sup> In turn, however, this cooperation inflamed grievances among other groups, which deduced that Third Force fighters were in the area for their own economic gain.<sup>54</sup>

## Zooming in: the Ubari conflict

The revolution's aftermath—the implosion of the regime's security apparatus and the collapse of the tourism industry—took a devastating economic toll on Ubari's residents. As a consequence, local competition over power, assets, and alternative livelihoods increased, stoking discontent among the town's impoverished and disenfranchised communities. Meanwhile, cross-border smuggling thrived. It is within this context that the battle in Ubari erupted, triggered by a quarrel between Tuareg and Tubu fuel smugglers in September 2014 (Stocker, 2015).

The conflict raged until the February 2016 ceasefire, claiming the lives of 300 fighters and civilians, wounding more than 2,000 people, and destroying Ubari's downtown businesses and homes (UNSC, 2016a, pp. 16–17). The fighting forced well over half of the population to flee to places such as Al-Aweinat, Ghat, Murzuq, and Sabha's outskirts of Tuyuri, as well as farther afield (Spindler, 2015). Many of those who stayed behind were too infirm or impoverished to move.<sup>55</sup>

As discussed below, the conflict spiralled out of control as locals mobilized their kin in the surrounding areas and across the border. Before long, Libya's rival military coalitions backed proxy forces in Ubari, further complicating the task of local and regional peace mediators.

## The row escalates

Although the town's joint security committee of Ahali, Tuareg, and Tubu officials tried to intercede in what started as a quarrel, fighters arrived from outside Ubari to reinforce opposing sides. Leaders from each community blamed the other for the escalation in violence.<sup>56</sup>

Before too long, snipers on both sides held downtown Ubari hostage. Tuareg fighters positioned themselves on the strategic

Tendi Mountain, with a panoramic view of the town, while Tubu fighters embedded themselves in the adjacent foothills. Ubari's main eastern entrance and the road to Sabha became a no-go area, the airport shut down, and the road leading west to a more remote, mostly Tuareg population was cut off (Murray, 2015a).

Tubu fighters, who held Ubari's eastern entrance and the nearby Desa neighbourhood, had arrived from Murzuq, Al-Qatrun, and Sabha, and from as far afield as Kufra and Rabyanah. The Ubari battle was a rallying cause for the Tubu community, whose members fought under military leaders such as Ali Akri and Sharafeddine Barka Azaiy. A key Tubu security official confirmed that Tubu belligerents mobilized kin across the border in Chad and Niger, and that they recruited fighters from Sudan (UNSC, 2016a, p. 17).<sup>57</sup>

In the Tuareg-held suburbs, such as Mashrouah and Campo, up to 15 local fighting groups were joined by volunteers from Ghat, the Tuyuri suburbs of Sabha, and elsewhere. They reported to the Tuareg military operations room at the foot of Tendi Mountain, to leaders such as Ali Salah al-Husseini.<sup>58</sup> Many Tuareg fighters used skills and weapons they had obtained while serving with the former regime's army and police.

Wounded Tuareg soon flooded into the field hospital on Ubari's Tuareg-held outskirts, where women—some of whom had served as administrators or guards in Qaddafi's security apparatus—volunteered as cooks and medical support.<sup>59</sup>

Since the road that connects the eastern, Tuareg part of Ubari to Sabha was besieged by Tubu snipers, the Tuareg also made use of another location as a hub: drivers evacuated the wounded to the town of Adiri, within Brak al-Shati—a four-hour drive away, across sand dunes—and carted food and black market fuel back from there to Ubari.<sup>60</sup>

The Red Crescent clinic in nearby al-Ghoraifa treated mostly Tubu casualties. In the words of one medic: 'Most of it is about the snipers.'<sup>61</sup>

## War by proxy

Having started as a local dispute that rallied more widespread support, the conflict was soon thrust into the larger national and regional context. Misrata's Third Force, which had been based in Sabha to ease tensions between tribal

armed groups and to protect interests in the area, saw the revolutionary Tuareg forces as a natural proxy. In November 2014, two months into the Ubari conflict, they joined forces to capture Sharara oil field from Zintani and Tubu fighters. At that time, the Zintani were focused on their battle against Libya Dawn around the Watiyah military base, to the northwest, while the Tubu were distracted by the fighting inside Ubari.<sup>62</sup>

