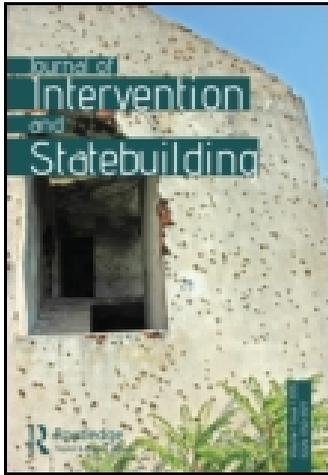


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Publisher: Routledge

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Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/risb20>

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Published online: 05 Aug 2014.



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To cite this article: Thijs Jeursen & Chris van der Borgh (2014) Security Provision after Regime Change: Local Militias and Political Entities in Post-Qaddafi Tripoli, Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding, 8:2-3, 173-191, DOI: [10.1080/17502977.2014.925249](https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2014.925249)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2014.925249>

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Security Provision after Regime Change: Local Militias and Political Entities in Post-Qaddafi Tripoli

Thijs Jeursen and Chris van der Borgh

This paper discusses the way the newly formed political entities and the local militias engage in statebuilding practices during Libya's transitional period of 2011–12. Focusing on the encounters between these actors in the security field, it provides insight into the capacity and strategy of national actors to build state structures and to develop the political arrangements that they deem necessary. It does so by identifying the key actors involved, as well as the interactions between them and the constantly evolving relations of control, power and authority. It shows how actors in the security field engage with each other in their efforts to expand and to institutionalize networks and influence, and the competition and alignments with other security actors that are active in the transitional phase and thereafter.

Keywords Libya; statebuilding; security; legitimacy; militias

Introduction

In February 2011, protests in the eastern city of Benghazi rapidly escalated into what became a national anti-regime uprising, during which Libyan civilians and defected military personnel fought the forces loyal to Muammar Qaddafi and his regime. Revolutionary fighters, or *thumar*¹ as they are generally referred to in Libya, initially enjoyed successes in the eastern province of the country. Nevertheless, Qaddafi's regrouped and mobilized forces retook most of the country in March 2011 and threatened to crush the oppositional epicentre of Benghazi in order to ensure victory (Bellamy and Williams 2011). In response to the impending humanitarian crisis, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 allowing UN member states to 'take all necessary measures' to protect the lives of Libya's unarmed civilians (UN 2011, 3). Subsequently, NATO installed a no-fly zone and used force against several military targets of the regime. As a result of this support, the oppositional fighters defeated the regime's forces and assassinated Qaddafi in October 2011. Meanwhile, the opposition formed the National Transitional Council (NTC) to fill the political vacuum left by the regime and to guide Libya towards its first elections since 1951.

Members of the UN Security Council explicitly stated that any foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory should be excluded (UN 2011). Simultaneously, the NTC, while strongly advocating a no-fly zone, also insisted that no foreign peacekeeping force should play a major role in the country and rejected the idea of deploying UN military observers. As a result, unlike, for example, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, there was no intrusive presence of an external force that led the political reconstruction in Libya once the conflict came to an end in October 2011. The international involvement during the transitional period was limited to a small UN mission deployed in Tripoli and the diplomatic and development presences of bilateral actors. While these actors sought to influence the political reconstruction, local actors primarily drove the process. In other words, Libya is a case of locally driven reconstruction after an international intervention that eventually contributed to a regime change.

Since international actors played only a minor role in the subsequent political transition in Libya, the case provides insight into the capacity and strategy of national (that is Libyan) actors to build state structures and to develop the political arrangements that they deem necessary. This was an extremely complex process in a country with weak state institutions and numerous political and armed groups, all negotiating and competing with each other for power and influence in the post-Qaddafi era. In this paper, we analyse the interactions between militias present and active in Tripoli and the newly formed political entities in the year after Qaddafi's removal. We are interested in how power relations were institutionalized in the absence of international parties playing key roles in the processes of building new security institutions. What mechanisms were developed by these different stakeholders as they attempted to (re)establish the monopoly of legitimate violence?

We will begin this article by outlining the framework that we use to analyse the interactions in the security field. Subsequently, we will discuss the background to the conflict in Libya where we will focus particularly on Qaddafi's security sector. Thereafter we address transformation in the national political field as well as the local security field, explaining the processes and dynamics that took place during the revolution of 2011. Finally, we analyse the negotiations in the security field in Tripoli during Libya's transitional period of 2011–12 and formulate our conclusions.

Analysing the Security Field in Libya

This paper analyses the interactions between Libyan actors in the security field. Based upon Bourdieu's definition of 'field', we conceptualize the security field as a multidimensional space of positions in which different heterogeneous security providers contest and negotiate over who dominates (Bourdieu 1985, 1989). The security field is therefore 'the site of a more or less overt struggle over the definition of the legitimate principles of division of the field' (Bourdieu 1985,

734). We argue that these security providers are involved in statebuilding activities, which can be defined as the deliberate projects of particular organizations and/or elites to make and build state institutions, as well as the ways ‘actors forge and remake the state through processes of negotiations, contestation and bricolage’ (Hagmann and Péclard 2010, 544). State formation refers to the longer on-going processes in which state capacity increases, or decreases—a contingent process that is not only the result of the intentions of the actors involved (Jung 2008). An understanding of earlier phases of state disintegration and formation is important to understand the specific statebuilding strategies of actors who have accumulated political and social capital in times of the former regime, and especially of those that challenged the incumbent during the armed insurrection and try to use this capital during the transitional period.

