



TUNISIA

Tripoli

Derna

Zintan

Zawiya

Gherian

Zliten

Bani Walid

Misrata

Sirte

Benghazi

Marj

Bayda

Tobruk

The West

LIBYA

The East

Mapping Libya's Factions
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EGYPT

ALGERIA

NIGER

CHAD

SUDAN



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1. Two camps, two governments, two parliaments

2. Who is in charge?

3. Islamists and anti-Islamists

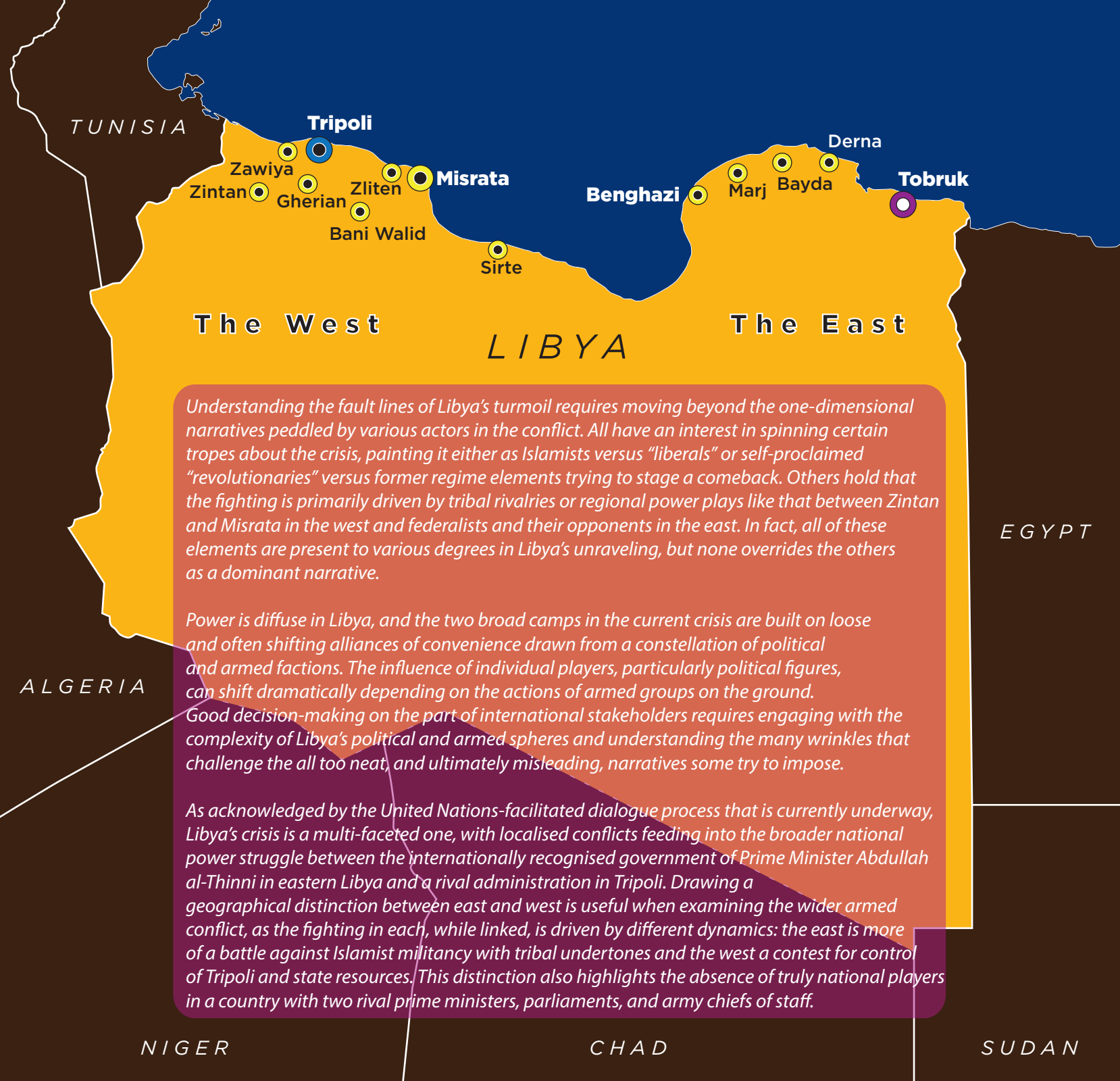
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Understanding the fault lines of Libya's turmoil requires moving beyond the one-dimensional narratives peddled by various actors in the conflict. All have an interest in spinning certain tropes about the crisis, painting it either as Islamists versus "liberals" or self-proclaimed "revolutionaries" versus former regime elements trying to stage a comeback. Others hold that the fighting is primarily driven by tribal rivalries or regional power plays like that between Zintan and Misrata in the west and federalists and their opponents in the east. In fact, all of these elements are present to various degrees in Libya's unraveling, but none overrides the others as a dominant narrative.