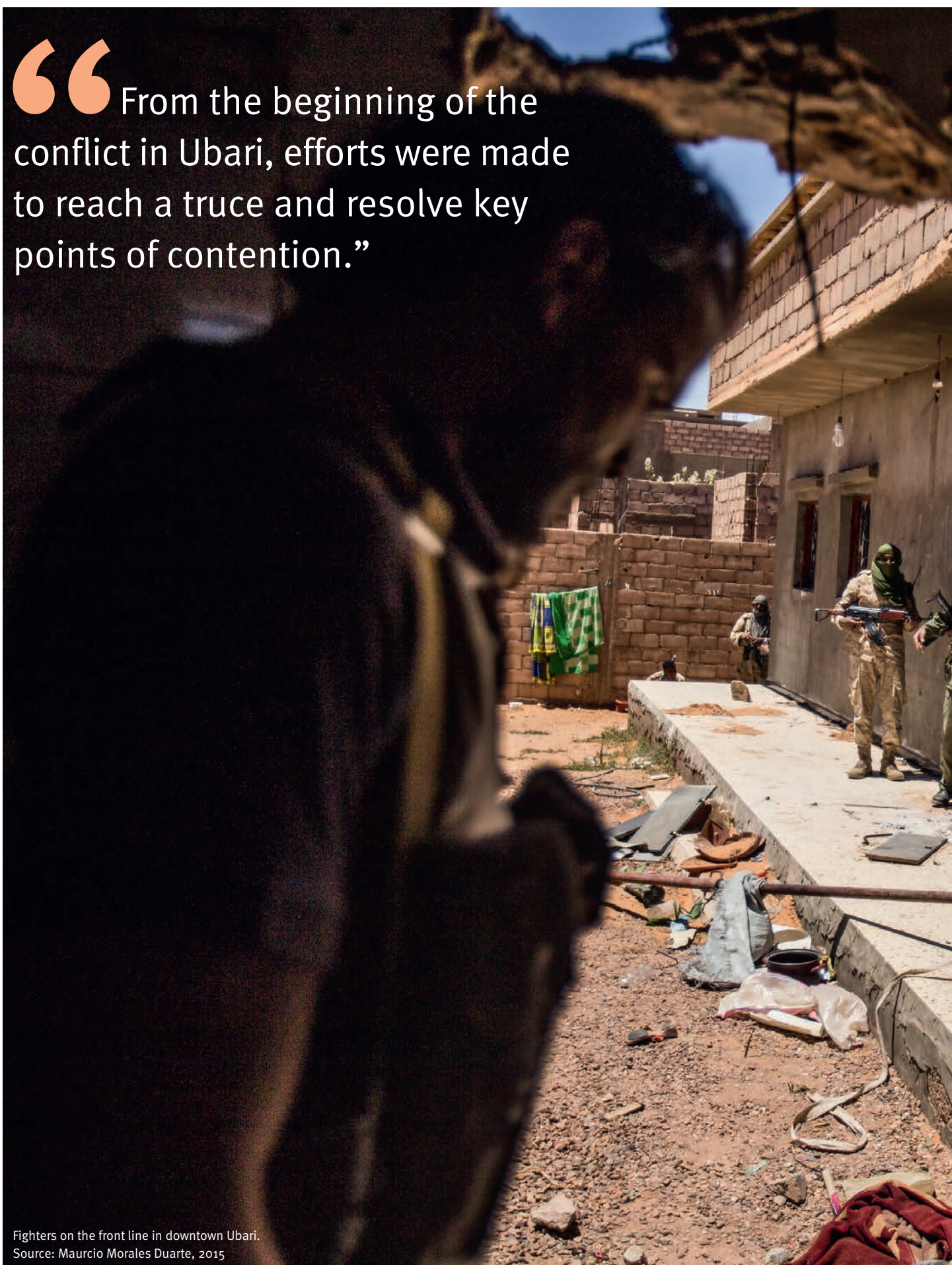
In January 2015, during a rare visit to the south-western border that was to shore up support and supply lines for Ubari, Third Force officials promised to augment Tuareg patrol operations. The Misratans failed to deliver on the promise, however, as they found themselves stretched thin, embroiled in fights against Haftar and his allied forces in the central oil crescent, in Watiyah, and in Brak al-Shati.<sup>63</sup> Having established an intelligence post at Germa, east of Ubari, the Third Force planned to take control of the airport outside of Ghat, near the Algerian border. The move would have allowed for a new supply base, as well as a means to block Haftar from landing there, but the plan was abandoned in the face of peaceful resistance from Tuareg residents (Murray, 2015a).<sup>64</sup>

While Tuareg fighters did receive a certain amount of support from the Third Force—including equipment, medical evacuations from Sharara, and much-needed fuel—their primary source of weapons financing was the ministry of defence, which was operating under Tripoli's National Salvation Government (UNSC, 2016a, pp. 16, 31–39).<sup>65</sup> Although fighters used artillery such as Grad multiple-rocket launchers and mortars, some Tuareg residents said they relied on old weapons from their jobs in the army or police, had acquired them from Qaddafi's stockpiles in the aftermath of the revolution, or had purchased them on the black market, as weapon prices were rising.<sup>66</sup> 'No one had weapons at home before the revolution—now everyone has two or three Kalashnikovs in their homes,' observed a Tuareg fighter. 'We bought our own weapons and ammunition, but the problem is, it's very expensive.'<sup>67</sup>

In contrast to the Tuareg, the Tubu were united in their allegiance to the HoR and Haftar's self-styled version of the national army, a coalition of former soldiers and armed groups, which used the conflict to expand their footprint in the south.<sup>68</sup>



“ From the beginning of the conflict in Ubari, efforts were made to reach a truce and resolve key points of contention.”



Fighters on the front line in downtown Ubari.  
Source: Mauricio Morales Duarte, 2015





## Overcoming negotiation deadlocks

From the beginning of the conflict in Ubari, efforts were made to reach a truce and resolve key points of contention—first locally, then at the regional level, and finally with international mediation. Sticking points included the Tubu demand that the Tuareg leave strategic Tendi Mountain, and the Tuareg call for a Tubu withdrawal from the town, or disarmament if their families stayed. Eventually, the parties would also have to agree on a neutral force to keep the peace, should one be achieved.<sup>69</sup>

The sides had competing narratives. Despite their internal split, the Tuareg were united against the Tubu in the Ubari conflict; they claimed to be fighting non-Libyan Tubu and other ‘foreigners’ who allegedly had the support of the French military forces in Madama (UNSC, 2016a, p. 17).<sup>70</sup> In turn, some Tubu accused their enemies of being ‘foreigners’ themselves—recruits from Mali and Niger, not Libya.<sup>71</sup>