The literature that analyses the emergence and the formation of the modern Western state underscores that the process proceeded in a complex and particularly violent fashion (Tilly 1992, 2007; Jung 2008). It was in the course of this state formation process that an elaborate discourse of statehood developed, in which the provision of security ‘became a core function of the modern state’ (Milliken and Krause 2002, 756). As the state apparatus gradually managed to monopolize the use of violence within its territory, the provision of security became a public good that was to be provided by the state. The use of violence to maintain a given political order became not only the exclusive right of the state’s security institutions, but, according to the Weberian definition, ‘the means specific to the state’ (Weber 1964, 154). This ideal-typical notion of the state and the inherent distinction between legitimate and illegitimate violence shaped the analytical lenses through which scholars and policymakers have interpreted post-conflict state formation as a state-centric process. In a similar vein, the international efforts to promote post-war statebuilding primarily concerned the (re)building of state institutions, especially those responsible for overseeing and implementing the monopoly of legitimate violence, whereas the importance of non-state actors was left unaccounted for.

However, it is increasingly recognized that the process of state formation is much more open-ended and contested (Ayoob 2002; Jung 2008). As Tilly (1985) points out, multiple actors actually share the right to use violence early on in the state formation process. In fact, the existence of different alliances and collaborations between state and non-state armed groups is considered to be a recurring feature of the first stages of state formation. These various partnerships and alliances between actors in state and non-state violence have been discussed and documented by several and conceptualized by others as ‘mediated states’ (Menkhaus 2007), ‘limited states’ (Migdal 2001), as well as ‘hybrid political orders’ (Boege et al. 2008). Central to these orders is that security provision, or rather the state’s inability or unwillingness to provide security for its citizens, is considered to be one of the main recurrent objects of which a multitude of actors in society compete and/or collaborate (Hagmann and Péclard 2010).

In our analysis of the security field in the first year after the regime change in Libya we focus on ‘the interactions of groupings with one another and with those whose actual behaviour they are vying to control or influence’ (Migdal 2001, 23). First, we identify the newly formed political entities that intend to establish national and local political order, as well as several relevant militias that have built up local power positions based on armed force and a certain degree of control over parts of Tripoli. In our analysis, we also focus on the repertoires used by different actors to legitimize their power positions and use of violence. Security actors implement symbolic repertoires in order to further their interests and to legitimize and give meaning to their actions. Repertoires are used to defend and challenge the existing power relations, and the state itself is an important producer of repertoires (Hagmann and Péclard 2010, 547). While all militias claim to represent local constituencies, the legitimization of these militias vis-à-vis each other and vis-à-vis the new political entities is crucial in the early period of the uncertain Libyan transition. Hence, we understand legitimacy here primarily as ‘the probability that other authorities will act to confirm the decisions of a given authority’ (Tilly 1985, 171). Obviously, this willingness of groups to recognize each other will partly depend on their resource base. The institutionalization of power relations is therefore a highly competitive and contested process between the stakeholders involved.

Second, we zoom in on this encounter between security actors, paying attention to the nature of the interaction and the (temporary) outcome of it. In studying these encounters, Hagmann and Péclard (2010, 550) emphasize the need to look into the sociopolitical spaces in which actors bargain and/or compete over the material and symbolic dimensions of the security field. These spaces structure the social actors’ scope by conditioning, but not pre-determining, their inclusion in or exclusion from the interactions with other relevant actors. The resources that individuals and organized interest groups have at their disposal affect the way these interactions materialize. For the local militias this concerns their capacity and willingness to use armed force, a resource that distinguishes them from other organizations in society and makes them actors to deal with before political entities can claim final control of the use of force. On the other hand, the political entities claim or already have access to state resources, such as oil revenues. The efforts to construct a monopoly on violence thus take place in a contentious field in which organized actors largely agree about the idea of a legitimate monopoly on the use of violence, but where the channels to reach consensus about the statebuilding trajectory are absent and are themselves objects of both negotiation and competition.

This article is based on data collected in two field trips conducted in Tripoli in 2012 and 2013. During this period, various members and commanders of Tripoli-based militias, political authorities, as well as policymakers and staff from several (inter)national NGOs and institutions, such as embassies, the United Nations, and local police, were interviewed. A representative sample of militias was made, including both militias that were large and influential as well as smaller and less known ones. This enabled us to acquire an accurate picture of

the actors in the security field. During the interviews and informal meetings with militia members and leaders, political authorities and international and local NGOs, key statebuilding processes were discussed in which we focused on the encounters between the different security actors. However, before we discuss the process during which the transitional political entities and the local militias were formed, we will elaborate first on the sociopolitical context in which these actors emerged.