Power is diffuse in Libya, and the two broad camps in the current crisis are built on loose and often shifting alliances of convenience drawn from a constellation of political and armed factions. The influence of individual players, particularly political figures, can shift dramatically depending on the actions of armed groups on the ground.

Good decision-making on the part of international stakeholders requires engaging with the complexity of Libya's political and armed spheres and understanding the many wrinkles that challenge the all too neat, and ultimately misleading, narratives some try to impose.

As acknowledged by the United Nations-facilitated dialogue process that is currently underway, Libya's crisis is a multi-faceted one, with localised conflicts feeding into the broader national power struggle between the internationally recognised government of Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni in eastern Libya and a rival administration in Tripoli. Drawing a geographical distinction between east and west is useful when examining the wider armed conflict, as the fighting in each, while linked, is driven by different dynamics: the east is more of a battle against Islamist militancy with tribal undertones and the west a contest for control of Tripoli and state resources. This distinction also highlights the absence of truly national players in a country with two rival prime ministers, parliaments, and army chiefs of staff.

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Two camps, two parliaments and two governments

Any survey of Libya's political landscape should bear in mind that politicians and elected representatives generally wield less influence than the country's multitude of armed groups, most of which are on the state payroll. In fact, many Libyans believe that certain political actors are only as powerful as their militia backers make them.

Libya's political sphere is currently divided between two broad camps:

Tripoli and the General National Congress

A last-minute decision in July 2014 to relocate the HoR, which was due to sit in Benghazi, to Tobruk prompted a boycott by some 30 of its members claiming it was a politically-motivated move that violated procedure. Some of these boycotters recently rejoined the HoR while others support a rump of its predecessor, the General National Congress (GNC), which reconvened in Tripoli in August 2014 after the Misrata-led militia alliance known as Libya Dawn drove rival Zintan-linked militias from the capital.

The GNC then appointed a Benghazi university lecturer, Omar al-Hassi, as prime minister. Hassi was sacked in March this year and replaced by his Defense Minister Khalifa Ghwell who is from Misrata. The GNC retained its previous chief of staff, Jadallah Obeidi, who oversees army units that have not joined Haftar's operation and instead recognise the congress. The GNC claims that it is the legitimate legislature after a controversial Supreme Court ruling in November 2014 invalidated the legal basis for the elections that brought the Tobruk-based HoR into being.

Tobruk and the House of Representatives

In the eastern town of Baida sits the government of Prime Minister (and former defence minister) Abdullah al-Thinni who was appointed by the June-elected House of Representatives (HoR), which is based farther east in Tobruk. Both al-Thinni's government and the HoR support the Dignity military operation launched by the then retired general *Khalifa Haftar* in May 2014 and backed by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. The HoR appointed Haftar as top military commander in March this year.

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Who is in charge?

Libya Dawn and Haftar's Dignity operation wield the most power over Libya's political actors. They are better understood as two broad camps comprised of loosely woven relations of support or affiliation forged more from a sense of perceived common enemies than long-term mutual interests or shared visions for Libya. The notion of leadership and hierarchy in both cases is often nebulous, and real decision-making, particularly related to military strategy, lies more in informal gatherings. Both camps have experienced internal tensions and some fracturing in recent months.