Negotiations dragged on between Tuareg and Tubu mediators, whose powerlessness grew as the clashing parties increasingly perceived Ubari to be besieged by national and international actors in a proxy war.<sup>72</sup> On 10 February 2015, six months into the fighting, representatives of the Tuareg confederation from inside Libya as well as the Sahel gathered at Barakat, outside Ghat, to overcome their internal differences and speak with a unified voice in the negotiations.<sup>73</sup>

By mid-2015, the destruction of Ubari and the displacement of its residents—as well as the south-west’s economic, political, and social isolation from the rest of the country—had taken a heavy toll. In July, fighting briefly broke out between the Tuareg and Tubu communities in the Tuyuri neighbourhood of Sabha as well, fuelling fears that the conflict would spread.<sup>74</sup>

Battle fatigue and pessimism had deepened amid intensified fighting and worsening conditions, and neighbouring countries such as Algeria became extremely concerned about the threat of regional instability. Faced with the risk that armed groups could capitalize on cross-border ties and that violence might thus spill over the border, Algeria bumped up security along its frontier with Libya, sealing the official Issayen crossing—a move that cut off cross-border kin from legal travel, trade, and access to medical care.<sup>75</sup>

As the fighting persisted, mediators on both sides blamed outside forces for

their inability to end the conflict, which they viewed as a national fight of which they wanted no part. ‘When I talk with Tubu leaders, they all agree with peace,’ one Tuareg mediator said. ‘So why is there a war in Ubari?’ (Murray, 2015a).

Among the regional actors that became involved in the negotiations, Algeria appears to have played a key role in securing peace in Ubari, notably by steering sustained talks in the Qatari capital, Doha (Menas Associates, 2015). Facilitators urged Tuareg and Tubu mediators to participate in the talks for nearly four months—until 22 November 2015, when the delegation heads signed the accord.<sup>76</sup> At the time, Abu Baker al Fakih, the lead Tuareg mediator, said that he was convinced that Tubu counterparts were genuine in pursuing peace.<sup>77</sup> Both sides, however, became suspicious of Qatar’s motivations in response to reports that the Gulf state had promised to rebuild Ubari.<sup>78</sup>

On 26 November negotiations shifted to Rome, where the Italian Catholic lay community Sant’Egidio mediated talks designed to hammer out the details, including of a neutral force to keep the peace (Menas Associates, 2015). Finally, in February 2016, an approved peace-keeping force from the Hassawna tribe of Brak al-Shati’, which was perceived by both sides as the most neutral in the area, entered the town. The peacekeepers moved into the old Maghawir compound, cleared fighters out of the wrecked downtown and from the nearby summit of Tendi Mountain, and supervised a prisoner exchange (Fezzan Libya Group, 2016). In the absence of a neutral national security force, the Hassawna have maintained the peace to date (Murray, 2016).

## An uneasy peace: Ubari today

More than a year after the ceasefire, Ubari’s heavily armed, impoverished residents are still observing the truce. As exhausted residents continue to trickle back to their damaged homes, the Hassawna peacekeepers man checkpoints in town, disarming residents who carry weapons and generally minimizing the risk of clashes.<sup>79</sup>

Various problems in Ubari remain largely unaddressed, however, increasing the threat of renewed violence.<sup>80</sup> Much of Ubari’s downtown is still in ruins or damaged, complicating the delivery of already intermittent basic services, such

as electricity, cell phone reception, water, and garbage collection. Although the municipality of Ubari and the UN Development Programme have assessed the damage, little aid has arrived to repair the hospital, schools, or residences, or to restore services (*Libyan Express*, 2016).

Moreover, the town’s few schools are overcrowded and understaffed, and the hospital is experiencing a severe shortage of doctors, nurses, equipment, and medicine.<sup>81</sup>

Meanwhile, limited job opportunities have left the town’s youths, many of whom fought in the last conflict and remain heavily armed, with little to do. ‘Now in this situation you have to join the army or police, or go to Tripoli to work, or else you will become a criminal. Anyone can give youth something bad to do,’ said one young Tuareg man (see Box 4).<sup>82</sup>

At the national level, the rival Libyan governments have made little effort to promote reconciliation among Ubari’s affected residents, or to resolve longstanding grievances, including claims to Libyan citizenship. Moreover, the rule of law system remains ineffectual, encouraging the tribes to continue to vie for control of oil fields and borders.<sup>83</sup>

In view of the security vacuum, both Haftar’s coalition and Misrata’s Third Force have also sought to sustain their influence, ostensibly to unite communities in the south behind their respective, ultimate bids for power across Libya. Haftar has invested power in an 11-man security committee, which is expected not only to negotiate with tribes and elders in the Fezzan, but also to unite the region’s disparate militias in one unified army. Haftar reportedly set up the committee after a southern delegation asked him to help stabilize the region (Mustafa, 2016).<sup>84</sup>

To counter Haftar’s coalition, the Third Force has informally allied itself with Tuareg general Ali Kanna. Formerly the head of the Maghawir Brigade, the Qaddafi loyalist had fled to Algeria during the revolution; since returning to Libya, Kanna has repositioned himself as capable of uniting southern tribes in an effort to thwart Haftar’s designs on the area (Galtier, 2016). Kanna’s lack of funds, however, has hampered his ability to assert his authority.<sup>85</sup>

Even though the Tuareg community remains divided on political allegiances, they continue to coexist peacefully, as tribal identity ultimately trumps the national agenda. Indeed, the neglected Tuareg 401 unit—whose members express



#### Box 4 A bleak outlook for Tuareg youths: no documents, few jobs, high risk

Mohammed\*, a 30-year-old tobacco shopkeeper on the main thoroughfare in Ubari's suburb of Mashrouah, exemplifies the predicament Tuareg youths face today. His family migrated to Ubari from Algeria in the 1970s, and although he was born in Libya, a condition that is legally sufficient for citizenship, he lacks documents to prove he is Libyan (CGRS et al., 2014). When the 2011 revolution broke out, Mohammed's media studies at a Tripoli-based college were suspended. 'At first we didn't understand the revolution at all,' he said. 'Many Tuareg were with Qaddafi. They were not educated and in the security services—this was the only job available to them.'