Qaddafi's Security Sector (1969–2011)

In 1951, Libya's security sector consisted of a variety of different security forces. First, King Idris (1951–69) deliberately divided his armed forces into a regular army and a variety of armed police forces, the latter consisting of elite groups charged with the task of protecting the King himself. These police forces, such as the Cyrenaican Defence Force (CYDEF) and the Tripolitanian Defence Force (TRIDEF), were almost twice the size and better equipped than the national army in order to control the potential of the latter to rebel against the monarchy. Furthermore, the CYDEF was also put in charge of protecting and policing the development of what would provide Libya with its main source of income: the oil installations. In order to maximize the loyalty of these police forces, King Idris primarily relied on tribal affiliations when selecting individuals for the commanding and influential positions (Wright 1981). Nevertheless, in spite of his attempts to control the national army, a group of young officers overthrew King Idris' rule in a bloodless coup on 1 September 1969. Eventually, the King's security forces were disbanded and integrated by the new regime and their commander, Muammar Qaddafi (Vandewalle 2006).

In a sense, Qaddafi's rule (1969–2011) was a continuation of the political situation under King Idris, during which Libya became a nation without modern state institutions, such as political parties and an independent security apparatus. Qaddafi did, however, reverse the tribal politics of the former King, who favoured Cyrenaica (the eastern province), whereas Qaddafi favoured tribes based around the Sirte basin in the province of Tripolitania (the western province) (Vandewalle 2006). Qaddafi attempted to create a stateless society in which ordinary citizens would be able to manage their own affairs without the intervention of state institutions. As such, there was no need for political parties, taxation, or national elections. According to Qaddafi's *Green Book*, his political manifesto, the definition of the term democracy required revision: from 'the supervision of the government by the people' to 'the supervision of the people by the people', implying that the political system needs to be constructed from the bottom up rather than top down (Vandewalle 2006, 104). This is what Qaddafi referred to with *Jamahiriyya*, or 'mass-ocracy': the state of the masses, where the citizens themselves take charge of their political and economic destinies unimpeded by the oppressive institutions of the modern state. In line with this political ideology, Qaddafi stated that the provision of security was also

the responsibility of every citizen, as a monopoly of violence was perceived to be unjust. He therefore supported the creation of the 'People's Militias', in which ordinary men and women would be in charge of defending their own country (Davis 1987). However, although Qaddafi's 'state of the masses' was designed to be run directly by its citizens, the discourse in which he advocated a decentralization of military, economic, and political influence never materialized. Rather, such an approach was entirely obscured by 42 years of highly personalized and repressive rule that dominated virtually all aspects of Libyan life (Brahimi 2011; ICG 2011a). Additionally, the decentralization of the monopoly of violence 'never went beyond symbolic displays of the People's Militia at carefully staged national events' (Vandewalle 2006, 149).

It was largely due to the way Qaddafi organized and structured the security sector that allowed him to remain in power. First, having first-hand experience with how a national army could threaten a regime, Qaddafi carefully and strategically kept the role of the formal security institutions (i.e. the police and the national army) to a minimum. Without a Ministry of Defence, the army was never assigned any task meant to safeguard the regime. Meanwhile leadership was frequently rotated in order to prevent a professional ethic from developing (Vandewalle 2006, 147). Details about police staff numbers are lacking, but owing to the presence of police stations, it is reasonable to assume that it consisted of approximately 30,000 to 50,000 men nationwide (Mattes 2004). As policemen usually lived in their own hometowns, the authorities often shifted senior officers around from one post to another at relatively frequent intervals in order to prevent them from acquiring political influence (Davis 1987).

Second, Qaddafi directly controlled the most powerful security organizations, such as the Revolutionary Command Council and the Revolutionary Committees (Mattes 2004). These entities were primarily charged with safeguarding the regime, existed outside the regular military structure, and were deliberately kept in separate, vertically integrated structures in order to minimize communication and cooperation between them. In the end, all lines of command would ultimately meet in Qaddafi's office in Bab al-Azaziyya.² In selecting key political and military posts within these institutions, Qaddafi primarily relied on family ties and/or tribal affiliations, using kinsmen from the Qadhadhfa, Warfalla, and Magharha tribes (Brahimi 2011). The privilege of these informal security organizations was largely undefined. Moreover, the image of impunity that these security organizations enjoyed gave rise to feelings of fear: Libyan citizens in general felt powerless before the security agents who often misused their authority against the public (Davis 1987; al-Werfalli 2011). In addition, an undisclosed number of other informal security organizations existed; these were never constitutionally defined. Their purpose was to help maintain social stability within the *Jamahiriyya* by controlling family and tribal members.

Finally, Qaddafi frequently created and re-created different coalitions in his political and security sector. For example, in 1981 Qaddafi called again for a new type of vanguard for his revolution, this time in the form of 'Guards of the Revolution'. Although the entity never actually became a viable organization,

it resulted in a number of restrictions on the power granted earlier to the Revolutionary Committees. The rise and partial curtailment of different entities and security institutions in the span of only a few years is illustrative of the constant performance of ‘balancing acts’ (Vandewalle 2006, 124) by which Qaddafi skilfully remained in power. Because of Qaddafi’s constant efforts to mobilize against anyone who could threaten his totalitarian rule and that of his direct family, no single individual or group could dominate the political and security field other than Qaddafi himself. Similarly, Qaddafi ensured that no personality other than himself or his sons emerged; officials were always referred to by their titles rather than their names, and football players had to be identified by their shirt number (ICG 2011a, 6–7).

In a model where people were expected to protect themselves and where security organizations that were closest to the regime were the most powerful, there was little room left for the national army and police forces. It is therefore of no surprise that, during Qaddafi’s rule, several tensions arose within the formal security sector in the form of mutinies and frictions with officers. In the revolution of 2011, these tensions surfaced stronger than ever.