Libya Dawn

In Tripoli, the power of GNC-appointed Prime Minister Khalifa Ghwell - like Hassi before him - is secondary to that of Libya Dawn's diverse alliance of armed groups that bolster his administration and which themselves lack a proper command and control structure. Formed in the summer of 2014 to remove Zintani influence from the capital, Libya Dawn comprises forces from the prosperous port city of Misrata - which form the majority - as well as a diverse range of Islamist and non-Islamist militias from cities and towns across western Libya, including from Amazigh (or Berber) communities. The alliance has become strained over the UN-facilitated dialogue process, with some political and armed components more supportive than others.

Dignity

Before Haftar was made army chief in March, al-Thinni's government and the HoR had endorsed the Dignity operation under the command of their appointed chief of staff, Abdul Razzaq al-Nadhuri. The precise nature of the relationship between Nadhuri and Haftar was ambiguous up to that point, with Haftar appearing to have more control over operations. Tensions between Haftar and key Dignity commanders in Benghazi over strategy, supplies, and Haftar's personal ambitions have increased since the beginning of 2015. Pro-Dignity factions in western Libya like the Zintani militias and Warshefana forces are aligned with but largely independent of Nadhuri or Haftar's orders. A similar dynamic applies with federalist militia leader Ibrahim Jathran whose forces are stationed at eastern oil terminals.

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The Islamist

Libya's Islamist political milieu is not as cohesive as is often thought. It includes *the Muslim Brotherhood* and networks drawn from members of the now defunct Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) that formed in the 1990s to fight Gaddafi, including its former leader Abdelhakim Belhaj.

Libya's Islamist firmament also contains several non-aligned Islamists who have influence in their towns or regions or are linked to certain militias. A number of the latter were part of the GNC's powerful Wafa bloc and were key to reviving the congress in August. Some are close to Libya's controversial mufti, Sheikh Sadiq al-Gheriani, who has issued provocative statements in praise of Libya Dawn.

These elements, which tend to be ultra-conservative, are sometimes at odds with the Muslim Brotherhood, which is often pulled in different directions by streams that tend to be either more pragmatic or more dogmatic. It has so far failed to gain much support among a population that, while deeply conservative, has shown little appetite for political Islam.

The anti-Islamist camp

The primary challenger to the Islamists in the political sphere remains the National Forces Alliance (NFA), led by Mahmoud Jibril.

Also in this camp is the HoR's **federalist bloc**, which includes the anti-Islamist Benghazi MP Abu Bakr Buera, as well as a significant **tribal component**. Jibril is from Libya's largest tribe, the Werfalla, and he and others have argued in favour of giving the tribes a greater role in public life. The absence of the rule of law and functioning institutions, particularly in the east, has prompted many to fall back on tribal arrangements for conflict resolution and dispute arbitration. This has bolstered the position of tribal elders in the political sphere more generally – and made them an important element of any mediation efforts.

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Dignity camp

Cradle of the 2011 revolution, Benghazi has been wracked by fighting since mid-May 2014 when Haftar launched his Dignity operation against Islamists. Several months before, Haftar had called for the suspension of the government and its replacement by a military council in order to “save the country”. Then Prime Minister Ali Zeidan accused him of attempting a coup and called for his arrest. Haftar later turned up in eastern Libya where he canvassed support from disgruntled former army and police officers and militias linked either to powerful tribes or federalists seeking greater autonomy for the east. He chose the name *Karama* or Dignity for the loose alliance of army units, including Benghazi’s Saiqa special forces and anti-Islamist militias, that resulted. The latter includes tribal-oriented militias like that of Ezzedin Wakwak whose men control Benghazi’s Beneina airport.

Haftar has a chequered history in Libya: he led troops during Gaddafi’s disastrous war with Chad in the 1980s and later defected to the United States where he is said to have collaborated with the CIA. Today, Haftar is backed by Egypt and the UAE. He has claimed that he will step down once Benghazi is “liberated”, but even elements broadly sympathetic to the operation to root out Islamists are wary of his political ambitions. These include figures in a number of eastern army units. Haftar’s efforts to establish and lead a supreme military council have met resistance from a significant number of HoR members, who fear he may use it as a vehicle to seize power.