Mohammed says he, like most of the Tuareg young people he knows in Ubari—a mix of military men and civilians—volunteered to fight during the recent conflict. The Tuareg formed up to 15 armed groups, which manned checkpoints across various neighbourhoods. The fighters, some as young as 15, mostly followed their neighbourhood leaders during the conflict, even though the Tuareg military operations room, at the base of Tendi Mountain, was ultimately in charge and in communication with Tuareg elders. 'We had few orders,' Mohammed said. 'If there was a big fight, everyone would go.'

He explained that the community was fully armed, holding old weapons from Qaddafi regime stockpiles as well as more expensive arms and ammunition purchased on the black market.<sup>86</sup> Mohammed recounted that after the ceasefire was called, he and other young fighters went home but did not disarm. 'The problem is that unemployed youths have weapons. We need jobs for people to put them down,' he said.

Many Tuareg youths had family in Qaddafi's army, or had themselves been drafted into the former regime's security forces. With few livelihood options, smuggling fuel, migrants, and drugs now provides an income for Tuareg and Tubu youths. As a Tuareg social activist pointed out, however, the illicit trade is not without its dangers: '[There is] a lot of fighting over fuel and drugs, the streets, and the power.'<sup>87</sup>

Since the fighting in Ubari stopped, a significant number of Tuareg have been barred from finding work in traditional jobs, such as in the state security sector, because they do not have the requisite national identification papers. Without these documents, they cannot travel or collect salaries. Such is the case for a Tuareg math teacher in Ubari: he has not received wages for nearly two years because he has no proof of citizenship. Reliant on family members for financial support, he volunteers at the area's only open secondary school; due to overcrowding, he now has up to 80 students in his class. He observed that the students who fought in the conflict often suffer psychologically—they have short attention spans, exhibit irritability, and are quick to start fights in school.

The lack of reconstruction funds has compounded the economic hardship and dismal outlook for young fighters, who have been asked to leave their weapons at home by Tuareg leaders and Hassawna peacekeepers. Tuareg military and civilian leaders indicate that many of these young people are recruited as paid fighters for armed groups—such as the Awlad Suleiman fighters in Sabha, the Misratan military alliance in Sirte, Zintani forces in the east, and competing powerful militias in Tripoli.

In view of the increased scrutiny of extremist groups moving within Libya, one Tuareg social leader in Ubari expressed concern. 'We have to protect the social system,' he said. 'There is the threat of outside interference [that would] pay money and corrupt people within a security vacuum.'

Note: \* Mohammed is not his real name; another name is used to protect his identity.

Sources: author interviews, Ubari, April 2016

nostalgia for the Qaddafi era—mans the Issayen border crossing side by side with border patrol unit 411, which is comprised of Tuareg revolutionaries.<sup>88</sup>

With respect to oil production, negotiations held between the Government of National Accord and the Zintani bore fruit in December 2016 (Elumami, 2016b).<sup>89</sup> Following the Zintani shutdown of the common pipeline that joins the Sharara and El Feel oil fields to the Zawiya refinery on the coast two years earlier, both oil fields came back online (Elumami, 2016c).<sup>90</sup>

## Conclusion

The peace in Ubari is extremely fragile, and the devastating impact of the violence on internal community relations, the town's infrastructure, and the economy continues to be felt. Since the ceasefire was agreed in February 2016, the town has received little aid to help rebuild from the rubble, repair shattered services, or revitalize the economy. Strong government institutions, rule of law, and long-term development are needed to back up the

peace. Especially hard hit are the community's youths—many of them former fighters—as they are expected to uphold the peace in the absence of viable livelihood options.

As Libya's rival governments continue to vie for control over territory and assets, fuelling local conflicts and neglecting economic and social needs in Ubari and the south, the Tuareg and Tubu communities remain largely confined to live their lives in the margins—reliant on illicit smuggling, fighting for monetary gain, and suffering from continued discrimination. While the Tubu appear to have made gains based on their support for the revolution, the Tuareg remain politically and economically disempowered.

These problems can threaten stability well beyond the perimeter of southern Libya. The availability of Tuareg and Tubu fighters for recruitment into militias in the north can exacerbate national conflicts, and raise tensions at home. Ubari's proximity to large oil fields means that what happens locally has an impact on the entire nation and its coffers. And the consolidation of illicit trade networks can affect security and economic conditions at the regional and international levels. To address the structural drivers of the conflict in Ubari, the Libyan government and outside donors will need to tackle a host of unresolved issues—for example by securing access to national identity papers and jobs; bolstering the national economy; investing in institutions, schools, and basic services; undertaking security sector reform; and strengthening border control.