Transformations in Libya’s Security Sector: The Revolution of 2011

During the revolution of 2011, the regime’s political structures and security forces were almost completely dissolved. This was partially a result of the defections of numerous army and political officials in the early phase of the uprising. While this weakened the regime directly, the defectors also contributed to the establishment of insurgent groups (Bellamy and Williams 2011). Within these groups, the former military officers and politicians fulfilled various roles, as they trained opposition fighters, provided a variety of resources, expertise and materials, and provided local insurgent groups and NATO with valuable information regarding the whereabouts of Qaddafi’s forces. However, the majority of the defections occurred in the east, as oppositional forces were able to drive out the regime’s formal security forces and, in addition, created a relatively safe environment to desert or defect. Furthermore, the defections primarily concerned national army officers and soldiers, whereas a significant number of policemen decided to simply abandon their posts rather than to defect. It was however a stark contrast to the west, where the majority of Qaddafi’s most loyal forces were stationed. Despite NATO attempts to induce defections through the dispatch of flyers, defections or desertions were not a principal factor behind the uprisings in western cities (ICG 2011b).

The defection of security officials and politicians and the defeat of the remaining forces by insurgent groups left a void in the political and security realm. This void was immediately filled by newly constructed political entities, such as the National Transitional Council. Under Mahmoud Jibril and Mustafa Abdiljalil, both former politicians in Qaddafi’s regime, the NTC was to become the political representative entity during the revolution for the insurgent groups and

the outside world, as well as the main political entity that would lead Libya during its transitional phase. However, although the NTC and the interim government claimed political authority over the insurgent groups and (inter)national legitimacy during the transitional period, it was in essence still self-appointed. Also, the NTC lacked fundamental resources, such as an institutionalized security force, as well as democratic support from the majority of the Libyan population. Inevitably, this gave rise to tensions with local and insurgent groups that were dissatisfied with their representation in the NTC, or disapproved of the NTC's authority claims (ICG 2011a; Pack and Barfi 2012; Salem and Kadlec 2012). In addition, the NTC was said to lack transparency concerning the nature of its activities as well as the identity of its members. Since it was well known that individuals from the former regime were involved, this increased suspicion among the public (ICG 2011a, 2011b). Nevertheless, although the existence of the political entities and the involvement of particular individuals was occasionally violently contested, the NTC was also more or less accepted by the insurgents and the rest of Libyan society for the duration of the transitional period. Since there was no alternative entity that successfully challenged its claims, the NTC became Libya's legislative entity and named an interim government as the transitional executive entity on 22 October 2011. As Libya's national political representatives, the NTC and the interim government that it created also gained access to the country's resources and assets primarily derived from oil revenues. In other words, the political entities acquired a position that allowed them to frame (non-)state violence and other actors in the security field as (il)legitimate.

On a local level during the revolution, Libyan civilians formed multiple militias that were essentially autonomous, self-armed, and initially built around a single purpose: the removal of Qaddafi (van Genugten 2011). They gathered weapons from abandoned barracks or even bought them from Qaddafi's forces. When and where insurgent forces prevailed, they created local military and civilian councils, which became the city's de facto political and military authority. The vast majority of the insurgent groups were geographically rooted: they identified themselves with specific neighbourhoods, towns, and cities, such as Zintan and Misuratah, rather than with ideology, tribal membership, or ethnicity. Accordingly, the insurgent groups prioritized the safety of their own area and rarely had the political ambition to pursue a political agenda once the revolution came to an end (ICG 2011b). The setting in Tripoli was, however, unique compared to most other cities in Libya. Although protests also took place in February and March 2011, a more centralized political and military insurgent command failed to materialize in the capital. Unlike other cities, where inhabitants were generally more like-minded concerning support for either Qaddafi (Beni Walid, Tahoorna, and Sirte) or the opposition (Benghazi, Zintan, Zawiya, and Misuratah), the allegiances were much more diverse in Tripoli, as 'pro-Qaddafi's' were often living next to 'anti-Qaddafi's'. After failed attempts to operate from within Tripoli, several insurgents eventually fled to the Nafusa Mountains in the west, while maintaining contact with small cells active in the capital. After an initial stalemate, the battle for Tripoli began on 20 August 2011, as multiple insurgent

groups from both outside and inside the capital simultaneously assaulted the forces of the regime. The fighters met each other only four days later in Bab al-Azaziyya, where they celebrated their victory.

The security field that came to exist in Tripoli directly after the revolution consisted of a cumbersome situation in which insurgent forces created a mixture of self-appointed militias and local groups. The locations that a militia secured during the revolution functioned now as their stronghold, and generally formed the territorial boundary in which they enjoyed self-proclaimed authority and de facto jurisdiction. Stationed in former military bases, empty civilian compounds, the national television broadcast centre, neighbourhoods, or car parks, militias became involved in the provision of security during the transitional period and rapidly acquired additional members. Although some militias clearly had the intention to become a lasting security force in the capital, others had little opportunity to return to civilian life and continued to guard their location. Affected by 42 years of Qaddafi's rule, militias installed checkpoints on the exact same locations where security forces of the former regime used to position themselves. Similar to the political entities, an important resource of the militias therefore concerned a claim of territorial control and the legitimate use of violence within that territory. However, more than simply securing a locality, militias generally possessed a large quantity of arms and weaponry that could be used to challenge competing militias and other armed forces. Together with the fact that the remainder of the Libyan police and national army were significantly understaffed and underequipped compared to the militias, the latter claimed to be the most effective security organization during the transitional period. Whilst protecting neighbourhoods, buildings, offices, the UN compound, oil refineries, and airports, any official security force could not match the reach and expertise of the militias. Although the exercise of their authority was fragmented and contentious, the militias, in other words, largely controlled the means of physical violence in Tripoli in the aftermath of war.