The anti-Dignity camp

Haftar’s air and ground offensive prompted a number of Benghazi’s militias to unite against him and form a coalition dubbed the **Revolutionary Shura Council**. This includes the February 17th Martyrs Brigade – the largest rebel unit to emerge in eastern Libya during the 2011 uprising – along with a regional branch of the state-sponsored Libya Shield Force, led by Wissam Ben Hamid. It also includes *Ansar al-Sharia*, a more hardline group that formed after the revolution whose members are accused of involvement in the 2012 attack on a US diplomatic mission in Benghazi and which was added to the UN-Al-Qaeda sanctions list in November 2014.

The Shura Council is connected with the Libya Dawn camp in western Libya insofar as they share a common enemy in Haftar and his Zintan allies. A number of fighters from Misrata militias like Al-Farouq have joined Shura Council forces in Benghazi. But the UN designation and Ansar al-Sharia’s opposition to a democratic trajectory are fraying the alliance, with backers in Misrata pushing for the others to disassociate from Ansar al-Sharia. There are indications that Ansar al-Sharia itself is in some disarray: a number of senior figures have been killed since May and others have left to join nascent Islamic State (IS) affiliates.

The Sahawat

Haftar’s offensive in Benghazi had been stalling until he declared a fresh push in mid-October 2014. Since then, he has made significant advances inside the city – including recapturing the Saiqa headquarters in southeast Benghazi that had been overrun during the summer. Key to Haftar’s recent gains are the so-called Sahawat, groups of armed civilians who have taken up the fight against Shura Council forces inside the city’s neighbourhoods. This has turned the battle for Benghazi into a more guerrilla-style conflict. Several Sahawat gained experience fighting as members of armed groups during the 2011 revolution. Many are armed directly by Dignity, but they are only loosely under its command. Some have been accused of abuses, including targeting perceived Islamists and destroying homes.

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Haftar's heartland

The eastern coalition that formed around Haftar's Dignity operation comprises several shifting alliances of mutual convenience based largely on shared short-term goals. Haftar draws on a substantial base of public support in Benghazi, where residents frustrated with deteriorating security and a series of assassinations rallied to his declared "war on terrorism". He is also popular in the towns of Baida, Tobruk, and Marj for reasons partly related to the tribal dynamics in those areas. Marj, where Haftar lived for some years, is crucial to his operation. Many of his forces hail from the town and its environs, as do some of his staunchest political backers. Fighters wounded in Benghazi are ferried back to Marj for treatment, and one of his three bases is located outside the town. Key to Haftar's strategy in the east has been attacking by air from bases including Benghazi's Beneina airport and Tobruk. His aerial commander is Saqr Jaroushi, who served as head of the Libyan Air Force.

The Tribal supremacists

One of Haftar's key allies in Benghazi is Ezzedin Wakwak, a tribal militiaman from the prominent local Bargathi tribe whose forces are widely considered to be the real power in Beneina.

Wakwak epitomises what some in the east refer to as a "tribal supremacist". His federalist sentiment is rooted in resentment over Tripoli's marginalisation of the east. This spills over to his animus towards those in Benghazi, including several prominent Islamist militia leaders like Wissam Bin Hamid, who trace their roots from western Libya. "Tribe will save Libya like the army saved Egypt", Wakwak said in early 2014.

The Salafists

An interesting wrinkle in Haftar's coalition is the presence of Salafis, some of whom are ex-members of the militias they are battling in Benghazi. Haftar has used these Salafi fighters as a propaganda tool in the media. A number are drawn from Libya's sizeable Madkhali Salafi stream. They follow Saudi scholar Rabi' al-Madkhali, who preaches obedience to the "wali al-amr", or ruler, and discourages political dissent. Libya's Madkhali sheikhs were therefore initially opposed to the 2011 revolution.

The wider Dignity camp also includes some mid-ranking figures from the former LIFG who have been part of the eastern federalist movement since 2012.

The federalists

The Cyrenaica Defence Forces, a militia linked to the main federalist political current, has offered support to Haftar but remained largely autonomous within the broader Dignity camp. Similarly, Ibrahim Jathran, the ostensibly federalist militiaman who led an almost year-long blockade of eastern oil ports until he struck a lucrative deal with Thinni's government in 2014, has publicly backed Haftar's operation, but this has not translated into anything practical in terms of sending men or weaponry to Benghazi. Jathran remains an important player in his own right, not least because of fears he could use a blockade of the oil facilities as a political tool again. His forces have been trying to thwart the Shuruq operation launched in December 2014 by Libya Dawn-allied groups attempting to wrest control of a number of eastern oil terminals. A recent agreement resulted in Shuruq forces retreating.