The volatility of the situation in Ubari is not merely a 'Libyan problem'. Should there be a resurgence of violence, the vulnerability of Ubari's young Tuareg and Tubu fighters, the availability of arms and ammunition in Libya, and enduring cross-border kinship ties could allow the fighting to spread beyond Ubari and across borders. Without a long-term solution, the Ubari conflict may cast a shadow over the south-west's stability and security for a long time to come. ●

## List of abbreviations

### AQIM

Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb

### bpd

Barrels per day

### GNA

Government of National Accord

**GNC**

General National Congress

**HoR**

House of Representatives

**IS**

Islamic State

**NOC**

National Oil Corporation

**PFG**

Petroleum facilities guard

**Notes**

- 1 See, for example, Lacher (2014).
- 2 Given security concerns in southern Libya, this Briefing Paper does not identify all interviewees by name.
- 3 Author observations based on travelling with a Tubu border guard unit, led by then revolutionary leader Issa Abdul Majid Mansour, across southern Libya's Sahara Desert, from Murzuq to Rabyanah and Kufra, in September 2012.
- 4 Since the Qaddafi era, the Ahali community has a substantial population in Ubari and is disproportionately represented on the town's seven-person local council, which has one position for Tubu but no Tuareg representation. The Ahali reportedly sided with the Tubu during the conflict (author interviews with Tuareg residents, Ubari, April 2016).
- 5 Author interview with Mustafa Sanalla, NOC chief, Tripoli, January 2015. Besides Repsol, the companies OMV, Stat Oil, and Total are also active at Sharara oil field.
- 6 Recognition of indigenous languages and culture is a major point of contention for Libya's Constitution Drafting Assembly (Libya Channel, 2016).
- 7 Many Tuareg from Mali who had become seasoned fighters returned home to start their own revolt in the early 1990s (Guichaoua, 2015, p. 328). This pattern would be repeated on a larger scale 20 years later.
- 8 The reversal followed Qaddafi's failed attempt to annex Chad's mineral-rich Aouzou Strip, which borders south-eastern Libya. In an attempt to alter local demographics and strengthen his territorial claim, he had resettled Tubu in the area and had also granted Libyan citizenship to Tubu who were already present in the Strip. In 1994, the International Court of Justice ruled that the Strip belonged to Chad—delivering a final footnote for Libyan designs on the area (ICJ, 1994).
- 9 Author interview with a Tuareg peace mediator from Ubari, Tripoli, May 2015.
- 10 Most of the estimated 2 million Tuareg reside in Mali and Niger (Shoup, 2011, pp. 295–96).
- 11 This group of Tuareg belongs to the Kel Ajjar confederation, which is also found in Algeria (McGregor, 2016, p. 22).
- 12 Many Tuareg were not able to register for citizenship because they were illiterate; had no access to information on how to

- register; or had not been issued the required documentation due to their semi-nomadic lifestyle (Murray, 2016).
- 13 The overall Tuareg population in the Sahel is thought to be between 1.5 and 3 million (Perrin, 2014, p. 294).
- 14 In talking about the battle that erupted in Ubari in 2014, Libya's Tuareg social leader and peace mediator, Abu Bakr al Fakhir, drew comparisons to a previous conflict: 'The Ubari case was not the first for the Tuareg. There was Ghadames.' He had lobbied the then Tripoli-based transitional government for money to build an alternative community in Awal after Tuareg had fled Ghadames (author interview, Ubari, April 2016).
- 15 Uncertainty with respect to the population size stems from the Tubu's semi-nomadic way of life, widespread illiteracy, their lack of access to information and documentation, and Qaddafi's manipulation of citizenship issues during and after the Libyan conflict with Chad (Murray, 2015c, p. 305). The Tubu have an estimated regional population of up to 350,000 (Cole, 2012, p. 13).
- 16 The Tubu in Libya mostly originate from the Teda group in Chad's Tebesti Mountains, and the more populous Deza based in Chad and Niger (Murray, 2015c, p. 305; Stocker, 2015).
- 17 Tubu leaders said that the National Transitional Council in Benghazi had promised their population citizenship and rights if they joined the 2011 revolution (Murray, 2015c, p. 312).
- 18 In May 2015, a number of interviewed Tuareg in Ubari and Ghat said that outside powers were increasingly encroaching on their terrain. In January of that year, a Tuareg military leader, Edal Abu Baker Essa—one of the few revolutionary fighters from Ghat—had asserted that if French ground troops were to enter southern Libyan territory, 'then jihad will start'.
- 19 Author interviews with Tuareg activists, Ubari, April 2016.
- 20 Author conversation with a Tuareg driver, outside a desert turnoff to the Salvador Pass, at Al-Uwaynat, January 2015. He pointed in the direction of Niger and said he had transported fighters there after the revolution.
- 21 Author interviews with Tuareg and Tubu representatives, Ubari and by telephone, April and July 2016.
- 22 Author interview with a Tuareg military leader, Ghat, April 2016. He said that Mokhtar Belmokhtar and his men of Al-Mourabitoun drove through the desert north of Al-Aweinat and Ghat to the Algerian border on their way to launch the In Amenas attack.
- 23 During author visits to Ubari in 2015 and 2016, Tuareg residents said that 'Sheikh Omar' was mostly in Misrata and Tripoli, and that he was frowned upon in Ubari. As one resident noted in April 2016: 'He brings trouble to us.' The military compound for Brigade 315 was closed during consecutive author visits; it sits alongside the former Maghawir complex beside Tendi