Militias continued to justify their existence throughout the transitional period by referring to repertoires that encompassed revolutionary legitimacy (Sharqieh 2012). Former combatants risked their lives during the revolution and successfully toppled the former regime. In their perspective, this entitled them to have a significant role in both the security and political fields during the transitional period. Omnipresent commemoration of those who gave their lives for the revolution, on roadside billboard photographs, as well as in everyday language and graffiti, produced, as Schröder and Schmidt (2001, 10) would argue, narratives in which the *thumar* were glorified. Additionally, to further legitimize their own existence, militias used repertoires referring to the ongoing unstable and insecure context in which they operated during the transitional period. Well aware of the fact that 'pro-Qaddafi's' were still inhabiting Tripoli, as well as several other towns in the south of Libya, such as Beni Walid, the militias claimed that the presence of these and other unknown armed groups were a significant threat to the stability of the country. The pronouncements of a continuing threat were an important element of the militias' repertoires, motivating them to

implement preventive security measures such as checkpoints. In short, the militias justified their presence and legitimized their capacity to use violence by referring both to their hard-fought victories during the uprising, and to the existence of a mysterious ‘fifth column’ in Libya’s capital.

Because of the indistinct nature of the numerous armed militias and other armed groups present in the capital, militias were reluctant to provide others access to their territory and prioritized the safety of their own geographical location, as they did during the battle for Tripoli. Clashes between several militias, for example in situations where a jurisdiction was challenged or territorial boundaries were perceived to be unclear, were therefore not uncommon. Also, the nature and goals of the militias often remained obscure. Whereas some showed sincere efforts to contribute to the safety of Tripoli, others appeared to be specifically concerned with personal or communal benefits. Nevertheless, militias attempted to formulate some kind of hierarchy themselves. For example, militia leaders and community members negotiated and mediated between militias, which created larger militias out of smaller ones as they joined forces. Additionally, self-made identity cards and ‘letters of authorization’ were printed in order to bring structure to the security field in the aftermath of the conflict.

This process provided several individuals and groups with opportunities to present themselves as influential and invaluable actors in the security field. However, it was already prior to the battle for Tripoli that initial alliances and collaborations amongst insurgent groups as well as with NTC representatives were formed. The Nafusa Mountains proved to be a particularly important geographical location where such agreements were made. An illustrative example here concerns how Abdelhakim Belhadj and his group were allegedly authorized by the NTC to become the Tripoli Military Council (TMC). The TMC was in theory charged with the task of subsuming all the other armed oppositional forces once Qaddafi’s forces in Tripoli were defeated. Born in Suq-al Jum’a, a neighbourhood in Tripoli known for its pro-insurgency mentality and support, Belhadj became an Islamist fighter in the Soviet–Afghan war and later active in the Libyan revolution during which he initially distributed weapons to the western cities. Already ahead of time, Belhadj managed to formalize his position with Mustufa Jalil (NTC) in the security field for the transitional period yet to come. Eventually, as the TMC and similar actors managed to strategically position themselves, the security field that would structure the interactions between security forces, political entities, and civic groups began to take shape. Shortly after the oppositional forces managed to gain control over Tripoli in late August 2011, the NTC decided to move its office from Benghazi to the capital. Subsequently, encounters between militias and political entities in Tripoli’s security field entered a new phase.

Encounters in the Security Field: The Transitional Period (2011–12)

As soon as the NTC officially arrived in Tripoli, a decision was made to recognize the militias during the transitional period by offering them the opportunity to

register. In practice, this consisted of little more than a largely informal procedure whereby militias acquired a stamp on a letter from the NTC, the TMC, or other local councils that were already 'legalized'. However, with a plethora of militias active in Tripoli, each struggling to prove their worth, militias were in general eager to register in order to further justify their existence and legitimize their use of violence in the presence of many other armed groups. It was therefore not unusual that interviewed militias claimed to have acted in accordance with the government when they used violence, for example to capture a criminal or 'pro-Qaddafi' loyalist. The decision therefore also created an incentive for relatively unknown or smaller militias to assault unregistered (and therefore 'illegal') and infamous militias in order to increase their own reputation as a legal and invaluable security actor in the capital. This is why armed groups contested the term 'militia'—it connotes the image of an anarchistic group that opposes the political authorities. Strongly preferred was the term of 'brigade' or 'katiba', which suggested that they operated in accordance with the NTC and/or interim government.