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Derna and the Islamic State

The eastern town of Derna is home to several militant groups, including the **Majlis Shura Shabab al-Islam**, which declared allegiance to **IS** leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in late 2014. The group comprises local returnees from Syria as well as a small number of foreigners and remains the only entity in Libya that Baghdadi has publicly acknowledged. It is challenging the stronger presence of other Islamist factions in the town. Tensions between the much larger **Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade**, which is led by LIFG veterans who say they support a democratic system in Libya, and IS sympathisers resulted in tit-for-tat assassinations in 2014.

In December 2014, the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade and other factions wary of or opposed to IS formed the **Majlis Shura Mujahideen Derna**. While its ostensible purpose is to counter the Dignity operation, it also aims to act as a bulwark against further IS expansion. Derna also has a chapter of **Ansar al-Sharia**, which is headed by former Guantanamo detainee Sufian Ben Qumu. As with Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi and Sirte, some of its members have left to join groups claiming affiliation with IS as they become more assertive in Libya.

Beyond Derna. In the first months of 2015, IS sympathisers claimed responsibility for attacks, including one on the Corinthia Hotel in Tripoli and a number of oil fields south of Sirte. They also kidnapped and later killed 21 Egyptian Copts near Sirte and took over a number of state institutions in the town. In March, the Misrata-led 166 Battalion took on IS in Sirte for the first time and fighting between the two continues.

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Libya Dawn and Misrata

Fighters from Misrata, predominantly drawn from the Libya Shield Central Region Force established by the army chief of staff in 2012, comprise the largest component of Libya Dawn. Most cannot be categorised as Islamist, yet they formed an alliance with Islamist factions from Tripoli and other western towns, particularly Zawiya, as well as non-Islamist armed groups, particularly Amazigh, from across Libya's western flank. Forces from the mountain town of Gherian, home to some of the biggest military bases in western Libya, are also prominent in Libya Dawn.

Key Misrata figures, including members of its business council and MPs who are boycotting the HoR, insist that Islamists have negligible influence within the city. Mohammed Sawan, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Justice and Construction Party (JCP), is from Misrata, but the Brotherhood and the JCP have little support in the city. In the eyes of many Libyans, Misrata has allied itself with the Islamists for political purposes, and it will take some time to shrug off the resulting negative perceptions of the city. Misrata is not as homogenous as is often assumed and there are increasingly divergent views on the actions of the city's militias and politicians.

Zintan and other western opponents of Libya Dawn

Libya Dawn's opponents in the battle for Tripoli were primarily militias from or linked to the small conservative mountain town of **Zintan**, of which Qaqa and its affiliate Sawaiq are the most prominent. The leader of Qaqa is Othman Mleghta, whose brother is a senior figure in the National Forces Alliance (NFA). These forces were built up during Zintani Osama Juwaili's term as defence minister and are broadly allied with Haftar's Dignity operation. Many **Amazigh** fighters joined Libya Dawn due to historical animosity towards predominantly Arab Zintan.

The Zintan-linked camp also includes former Gaddafi fighters and forces from the Warshefana region in Tripoli's hinterland. Warshefana fighters have clashed with Libya Dawn factions, including the Libyan Revolutionaries Operations Room (LROR), whose members were accused of kidnapping then Prime Minister Ali Zeidan in 2013. But the **Warshefana tribe** is divided between those who allied with Zintan and fought as part of the so-called Noble Tribes Army and a smaller number who joined and fought with Libya Dawn. The Zintan-allied Warshefana disparaged attempts by its local Shura Council to resolve clashes that resulted in the displacement of thousands of residents in September 2014. Historically close to Zintan is Bani Walid, stronghold of Libya's largest tribe, the Warfalla. But Bani Walid has largely stayed on the sidelines of the current crisis despite a long-standing antagonism with Misrata.