- Mountain, which now houses the Hassawna peacekeepers.
- 24 One example of such exaggerations is a high-level European diplomat's characterization of Libya's south-west as 'a Club Med for terrorists' (author interview with a diplomat assigned to Libya, Tripoli, November 2014).
- 25 Author interviews with Tubu military and civilian leaders, Kufra and Murzuq, 2012–14, and by telephone, 2015 and 2016.
- 26 During consecutive author visits to Tuareg border posts alongside Algeria, members of border patrol unit 411 said that equipment, training, and funds were desperately needed. In 2016, Tuareg military and civilian leaders told the author that they felt they were misunderstood by the international community; they spoke of the urgent need for dialogue about security with the United States—rather than the French, towards whom they harbour historical animosity.
- 27 French economic activities include the Areva uranium mine in Niger, as well as Total oil interests in the region (Al Jazeera, 2014; Flynn and De Clercq, 2014). The recent merger of terrorist groups in nearby northern Mali, including AQIM and Al-Mourabitoun, led by Salafist head of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly, is cause for concern there (Macé, 2017).
- 28 During a visit to the Madama post in December 2014, French defence minister Jean-Yves Le Drian vowed to stop 'the jihadists, terrorism and those who want to transform this ancient caravan route into a route of violence and trafficking' (AFP, 2015).
- 29 One major trafficking route runs from Agadez in Niger to Al-Qatrun in Libya. Other smuggling routes traverse through the Salvador Pass in Niger to south-west Libya, as well as from Tamanrasset in Algeria through to Ghat in Libya, or across the north-western Libyan border at Ghadames.
- 30 Many Tuareg returnees from Mali loitered around downtown Ubari with little work to do (author observations, April 2013).
- 31 Author interview with Mohammed Bilal Issa, a Tuareg military leader of border patrol unit 411, outside Issayen, April 2016.
- 32 The Ténéré Brigade would eventually fall under the Tendé Brigade (Lacher, 2014, p. 2).
- 33 Author interview with Mohammed Bilal Issa, outside Issayen, April 2016.
- 34 Author interview with a former high-level Tuareg diplomat who served under Qaddafi, Ghat, January 2015. For a few years before the revolution, during Qaddafi's 'opening up' period, international tourists were able to visit Libya, albeit under tight control. There were direct flights from Europe to Ghat.
- 35 Author interview with a Tuareg smuggler, Ghat, February 2015.
- 36 Author interview with Tuareg representatives, Ghat and Ubari, April 2016.
- 37 Author visit to a gathering of the Tuareg confederation in Barakat, outside Ghat, 10 February 2015.
- 38 Author interviews with Ali Ramadan Sida, Kufra, 2012, and with Hasan Musa, Tripoli, 2012.