All armed groups had, in theory, the opportunity to change their formal status from armed group or militia to 'legal brigade'. Yet groups and/or individuals, such as Belhadj, with strong social connections to influential political officials were able to become more closely affiliated with the interim government and cooperate on various occasions. By creating these initial ties, the political entities aimed to prevent the militias from being a barrier to the statebuilding process. However, it was simultaneously intended that they would deal with the militias at arm's length, thereby preventing them from becoming too closely affiliated with the political apparatus. The vast majority of the militias therefore had few opportunities to actually formalize agreements and collaborations with the political authorities. As a result, militias sought alternative ways to prove their added value in the security field. They did this by claiming, for example, that they alone represented a certain category of *thuwar* or that they were the only ones that could control an important location of Tripoli. The Tripoli Revolutionary Council (TRC) headed by Abdullah Naker, for example, underscored how they were different from the TMC by arguing that they represented 'revolutionaries', while the TMC consisted of 'former military personnel'. Although these claims were not necessarily based on really existing divisions, it is a characteristic illustration of how different militias began to claim the necessity of their own presence and leadership in Tripoli's post-conflict security field. To their frustration, however, few militias actually saw their claims reinforced by the NTC and the interim government, which left them vulnerable to contestation from competing militias in the area.

In the process of establishing contacts with the political entities, the militias also utilized their positions as holders of the physical means of violence as leverage in order to acquire benefits they considered to be rightfully earned. First, militias demanded rewards from the NTC in the form of payment for their efforts during the revolution, and were successful in doing so. Rewards were set at 2,400 Libyan dinar (€1,500) for single men and 4,000 Libyan dinar (€2,500) for

married men. Important to underscore here is that these rewards were handed out per militia. In other words, individuals could not collect the reward themselves, but had to be registered with a militia in order to receive the money. Militia leaders in turn would receive the amount of money according to the number of registered members. Obviously, this practice proved to be a strong incentive for individuals to sign up and join a militia. Due to their relative informal nature and structure, as well as a lack of any structured admission procedure, 'practically everybody could join a brigade'.³ Whereas there were an estimated 20,000 fighters involved during the revolution, approximately 200,000 people were to receive a reward for their 'efforts' (ICG 2012). Furthermore, the handing out of the rewards contributed to an understanding in which armed individuals could successfully demand money from the political authorities. In practice, this resulted in roadblocks in the capital where armed men would block traffic until they saw their demands met. By conceding to these requests, however, the political entities also ended up encouraging similar acts in the future and indirectly increased the number of militia members.

Second, militias also 'negotiated' for individual and communal compensation before giving up territory. Although the initial purpose of these armed groups was the removal of Qaddafi, the sociopolitical capital and resources that the militias acquired over the course of the revolution was not to be given up freely. An example here is a militia from Zintan that defeated the forces of Qaddafi at the international airport in Tripoli. Although many members of the militia did not seek to pursue a professional career in the security sector, they did not want to simply abandon the airport when they were asked to by the interim government. Eventually, after several months of tensions between the militia from Zintan, other militias, and surrounding neighbourhoods, the interim government provided militia members with the opportunity to join an official security force or to receive training elsewhere in the country. According to a spokesperson from the militia, the lack of direct communication with the political authorities was their greatest frustration, for it made it impossible to negotiate their goals and uphold their reputation in society. However, although the airport was officially handed over, part of the deal was that some members of the militia from Zintan remained present on the scene as paid security guards. Another example concerns Bashir Sadawi, which requested that the interim government permitted them to join the national army as a whole militia instead of as individuals. While this was initially denied, progress in the negotiations between the two began to favour Bashir Sadawi, as they refused to disband and the interim government has appeared to concede to some of their demands. Bashir Sadawi claimed that 'we are one family now; we have known our commander for nine months, and we operate much better as one brigade. Tripoli is safer now than if we would be separated'.⁴

Although the political entities legalized the militias' existence, informally cooperated with a few closely affiliated militias (such as a militia from Suq al-Jum'a), as well as financially supported them, they simultaneously expected and demanded their dissolution and disarmament. The political entities aimed to

increase their own significance in the security field by strengthening the official security forces and gaining influence over the multitude of militias. In order to increase this influence, the Ministry of Interior officially set up the Supreme Security Committee (SSC). Shortly after insurgents managed to take control of Tripoli, officials announced that they ‘had founded the SSC as a first step towards creating a powerful security force’.⁵ However, the SSC was originally created as a body in which the different militias would be placed under a single structure of command. As such, the SSC could also be seen as a ‘parking space’ for militias and as a first step in a local disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process. Once they had become part of the SSC, militias would be eligible to be selected by political officials for different reintegration and training programmes. In practice, the SSC largely consisted of a multitude of militias that were incorporated as a whole. In return for joining the SSC, militia members received a salary, a uniform, as well as, ostensibly, a significant advantage in the security field vis-à-vis other militias, for they were now considered to be part of an official security institution. In the post-conflict context of poor socioeconomic conditions that several militias found themselves in, it is understandable why many individuals and militias signed up. SSC members were paid 1,000 Libyan dinars per month, whereas for example a regular policeman earned 600 to 800 Libyan dinars per month. Again, this led to an increase in the number of militia members. Furthermore, militias that joined the SSC were no longer to be referred to as ‘brigades’, but instead carried the more official nomenclature of ‘battalion’. This rhetoric and the uniforms of the SSC guards, stating ‘national police’, clearly illustrated a perspective on the symbolic hierarchy within Libya’s security sector.