- 39 Author visit to Tubu and Zintani security positions, Sharara oil field, April 2013. The Zintani exploited an opportunity during the revolution, taking advantage of the weakened Tuareg community to expand their sphere of influence along the western border into the south-west, around Sharara oil field. While the Tubu benefitted from these developments, they did demonstrate to demand higher PFG wages at El Feel, which is operated by Italian-owned Eni and the NOC (Adel, 2014; ICG, 2015b).
- 40 Author interview with Issa Abdul Majid Mansour, then a Tubu military leader, outside Zuella, September 2012. He had served in the Libyan interior ministry during Libya's war with Chad. After angering Qaddafi, he fled to Finland, where he became a founder of the Front for the Salvation of Libyan Tubu. He returned to Libya during the 2011 revolution.
- 41 After the revolution, the defence ministry set up auxiliary Libya Shield forces across the country to contain local armed groups that were reluctant to join the old national army. The Shield was intended to fill security gaps by funding and equipping local armed revolutionary groups to enforce the rule of law; instead, it ended up playing a destabilizing role and enabling violence between communities. Until its dissolution in 2014, the Shield also backed the Tubu's Sheikh Mohammed Salah Martyrs Brigade, which patrolled alongside Ahali and Tuareg brigades in downtown Ubari before the town's conflict (Lacher and Cole, 2014, pp. 39–53; author interviews with Tubu military leaders in Ubari, April 2013). The ministry of interior had an auxiliary programme that was similar to the Libya Shield: it set up Supreme Security Committee forces across the country (Lacher and Cole, 2014, pp. 30–35).
- 42 Author interviews with Barka Wardagou, a Tubu military commander who took control of Murzuq during the revolution and has since died, Murzuq, September 2012; with members of the Sheikh Mohammed Salah Martyrs Brigade, Ubari, April 2013; and with PFG members, Sharara oil field, April 2013.
- 43 Author telephone interviews with a Tubu security official from Ubari and Tubu residents, April and June 2016.
- 44 Author interviews with a Tubu representative, Murzuq, November 2014, and with a Third Force representative, Sabha, November 2014.
- 45 Author interview with a Tubu peace mediator, Tripoli, April 2013.
- 46 Author interviews with Tubu leader Issa Abdul Majid Mansour, Zuella, 2012; with Tubu leader Barka Wardagou, Murzuq, 2012; with a Tubu security official, Ubari, 2013; and with a Tubu security official from Ubari, on the telephone, July 2016.
- 47 Author interviews with a Tubu security official, Ubari, April 2013; with a Tubu security official, Murzuq, November 2014; and with Tubu representatives, on the telephone, May 2015 and July 2016. One Tubu representative from Murzuq told the author the Salvador Pass was an area for 'crocodiles' (a term used to refer to Islamist militants). A target of this rhetoric was the Al-Haqq Brigade's potential links to extremism. It underplayed the fact that the group was largely comprised of teenagers of Sahelian origin, who defended Tuareg positions in the very local Ubari fight. The fighters were ill-equipped, loosely disciplined, and, in some cases, wearing flip-flops (author conversations with Al-Haqq fighters, Ubari, April 2016).
- 48 Author interview with a Tuareg notable from Ubari, Tripoli, May 2015.
- 49 Author interviews with Zwayya representatives, Kufra, 2012.
- 50 The Libya Shield forces were led by Wissam bin Hamid, who would become a leader of the Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council, a military coalition that took on Haftar's Operation Dignity (Murray, 2012).
- 51 Author visits to the regional border towns of Ghadames (2012), Kufra (2012), Sabha (2012–16), and Ubari (2014–16), areas controlled by armed groups and characterized by conflicts over assets. A Tubu mediator who helped to establish a truce in Sabha expressed concern regarding trigger-happy youths in the town. 'The wise people are together. But the young people are separate now,' he said. 'How do you bring these people together?' (author interview with Muhammad Sidi, a principal Tubu peace mediator from Al-Qatrun, Tripoli, April 2013).
- 52 Author interview with Mohammed al-Durat, head of Third Force operations at their military headquarters, Sabha, November 2014.
- 53 Author interview with Third Force representatives, Sabha, November 2014 and January 2015.
- 54 Author telephone interviews with Tubu representatives, July 2016; author interview with Tuareg residents, Tuyuri neighbourhood, Sabha, April 2016.
- 55 Author interviews with members of displaced Tubu families who were sharing rooms in apartment blocks in Murzuq, November 2014, and with displaced Tuareg families at an unfinished construction site nicknamed 'the Chinese Company', on the outskirts of Ghat, January and May 2015, and April 2016.
- 56 Author telephone interview with a Tubu security official who was part of the joint security committee, Ubari, November 2014.
- 57 In author interviews in Ubari, May 2015, Tuareg fighters alleged that foreign fighters from Chad and Sudan were active on the Tubu side. A senior Tubu security official acknowledged that fighters from the Darfur-based rebel groups Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudan Liberation Army–Minni Minawi had been recruited by the Tubu to fight for pay in Ubari. 'No one will admit this—it is a dangerous story,' he said in an author telephone interview in July 2016. Along similar lines, the UN Panel of Experts concluded there was 'strong evidence' that members from Darfuri armed groups were fighting in Libya on the side of Haftar's coalition, including fighters from the Justice and Equality Movement and the Sudanese Liberation Army (UNSC, 2016a, p. 17).
- 58 Author interviews with Tuareg military leaders, including Ali Salah al-Husseini, Ubari, May 2015 and April 2016, and with Tuareg social leaders, including Mohamed Saleh al-Ansary, Abu Baker al-Fakih, Ali Aljeli, and Ismael Mohammed, Ghat and Ubari, May 2015 and April 2016.
- 59 Author visit to the Tuareg field hospital, set up in a secondary school on Ubari's outskirts, May 2015.
- 60 Author interviews with Tuareg residents, Ubari, May 2015 and April 2016.
- 61 Author interview with a Red Crescent medic, al-Gharaifa, November 2014.
- 62 Author interview with a Third Force representative, Sharara oil field, January 2015. He said that the Tuareg had made arrangements with Misrata's Third Force before they took over Sharara by force on 5 November 2014, and that the Third Force arrived on 7 November. Sharara came back online by mid-November, but the Zintani retaliated by turning off a valve in the oil pipeline, which runs through their territory at Rayana to the Zawiya refinery on the coast. That move effectively shut down oil production for the next two years.
- 63 Author interviews with three Tuareg security officials at the Issayen border crossing between Libya and Algeria, January 2015. The men said they were watching for smuggled migrants and drugs, such as hashish and the opioid painkiller Tramadol. They observed that they themselves were under-equipped and understaffed, in contrast to the Algerian border guards, who controlled their side of the border tightly.
- 64 Author visit to the Third Force intelligence outpost in Germa, a former safari hotel, November 2014. The Third Force had driven a military convoy from Sharara oil field to Ghat airport in January 2015, but they retreated peacefully after Tuareg civilian leaders told them they did not want Ghat to become politicized—and after protesting Tuareg residents had laid rocks down on the airport runway. However, days later, an airplane from Tobruk successfully landed at the airport, illustrating the political divisions within the Tuareg community between support for the Tripoli- vs. the Tobruk-based governments (see Box 2). As noted by a former GNC representative from the south: 'Many towns in Libya are either with Karama [Operation Dignity] or Fajr [Libya Dawn]. But Ghat doesn't have a specific allegiance [. . .]. In the morning the Al-Thinni government [in Tobruk] visits them, while the Al-Hassi government [in Tripoli] visits them in the evening' (author interview, Tripoli, February 2015).
- 65 Author interview with a Tuareg military leader, Ubari, April 2016.
- 66 Author visit to Tendi Mountain, Ubari's battle frontline, May 2015; author interviews with Tuareg fighters, Ubari, May 2015 and April 2016.
- 67 Author interview with a Tuareg resident, Ubari, April 2016.