The SSC was placed directly under the mandate of the Ministry of Interior and consisted of a national headquarters in Tripoli. In the eight months following its foundation, the SSC rapidly developed into a nationwide body with 85,000 members by late May 2012. This is illustrative of the incredible speed at which the SSC became a significant actor in Tripoli’s, as well as Libya’s, security field. However, the SSC suffered from its image that it was open for recruitment and that many joined as a result. It was sometimes referred to as ‘the home for the homeless’, or a body in which only ‘kids, criminals, and people who claim to be *thuwar*’ reside.⁶ The SSC was therefore largely perceived as an opportunity for individuals and groups to acquire a decent income as well as to increase their legitimacy versus other militias and the police in Tripoli. Furthermore, the lack of transparency by Libya’s political authorities, both in the media and by other state and non-state authorities, did not clarify the SSC’s purpose in the security field. Illustrative here was the question that a police commander, who experienced the growth of the SSC in the security field first-hand, in the district of Inzara asked: ‘could you please come back when you find out why the SSC was founded in the first place?’⁷ Frustrated by the lack of information and largely left unattended by the political entities, the police could not however compete with the influence of the SSC in Tripoli.

Yet, unlike the police and the militias, the SSC enjoyed neither revolutionary legitimacy nor the image of a well-trained and institutionalized police force that operates for the sole benefit of the Libyan population. As a result, certain militias and policemen contested the SSC, as they felt that this rapid growing security actor threatened their opportunity to use their position as leverage in interactions with political authorities, or limited their ability to provide security in the first place. Tensions between militias and SSC groups eventually became a recurrent feature of Libya's transitional period. On the one hand, the SSC was founded to curtail the power of the local military councils and larger militias, as well as a first step in a process that would eventually monopolize the means of physical violence. With this in mind, SSC groups contested the authority and presence of militias that were not part of the SSC and therefore officially still operated of their own accord. For example, a militia that had controlled the National Television Broadcast centre in Tripoli ever since seizing it from Qaddafi's troops was challenged by the SSC. According to the commander of the militia, two cars with artillery and eight armed men arrived at the broadcast centre and claimed that they were authorized by the interim government to take over the responsibility to provide security at the centre. Although the SSC forces left after a heated discussion with the commander of the militia, armed guards cleaned their Kalashnikov's afterwards in case the SSC might return. Incidents such as this further fuelled the tensions and contestations between armed groups active in Tripoli.

Nevertheless, in contrast to the aforementioned contestation and dislike of the SSC, there were also examples in which militias, SSC groups, and the police actually cooperated in security-related activities. SSC groups for example joined forces with militias from Suq al-Jum'a and Janzur that were not registered by the SSC as they dealt with several incidents in Tripoli. This type of short-term cooperation between the two security actors was legitimized by the need for a common answer to the existence of 'illegal armed groups' that endangered either the local population or other recognized militias. Furthermore, SSC groups were used to compensate for the fact that the police was structurally understaffed and underpowered, and therefore unable to match the physical force of larger militias. Subsequently, policemen and SSC guards guarded important checkpoints in Tripoli, such as at Martyr's Square, side by side.

Since the SSC was not the institution many influential and renowned militias initially desired to join, some militias decided to create their own political and military structures and platforms, through which militias throughout Libya discussed, negotiated, and formed alliances. The best example here is the Union of Revolutionary Fighters (UoRF), which consisted of 40 militia commanders and leaders. The UoRF argued that it operated on a political level equal to the NTC and the interim government, as well as creating a security force, known as the Libyan Shield, which operated and developed in a way similar to the SSC. While the SSC was placed under the Ministry of Interior, the Libyan Shield was placed under the Chief of Staff and therefore under the umbrella of the Ministry of Defence (ICG 2012). During and directly after Libya's transitional period, both

the SSC and the Libyan Shield became the country's two largest security actors and together subsumed all, or at least the vast majority, of active militias in post-Qaddafi Libya. However, as more recent events verify, the extent to which the SSC and the Libyan Shield have actually implemented the orders they have received from the interim government is at least questionable.

Over the course of the revolution and during the transitional period, the political objectives of the different militias changed. For many, a primary concern became how they could maintain and/or improve their significance in the statebuilding process, and therefore engaged in interactions with political authorities and other armed groups in order to have their socioeconomic and political goals met. In doing so, however, militias had to take into account whether other actors, such as state institutions, armed groups, and civilians, would perceive their presence and activities legitimate. For some militias this entailed joining the SSC or other 'official security bodies', whilst others formed their own security structures. Such decisions primarily served to further institutionalize the power relations in the capital's security field.

Conclusion

In this paper we discussed the interactions between the newly formed political entities and Tripoli's local militias in the security field during Libya's transitional period of 2011–12. We identified and discussed the actors involved, and zoomed in on some of the characteristic encounters between security actors during this period and the constantly evolving relations of control, power, and authority. Although international institutions have contributed significantly, and probably decisively, to Libya's regime change, their absence during the post-conflict state formation allowed Libyan actors to organize the provision of security themselves. The Libyan case therefore helps us to understand how local actors collaborate with and contest each other in the process of (re)constructing the country's security sector after a regime's collapse.