- 68 Since 2012, parties to Libya's conflict have received several weapons transfers that broke the international arms embargo on Libya (UNSC, 2015; 2016a).
- 69 Tubu rejected a Tuareg proposal that either the Third Force or Amazigh fighters could serve as a 'neutral force' (author interviews with a Tuareg mediator, Ubari, May 2015 and April 2016, and with Tubu representatives, Murzuq, November 2014, and on the telephone, 2015–16).
- 70 Author interviews with Tuareg fighters, Ubari, May 2015. They claimed dead fighters pictured in photos on their cell phones could be identified as 'foreign' due to their looks. They also said they had identified foreign accents on their hand-held radios.
- 71 Author telephone interviews with a Tubu security official and Tubu representatives, 2015–16.
- 72 One Tuareg peace mediator expressed concern over the potential for a lasting peace: 'The Tubu who live in Libya don't have power over their fighters' (author interview, Ubari, May 2015). Many Tuareg concurred, saying that the Tubu could not control foreign fighters that they recruited (author interviews with Tuareg representatives, Ubari, 2014–16). Similarly, Tubu representatives indicated that the Tuareg were unable to control individuals from Mali and Niger in their community (author interviews, Ubari, 2013, and telephone interviews, 2014–16).
- 73 At the meeting, which was attended by hundreds of Tuareg leaders, concerns were aired about splits within the community. The group established the Tuareg Social Council, which replaced the Tuareg Advisory Council and Supreme Tuareg Council; the new body elected the former Libyan ambassador to Niger, Hussein al-Koni, as its president and named Abu Baker al Fakhri deputy (observations by the author, Barakat, outside Ghat, 10 February 2015). The gathering was deemed a success with respect to resolving differences within the Tuareg community in Ubari (author interviews with Tuareg residents, Ghat, February 2015).
- 74 The fighting broke out on 10 July 2015, amid high tensions between the Tuareg and Tubu communities, which live side by side in the impoverished neighbourhood of Tuyuri in Sabha. Two weeks later, a ceasefire was negotiated; it has held to date (author interviews with Tuareg fighters, Tuyuri neighbourhood, Sabha, April 2016).
- 75 Author interviews with Tuareg guards from border patrol unit 411, near the Issayen border crossing, April 2016.
- 76 The accord was signed by Tubu representative Ali Sidi Adam and Tuareg mediator Abu Baker al Fakhri, who led the respective delegations of mediators. Throughout the conflict, multi-track peace negotiations had taken place, including in eastern Libya, the United Arab Emirates, and, most successfully, Doha. Some Tuareg fighters complained that Tuareg negotiators were being 'detained' in Qatar until they signed, a sentiment echoed by the wife of one attendee from Ghat (author interviews, Ghat and Ubari, November 2016).
- 77 A Tuareg signatory to the peace agreement observed: 'We felt the sincerity of the Tubu elders we were talking to because we met them in many public and secret meetings. We knew they were serious when they brought [Tubu commander] Sharafeddine [Barka Azaiy]' (author interview, Ubari, April 2016).
- 78 While the Tubu argued that Qatar was a backer of extremists, one Tuareg mediator expressed other concerns: 'I don't trust Qatar. This is an investment for them due to oil in the area' (author interview, Ubari, April 2016).
- 79 Author interview with the leader of the Hassawna peacekeepers, Ubari, April 2016. He said the will of the heavily armed local Tuareg and Tubu communities to maintain the peace was crucial to their success.
- 80 Author interviews with Tuareg military and civilian leaders and residents, Ghat, Sabha, and Ubari, April 2016; with Hassawna peacekeepers, Ubari, April 2016; and with Tubu security leaders and residents, online, April–July 2016.
- 81 During the conflict, two nurses from the Philippines said they were being held against their will at the hospital because they were the only ones in the area qualified to work; after the ceasefire was negotiated, visiting doctors from Misrata complained about the hospital's untrained support staff and shortages of equipment and medicine (author interviews with hospital staff, Ubari, May 2015 and April 2016).
- 82 Author interview with a Tuareg youth, Ubari, April 2016.
- 83 Author interviews with military and social leaders from the Ahali community and the Hassawna, Tuareg, and Tubu tribes, Ubari, April 2016, and online, April–July 2016.
- 84 Author telephone interviews with a Tuareg representative allied with Misrata forces in Sabha, July 2016, and with a Third Force representative, July 2016.
- 85 Author telephone interview with a representative of Misrata's Third Force, July 2016. He said that Ali Kanna would be capable of uniting communities and heading up security in Libya's south-west. A number of Tuareg and Tubu mentioned Kanna's close ties to Algerian intelligence, a perception that bolsters their suspicions that proxy powers are meddling in affairs of the south (author interviews, Ghat and Ubari, April 2016; author telephone interviews, July 2016).
- 86 Author interview with Tuareg resident in Ubari, April 2016. He said that now on the black market an AK47 or FN would cost him between LYD 1,200 and LYD 2,000, and an RPG cost between LYD 5,000 and LYD 7,000.
- 87 The social activist said that few weapons were currently being smuggled out of Libya, and that they were in demand. He also noted that hashish and Tramadol were easily accessible in the community, along with homemade alcohol. He indicated that expensive drugs such as cocaine were not used locally, but that they transited through the country (author interview, Ubari, April 2016).
- 88 Author interview with security officials at the Issayen border crossing, April 2016. These guards, who had served in the police and army under Qaddafi, pointed out that they brought their own weapons to work, received salaries sporadically, and had only one working truck and limited fuel.
- 89 Author interview with Mustafa Sanalla, NOC chief, Tripoli, January 2015.
- 90 The NOC reports that Sharara's output potential is about 330,000 bpd, and El Feel's around 90,000 bpd. Libya's total production of crude oil one year before the 2011 revolution was 1.65 million barrels per day (bpd) (ICG, 2015b, p. 2). As of December 2016, its overall output stood at 600,000 bpd (Elumami, 2016c).

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A Working Paper of the Small Arms Survey/Security Assessment in North Africa project, with support from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Global Affairs Canada, and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.



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