The interactions in Libya's security field during the first year of the transition can be divided into two phases. The first phase was characterized by the adaptation of the militias to the new situation in which they sought to solidify their power position by occupying territories or positions, formalizing their own existence, for instance by printing ID cards, as well as the creation of larger militias and the formation of new alliances through (in)formal networks. Once the conflict came to an end, the militias adapted their repertoires to this new situation, usually referring to a combination of revolutionary legitimacy and territorial control. The second phase consisted of the period after the arrival of the NTC in Tripoli, the self-proclaimed political authority to which militias had to relate, either positively or negatively. Several militias in Tripoli sought support from the political entities in order to justify their existence and legitimize the use of violence vis-à-vis other armed groups in the city. Through different strategies, militias purposefully negotiated and forcefully expanded in order to

extend and institutionalize networks and influence, which allowed these actors to contest other growing and competing bodies in the security field. The efforts of the NTC to bring order to the security field and to gradually build a security sector proved to be highly problematic. An important means of the new political entities to deal with the militias was the creation of the SSC. This entity sought to place militias under central command, but it also was supposed to play a role in the disarmament and reintegration of a number of militia members. By doing so, the new political authorities created their own institution that could implement a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. Although the SSC was in theory a solution to the geographically divided security field in Libya, and countered the influence of certain militias and non-state security structures, it was challenged in practice and fuelled tensions between armed groups active in the streets of Tripoli.

The construction of a more unified security sector and monopolizing the use of physical violence did not materialize in the period under study. From one perspective, the security field during the transitional period could even be seen as a continuation of the security sector under Qaddafi, with the existence of different militias and official security institutions all claiming a specific role within and added value to the security field itself. However, unlike Qaddafi's security sector, Tripoli's militias have been able to develop their own political agenda as well as the capacity and opportunity to pursue and defend their objectives. Consequently, this also leaves the opportunity open for a multitude of actors to continue to challenge, and occasionally violently oppose, the creation of more formalized alliances and official security institutions in contemporary Libya. This continued well after the first elections organized since 1951. On 7 July 2012, the General National Congress (GNC) replaced the NTC as the political authoritative entity, with Ali Zeidan as the country's first Prime Minister. At the beginning of 2013, armed men entered the GNC's main office and occupied it until their demands, presumably a screening of governmental officials for former Qaddafi loyalists, were met. Again, in early 2014, armed groups forced the GNC to relocate to a secure hotel in Tripoli. Both examples illustrate the fluid security field in which different armed forces continuously contest and collaborate with each other, but are in the end primarily concerned with their own position and influence over others.

Notes on Contributor

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Notes

- 1 *Thuwar* literally means ‘revolutionary’ and was used to refer to the people who fought ‘on the side of the people’ during the uprising of 2011. The term is not to be confounded with *mujahedeen*, which, in contrast to *thuwar*, has a religious connotation. *Thuwar* comes from *thawra*, which means ‘legitimate revolution’ and not simply an *inqilab* (military coup) (Vandewalle 2006).
- 2 Bab al-Azaziyya is Qaddafi’s largest military compound, that was located in the centre of Tripoli.
- 3 Argued by former revolutionary fighter I on 4 May 2012. Other individuals also underscore how easy it is for non-former combatants to join a militia, such as an affiliate of El-Keeb and Abdelhakim Belhadj, interviewed on 10 May 2012, who states that people ‘just can wear some army clothes and hold a weapon and the new flag, join a militia and appear as a *thuwar* in the streets of Tripoli’.
- 4 Author’s interview with the interrogation officer of Bashir Sadawi on 8 April 2012.
- 5 Author’s interview with the co-founder of the SSC on 6 May 2012.
- 6 Author’s interview with former revolutionary fighter I on 5 April 2012.
- 7 Author’s interview with the commander of the police station in Inzara on 23 April 2012.

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Appendix: Interviews

- Interview with a close affiliate of El-Keab on 10 May 2012
- Interview with a commanding officer of *Bashir Sadawi* on 17 April 2012
- Interview with a guard from *Bashir Sadawi* on 17 April 2012
- Interview with Abdelhakim Belhaj, head of the TMC on 13 May 2012
- Interview with Abdullah Naker, head of TRC on 7 April 2012
- Interview with an airport security guard from the Zintan militia on 20 May 2012

Interview with an official of the NTC on 16 April 2012
Interview with former revolutionary fighter I on 1 April 2012 (key informant)
Interview with former revolutionary fighter II on 5 April 2012 (key informant)
Interview with former revolutionary fighter III on 14 March 2013
Interview with former revolutionary fighter IV on 16 March 2013
Interview with former revolutionary fighter V on 16 March 2013
Interview with former revolutionary fighter VI on 16 March 2013
Interview with Mustafa Sagezly, General Manager of the WAC on 13 May 2012
Interview with the co-founder of the SSC on 6 May 2012
Interview with the commander of the police station in *Inzara* on 23 April 2012
Interview with the DDR program officer of the UN on 23 April 2012
Interview with the defence advisor from the British Embassy on 1 May 2012
Interview with the head of the coordination commission of the TMC on 2 May 2012
Interview with the head of 'Safe Group' on 2 May 2012
Interview with the interrogation officer of *Bashir Sadawi* on 8 April 2012
Interview with the Libya analyst of the Center for American Progress on 9 April 2012
Interview with the Libya analyst of the International Crisis Group on 3 April 2012
Interview with the manager of the militia in *Suq al-Jum'a* on 21 April 2012
Interview with the program officer of the National Democratic Institute on 31 March 2012
Interview with the security specialist of Reuters on 17 April 2012
Interview with the UN Head of Benghazi office on 12 March 2013
Interview with the vice-president of *Suq al-Jum'a* on 18 April 2012
Interview with the vice-president of the militia in *Janzur* on 23 April 2012